

Norwegian Passenger-Carrying 'China Coasters' Trading South China/Southeast Asia 1896-1977

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Historical Overview

Introduction

Small Norwegian-flag tramp ships first appeared in Chinese waters in the 1890s, rather later than those of some other European nations, but soon found a niche, mainly on charter to Chinese merchants. By the early decades of the 20th century, that role evolved into servicing liner trades across the South China Sea for the carriage of rice, general cargo and Chinese deck passengers. Of course, worldwide, early cargo steamships without a dedicated passenger capacity not infrequently took on passengers who needed transport and had few alternative means of passage, but the growing demand in Chinese waters was such that through experience, some shipowners began to focus on this valuable trade and to design ships for this purpose with improvements through to the mid-1960s.

Why Norwegian shipowners should have been favoured by Chinese merchants (and also perhaps Japanese and Russian interests) is an intriguing question but some reasons are apparent. Norway was not a colonial power. In fact, it was as late as 1905 before it achieved full independence from Sweden, thus just six years before the Chinese Revolution that established the Republic of China. Ingvild Helle has suggested that Norwegian ships carrying passengers to and from South China were less burdened by regulation because Norwegian laws concerning passenger vessels did not apply to those trading outside Europe, thus needing to have regard only to laws enforced by British jurisdictions at Hong Kong and Singapore or the Dutch in the East Indies.

Norwegian owners, brokers and masters, who were adept cross-traders, seem to have respected and dealt in a businesslike way with their Chinese counterparts, in marked contrast with the condescension they experienced from many British firms (with the possible exception of John Swire & Sons), German and Japanese firms. Trust was established to mutual benefit and deepened over time. The ships had Norwegian officers and engineers but were crewed by Chinese while a Chinese *compradore/chinchew* managed the ticketing of third-class passengers and the booking and discharge of cargo in liaison with shore brokers, shippers and consignees. Hans Olav Isaksen, a former coxwain for BK&Co. states that in the postwar period ships carried three *compradores* – to prepare loading papers and other official papers in Chinese, to handle the ticketing of passengers, and to supervise passengers during the voyage.

For the Norwegians it was a fairly idyllic life. At 10-11 knots it was a 7-8 day voyage from Hong Kong to Bangkok, just four to Saigon. Though having to contract for three years at a time, they sailed in warm seas, well looked after by their Chinese stewards, with alcohol to hand and accessible nightlife in all three ports and thus were not bound by the constraints of family life in the tight-knit towns of Norway. Seafaring was seldom much better.

The 'China Coaster' evolved in the early 20th century from a plain 3-hatch cargo steamer known on the China Coast as a 'beancaker' and traded over the range North China-Malay Straits. Size was restricted by port conditions at Tientsin and Bangkok, thus no more than about 300 feet long overall and of shallow enough draught to pass over the bar below Bangkok. The typical design at the beginning of the 20th century was a 3-4 hatch/2-hold vessel able to carry up to 3,000 tons of cargo with a midship accommodation block cabins for a small number of first- and second-class passengers and unobstructed, ventilated and lit 'tween decks fore and aft above the two holds to carry up to around a thousand unberthed passengers or on some vessels, even more.

An interesting contrast between British and Norwegian vessels is that by 1924 the Hong Kong Government had issued Piracy Prevention Regulations that required ships registered there to be protect the navigating bridge with bullet-proof dodgers, screens, grilles and barbed wire entanglements, while also mandating the installation of wireless, prescribing numbers of rockets, Verey lights, arms and ammunition and specified numbers of armed guards. All certified officers were to be armed at all times when the ship was in a Danger Zone. Norwegian-flag ships, though calling at Hong Kong and also affected by piracy, did not implement all the detail of these regulations. Bridges were fortified, wireless sets installed, and officers were provided with arms but piracy grilles, which also hindered movement around the ship by officers and crews, were not fitted, nor did the owners wish to incur the extra expense of carrying armed guards. The onus therefore fell upon the Chinese compradores/supercargoes to ensure that pirate gangs did not board among the deck passengers. They did not always succeed. Several Norwegian-flag ships would later be looted and apparently wealthy Chinese cabin passengers be kidnapped for ransom.

Triple-expansion steam engines gave a rated speed of 10-11 knots with motorships being introduced from the late 1920s and usually a bit faster. The type was developed from the late-19th century by Butterfield & Swire's China Navigation Co. and Jardines' Indo-China Steam Navigation Co. Norwegian owners and builders copied and improved on the design, as did German-flag (from 1920 Danish-flag) Jebsen & Co. While the British-flag ships served their owner's liner trades, the Norwegian and Jebsen ships were built for time charter, usually to Chinese merchants but sometimes also to the two British lines and pre-WWI, to Norddeutscher Lloyd (NDL) of Bremen. In the 1930s China Navigation took delivery of the more sophisticated *Shengking* (1931) and *Shuntien* (1934) for the North China line while in 1934 China Merchants added the quartette of *Hai Chen*, *Hai Heng*, *Hai Li* and *Hai Yuan*, all of maximum China Coaster size but with extended cabin-passenger capacity. These are better be regarded as small coastal passenger liners than as China Coasters.



Jardines' 2343-grt, 4-hatch HANG SANG (1901), seen here at the Shanghai Bund c.1938-39, and her sister HOP SANG (1901) epitomise the transition from 'beancaker' to China Coaster. From 1940 to 1950 as TAIPOSHAN (British flag) she was operated by Shun Cheong S.N. Co. from Hong Kong to Saigon and Bangkok (Postcard SK coll.).

This post provides a general survey followed by brief text and illustrated fleet lists for the various owners in eight parts: **I.** Bruusgaard, Kjøsterud & Co. (BK&Co.), **II.** Hans Kiaer, **III.** Wiel & Amundsen, **IV.** H.M. Wrangell & Co., **V.** Wallem & Co., **VI.** Arne Sveen's Rederi, **VII.** A/S Norfinn (Jørgen Krag), and **VIII.** Norwegian-built, Chinese-owned. Substantial reference has been made to Ingvild Helle's University of Bergen Master's thesis (2012) *With Valuable Cargo: Norwegian Shipping Companies' Participation in Shipping Chinese Labour Migrants in the Period 1895-1930*, accessed via <https://hdl.handle.net/1956/9059>, which inter alia draws on a range of Norwegian sources including published histories and archival material of various of the companies in the period until 1930.

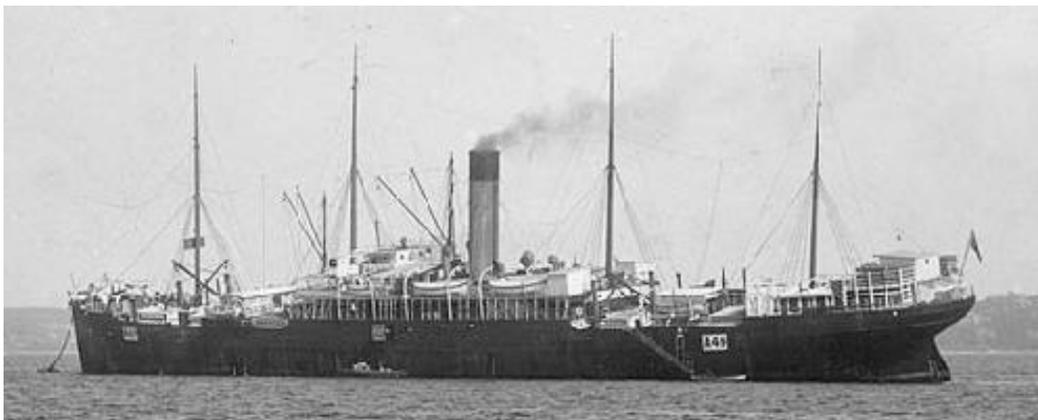
Early Periods

The passenger trade across the South China Sea between coastal South China and Southeast Asia traces back around 1,500 years. Many were merchants, some artisans, some labourers; some settled and intermarried, others eventually returned to China. By the eighteenth century, Amoy (Xiamen) junks were reportedly as large as a thousand tons and some carried hundreds of passengers, as well as cargo. These sailing vessels, large or small, sailed according to the monsoons, southwards with the southwest wind, home with the northeast wind, thus with several months in between to lay over and exchange cargoes. With the opening of Treaty Ports, the lifting of the imperial prohibition of emigration in 1858 and the emergence of faster and more reliable Western steamships owned by small companies and chartered to Chinese firms, the rate of emigration increased rapidly, preponderantly of Chinese men seeking to work for profit such as in the mines and rubber plantations of Singapore and Malaysia, the rice fields of Thailand, or the gold fields of the Americas and Australia. The word 'coolie', of Indian subcontinental origin, was often used by Westerners to describe these migrants in a rather derogatory way. The Chinese word *kǔlì* (苦力) is thought to be an instance of phono-semantic matching that literally translates to 'bitter strength' but is more commonly understood as 'hard labour'. The travel often involved borrowing funds at the outset for repayment to triad-linked brokers, often on usurious terms. But the financial reward was enticing, and migrants might, after a number of years, return as wealthy men to their home villages in China. Others who died overseas returned home in coffins, whose carriage was a significant return cargo.

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

Over time and stimulated by high freight rates during and after the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War, British and then German lines began to encroach upon the feeder lines from Singapore and Hong Kong. The Ocean Steamship Company owned by Alfred and George Holt in Liverpool pushed most aggressively into these local trades [Study **Blue Funnel Line/Ocean S.S. Co. Ltd/East Indian Ocean S.S. Co. Ltd and other Singapore-based feeder lines (1881)** accessed via oldchinaships.com 'Singapore' tab]. In 1891 they formed the East Indian Ocean S.S. Co. Ltd (EIOSSC) as a subsidiary to manage most of these intra-Asian lines. Meanwhile NDL of Bremen, which had opened a mail line from Germany via Suez to Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai, was also extending its network of local lines from Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and German-occupied Tsingtao. After a period of fierce competition, in April 1899 the Holt brothers sold EIOSSC to a syndicate on behalf of NDL, which eight months later also took over the Scottish Oriental S.S. Co. Ltd (SOSSC) and its lines from Hong Kong to Saigon and Bangkok. Once the SOSSC ships had been transferred in April 1900, NDL had achieved a partial monopoly of steam shipping around the South China Sea, most obviously in the case of Bangkok.

The Straits-China trade remained more open because of the busy intra-Asian traffic between the Bay of Bengal, China and Japan that was underpinned by the carriage of opium, raw cotton, jute and rice. These larger ships of Jardines' Indo-China S.N. Co. and the Apcar Line (in 1912 taken over by British India S.N. Co.) also carried deck passengers between South China and the Straits. By 1898 the Singaporean firm of Wee Bin & Co. (from 1914 Ho Hong S.S. Co.) was running quite large second-hand passenger tonnage between the Straits and South China, as from 1903 did Lim Chin Tsong from Rangoon to South China, latterly with the two former Bibby Line sisters *Seang Bee ex Shropshire* and *Seang Choon ex Chesire* (both 5700 grt/1891). In the second half of 1920 H.M.H. Nemazee's small *Rupara* was deployed in the South China-Straits 'coolie' trade, returning to Hong Kong via Hoihow, then in early 1921 was chartered out for a year to Chinese for the Singapore-Borneo trade. None of these ships could be regarded as China Coasters.



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

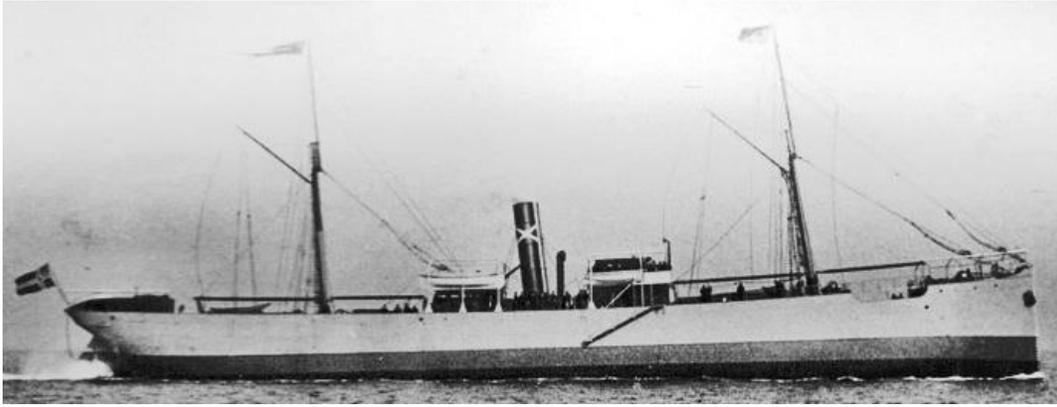
The German monopoly was of great concern to the Chinese owners of the big steam-powered rice mills in Bangkok and Saigon (Cholon), who had been the main shippers by the SOSSC steamers, and they immediately sought ways to regain control over their freight rates. This could be done most readily by chartering. In October 1901 the Straits Times (15/10/01) reported that seven Norwegian-flag steamers had been chartered for at least a year to carry rice between Bangkok and Singapore, also two more to carry timber (probably teak)

to Calcutta. Since the 1890s, independent British, German and Norwegian shipowners had sent small tramps out to the China Coast more or less 'on spec.'. Typically, these were plain Baltic traders, 3-hatch, single-deck cargo vessels of 1,000-2,000 tons cargo capacity that could find charters to carry coal, timber or grain at cheap rates for Chinese or foreign firms.

The Norwegian Ships

Norway was notably later than most European seagoing countries to change over from sail to steam but by the mid-1890s had started to send steamships for charter in China Seas. Helle points out that commercial banking was not properly established in Norway until the 1890s and even then ships could not be pledged as mortgageable assets until 1903, so small regionally based firms were at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, much interest in Norway and especially in the port of Drammen appears to have been generated by an article published in 1892 by a former long-term Chinese Maritime Customs officer Marcus Bull, who called for Norwegian steamships to be built for the China coast. He believed the Norwegian steamers at that time were too large and underpowered and recommended a smaller size (800-1,000 dwt), larger engines and shallow draft to suit conditions in Chinese ports. He urged that the ships be equipped with side-ports for cargo handling and a well-ventilated upper ('tween) deck with both deck and side vents to enable the carrying of passengers, who would not require bunks because they carried their own mats. Helle (p.57) states, "Bull's recommendations were taken seriously by Norwegian shipowners and ten such ships were built by 1895 (sic)...although most Norwegian ships that sailed in this area from the turn of the century were larger." The ten ships are not listed but appear to be BK&Co.'s *Hovding* (2088/96), *Hermes* (1358/96) and her four identical sisters *Helios*, *Hermod*, *Hugin* and *Hydra*, Wiel & Amundsen's *Dagmar* (1457/96) and *Vidar* (1543/96), and Hans Kiær & Co.'s *Prosper* (1290/96) and *Pronto* (1363/96). With the exception of *Pronto* (Denmark), these vessels were built in the UK and their histories are detailed with illustrations in our linked ships list.

Knowledge of the ships' employment is patchy but in the period until around 1910 the focus was on Northern waters. By the mid-1890s the 'North China Herald' reports several Norwegian steamships as carrying coal from the Japanese ports of Miike or Moji to Shanghai, mostly small coals for 'native dealers', who presumably were also the charterers. In 1897 this included *Dagmar*, *Produce*, *Progress* and *Prosper*, also Thoresen's earlier *Skuld* (1439/92) and *Sultan* (2100/93). Some of these ships also carried Chinese deck passengers from Northern Chinese ports to Manchuria or Vladivostok. In time, they also proved well-suited to the profitable emigrant trade from South China, returning with rice from Bangkok or Saigon to Hong Kong or Singapore. According to skipshistorie.net, as early as 1901 BK&Co. recorded that "In 1901, experience has been gained that these ships should be purpose-built: shallow-going, great engine power, and furnishings for as many rice field workers ('coolies') as possible". *Haldis* and *Halvard* (both completed in 1902 with substantial 'tween deck capacity for up to a thousand deck passengers) were the first of these special ships, the first local verified reference, in the 'Straits Times' of 19 June 1903 being of *Haldis* arriving in Singapore with Chinese immigrants, 337 men, 12 women and 5 children from Amoy and 158 men, 4 women and 1 child from Swatow. Another 150 from both ports were traveling on to Penang. On the return leg from Rangoon, Bangkok or Saigon, rice was carried in the lower holds. There were close ties between the rice millers in Bangkok and Saigon and rice merchants in Hong Kong.



Otto Thoresen's SULTAN (1893) was a fine vessel that stranded on the North China coast in June 1897 and after salvage was acquired by Jardines as MAUSANG (coll. Per Sundfaer/skipshistorie.net).

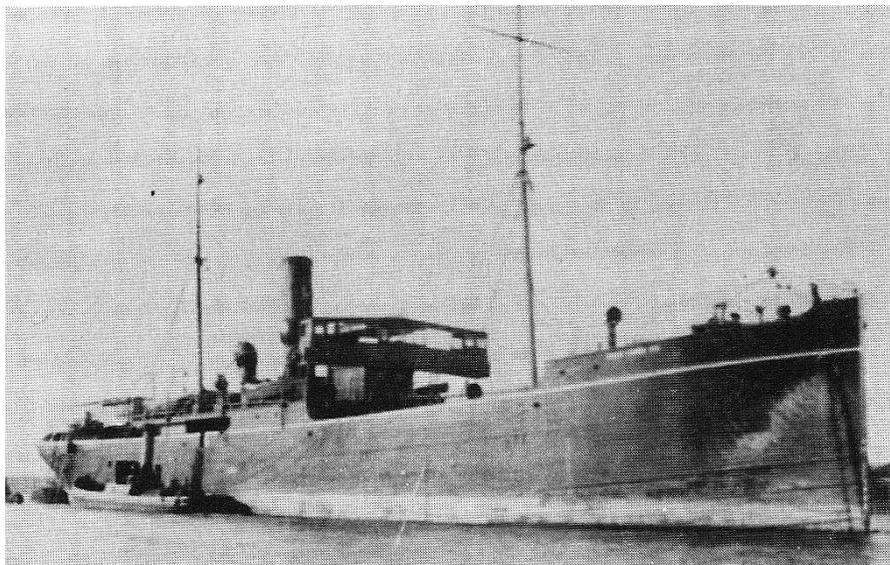
Sometimes masters held a share in the ships and could deal on the spot. Other charters were arranged through local shipping brokers and agents in Shanghai, Hong Kong or Singapore. Two of these firms were Norwegian, Thoresen & Co. (est. 1902 by Olaf Thoresen) and Wallem & Co (est. 1903 by Haakon Wallem). Both firms would cultivate close ties with Chinese merchants. Over the period 1903-5 virtually all of the Norwegian ships were hired out on time-charter contracts, mainly of 3-8 months duration.

Six Norwegian passenger ships are reported to have transported Chinese labour migrants during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, namely *Haldis* and *Halvard* of BK&Co. and *Prometheus*, *Pronto*, *Proteus* and *Prominent* (sic., but presumably *Providence*) of Hans Kiær & Co. According to Bjarne Aagaard of BK&Co.'s long time agents Thoresen & Co., these ships were all specifically built for shipping Chinese passengers and had intermediate through decks with side doors, while the subsequent *Prominent* (1906), *Prosper* (1917) and *Produce* (1918) also had cabin accommodation for a few passengers and the compradores with electric light. Aagaard adds that *Profit* (1904), *Promise* (1904) and Wiel & Amundsen's *Drufar* (1905) and *Childar* (1906) were also built for speed able to carry passengers (Helle p.65).

In mid-1906 the Bangkok millers persuaded the Japanese line Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) to put chartered ships on the berth between Hong Kong and Bangkok. From this time the length of charter contracts for the Norwegian ships tended to increase. Wiel & Amundsen's *Childar* (1734/1905) and Hans Kiær & Co.'s *Prometheus* (1672/02) were the first two chartered with the former taking the first sailing from Swatow on 29 May. Immediately NDL's Swatow agents, Butterfield & Swire, reduced the passage rate from \$14 to 50 cents but NYK still managed to carry 235 deck passengers at \$3 per head (NCH, 10/8/06) – NYK's Swatow agents were the well-established firm of Bradley & Co. A meeting in Bangkok on 15 August 1906 attended by heads of 35 business firms agreed to provide 'all the support possible' to NYK and also a new French line, not identified but presumably A.R. Marty & Cie. (ST, 28/8/06). *Proteus* is recorded as having been certified to carry 998 passengers on a voyage between Swatow and Bangkok in July 1896. Nevertheless, after eighteen months of cut-rate competition, NYK withdrew by mutual agreement with NDL at the end of 1907 (ST, 11/1/08), which reduced the demand for chartering Norwegian ships.

Although Swatow was the major port of embarkation in this period, Hoihow on Hainan Island also became more important as steamers began to compete with traditional sailing junks operated by the chartering brokers. According to a Norwegian Consulate report, in 1907 and 1908 Hans Kiær & Co. was the only Norwegian company operating from this port, with *Pronto* and *Progress*, on a four-month charter to A.R. Marty. The next year the only Norwegian ship operating from Hoihow was *Drufar*, transporting workers exclusively to and from Bangkok.

The millers then came together to form their own shipping company, which by mid-February 1908 was said to have raised capital of 3 million Siamese ticals (baht) (ST, 20/2/08). It took longer than expected to finalise but in January 1909 the new firm was promulgated in Bangkok with that amount of capital as the Chino-Siam Steam Navigation Company Ltd, initially reported as Chino-Siamese Mail Boat Co. Ltd (ST, 18/1, 19/5/09). The first vessel to be chartered, in March 1909, was again *Childar* (1905), which arrived at Swatow early that month and was reported to have been received with enthusiasm by the local Chinese gentry and scholars, who 'went aboard in large numbers to celebrate the occasion' (NCH, 24/4/09). It was added that 'the spirit of patriotism is much in evidence and will cover many deficiencies in the eyes of those intending to embark', as did 325 passengers on that first voyage, though on arrival at Bangkok from Hong Kong on 9 April there were said to be with 130 deck passengers paying \$10 each (ST, 19/4/09). *Childar* was followed by Hans Kiær & Co.'s *Proteus* (1679/02) which departed Bangkok for Swatow on 9 May with a full complement of 600 returning passengers (ST, 19/5/09). By then competition had again broken out. While *Proteus* charged 8 tcls for the passage, NDL cut the rate to 2 tcls for its *Rajaburi*, which sailed on the same day with only 66 passengers. In 1909 a total of seven Norwegian ships were under charter to Chino-Siam including *Prometheus*, *Drufar*, *Haldis*, *Halvard* and *Thordis* (1749/06 of I/S D/S *Thordis*' Rederi, Tonsberg, wrecked in 1911 in the Sea of Okhotsk). The Vice-Consul in Hoihow wrote that these ships were not used so much for the transport of cargo as for the transport of 'coolees' to Bangkok (Helle p.68). Nevertheless, they would have carried rice from Bangkok on the return voyage. Five of these vessels plus another Norwegian ship were then chartered to Chino-Siam for another year and, due to insufficient Norwegian tonnage, two German ships as well.



NDL's RAJAPURI (1900), evidently transferring passengers aft (Kludas p.83).

As business boomed, more steamers were chartered by Chino-Siam, including in 1910 until November 1911 the German-flag *Sexta* (1643/06). Some steamers traded Swatow-Hong Kong-Bangkok, others Hong Kong-Hoihow (Hainan)-Bangkok, then from early November 1910 extending to Singapore en route to Bangkok with *Haldis* assigned to this route, thereby putting more pressure on NDL (ST, 11/11/10). But after failed negotiations in Bangkok in late November 1910, NDL maintained its pressure (*Straits Echo*, 26/10/10, *Penang Gazette*, 1/12/10). Chino-Siam was unable to earn a profit and was said to have been 'in extremely precarious circumstances', though its shareholders, mainly rice millers, would have benefited from the lowered freights. Amidst reports of dissension in the company, in August 1912 it was announced that a quarter of the shareholding had been transferred by leading shareholder Yee Goh Hong to the Republic of China under the authority of the Viceroy Governor-General of Kwangtung (SFP, 3/8/12). This was probably a way of trying to keep the company trading.

By March 1912 *Childar* was still on charter, also from BK&Co. the 1700-grt sisters *Haldis* and *Halvard* and, once again, the German-flag *Sexta* (ST, 9/4/12). Six months later it was reported that Bangkok rice miller Sieng Kee had on charter Hans Kiær & Co.'s *Profit* (1904) and had just taken up the Norwegian *Standard* (A/S Standard, Tonsberg, 1461/06) for shipments to Singapore, while other millers were looking to charter three or four more such ships (ST, 22/10/12). *Proteus*, which had been operating in the rice trade on charter for over ten years, in November 1912 was chartered by Ban Seng Chiang for twelve months from January 1913 for the Singapore trade (ST, 15/11/12). Another vessel was Wiel & Amundsen's *Drufar* (1739/05), a sister to *Childar*, which by December 1915 had completed 100 round trips – Chino-Siam gave the master, Capt. Jens Bing, a gold watch and chain (NSH, 11/12/15). In October 1915 Chino-Siam even chartered the British-flag 'beancaker' *Wai Shing* (1903) from Jardines for seven voyages at \$24,000 per voyage (Malaya Tribune, 27/10/15). Thus, business was brisk, but still unprofitable for Chino-Siam. An overview by broker Joachim Greign & Co. of Norwegian ships transporting Chinese labour migrants in the period 1912-16 shows that most were under time contracts of 1 to 3 years (Helle p.61).

British interests were unhappy with the aggressive Norwegian encroachment and there was some grumbling to the British authorities in Hong Kong and Singapore, not least on safety grounds. For example, the 'Straits Times' of 28 January 1915 lamented:

There seems to be no limit whatever to the number of coolies (Norwegian ships) take on board. Between Bangkok and Swatow and Bangkok and Hoihow and one so often finds little boats of from 500 to 1000 tons with from 1500 – 2000 coolies aboard. On board one of these ships the other day, with about 1300 coolies on board, the skipper was asked what would happen in case of accident? He said "it would certainly be a case of every man for himself," and pointed out that the boats and life-rafts would not hold one-third of those on board...Most of these boats after leaving Hongkong go to Swatow to pick up their coolies and pass Hongkong on their way back to Bangkok." They carry no doctors or anything of that sort and the whole thing is really scandalous...things were bad enough on the German coolie-carrying boats, but they are infinitely worse on the Norwegian vessels, which in many cases are not fit for carrying.

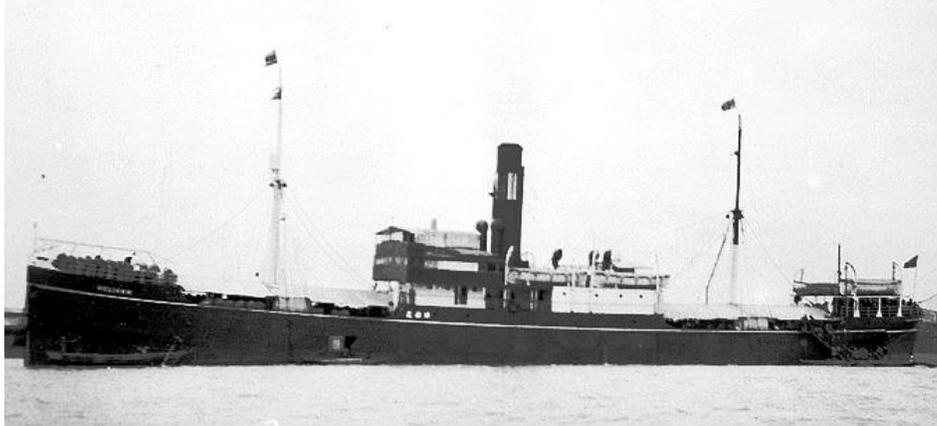
In point of fact, conditions on British-flag ships also left much to be desired. Supervision by the consuls and Chinese maritime Customs in Amoy and Swatow was lax and easily evaded by experienced passage brokers and compradores, over whom Masters had little practical authority. Nevertheless, change was in the offing with a turnover of owners, better ships and, from the 1920s, tighter regulation of the passenger trade.

Watershed

The immediate source of change came from the other side of the world with the outbreak in August 1914 of the great War between Germany, Britain and its allies. German ships, including almost the entire NDL fleet, were immediately interned in neutral ports, mainly Bangkok, Manila and the Netherlands Indies. As a result, Chino-Siam could now work its ships at full capacity and more normal rates, such that in 1915/16 (March-March) it earned a profit for the first time (ST, 16/2/16).

The shortage of tonnage could not easily be redressed but during 1915 or 1916 BK&Co. and Hans Kiær & Co., possibly with the backing of Chinese capital, each ordered two 2230-grt, 10-knot cargo-passenger ships from Hongkong & Whampoa Dock, of an improved standard in keeping with British regulations. The Kiær contracts were taken over in 1917 by H.M. Wrangell & Co., cashed up following an insurance payout. The ships were delivered as *Helikon* (September 1917), *Prosper* (December 1917), *Hermelin* (January 1918) and *Prominent* (February 1918), though on completion *Helikon* and *Hermelin* were requisitioned and taken under the British flag to be managed by Furness, Withy & Co. Ltd until September 1919. The first Norwegian ships built in the

Far East, they constituted an outstanding quartette of identical ships of almost 3,000 tons deadweight with two holds/four hatches and cabins for 20 passengers and a long, teak-planked 'tween deck space for probably around 1,000 third-class. While *Helikon* and *Hermelin* were under requisition, China Merchants *Kung Ping* was chartered for a year at the high wartime rate of HK\$102,00 per month (ST, 21/5/18).



HELIKON (#547) (Ragnar Andersen/skipshistorie.net).



PROSPER (#554) middle hull) under construction at Kowloon. Nearside vessel is somewhat larger CHAK SANG (#553) of Indo-China S.N. Co. The third vessel would be HERMELIN (#548) (HK&WD/HKMM ID 2008.0197.019b).

Although circumstances were now more favourable to the Chino-Siam venture, commercial viability proved unattainable. In the year ending March 1917 the company turned in a modest profit of 357,416 ticals, but the accumulated loss was still 213,294 ticals (*Malaya Tribune* 12/3/18). It was hoped to offset the loss in the 1917/18 financial year despite high charter rates and the high cost of coal. China's entry to World War I in August 1917 allowed interned German tonnage to be seized and put into service, though on the other hand the Hong Kong Government's requisition of tonnage, including the new *Helikon* and *Hermelin*, cut into the rice trade. Chino-Siam muddled along until the postwar depression that struck worldwide in April 1920 led to general over-tonnaging and further losses. There was no willingness to persevere. On 21 July 1920 a meeting in Bangkok unanimously agreed to wind up the company (*Malaya Tribune*, 7/8/20).

It may be noted in passing that in the eleven years of its existence, Chino-Siam owned only one ship, the 480-ton, twin-screw lighter *Dusit* (1911), which was taken over in 1917 from the Siam Commercial Bank and sold in mid-1919 to the Anglo-Siam Corporation of Bangkok. Legal wrangling over the authority to sell and the allegedly cheap sale price dragged on to the end of 1920. Built in Scotland for a Chinese rice mill owner, *Dusit* had been designed to tranship cargo to/from ocean-going vessels in the anchorage at Koh Sichang. Acquired in 1939 by the Danish East Asiatic Company, she is reported by Ole Stig Johannesen as having been recovered at

Singapore in 1945 and sold ten years later to Thai owners. From October 1959 to August 1960 she was calling regularly at Singapore as the Singapore-registered, British-flag *Hai Teck Ann*. Chartered in late 1961 by P.T. Pelajaran 'Sang Saka' of Jakarta, she was expropriated by the Indonesian Government after the outbreak of the Confrontation campaign against Britain and Malaysia but evidently continued to be operated for some time by Sang Saka. Lloyd's subsequently listed her as owned by Hiang Sing Shg Co. Ltd under the Panamanian flag and as such she survived in Lloyd's Register until 1998. In the late-1960s Sang Saka did sell other ships for demolition in Singapore but it is unlikely *Hai Teck Ann* lasted beyond 1970 and certainly was never seen as such.

The Interwar Years

Despite the collapse of Chino-Siam, the rice and passenger carriage between Bangkok/Saigon and Hong Kong/South China remained a staple trade that always needed shipping space and the Norwegian-flag ships continued to be well employed under charter into the 1920s. In 1922 BK&Co., always well capitalised and showing the initiative, took a major step forward (and the only such move, prewar or postwar by a Norwegian owner) in formalising its position as a South China-based operator, China-Siam Line with Thoresen & Co. part owners and agents in Hong Kong. Three years later BK&Co. would acquire 50% of the shares of Thoresen, which proceeded to open a branch in Bangkok. The formation of China Siam Line just two years after the collapse of Chino-Siam suggests some continuity. Whereas Chino-Siam had been a chartering operation, China Siam Line was a conventional shipping line whereby the owner (BK&Co.) provided the tonnage and the agents (Thoresen & Co.) looked after the management. The first ships employed by China Siam Line were *Haldis*, *Halvard*, *Hermelin* and *Helikon* which were now freed from time charters to various operators. Sailings were advertised Bangkok-Swatow-Hong Kong about twice a week and Bangkok-Hoihow-Hong Kong about twice a month. By the eve of the world depression, a larger fleet enabled China Siam to advertise weekly services Bangkok-Singapore, Bangkok-Swatow-Hong Kong, Bangkok-Hoihow-Hong Kong and Swatow-Hoihow-Singapore; BK&Co. separately continued to charter out other ships of its large fleet not using the CSL banner.

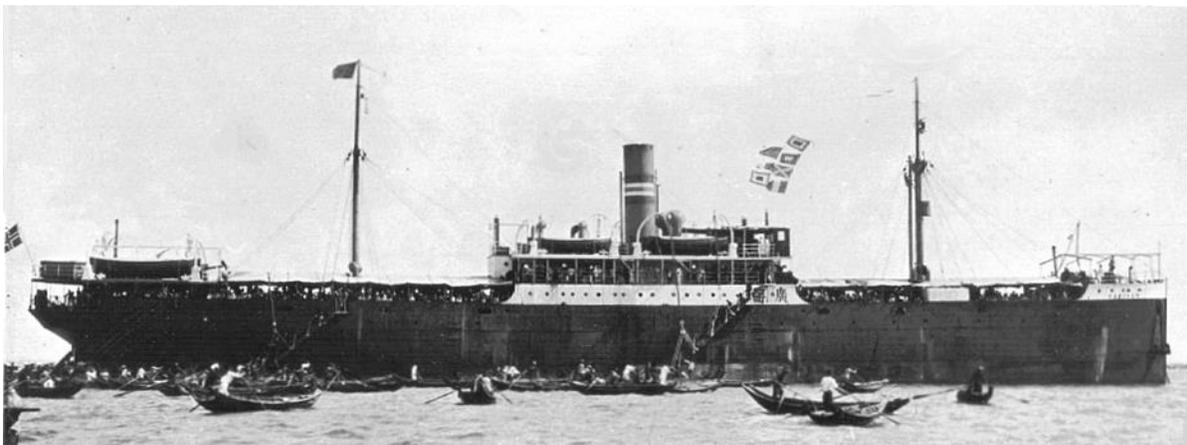


BK&Co.'s 2000-dwt HENRIK (1920) at Singapore in 1920s in charterer's colours with Cantonese name 恒安 HANG AN. One of a class of eight built by New Eng. & S.B. Works, Shanghai. Sisters HERO, HYDRA, DUKAT (from 1930 owned by Arne Sveen), DUX (later Arne Sveen's NGOW HOCK), HALVDAN, HAFTHOR and HERVAR. None reported to have carried passengers (Alg. Rijksarchief, KPM Archive).

BK&Co./China Siam Line achieved a spectacular coup in 1923 in the form of a ten-year agreement with the largest and most reputable Chinese trading house, Wang Lee, which also ran a large rice company, to act as the firm's agent in Bangkok. The Wang Lee dynasty could trace its origins to Kwantung Province near Swatow, had operations covering Hong Kong, Thailand and the Malaya Peninsula and connections with BK&Co. was said to go back 23 years. What underpinned that structure was the economic weight of the rice milling in Bangkok, the rice merchant structure in Hong Kong, and the passage broking in Swatow. The China Siam Line-

Wang Lee connection relieved the millers, merchants and brokers of the risks and potential losses of shipowning and chartering and China Siam Line remained a Sino-Norwegian collaboration. Indeed, Chino-Siam had been referred to in common parlance as the China Siam Line Wang Lee affiliate Tan Guan Lee Co. Ltd henceforth served as agents in Singapore, primarily for the busy Bangkok-Singapore rice trade, which employed mainly the 2000-dwt 'Hero'-class freighters.

In the mid-1920s Shanghai and Hong Kong broker/shipowner Wallem & Co. entered the passenger trade with the construction of three China coasters of a somewhat larger type of 3500-dwt with a speed of 12 knots. Although Wallem & Co. had been shipowners since 1907, hitherto their fleet had comprised cargo vessels deployed as trampships, mainly in the various coal trades and at the beginning of the 1920s as a sole proprietor, Haakon Wallem was experiencing major financial difficulties. After attempting start-ups of a number of companies throughout 1922, he finally achieved success with the formation of A/S Wallem, which purchased second-hand *Kronviken* in 1922 and *Solviken* in 1923 and soon employed both vessels very profitably in the Far East (Helle p.86). Wallem saw opportunity for a larger and improved China coaster able to be chartered for the carriage of deck-passengers as well as cargo and sought to order the very best ship of that type. *Norviken*, *Daviken* and *Sandviken* were delivered from the Scottish yard of William Hamilton & Co in quick succession between December 1925 and January 1926. Their outstanding feature was a teak-planked awning deck able to carry a few first-class passengers in well-appointed cabins along with a very large number of third-class passengers. As licensed in Hong Kong, they could carry around 20 first-class and up to 1,100 third-class passengers (NCH, 5/6/26). The slightly smaller *Solviken* (1910) was converted in a like fashion making up a quartette. During the 1920s they were all mainly chartered for the South China-Straits passenger trade. From 1930/31 until 1937 the three newer ships were chartered to Indo-China S.N. Co. for service on the China Coast while *Solviken* at a cheaper hire mostly remained in the Straits trade.



Wallems' DAVIKEN at Singapore, late-1920s, with a large complement of deck passengers, awnings rigged on all four hatches (KPM/Alg. Rijksarchief).

Records of the Dutch Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM) give a good overview of the Straits-China trade in 1926, a busy year because of the rubber boom in Southeast Asia. The boycott of Japanese and British tonnage resulted in a record number of Chinese being transported from Swatow in 1925. The KPM itself ex Sumatra provided 25 sailings (fortnightly) alongside China Navigation (42), British India (Apcar Line) ex Calcutta to Japan (34), Jardines' ex Calcutta (28), Ho Hong (21) and the Rangoon-Chinese owner of *Seang Bee* (7). In October, these six companies reached a minimum tariff agreement from Amoy. Several Chinese charterers were also identified: Kuen Sang & Co. (20) by *Wing Hong*, *South Africa*, **Fingal** (2137/23, A.F. Klaveness), *Haiching*, **Mondego** (ex *Standard*), *Haiyang* and *Hai Hong*, Tan Guan Lee & Co. (10) by **Helikon** and **Helios**, Hang Seng & Co. (9) by *Haitan* and **Svale** (2175/05, reg. Trondheim), on charter to Khoon Seng & Co. (7) by *Clara Jebesen*, **Pronto** and *Seistan*, and Lee Hock & Co. (5) by **Norviken** and **Solviken**. Another 483 sailings by

'outsiders' made a total of 702, equivalent to two sailings each day. The eight Norwegian steamers (*italics*) were therefore a small percentage of the overall tonnage, by no means as prominent as in the Bangkok and Saigon trades.

Much the same pattern would persist through the late 1920s. The Amoy agreement was extended for a year from April 1927 while the KPM, China Navigation, Ho Hong and the owner of *Seang Bee* reached agreement on minimum freight rates from Swatow. Passengers departing from or arriving at Swatow reached their peak in 1928 at 2,370,224 (Helle p. 86) but once the anti-British boycott ended in early 1927, the Norwegian share in transportation fell. *Prosper*, *Prominent* and *Pronto* all were on time charters 1926-29 and sailed from Hong Kong and Canton to Bangkok and Saigon each carrying between 219 and 700 deck passengers as well as rice and general cargo (Helle p.91).

This core group would consolidate in the early 1930s after *Seang Bee* was sold to breakers in 1931 and then in 1932 the bankrupt Ho Hong company was taken over and re-formed by Butterfield & Swire (China Navigation). On the Chinese side, in 1930 Hang Seng & Co. morphed into Wah Seng & Co./Wah Nam & Co. with 51 sailings, thus weekly, by the charters *Lyeemoon*, *Seistan*, ***Norviken***, ***Pronto***, ***Prominent***, ***Haldis***, *Tinhow*, ***Solviken***, ***Daviken***, ***Halvard***, ***Svale***, ***Prosper***, and *Gustav Diederichsen*, while Tan Guan Lee (15) chartered ***Hai Hing*** and, as previously, ***Helios*** [Norwegian-flag ships in bold font]

In 1929 BK&Co. entered into an agency agreement with Eng Hock, thus gaining access to ports such as Amoy, Penang and Rangoon (Helle p.93). Sailings commenced for *Hai Hing* Amoy-Swatow-Hong Kong-Hoihow-Singapore-Penang Rangoon. In a letter on 2 August that year to the Chinese Ministry of Trade the Norwegian Vice-Consul in Hong Kong listed the Norwegian passenger ships carrying Chinese migrants as *Daviken*, *Solviken*, *Sandviken*, *Norviken*, *Hai Hing*, *Helios*, *Hellas*, *Hiram*, *Hirundo*, *Prominent*, *Prosper* and *Pronto* (footnote Helle p.86).

In the Bangkok trade, in 1929 another Norwegian shipowner entered the Bangkok trade in association with a syndicate of five Teochew rice merchants who sought to compete with China Siam Line in the rice trade between Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong. Their trading name of Ngow Hock denoted 'Five Fortunes'. Like Chino-Siam previously, Ngow Hock sought not to buy and manage ships but to charter under the Norwegian flag. For this purpose, they turned to Capt. Arne Sveen of Oslo, whom at least one of the parties to Ngow Hock must have come to know during calls at Bangkok on Norwegian-flag ships.

Presumably with funds mainly provided by Ngow Hock, in August 1929 Sveen bought from BK&Co. and registered under the Norwegian flag the single-deck, 2000-dwt cargo ship *Dukat* (1920) for charter to Ngow Hock, Sveen owner-master, for trading between Hong Kong, Bangkok and Singapore. In 1932 Sveen/Ngow Hock added the sister ship *Bratland* ex *Dux* (1920) renamed *Ngow Hock*. Both were able to carry almost 2,000 tons of rice but few passengers. Sveen therefore ordered from Norway a larger 3600-dwt ship with an extended shelter deck amidships for passengers. She was delivered in mid-1936 as *Mui Hock*, entering the Bangkok-China service in October.

While *Mui Hock* was a plain and practical ship, she was much inferior to BK&Co.'s new diesel-powered *Hai Hing* (1929) and even more so the *Hai Lee* (1934). Motorships dated back to before World War I and were by no means an innovation in world shipping but China Coast firms had remained loyal to steam engines because coal was plentiful and cheap and a good part of the burden of maintenance fell on shipyards rather than crews. Coal availability was not the case, however, at Bangkok, which explains why from 1912 the Danish East Asiatic Company took delivery of motorships for their ocean line. The associated Siam S.N. Co. Ltd that served the coastal trade took delivery of motorships from *Malini* (1925). BK&Co.'s *Hai Hing* (1929) was therefore hardly precocious. Coal bunkers were cheap at Hong Kong and Singapore but diesels did away with the need

to carry sufficient coal for the roundtrip and doing away with the coal bunker, thereby allowing more rice to be carried on the return trip. Norwegian shipowners were ahead of their British rivals, though not by much. In December 1930 China Navigation took delivery of its first motorship, the 4450-dwt, 12-knot *Anshun* for the South China-Straits trade, a ship comparable in size with *Hai Lee* but single-screw and rather slower. China Navigation added two more coasters, the 2800-dwt, 11-knot *Yochow* (1933) and *Yunnan* (1934), then reverted to steam. Jardines were less adventurous and remained wedded to steam until after World War II. All round, *Hai Hing* and *Hai Lee* set a high standard and became a model for Norwegian-flag ships that would follow after World War II.

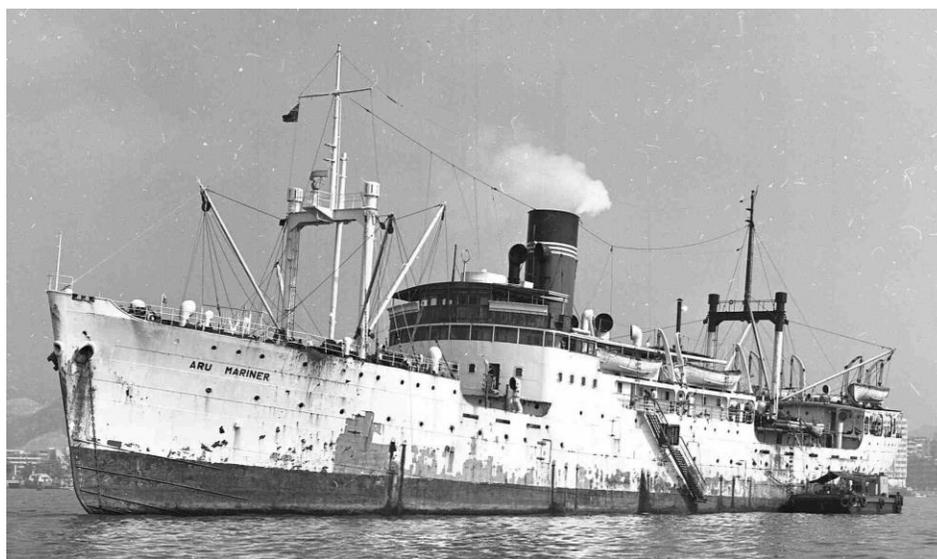


HAI LEE (1934) when new with bow to stern housings, awnings and davits for more boats
(H. Larsson-Feddes/sjohistorie.no).

On the eve of World War II four fine China Coasters were delivered by the Hongkong & Whampoa Dock in Hong Kong, one to BK&Co., two to Indo-China S.N. Co., and one to Jebsen. All were advances on their owner's previous vessels and as a group they epitomised the 'state of the art'. BK&Co.'s *Hermelin* (April 1940) was a more compact *Hai Lee* (1934) for the Bangkok line with a somewhat smaller deadweight of 2620 tons and a 5-cylinder Burmeister & Wain diesel for a speed of 12 knots. The other three were sturdy coal-burning steamers, well fitted out. Jardines' *Wing Sang* (August 1938) and *Tai Sang* (October 1938) were built for the Canton-Hong Kong-Shanghai-Tientsin line on the prototype of Lithgows *Tak Sang* (1935) with a three-island hull that included a raised poop deck – the central raised bridge deck was fitted with anti-piracy grilles to protect the officers and passenger cabins above. With a typical 3,000 deadweight capacity, their four hatches were served by steel hatch covers and Japanese-style goalpost masts, they had spacious 'tween decks, and a Gotaverken turbo-compressor fitted to their quadruple-expansion engines gave a service speed of 14 knots – on trials *Wing Sang* did 14.63 knots. The Danish-flag *Heinrich Jessen* (September 1940) was a generally similar vessel with conventional rather than steel hatch covers but with a greater deadweight of 3,400 tons though, without the exhaust turbine, a slower 12/13-knot speed. *Hermelin*, *Wing Sang* and *Heinrich Jessen* would survive the war. In October 1947 the latter pair would be converted to oil-firing.

As a Danish vessel of the extensive Jebsen China coast fleet, *Heinrich Jessen* is not represented in our list so, for the sake of completeness and to illustrate the versatility of the ship, some account of her may be given here. On completion, she was immediately requisitioned by the British Ministry of War Transport, Denmark by then being under Nazi occupation, and at the beginning of November 1940 placed in service between South China, and Bangkok under the management of Butterfield & Swire, then from March 1941 switched to the rice trade from Rangoon to Singapore under the management of British India S.N. Co. From November 1941 she served as a baseship at Calcutta, then after repairs at Colombo in mid-June 1942 was delivered **at Calcutta** to serve out the rest of the war and beyond as the motor torpedo boat base ship R.I.N. *Barracuda*. On 1 January 1947 she arrived at Singapore from Calcutta and proceeded to Hong Kong for refit by her builders prior to very belated delivery to Rhederei M. Jebsen on 14 May. She was now licensed for 10 first, 28 second and 1,000 deck passengers. After a few months on the China Coast, in October 1947 she was chartered for a year to newly formed Dutch-flag Royal Interocean Lines to revive the Sumatra-Malaya-China line, then from

November 1948 for a year to China Navigation Co. for their Amoy-Swatow-Straits line. Through the 1950s she ran for her owners in a Jebsen Line between the Straits, Shanghai and North China. In December 1958 she was detained by the Indonesian Navy at Tanjung Priok (Jakarta) for loading copra at Ambon for Singapore without proper permit and had to offload. Nevertheless, she was back on charter in Indonesian waters from March to August of the following year. During 1961 she voyaged to then Dutch New Guinea and undertook at least one voyage repatriating Chinese to Canton. At the beginning of 1962 she made a few voyages with cabin and deck passengers between the Straits, Nagapatnam and Madras, in midyear was calling at Aden and the Red Sea, and later in the year was on trip charter to Burma Five Star Line for service between Burma and Japan. Jebsen sold her in 1964 to United China Shipping Co. of Hongkong and as *Aru Mariner* she was placed under the Liberian flag for charter to Indonesia and until at least mid-1968 she operated for state-owned interisland shipping company PELNI in a three-weekly express passenger service from Tanjung Priok to Surabaya, Makassar, Menado/Bitung and Ternate for which her deck passenger spaces would have been well used. By early 1969 she was plying between Java and Hong Kong, probably carrying cattle northbound, and continued in this trade until arrival in Hong Kong on 23 November 1970, after which she was delivered to Yau Wing Shipbreaking Co. for demolition.



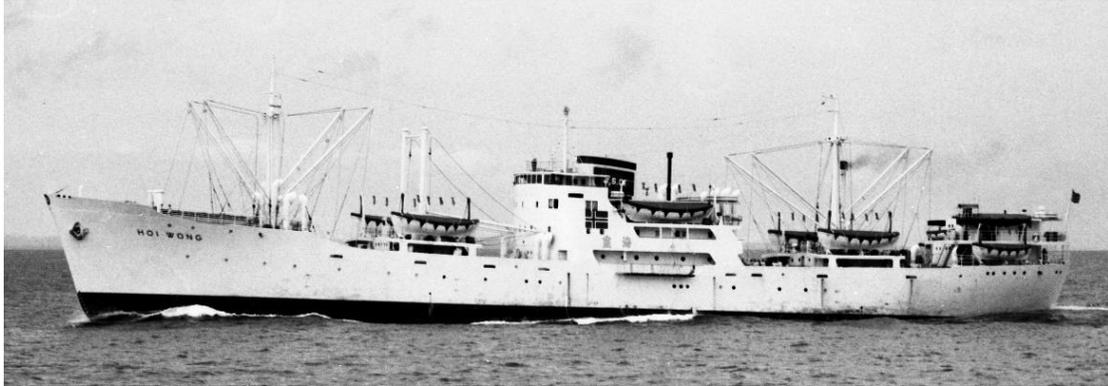
HEINRICH JESSEN (1940) as Liberian-flag ARU MARINER off Stonecutters' Island, Hong Kong, 8 Dec. 1969. Her three-island configuration and 'tween deck portholes are clearly apparent but after four years of passenger service in Indonesia she had been downgraded to a cattle carrier and a year later would go to breakers (W. Schell).

After 1945

Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937 at first worked to the advantage of neutral Norwegian-flag intra-Asian shipping because the losses and blockade of Chinese-flag shipping meant gave more opportunities for charter and at premium rates. Some ships were switched from the southern trades to the China Coast. The German occupation of Norway in April 1940 had no immediate effect on this business but Japan's declaration of War in December 1941 and swift occupation of Southeast Asia brought it to a sudden end. Those Norwegian ships that could escape sought refuge in the Indian Ocean or Australia.

The end of requisitioning in April 1946 saw a much-depleted fleet returned to owners. BK&Co. retained passenger carriers *Hiram* (1926), *Hai Lee* (1934) and *Hermelin* (1940), Odland (D/S A/S Produce) recovered *Prosper* (1917) and *Sveen Hock Lee* (1936) and Wallem *Daviken* (1926) and *Sandviken* (1926). There was plenty of business because of the urgent need to restore to the rice trade to Hong Kong and Singapore and, in the passenger trade, to reunite families stranded by the war. All owners except Wallem therefore sought to replace tonnage while former whaling company manager Jørgen Krag of Oslo was persuaded to invest in building three ships in quick succession. Wrangell's heirs revived Skibs A/S Corona in the South China Sea trade, ordering *Hoi Wong* (1948) and *Hoi Houw* (1949), state-of-the-art, 5-hatch China Coasters with the

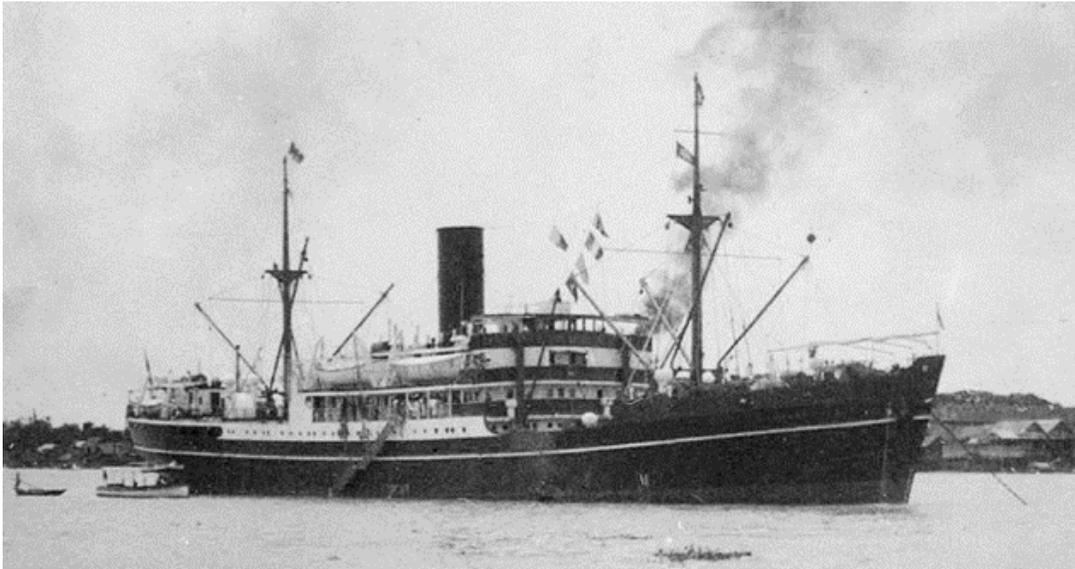
innovation of an air-conditioned accommodation block for the officers and ten first-class passengers, 'tween deck space for around a thousand passengers, all-electric winches for handling their 3,000 tons of cargo and 7-cylinder diesels for a good service speed of 14-knots. It may be noted that the Master of a Wrangell ship reported undertaking a voyage in the mid-1950s with as many as two thousand passengers (Helle p.76).



Wrangells' HOI WONG (1948) in Malacca Strait, September 1962, in charterer Jebshun's colours for the South China-Straits trade. The row of portholes shows the passenger 'tween deck. The smoke at the mainmast is from a temporary vent to the passenger galley (Dr. George Wilson).

Despite early postwar optimism, it soon became apparent that there would be no restoration of prewar trading conditions. Termination of treaty rights and the application of cabotage closed China's domestic coastal trade to foreign vessels. Foreign companies, including Wallem & Co., withdrew their offices from Shanghai to Hong Kong. The fall of Shanghai to Mao's armies in July 1949 led to a US-backed Nationalist blockade of the China Coast and for some months there was little activity. Ho Hong laid up its last ship, *Hong Siang*, at Singapore after arrival from Amoy at the end of September 1949. Swire's and Jardines attempted to run the blockade to Swatow and Shanghai but withdrew after vessels had struck mines and the risks became too great. That left Norwegian owners in a strong position to charter to Chinese traders provided they could cover war risks. There was growing demand for rice shipments to Hong Kong, whose population was soaring, and still a modest general cargo trade out of Swatow and Hainan, also still a passenger trade to Bangkok, Singapore and Penang, though official controls restricted the monthly number for family reunions and migration to hundreds rather than thousands.

The 'China Coaster' or perhaps now 'South China Sea Coaster' therefore remained viable through the 1950s and into the 1960s, though not with their traditional British owners. Jardines withdrew from the passenger trade to concentrate upon their traditional line to Calcutta via Singapore and a developing trade with Australia. China Navigation (CNCo.) took delivery in 1946/47 of a final quartette of 'S'-class China Coasters as replacements for the Bangkok line while ambitiously ordering much larger and faster ships for the Straits and Indonesian trades. Designed for the South China-Straits line, *Anking* (1950) and *Anshun* (1951) soon proved to be too big while *Chungking* (1950) and *Changchow* (1951) were chartered out to Messageries Maritimes for operation from France to the South Pacific and then sold to the Admiralty without ever entering their intended service to Indonesia. In 1952, after the mining of *Anhui* (1925) at Swatow, CNCo. allocated *Anking* and *Anshun* to the pilgrim trade, sold their older consort *Kweiyang* (1921) to the Wha Thai Company of Bangkok, redeployed two and later three 'S'-class to a new Sydney-New Guinea line [Details of these three groups of ships may be found in our studies accessed via the 'CNCo.' tab at oldchinaships.com]. As indicated above, the associated Ho Hong S.S. Co. had already closed its South China-Straits-Rangoon line.



By way of comparison, China Navigation's SHANSI (1947) in the river below Bangkok, Sept. 1952. Second last proper China Coaster built for British owners and photographed just before transfer to the Sydney-Papua-New Guinea trade (coll. H. Dick).

By the mid-1950s what had emerged out of much shuffling of tonnage was that ownership and management of the South China Sea trades had shifted from London to Bangkok, Hong Kong and Singapore. In 1947 Hong Kong-based, Swatow-linked Jebshun Shipping [study accessible via the 'Singapore' tab at oldchinaships.com] re-entered the Swatow-Straits cargo-passenger trade by chartering *Prosper* (1917) and would subsequently charter Wrangells' *Hoi Wong* (1948) and *Hoi Houw* (1949), both wearing their bright funnel. In Bangkok, former charterer Ngow Hock in 1955 bought Jardines' *E Sang* ex *Hai Heng* (1934), renamed *Blissful*, then in 1959 the elderly *Prosper* and CNCo.'s motor coaster *Yunnan* (1934), renamed *On Thai*. Ngow Hock continued to charter Norwegian-flag tonnage but this was now supplementary. Over the same period, Hong Kong-based, British-flag Shun Cheong S.N. Co. bought CNCo.'s coastal liner *Shengking* (*Taipoosek*) and Jardines' *Wo Sang* ex *Hai Chen* (1934) (*TaipooHong*) and the China Coaster *Wing Sang* (1938) (*Taipooloy*) to offer more cabin-passenger accommodation and faster voyages South China-Hong Kong and Saigon, Bangkok, Singapore and Penang. Dredging of the bar at Bangkok and the opening from 1954 of upstream berths at Khlong Toey for 10,000-dwt cargo ships removed the draught limitation for local traders. Wrangell responded by commissioning *Hoi Ying* (1955) as an improved 'Hoi Wong' class with 5 hatches and a greater deadweight of 4,500 tons, though Sveen's pretty 2,800-dwt *Hock Lee* (1956) was traditional apart from her bipod masts and even regressive in being a compound-engined slow steamer.

Seven war loss replacements for BK&Co. were completed in 1949/50 including three passenger ships with both cabin (90 first, 20 second) and the usual 'tween deck accommodation (720 steerage), namely *Hermod*, *Helios*, *Hai Meng* and the larger *Hai Hing*. From 1949 the company had to find new trades and CSL expanded its services in three directions. The first of these was to Japan, where destruction of the Japanese fleet and postwar restrictions had created a new opportunity, principally a demand for cargo space. By early 1951 CSL were operating a regular service from Bangkok to Japanese ports via Manila and Keelung. The service was profitable in both directions, there being at that time a large demand for Thai rice in Japan, while it is recorded that cargoes loaded in Japanese ports included metal products, textiles, cement and vehicles. In September 1959, services were extended from Penang into the Bay of Bengal to Rangoon, Chittagong and Calcutta. The third area was ports in North Borneo. CSL was able to continue to provide regular calls to Chinese ports, but these were no longer the primary focus. Since this network had outreached and outdated its original name, from 1 January 1960 China Siam Line was restyled Norwegian Asia Line (NAL), from 1972 operating as Indo-China Norwegian Asia Line (ICNAL) following the withdrawal of Jardine ships.



Designed as a running mate for HAI LEE, postwar HAI HING (1950) as built (coll. Hans Olav Isaksen/skipshistorie.net).

BK&Co. maintained the passenger accommodation passenger facilities in its vessels as late as 1966 but by 1969 priorities were such that all vessels were being operated as cargo only with former 'tween deck ports sealed up. Their immediate postwar vessels, now too small, were then sold off, the last being *Hai Hing* in 1974. After sale *Hai Meng* was sunk in hostilities in 1972 but *Hermelin*, *Hai Hing*, *Helios* and *Hermod* each lasted five to eight years with new owners, the first three joining *Hoi Houw* in the fleet of Kin Wah Maritime Co., Hong Kong which then operated them with 'Country' names between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, although with cargo only.

During the 1960s as second-hand passenger tonnage became available at modest prices, Singaporean and Hong Kong owners took advantage. In 1961 Kie Hock Shipping introduced the 10,500-grt, 16-knot former Australian coastal liner *Duntroon* (1935) to run between the Straits and Hong Kong/Whampoa as *Tong Hoo*. She proved too large and was soon chartered out, while Shun Cheong commissioned the 5-hatch, 6000-dwt *Taioosek* (1962) and *Wrangell* the near sister *Hoi Kung* (1964). Their lesser number of third-class passengers was now carried only in the after 'tween deck and in greater comfort with bunk beds and table settings. The older *Hoi Wong* and *Hoi Houw* were similarly refitted, the later prior to transfer to the Singapore-Christmas Island supply run. Yet there was still some role for the older China coasters. In the mid-1960s all four of CNCo.'s 'S' class (1946/47) were taken up by Singapore owners Kie Hock (2) and the newly formed Pacific International Lines (2).



Wrangell's HOI HOUW on the buoy off Christmas Island, early 1960s, after arrival from Singapore. The phosphate loading wharf was around to the right (T.C. Woot).

For the remaining operators, the shift in passenger carriage with Hong Kong and China from third-class unberthed to cabin-class picked up at the end of the 1960s. In 1968 Guan Guan Shipping of Singapore introduced to the Hong Kong/Whampoa trade the 5180-grt, 14-knot *Kim Hwa* (1950). Built as *Daressa* for British India S.N. Co.'s Bombay-Persian Gulf line, she was something like an enlarged China Coaster with cargo capacity in two holds of around 4,000 tons and accommodation for 26 first, 60 second and about 650 unberthed passengers. In 1969 Pacific International Lines, owned and managed by the former General Manager of Kie Hock, Y.C. Chang, introduced the very comfortable *Kota Panjang* ex *Taiyuan* (1949), previously running between Japan, Hong Kong and Australia, then Guan Guan responded in 1971 with the 7656-grt former Portugal-Goa-Macao liner *Timor*, renamed *Kim Ann* (1951) and in 1974 her sister *India* (1951), renamed *Kim Hock* (II). The latter pair were proper passenger ships designed for around a hundred cabin passengers and another 300 or so troops below aft in 6-berth cabins.



KIM HWA ex DARESSA (P. Foxley/Chris Howell/Shipspotting).

The period through the 1970s into the early 1980s was therefore an Indian summer of the intra-Asian passenger traffic by sea before air flights became cheap enough that the much longer and less predictable sea voyage no longer commercially viable, even for well fitted-out passenger liners. In 1971-2 *TaiPOSEK* and *Hoi Kung* worked on charter to the short-lived Micronesia Inter-Ocean Lines (MILI) for cargo-passenger service between Japan and the islands of Micronesia, all a long way from the South China Sea. Meanwhile, containerisation was beginning to take over the cargo trade. The old *Prosper* (1917) and *Daviken* (1926) both went to breakers in 1968 after a remarkable 51 and 42 years of service respectively. During the 1970s most of the postwar China Coasters also went to breakers. The last survivors of the Norwegian-flag fleet, by the end of 1977 sailing under other flags, were *Hoi Houw* (broken up in 1984), *Hoi Ying* (in 1985) and *Hoi Kung* (in 1986), as also the Norwegian-built *TaiPOSEK*.



Elderly PROSPER loading at Bangkok in the 1960s in Ngow Hock colours (Internet).

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