

MARITIME PROFESSION — Local Vessel Trade

Host : Because of the well-developed transportation system nowadays the younger generation is no longer familiar with the less-used means of transport. Local vessels are no longer a major transportation mode connecting the islands in Hong Kong. Thus the industry lacks injection of new blood for succession. Can the younger generation realise the romance of sailing across the sea in the olden days? To understand more about the work on local vessels let me interview Mark

(Mark, Marine Officer Trainee, Local Ferry Company)
and Fai

(Fai, Engineer, Local Ferry Company)
for the entry requirement of the local vessel trade

Host : How to join the local vessel trade?
What are the requirements?

Mark : It is really very simple. You only need to study specific short term training courses such as the Certificate in Basic Training for Local Craft Ratings provided by the Maritime Services Training Institute. Upon completion, you can join us as a general rating.

Mark : There are two departments on the vessel: deck department and engineering department. The highest rank of the deck department is the coxswain.

and that of the engineering department is the chief engineer

The coxswain is responsible for operating the vessel
and to ensure safe navigation

The chief engineer is responsible for the maintenance
repair and operation of engine in the engine room

The working hours are quite special

Unlike the normal working hours from 9 to 5

We are on duty for one day and off duty the other day

It means we work for 24 hours

and then have a day off in the following 24 hours

The 24 duty hours consist of working time

breaks and standby time

Fai : There is support team for the engineering department

It is responsible for

annual vessel inspection, daily maintenance

and some clerical work like other companies

Host : What about the prospects?

Mark : It is quite stable

Because when you become a seaman

You will target to be a coxswain

Then you are more determined

to go forward step by step

After becoming the coxswain accumulating sufficient experience

you will have the opportunity to be the management

Host : What about the promotion path?

You have mentioned about going forward step by step

do you have to get any certificates or pass any examinations?

Mark : Yes, there is no shortcut in this industry

but follow the "3-2-1" step

You start from Local Coxswain Grade 3 Certificate
and then Grade 2
until you obtain the Grade 1 certificate as the final step
During this period, you still need to undertake a lot of training courses
and obtain other certificates
to become a coxswain

Host : How long does it take to become a coxswain?

Mark : It varies from person to person
Generally it takes about 3 to 5 years
The salary of the coxswain is around HK\$30,000 at the time being
It is a little bit higher than the chief engineer

Host : Is there any woman working on the vessel?

Mark : In fact, on the Hong Kong-Macao lines and seagoing vessels
there were female captains as well as female pilots a while ago

Host : It means women are also capable for many seafaring positions

Mark : Definitely

Fai : Both men and women
can be engineers
There is no difference

Host : How did you get started?

Mark : I loved the sea so much when I was a student
I wanted to be a captain
I know the career path of seafarers is clear
and you could achieve your goal step by step
In addition, majority of people focus on the finance

and economics in Hong Kong
But for me, I like a solid and practical job
The work of a coxswain suits me
Nobody can take my experience away
as I own it
My future will be guaranteed
And, the certificates and experience acquired are professional

Fai : It has been more than 20 years since I started from 19
I am quite interested in this industry
From all the different courses I studied
such as the mechanical engineering
in the Institute of Vocational Education ("IVE")
allowing me to apply the theory into practice
My company provides me a lot of coaching and training
Sometimes, when I come across with some conversion projects
such as replacing the old models by new models
I can learn a lot from it

Host : But the job is not easy
When you face difficulties
you may be frustrated
How do you keep going?

Mark : The work is indeed hard
due to the increasing traffic on the sea
Also, we must make use of the available facilities
to deal with different situations and overcome them
For example, the weather is always changing
It has a nice weather today
It may turns bad tomorrow
It rains quite heavily today
It may be windy tomorrow

Host : What about you, Fai?

Fai : With the guidance of experienced engineers
there is nothing to worry about
Take it slowly, step by step
I can always ask when I have questions
If you are willing to take advices
study and attempt
there is nothing to fear

Host : Local vessels are not anymore
the major means to get across different regions of Hong Kong
but it is still indispensable
It brings a distinctive rhythm for the busy city
If we want to retain it, injection of new blood is needed
to allow this unique rhythm continue playing

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