

Jebshun Shipping – An Asian Shipping Legend

by Geoff Walker

During the golden years of shipping in Hong Kong, between 1950-70s, one shipping company that stood equal amongst contemporaries was “**Jebshun Shipping**”. Founded by **Lam Choon Cheong** (better known as **C.C. Lam**), a native of the Chiuchow region of China, but long - term resident in Hong Kong.

The demand for shipping between Hong Kong, Swatow and Thailand had always been robust, given immigration tendencies during the era, and the importance of the Thai rice trade within the region. The first Chinese shipping company to capitalize on that route was **Chino-Siam Steam Navigation**, which was founded in 1908 by a group of Thai Chinese business leaders. The **Chui Yick Steamship Company**, was also an associated offshoot, through strong inter-company and management ties with **C.C. Lam**.

C.C. Lam formed **Jebshun shipping** in 1931, after breaking with earlier shipping partners and **Chui Yick Steamship Company** with which he had been connected. Hitherto, he had been involved in shipping which ran routes mainly between Hong Kong/Swatow, Thailand, and Singapore. Initially, **Jebshun Shipping** operated in the same familiar routes he knew so well, with an early focus of importing rice to Hong Kong and China from Thailand, which proved to be a flourishing enterprise.

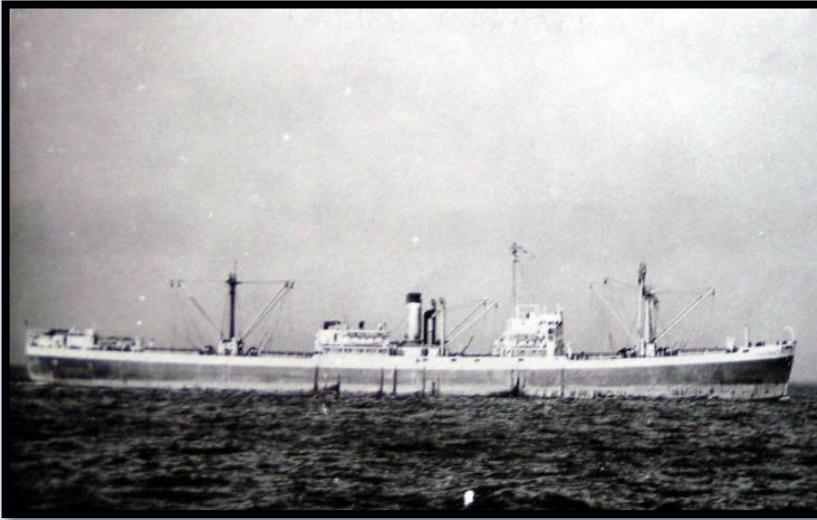
During the war years and the 1940s little is known about the company activities but in the 1950s, **Jebshun** started to expand its fleet (ship names all starting with the word “Shun”) through acquisitions of pre-owned tonnage, mostly sourced from European ship owners. In 1950, **Jebshun** acquired the 30 years old, 3372 tons “**Mausang**” from Jardines’ Indo China Navigation Co and renamed it “**Shun Lee**”. They sold it to Wallemis in 1952, who renamed it “**Hippopotamus**”, but bought it back in 1955, and operated it until 1960, when it was wrecked by a Typhoon on a reef in the notorious Pratas Islands, in the South China Sea.

During 1951, **Jebshun** purchased the aging 1717 tons cargo ship “**Edendale**”, built in 1897, from Heap Eng Moh Steamship Co of Singapore. Heap Eng Moh was at that time majority owned by the Javanese sugar Baron, Oei Tiong Ham, who had used the vessel previously on the Hong Kong to Swatow trade route. In January 1955, the 58 years old “**Edendale**” which flew the Hong Kong British flag, was sunk by Nationalist fighter planes in Swatow with 1000 crates of oranges on board, that were destined for Singapore, for Chinese New Year celebrations. The ship’s Captain and 61 crew members were rescued and returned to Hong Kong overland. The following month, **Jebshun** bought the 5400 tons, 40 years old “**Fionia**” from the Danish trading firm of East Asiatic Co and renamed it “**Hoi Hung**”.

Further acquisitions were made in 1956, when **Jebshun** bought the 1000 tons “**Tong Song**” from Straits Steamship of Singapore and renamed the ship “**Shun Fung**” to replace “**Edendale**” on the Hong Kong-Swatow route. **Jebshun** was active again during 1957, purchasing the 2592 tons “**Baltavia**” from United Baltic Corp and renamed the vessel “**Shun Shing**” (broken up in 1964). Another purchase in 1957 was the Norwegian vessel “**Skienfjord**” (built 1922), for £165,000, and renamed it “**Shun Hing**” (broken up in 1959).

1959 also saw **Jebshun** purchase their biggest ship – the 10070 tons “**Grelrosa**” (built in 1942) from Cardigan Shipping of the UK and renamed it “**Shun Tai**”. For the position of Chief Engineer of “**Shun Tai**”,

Jebshun procured the services of Ms. Victoria Drummond, MBE., the first woman marine engineer in Britain, with over three decades of experience. A fire took place on **“Shun Tai”** on passage from Bangkok to Hong Kong in 1960, due partly to a combination of combustible cargoes, but Drummond managed to contain it and the ship limped into a port, a few days later. **Jebshun** also bought **“City of Cardiff”** in 1959 for £77000 from the Ellerman Lines and renamed it **“Shun Wing”**, the ship making headlines when it went missing in the North Sea for a week in December.



Unknown photographer

Ex Ellerman Lines **“City of Cardiff”** renamed by **Jebshun** Shipping as **“Shun Wing”** in 1959.

Chief Engineer of the **“Shun Tai”** Ms. Victoria Drummond MBE. Who became the first female Chief Engineer, to qualify in the United Kingdom; in a career spanning 40 years Drummond made 49 ocean-going voyages. She persevered with her career through hardship and at times enduring prejudice and discrimination, from some of her immediate superiors, both ashore and afloat.

Image of Victoria Drummond, likely taken upon being awarded her MBE., for bravery and service during WW2.



Unknown photographer



Courtesy Industrial History of HK Group

“Shun Tai” ex **“Grelrosa”** acquired by **Jebshun Shipping** in 1959, from the UK based Cardigan Shipping Company.

In 1964, it acquired the 7542 tons **“Garthdale”** (built in 1944 as **“Frumenton”** for R. Chapman & Sons of Newcastle) from Esgarth and renamed the ship **“Jeb Lee”** (see below image), it was scrapped at Hong Kong in 1970.



Sadly, in 1966, **C.C. Lam** died at the age of 66, and control of the company passed to his sons; Andrew Lam succeeded his father as head of the group, while his younger brother Wilson K.H. Lam managed the Hong Kong business, another brother K.Y. Lam was responsible for managing the Malaysian side of the group.

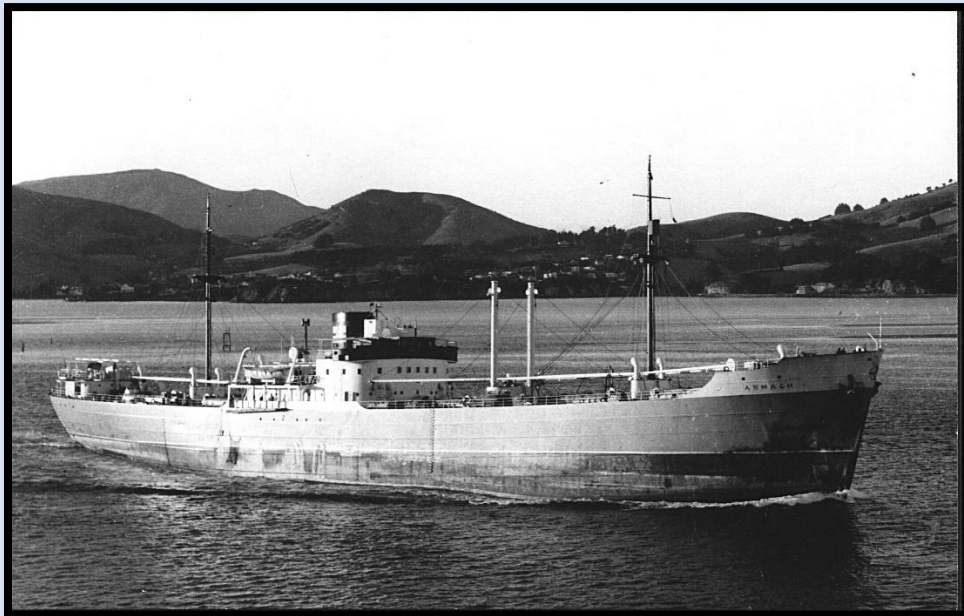
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Under the second generation of management, **Jebshun** increased its expansion program. In 1968, **Jebshun** bought 8926 tons **“Bradford City”** from Vercharmian Steamship, and renamed it **“Shun Wah”**, and then in 1969, they acquired the 6523 ton **“Eastern Star”** built in 1951, from Jardines, and renamed it **“Precious Diamond”**. Another addition to their fleet was the 6957 ton **“Chanda”** from British India Steam Navigation Company, which became the **“Precious Pearl”**.



"Shun Wah" ex Bradford City

Courtesy shipsnostalgia.co



Unknown photographer

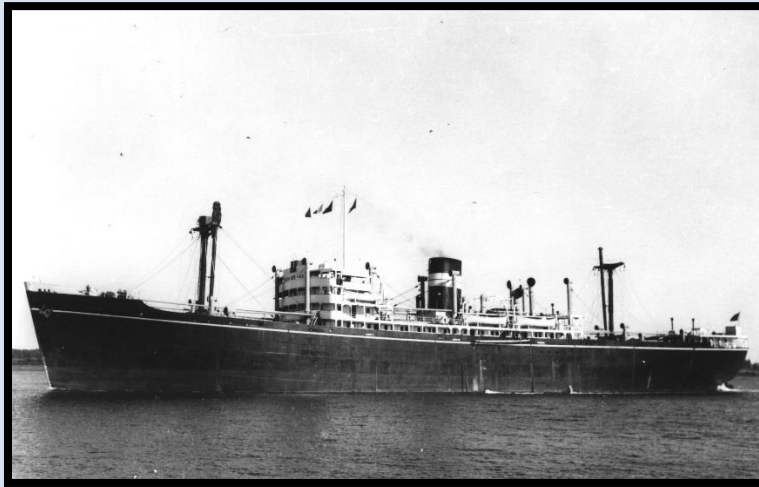
An earlier image of **"Shun Wah"** when still in "Federal" colors as **"Armagh"**.

Unfortunately, the company sustained several losses during this time. In March 1969, **"Shun Tai"** was in a collision south east of Singapore and sank as a result, although managed by **Jebshun Shipping** Hong Kong, the vessel was under Somali flag at the time of the casualty. Then in July 1969, a major fire destroyed **"Precious Diamond"** and injured dozens of workers while it was being refitted at Hong Kong.

In October 1970, **Jebshun** acquired 7273 tons **"Chandpara"** from British India Steam Navigation and renamed it **"Precious Ruby"**. Only a short time later in March 1971, **"Precious Ruby"** ran aground near Dairen, whilst on passage from Chinwangtao to Chittagong, with a cargo of coal.



The BI ship **"Chandpara"** sold to **Jebshun Shipping** and renamed **"Precious Ruby"**.



The BI cargo vessel **"Chanda"** operated by **Jebshun Shipping** as **"Precious Pearl"**.

The run of bad fortune, high fuel oil prices and the rapid onset of containerization caused **Jebshun** to file for voluntary liquidation in December 1971, which was approved shortly thereafter. The remaining employees were made redundant, and the three lasting vessels – **"Shun Wah"**, **"Precious Pearl"** and **"Shun Wing"** were sold for demolition beforehand. So, ended the existence of another of Hong Kong's shipping dynasties, their ships having become icons of the South China Sea, and long-standing participants in South East Asian trades.

End

References: The Industrial History of Hong Kong Group, National Maritime Archives, and various online data available on Public Domains, from which much material has been sourced.

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