

Hong Kong Dustbins of the South China Sea

By

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By the mid 1950's the world's shipping fleets were recovering after the high losses during WW 2. Europe was building new and more modern tonnage at quite a rapid pace, and the Europe to Asia shipping trade was also entering a period of renewed expansion. This gave opportunities to Asian corporations that were inclined towards ship owning, to enter the market and develop their business. This was made easier for them because of the abundance of older tonnage that was becoming available on the market at cheap prices. In most cases the ships were old and well worn, but still with a few years life remaining.

As a consequence, the 1950-1960s saw a large number of these older vessels finding their way into the hands of Far Eastern owners. Hong Kong was an attractive location for many of these fledgling ship owners to establish their business Head Quarters and develop their fleets. Hong Kong offered stability of government, a competitive commercial environment, and a vibrant shipping register that provided an air of respectability due to the fact that it was closely fashioned on that of the United Kingdom. There were those however, who registered their ships in Panama and operated their ships from Hong Kong, under the notion that Panama may be a more flexible register for the ageing ships, and there was less transparency for companies when registered in Panama. Some of the more dodgy operators looking upon this as a convenient means of avoiding liability in the eventuality of financial delinquency or mishap linked to their vessels. All said and done, and in reality, a Panamanian Company was nothing more than a brass plate on the door of an attorney's office in Panama.

Hence, there was a "Boom" in the number of shipping enterprises and vessels being registered in Hong Kong during this period. Many of the shipping companies traded their vessels within Asia, particularly those countries that were within relatively close proximity to the South China Sea, such as Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan (aka Formosa), Philippines, Borneo, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore and Malaya as it was then known. These old vessels were very dominant in the waters around these areas. The term "Hong Kong Dustbin" evolved due to many of the early owners just painting their vessel's funnels all black – somewhat resembling and upturned dust bin. Henceforth, the name stuck. It would also be true to say that there was a fair share of shady ship operators around in those early days of development that may not have been so enthusiastic in openly advertising their company insignia or identity, for reasons best known to themselves.

The only real way of identifying these "Hong Kong Dustbins" was by the Union Flag prominently painted on each side of the vessels hull, with the ship's name in Chinese Characters, likewise displayed. It would be true to say that this was primarily to facilitate ease of recognition as there were a number of open conflict zones about the China Seas around that era, such as China and Formosa, North Korea and Vietnam. Restrictions of trade applied between some countries, a good example of which was between Formosa (Taiwan) and China with most commodities being transshipped via Hong Kong on what were loosely defined, but not strictly correct, neutral tonnage. In the mid- to late 1950s the Formosa Straits

was notorious as a conflict zone between China and Formosa (now known as Taiwan). Similarly, North Vietnam became a “War Zone” in the mid 1960s, when numerous vessels were mined or bombed.

It was only around the mid-1960’s that many of the allegedly dodgy shipping companies, threw off their shady veils, and started to take a pride in vessel ownership and display company Motifs and Logos on vessel funnels. This period was also a golden age for numerous ship management concerns that managed the various vessels on behalf of beneficial owners, another way of masking true ownership in many cases.

Sometimes, these old ladies would anchor for weeks either at Yau Ma Tei or Western Anchorages, to await the opportunity of suitable cargoes. In the event of an approaching Typhoon they often shifted to a more sheltered area of Hong Kong known as “**Tolo Harbor**”, which was often the scene of numerous groundings following a Typhoon.

During the first half of 1960s there were lucrative cargoes available for ships willing to trade to North Vietnam, namely; Haiphong and Port Campha, situated at the head of the Gulf of Tonkin. Port Campha was a port known for its coal exports. This was a temptation for some owners of “old ladies” of the sea. By paying ship’s crews so called “Danger Money” they were attracted to this trading area which resulted in a significant number of vessels becoming casualties, due to bombing or mining.

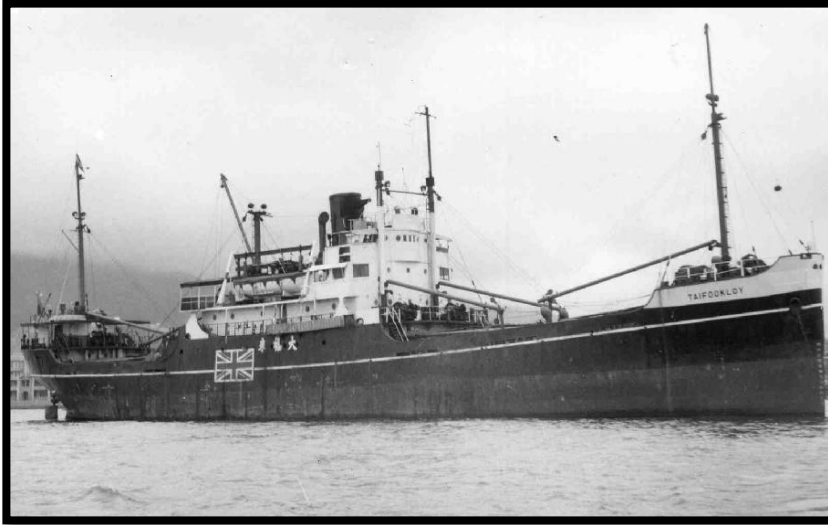
One of the dangers associated with remaining in Hong Kong Harbor during a typhoon was, the serious consequences of dragging anchors in Typhoon conditions. This seriously increased the danger of collisions between vessels and also the high risk of dragging anchors across the telephone cable reserves and snagging the various marine cables that linked Hong Kong with Kowloon, as well as internationally. The Hong Kong Marine Department was therefore, very actively engaged in implementing the “Typhoon Regulations” applicable to ships and raised the alert at an early stage once a pending Typhoon became imminent.

Of course, Hong Kong had its share of long established and more traditional ship owners. This included, amongst others, China Navigation Company, Indo-China SS Company (Jardines), John Manners Group and its various shipping subsidiaries, Williamsons and their Douglas SS Company, Harley Mullion and Company,

Moller Shipping, Wallem and Company, to name but several. These entities were the backbone of Hong Kong shipping during the early and mid 1960s, prior to the advent of many newcomers which are household names in Hong Kong shipping circles nowadays.

Hong Kong was also an attractive management base for Euro-continental ship owners who had traditionally operated regionally around the Far East, such as Thoresen, Wrangell, and Bruusgaard of Norway and, Jebsen of Denmark.

Gallery of typical “Hong Kong Dustbins” during the 1950-60s



An American “Jeep Class” built in 1944. The **“Taifookloy”** at anchor in Hong Kong during the period. This type was used quite extensively for the various coastal trades of the Far East—easy and cheap to operate. Its very basic construction made it easy to maintain.

Union Flag and ship’s name illustrated on ship’s side. The ship was wrecked on Lantau Island in 1962, as a result of grounding during a Typhoon.



“MV. Wishford” – Owned by a Mainland China front company based in Hong Kong. Note the Union Flag painted on ship’s side.



The old steamer "**Landspride**" operated by Wheelock Marsden and Co. of Hong Kong



Another old steamship "**Inchstuart**" operated by the well know Williamsons and Co. of Hong Kong



MV East Wales sold to Hong Kong owners and renamed **“Universal Skipper”**



An ex Australian **“Dustbin”** acquired by Hong Kong interests and renamed **“Pacific King”** captioned at the end of her working life on her way for demolition at Junk Bay, in 1969.



The old steam ship **"Lady Isobel"**.
Purchased by John Manners – Hong Kong
and renamed **"Manly Breeze"** and later
changed to **"San Carlos"** by the same
owners.

Sold to John Manners – Hong Kong
in 1957 and renamed **"Wear
Breeze"**



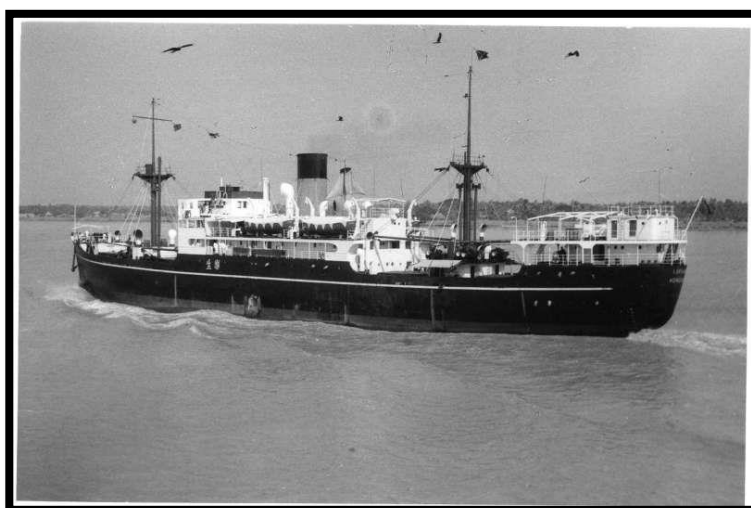
One of the smarter looking
"Dustbins" – **"MV Inchdouglass"** of
Williamsons - Hong Kong (formerly
Douglas Steam Ship Company)

"Incharran" of Williamsons (formerly Douglas Steamship Company), – departing Hong Kong in 1955, renamed **"Ho Sang"** after her sale to **Jardines**, and used mainly in the Far East Logging Trade



Jardine's **"Hop Sang"** sister ship to the **"Ho Sang"** used extensively in the Far East logging trade. The Borneo river ports were the main source of their cargoes and they operated in this trade, very successfully, for a good number of years

The handsome looking, and very trim, **"Lok Sang"** belonging to Indo-China SS Co. – Jardines.



The original old
"Bradford City",
eventually sold to
Jebshun-Hong Kong in
1968, becoming **"Shun
Wah"**



The **"Peebles"** an old Geordie
Tramp, sold to John Manners –
Hong Kong in 1957 which became
their **"San Fernando"** being
placed under the Panamanian
registry.

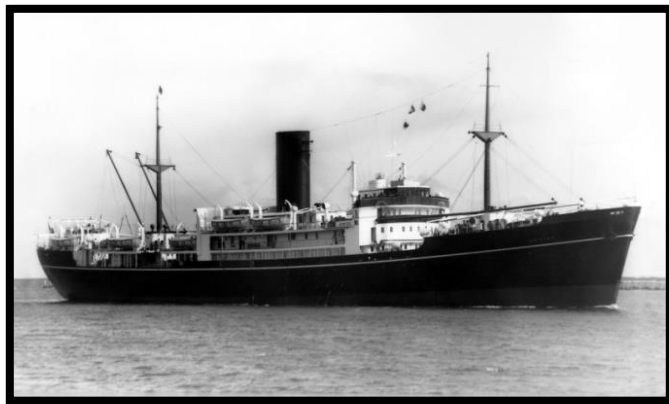
Perhaps the painting of the
"San Fernando" by the
renowned Maritime Artist-
Tony Westmore, illustrates a
more interesting setting.
Depicted loading bagged rice
mid-stream in the Chao Phraya
River – Bangkok, during the
late 1950s



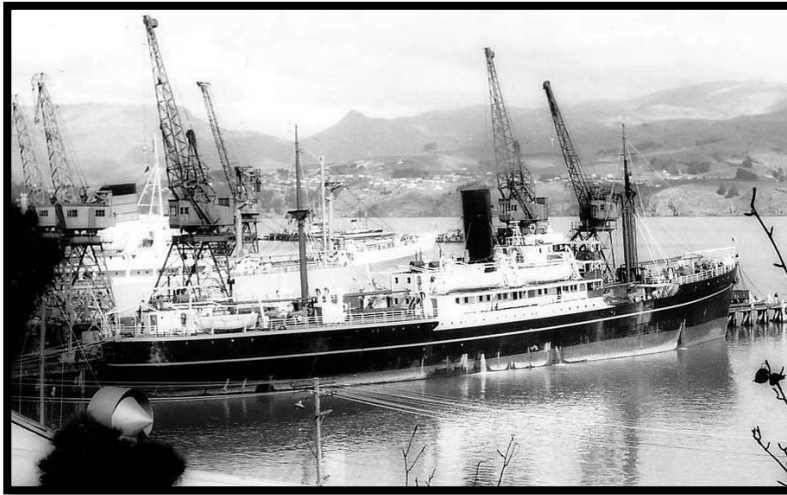


The Hong Kong owned **"Sinkiang"** of the extensive **China Navigation Company** Hong Kong shipping empire. Their tonnage always looked well maintained and nicely presented.

Other Hong Kong icons of the 1960s
(Right) China Navigation's **"Anking"** and
(below) their **"Soochow"**



"Soochow" the location in the photograph looks like **"Jesselton"** main quay.



The **"Soochow"** of China Navigation Co. seen during one of her calls to New Zealand



The ex **"Choy Sang"** became the **"Milford"** under Hong Kong British flag and operated on behalf of Mainland Chinese shipping interests.



Another Mainland Chinese vessel under Hong Kong registry and management **"Fairford"** steaming eastwards through Hong Kong Harbor in 1959.



An ex Booth Line vessel. **"MV Hai Win"** placed under the Honduras Registry. A far distant cry from the beautifully maintained vessel she was when under the management of her previous owners. This image was taken circa mid 1970s.



A run down looking **"MV An Hing"** was another ex-Booth Line vessel purchased by Hong Kong operators during the 1970s, also placed under the Honduras Registry. A sad sight to behold.

Various Losses and Typhoon Strandings of the 1960s

The Typhoon Season in Hong Kong usually spans the months of May to October, with July, August and September being the most prolific months for Typhoons. During the 1960s one of the most serious to hit Hong Kong was Typhoon Wanda in September 1962. Not only was substantial damage sustained to the colony's infrastructure but some 36 ocean going vessels were either driven aground or wrecked in the devastation.

The deep, landlocked indentation of **Tolo Harbor and Plover Cove**, flanked by high hills that protect the snug anchorage from Typhoons, remains a favored haven for ships in Hong Kong. Located in the N.E sector of Hong Kong's New Territories, it is usually available for vessels drawing up to 8m draft. Unfortunately, the topography of the area did not always offer the protection sought from the weather, resulting in numerous Typhoon casualties.

The Hong Kong shipyards obtained much business over many years from ships becoming stranded by Typhoons, as well as other vessels salvaged in the South China Sea by the iconic Hong Kong Tug "**Taikoo**" operated by the China Navigation Company on behalf of the Group's Taikoo Shipyard.



A busy Taikoo Shipyard showing vessels belonging to prominent Hong Kong owners, namely, Wallams, Williamsons and Bruusgaard. The other major shipyard of the era, the Hong Kong Whampo Dockyard, also had its fair share of repair work resulting from Typhoon casualties.



The small steamship **"Juno"** (ex Bidelia, ex Cardross). Although owned by Madrigal SS of Manila she was regularly seen in Hong Kong at Yau Ma Tei anchorage. Sadly, she was lost in the South China Sea with all hands, in a Typhoon when on passage from Hong Kong to Brunei, during 1964 with a cargo of Cement, Bricks and General.



An interesting study of the Dutch freighter **"Tjibanjet"** well and truly wrecked in Hong Kong resulting from **Typhoon Gloria** during 1957.



Another Typhoon casualty of the 1960s. Pictured, the Wallem's managed **"Vincon"** high and dry in Tolo Harbor

The Wallem's managed, but Panama registered, **"Ocean Venture"** wrecked at Tolo Harbor during **Typhoon Wanda** which struck Hong Kong in 1962



Despite Tolo Harbor being considered a safe haven regrettably not so for **"Fortune Lory"**. Pictured well and truly wrecked, again as a result of **Typhoon Wanda** in 1962



The old Panamanian registered steam ship **“Crescent”** wrecked in Hong Kong at Tolo Harbor due to a **Typhoon Wanda** in 1962



Although of poor quality, this image depicts the **“Carronpark”** (later procured by John Manners – Hong Kong) subsequently renamed **“Asia Fir”** and later **“Asia Breeze”** with **“Taifookloy”** in the background. Both vessels are aground on the northern coast of **Lantau Island** following **Typhoon Wanda** in September 1962.



Another typical Hong Kong **“Dustbin”**, one of many casualties of **Typhoon Wanda** in 1962

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