Sailing on a Neoliberal Sea: Multinational Seafarers on Container Ships

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Abstract

Containerization since the late 1950s has revolutionized not only shipping, including its operation, organization and productivity, but also the economic geography of production, trade and consumption. After the economic crises in the 1970s, the incessant neoliberal quest by shipping businesses has also "containerized" seafarers, the vanguard transport workers at the core of economic globalization. Working at sea for the life at home is a moral dilemma that entraps seafarers in the second-best choice, leaving them with virtually no alternatives. Restricted contact with home, denial of shore leave, lowered manning scales and single-person tasking have all exacerbated the sense of isolation at sea. Subject to constant loading, unloading and reloading of their bodies, contract-based seafarers of different nationalities are drifting in the market until they leave the industry or until they are finally scrapped. The exigencies of the neoliberal system, as manifested in industrial discipline and allied networks of control, coerce relative harmony among nationalities on board. The research on seafarers challenges the logic of area studies in social sciences and, at the same time, permits rethinking of the vastly facilitated mobility of our times.

摘要

自20世紀50年代末起，貨櫃的出現不但爲海運業的運作、組織和生產力帶來了重大的突破，也從生產、貿易和消費方面改革了世界的經濟地貌。70年代經濟危機之後，海運業對經濟新自由主義持續追求，這同時也「貨櫃化」了在經濟全球化的核心從事物流的海員。爲了陸上的家庭而到海上工作，對於大部份海員來說是一種道德的困境，是第二最佳選擇，而海上工作的單一專業化又制約了他們在陸上的發展。與家人有限的聯繫、上岸的要求被拒絕、人手編制的比例下降和單獨工作的模式都加劇了海員在海上的孤立感。不同國籍的合約制船員不斷加載、卸載和重裝自己的身體於船上，並漂流在經濟市場中，直到他們自願或被迫離開這個行業。經濟新自由主義制度的迫切需要，表現在海運業中的工業紀律和對海員聯合網絡的控制上，這亦促成了船上不同國籍之間相對和諧地相處。這項對海員的研究挑戰了社會科學中地區研究的邏輯，同時也令我們重新思考這個世代中所謂的流動性。

Acknowledgements

The image of a polyglot crew living and working in the same sailing vessel has long intrigued me. When it came to studies of inter-ethnic relations, I wondered if a hypothetical "global village" on earth could be actualized on board, where people of different socio-cultural backgrounds embraced diversities and coalesced into a small society without the bounds of terrestrial nation-states. It was up till the summer of 2006 when I gained the opportunity to board my first container ship and officially embarked on my sailor research. Into the gates, through the cranes and up to the deck, I observed the conditions of merchant mariners and interviewed them on the spot. From that time on, I began to revel in studying seafarers' life stories and experiences of our times.

For the past seven years, I have been receiving much nurturing from the Anthropology Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong where I took profound intellectual leaps. These years have also been extremely difficult for me due to some overwhelming family situations and personal matters. "Sailing on a Neoliberal Sea: Multinational Seafarers on Container Ships" is not only the crystalization of my years of work, but also the result of many people's care, including my committee members, Professor Joseph Bosco, Professor Keping Wu, external examiner Professor Michael Herzfeld, and my supervisor Professor Gordon Mathews who has been guiding me since the beginning; other teaching staff, especially Professors Saroja Dorairajoo, Drs Erika Evasdottir and Danning Wang, and colleagues of the Department offering their valuable opinions, advice and encouragement to me; a few close friends who stand by me through thick and thin, and, last but not least, my informants, who kindly provided precious information

about shipping and seafaring to me. My heartfelt gratitude to all these people cannot be fully expressed in words but is reverently presented in this thesis.

In the loving memory of my grandfather, grandmother, great uncle and my mother. May all glory go to God.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Photo 1.1: A container ship berthed at Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 19 December 2008.

90 per cent of world trade is conveyed by the international shipping industry, of which the ocean-going container ships are responsible for carrying most of the manufactured goods and products that we consume on a daily basis. On board these gigantic container vessels in the labyrinth of international trade are navigators, engineers and caterers. They are the predominantly male seafarers, otherwise known as merchant mariners or seamen of virtually every nationality in the world. (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010f). Seafaring and shipping are some of the truly globalized industries in the world, as Maritime Knowledge Centre of the International Maritime Organization, a United Nations specialized agency, illustrates

in its publication *International Shipping and World Trade: facts and figures* (2008: 26):

> Shipping is perhaps the most international of all the world's great industries. The ownership and management chain surrounding any particular vessel can embrace many different countries; it is not unusual to find that the owners, operators, shippers, charterers, insurers and the classification society, not to mention the officers and crew, are all of different nationalities and that none of these is from the country whose flag flies at the ship's stern.

There are hardly any other human communities that are comparable to seafaring crews, not only in the sense that they are multinational or multiethnic,[1] but also because the ship in operation is a unique human-made environment with idiosyncrasies in its hardware, software and context of operation: it is both the working place and dwelling of approximately 20 crewmembers on board, who are living outside their societies most of the year; more than 65% of seafarers of all ship type is currently working in a team with two or more nationalities (Kahveci, Lane and Sampson 2002: 6); an individual seafarer works, lives and socializes with his coworkers in the same shipboard space for weeks or months before he finally signs off for vacation or another voyage; seafaring is inherently isolating and one of the most risky jobs in the world. The shipping industry also has a relatively low public profile. The name "seafarers" seldom hits the headlines with the exception of piracy

[1] The nationality of a seafarer is his political membership of a sovereign state, while the ethnicity of a seafarer is his identification with an ethnic group that may not overlap with his nationality. A seafaring crew is sometimes multiethnic in that all the seafarers on board are of the same nationality and yet they may come from different geographical parts of the country and share different socio-cultural identifications. "Multinational" or "multiethnic" are therefore used as modifiers to distinguish between different shipboard compositions.

on the high seas when international actions are involved.[2]

In such a context, how seafarers of different nationalities and diverse backgrounds reconcile their differences and cooperate in shipboard spaces is a question of anthropological concern. Multinational seafarers work in a remarkably harmonious manner, even if such unity between different ethnic groups is difficult to observe in the world onshore. Many seafarer informants gave positive feedbacks when they were asked to comment on their shipboard social relationships. Throughout this research, phenomena such as social harmony on board are examined and the effects of the development and practices of the shipping industry are revealed. The container ship is a telescopic, confined and mobile site through which this thesis looks at a variety of issues such as labor relations, work patterns, the nature of global capitalism, politics of cross-national interactions, inter-ethnic relationships and social performance at work. In doing so, it discloses the bio-politics involved in regulating one of the most mobile occupational groups of our times.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Literature reviewed for this research covers academic books, articles from online journals, newspapers, personal pages of seafarers, and publications by shipowner, seafarer and other shipping organizations. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) are examples of organizations working for the well-being of seafarers, and they issue publications from press releases and online news to leaflets and reports. The Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) of

[2] Towards the end of this research, piracy off the coast of Somalia has already raised international alarm. Since the early 21st century, the sea areas have been plagued by piracy and its reasons of upheaval are complicated, involving the geographical location of Somalia, her internal economic, political unrest and environmental destruction by foreign vessels etc.

the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences, an international research facility with emphasis on occupational health and safety, has also been publishing on the conditions of seafaring, and disseminating research findings across the maritime community as well as academia.[3] *The Global Seafarer: Living and Working Conditions in a Globalized Industry* (Alderton et. al. 2004), coauthored by researchers from SIRC and other social scientists, is one of the most comprehensive, informative, and systematic works on the maritime industry. It begins with the political economy of world shipping, flag states and regulations, the labor market for seafarers, and then delves into different aspects of seafarers' lives.

To investigate life at sea, it is essential to note how macroscopic developments of the industry have exerted considerable impact on the microscopic living, working and social conditions on board as well as seafarers' lives in general. In this aspect, Allen and Hamnett's (1995: 1-10) *A Shrinking World? Global Unevenness and Inequality* discusses how the world has not been shrinking for everyone. In spite of the technological progress and circulation of capital that seem to spread far-reaching effects globally, the book shows how globalization has been an uneven experience for different participants, and that there is a disjuncture between global trends and local realities. Thus, studies on globalization must scrutinize day-to-day experiences in locales which are contingent on global processes. This seafarer research shares a similar view in that it is an endeavor to look at the daily lives of seafarers as the vanguard transport workers for international trade and the effects of globalization and developmental changes of the industry on shipboard situations. It also verifies that many seafarers, similar to the traders studied by Gordon Mathews (2008), are driven by the need to accumulate economic capital to cooperate on friendly terms, apart from

[3] For more information, visit http://www.sirc.cf.ac.uk which is the official web site of the Seafarers International Research Centre.

being regulated by the enforcement of company policies. Cooperation, obedience and social harmony observable on board are not simply a matter of seafarers being subjugated to the exigencies of international trade but also involve the agency of seafarers in exercising their roles through the work of seafaring.

Guo Jiunn-Liang, Ye Kung-Don and Liang Gin-Shuh's (2007) publication in *International Journal of Management* entitled "Exploring Employment Condition Dilemmas: An Interview Study with Seafarers" offers qualitative interview extracts that illustrate the employment conditions of Taiwanese seafarers, including their position among multinational seafarers, the structural problem of the Taiwanese seafaring labor market, and other current issues Taiwanese seafarers face. Studies on seafarers can be found in various fields such as applied psychology (Havold 2007), medicine (Wadsworth, Allen, Wellens, McNamara and Smith 2006), sociology (Obando-Rojas, Welsh, Bloor, Lane, Badigannavar and Maguire 2004), law (Bloor, Datta, Gilinskiy and Horlick-Jones 2006), industrial relations (Lillie 2004), biochemistry (Bloor, Thomas and Lane 2000), oceanography, resource management, operation and management science as well as cross-disciplinary studies. Seafarer research in the field of anthropology is, however, relatively limited.

The anthropology of work on female migrant workers can be found in a number of books. Pun Ngai's (2005) *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace* studies young women, known as dagongmei, who migrated from rural areas to the burgeoning foreign-owned factories in Shenzhen special economic zone. There, they engaged themselves in years of exhausting work and the chronic pains they reported were an indication of their resistance to the oppressive working conditions. Unlike the dagongmei, seafarers generally dare not report any chronic pains as a form of resistance even when accidents and injuries happen at sea, for the

fear that their shaky employment will be easily terminated in this way. The "factories" that seafarers work in are also offshore which makes their resistance to the management practically difficult. Carla Freeman's (2000) *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean* is an ethnography grounded in Barbados. It is a study of females working in the assembly line of a high-tech industry, who constructed "pink-collar" identities by engaging in a sense of "professionalism" as manifested in their outlook, labor and commitment to both the job and motherhood. "Professionalism" is also enacted in the seafaring industry through scientific management and operation of computerized machinery on board. However, contemporary seafarers distinguish themselves from other workers not as much in their physical appearance as in their held beliefs of meaningful sacrifice for their families, a manifestation of manhood and labor. Anru Lee's (2004) *In the Name of Harmony and Prosperity: Labor and Gender Politics in Taiwan's Economic Restructuring* illustrates Taiwan's economic restructuring after World War II and its incorporation into the global economy, and explains the nature of capitalism and production cycles. She discusses how industrialists tackled domestic and international competition by reorganizing the division of labor, reducing factory size, importing foreign labor with legal assistance by the government, and relocating production. By the end of the 1990s, most labor-intensive industries in Taiwan had been exported to areas in Southeast Asia and mainland China, while some light industries still remained. The shipping industry shares similarities with Lee's study in terms of reconfiguration of organization, business innovations and their timing. Through her fieldwork, Lee also scrutinizes how discourses on work ethics have mobilized women to contribute their labor to Taiwan's textile industry, not only through economic incentives, but also the need women perceived to fulfill filial piety

and support their families: the obligation to satisfy familial interests turned many daughters into secondary-wage earners in factories. The money they made was used to renew their families' flats and actualize their pursuit of modernity (Lee 2004: 70, 84, 109). Working for family is also an ethic that has been popularized among seafarers in the restructuring process of the international shipping industry. Their devotion to their work at sea is legitimized by the remittances they make, which is the capital for upward socio-economic movement of their families.

Herbert A. Applebaum's (1981) *Royal Blue - The Culture of Construction Workers* is an ethnographic work on male construction workers. The structure of the book provides inspirations to my research: it starts with a day at a construction site and then develops to its genesis, methodology and understanding of construction work; the book looks into such aspects as personal backgrounds of construction workers, their socialization at work, craftsmanship, ownership of tools, control over the work process, self-respect, degrees of job satisfaction and senses of security, based on physical evidence of their collaborative and personalized efforts at work. Like construction workers, blue-collar seafarers are mostly males working in teams through hierarchical division of labor, whose main responsibilities are to wield tools, equipment and machinery on board. Biao Xiang's (2007) *Global "Body Shopping": An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry* examines how "body shops" in different countries cooperate to recruit and arrange labor for contracted work, and afterwards, farm out the workers to another client or bench them for the next placement. This systematic global management of labor sources serves the volatility of transnational capitalism well. My seafarer research shares insights with Biao's work in recognizing the concrete actions of job agents and shipping management as the foundation of pushing abstract international trade figures and

bolstering capital movement: oil supply in the Middle East, factory production in China, wives and children left at home in the Philippines are all examples of everyday realities that support the neoliberal flexibility of capital. From this, we see how the inequalities of socioeconomic relations on an international scale are necessary for cross-national capitalistic pursuits. An in all, this thesis shares with these works as political economy examinations of transnational workers in the era of globalization.

Theoretically, I adopt neo-Marxist, Foucauldian and structural functionalist approaches to the study of industrial relations, power, shipboard social roles, relationships and economic globalization respectively. Among these schools, Michel Foucault (1980: 99) suggests that researchers conduct

> an ascending analysis of power, starting . . . from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been - and continue to be - invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc. by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination.

Power can be piecemeally organized, independent of systematic strategy by the dominant class (Foucault 1977: 45). The human body is nevertheless the ultimate, irreducible site of repression, where socialization, surveillance, discipline and punishment are carried out as "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (*ibid.*: 26). In this thesis, I offer analyses of power through occupational discipline, job hierarchy and other controls on seafarers' bodies. Foucault's theories on power and structural functionalism and form the theoretical bases I use to approach the microscopics of seafaring. According to

structural functionalism, social integration and stability are achieved through the functional mechanisms of social institutions in upholding social structure. The behavior of individuals is regulated by these functional social institutions and society is therefore an integrated totality (Eriksen 2004: 61-62). This will be applied to explain how the miniature shipboard society is held together in an organically functional way.[4]

The macroscopics of seafaring are explored through world-systems theory as developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), and through David Harvey's (1989) time-space concepts, namely "time-space compression" and "flexible accumulation." Harvey's (1989: 300) idea of "time-space compression" recognizes that "the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space." Shipping is a vivid example of these compressions of temporal and spatial dimensions, given the inputs of technologies and business pursuits. As for "flexible accumulation," in David Harvey's (1989: 147) words, it is

> marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation. It has entrained rapid shifts in the patterning of

[4] Foucauldian power and structural functionalism are in many ways opposing theoretical orientations. But in this thesis, their theoretical components are extracted to assist the analysis of microscopic seafaring lives. The former is used to explain the power controls on seafarers and the latter is used to explain how the social structure on board is maintained, making the two explanations complementary.

uneven development, both between sectors and between geographical regions.

In the shipping industry, the practices of flags of convenience and mixed nationality crewing are common strategies of capital accumulation resting on the flexibility of ship registry and choice of labor markets. New states of affairs in terms of ship regulation and manpower sourcing result, as they come hand in hand with time-space compression. The relation between the shipping management and seafarers will also be theorized through Anthony Giddens' (1990: 14) concept of "time-space distanciation," which asserts that

> time and space are organized so as to connect presence and absence. Connections between localities become less dependent on face-to-face interactions (co-presence) but more on remote interactions with the absent others (absence). Time-space distanciation therefore disembeds social relations and rearranges them in extensive spans of time and space (as quoted in Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 8).

Put into the context of seafaring, seafarers working in the globalized shipping industry are administered in temporal and spatial dimensions at a distance by their management. The world system also involves an international division of labor among the core, semi-periphery and periphery, according to Wallerstein (1974). With the economic production in the dominating core being capital-intensive and those in the semi-peripheral and peripheral countries being labor-intensive, the core extracts raw materials and resources from the latter two through the market of purchasable labor and commodities. Synthesized with Marxist concepts of class, world-systems theory

will be applied to understand international division of labor and roles of different national representatives from the core, semi-peripheral and peripheral countries in international seafaring. It aims at explaining how the managements, mostly originating from the core, extract labor resources from different parts of the world through strategies of flexible accumulation in the neoliberal business world. All the theoretical orientations mentioned in this section will be further discussed to illustrate different aspects of shipping and seafaring in the rest of the thesis.

Photo 1.2: A mariners' internet café near the Port of Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 28 December 2008. Posters and signs in the café were printed in Chinese, English, Filipino, Thai, Vietnamese and other languages, reflecting the diversity of seafarer customers.

Research Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork for this research began in July 2006 in Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong. The terminals are some of the busiest container ports in the world, handling over 16 million TEUs in the year 2006 (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 25).[5] Complementary fieldwork around port areas was done in the Embarcadero of San Francisco, the United States in November 2008 and the port of Kaohsiung, Taiwan in December 2008. In Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, through the help of a key informant, I was granted authorization to enter the restricted port areas and visited some of the container ships that berthed there. Inside and around the port areas and on board ships, I conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews in random encounters, and arranged focus groups whenever possible. Photos were taken and videos were recorded to add to the database of field notes. Furthermore, I made private interview appointments with staff and representatives from shipowner, seafarer and other shipping organizations as well as off-duty and retired seafarers for more personal enquires on their situations. Additional interviews have been carried out with vendors at the ports, students of maritime education and training (MET) institutes, and seafarers and staff at seafarer centres. Some of the interviews were tape-recorded upon agreement, translated if necessary and transcribed verbatim, extracts of which are presented in the rest of the thesis. All these field methods aimed at gathering the primary data needed to illustrate seafarers' lives at sea. In total, more than 120 informants have contributed to the ethnographic data of this research; their anonymity is kept to protect their identities.

Due to the nature of contemporary shipping, a ship usually berths at a port for no

[5] "TEU" stands for "Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit." It is an international measurement unit for trade volume of containers and it represents the standard twenty-foot container (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 36).

more than 12 hours, and seafarers are very aware of the implications. And yet, berthing is a golden time to investigate shore-sea interactions and seafarers' work routines. I spent a whole afternoon each time I was on a ship and made my research intention clear and straightforward. Accompanied by a representative from a seafarer organization most of the time,[6] I tried to build up rapport in seconds through their trust in the representative. Their desire that their industrial conditions be known was one reason why they were willing to share their lives with me when I had meals with them, sat down with them in the rooms and followed them to work with the captain's permission. Information about the conversations between seafarers such as their topics of discussions, job ranks and nationalities was collected. The situations on one ship were compared with those on others to figure out the similarities and differences.

During the course of my research, I constantly applied for permission to sail with crews but was met with refusals from different shipping companies for security and business reasons, which also reveals some of the major concerns of the contemporary shipping industry. I tried to compensate for this lack of participatory fieldwork and rigorous research on board sailing ships through interviews, literature research, media analyses and participant observation at ports. The trust in interviews as the major field method implies that this research lacks significant participant observation on board, a fundamental characteristic of ethnography. Yet, the interviews are revealing in another sense that they provide first-person quotes and data about the life at sea, an auto-ethnography in its nascent form. International shipping is also a mega-scale

[6] The accompaniment of a representative from a seafarer organization is a factor influencing the research findings: he is of a particular nationality and religious affiliation. However, the representative is one of the port visitors that seafarers welcome, since he works for the benefits of seafarers. He even knows some of them personally as he has been visiting ships every day for decades. After a brief introduction and reassurances about me, the representative often helped me as an outsider to enter the inside seafarer communities. Then the representative left me alone for a while to conduct interviews on my own or follow some seafarers around. Given the nature of port stays nowadays, introduction through a seafarer representative is one of the few plausible ways to carry out fieldwork on ships.

industry that involves myriad interest groups and transnational linkages. A ship operating at sea is embedded in a network of parties including charters, shipbrokers, consignors (senders or shippers) and consignees (receivers), bound together by contracts of carriage, job agents, marine departments, logistics companies and over a million seafarers.[7] Shipping is a volatile industry that is tied to the ever-changing conditions of the global economy. Given the size, scale, complexity and volatility of the shipping industry, this thesis concentrates on introducing the general industrial phenomena of seafaring instead of unraveling all of its knots.

The main research targets are seafarers who have working experience in the contemporary era, irrespective of their age, job rank, nationality and gender. Retired seafarers and ex-seafarers were interviewed so as to present and compare their working life with more recent experiences. Although I have a brief discussion of female seafarers in Chapter III, I largely exclude them in this thesis, in that their different situations from male seafarers are worth additional research, and they constitute 1-2% of the global seafaring population; 94% of them work on passenger ships and only 6% on cargo vessels (International Labour Organization 2003). For simplicity's sake, seafarers in this article refer to male seafarers. In this research, I focus on the contemporary era, which I define as from the 1980s to the present. The 1980s is when revolutionary developments in the shipping industry took place, causing widespread and deep effects on seafaring life. "Ships" in this thesis refers to "container ships," "on board" means "on board container ships," and so on. "Seafarers" specifically refers to crew workers who carry out navigation, engineering

[7] As Kahveci and Nichols (2006: 33) illustrate, a merchant vessel such as a car carrier "owned by company X might have its crews recruited, trained and employed by company A, its technical management (repairs and maintenance) performed by company B, its operational management (contact with manufacturers, scheduling of vessels, chartering and marketing) performed by company C and its coordination of port activities (organisation of crew signing on and off, organising tugs, bunkering and provisions, dealing with port papers) by company D or even companies D and E."

or cooking work on ocean-going container ships unless otherwise specified. I also differentiate "shipping" from "seafaring" in that the latter refers to the work of seafarers but the former has a broader meaning, including seafaring, ship managing and other areas within sea transport.

Since the container ships in operation are moving and not fixed to a particular territory while seafarers are simultaneously confined on board, it can be problematic to label seafarers as "migrant workers" or "overseas workers." For example, Filipino seafarers are different from other overseas Filipino workers (OFW) in that they are "away from 'home' but lacking a locally embedded workplace" (McKay 2004: 3). Unlike many jobs, in which the workers can leave the working spaces and return to their home spaces after work, seafarers' workplace is also their living place for the entire voyage. It is a space devoid of many things that shore-based people take for granted and is inherently dangerous and hazardous. In the course of a voyage, these "seafarers have no host destination, spending their working lives traversing international waters" and that is why McKay (2004) describes them as "suspended migrant workers." I see "suspended migrant workers" as an appropriate descriptive term for seafarers and a key term for such research. The research on seafarers as suspended migrant workers hence challenges the epistemology of geographical studies, many of which are comprehensible in terms of geographical regions on shore with national and ethnic boundaries within and in between, whereas the boundary of seafaring can be stretched to the shoreline of most of the world's oceans with the open sea largely non-national and non-ethnic. In the age of globalization when enclosed communities are thought to be non-existent, the seafarer case can be a resurrection of the traditional anthropological society of study.

Thesis Structure

The central research question is this: "How do multinational seafarers of diverse ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds reconcile their differences and cooperate on board the ocean-going container ships in this contemporary age of neoliberalism?" To fully explore the connection between interethnic coexistence and neoliberalism, a sub-question will be raised and answered in each chapter of the thesis and collectively, the discussions of the sub-questions build up to the answer to the central question. These sub-questions include: "What are the major economic and technological developments of the shipping industry across the contemporary era that are affecting the conditions of seafaring, including shipboard work patterns?", "Why do contemporary seafarers enroll in the industry?", "How does containerization influence the social dimension of seafaring lives?" and finally, "How do seafarers of such a diversity of nationalities communicate with, look upon and treat each other on board?"

In addition to Introduction and Conclusion, the thesis consists of four body chapters. Chapter II, "On Board the Container Ship in the Sea of International Trade," introduces the background of contemporary shipping and seafaring. It recognizes that sea transport, flags of convenience and mixed nationality crewing are all not particularly new phenomena but points out that the contemporary industrial organization is the unique result of crisis and innovation, technological advancement and recent developments of the global economy based on the principle of neoliberalism. It also briefly discusses conditions aboard ships, including the shipboard hierarchy, internal structures of a container ship, and a typical day at sea. Chapter III, "The Contemporary Meanings of Seamanship," seeks to understand meanings of seamanship in the contemporary era: how the original notion of sailing to

explore the world has been disenchanted and, as a result of the new labor deployments, making a living for seafarers' families is left as one of the major reasons to work at sea. The chapter looks into the promotional paths and industrial mobility within seafaring. A brief account of female seafarers is given near the end of the chapter. Chapter IV, "The Containerization of Seafarers," investigates the power controls over seafarers and their manifestations in space, surveillance and other aspects of seafaring. It introduces the idea of "seafarer containerization," and argues that under logistic containerization and various industrial changes, contemporary seafarers are deprived of the full benefits of globalization in one of the most globalized industries: they face much restriction and confinement, including restricted shore leave, isolation from home and elevated requirements for bodily performance in the imprisoning shipboard space. Chapter V, "All in the Same Sea," examines the social tensions among multinational seafarers in terms of their various degrees of representation in the job hierarchy, communication barriers and ethnic stereotypes, and how they are dealt with in the context of multinational seafaring. It discusses the social politics among multinational seafarers and the nature of bonding on board. In developing this thesis, I try to bridge macroscopics and microscopics and make multi-layered analyses to understand the interconnections within the global span of the shipping industry, the management and life experiences at individual levels.

Chapter II: On Board the Container Ship in the Sea of International Trade

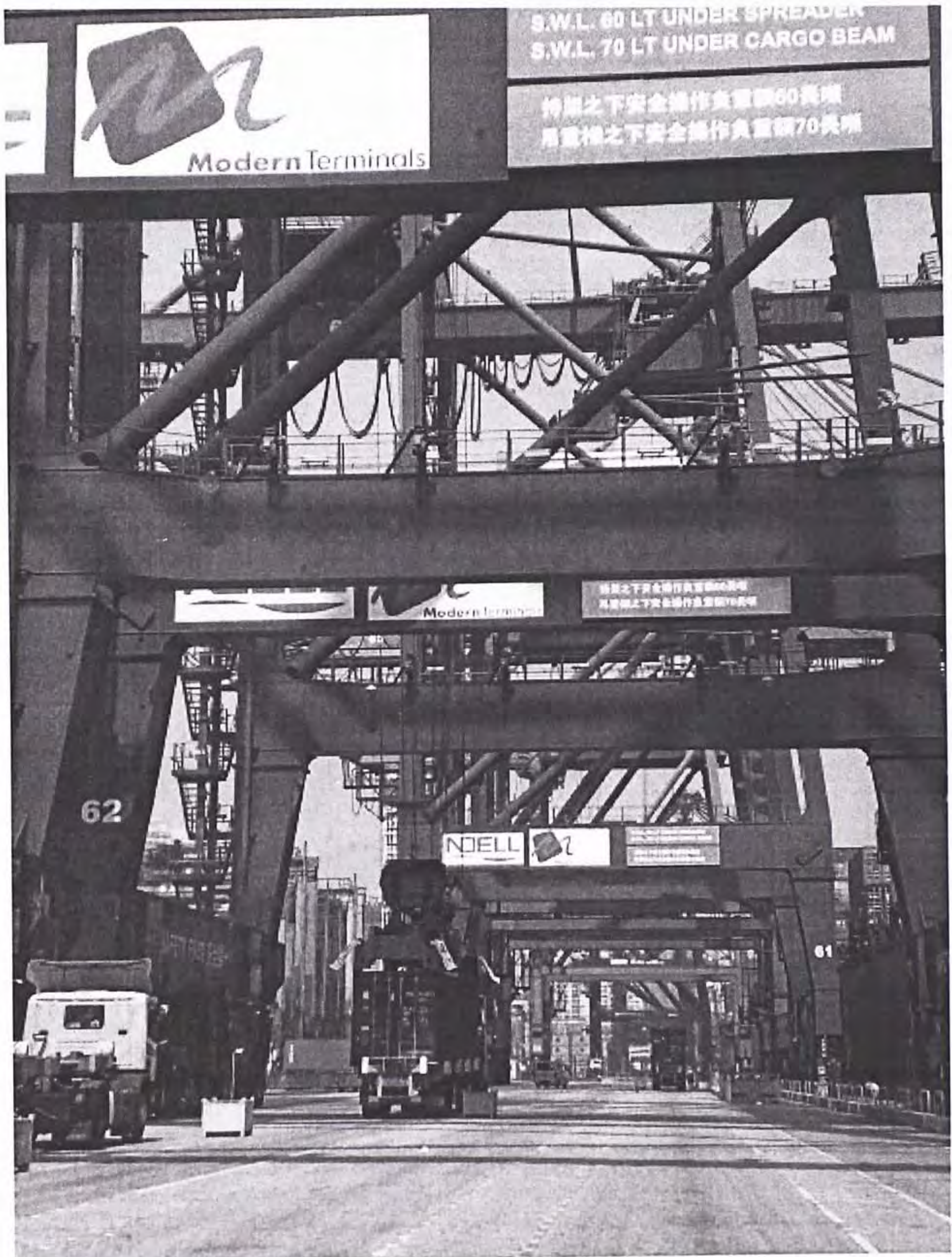

Photo 2.1: Port cranes for loading and unloading containers between the ship and the truck at Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 7 October 2007.

This transshipping process at the port has had its efficiency greatly enhanced by the technological advancements in terminal operation associated with containerization.

The question to be explored in this chapter is "What are the major economic and technological developments of the shipping industry across the contemporary era that are affecting the conditions of seafaring, including shipboard work patterns?" The chapter is the first step to arrive at a thorough contextual understanding of the shipboard situations and social mechanisms of interaction and communication among multinational seafarers; it investigates the prevalent business practices and organizational tactics of the shipping industry, as well as major technological advancements in the neoliberal epoch. Scenes on board the container ship will also be presented through descriptions and spot coverage.

The New Economic Sea

Shipping or sea transport as a transportation means across geographical barriers of water has existed since antiquity. "From the Phoenicians, through the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Carthaginians, the Chinese, the Vikings, the Omanis, the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the Italians, the British, the French, the Dutch, the Polynesians and Celts, the history of the world is a history of exploration, conquest and trade by sea" (International Maritime Organization Maritime Knowledge Centre 2009: 6). Seafaring crews have been polyglot for centuries as well:

> Even where nineteenth-century ships set sail with single nationality complements, crew members that became sick or injured, who died or who simply signed off, were frequently replaced with whomever was available in foreign ports,

> regardless of nationality. Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of polyglot crews in international shipping since the fifteenth century . . . it is only since the 1980s that modern-day practices of international recruitment came to be formalized on a world scale (Alderton et. al. 2004: 96).

That is to say, what is revolutionary is the systematic way of locating, recruiting and organizing seafarers through the interconnected network of crewing agencies, shipping management and training institutes scattered around the world. Such a revolution in the organization of shipping businesses, one that has been largely formalized around the 1980s, is actually part of a response to the global economic crisis and overcapacity problems in the shipping industry that erupted in the 1970s: "a slump in world trade and a glut of ships produced a spate of intense competition and the inevitable accompanying drive to cut costs" (*ibid.*: 2). As a spokesperson for a shipowner organization, who was also an ex-seafarer, recalled the restructuring of the international shipping industry in recent decades, he explained to me:

> The seafaring life continues to change. I was at sea in the 1960s. And when I was at sea, we had a shortage of seafarers. In the 1960s, early 1970s, I was led on one ship by a second mate with a broken leg. He had to be lifted by crane onto the ship. The guy came to the sea with such labor shortage. . . . And then we went through a period of contraction of the industry, from the early 1970s and right until the 1980s. . . . We had a lot of seafarers in the old days. And when the great contraction came, a lot of people had to come to shore. I was one of them who went to shore. . . . And then when the market started picking up again, we found many more other seafarers being employed from Eastern Europe and Asia. . . .

> Of course we went through many years of low liquidity. Very, very difficult business. Extremely difficult period. And because of that, we really had to look for any saving we could. We became very, very cost-orientated. As we always grumped and mumbled, the accountants were running the business and they were looking at every penny that had been spent. Under great cost pressures and since the industry was not earning any money, we started seeing crews being employed more from Asia because they were cheaper. Ship managers, crewing managers would look at any crew source that could be cheaper, because cost was so important. And if you didn't have cost control, you were out of business.

In his explanation, the labor shortage in previous times turned into a surplus in the 1970s. Foreign ratings were then accepted as they "would accept low wages and whose statutory and negotiated fringe benefits were few, if any" (Marsh and Ryan 1989: 218). The current shipping practice of searching for and employing lower-wage crews from Asia since the 1980s, and from Eastern Europe since the 1990s, has been a business solution to industrial crisis and cost pressures. Sampson (2004) believes that such business reactions are realistic and inevitable given the amoral nature of global capitalism. Where business rivalry with competitors is growing intense and, at the same time, international labor markets have been deregulated, pushing down the price of labor --- a significant variable cost --- is essential; deviation from this will result in competitive disadvantages:

> If some parity within international wage settlements is not achieved, then in free, and relatively unregulated labour markets, employers will chase down the price of labour, playing one source off against another, in order to gain the edge over

their competitors. There is nothing malicious or malign in this; it is simply the nature of business in a capitalist economy. Competition is key and labour costs are critical.

In shipping we have already seen such forces at work as traditional labour supply nations have been superseded by newer ones, which have in turn come under threat themselves from new areas of competition. Whilst a few employers might continue to buck the trend of constantly scouting for newer and cheaper labour sources in favour of quality, workforce stability, and training standards, in many trades such actions can threaten market share, as competitors drive down prices and head for the cheapest labour available. Therefore, many employers have little choice but to follow the trend set by their rivals, even where they are reluctant to do so (Sampson 2004).

When shipping businesses made it through the depression of business cycle, they have adopted strategies with unprecedented flexibility over the expanse of time and space.

Neoliberalism and Flexible Accumulation

As merchant ships evolved from canoes, sail, steam to engine-driven ships, merchant shipping also formed increasing connections and interrelationships between regions and nations. The increasing economic connectedness and ensuing interdependence between nation-states were elevated after the Cold War as the communist block collapsed and joined the global capitalist system, leading to further dismantling of trade barriers and more deregulated transnational economic flows. Government withdrawal from active intervention in the market has been identified as following the

principle of "neoliberalism" which can be defined as "an ideology emphasizing the market as the ultimate arbiter of value, and advocating minimal restriction of the market by the state" (Mathews 2008: 18). Although the role of states in business organizations can never be neglected in reality, the essence of neoliberalism holds in today's world and it is well exemplified by shipping businesses: shipowners and shipping operators flexibly extract and deploy their business capital on an international scale to their best advantage.

Neoliberalism permeates through layers of human resource management down to labor recruitment. A look at the distribution of shipping ownership shows that the traditional maritime countries in Japan and Western Europe, as a heritage of European maritime trade and colonialism, still own and operate a large share of ships and shipping companies in the industry. However, reapplying Wallerstein's (1974) world-systems theory, many of these shipowners have outsourced and subcontracted their human resource management and ship operations to third parties who, through networks of manning agencies, assisted them in the recruitment of lower-wage but qualified seafarers from unfamiliar regions of the world.[8] To sustain the stability of the labor market, specialist ship-management companies establish connections with labor supplying countries, often reaching to their MET institutes and sometimes involving in the training of officers and ratings (Alderton et. al. 2004: 21). The recruitment methods of seafarers now include direct hire by shipowners, shipping companies and manning agents or through other middlemen and brokers (Chia 1989: 8). This international network of recruitment is bolstered by many states' foreign

[8] Ship management started to establish at an internationally recognizable level since the 1970s. Hong Kong, at that time, was one of the places where ship management specialists grew rapidly. As a result of their failed speculations, shipowners who went bankrupt in the 1970s crises had their ships repossessed by banks that mortgaged them. Instead of selling these ships at scrap value, the banks turned to management professionals to operate the ships. Meanwhile, in Europe, the growth of ship management was an extension of or derivation from existing shipping enterprises (Alderton et. al. 2004: 20).

economic policies to attract multinational corporations' investments. It takes the desirable semi-peripheral and peripheral labor of exchange values listed in the international market, and places them on board the trading vessels owned by countries from the core. The result is the formation of an organized international labor market first time in the history of shipping. A Hong Kong ex-seafarer told of the number of nationalities in the 1970s:

> There were just a few nationalities at my time. For example, the crews were mostly Koreans and the officers were Hong Kong people.[9] For more senior positions such as the captain, some were Westerners. I have worked for three Chinese-owned shipping companies. At one company, there were mainly Taiwanese and Hong Kong people, with some Indians and British in the senior positions such as the chief engineer and captain.

Such a range of nationalities—Korean, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, Indian and British—was considered as "few" as compared to the contemporary situation. "There used to be only German nationals on German ships. Now we have Russians, Polish, Slovakians, Romanians, people from New Zealand, Australians, Chinese and many others," said a German seafarer. Outsourcing and networking are, however, not the only causes for the current workforce diversity. There has been another prevailing practice in the industry fostering mixed nationality crewing, which is the flag of convenience.

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[9] What the informant and some other elder seafarers meant by "crew" was "ratings." "Ratings" are unlicensed qualified seafarers holding junior job positions in the shipboard hierarchy. Sometimes, "crew" is used to refer to "ratings" but in this thesis "crew" is defined as "a functional team of seafarers, with respective job positions in the shipboard hierarchy," and the term "ratings" is particularly used to refer to seafarers lower in the shipboard hierarchy.

Flags of Convenience

Through governmental or private registries, each ship flies a flag known as a civil ensign, which denotes its country of registration i.e. flag state. The ship is required to operate under the laws of the flag state and international maritime conventions that the state has ratified. Based on both internal and external factors, flag states outline their own maritime laws, with variations of strictness, requirements and references to international conventions and exercise various degrees of stringency in their administration. This variation and the right to choose the country of registry give shipowners considerable room to tactically select and register their ships under sovereign states that may offer them beneficial terms and rights in operation. Other than labor, environmental protection, safety, ship maintenance, taxation, and legal liability are some major areas of shipping that flag-state laws are supposed to regulate. When assessing the amenability of flag-state laws to their vessel operation, many shipowners regarded the cost of production as a key factor of consideration. Following this logic, shipowners favor those laws of flag states that do not add to or even reduce their production costs upon the registry of their ships:

> Essentially, within flag state law, shipowners are provided with the opportunity to opt for a low taxation regime; reduce legal liability through the creation of a single-ship company; employ seafarers of any nationality and combination they wish; follow their own system of vessel maintenance; and, choose which organisation classifies their vessels (Winchester 2003).

The following table compares the top countries of registry for ships and countries of ship ownership. The top four countries of registry are Panama, Liberia, Bahamas

and the Marshall Islands with respectively 183,503, 82,389, 46,524 and 42,636 millions of gross tons shipped under their registries. These four countries are not among the top twenty countries of ship ownership, showing a disjunction between registry and ownership of ships in the shipping industry:[10]

Rank	Countries of Registry	Millions of gross tons	Rank	Countries of Ship Ownership	Percentages of World Fleet
1	Panama	183,503	1	Greece	16.81%
2	Liberia	82,389	2	Japan	15.58%
3	Bahamas	46,542	3	Germany	9.07%
4	Marshall Islands	42,636	4	People's Republic of China	8.18%
5	Singapore	39,885	5	Norway	4.51%
6	Hong Kong, China	39,100	6	United States	3.84%
7	Greece	36,822	7	Republic of Korea	3.63%
8	Malta	31,633	8	Hong Kong, China	3.22%
9	People's Republic of China	26,811	9	Singapore	2.76%
10	Cyprus	20,109	10	Denmark	2.64%
11	Germany	15,282	11	Taiwan, China	2.52%
12	United Kingdom	15,246	12	United Kingdom	2.50%
13	Norway NIS	15,039	13	Canada	1.81%
14	Republic of Korea	14,144	14	Russian Federation	1.74%
15	Italy	13,599	15	Italy	1.71%
16	Japan	13,536	16	India	1.55%
17	United States	11,267	17	Turkey	1.27%
18	Denmark DIS	10,094	18	Saudi Arabia	1.25%
19	Bermuda	9,592	19	Belgium	1.17%
20	Antigua and Barbuda	9,536	20	Malaysia	1.08%

Table 2.1: Comparison between the top 20 merchant fleets by millions of gross tons

[10] In 2003, Mongolia, the largest landlocked country in the world, offered registry under her flag. Other flag states such as Bolivia also do not have a coastline and a navy but admirals. (Kahveci and Nichols 2006: 24)

shipped under their countries of registry (Source: Lloyd's Register Fairplay "World Fleet Statistics 2008" data as of 31 December 2008) and the top 20 merchant fleets by their share of the world fleet (measured by total deadweight tonnage) in terms of parent countries' beneficial ownership (Source: UNCTAD Review of Maritime Transport 2008, data as of 1 January 2008, compiled by the UNCTAD secretariat on the basis of data supplied by Lloyd's Register Fairplay) (as quoted in International Maritime Organization Maritime Knowledge Centre 2009: 13, 14).

Flag of convenience, or FOC, also known as open registry, refers to the registry of a ship to FOC states, which are not the shipowners' countries of origin. Once again, the practice has long existed in maritime history but it is not until recent decades that it has grown to a global phenomenon. "I could see Panama flags on German-owned ships 50 years ago. Governments of Panama and other FOC countries are happy to earn money because ships operating under their flags have to pay tax to them," said a retired seafarer. As we look through history, FOC had its origin before the World Wars:

> Since the Second World War it has been common practice for ships to be registered in states other than that of their owners. Originally devised in the 1930s by ship owners in the US who were trying to avoid alcohol prohibition, the so-called 'flag of convenience' system is now widespread, covering more than half of the world fleet (Whitfield 2007).

Military, political, and other reasons of FOC registires in the past have been,

however, largely supplanted by economic considerations at present.[11] States such as Liberia and Panama were already popularized as FOC states between the Wars, but it is only later that that their registries expanded, mainly utilized as a means to economic ends:

> In the context of trade liberalisation, FOCs allow businesses to minimise regulatory constraints whilst pursuing the most lucrative business opportunities. They can be attractive to companies seeking to reduce the higher crewing costs associated with national flags that stipulate quotas of crew of the same nationality. They offer tax advantages and minimal bureaucracy (International Transport Workers' Federation. 2006b: 6-7).

The modern practice of FOC is also a product of economic neoliberalism. As states withdraw many of their interferences in the market, shipping businesses are freed to circumvent stringent regimes and take advantage of lenient ones—those of the popular FOC flag states. They engage in what Kahveci and Nichols (2006: 18, 38) call "fictitious capital export and labor import" --- changing the nationality of their vessels so that they can enjoy similar economic benefits that land-based owners get when they close their factories and relocate them aboard; and alter the registry with considerable ease through which they can have largely unrestricted access to labor from the cheap labor zones of the world, a flexibility that exceeds that of many

[11] Politically motivated reflagging can be found in the mid 17th century when Dutch shipwowners chose to fly Swedish flag at a time when England and Holland were at war. Before World War II, many of Esso's tankers, under the flag of the former Free City of Danzig, also switched to Panamanian flag and substituted American for German crews for fear of the outbreak of war. During World War II, ships that were originally American-flagged also reregistered in Panama in order to go to England. The recent development of flagging out was believed to be initiated by US shipowners after World War II as they tried to circumvent the legal requirement of using costly American crews (Kahveci and Nichols 2006: 17).

land-based industries.

Notably, the effectiveness of the execution of FOC laws on shipowners is challenged, if we take into consideration the FOC states' rule over their registered ships not only in serious admiralty cases, such as oil spillage, but also in daily quality control. One deficiency of the FOC practice that has long been pinpointed is the "missing link": the missing genuine link between a shipowner and the flag state. This leads to difficulties encountered by FOC states in tracing the anonymous shipowners and executing their jurisdiction as they have no assets or personnel in their territories – property to seize, people to arrest (The International Transport Workers' Federation 2006b: 10).[12] This means, with application of Wallerstein's (1974) world-systems theory, that the FOC practice allows shipowners in the core to take advantage of FOC registry without any corporeal business establishments in peripheral FOC countries. The lack of states' control over FOC ships as well as the absence of shipowners and their entities in FOC countries exemplify how time and space of businefss organization have been distanciated hyperactively in the shipping industry (Giddens 1990: 14). Another form of "absence" is manifested in the obvious nonattendance of FOC nationals on board all merchant vessels. As Lane (2000: 10) writes:

> It is taken for granted and therefore passes unremarked that in the world's larger flag fleets – Panama, Bahamas, Liberia, Cyprus, and Malta – nationals of these flag states do not feature in any known collections of manpower statistics. Furthermore, the second register fleets and increasingly the first register fleets in most OECD countries as well as the Hong Kong and Singapore fleets, all have

[12] It also makes it difficult for states to monitor their ships when they are poverty-stricken and war-torn (Kahveci and Nichols 2006: 26)

ships where dwindling numbers of crew members are nationals.[13] These well-known and simple facts all signify enormous changes in the labour market for seafarers.

The flag of a ship does not act as an indicator of the crew composition on board, nor does it correlate with the nationality of the ship owner or operator. "It's not about national pride, it's just about money. When it's no longer profitable to run under a flag, shipowners change to another one," said an Austrian spokesperson for seafarers. Ships' flags are contextually different from national flags in terms of their potentiality to provoke nationalistic sentiments. According to this informant, the ship flag is now nothing more than a symbol of economic immediacies that is not relevant to seafarers' identities.[14] Some seafarer informants still preferred to work on board ships that fly the national flags of traditional maritime countries for these ships show a higher tendency to provide better job conditions. Yet, the business logic is not something seafarers think that they can override.

Mixed Nationality Crewing

As a consequence of the flexibility of labor accumulation and permutation, the population of seafarers from where shipowning is concentrated, i.e. the core, has been reduced in dominance in the global seafaring workforce and has been replaced by a continual inundation of lower-wage labor from the semi-periphery and periphery.[15]

[13] To counteract with the FOC, some States have created second registers with relaxed regulations to recapture registry (Alderton et. al. 2004: 29).

[14] As Kahveci and Nichols (2006: 17) point out that "flagging out" can be found in the distant past, they write that in the 18th century, the flag of a vessel in the Eastern Mediterranean did not indicate its ownership nor the nationality of its captain. Ships' flags, unlike flags in many other contexts, have always been a matter of convenience.

[15] The global merchant fleets are not entirely owned by "the core." Greece, as the largest country of ship ownership, is after all only at the edge of the core. People's Republic of China, the fourth largest shipowining country is not considered as a core country as well. With regard to this, what I deduce in

The result is the prevalence of mixed-nationality crews:

> The Philippines and India are very significant maritime labour supply nations, with many seafarers from these countries enjoying employment opportunities on foreign flag ships operated by international shipping companies. China has also seen a large increase in the number of seafarers, but at the moment most of these work on the Chinese fleet, meeting domestic requirements. . . . Eastern Europe has recently become an increasingly large supplier of seafarers with high numbers from countries including the Ukraine, Croatia and Latvia. . . . Other major labour supply countries include Greece, Japan, Russia and the United Kingdom (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010e).[16]

In fact, "nearly 150 nationalities are recorded on seafarers' supply lists. Over 40 per cent come from the Far East, 30 per cent from Eastern Europe, over 10 per cent from South Asia and Middle East, while the traditional maritime countries contribute 13 per cent" (Wu 2002). The registry of ships to FOC states with fewer legal restrictions on crew composition has facilitated the implementation of mixed nationality crewing. All in all, the seafaring industry has been observing the shift of crewing patterns from largely nationals i.e. people of the same nationalities employed

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this thesis is the point that shipowning is concentrated in the core as compared with the semi-periphery and periphery. This acts as a comparison to the concentration of ship registry and seafaring labor sources in order to explain the international division of labor in the global economy.

[16] This also points to the question of why there is a lack of significant populations of Africans, Caribbean and Latin Americans in the seafaring industry: up till the early 1970s, crewing patterns of international shipping were still in line with post-colonial links. That is to say, British-owned vessels would usually be manned by British, Bangladeshi, Indian, Hong Kong Chinese and Sri Lankan seafarers; Dutch-owned vessels would usually be manned by Indonesian and Surinamese seafarers (Kahveci and Nichols 2006: 27). At the turn of the 20th century when an international labor market of seafarers has already been formalized, some shipowner representatives said Latin America was among the next destinations to be explored, after labor sources from the globe's major continents are employed and tested already. The neoliberal pursuit of cheap but qualified labor is incessant in the shipping industry and is not confined to particular nationalities.

on their national fleets to largely temporal and contract-based multinational crews employed on foreign-owned ships. Around two decades ago, for example, most mainland Chinese seafarers were still permanent employees of state-owned enterprises. Nowadays, an increasing number of them are freemen employed by local and foreign shipping companies on short-term contracts through crewing agencies (Wu, Lai and Cheng 2006). Lane (2001) discusses the growth of mixed nationality crewing in recent years:

> Fifteen or so years ago, in the first half of the 1980s, a lot of ships began to acquire what were often called "exotic" crews. Seized by an economic crisis where there were too many ships chasing dwindling volumes of cargo, shipowners went in search of cheaper running costs. The first step was flagging out and the second was recruiting seafarers from countries where employment costs were relatively low. Most of the world's ships continued to be owned in Europe and Japan but European and Japanese crews were replaced by seafarers recruited in S and SE Asia. By the 1990s, Eastern European crews joined the stream of new entrants, and in the 2000s it is the turn of Chinese and Latin Americans.

Now the "exotic" is no longer "exotic" as seafarers have become used to working with a variety of nationals and mixed nationality crewing is a norm of human resource management in international shipping. Although the overall composition varies over time, the national diversity of seafaring workforce remains great.

The New Technological Sea

Technology has long aided people in moving things and living beings across geographical boundaries and traveling long distances. Today's merchant vessels come in a great variety of forms: general cargo ships, tankers, bulk carriers, passenger ships, container ships, fishing vessels etc., differentiated by the types of shipments they carry and their ship structures. The container ship, among them, is a type of cargo ship which carries truck-sized containers of non-bulk cargoes (International Maritime Organization Maritime Knowledge Centre 2009: 15-17). It is a relatively new ship type in maritime history and yet momentous: the one sector which can be said to have transformed the face of shipping, certainly in the latter half of the 20th century, is that of container shipping. Unheard of before the 1960s, the container is now ubiquitous and is the standard unit of cargo for just about every form of manufactured item on the planet (International Maritime Organization Maritime Knowledge Centre 2009: 16).

The use of "boxes" to contain shipments has existed for millennia. The modern intermodal container is, however, an invention in the 20th century, when the design of Malcolm McLean went international and the relevant shipbuilding, port infrastructural and transportation technologies were established (Levinson 2006). The modern container ship is an evolution from what was previously known as box boats, with boxes made of wood and iron. Now the container is made of metal such as steel, pressurized or un-pressurized, folding, open sided or open topped, flat platform, ventilated or refrigerated and sealed in transit. Two common ISO containers are 20-foot (6.198 metres) and 40-foot (12.192 metres) with volumes of 1,169 cubic feet (33.1 cubic metres) and 2,385 cubic feet (67.5 cubic metres) respectively (Davies n.d.: 32). Containerization is a systematic technology and a part of the standardization process in the shipping industry. It has greatly reduced transportation cost of

shipments per piece and enhanced efficiency of shipping, supporting a drastic rise in international trade. The modes of transportation involved in shipping intermodal containers include truck, rail and trailers besides container ships, with interchangeability between these modes of transportation in intra- and intercontinental shipping.

Technological innovations of shipping are not only manifested in logistic arrangements but also in the equipment on board. An ex-engineer who had working experiences in the shipping industry from 1975 to 1987, across the start of the contemporary era, said:

> At the later times of my employment, we already had automated ships with unattended machinery space. They called it UMS. For these ships, engineers worked together during the daytime. After 5 p.m., the alarm panels were switched to our own rooms. Of course we needed to go downstairs and patrol sometimes, for example, before we went to bed. If anything happened when we were sleeping, the alarms went directly to our rooms and we arrived at the engine room to fix the problems.

"Unattended machinery space" or "remote machinery control" introduced in the 1960s was an automation project resulting in partially unmanned engine rooms. Today, engine monitoring is still necessary and engineers have to carry out some residuary functions. But the engine room is partially controlled by computers and engineers need to make occasional inspections only. The bridge also evolves from the traditional wheelhouse to an electronic control centre for all the main shipboard functions, from monitoring the cargo and engine conditions to weather forecast. Henceforth, scientific

management of shipboard equipment has become a basic requirement for contemporary seafarers, a significant component of their seamanship. This is an example of how technology has altered the job nature and working patterns of seafaring. As a result of increased mechanization and automation, mixed nationality crewing also comes with reduced manning scales and increased productivity per capita (King 2001: 574). Nowadays, the mean crew size for container ships is 21.1 with a standard deviation of 4.9 and a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 49. (Ellis and Sampson 2008: 37). As Alderton et. al. have written (2004: 106):

> during the past 20 years or so, there has been a reduction in the size of crews. In the early 1970s, a typical 10,000 grt bulk cargo carrier would have had approximately 40 crew members.[17] Today, a much larger (that is, 30,000 grt) bulk carrier is likely to have only 18 to 25 crew members on board. The same crew-size pattern applies to cargo-carrying ships of all kinds.

In other words, in today's shipping world, it is common to find a smaller crew operating a larger container vessel with advanced shipping machinery in track with port operation and logistic management. Still, this smaller crew retains the modified version of the traditional job hierarchy to steer through the commercial oceans of the world.

Shipboard Structures

A container ship operates as a business unit through departmental administration. The three shipboard departments, Culinary, Engineering and Navigation, are specialized in

[17] "GRT" stands for "Gross Registered Ton."

their scope of operations, functional for the whole ship and internally hierarchical.[18] Posts and their exact titles vary on different ships. Typically, they include but are not limited to Chief Engineer (Officer), Second Engineer (Officer), Third Engineer (Officer), Fourth Engineer (Officer), Oiler, Fitter and Wiper in the Engineering Department;[19] Captain/Master, Chief Mate (Officer), Second Mate (Officer), Third Mate (Officer), Bosun,[20] Able Seaman and Ordinary Seaman in the Navigation Department; and Cook and Steward in the Culinary Department. As the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009a) states: "A typical deep-sea merchant ship has a captain, three deck officers or mates, a chief engineer and three assistant engineers, plus six or more seamen, such as able seamen, oilers, QMEDs, and a cook." The exact number of crewmembers on a ship depends on the ship size and service but the general job hierarchy is observed. Seafarers are also categorized into "officers" and "ratings." "Officers" are licensed qualified seafarers holding senior job positions in the shipboard hierarchy: deck officers (Captain, Chief Mate, Second Mate, Third Mate etc.) and engineers (Chief Engineer, Second Engineer, Third Engineer, Fourth Engineer etc.). Ratings are unlicensed qualified seafarers holding junior job positions: e.g. Bosun, Able Seaman and Ordinary Seaman of the Navigation department; Oiler, Fitter and Wiper of the Engineering Department; Cook and Steward of the Culinary Department. Seafarers of the three departments usually wear three different types of uniforms at work. Officers, particularly senior navigation officers, often have badges sewn on the shoulders of their uniforms to indicate their positions.

[18] The culinary department is also called the catering or steward's department and the navigation department is also called the deck or cargo department in some other contexts.

[19] Oiler, Fitter and Wiper of the Engineering Department are ratings i.e. unlicensed qualified seafarers holding junior positions in the shipboard hierarchy. The Oiler's main responsibility is to "oil" the engine and other machinery. The Fitter's main responsibility is to "fit" the engine and other machinery i.e. to modify through machining. The Wiper's main responsibility is to "wipe" i.e. clean the engine and machinery.

[20] Bosun is also known as Boatswain. He is usually the most senior among all ratings of the Navigation Department.

The Captain is higher than everybody else in the job hierarchy, including the Chief Engineer, the head of the Engineering Department. Appointed by the shipping company, he is supposed to be the one with the most sophisticated and officially recognized seafaring knowledge, skills and experiences. In practice, though some other seafarers noted that the captain bore the important responsibility for keeping the ship in good order and being accountable for man-made losses or damages, some seafarer informants thought that the actual work many captains did was minimal: oral supervision, coordination, observation and paperwork.

The Culinary Department is small compared with the other two departments. They provide catering services to the rest of the crewmembers. Their main working areas are the kitchen and the mess rooms. The Engineering Department, with their main working area in the engine room, is responsible for the proper functioning of marine propulsion and other machines on board. The Navigation Department mainly deals with cargo handling and navigation. Their main working areas are the cargo office and the bridge with steering and commanding equipment. As an engineer said:

> The working situations of different departments are different. For example, the engineering department is mainly responsible for the propulsion engine and auxiliary engine and all shipboard machinery. But if you are a deck officer, you are mainly doing navigation and dealing with cargoes. And the so-called crews under you assist you in jobs such as, for example in the engineering department, helping you to lift, clean and take things. The kitchen cooks for all officers and ratings. There is often one cook who is responsible for all people onboard.

The Hong Kong Shipowners Association's publication (2007: 8-10) "Think

Maritime: Your Guide to the Maritime Industries" introduces the responsibilities of different job ranks in the seafaring world. In the following table, some of the common job ranks on board merchant vessels and their relevant job responsibilities are shown:

Job Rank	Descriptions
"Master"	"Usually addressed as the Captain. Is in overall command of the ship and is effectively her General Manager and ultimately responsible for the safe navigation and operation of the ship. He is also the owner's representative and deals with charterers, port agents and cargo formalities."
"Chief Officer"	"Often known as and addressed as the Mate. Is responsible for the day to day working of the deck crew and for the stowage, loading, carriage and discharge of the cargo with particular attention to the ship's stability."[21]
"Second Officer"	"Often known as the Second Mate. Is the ship's navigator with a prime responsibility for the upkeep of charts and passage planning. He is often the ship's medical officer."[22]
"Third Officer"	"The Third Mate holds a Class 4 (OOW Deck) Certificate and assists both the Mate and Second Mate and is responsible for the ships lifesaving and fire-fighting equipment."
"Chief Engineer Officer"	"The Chief Engineer is effectively the ship's technical manager and is responsible for the operation and upkeep of all machinery, engineering systems and the structural integrity of the ship."
"Second Engineer Officer"	"The Second Engineer is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Engineers and engine-room crew. He has a prime responsibility for the main engines as well as spare gear and stores."
"Third Engineer Officer"	"The Third Engineer works closely with the Second Engineer and often has prime responsibility for the ships electrical plant (alternators) and assists with any main engine upkeep. In the absence of a dedicated Electrician or Electro-Technical Officer he would also be responsible for the ship's 'electrics.'"
"Fourth Engineer Officer"	"The Fourth Engineer holds a minimum of a Class 4 Engineering Officer of the Watch certificate and assists with all aspects of machinery upkeep. He is usually responsible for fueling and daily monitoring of fuel

[21] The chief mate takes over the role of maintaining the order and proper functioning of the whole ship when the captain is incapacitated.

[22] The Second Mate is the one who has basic medical knowledge and training other than his seafaring skills. He diagnoses and treats ill seafarers, and carries out small-scale surgeries in the medical room of the ship if necessary.

	supplies."
"Electrical / Electro Technical Officer"	"Some ships carry Electrical or Electro-Technical Officers responsible for the vast amount of electrical and electronic equipment fitted."
"Cadet"	"Both Deck & Engineer Cadets follow a structured training programme with academic studies ashore coupled with practical experience afloat."[23]
"Catering Officer, Purser, Chief Steward"	"Depending on the business of the ship, the catering staff are managed by a Purser or Catering Officer who is responsible for the ship's 'hotel services' and paperwork."
"Deck Rating"	"The Deck Ratings – Able Seamen (SG1) - carry out routine upkeep work and provide the helmsmen and lookouts whilst the ship is at sea."
"Engineering Rating"	"Under the Petty Officer (Motorman) are the engine-room ratings who assist the engineers with machinery upkeep and watchkeeping."
"Cooks and Stewards"	"Provide the 'hotel services' vital to the wellbeing of all onboard."

Table 2.3: Seafaring job ranks and job descriptions (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 8-10).

To illustrate further, here is the crew list of a ship that belonged to a Korean shipping line under the Liberian flag (an FOC flag) berthed at Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong on 14 August 2006. The crew list shows the typical job ranks on board as well as the nationalities of seafarers. Among the 25 seafarers, 20 (80%) are Filipinos, 2 (8%) are Germans, 1 (4%) is Austrian, 1 (4%) is Polish and 1 (4%) is Ukrainian. All the ratings i.e. Bosun, Fitter, AB,[24] OS,[25] Oiler, Wiper, Chief Cook, Steward and Messman are Filipinos.[26] The captain is German, the chief mate is Polish and the chief engineer is Austrian. The officers and the ratings respectively make up 32% and 68% of the whole crew:

[23] A cadet is a seafaring trainee who receives off- and on-the-job education and training.
[24] "AB" stands for "Able Seaman," a rating of the navigation department who is junior to Bosun and senior to Ordinary Seaman.
[25] "OS" stands for "Ordinary Seaman.
[26] Messman is a rating who is junior to Cook. He is also known as Steward in some other contexts. He provides assistance to the catering services on board.

			2.Port of arrival/ departure Pusan	3.Dates of arrival/ departure 14.08.2006	
4.Nationality of ship Liberia			5.Port arrived from Xingang		6.Nature and No. of Identity document
7.No.	8.Family name; given name	9.Rank or rating	10.Nationality	11.Date and place birth	Passport
1	(Concealed to preserve confidentiality)	Master	German	(Concealed to preserve confidentiality)	(Concealed to preserve confidentiality)
2		Chief Offc.	Polish		
3		2nd Offc.	Filipino		
4		3rd Offc.	Filipino		
5		Chief Eng.	Austrian		
6		2nd Eng.	German		
7		3rd Eng.	Filipino		
8		ETO	Ukrainian		
9		Bosun	Filipino		
10		Fitter	Filipino		
11		AB	Filipino		
12		AB	Filipino		
13		AB	Filipino		
14		AB	Filipino		
15		OS	Filipino		
16		OS	Filipino		
17		OS	Filipino		
18		Oiler	Filipino		
19		Oiler	Filipino		
20		Oiler	Filipino		
21		Wiper	Filipino		
21		Wiper	Filipino		
23		Ch.Cook	Filipino		
24		Steward	Filipino		
25		Messman	Filipino		

Table 2.4: The crew list of a Liberian ship operated by a Korean shipping line and berthed at Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, on 14 August 2006, showing the distribution of nationalities over different job ranks.

The following is a typical floor plan found inside a container ship with "F – Deck" as the highest deck and "Third Deck" as the lowest deck, showing the structure

of the container ship and its relationship with the job hierarchy:

Deck	Rooms
F – Deck	Captain Chief Officer Owner Gyro Room
E – Deck	Chief Engineer First Engineer Electrician Pilot
D – Deck	Second Officer Third Officer Reefer Electrician Second Engineer Third Engineer Cadet Electrician Cadet–A Cadet–B Officers Laundry & Drying Room
C – Deck	Boatswain A.B.1 A.B.2 A.B.3 O.S.1 O.S.2 Oiler 1 Oiler 2 Hospital Fire Station No.2
B – Deck	Chief Cook Messman Oiler 3 Wiper Bonded Store Gymnasium Crew Laundry and Drying Room
A – Deck	Officers / Crew Saloon Galley Public Toilets Provision Rooms

Upper Deck	Cargo Office
	Engine Control Room
	Fire Station No.1
	Tally Room
	Gangway / Main Deck
Third Deck	Pilot Boarding Access

Table 2.5: Deck directory inside a container ship, 31 October 2008.

This block of different decks is generally constructed above the ship engine i.e. the Engine Control Room on the Upper Deck in the directory, at the stern of the ship. The captain usually lives at the top and the rest of the crew team lives underneath him.[27] The above deck directory shows some of the common amenities on board the modern container ship, which include a gymnasium and video rooms with CDs and DVDs. Having boarded the ship, the immediate floor I entered was the Upper Deck. The captain and one senior mate were working inside the cargo office and, with the assistance of port officials, handling cargoes through a computer. The rest of the crew moved between different spaces according to their routine work schedule. Engineers came by and reported to the captain in the cargo office. Then I took an elevator to the decks above the Upper Deck, which were different floors of accommodation and other shipboard amenities. I had lunch near the galley with off-duty seafarers of various job ranks and learnt about their typical day of work at sea.

A Day at Sea

To ensure that the ship in operation is always being maintained for long durations of voyages, seafarers work by a shift system called watchkeeping. Each seafarer is

[27] The living space and working spaces on board are not very distinguishable. Cabins and mess rooms may be regarded as living spaces for seafarers but in reality, they can also be manipulated for business operations, as will be explained in the coming chapters.

assigned regular periods of duty within a day, separated by regular off-duty periods to recharge themselves. All shipboard crewmembers shift work around the 24 hours of the clock to handle the ship so that enough hands are always on duty on board. Although the work patterns of the culinary department are usually different from those of the other two departments, nearly all seafarers eat, work and sleep in a very routine manner. A seafarer (Aladdin 2002) writes online:

> We are 3 Deck Officers working 4 hours and then we are 8 hours off. As we say on the ship: we are on watch (duty). So there [is] . . . always someone on watch on the ship. All Officers stand watches at sea. In port they are on watches as well during loading and discharging. . . . For example if the Chief Officer stands the 8 - 12 watch there is a 2nd Officer relieving him at 12 o'clock
>
> Then at 4 o'clock 3rd Officer comes on watch until 8 o'clock when I get on my watch.
>
> On each watch the Officer have an AB. During the night the AB [is] . . . on the bridge . . . helping the Duty Officer to keep a look out for other ships.

Seafarers' working patterns at sea are changed when the ship berths at a port and during emergencies. But the changed working patterns are still routines at ports and for emergencies. Stewart (2009) gives a detailed description of the daily life at sea in her online blog:

> You can pretty much guarantee that my life each day on the 4-8 watch involved the same things, day after day after day. You get yourself into a routine and everything just starts to happen automatically after time. You wake up and go to

sleep at the same time, meals were always at 8, 8am and 8pm. The afternoon nap wasn't something that you planned, it started to happen naturally no matter where you were. Yes that's right. When I hopped off the ship for some time off I would instantly start to fall asleep at 3pm every day. If I didn't I would find myself curling up in the corner somewhere just to try and get half an hour of shut eye. You wore the same clothes, either bridge uniform, overalls or casual gear. You know who everyone is instantly from the distance by what shirt they were wearing.

Anyway my daily routine when on the 4-8 watch was basically set out as follows:

0330 – Wake up and get ready for watch.

0400 – Bridge or Cargo Watch commences.

0800 – End of Watch.

0815 – Breakfast, usually by myself.

0930 – Study.

1000 – Morning cup of tea.

1200 – If not doing safety checks or study then may have lunch.

1500 – Afternoon nap.

1530 – Wake up and get ready for Bridge or Cargo Watch.

1600 – Bridge or Cargo Watch commences.

2000 – End of Watch.

2015 – Dinner, usually by myself.

2030 – Study.

2200 – Try and be asleep before clock reads 2200.

The 4-8 watch means that the seafarer is on watch from 0400 to 0800 and from 1600 to 2000. She also carries out some safety checks in between the two time slots. This is the particular watch schedule she has to follow. After she finishes her watch, another seafarer will come and substitute for her. In detail, the following table shows the standard watch system on a merchant ship:[28]

Time	Team
0400-0800	Team 1
0800-1200	Team 2
1200-1600	Team 3
1600-2000	Team 1
2000-0000	Team 2
0000-0400	Team 3

Table 2.6: Standard watch system on a merchant ship.

Following this standard watch system, each day is divided into six watches of four hours' duration each. A seafarer on the 8-12 watch stands watches at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., four hours at a time. The rest of the day can be used for resting and recreation. His work schedule is consistent and revolves around the clock every day. Every watch team has crewmembers from both navigation and engineering departments to keep watches over the machinery and on the bridge.[29] Watches can also be categorized according to their functions e.g. cargo watch for cargo handling, gangway watch for

[28] Exact watch systems vary between different ships due to differences in the ships' services, policies of shipping companies, number of available crewmembers etc.

[29] The routine of the culinary department differs from those of the other departments in that the galley needs not be operating 24 hours a day, as long as enough food and other catering services are regularly provided to sustain the rest of the crewmembers.

port security, lookout watch for avoidance of ship collision and other aspects of safe navigation. Since labor input is continuously required for a sailing ship, seafarers rotate shifts and work about half of the day, 7 days a week on board (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009a). They do not have regular holidays, like many shore-based workers do, as long as they are employed on board. Such working patterns can be boring and exhausting for many seafarers.

Departing from the shore, a group of seafarers described to me their route to their designated ship: "I guess we just arrived here in Hong Kong at 10:30 in the morning. The company gave us air-tickets to fly to Hong Kong, where we would board our ship to work. The agents picked us up and drove us from the airport to the ship, and dealt with immigration." Non-domiciled seafarers are often brought together in this way to board the ship which their employers assign for them. As a new crewmember introduces himself to his teammates on board, the captain and other senior officers are usually the first people he reports to. A seafarer described his self-introduction to a new seafaring team:

> They know I am coming because all my information is given to the captain. He knows who is going to replace who. For new entrants in the industry, the people onboard may not know them. For example when we first went aboard, we were called cadets. Of course no one knew us then. But after we have worked for some time in the same company, although we have not been on the same ships, a few people can recognize our names. For the so-called self-introduction, for example, I am a third engineer, I report to the second engineer when I go aboard. If not the second engineer, then the chief engineer. If not the chief engineer, then the captain.

Through this introduction to the new ship, he became incorporated into the seafaring team and went to his assigned sentry post as the ship sailed away.

Chapter Summary

To understand the context of shipping and seafaring, I have investigated the prevalent business practices and tactics of the shipping industry as well as some of its technological advancements in the neoliberal age. Polyglot crews and flags of convenience are not new phenomena in maritime history. Rather, it is their organization and scale that is revolutionary in the contemporary era. The reason for their emergence lies in the economic crisis of the shipping industry at a time anterior to the contemporary era, in the 1970s to the 1980s, when world trade plummeted and ships were overproduced. Industrial competition to survive in the dampened shipping world inevitably pushed the shipping businesses into looking for ways to cut production costs. Such a reaction was upheld and promoted by the ideology of neoliberalism that has been widely governing the global economy since the 1980s.

The ensuing deregulations in the global economy have opened up new labor sources for shipping. Formalized since the 1980s, the international recruitment of seafarers on a global scale is a result of shipowners outsourcing their human resource management to foreign third-party agents. This is also a consequence of shipowners' cost-oriented choice of ship registry to observe more lenient maritime regulations, particularly with the assistant practice of flags of convenience. In other words, the shipping businesses owned by the core are largely manned by labor from the semi-periphery and periphery, in accordance with world-systems theory (Wallerstein 1974). Strategically, the core uses its freedom to register their ships under peripheral

flags that economize their costs of production and maximize business profits. Such a phenomenon reflects how state laws can be utilized for economic expediency under neoliberalism.

The transition to container shipping, along with a chain of technological innovations in port design, shipbuilding and conveyance, has also transformed the seascape and landscape of international logistics, rearranging the networking of ports around the world. In addition, industrial automation and mechanization have increased the productivity of seafarers per capita, reducing their crew sizes and fundamentally altering the nature of work on board. The traditional job hierarchy with three functional departments, each specializing in an important area of shipboard operation, has lasted to date. But lowered staffing levels, a greater monotony of routine work, scientific management of shipboard equipment, and different degrees of representation by various nationalities in the job hierarchy have resulted from the techno-economic developments of the international shipping industry. Such results also give rise to new interpretations of the meanings of seafaring.

Chapter III: The Contemporary Meanings of Seamanship

Photo 3.1: A presenter from a maritime training institute explaining to an audience about work at sea, Hong Kong, 7 November 2008. Hong Kong, like many other developed countries, still educates and trains some local seafarers.

In analyzing the assemblage of multinational seafarers, it is essential to ask, "Why do contemporary seafarers enroll in the industry?" Having recognized influential shipping developments in the previous chapter, in this chapter, I focus on the supply side of the labor market by studying seafarers' reasons for becoming seafarers. Seafaring is a job that requires a variety of specialized knowledge and skills. A seafarer usually starts from the basics and advances through formal learning and

training. The aim of this chapter is to show the underlying meanings of the acquisition and progression of such seamanship.

The Sailor: Romanticization and Disenchantment

"Mariner," "seaman" and "sailor" are some other names which stand for "seafarer." Yet the word "sailor," for example, contains a plethora of references such as "military personnel," "someone who sees service in the navy" and "worker in merchant shipping." The key is that a "sailor" sails on the sea. In my research, what springs to the amateur's mind when thinking of "a sailor" is often the image of "a drunkard," "a macho man," "a guy with tattoos," "someone who goes whoring" or "a handsome, audacious guy who sails on the sea and explores the world." In the general public's eye, the "sailor" often either carries a blend of romanticized and stigmatized connotations or is a "distant and unknown" personage. However, for people working at the heart of the seafaring industry, they know very well the outlook and soul of being a "sailor." The meanings of seafaring knowledge and skills of work, what I call "the meanings of seamanship," are not an unvarying generality but negotiable significations changing over time:[30]

> At different periods in history, the profession has been regarded in different ways. In ancient times seafaring meant involvement in commercial activities; at the time of the discoveries seafarers were in the forefront of progress, and today it is still a profession that can provide a better way of life for families, especially for the sons and daughters of seafarers from developing countries (Veiga 2005).

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[30] Seafarers also address themselves in different ways. "Seafarer," "seaman" and "mariner" are more official terms while "sailor" is sometimes used as well. When a seafarer introduces himself during a shipboard interview, he usually refers to his job title.

From the trader to the discoverer to the breadwinner, the seafarer sails in the evolving context of meanings of seamanship. Given that the ship as a technological means of transporting materials and goods simultaneously carries its operators on board, today, notions such as "working on ocean-going ships takes you around the world" and "seafaring is a career which enables you to travel" are still marketed as an attraction in some job recruitment notices.[31] Contemporary mass transportation, tourism and mass media are, however, disenchanting this romanticization: "Where once youngsters became sailors to see the world, affluence has removed that attraction as Singaporeans start travelling young" (Goh 2006). Generally speaking, seafaring has become less attractive as a way to travel partly because of other accessible alternatives. During the days when transportation to foreign lands was not fully developed, sailing on a ship was a way to see the world and explore new lands. Nowadays, with more affordable air tickets, traveling by air is no longer an impossible luxury for most people. Globalization has also spread images and news of different parts of the world and there is hardly a piece of land on earth that is not "exposed" and "explored."

One may think that, with reduced manning scales, the recruitment of lower-wage laborers from developing countries is to blame for eliminating jobs for people from developed countries. But an undeniable fact is that, for the latter, seafaring has become lost its romanticized attractiveness as a way of earning and a life-long career. An experienced Hong Kong seafarer recalled the flourishing period of seafaring:

> There was a course called marine engineering at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. At that time, there was a strong demand for seafarers. Many shipping

[31] This is however challenged by the prediction of fully automated ships, on which all human labor will be replaced by fully automated machinery. New socio-economic relationships in the industry will be formed then.

> companies gave sponsorships to the course in terms of tuition fee allowances. Having graduated, and when there was external examination for certificate qualification, it was fast for me to be promoted to chief engineer. Of course one should work hard. But it was fast to achieve the goal.

He then went on to say that the course was eliminated after some time, "It seemed that I was the ninth generation.[32] It continued until ten something because no one went seafaring. When a student who took the course graduated, he changed to other careers. After graduation, I met some juniors. Some of their same-year schoolmates didn't go seafaring at all." The younger generation did not see the same career prospects at sea as he did. "The seafaring industry in Hong Kong has been declining for a long time," he added.

Growing affluence with more economic activities and job opportunities in developed countries has meant that many people there would rather find a shore-based job than having to leave home for the pay of seafaring. The attraction of the high wage at sea has been diminished. With regard to the falling supply of national labor, *The Business Times of Singapore* writes:

> The pool of seafarers has shrunk significantly over the years. About 30 years ago, Singaporeans made up half the officers on ships flying the Singapore flag. . . . Today, only 3 per cent are Singaporeans. . . . The rest are from India, the Philippines, Indonesia and China. In the past five years, fewer than 40 seafaring certificates of competency were issued to Singaporeans annually. Last year, just 28 were given out. Further, six in 10 of the 582 certificates issued went to those

[32] For "ninth generation," the informant meant that it was the ninth year since the establishment of the course that he graduated from.

aged 40 and older. To overcome the shortage, the union plans to go to other countries to offer training to maritime college cadets who will agree to work on Singapore-registered ships upon graduation (Goh 2006).

From constituting 50% to 3% of the officers on board ships that are registered under the Singapore flag, Singaporean labor supply to the seafaring industry is aging and drying up. The response of the country's industrial union is to train people in other countries who will work on their ships to solve the labor shortage. The consequence is predictable: more foreign seafarers are likely to be employed on Singapore-registered ships and gradually replace the aging Singaporean seafarers.

Some younger people from developed countries do enroll in the shipping industry. One reason for them to apply for the job, according to an Austrian seafarer I interviewed, is just to have a job: "Forty years ago, you earned more at sea than on shore. Now money isn't such a strong incentive though it is still important. People sometimes just want to have a job if they don't show an eagerness to go off at ports." An elder seafarer described younger Western seafarers nowadays as having "an idealistic wish to make the minimum efforts to gain the maximum payback." He continued to say that unlike many Southeast Asians, Western newcomers in the seafaring industry might not be aware of how busy many down-to-earth seafaring tasks were. Hardships at sea and opportunity costs of the sea life make some of these newly employed seafarers quit their job:

> The great majority of the cadets soon discover that a job at sea is stressful and strenuous. The introduction of legislation which tends to criminalise seafarer(s) has not helped. And thanks to the new security code, seafarers are no longer able

> to get shore leave in many ports, which enhances the fatigue and stress. Perhaps we should wonder that any UK cadets stay at sea given all this and considering the opportunities available ashore (Gekara 2006).

A number of important issues are raised here: criminalization, restricted shore leave, fatigue and stress that are part of the reality at sea. In general, recruitment of seafarers from developed countries encounters a lot of difficulties. "Very few in the younger generation are willing to join seafaring, especially in the engine department. The average age of Taiwanese engineers on board this ship is greater than fifty. I predict there will be no more Taiwanese engineers in just a few years," said a Taiwanese chief engineer (as quoted in Guo, Ye and Liang 2007: 4). The newly employed Taiwanese seafarers, like many other seafarers from developed countries, are becoming less willing to engage in the seafaring industry in the long run. At the same time, "There is some evidence that the choice of a seafaring career often runs in families but, unfortunately, today many older seafarers from traditional maritime nations say they would not recommend their children to go to sea" (Gekara 2006). These older seafarers prefer to let their children work on shore instead of encouraging them to follow their tradition of working at sea due to the unattractiveness of the seafaring job. In the face of this situation, a representative from a shipowner organization revealed to me an owners' point of view:

> We have been having a problem since five or six years ago. We identified this problem as being that of our industry, the ocean-going industry: we train people for other industries. People came to the sea for a period of time and then they went to other industries. So we trained people in our industry who then became

marine pilots.[33] Or they became Marine Department inspectors. Or they became admiralty lawyers who were normally ex-seafarers. Now we have realized that being in Hong Kong, we won't be training people as we did before. We won't be bringing people through. And shipowners said, "We really don't care because we can recruit any crews we like." You know, "We don't need to recruit Hong Kong cadets," "We're not interested in Hong Kong cadets," "We don't care if the Marine Department in Hong Kong has to hire PRC officers since we no longer 'supply' them with locally trained mariners. That's not our concern."

Learning from the Hong Kong case, it seems that the reduction in local labor supplies is not seen as a serious problem for shipowners and shipping operators, in that at least the supply of ratings and junior officers is guaranteed by the large pool of seafarers from other labor markets. As Obando-Rojas (2003b) reports, "A quick scan of seagoing jobs reveals a high demand for skilled and specialized individuals. In contrast, there is no great demand for the 'general purpose' seafarer, i.e. the officer or rating who has only the minimum qualifications and no in-depth skills on any particular type of ship." With respect to many shipwoners' attitudes, a Taiwanese seafarer expressed:

What the shipping company cares about is how to make more money. Nobody takes care of seamen's welfare. The government, seemingly, cannot afford to put forth any effort toward improving seamen's employment conditions. So, five years from now there may be no more employment opportunities for Taiwanese seamen except for positions of captain and chief engineer (as quoted in Guo, Ye

[33] Pilots are locally engaged navigation specialist with knowledge to guide an ocean-going ship from the deep sea, through the harbor to its nominated berth for docking and the other way round (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 25).

and Liang 2007: 4).

The labor demand and supply of seafarers from developed countries has a tendency to be "professionalized": aging seafarers from developed countries are being promoted to higher positions while the drop-out rate of new entrants stays high. In spite of all these, meanwhile, the story of a 41-year-old Indonesian able seaman indicated another side of the seafaring industry:

> I have worked at sea for more than 10 years. During this time I bought two houses in my country. In possibly three or four years, I will retire from seafaring and start a small business. While at sea, I frequently missed my family to the extent that I couldn't sleep. I wouldn't continue in seafaring if I had enough money (as quoted in Guo, Ye and Liang 2007: 5).

Just by being an able seaman, the Indonesian seafarer had acquired two houses though if it was not for the money, he would not have worked in the seafaring industry. The job nature of seafaring may not be very appealing to many people today. But the wages of seafaring can still bring much upward economic mobility for people from developing countries. These people are now making up the major labor sources of the industry. Let me discuss this in terms of Filipinos, the largest nationality group in the industry.

Making a Living for Home: the Filipino Example

In the first chapter, I introduced how neoliberalism and flexible accumulation penetrated labor management in the shipping industry. Exploitation of labor is a

general phenomenon in capitalism. During and after the economic crisis from the 1970s to the 1980s when shipping companies competed to survive and thrive, labor has become an easy target of cost reduction. The rising wage levels in developed countries suggest higher costs of production for shipping businesses if their laborers are employed. Meanwhile, the opening up of foreign labor sources with lower wage levels has also pulled employers in making new labor choices. Some employers in developed countries still prefer to hire a certain percentage of their nationals. Their reasons include maintaining national human resources for internal sustainable development, avoiding over-reliance on foreign laborers, and nationalistic considerations. However, in the face of global economic neoliberalism and intense industrial competition, most shipowners and shipping operators have been forced to look for lower-wage labor sources, especially when these sources can provide comparable quality of services. As listed in the following table (Ellis and Sampson 2008: 23), the top 10 nationalities working on general cargo or container ships are:

Rank Order	Nationality	Percent
1	Philippines	23.9%
2	Russia	9.3%
3	Ukraine	8.0%
4	China	4.9%
5	India	4.8%
6	Turkey	4.5%
7	Indonesia	4.1%
8	Poland	4.0%
9	Myanmar	3.2%
10	Germany	2.2%
	Other (n=102)	31.0%
	Total	100%

Table 2.2: Top 10 nationalities working on general cargo/container ships and their respective percentages of the total workforce on ships (Ellis and Sampson 2008: 23).

Other than the Philippines, which contributes a dominant 23.9% of labor in the seafaring industry for general cargo or container ships, Russia, with a second top percentage of 9.3% and Ukraine with a third of 8.0%, other top nationalities are spread relatively evenly in the total workforce. On the supply side, seafaring as a way to earn a handsome income still applies to many people in developing countries. We may consider the Filipino seafarers, currently the largest nationality group in the seafaring workforce for container ships as an example. A Filipino cadet said during an interview:

> It would be hard to deny that seafaring has a high salary. A very high salary. As a cadet we have around 500 dollars per month.[34] Those 500 dollars are already much if you spend it in the Philippines. But if you talk about the salary of the chief engineer, each month about 10,000 dollars. That's a lot of money for us to live on in the Philippines.

As another Filipino seafarer said, seafarers in his country "have good outlook, houses and facilities." The wages they can earn from their job are relatively high as compared to their national counterparts on shore. Such incomes are useful in upgrading the social and economic statuses of themselves and their families. The same degree of upgrade often does not apply to seafarers of developed countries, when their relative differences in wages with their national counterparts are generally not as large as those of seafarers from developing countries.[35]

Many seafarers particularly those from developing countries emphasize that they work at sea to support their families, which is a major reason for them to endure

[34] Dollars in this thesis are U.S. dollars.

[35] The difference between developed and developing countries is not an absolute division and wages for different nationalities vary, but the general situation is as I have described.

hardships at sea. In the year 1987 alone, the total number of Filipinos employed on European-owned ships increased rapidly from 2,900 to 17,057 (Alderton et. al. 2004: 58). A seafarer survey (Zhao and Amante 2003) showed that 81% of Filipino seafarers originated from the high poverty rural areas of Bohol, Cebu, Leyte and Mindanao. They typically come from large families, with an average of 9 members in each family --- 2 parents, 6 siblings and the seafarer himself. Their families were previously of low socio-economic status in Philippine society. 58% of seafarers' fathers engaged in farming and fishing, and 55% of their mothers were fulltime housewives. Most of these Filipino seafarers are married males and have an average of four children. These Filipinos shoulder the responsibilities of providing financial support to their families.

Besides, their job search, from learning the job, collecting funds for enrolment in maritime education and training, and traveling to contact crewing agencies, is a process that often takes years to finish. In this respect, international bodies such as ILO and IMO have tried to enforce conventions that guarantee the well-being of seafarers, e.g. curbing their exploitation by job agencies. In reality, however, some seafarers need to borrow loans and pay several months' salaries to their agents in order to be employed. "In the Philippines, competition for jobs makes the payment of bribes to crewing agencies common. There are examples of would-be seafarers working without pay for agencies, sometimes for several years, before they are rewarded with a contract" (International Transport Workers' Federation 2006b: 24). While some informants had experiences of being cheated by agents, many of them could only go back to the same agents who cheated them earlier because there were no better ways to ensure further employment. "It is a risk we have to take, if we are to get a job," said a Filipino seafarer.

It is thus clear that these seafaring applicants invest time, energy and money in the hope of earning the higher wages payable by seafaring jobs and envisaging a change of their fate. Some informants said that their decision to work at sea was not a personal, free-willed choice but a "forced consequence." They felt that they did not have any other choices but to work as a seafarer, in order to support their families and gain better life prospects. One Filipino seafarer gave me a description of his background:

> On the father's side of my family, there are eleven people. He has 10 siblings: 3 sisters and 7 brothers. All of them are fishermen. That's why when I was young, when I was just 5 year-old, they wanted me to be a fisherman. But I found a way to change that kind of lifestyle. I didn't want to be a fisherman for all of my life. That's why I have to make a change. But it's an advantage to me that my family members are fishermen as I know how to swim. Every time I go on board and then to the sea, I am not scared. We came from a very poor family though.

His decision to work as a seafarer was his way to change his predestined occupation and take advantage of the fishing experience as well. He continued to elaborate on why he joined the seafaring industry, focusing not on familial reasons but on the larger economic background of his country: "One of the things that has forced me to take this job is that, in the Philippines, our economy is unstable. That's why we have to work abroad. My sister is working in Hong Kong as a domestic helper. My brother will soon work in Dubai or Saudi Arabia." The Filipino seafarer and his siblings exemplify overseas Filipino workers, a common phenomenon in international migrant employment. He emphasized that one fundamental reason for his siblings to

work abroad and for him to work aboard was that the economy of his country has been forcing people like him to look for opportunities elsewhere in order to support themselves and their families at home. Under the same national economy, another Filipino seafarer said, "There are three people in our family. And also, we are a poor family in the Philippines. It was very difficult for me. I wanted to take a seafaring job because I have a lot of skills to give, and also because my father is an electronic technician." The common factor these two seafarers shared was their poor family background. For the second seafarer, the influence of his father's profession as an electronic technician had also given him qualities to apply for and work as a technician on board.

Like other overseas workers, Filipino seafarers' remittances make important contribution to their national economy, accounting for as much as 10% of the total OFW remittances (Evangelista 2002). For a Filipino seafarer, a minimum of 80% of his wage is officially required to be remitted to a bank account in the Philippines. "We have 80% of our basic wage for our allotment, for our family. And the remaining 20% is for our salary on board,"[36] said a Filipino seafarer. In fact, there are very few opportunities for seafarers to spend money on board except, for example, when they buy beer, with strict limitations on the quantity they can consume. Their food and accommodation are all provided, and this means that most of the money earned by Filipino seafarers goes directly to their families back home. Filipino seafarers together with other overseas Filipino workers are acclaimed by their government. In his working paper entitled "At Home on the Move: Filipino Seafarers and the Making of a Transnational Ethnic Niche," McKay (2004: 2) contends that "the Philippine

[36] The 80%-20% ratio does not apply to Filipino seafarers only. A Hong Kong seafarer said during an interview, "For example, if I have HK$10,000 as my salary, I am paid HK$8,000 'family' salary every month to support my family. HK$2,000 is then paid on board. You don't have the opportunity to spend the HK$2,000 every month. So it accumulates."

state . . . in its attempt to harness the resources of the Diaspora, has helped construct the Filipino seafarer as both pliant cheap labor and nationalist hero." The Filipino seafarers are portrayed as "cheap labor" to attract more foreign shipping companies to employ them, which helps relieve the unemployment problem in the Philippines. As the Philippines was once a colony of Spain (1565-1898) and the U.S. (1898-1946), a Western European seafarer thought that the Philippines was "one of the most Westernized countries in Southeast Asia. Filipinos demonstrate fluent English skills, one which is amongst the best among all Southeast Asians." In this sense, Filipinos are employed as seafarers for both their marketable seafaring qualities e.g. English proficiency, marine and technical experiences, and their relatively low cost.

In fact, in addition to Filipinos, many contemporary seafarers' major motivation to work in the industry is quite different from that in Sherar's (1973: 15) time, the early stage of containerization. According to her, American seafarers, for example, were sociologically marginal people who could seek psychological job security and job harmony in their occupational choice. As she writes, these seafarers "tend to be lonely people, many of them come from broken homes, or homes torn by internal strife and tension. Many have no families, or have only sporadic communications with those at home." An elder seafarer also described earlier seafarers of his time as "free wanderers with restless souls."[37] Although mixed nationality crewing in a broad sense is not a new phenomenon, the social origin and family background of many contemporary seafarers are quite different from those of their predecessors of the

[37] There were even sayings in the past that "bad guys" were sent to the sea and left alone. An ex-seafarer retold the stories, "I think you have heard about it: people who wanted to leave society and avoid being caught, people who just left prison and had nowhere to go were usually at the rating level. That means for a rating, you didn't know what kind of person he was. You could not offend him just because you were a senior and overworked him." Another experienced German seafarer said in a separate interview, "They sent jail people on board as a way to control people in the past. Because they were out there in the sea, they couldn't cause trouble to the on-land people, and they were doing productive work that boosted trade."

1980s or earlier. A survey carried out for the International Transport Workers' Federation revealed that 55% of seafarers provide financial support for two to four people and 23% for five or more (as quoted in Kahveci 2000). So instead of lacking familial connections as the American seafarers portrayed by Sherar (1973), most contemporary seafarers, including the Filipinos, exhibit obvious familial orientation

The Variety of Meanings of Seamanship

The composition of the seafaring world is so diversified that, in addition to making important repatriations to their homelands, different seafarers enter and continue to work in the industry for a variety of other reasons.

One Thai informant told me that his Buddhist teachings about transcending life's sufferings had enhanced his endurance of difficulties at sea. He was introduced by his relatives to the industry and became a seafarer out of survival needs. However, working as a seafarer had put him in a sort of "dilemma." In his words, "To be a good man according to Buddhism, you don't earn much. Rather, you stay with your family. But, you need to give your family a good life in order to be good." In the end, he chose to work as a seafarer for the sake of his family and religious aspiration to be good, hoping that the search for wealth to support can be offset by the duty of being with his family. Many other seafarers' reasons for enrollment in the industry also involve particular historical, environmental and societal reasons.

I met the staff from a Danish shipping organization and they explained to me about the recruitment patterns of seafarers in Europe. Western Europeans used to dominate the seafaring labor force in the old days. Owing to the quest for reducing labor costs later on and the convenience of labor imports, the Western European shipping companies are employing more Eastern Europeans as well as Southeast

Asians. Potential workers are readily found and trained in Eastern Europe and meanwhile, environmental factors may also catalyze Eastern Europeans to join the seafaring industry. Take Russia as an example. Although Russia may be a relatively less favorable recruitment site in the international labor market because of its political instability, Russia has an established history of shipping headquartered at St. Petersburg. A Russian captain's story reflected the factors in encouraging him to join seafaring. "I wanted to see the oceans. I was previously engaged in the national navy. There were changes in the governance and the demand for the navy fell. And then I became a seafarer." He did not choose to work as a seafarer in the first place but drifted with the tide. A German chief engineer also explained his reasons for working as a seafarer with reference to his national navy. By working as a seafarer, the German informant could be exempted from military service. And by working on an FOC-ship, he was further exempted from supplying necessities to the army if a war broke out:

> In Germany, all boys needed to go to the military when they became adults. I once applied for the Engineering Department of the Navy. But they said they were not sure. So I became a seafarer [in the international shipping industry]. You know, if a war broke out, those boys who were trained in the military would have to go to war. As a seafarer, I was exempted. And for those German-flag [merchant] ships, they also needed to supply the military with materials such as food and goods. I was working on a Liberian-flag ship which is an FOC-ship and so I wouldn't have to go.

Some seafarers, after I asked them why they went to sea, responded immediately

that their family was the most important thing in their lives. Others, like a captain I interviewed said, "What's the most important thing in my life? That's really a tough question. My family, my wife, my children, my job are all important. I think it's a combination of all of them. And money is important too. I have to pay for my flat, my car. You certainly need some money to live." In reality, the meanings of seamanship are more complex than simply considerations of family. And no matter how much the seafaring job has been disenchanted, still, some seafarers greatly value the job nature of seafaring since it is their interest or dream to work on board. An informant said he had a bent for engineering and enjoyed being an engineer and doing the engine maintenance work. He thus took the relevant major in the university and gained the qualifications to work as an engineer on board. Another chief mate was previously a medical doctor but he finally responded to his calling of being at sea and changed careers.

Some believe that one reason some seafarers work on board is to get away from the encumbrances of shore life, usually with visions of sea adventures. But this is usually not the case for seafarers whose financial needs for themselves and their families are urgent, who make up the majority of the workforce nowadays. Although some seafarers do appreciate experiencing changes of the sky, sea surface and weather, as well as voyages and shipboard amenities, many of them have gotten used to these. Weather is often not something to be appreciated, but rather endured. As a Croatian seafarer said, "The waves were high and you needed to work at the same time. You spent more energy then. When there were stormy waves, you get tired. You needed to do the daily routine while spending energy to deal with the bad weather." Seafarers said they had to be prepared for occupational hazards and harsh conditions such as sailing in typhoons, under a snowing sky, through rough seas and other

extreme physical conditions as well as emergencies such as piracy, not to mention the long-term separation from the shore and their families. The shipboard alienation can cause seafarers to suffer from both claustrophobia with a small number of shipmates and agoraphobia on the open oceans. "For seafarers, the hazards and dangers of life at sea are an everyday reality. This is something that is reflected in the routine, matter-of-fact manner that these stories are told. However, the fact that these events are often accepted as part of a seafaring career does not mean that they are not experienced as emotionally stressful" (Thomas 2004). For many contemporary seafarers, their enrolment and continuation of work in the shipping industry is a process of envisagement, realization and endurance.

Promotion and Dropping Out

Entry-level seafarers have received basic training in areas such as first aid and firefighting, and need to accumulate knowledge and experience before they become eligible to apply for officer certificate examinations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009b). "You basically follow a similar job path: entering a ship mechanics school and then becoming specialized and qualified," said a seafarer. It should be noted that officers in the seafaring industry come from different countries, not only the more economically developed ones. "People of any nationality can get to the top," said a Filipino officer, who, like many other informants, agreed that evaluation of labor qualification has been standardized with universal requirements. The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW 1978/1995) has set uniform standards of competence for seafarers and outlines the qualification requirements of labor (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010c). For this reason, there are "equal chances for everyone

to be promoted, since it is the work performance and qualities that count," continued the Filipino officer. When asked about the time it took to be promoted to chief engineer, an engineering cadet replied:

> It should take around 5 years to be promoted to junior engineer. After one year as a cadet, we have to get a board examination. If we pass the exam, it will upgrade our qualification, and then we will be able to apply for becoming an engineer, 4th engineer. But this doesn't happen to everyone. I feel pity for some other seafarers who weren't able to pass the exam. They are already 40 but still, they are not senior engineers. They are still oiler, wiper. It doesn't mean to say that they need to graduate from university. It depends on how you work, your exam results and on the captain.

Seafarers progress in their seamanship over time, though their promotion depends on a number of factors including the captain's evaluation, examination performance and the employer's decision. But one salient point the above seafarer made was that work performances and qualifications gained through passing examinations, rather than one's nationality counted most in job promotion. If an engineering cadet could not pass an examination such as the board examination mentioned above, the cadet could not be promoted to the engineering officer and could only continue working as a rating. So a seafarer himself bears responsibility in his promotion, as another informant remarked, "It doesn't mean that they will necessarily promote you after you have taken certain examinations. Holding the certificate, some companies allow you to be promoted and some companies do not." Certification is only a part of the requirement for promotion but it is a necessary

criterion.

While some seafarers work with a hope to move up the hierarchy and stay in the seafaring industry for as long as they can, others treat their employment as a short transitional period in life. A Hong Kong seafarer said, "Wages are one of the reasons for to me to choose this career: to quickly earn some money. Afterwards, I can come back to look for a shore job." Another example of this can be found in this Hong Kong seafarer's experience:

> Many ex-captains are working as marine officers or senior marine officers in the Marine Department. Many ex-engineers now work as surveyors or safety officers. Some ex-captains changed to be pilots too. We also have some marine jobs that are related or linked to seafaring, for example, working in river trade.[38] I have worked for half a year in such a job. I heard that some of my previous schoolmates worked in river trade too, after they retired from ocean-going trade. Ultimately, we need to go back to our homelands.

Seafarers like this informant find the need to go ashore, especially when the long-term separation from home becomes unbearable. Cases of divorce and other family problems are not hard to find among seafarers. The same reason, family, can be a pull factor for seafarers to enter the industry as well as a push factor for them to leave it. Financial conditions can also be a factor in affecting a seafarer's job prospects, for some seafarers lack sufficient funds to further upgrade their qualifications:

[38] As compared to "ocean trade," "river trade" refers to river or short-distance coastline shipping. It can be a part of the whole process of intermodal shipping, often prior to and after ocean trade. Working on board river-trade vessels, the informant did not need to sail into international seas. His current job enabled him to return to the shore more easily and frequently.

While there are many companies which will assume the cost of training, the reality is that many seafarers have to pay for themselves all, or at least a proportion, of their training costs. This leaves the unskilled seafarer in a vicious circle in which he or she is unable to find employment because of lack of training and, in turn, cannot access further training because of lack of money to pay for the fees (Obando-Rojas 2003b).

As a result, rather than spending money in self-improvement, some seafarers are prepared to work in the lower ranks for their seafaring career until they have saved up enough money, and then quit seafaring. Moreover, although the requirements for seafarers' qualifications can be measured by international standards, the actual promotion of seafarers involves intricate factors such as flag-state laws and labor policies of companies with different origins and traditions. A chaplain working for the benefits of seafarers said:

> On a German-flagged ship, you need to be German in order to be the captain of the ship. It's not about loyalty to the company. The ship is a territory of Germany. It's the law. It's like on an airplane. On an American airplane, there are only American captains. We have a German company which has many ships, half with Liberian flags and half German. And on the ships with the Liberian flag, they sometimes have 70% Filipinos. Filipinos of this company can only be captains on the Liberian-flagged ships. I know an Austrian. He studied in Germany, but couldn't become a captain on a German ship. Now nationals from EU members, for example Austria, can become captains on a German ship but

they must speak German. The company has a language test for that.

Similarly, a Russian officer of a German shipping company was about to be promoted to captain. He said that he was learning German to ease his promotion. In these cases, proficiency in the national language of their employing company had become a necessary qualification for non-Germans to be promoted. In fact, the career paths of seafarers of different nationalities are often different, for their starting points are often different too. This can be attributed to their origins and the availability of resources in acquiring initial qualifications. As the aforementioned chaplain pointed out:

> Many Filipinos started as mess men until one day they got promoted to cook. In the engineering department, they started as ordinary engineers. Or they began by working as cadets. They often started from the lowest position. There are exceptions though. I heard it from some Filipino seafarers that some Filipino families sent their sons to private maritime schools. It was costly. But in that way, they could become higher seafarers as their starting point.

The "fair" promotion in the seafaring industry has opened doors to many nationalities. Nevertheless, multinational seafarers of different origins possess different visions of their career paths based on their financial conditions, shipping companies' policies, their starting points and other factors. On the whole, the seafaring workforce is relatively fluid as promotion and dropping out are considerable. New blood from different countries is being pumped in while some seafarers drop out before they receive all the promotions up the job hierarchy. "Loyalty to a particular

company doesn't really exist. Shipping is not attractive nowadays, not as it was in the past. It's the money that counts," said a Russian third mate.

Female Seafarers and their Seafaring Stories

Found on very few ships, females' role in international trade and transportation cannot be neglected. Like males, female applicants for seafaring are expected to have well-built, if not physically super-strong bodies tough enough to cope with the nature of seafaring work. So far, there have been few but increasing numbers of female seafarers in the shipping industry, as my informants reported. Many analysts have argued that such a phenomenon is the result of mechanization, automation and increasing gender equality. Female seafarers are still believed by some to challenge the traditional image of seafarers though. If there are any female seafarers on board, they need to know "how to cooperate well with other males and work just like males." Here I use the interview with a German female engineer to show more about the relation between gender and work. This female seafarer said she really enjoyed being a seafarer and in order to work well with male coworkers, she drew no physical line between herself and others. In her words:

> Separated from others? No, not at all! I don't keep myself away from other sailors. I mean I like the Filipinos (her subordinates) and I eat with them, work with them, drink with them. Of course, you know, I need to keep a certain distance in order to supervise them. Otherwise, they won't listen to my orders. I don't have problems working with men. I think men are easier to work with. Many women are complicated in expressions. The only problem I have is older people. You know, you have motivation to work hard but they are near to

retirement. So I get confused in the communications with them.

Gender seems to be of little significance in this seafarer's daily work. Yet, a representative from a seafarer centre had visited the ship and talked to this female engineer. He told me that in Germany, women have a relatively higher social status than their counterparts in other countries such as the Philippines. Their society offers larger acceptance and space for them to work as seafarers. However, no matter where a female seafarer comes from, skepticism and institutional discrimination against women in the shipping industry still exists to some degree. The rudimentary mindset for such a phenomenon is believed to be the traditional cultural expectations of different gender roles: the idea that females are not supposed to sail at sea but stay at home. As one female seafarer pointed out, some traditional, or in her terms, "old-fashioned" shipping companies still do not accept women to apply for seafaring jobs. She added, "I won't say that I would like to have more women on ships. The key is that everyone should be given equal chance to do what he or she wants to do. Women must have their chance."

In addition to institutional obstacles, a young female seafarer told me that before she joined seafaring, she needed to negotiate with her parents and friends, persuading them and showing them her determination. "I met opposition during apprenticing. My parents tried to push me to leave the industry, and my friends tried to dissuade me not to take a seafaring job." Her parents' final acceptance was especially important in supporting her choice. However, when talking about her future plans, she admitted that she did not have the wish to be promoted to the highest post. "I mean, seafaring is a good job, but I won't do it for my whole life. I will return to my home and have a regular life later on," by which she meant living ashore and starting a family.

The attitudes of male seafarers towards female seafarers are very diverse. I have talked with seafarers under a female boss. They said they followed her orders but in their hearts, they found it "strange" to be led by a female. These subordinates were largely Southeast Asians; the female seafarer was a Western European. As one Filipino said, in the Philippines, men were not used to being subordinate to women at work. These male seafarers had brought with them their local gender conceptions and were struck by the "unusual" situation of having a female boss (even if this situation was temporary). In another case, a male seafarer boarded his ship and looked for the captain to report to duty. When the former ran into the captain's office and asked "where's the captain?", he saw a female. He said to her again, "where is the captain?" He did not believe that she, as a woman, could be the captain of the ship on which he was appointed, but rather took her to be the wife of the captain.

Working in a predominantly male seafaring world, women are still "deviants" in some male seafarers' and management's eye. It is hard to say for sure whether this kind of attitude will be overcome in the long run; in any case, the current reality is that more females are performing tasks that are used to be done solely by males. "Some companies like female seafarers," said a male seafarer. "But they often work for a few years and leave the industry when they have children." However, others remain and sometimes earn considerable respect. This is shown by a female captain who was physically large; her "huge" body was often emphasized when male seafarers talked about her. "She could take you with one hand," said one of these male seafarers. I was also told that her large body size caused some seafarers to believe in her inner ruling power. Her crew was aware of her physical strength and obeyed her just as they obeyed male captains.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined what the seafaring job means to contemporary seafarers, why they have entered the industry, what their motivations to work are, and their senses of their career paths. The romanticized notion that "the sailor sails on the sea to see the world" has been disenchanted by the wide availability of mass transportation, mass media and tourism. With economic development on shore, many developed countries have prospered and job opportunities are more abundant; the high income earned by seafarers is not as much of an appeal to the younger generation from the developed world but still attracts many from developing countries.

Through representative case studies, this chapter looks into the largest nationality group of seafarers in the container shipping industry: Filipinos. Most Filipino seafarers came from the lower economic levels of their society, shouldering the need to support their large families and perhaps to change their predestination. Through the devotion of much money, time and effort, they eventually came to be employed on board. Experiences gained e.g. through fishing or technical work in their families also led some seafarers to become seafarers. The Philippines state, economically scourged, is promoting its national labor in the international job market, including seafarers, as reliable cheap workers while extolling their contribution of foreign currency to the country's economy. The chapter also demonstrates a range of different meanings of seamanship such as responding to a sense of calling to work at sea. Yet, considering the contemporary demographics of the seafaring workforce, the key factor motivating many seafarers is simply the patriarchal desire to make a living and support their families.

It is generally agreed that promotion in the seafaring industry is not based on nationality. But the reality is that multinational seafarers work in the industry based on

different starting points and varied availabilities of resources in order to qualify themselves for promotion. Some begin from the lowest job rank while some, having the ability to invest in their qualifications, start working in the industry in more senior posts and receive quicker promotion. The fact that upgrading costs money and time means that seafarers from different countries of origin with different financial resources climb up the hierarchy at different paces. That is one reason why some seafarers from less developed countries are prepared to work in the lower ranks for their entire careers. They may still gain enough money through doing so to successfully sustain their families.

The chapter ends with a discussion of female seafarers, who have been "genderized" through their engagement in seafaring: their demonstration of masculinity is considered as necessary within the predominantly male industry. In spite of institutional discrimination and stereotypes, females' participation and promotion in the seafaring industry infuses new elements into seamanship in the contemporary era, showing that females can be breadwinners and leaders too. Many female seafarers come from developed countries, where more socio-cultural freedom is given to females to explore their desired job opportunities. Female seafarers are often believed by both others and themselves to be more temporary, in that they may eventually leave to begin a family on shore. Many male seafarers also envision going back to shore and rejoining their families after going through the difficulties at sea and eventually earning enough money to leave the industry.

Chapter IV: The Containerization of Seafarers

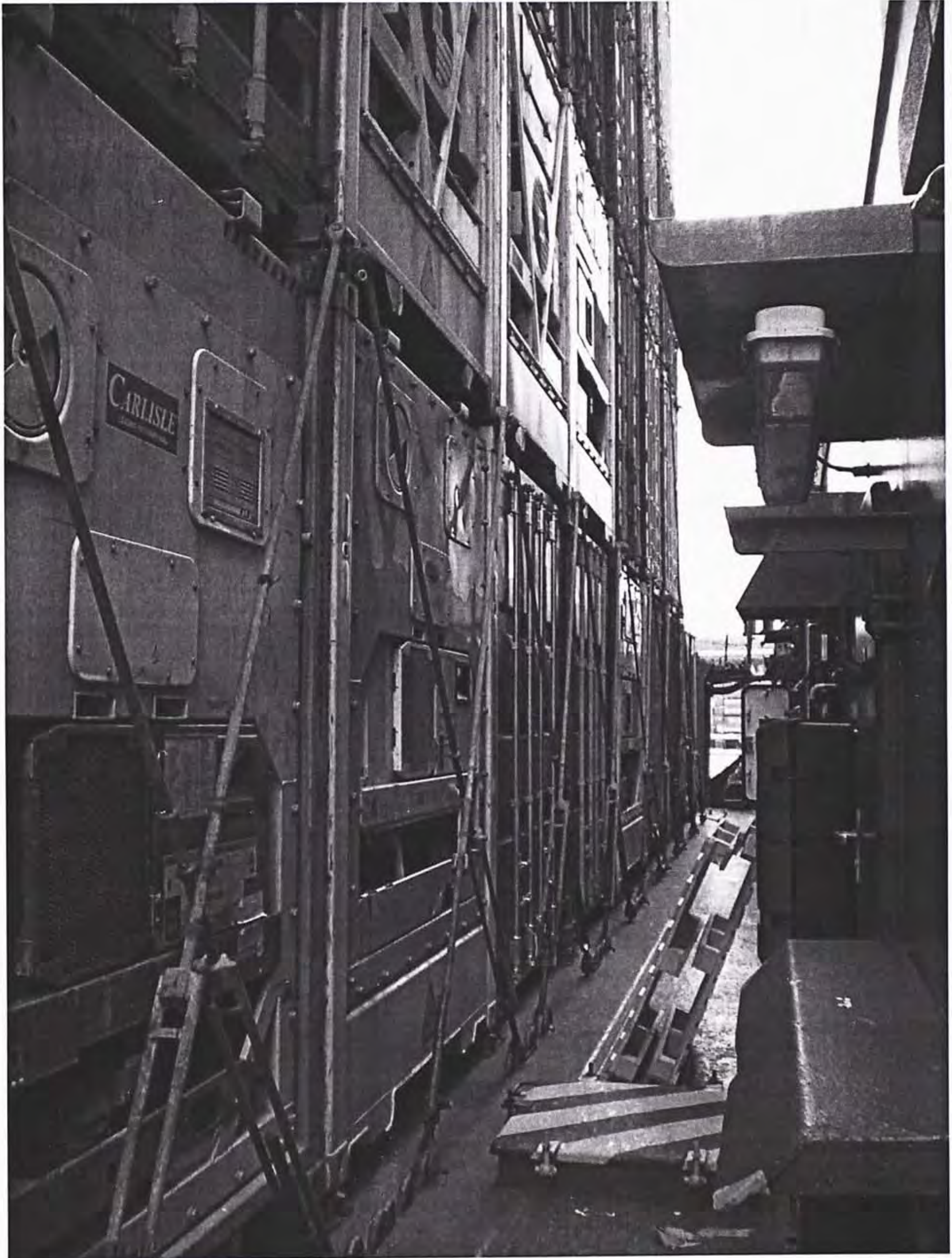

Photo 4.1: Piles of containers on the deck of a ship, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 4 September 2008. Their content is invisible to the

naked eye. A container usually travels long distances without being opened in transit.

"How does containerization influence the social dimension of seafaring lives?" is the inquiry to be discussed in this chapter. Having explored the contemporary meanings of seafaring work in the previous chapter, I will explain the impact of shipping developments, particularly containerization, on seafaring conditions in this chapter. In doing so, I argue that not only shipments but also seafarers are "containerized" on board: compartmentalized on the container ships for the functionality and interests of the shipping industry. I then show how contemporary seafarers have been undergoing a process of "de-globalization" through engaging in one of the most globalized industries on earth, as they are largely deprived of the benefits of globalization and connections with social worlds.

Transformation of the Seascape and Portscape

With technological innovations and the flexible accumulation of capital, gigantic container ships are owned and operated on an international scale, plying oceans with an ever accelerating speed and tonnage capacity. They have compressed time and space for many shipowners, shipping operators and consumers on shore. The control of turnover time, which is "the amount of time necessary for money furnished to fund new production to be recovered with a profit through the sale of services and goods," (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 7) is key in influencing business profitability. The turnover time for shipping businesses has been greatly reduced and this is done by "deployment of new technologies in production (automation, robots) and new organizational forms (such as the 'just-in-time' inventory-flows delivery system, which cuts down radically on stocks required to keep production flow going)" (*ibid.*).

These strategies accelerate the absorption of business surplus by means of spatial and temporal displacement (Harvey 1989: 156). As Bloor (2000) writes about the deployment of new technologies and organization forms in the shipping industry:

> In the last quarter of a century the shipping industry has been transformed out of all recognition, both technologically (containerisation, automated engine rooms, satellite communications) and economically (the development of a single global labour market for seafarers, the growth of crewing companies and ship management companies).

Many postwar seafarers have witnessed and experienced firsthand big industrial changes, from housing in the forecastles to one-person cabins with independent shower and toilet, from boilers manipulated by shovels and muscles to remote-controlled and computerized engine rooms (Kaukiainen 1993: 164). Here is a quote from a seafarer who still remembers vividly how the modernization of shipping has transformed life at sea:

> Seafarers' life has changed tremendously. On my first ship, we had about fifty people. Nowadays, when we go to sea, we have twelve, thirteen people on a very much bigger ship than my first ship. So the number of people on board is much reduced now. Previously, the ship went into a port and we might be there for ten days or two weeks. Nowadays, we go to a dock which is miles away from land. We don't actually see the city at all. . . . On my first ship, we had very few electronics. Nowadays, it's all electronic: electronic charts, special radars, GPS. So it's very different.

As the informant remarked, these industrial changes in crew size, ship size, port stay, port location and technological level of shipboard facilities have all taken place within the last few decades. Another experienced seafarer stressed the earthshaking effects of containerization:

> There were no mangos in my country in the past. Now they are all over the world. We have goods from far far away. Refrigerated containers can freeze goods to minus 20 degrees or keep the temperature higher than 40 degrees. This is especially important to transport goods such as salmon. And this is a result of containerization. We have more transport goods, bigger ships and smaller crew teams, which is also the result of automation and mechanization.

Containerization as a technological development since the 1960s has revolutionized the landscape and seascape of logistics. The advent of containers as a common means of intermodal freight transportation saved manual labor and time. Introduction of the container to the shipping industry was slow at the beginning due to large-scale infrastructural modifications and resistance from labor unions etc. But its great cost-effectiveness proved its expansion inexorable (Levinson 2006). "Containers brought convenience, speed and other advantages. Previously, there were all sorts of loading problems. For example, the weight of a box had to be balanced. If not, they would topple," said a Danish ex-seafarer. Before the age of containerization, cargo loading and unloading was done mostly by longshoremen by hand. It was time-consuming, costly and laborious with high wastage rate. Containerization also means that shipments are carried in more than one mode of transportation, enabling

more fixed sailing schedules, standardization of shipment packaging, increased efficiency through mechanization and shorter port stays of ships and seafarers. It leads to chain effects such as the radical alteration of the port landscape: the use of cranes as infrastructural facilities assisting loading and unloading of containers, and privatization of the port areas out of safety and security concerns (Levinson 2006). Veiga (2002) writes as follows:

> Until the age of containerization it was common for vessels to stay for long periods in port and the populations living there were familiar with the presence of vessels. Today, most ships, while in port, operate in terminals far away from the city centre and their stay is reduced to the minimum. Furthermore, if the populations have no contact with the vessels, the crew in turn often do not have the possibility of going ashore.

This brings us to the issue of restricted shore leave that is commonly faced by seafarers nowadays. It also explains why it is hard for a contemporary seafarer to be "a handsome, audacious guy who sails on the sea and explores the world."

Photo 4.2: An exhibition board in Embarcadero, San Francisco, the United States, 25 November 2008, showing a notice reading: “Pier 39 Obsolete For Shipping?”

Much has changed in the shipping industry over the years, and consequently,

on the San Francisco waterfront. Long finger piers such as Pier 39 were once ideal tie-ups for ships carrying break-bulk cargo.[39] Large gangs of longshoremen, using pallets and slings would often take four or five days to unload and load a freighter.

Today, break-bulk cargo is almost non-existent. The modern method of shipping is to use containers, where giant cranes can have a huge freighter in and out of port in as short a time as four to eight hours.

With the end of break-bulk cargo, piers like Pier 39 became obsolete for shipping. Containerized shipping requires a vast area of back-up space adjacent to the shoreline to accommodate the large containers. With the downtown area and office buildings at the base of Telegraph Hill stretching almost to the water's edge, the San Francisco Port had no opportunity to convert the finger piers to containerization capability.

Most shipping moved across San Francisco Bay to Oakland, which had foreseen the move to container shipping and had prepared facilities. The Port of San Francisco began to concentrate its shipping efforts on the southern waterfront, where more than enough back-up space is available, and the city is only now beginning to regain its reputation as one of the major shipping capitals of the world.

Ports Away from the Shore

Shore leave was originally a chance for seafarers to "breathe the shore air" and

[39] Break-bulk cargo is a common form of cargo before the age of containerization. As implied by its name, break-bulk cargo is cargo that can be "broken down" when it is loaded and unloaded individually onto and off the ship. Dry bulk cargo is carried by bulk ships. Liquid bulk cargo is carried by tankers. And general break-bulk cargo used to be carried by break-bulk ships. Today, break-bulk cargo still exists but its importance is reduced with containerization, as an improved way of logistic arrangement (GlobalSecurity.org 2010).

sightsee in foreign countries, leaving the hierarchical and stressful shipboard environment for a while. According to some senior informants, ports in the old days were "public areas" and "hubs of shops and bars" where transactions and other activities took place. There, seafarers had the chances to interact with the locals, and with seafarers from other ships and countries. "There were all sorts of people, traders, hookers. There were bars. Lots of people at the ports," said a seafarer. Technological levels were not very high then, as informants described. Port duties were carried out manually by simple machines and could not be finished within a short time. This usually gave seafarers days to stay in the port areas and tour around the cities, as well as chances to spend money. At present, the modern container ports are in stark contrast: they are often characterized by gigantic machinery such as cranes, control headquarters, an army of container semi-trailer trucks, and warnings indicating that it is dangerous to walk inside the port areas.[40]

To protect the lucrative shipping business from possible harm, ports are privatized and controlled areas which allow authorized visits only. This measure has significantly reduced the degree of social contacts between shore people and seafarers during an anchorage, changing the social meanings of seafaring. Meanwhile, containers are loaded and unloaded by cranes and monitored by computerized centres at the ports and on board. Such technologies make accurate calculations to balance the weights on the ship deck. As a result, old ports are modified and new ports are built in areas far from the city centres, where "there are large, relatively less expensive waterfront spaces for container storage and infrastructure," as an informant commented. An International Transport Workers' Federation northern Californian

[40] Before I participated in one arranged tour visit to a port, the shipping company concerned requested me to sign a letter of indemnity in which I had to confirm that "I am fully aware that the marine environment (including the Vessel) is inherently hazardous and potentially dangerous, resulting in damage, death or personal injury."

inspector in the United States explained:

> With containerization, you need a lot of room. And you need room where it's cheapest to build a container terminal. So this is out in the hinterland and it's very difficult and very expensive to go anywhere. As the industry has changed, the terminal facilities have changed, it's all changed with containerization. In San Francisco, we had the Embarcadero, which is the street that runs along the waterfront, which used to be full of ships. And now that's all gone and the ships are 15 to 20 miles away. They're not just far away from San Francisco, they're far away from anything - no municipal transport because there's no people nearby other than the people involved in the terminals on shore who drive where they're going and drive home. There's no reason for the municipalities to put in a bus service. So these guys lead very isolated lives (as quoted in Alderton et. al. 2004: 107).

The transition to container shipping in the Port of Oakland has accelerated the decline of shipping in the Port of San Francisco. The heyday of older ports, like the piers in Embarcadero, ended in the restructuring process of the shipping industry. Ports today are often private zones separated from the larger shore world, constructed in remote areas, far away from city settlements and facilities. All of these exacerbate the partition between seafarers and the world onshore.

Photo 4.3: Chandlers transported by trucks to their ships, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 31 October 2008. Daily necessities are conveyed to ships without any interaction between seafarers and locals.

Photo 4.4: Authorized vendors carrying large bags of goods along the ladder onto a container ship, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 4 September 2008. No elevator facilities were available for them.

From Days to Busy Hours

From a shipowner's point of view, a ship that is not moving means wasting money, and the constant need to reduce time cost in seamless intermodal transportation is vital for business. "Ships are technically sophisticated, high value assets (larger hi-tech vessels can cost over US $150 million to build), and the operation of merchant ships generates an estimated annual income of over US $380 billion in freight rates, representing about 5% of the total global economy" (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010a). Shipping is a means to transport goods from a point to another point and its mission is completed upon delivery. The shorter the delivery process, holding other factors constant, the more time costs are saved. Efficiency is further emphasized with containerization, and is observable in the field: terminals where everything flows quickly day and night. During the past decades, despite periodic downfalls, the overall volume of international trade has been rising. With the advancement in shipbuilding technology, bigger ships are constructed and can also carry more shipments with a faster speed, which again enhances the cost-effectiveness of shipping. An ex-seafarer who started sailing in the 1960s depicted this transmogrification:

> Before the 1960s, most ships were smaller. We couldn't go to places very far away by sea. For example, in Southeast Asia, many shipping businesses had a fleet of small ships trading within Southeast Asia. But when I started sailing, the international shipping industry had already started to trade in cross-Pacific, Indian Ocean, Atlantic regions. At first, I worked as a cadet. There were about 18 months for my contract. But I only worked for four and one-fourth voyages. Why? Because every time I went to the Persian Gulf. Since 1975, the Persian

Gulf started to develop. They bought a lot of building materials and machineries to develop their harbors. But before that, some ships had to anchor for a long time, in between West Africa and the Persian Gulf, to finish anchoring and transporting shipments. And ships needed to queue up because Persian Gulf harbours didn't have the infrastructure to unload their things. Now it's different. All ports have infrastructure. You don't need to wait for a long time.

Nowadays, the duration of port stay for a container ship depends on a number of factors such as the shipping schedule and other logistic concerns. Generally, it is a short busy time for seafarers at ports. "In the 1980s, port stays started to shorten. As soon as there were containers," said a seafarer. Containerization has further facilitated the efficiency of port operation and kept the seafarers in a busy state of loading, unloading and shipping. As a seafarer described:

> At each port, not all the containers are loaded and unloaded onto the ship or off the ship. Maybe there are hundreds of containers to be loaded and unloaded each time. They are just a part of the shipments on board. An individual container may need to go, for example, from Asia to Europe within a specific period of time. But the ship, carrying other containers as well, may need to call at many ports before it delivers that container in Europe. Maybe within Asia, there are already Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, so many ports. There are many loadings and unloading, ups and downs during a voyage.

The container ship is always carrying containers, the conditions of which have to be constantly monitored at sea and at ports. Upon arrival, containers need to be

transshipped and new containers carried on board. In the end, port stays last for an average of 12 hours or fewer. "When the containers come to the port, the ship that carries them only stops for 4 hours, 6 hours. No matter which department of the ship you go to, it is busy," said a seafarer. "From days at ports to hours at ports," as another seafarer said. Shipboard crewmembers are often meanwhile busy with all kinds of duties:

> On top of the normal everyday routine work on board for all crew members, there is also additional work that has to be undertaken in port, mainly by senior officers. This includes dealing with visitors (that is, immigration and customs officers, PSC [Port State Control] inspectors, cargo surveyors, flag State and class surveyors and so on), loading/unloading cargo, lashing and unlashing cargo, dealing with cargo plans, bunkering, crew changes, taking stores as well as the many additional engine and maintenance tasks that can only be done while the ship is stationary and in port (Alderton et. al. 2004: 106).

Many of these duties, as mentioned above, can only be carried out when a ship berths at a port. With reduced crew sizes, there are often just enough crewmates to fulfill the heavier port responsibilities. A third mate said:

> I am usually very tired. You know, berthing stand-by, duty for cargo operations, standby for leaving, and navigation duty repeat over and over in a tight cycle. I have been on this ship for five months. . . . I've been at ports more than 80 times, but I've briefly gone ashore only five times to get some snacks (as quoted in Guo, Ye and Liang 2007: 8).

Even though this seafarer had come to different ports more than 80 times in just five months, he could take shore leave only five times. With the implementation of international regulations on ship standards, ship inspections are carried out at different ports. This often requires seafarers to stand by on board and rectify any deficiencies as soon as they are spotted. This is understood through the following illustration of the regulatory framework surrounding the international shipping industry (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010b):

> The shipping industry is principally regulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which is the London-based United Nations agency responsible for the safety of life at sea and the protection of the marine environment. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is also responsible for the development of labour standards applicable to seafarers worldwide.
>
> IMO has adopted a comprehensive framework of detailed technical regulations, in the form of international diplomatic conventions which govern the safety of ships and protection of the marine environment. National governments, which form the membership of IMO, are required to implement and enforce these international rules, and ensure that the ships which are registered under their national flags comply.

Many of these national governments have delegated the enforcement of IMO regulations to groups called classification societies, whose work is supplemented by port state controls (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010b). Officers of these port state controls possess the rights to make unannounced

inspections on board, cite a ship for deficiencies in its shipping standards and detain it until rectifications are made:

> A PSC (Port State Control) inspection follows a set of procedures to check if a vessel complies with the standards established in the international conventions. The inspection is unannounced and carried out by inspectors who come onboard and in the first instance check the certificates of the ship and the crew. A deficiency is a deviation or violation against a measure in the international conventions which needs rectification. The deficiencies are recorded at the end of the inspection and discussed with the master along with a set of recommendations on when they should be rectified (International Maritime Organization Maritime Knowledge Centre 2009: 20).

Since there is often a "missing link" between shipowners and flag states with the extensive practice of flag of convenience, PSC is given more weights in policing ships at ports:

> Because flag state control has become less effective, an increasing policing role is being given to port states: countries that have signed up to IMO and ILO shipping conventions are expected to enforce the regulations in those ships which visit their ports. Port state control officers have the power to inspect all ships in their ports, to require that any defects they find are made good, and to detain defective ships in port until those defects are rectified (Bloor 2002).

A seafarer gave an example and said that the ship could be detained in the United

States if the PSC found kernels of Asian fruits on the deck or it would be penalized if oil was found on the edge of the ship shell. Inspectors had even checked seafarers' cabins to further ensure that there were no "foreign" kernels. He remarked that in one incident, a chief engineer was fired because he emitted some waste water into the sea area of a port without authorization. Such penalization of seafarers failing to meet the requirements of perfect ship standards has been identified as a kind of scapegoating and in fact has burdened many seafarers with high pressure. A seafarer priest (Fr Guy Pasquier 2010) writes:

> The captain, chief engineer and chief mate are particularly under pressure due to such fears as financial loss or the risk of pollution. The smallest technical problems, delays or mistakes are reported to the shipping company. If an individual seafarer is considered culpable, there will be sanctions against him. This is the harsh and pitiless system which operates onboard ship today.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (2006b: 29) also notes:

> In the modern maritime industry, reduced crews are expected to effect fast turnarounds and take ever greater responsibility for maritime security and pollution prevention. On the one hand they are subject to pressure from the company to remain economically competitive at all costs. On the other hand they face the threat of heavy-handed sanctions by States eager to find scapegoats for politically sensitive cases involving environmental damage.

Expectations on seafarers to handle increased workloads, to secure the maritime

industry and the sea from pollution, to remain competitive despite the threat of falling into scapegoating by port states and employers all come at one time. Port state controls, with the original aim of ensuring perfect order on board, have added to the already heavy job burdens of seafarers. Consequently, this entails even less time available for shore leave. If a ship is held in custody at a port, all the crewmembers on board are detained until further notice. Even if this does not happen, port state control officers are sometimes the only "shore people" seafarers are able to meet at a port. As a result of all the restrains on shore leave, some seafarers like this informant have given up the desire to leave the ship:

> I no longer want to take shore leave. Every time it is like that. I am used to it. But some people are not used to it. Some people still need to go ashore just for a walk within that short period of time. But for me, I was already promoted to the senior position. You need to take care of a lot of maintenance and preparation at ports.

The restriction on seafarers' access to the shore not only involves an aggravated workload on board but also the deprivation of their ability to leave.

The Guards, the Victims and the Terrorists

Shore leave is further restricted out of security concerns under globalization, as international laws are implemented to raise the degree of port security. For example, the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) code has been put into practice since July 1, 2004 as a response to the September 11, 2001 attack. "ISPS (The International Ship and Port Facility Security Code, 2002) includes mandatory

requirements to ensure ships and port facilities are secure at all stages during a voyage," including the time it docks at the port (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010c). The International Transport Workers' Federation (2006a: 3) introduces the details of the code, including its requirements intended to improve the use of port security plans, measures to monitor and control access and activities of people and cargo within port facilities:

> Hailed as a comprehensive new regime for the shipping industry, the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code came into effect on 1 July 2004. Its 'fast track' introduction was agreed by the International Maritime Organization in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States.
>
> The Code sets out a wide range of requirements intended to improve security in the maritime sector, including the use of ship security plans, ship and company security officers, shipboard security equipment, port security plans and security officers, and measures to monitor and control access and the activities of people and cargo onboard ships and within port facilities.

Such comprehensive legislation was set up with the objective of safeguarding the international shipping industry and counteracting potential terrorist attacks. But they have burdened many seafarers with more psychological pressures due to new procedural routines:

> A concern held by many seafarers was that of high workloads, relating to a number of factors. Many saw the implication of new legislation, such as the ISM code as adding extra paperwork on top of already existing procedures. This

> additional paperwork was seen as unnecessary, a burden or simply a paper exercise. . . . Indeed, many seafarers reported that they spent extra time in addition to their working hours in order to complete the paperwork, a fact recognised by seafarers and managers alike.
>
> Another concern was the increased number of roles and tasks seafarers were required to take on. This was seen to relate to legislation, such as the International Ship and Port Faculty Security (ISPS) code, which requires seafarers to take on roles and tasks. The upshot of this is that seafarers are taken away from their other duties; for example, in port a vessel must have a gangway watch. This not only takes the seafarer away from their other duties, but may also increase the workload for other crew onboard (Ellis 2005).

Under the security conventions, seafarers of reduced crew sizes have to take on extra roles and duties other than their basic seafaring work. In other words, seafarers are bearing the responsibilities of guaranteeing shipping safety and security, running the risk of being attacked at sea and at ports and at the very same time being suspected as potential intruders themselves. A seafarer told me, "We may understand the virtues and necessities of this kind of convention. But with extra paperwork, sometimes the psychological pressures are high as it makes us focus too much on minute details. We shoulder a mission to protect the world but are at the same time treated as potential terrorists." Survey responses concerning ISPS have shown that there has been "a prevailing sense amongst those working at sea that the new regulations have been brought in primarily to protect United States interests and without consideration of the effect on seafarers." (International Transport Workers' Federation 2006a: 9) In the face of raised international security concerns, some

nationalities among others have even been stigmatized as "more dangerous":

> The crewing manager of one of the biggest ship management companies has reported that until recently his company used to employ officers from Pakistan but, because of the difficulties experienced by seafarers in various ports due to their Pakistani nationality, the management company has decided to terminate their employment. The manager said that the company had considered not employing them aboard US-destined vessels but this proved to be very difficult as vessels could change their schedule at very short notice (Kahveci 2007b).

Thus, given unpredictable shipping schedules, in order to avoid the difficulties experienced by employing Pakistani officers, be it extra time or procedures involved, the management gave up employing them altogether. Various degrees of distrust have also been cast by port security upon other nationalities, especially those with ethnic identification with Islam, such as Malays:

> Though the years after the 9/11 attacks have already witnessed incidents of racial profiling against Muslims in the West, fears of terrorism are now making targets out of Muslims elsewhere in the world. The Malaysian Seafarers Association claimed recently that international shipping companies are not recruiting Muslim sailors and officers from Malaysia. Muslim Malays do not have last names, but instead attach their own given names to those of their fathers with the word "bin" (son of) or "binti" (daughter of). This distinct characteristic allows potential employers to easily weed out Muslims by name. At the same time, local shipping companies are staffing their ships with cheaper Indonesian and Filipino sailors,

leaving Muslim Malays sailors in dire straits (Yale Global Online 2005).

Names have thus become an identifier for potential employers to target and rule out Muslim Malays. The competition with lower-wage labor sources further worsens Muslim Malays' fading position in the seafaring industry. Even if they are operated and owned nationally, container ships plying international seas with shipments that enter national waters are, after all, considered as "foreign." Their potentiality of "threat" is not obviated by most countries due to uncertainties about the containers and people on board. This is especially true when many ports have high volumes of container transportation and the business organization of shipping is intricate. A manager in a shipping organization said, "Crews are treated very badly by customs officials and immigrations officials around the world." One worker in a seafarer organization even remarked that seafarers were like pigs as they are modeled, examined, categorized and even disparaged in some cases. Seafarers are not only sailing on the sea of international trade but also on the sea of international politics e.g. when mainland Chinese seafarers usually encounter a lot of obstacles in touching Taiwan's soil. Multinational seafarers are assembled through a global network of recruitment. However, denials of access to land are often issued by port states in the name of security and political concerns. Seafarers of different nationalities are sailing globally but receive different treatments at ports and experience varied degrees of freedom for shore leave. The nationality of a seafarer is one of the key factors in affecting his access to different ports. Generally speaking, contemporary seafarers working in an era of increasing globalization face more restrictions in taking shore leave than seafarers in the old days.[41]

[41] It may be argued that the implementation of ISPS and other elevation of port securities are a sign of

Photo 4.5: The lounge of a seafarer centre near the maritime container terminals in Kwai Chung, Hong Kong, 18 October 2007.

To Make a Phone Call

When many seafarers think that the important port-based welfare services are access to international phones, cheap phone cards, and transportation to shops, town areas and seafarers' centres (Kahveci 2007a), these services are often either absent or not readily accessible. And phone boxes, when provided, are often very near to the port areas or within the port areas, but not outside the port zone. In the end, interpretation

resistance to economic globalization in the form of protectionism. The problem is that such restrictions do not aim at stymieing the flows of shipments. Rather, they are legislations passed to guarantee and facilitate the safe flows of shipments. It is therefore another example of how the neoliberal spirit continues to govern shipping businesses, in which the mobility of seafarers is not a major concern.

of shore leave is sometimes reduced to "leaving the ship" or viewed as "anywhere out of the ship on land is shore." Apart from raised international port security concerns and heavier workload that restrain seafarers from leaving their ships, when seafarers are granted the opportunity, some of them hesitate as they face another restriction: financial affordability. A Filipino seafarer commented:

> In every country, you don't know about the exact price level. Like here in Hong Kong, we bought food last night before we went onboard our designated ship. The meal cost us twenty Hong Kong dollars. It is around a hundred pesos. A hundred pesos is too expensive. In the Philippines, we can eat with a hundred pesos for three meals.

Seafarers who receive lower wages tend to have a tighter budget in spending on recreational sightseeing on shore. This is particularly the case when the price levels are high in the port cities of developed countries, which are the destinations of many shipments on board.

It may seem that seafarer centres around many ports of the world should be able to offer reasonable services and facilities to visiting seafarers. Indeed, these centres were founded to work for the welfare of seafarers. However, based on my observations of the seafarer centres in Hong Kong, they do not have a very high rate of usage despite a range of services and facilities available e.g. IDD telephone services, Internet access, a bar, dining facilities and other amenities. I asked a person in charge of one centre about this and he replied that the busy working schedule of seafarers at ports often prohibited them from leaving their ships. In fact, the transportation from a ship to a seafarer centre is also considered as an important part

of port-based services for seafarers. In the Hong Kong case, the Kwai Tsing Container Terminals have 24 berths, 8500 metres of quay length, and nine terminals owned and run by five different terminal operators; only one of the terminals is close to the seafarer centre (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007). Application, registry and declaration are usually required to enter each terminal. From the ship to the seafarer centre, a seafarer needs to pass through all the operating container cranes, semi-trailer trucks and other vehicles, container stacks, construction sites, security stations until he finally steps on the shore in front of the seafarer centre.

A seafarer said, "The port is not beautiful. You can only see big containers, big ships and the shore line. We cannot go for three hours of driving. We don't have time to take a ride. Sometimes we only go to the seamen's centre to make a phone call home." Making a phone call in these clubs becomes one of the more affordable and accessible shore activities for seafarers.

Telecommunications at Sea

One may assume that advancements in telecommunications have helped seafarers to keep in touch with their families and friends. Indeed, telegraph fax, Global Positioning System, electronic distress and safety communications known as GMDSS (the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System), Inmarsat (the International Mobile Satellite Organization) have all enhanced the communication between the ship and the management on shore.[42] Many seafarers can afford to own a mobile phone and the rates of long-distance phone calls are less expensive than before. Full network coverage of telephone services is, however, not readily available in the open oceans. Usually, seafarers can make phone calls and send or receive text

[42] Inmarsat was formerly established by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as the International Maritime Satellite Organization but was later privatized and listed in the market (Alderton et. al. 2004: 96).

messages on board only when their ships approach port areas, or must look for other phone services if they have the chance to take shore leave. At some ports, they also benefit from vendors selling phone cards with IDD services. But the prerequisite is that these vendors are granted permissions to board their ships and sell. Such a practice is meeting more restrictions under raised port security.

At sea, seafarers can only communicate with the outside world by a few means such as satellite phones. Satellite communication deployed in the 1970s facilitates the supervision of the management over shipboard situations (Alderton et. al. 2004). It is also possible for headquarters to make simultaneous decisions with respect to the conditions of their fleets across the globe. This communication is, however, mainly restricted to business operations and very expensive for seafarers to use. As a Russian cadet said, "Satellite is very expensive. We can't use it normally. In case of emergency at home, the company will send you a telegram. Then you ask the captain for permission to make a contact home by satellite. He may or may not allow you to do so, though." It thus needs to pass through several levels for news at home to be transmitted to the seafarer, and then go through bureaucracies again for the seafarer to reach home by satellite communication.

The use of the Internet, as another advancement in communication technologies, has also not widely benefited seafarers. "It would be so much better if we had offshore Internet connections on board. It would be even more convenient if we had Internet service in our own cabins. Right now, as far as I know, not many seafarers can access the Internet. If we could do so, we could keep in touch with our loved ones better," a seafarer said. With reference to a study on welfare services for seafarers (Kahveci 2007c), job rank is a factor affecting seafarers' accessibility to the Internet. The Internet is again often limited to administrative use only:

All the vessels that seafarers worked on had e-mail facilities. However, it has been stated that it was mainly for official use. Where it was possible to use e-mail on board seafarers expressed dissatisfaction with the limited number and length of messages they could send and also the lack of privacy. Some seafarers said that they not only had to pay for the messages they sent from their ships, but also for incoming e-mails too (*ibid.*: 7).

It should also be noted that the relevant technologies must be present at the seafarers' homes so that they can send and receive messages via the Internet. One Polish seafarer told me about how he kept in touch with his family:

> I use the Internet mostly when I go on shore, if it is available there. In that case, I don't need to worry about the captain or my company reading my mails. We had Internet connections on my last voyage but the computers are public. I prefer to use my personal phone to send text messages to my family and friends since it is more private and it is not so expensive.

Seafarers work in an industry at the frontline of technological progress. However, time zone differences, expensive rates of satellite phones, limited Internet provision and limited telecommunication coverage, as well as rank differences all mean that seafarers, especially ratings, are largely removed from the globalization of these information technologies (Kahveci 2000). Modern telecommunications do improve seafarers' communications with home to some extent but seafarers are still lagging behind in this aspect of globalization.

Social Costs for Families

Seafarers working aboard are restricted from making instantaneous decisions concerning their homes and families. When emergencies such as bereavement and relationship breakdown happen at home, seafarers at sea are incapable of going home immediately as they are in the middle of a voyage. Some companies allow seafarers to bring their spouses on board. Nevertheless, this right is typically limited to officers and the captain only. And even when wives are brought aboard, their seafarer husbands are working and resting most of the time. When they are working, these wives are then left alone with a few other crewmembers who are unknown males in most cases. Besides, many seafarers' wives shoulder the responsibilities to take care of their children and families at home. Although leaving home for a long trip at sea enables these wives to experience the working life of their husbands, it is often not a consideration for them.

For a contemporary seafarer, his absence from family is an evidence of his high-return hard work at sea. Remittances are often used to sustain or upgrade families as aforementioned. Still, homesickness is always a concern for most seafarers. "Of course you will be homesick. I mean, unless it's someone with nobody, no family members at all, any normal person will be homesick as long as he has a family," said a seafarer. Another seafarer said, "Especially sometimes I cannot sleep because I am thinking about my family at home." Away from home most time of the year, seafarers usually miss the important moments that happen at home.

Regardless of their employers, trade routes, or nationalities, seafarers are subject to what Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003: 59) depict as "prolonged separation from their home and families . . . characterized by infrequent opportunities for

communication." Seafaring is "a lifestyle that involves a constant series of partings and reunions with associated transitions from shore-based life to the unique work environment of the ship." From one ship to another ship, from the ship to the shore and from the shore to the ship, not only are seafarers making constant adaptations to the changing environments but their families are also making adjustments. One seafarer's wife said, "A single person can live as others and lead a beautiful life. But I am in a predicament: behind the appearance of being single, my partner away at sea is in my mind. Therefore, I cannot live as a single person. But the reality is that nor can I enjoy the shared life of a couple. I fall in between" (as quoted in Tang 2006). Notwithstanding the wage repatriation, family problems such as divorce, poor relationships with children can often arise from a seafarer's employment at sea.

Leave periods are supposed to be the time for seafarers and their families to reunite and bond. However, during this time, seafarers who seek to get promoted need to apply for higher certificates, giving them less time to spend with friends and relatives. Their old friends and relatives are likely to be working during the week, leaving the seafarer on his own preparing and waiting for the next contract to come. As a seafarer told me:

> After returning home for a month, I want very much to go to the sea again. I have some old friends who are also seafarers. We went to the same maritime school together. But I often can't see them: when I'm on leave, many of them are still working at sea; we don't return home at the same time. I have few other friends on shore, since I am away all the time. When I return home, I have free time every day but my shore-based friends are only free on weekends. What to do from Monday to Friday? When you have a family, it's better. But my wife

needs to work every day too. I can take her to work and pick her up after work. But how about the time in between?

Some seafarers have given up supportive social environments for the sake of employment opportunities: "In order to have a better chance of finding work, seafarers commonly migrate with their families from their birthplaces to hub ports where the jobs are. As a result they become isolated from their extended families and from friends. This inevitably reduces the social support available to families while the seafarer is at sea" (Kahveci 2000). This is exemplified by some of my Filipino informants who migrated from their villages and reestablished their families in Manila, where seafaring recruitments were available. The gain of doing so is better access and chance of employment but the cost is separation from their previous social networks.

In short, seafarers' employment in the international shipping industry is both economically rewarding and often socially damaging for their relationships with their families. In cases which the latter outweighs the former, serious relationship problems can arise and affect seafarers' performance at sea. It also explains why many seafarers feel that they must quit the industry for reunion with their family and shore-based life after working for some time.

Controls on Working Bodies

As an effort to promote occupational professionalism, the shipping industry has listed rules concerning the physical requirements and discipline of seafarers. An example is the restriction or complete ban on alcohol consumption during voyages. "Only on Saturdays can we buy beer. Sometimes we have parties on Saturdays. But it all depends on the captain. Parties are held maybe twice a month. But not too much

drinking. They can only allow us two to three cases of beer each time. No spirits because we have to work later," said a seafarer. These informants said that arguments and other problems may break out between crewmembers if they get drunk. A retired seafarer said, "I was on a ship with some Koreans. The Koreans had a mid-autumn festival and they invited me to attend their festival. It was fun. But there was one problem: they drank too much. It became so difficult to control people when they got drunk. Now there is much less drinking on board." Maintaining shipboard order is important, but the side-effect of proscription of free alcohol consumption on board is the loss of social opportunities associated with drinking. Gone are the days when seafarers could socially drink and chat in the open area on deck after a day of work. The open areas themselves have become more limited, partly due to containerization and air-conditioning. Some informants told me that their luggage was checked before boarding, and bringing alcoholic drinks that exceed the official limits is strictly prohibited and subject to punishment: seafarers run the risk of being fired and blacklisted if they breach these rules.[43] "It is illegal to smuggle alcohol on board. Maybe there are a few who do it for money. But once they catch you, you are fired and you cannot go to the ship anymore because they have a record," said a seafarer.[44]

Acting on the premise of professionalism and knowledge of safety, the

[43] The exact limits vary between shipping companies and their degree of execution on board. In general, there has been an industrial ban on free alcoholic consumption on board.

[44] Another seafarer explained how the current unfixed shipping schedule made it less plausible to smuggle, "Most probably, people in the past smuggled. What they smuggled was, for example when they went to Japan, Seiko watches and Citizen watches. At that time, these watches were very popular. In the 1960s, these watches were worth a lot of money when traded in South America and South Africa. I heard that people in the past did not buy a lot each time. Maybe 10 or 20 watches. They went somewhere to sell and earned some money for their own saving and use. Later, people smuggled beverages such as alcoholic drinks. But the shipping schedule must be fixed in order to do this. Only if you know what your next port is can you buy and sell things. And there must be someone who is waiting for you for the exchange. For the ships I worked on, we didn't know the whole routes. For an unstable schedule, it's impossible to do sales and smuggling. The destination of the next voyage is often unknown. It's only after you arrive there that they will tell you what the next voyage will be." Containers have clear destinations but seafarers do not. Seafarers, as workers on board instead of initiators of international trade, are always sailing for shipping orders and are often unable to predict their sea routes. Organized smuggling is hence implausible.

requirements on seafarers' bodies are also manifested in other areas. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009b) writes as follows about seafaring work:

> Most positions require excellent health, good vision, and color perception. Good general physical condition is needed because many jobs require the ability to lift heavy objects, withstand heat and cold, stand or stoop for long periods of time, dexterity to maneuver through tight spaces, and good balance on uneven and wet surfaces and in rough water.

An engineer said, "Not everyone could handle seafaring work. I remember when I was joining marine engineering that the entry requirement was written as, 'not being afraid of dirt, not being afraid of heat.'" He continued to talk about the navigation department: "Working on the deck requires very good eyesight because you need to read signals precisely. When there is a ship in the distance, you need to keep away from it. You need to see their lights. So if you are color-blind, it is not possible to be a seafarer." It is regarded as the nature of the seafaring job that a worker must be able to work in harsh conditions, an ability to endure that may deteriorate at a certain age:

> Unlike many shoreside jobs, seafaring requires that the employee meets stringent medical requirements. Indeed, in some countries, crewing agencies are now reluctant to accept seafarers over the age of 40, because they also realise that the possibility of a medical problem and the consequent costs is a significant risk. But the risk of illness or an accident is real for seafarers of all ages (Bailey 2003).

A seafarer's work and health record in the industry can determine his prospects

of further employment. As Bailey (2003) writes, "in the course of my work as a researcher I have met many seafarers who now find themselves unemployed owing to accidents, injury." Replacement of seafarers takes place in a way that "non-qualified" seafarers are sorted out, changed or removed, including those who fall ill physically and/or mentally from the oppressive surroundings on board. The cost of retaining them can lower the productivity and reduce the profitability of shipping companies. "The shipping industry labour force is a healthy one largely because those who are unhealthy leave the industry," Bloor (2000) writes. Such close check on seafarers' bodies can result in what Bhattacharya (2006) labels "under-reporting":

> Major accidents on ships, major pollution incidents and fatalities are generally reported with . . . certainty. However, under-reporting gets progressively more prevalent as we move from fatal accidents and large-scale pollution to near-misses and seafarers' occupational health-related problems. Reporting such cases is very often considered optional as many remain sceptical about the purpose and consequences of it. Research has shown that social and economic prejudices preclude people from making such reports. We are not only talking about reports from . . . a bosun, motorman or second engineer, but from the master to the company office, or from the company office to the flag state. Apprehension about reporting takes many forms: fear of being identified with a negative incident such as slipping in the galley, dropping a hammer from a height or even encountering a close quarter situation during navigation. Also, reporting non-conformity or bringing to light deficiencies such as a faulty oily water separator or damaged walkie-talkie set is often associated with slowing down shipboard operation and making things "official". In many situations,

seafarers may consider making such reporting unmanly and unprofessional, or associate it with fear of being judged negatively or even being reprimanded. Similarly, certain safety incentive schemes, such as the number of no-accident days, are often misconstrued onboard as the minimum accepted level of performance. This silently encourages under-reporting as many jobs get completed on time and without a problem.

Seafarers, for fear of being blamed in cases of accidents, or simply being considered as incompetent to work in the seafaring industry, tend not to divulge incidents of minor human error or health problems. Otherwise they are running the risk of their productivity being questioned and their prospects of future employment becoming shaky.

In further discussing the controls on seafarers' bodies, there are other instances which deserve attention and one can be found on board Chinese-owned and -operated ships. A representative from the Chinese Communist Party is often appointed to stay on a mainland Chinese-owned and -flagged ship. As Zhao (2003) reports, "political commissars were placed on board merchant vessels, sailing together with the crew. Of course, these 'political thought workers' were intended to exercise political and ideological control over seafarers as eyes and ears of the party-state." Beyond this, they may serve to enforce morality on seafarers. I have interviewed a Chinese seafarer who showed anxiety when I asked about sensitive topics such as sex:

> (Looking around) Well, you know, we seldom talk about this kind of thing. The representative is watching us. We are not supposed to violate our behavioral rules such as discussing sex in public or patronizing prostitutes. I am not sure if

other people will think about sex privately. After all, nobody knows what you are doing when you shut your cabin door. In the daily conversations, though, we do not mention that.

In fact, not on this ship but on many other container ships, erotic calendars or posters are not difficult to find in cabins and entertainment rooms, in which nude female figures are often displayed. Seafarers' attitude to these materials is reflected by one response saying "we can only look at this [and not do anything else]." After all, the expression of sexuality is constrained by intensive work on board and at ports. This leaves seafarers with little time and energy for erotic thoughts or sexual activities. And another basic feature of sailing has always constrained seafarers' bodies, if to increased extent in today's world.

Out There on One's Own

Isolation has always been a key feature of life at sea. Out in the boundless water, fellow shipmates are typically the only people seafarers can interact with. However, the isolation or lack of socialization between crewmembers has been intensified with reduced crew size and other changes after the recent development of the shipping industry. A seafarer who has more than 40 years of working experiences in seafaring and the shipping-related industry reminisced about his life as a seafarer: "I suddenly came across someone one day. Others told me that he was the chief mate. I didn't recognize him at all. You know, back then there were 40 or 60 people on board a ship. It took time to remember every face and position. Now there are around 20 or fewer on board a ship. So you see the same people every day." Another ex-seafarer, who is now working in a shipping organization, recollected:

> When I was at sea, we used to have quite a good social relationship because there were enough people on board. So we talked to people, we got together and watched a movie. We got 15 people in a room, watching a movie. And you know, that was kind of communal atmosphere. . . . Nowadays, there are so few people on board. It's actually, I think, quite a lonely life. Much more lonely than it used to be. Nowadays, you do your watch, six hours on the bridge by yourself. Nobody else. Six hours off the bridge. And again, many other people are working when you are off-duty. So you may not see too many people around all the time. Then six hours back on the bridge by yourself. Six hours off the bridge and sleep. So it is a very lonely life.

Today's life on board was stressed as "lonely" by the ex-seafarer as compared to his past sea life. In the six-on-six-off watch system practiced by some ships, 24 hours of the day are divided into four sessions, with one group of crewmembers on duty during the first and third sessions and another group during the second and fourth sessions. This could put the seafarers in a cycle of intense work and short rest as they could not sleep more than six hours each time. This not only isolated the watch groups of seafarers but also isolated crewmembers within a watch group, as they all worked as individuals apart from one another. Many seafarer informants such as Aladdin (2002) described the life routine on board as "either working or sleeping":

> Washing machines are a must. At least two, one for working clothes and one for other clothes; there is a laundry room onboard so we can wash our clothes. There is also a gymnasium, with usually a ping pong table and weights and a bicycle

> and stuff for exercise. I have no time to spend there. Today there are just as many people on the ship as they need, so it's only work and sleep.

An officer on watch, for instance, may be navigating on the bridge all by himself for hours before he is off-duty and another seafarer is on watch again. Under commonly practiced single-person tasking, many seafarers work alone and resort to their individual cabins after hours of demanding work. The improvement of amenity standards on board, e.g. the provision of air-conditioning on many ships, was generally regarded by my informants as an advantage of shipping development. Modern ships are furnished with recreational facilities which supposedly serve social needs. However, heavier workloads and duty shifts of reduced-size crew mean that seafarers often do not have enough opportunities, time and energy to utilize these facilities. The sealed cabin compartment further limits socialization among coworkers while facilitating the management on board. It differs from a hotel room in that it is constantly hit by throbbing of the engine, clanking between containers, cranes and other heavy machines at ports, sea motions, the vicissitude of weather and loneliness.

A gigantic container ship reserves much of its hull and deck area for piles of containers and the engine, and there is little social and private space for seafarers. Container ships are, after all, not built for accommodation or social recreation, but are instruments of international trade with their shipboard space optimized for business operations. The development in shipbuilding technologies in constructing larger ships, which can carry more freight without sacrificing shipping speed and safety, is a matter of capitalistic pursuit for economies of scale. In spite of the technological progress in ship design, building and equipment, the workload of an individual seafarer is not reduced, due to the higher volume of international trade, higher labor competition,

and job requirements of scientific management of containers and container ships. It is not only the reduced crew size but also the working patterns such as the watch system and single-person tasking that has reduced social interactions on board. "Nowadays, there are fewer contacts between people. The problem is that you will become unused to socializing with people," said a seafarer. Some other informants also agree that one may fail to perform "normative social behavior" if one stays too long at sea. In the long run, seafaring is agreed as socially damaging for its isolation from the shore, families and even from shipmates during and after working hours. "People who take up seafaring really have to be able to cope with working by themselves. They need to take responsibilities by themselves, to be able to make good judgment," said a manager in a shipping organization.

"A Prison with Nice Facilities"

In a nutshell, seafarers working in the contemporary era have experienced more physical controls and increased intensity of social isolation on board than their counterparts in the past. As aforementioned, it is widely agreed that accommodation facilities are of reasonable standards on board many modern container ships:

> At best, ships have single-berth accommodation for all crew members, with en suite bath and toilet facilities, adequate space for storage, desks or tables, comfortable seating, air conditioning/heating, good lighting and ventilation. Officers are allocated larger rooms or a suite of two rooms with separate living or sleeping areas and refrigerators. Laundry facilities include a sufficient number of washing machines, dryers and irons. The minimum standards of accommodation are laid down in a number of international labour

Conventions . . . and certain Recommendations (Alderton et. al. 2004: 125).

In reality, though, the standards of facilities on different ships constructed at different times vary even under the same shipping companies, as informants said. As the manager of a shipping organization pointed out:

> One of the problems we face is that a lot of ships have accommodations which are really not up to standard. It's accommodation on ships built 40 years ago. And so we're working to tackle this problem. We have a small working group which I belong to, working on habitability. We're looking at the accommodations and at ways about how things are designed for the seafarers on board. For example, you'll find that some ships actually have the rating common bathrooms, which is not good. I mean nowadays, every cabin should have a separate bathroom.

Still, on one of the so-called "finest" container ships, some informants described the ship as "a prison," or "a prison with nice facilities."[45] The seafarers' reference to the container ship as a prison is not without reason, since there are usually only males working and living in the limited shipboard spaces, being supervised, with their behavior controlled and without many contacts with the outside world for a long period of time. A worker in a seafarer welfare organization said:

> I had one ship, with the captain and chief mate German, and the rest Filipino. The captain said, after six months, the chief mate wanted to leave so much. It is

[45] As my informants reported, not all merchant vessels are up to standard. Some seafarers are living and working on board ships that are not only technologically backward but also cannot meet minimum standards.

because during a year, every day would be the same: same ship, same work and same people. The chief mate got sick and tired of it. For some people, they find nothing new after sailing for some time. It becomes so boring and intolerable.

A sense of being "trapped" with a small number of crewmembers for a long time on board is entailed by sailing at sea. As Kahveci (2007a) reports, "Many seafarers described their lives at sea as 'being in prison', 'isolated', 'lonely' and a 'sacrifice' to provide better living conditions and opportunities for their loved ones. In this context, compared with port-based facilities, welfare services provided aboard their vessels did little to improve the situation." In the end, containerization and the other developments of shipping also "containerize" seafarers on board, an "imprisonment" that is given meaningfulness through one's wages for one's family. After having been away from home and from the shore for weeks or months, I witnessed seafarers on board becoming delighted just to receive newspapers in their language from visitors such as the chaplain of a seafarer organization. As a seafarer said:

> Sometimes we leave for one month before we see the port again. When some seafarers were on their first vessel, they just waved to the people at the port. Because for more than one month they could not see other people, they just waved to everybody at the port and said "hi, how are you?" They long to see other people.

In spite of the increased speed of ships, the duration of transport to some ports can sometimes take weeks. It makes seafarers feel exhausted, especially when the routine of work is repeated and they see the same few faces every day. The shipboard

environment can be anti-social and oppressive. But seafarers are often unknown to the shore except in cases such as piracy and oil spillage. A researcher writes, "The fact that the shipping industry is mostly in the headlines only when there is a disaster is a real cause of concern because the perception the public forms of the industry is therefore biased" (Veiga 2002). "Of all the sectors that make up the global transport infrastructure, shipping probably has the lowest public profile and the least representative public image. Its importance is not well known although not a single area of our life remains unaffected by it" (International Maritime Organization Maritime Knowledge Centre 2009).

Seafarers' "containerization" implies that their working, living and social situations are hardly known to the larger shore world. With reference to Anthony Giddens' (1990: 14) "time-space distanciation," one's "present" coworkers in one local context i.e. on a ship and the "absent" management in another locale are connected within the system of supervisory networks. However, employers are not physically accessible in the working environment on board and often personally unknown to seafarers. On the high seas, ships, including their shipboard seafaring teams, are physically isolated entities, largely out of the shore's sight, mind and contact. It is a problem of practicality for multinational seafarers to unionize on a international scale. Besides, the employer is usually not a physical being but an impersonal company with a hierarchical bureaucracy and headquarters located in foreign lands. It makes it difficult for workers to bring employers and other parties to the bargaining table as Whitfield (2007) discusses the lack of official support for seafarers:

To whom can they turn? The flag state? Not very likely, given the money it earns

from shipping companies. Their own country? Even if there is some form of representation in the foreign port, it is going to be a long bureaucratic process. The port state? Its main interest will be in collecting port dues and moving the vessel on. The ship owner's own country of residence? The system is designed to disguise its identity. The crewing agency, which the seafarer may have paid in order to get the job in the first place? A risky strategy, as the seafarer could be blacklisted – and never get another job.

The flag state, their own country, the port state, the shipowner's own country of residence and the crewing agency are probably all not very reliable or approachable for seafarers to turn to when their opinions need to be heard and their situations need to be improved. Labor is, after all, objectified as a factor of production and capital under capitalism. This objectification leads to a homogenizing ground for business deployment, e.g. measurement of each worker in terms of his or her wage levels and qualities. The availabilities, qualifications, prices and the surplus values extractable from different labor forces are some of the main determinants for business dispositions. The conversion of nationals into wage labor in the international market, outside the active intervention of states, has further aggravated seafarers' lack of control over their situation:

> Labour of any kind requires a certain concentration, self-discipline, habituation to different instruments of production, and knowledge of the potentialities of various raw materials for conversion into useful products. Commodity production under conditions of wage labour, however, locates much of the knowledge, decisions as to technique, as well as disciplinary apparatus, outside

> the control of the person who actually does the work (Marx as quoted in McLellan 1977: 123).

Since ships are complex and expensive structures, and shipping businesses involve high investments and yields, shore-based shipping management has to extend and strengthen their controls to the sea. This means that seafarers can exercise fewer controls on the ships they operate in such areas as the sailing routes, buying stores and spares, design and construction of shipboard equipment and other operational decisions and implementations (Ure 1835: 23). It is the "prison factory" which goes hand in hand with the development of the mercantile economy (Foucault 1977: 172). This "prison" has elaborate procedures

> for distributing individuals; fixing them in space; classifying them; extracting them from the maximum in time and forces; training their bodies; coding their continuous behavior; maintaining them in perfect visibility; forming around them the apparatus of observation, registration, and recording; constituting on them a body of knowledge that is accumulated and centralized (Foucault 1977: 231).

Internationally assembled and literally flowing along sea trade routes, contemporary seafarers are disciplined and self-disciplined inside container ships and in their jobs through employing their professional seamanship. They are "containerized" in temporal and spatial controls for conveying shipments of international trade. They do not have definite destinations, but are used and reused, constantly laboring for one contract after another – cheap labor necessary for the functionality and profitability of international trade. This reality establishes and

reinforces the solidarity among seafarers sailing on the neoliberal sea, which will be discussed in the penultimate chapter.

Chapter Summary

Containerization has been recognized as one of the most significant developments of shipping in the mid and late 20th century. Efficiency of logistic movements has been greatly enhanced by container standardization and streamlined conveyance in intermodal freight transportation. Such technological progress entails a kind of "containerization" for seafarers as these transport workers are contradictorily traveling long distances and confined on board their ships, like containers being shipped around, loaded and unloaded. It is by working in the globalized industry of shipping transportation that seafarers are de-globalized from much of the to-and-fro of the world.

Restrictions on shore leave are a common problem contemporary seafarers face. It arises from a variety of reasons: the "fortification" of container ports, construction and relocation of ports to the hinterland far away from downtown areas, heavier port responsibilities at ports including fulfillment of the requirements by port state controls, tightening working schedule as a result of the emphasis on efficiency and turnaround rates, raised global security concerns in response to the September 11 attack, lack of information and accessibility of welfare services at ports, and seafarers' own limited financial situations.

The limited provision of telecommunications at sea has caused seafarers to be in infrequent contact with their homes. The economic emancipation associated with their employment at sea is oftentimes outweighed by the social damage to their relationships with their families and homes. Together with homesickness and lack of

concern from the shore world, the common single-person tasking by shrunken crews reinforces seafarers' loneliness and sense of isolation at sea. The provision of shipboard amenities of improved standards does not help much in relieving such social alienation but instead imposes an imprisoning feeling and experience at sea.

Chapter V: All in the Same Sea

Photo 5.1: A rating's cabin with basic facilities, which have shown great improvements over the decades, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 23 November 2006. Seafarers bring their own belongings and take them away when they leave the ship. The cabin is therefore a temporary dwelling place on board for them to rest after work.

In previous chapters, we have discussed the foundations of contemporary shipping, the reasons and meanings of seafaring work and the "containerization" seafarers are experiencing. This chapter seeks to answer another core question of seafaring: "How do seafarers of such a diversity of nationalities communicate with,

look upon and treat each other on board?" The chapter will first explain the factors that have caused potential social tensions among multinational seafarers and then illustrate other factors that help hold seafarers in a degree of harmony despite such tensions. These tensions and their solutions all come from the nature of the sea of international trade, politics and technology that the contemporary shipping industry, operates on.

Representation and Wage Differentiation by Nationality

The globalization of mostly regionally owned and operated shipping industries has not only led to realignments of labor and capital accumulation but also to new socio-economic relationships on board. Seafarers of different countries are not proportionally represented among the 466,000 officers and 721,000 ratings. (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010e). The OECD countries, the Far East and Eastern Europe are all sources of officers in the international shipping industry. But the top five officer-supplying countries in 2008 are People's Republic of China (51,800), Philippines (50,400), Ukraine (35,400), Turkey (32,400) and India (31,200) instead of OECD countries (International Maritime Organization Maritime Knowledge Centre 2009: 37). Although European countries such as Germany and Poland are not among the top five officer supplying countries, German and Polish nationals are over-represented in the senior officer positions, which means that, relative to the German and Polish seafarer populations, a large percentage of German and Polish seafarers work as senior officers. This is shown by the following distribution statistics of nationalities at different job ranks: senior officers, junior officers and ratings:

Senior Officers		Junior Officers		Ratings	
Nationality	*Percent*	*Nationality*	*Percent*	*Nationality*	*Percent*
Russia	13.4	Philippines	20.4	Philippines	32.9
Ukraine	9.6	Russia	12.6	Ukraine	7.3
Philippines	8.4	Ukraine	9.5	Russia	7.0
Germany	6.8	India	6.1	Turkey	5.1
Poland	5.6	China	5.6	China	4.9
Other (n=83)	56.2	Other (n=76)	45.7	Other (n=90)	42.7
Total	100.0	*Total*	100.0	*Total*	100.0

Table 5.1: Top 5 Nationalities by rank for general cargo/container ships (Ellis and Sampson 2003: 26).

Germany and Poland are the only developed countries that are among the top 5 nationalities of seafarers working on board general cargo/container ships. Seafarers of all job ranks are over-represented by people from semi-peripheral and peripheral countries. It should be noted that the permutations of different nationalities on board are not completely random and not decided wholly by the invisible hand of demand and supply in the market. They practically rely on factors such as company preferences and colonial heritage. And yet, today's employment of seafarers is generally a constant search for cheaper labor and business benefits. For example, a Hong Kong seafarer said, "Our company employs Burmese, Filipinos and Thais other than Hong Kong seafarers. It is a way to diversify risks, I think, as it can avoid over-reliance on a particular labor market. It is also a way to balance power and avoid concentration in a particular nationality." The company hiring different nationalities was interpreted by him as a kind of risk management to maintain control over workforce stability and training standards (Sampson 2004). Another Hong Kong seafarer employed by a Hong Kong Chinese-owned shipping company said his company generally recruited a certain number of locals because of its easier control over them. He explained, "Our company likes to employ 'our own people.' It's easier

for them to call us to work. They can also save money by asking us to go to the local port and board the designated ship." In this way, the company saved money by asking the recruited Hong Kong seafarers to board the company's ships when they pass by the ports of Hong Kong, rather than offering them air tickets and arranging other transportation for them to board a ship abroad.

Consequently, seafarers often encounter certain nationalities more frequently than others, instead of working with every nationality by chance. At the same time, mixed nationality crewing with disproportional representation of nationality comes with wage differentiation by nationality. Performing the same job and of the same job rank, seafarers are paid at different wage levels according to their nationality, or more precisely, their citizenship at their places of enrollment: people of the same nationality, e.g. nationals from different provinces of mainland China, can be paid differently. Lim (1983: 80) calls the differential wage levels payable to workers from developed and developing countries for performing the same productive work as "imperialist exploitation," which by its name implies the exploitation of the developing world by the former colonizers. In this respect, Nash (1983: ix) writes, "the advantages afforded by large international wage differentials are as important, from the point of view of industry, as the capacity to achieve increased control over workers and to counter demands for higher wages and so-called fringe benefits." Through multinational crewing with international wage differentials, shipping management attains the benefits of sourcing the most economically competitive labor as well as gaining labor control through their actions in the market. As a seafarer commented to me, "People of different nationalities have different salary levels. That's why people of different nationalities are employed."

A source from the International Shipping Federation (as quoted in Kahveci and

Nichols 2006: 27) shows the monthly average wages of an able seaman of different nationalities in 1992, 1995 and 1999. While able seamen such as those from Germany, Australia, Denmark and Italy all suffer from a significant percentage deduction of their wages from 1992 to 1999 due to the fall in their demand and supply, the wages of Filipino, Polish, Indian, Chinese and Bangladeshi observe a double-digit increase:

Nationality	**1992**	**1995**	**1999**	**Percentage change 1992/1999**
German	5,758	6,575	2,689	-53
Australian	4,527	4,701	1,590	-65
Danish (DIS)	3,524		2,000	-63
Italian	3,351	2,524	1,583	-53
Dutch	3,328	3,844	1,687	-49
Filipino	899	894	1,068	+18
Polish	861	1,197	1,261	+46
Indian	825	869	1,026	+24
Indonesian	778	487	852	+9
Pakistani	477	446	402	-16
Chinese	381	747	726	+90
Bangladeshi	305	277	509	+66

Source: Data obtained from ISF.

Table 5.2: Average AB monthly wages in US$ 1992, 1995 and 1999 (*ibid.*).

The wage difference between a German (2,689) and a Bangladeshi (509) able seaman is still polarized in 1999, amounting to a difference of 2180 US dollars. Not only are seafarers paid differently, but the terms of their contractual employments are also different. "I have one month working and another whole month on holiday. The company is the best out there. This is different from the Filipinos. For example, they work for nine months before they have the holiday. We have two systems. . . . Yes, it's unfair," admitted a German engineer. On the surface, it may seem that seafarers from developing countries are more exploited since their contracts last longer and so

they have to spend longer periods at sea. But the issue is more complicated than that. For example, the Filipinos mentioned above requested to prolong their contracts in order to earn more income. When a German seafarer and a Filipino of the same job rank carry out the same job responsibilities, the former usually earns more than the latter in an absolute sense. But in a relative sense, as compared with their own counterparts in their home countries, "a Filipino chief mate can have a gardener, a domestic helper and a car at his house. A German captain may not be able to do so," said a person in charge of a seafarer organization. "What is fair? If Europeans and Southeast Asians received the same treatments, the Europeans would complain," said a Polish engineer on board a Western European-owned ship with Southeast Asians employed. Given this repressive logic of salaries, he went on to say, "A few Filipinos asked to lengthen their contracts. But their contracts have already been lengthened to two years and they are still asking." At a separate interview, a Filipino seafarer emphasized that currency differences and exchange rates needed to be addressed in considering the different wage levels payable to seafarers of different nationalities. It is not only the absolute amounts of wages that are determinant in evaluating the labor conditions of employees in this international industry. As one seafarer told me:

> Of course we have to address the currency differences. I expected it already before I was employed. It's pesos that we are earning and spending. These currencies that different nationalities of seafarers earn and use are different. The currency of the wage depends on the contract. The contracts that Westerners signed were from the agents in their countries. And so they can earn a different wage level in terms of a different currency. No matter how we try to think about that, we cannot earn their income because our contract is in the Philippines.

> That's why we never think about that. Otherwise you will be upset and angry.

Seafarers from less economically developed countries are sometimes perceived by seafarers from more developed ones as bearing a degree of resentment towards them because of the wage difference. Although most seafarers understand the industry's continual pursuit of cheaper qualified labor, this does not mean that all seafarers like this fact. For those who are paid less, many of them learn to accept the situation but some do indeed bear dissatisfaction. At the same time, the more well-paid seafarers are not necessarily at ease, for the ceaseless labor competition also imposes insecurity on them:

> Although seafaring is seen as a means of advancement in a number of countries, the free market nature of the industry ensures that there is constant pressure on seafarers from the threat of cheaper labour supplies. This makes for a reluctance to press for higher salaries and or better conditions of employment. In some cases seafarers are prolonging their time at sea and foregoing visits to their families for fear of competition (International Transport Workers' Federation 2006b: 24).

Indeed, in a labor market with growing competition from different labor sources, the bargaining power of seafarers for their job conditions is reduced, and more seafarers are willing to sacrifice their desire for better working conditions in exchange for a better record with their companies and continual employment. Even the largest nationality group of seafarers, Filipinos, are facing competition from Chinese seafarers, whose wages are even lower. The situation is similar with seafarers from

developed countries being replaced by Filipinos. Of course, quality of labor cannot be totally forgone in the pursuit of lower costs, and yet the trend has been towards training cheap labor. When asked if he was facing any competition from other nationalities, a Filipino cadet said, "Yes, China. But also India. There's a competition from Chinese because they have a lower salary than we do. We can get around 500 dollars. They get around 150 dollars." Multinational seafarers are aware that being paid on different wage levels, no one is indispensable and no one can ever be altogether secure in employment.

English as the Common Industrial Language

The potential tension among multinational seafarers, who are recruited to work together but are paid differently and represented disproportionately in the seafaring world, is not only found in economic and employment terms but also in communications. Communication channels for seafaring include oral reporting, regular meetings, and walkie-talkie conversations. They follow chains of order along the shipboard hierarchy and company bureaucracy. To give an example, a seafarer's salary was once late and he told the captain directly during his working hours. The captain then called the shipping company, which later settled the problem. Meetings to discuss work issues such as safety matters and reports on work and drills against fire and piracy etc. are regularly held. Work-related communications are not only useful in exchanging information, but also in upholding the social structure of a shipboard community.

English is the lingua franca, the industrial language of international shipping. It is set as a prerequisite criterion for an applicant. However, it is not the mother tongue for most seafarers today. Multinational seafarers' English is accented in different

ways and sometimes it causes imperfect communications between crewmembers. A captain told me, "The Chinese, for example, may watch out for their English grammar. But when their words come together, you just can't understand what they mean. And the Chinese tend to reply 'yes' no matter what you say to them. They may not really understand my meaning but they tend not to ask." A European captain recalled an emergency case in which a Chinese seafarer reported to the port station. Due to his lack of English proficiency, he was unable to describe clearly the situation on board. Occasions such as this are potentially catastrophic.

Language is an issue during and beyond work. Seafarers of various nationalities may know the technical and traditional nautical terms well. But when it comes to non-official topics, such as jokes, which may require contextual, inside knowledge of certain cultures and ethnicities, "outsiders" sometimes encounter difficulties in fully understanding and conveying their meanings in English. As Alderton and other researchers (2004: 13) have discussed, "joking in a second language is fraught with further difficulties, including the added complexities caused by cultural 'interference'. Crew members with inadequate language skills may well avoid the use of jokes altogether, thereby missing out on an important aspect of the social life on board." Many seafarers tend to socialize more with their own fellow nationals in the end. And when they do so, they tend to use their vernacular. A German captain said, "I do enjoy my social life with the crew. I communicate a lot with them. Europeans are easier to work with though. But certainly Germans are the easiest. I mean the communication is the easiest." Another German seafarer said, "I talk to other Germans on the ship in German. Yes, it is less smooth to talk to Filipinos. I have to use English." Language is thus a barrier to more social mixing on board. On one occasion, one Caucasian and two Chinese seafarers sat down in a seafarer centre, had beers and chatted in English.

When the Caucasian seafarer left for the washroom, the two Chinese talked in fluent Mandarin immediately.

Some ships operated by mainland Chinese shipping companies are special cases in the shipping industry. Generally, there are only mainland Chinese on board and they communicate with each other in their native language. Such situation has given a mainland Chinese seafarer a stronger sense of bonding with his shipmates. In comparison, a manager in a shipowner organization mentioned cases in which Hong Kong seafarers encountered difficulties in social mingling on board:

> When a Hong Kong cadet is on board ships full of Filipinos, he is the only Hong Kong guy. That's difficult for him. The Filipinos all speak their home language. The Hong Kong cadet is very lonely, very much alone. Even when the Hong Kong cadet works on a mainland Chinese ship, he will find cultural differences with other crewmembers. I think the most responsible ship managers will never ever isolate people on board. They should always make sure that a seafarer has some other people of the same nationality with him.

Not having "the same people" speaking the same language and sharing similar culture was considered by this informant as adding to the hardship of life at sea. The comment from a chief engineer pointed again to the problem of shipboard communications with foreign crew members:

> It is a little troublesome to work with foreign seamen. You know, the work in the engine room is complex, and there are so many technical terms. Sometimes they cannot get it at all when you speak a technical term. It is also difficult to teach

> them how to work. Usually I need to demonstrate how to work myself at least once for them. If my engine officers were foreigners, I'd be nervous. In the positions of fitter or oilier, the condition is acceptable (as quoted in Guo, Ye and Liang 2007: 9).

Speaking from a subordinate point of view, a Taiwanese seafarer also emphasized the differences in language and culture in the communication with foreign superiors:

> While on duty with foreign quartermasters, the four-hour periods of work seemed to become longer. Generally, we speak only two or three sentences to each other during a shift, and this only when necessary. While working with Taiwanese or Chinese quartermasters on the bridge, there was much to talk about. Certainly, the contrast is due to differences in language and culture (as quoted in Guo, Ye and Liang 2007: 8).

Imperfect communications due to the lack of English and multicultural proficiencies can socially divide people. Nevertheless, most seafaring teams cooperate well as functional units and maintain friendly relationships with one another. This is largely a result based on the fundamental nature of contemporary shipping and its industrial environment.

Hierarchy, Punishment and Obedience

The obvious hierarchy on board every ship is that every crewmember has a clearly-defined role in operation. Nationality and job position, instead of personal

name, are common references used to identify and address people on board. And when a job position is called upon, a hierarchical sense is implied: either the target is higher or lower in the structure than the subject.

The captain is the highest on a ship and the center of power and authority. As described by one seafarer, the captain is also like the "boss of a company." Through his empowerment delegated by the shipping company, his respect is gained through his title and also his right to report on the behavior of the rest of the crew to the shipping company. With regard to this, a vendor, whose family business had been selling electronic products on board and observing the industry for many years, talked about the behavioral disciplining of seafarers:

> Captains write reports on individual seafarers as records for their companies. These records are crucial in determining their career prospects. Once a seafarer receives bad comments from the captain, he may be blacklisted by the company and he needs to change his employer. So the performance on board is important. Now promotion is different from that in the past. It is more difficult. They usually have to graduate from maritime schools and apply for licenses. The decision of whether one can be promoted also depends very much on the seafarer's skill in managing affairs, both technical and social. This is true with regard to today's labor market. As the pool of labor is large in countries such as the Philippines and the competition is high, only those "high-quality" ones, for example, friendly guys causing no disturbances to the onboard operation, can join and continue to work in the seafaring industry.

Institutional controls and blacklisting of seafarers by shipping agents are further

elaborated upon in this comment by a seafarer spokesperson:

> There are generally good wages for seafarers. But labor is still exploited, say, by the agents. Some seafarers need to pay a whole month's salary to their agents to pay the agent commission owed upon successful employment. Seafarers recruited by agents are usually on a contractual base. Agents want short contracts so that they can earn money each time a seafarer signs up. Some seafarers who have broken the rules are blacklisted and their agents pass the information onto other agents so that all these agents cooperate to get rid of the disobedient seafarers. Shipping companies want to keep the agents. It saves their recruiting costs and agents can offer them cheap labor as well.

Reports and blacklisting are a part of the mechanism that raises the power of management. Being blacklisted means that a seafarer has little chance to work again in the seafaring industry, for the blacklisting is often not only a record in one shipping company or one agent but a shared record among many. Non-docile workers can therefore be punished and differentiated from docile workers. Each worker is measured by his job performance. It forms a common ground for personal comparison across nationalities. A Ukrainian seafarer said, "The captains are observing us: how we are doing our jobs. That's why we have to work hard. They are doing some evaluations. They are giving us grades for that and the grades will be passed to our company. And then our company will have to decide whether to promote us to a higher position." It does not mean that seafarers necessarily have to flatter the captain or even superbly perform their job, but maintaining working qualities with a good attitude and without making significant mistakes is important.

Since most seafarers are contract-based, those who are no longer considered as seaworthy do not receive a renewal of their contracts. "Casual employment, whereby you are employed for a period of time and then go back home to find yourself unemployed again, is the norm in labour-supplying countries" (Obando-Rojas 2003a). For many seafarers, seafaring is a job that lacks security: "when I am not working as my previous contract ends, I feel anxious and I don't know when my next contract will come," a seafarer said. A Taiwanese seafarer also told me:

> A lot of us seamen are employed contract by contract, despite the fact that some of us are working for the same companies again and again. My contract, for example, has been renewed in the past couple of years. I have good records in the company and I am qualified. But I am getting old. I am afraid that my company will stop renewing my contract one day and replace me with a cheaper crewman from another country.

Obedience at work does not mean that all seafarers like to be amenable per se but it can be a strategy to secure continuous employment and enhance one's chances of promotion in the face of labor competition. As discussed in Chapter III, seafarers, particularly those from developing countries, sell their labor to live and to support their families. The domination of seafarers, including the control over their bodies and their social amenability at work, is justified by their wages. Exploitive wages are a necessary condition for profit-seeking under capitalism and it is the money economy that renders labor purchasable at particular exchange values. In regard to the disciplinary power exerted over workers, a number of instruments are being used: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and their combination in examination.

Seafarers as a working class are spatially bound in hierarchized surveillance (Foucault 1977: 188, 190). They are ranked by the industry into different job titles. The higher-ranked supervisors supervise the lower ranked and all workers on board are supervised by the shipping management. A ship in this way forms a part of an integrated system of power. The power of conformity from normalizing judgment is coercive: "The perpetual penality that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes." Workers in the factory ship are subject to "a whole micropenality of time (latenesses, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behavior (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body ("incorrect" attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency)" (*ibid.*: 194, 195).

Individuals' actions are under constant visibility, transforming brutal power into the invisible exercise of power. This leads to "examination" as a ritualized mechanism of discipline with the combination of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment. It is "the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification." "The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them." (*ibid.*: 67) In the captain's report, as personal evaluation of seafarers, each subordinate becomes describable and analyzable. The results of examined seafarer bodies are useful to the management as they indicate the use values of their human resources. In turn, the management can use the results as reference for maximum extraction of labor and time. Observation and record of the controlled bodies also involves these bodies' internalization of the control (*ibid.*: 197,

199, 201, 202, 204). The consequence is collective obedience by seafarers for the security of their jobs and wages, and thus docile bodies ideal for the functionality of the shipping factories.

Once employed in the industry, many seafarers avoid being blacklisted and seek to keep their high-income job for as long as possible. Their immediate motivation is typically the wage and their ultimate motivation is typically the family that they are supporting. Social harmony is, in this sense, not only a result of industrial controls and the nature of the seafaring job but also instrumentally maintained by the seafarers themselves in earning the wages. When asked how they do this, informants commonly responded that they "go with the flow," "don't do anything wrong," "play it safe," and "don't start any fights" despite occasional disagreements. "It will do you no good to offend somebody on board, especially officers. That will only make your life on board even more difficult, since you're going to stay with them in the same ship for some time," said a Chinese seafarer. In times of social incompatibility, social distances are kept to avoid disputes and maintain the common good: "getting the work done." "Most of the time, it's been peaceful. If a person doesn't like others on the ship, he can go to his room and ignore them," said a German seafarer. The individual cabin is the private space on board where seafarers can avoid social interaction and potential trouble after work, even though it is still a space inside the workplace. Another German seafarer said, "The majority likes to be with people. But some people are loners. They lock themselves up." The isolating nature of seafaring itself, as previously discussed, somehow offers the option of being in the group but isolating oneself from others at the same time.

If seafarers choose to socialize, there are common strategies they employ as well. "Sometimes I listen to other shipmates when they tell me seafaring stories.

Sometimes we talk about work matters and past experiences. We don't talk about personal things unless we feel very close to each other," said a Thai seafarer about the recollection and anecdotes shared on board. Other possible topics of informal conversations include "bars visited, beautiful women, lively ports, sad shipmates, storms and calms, good and bad captains, devious crewing agents, abominable food, and the like" (Alderton et. al. 2004: 98). Seafarers tend to avoid topics such as religion and politics that are regarded as "too sensitive" in the confined shipboard context. "The more people you have come into contact with, the more socially sensitive you have to be: you don't want to offend people. You need to know how to respect people, regardless of your job rank," said a Romanian seafarer. In fact, many seafarers of senior positions are aware of the need to cope with cultural diversities on board. "We don't make unreasonable commands to our subordinates. We cannot discriminate against our crewmembers. We need to work with people of different cultures in this industry. We know our job," said a Greek captain.

Ethnic Stereotypes, Division and Unity

Working in a confined but multicultural environment, seafarers who have experienced interacting with people of different ethnic backgrounds sometimes opine on different ethnicities. Some ethnicities are regarded as easier to get along while some are regarded as distant and more difficult to understand. "There are some cultures that are difficult to work with," said a captain. "For example, it's difficult to understand Muslims. They speak in a different way. They eat in a different way. They work in a different way." This was how he explained the difficulties he experienced in cooperating with Muslims. Ethnic essentialism is upheld by some seafarers in viewing the diversity of coworkers around them. "By nature of their upbringing, their culture,

seafarers of different nationalities have different jokes, they have different mentality," said a seafarer, highlighting the concept of "differences." Another seafarer said, "I think nationality is more important as a factor of social division on board than job rank. Because people of the same nationality have more common topics, their cultures are the same, what they celebrate are the same, their backgrounds are the same." Collective behaviors observed from a group or groups of nationals are sometimes inferred as the behavior of the whole nation. Like the situation in many shore societies, the synchronization of "people," "culture" and "nationality" or "ethnicity" exists in the minds of many seafarers: a particular nationality or ethnicity is seen as having a people with particular customs, language(s), mindsets and behaviors.

However, constant contacts with seafarers of different nationalities can lead some seafarers into rethinking their ethnic stereotyping. Consequently, their essentialism may be broken down, enhancing cross-cultural acceptance, tolerance or understanding. A seafarer said, "Yes, working as a seafarer has increased my acceptance to different people because I see more things through the job." But the fact is that in today's de-ethnic seafaring environment, there are few opportunities for seafarers to ethnically exchange with others. Shore leave is much restricted and seafarers are losing their opportunities to see and experience the foreign. The shipboard environment, where work and ship design have been largely standardized, socialization reduced and controls on seafarer bodies maintained, is also not encouraging multinational seafarers to experience their multinationality. A sense of "United Nations" is typically reduced to knowing "the number of nationalities on board" and functionally working with different nationalities. The neoliberal system, in this sense, seems to impose limitations on ethnic amalgamation but enhance control over them.

With such a job nature in the contemporary era, generalizations are still likely to be drawn by seafarers on the behavioral patterns and mindsets of others to negotiate differences and uncertainties. This kind of generalization can have been initiated at the early stage of the whole enrollment process of a seafarer. A graduate from a maritime institute told me that his instructors at school "taught" them "the characteristics of different nationals in the seafaring world." Similarly, a Filipino seafarer mentioned that the instructor at his maritime school advised them to be careful of Russians and Greeks because "the way Russians and Greeks express themselves is different from us Filipinos." Such inculcation of stereotypes is only paving the path for pre-employment to the world of "others", who are all in the same occupational group but whose presumed particularities are something that one should be wary to deal with.

Such ideas of "us" and "them" delineate and reinforce the ethnic boundaries between different seafarers. The result is often stereotypical sayings about seafarers of different nationalities such as "Filipinos are friendly, cooperative, kind, obedient, hard-working" and "easy to work with and handle," "Germans like to drink," "Chinese English [the English language ability of Chinese] is not good," "Russians are difficult to deal with," "Americans are too individualistic" and "full of themselves" and "Eastern Europeans are more conservative, suspicious, sensitive and more difficult to get acquainted with." These stereotypes, pejorative or complimentary, are simplifying realities. What is intriguing is that some shipping participants, such as agents and seafarers themselves, circumstantially essentialize these stereotypes even if they are aware of their short-sightedness. Stereotypes can act as sources for seafarers to imagine primordial national dispositions, especially when they are away from home and put into interactions with crewmembers of a variety of nationalities: stereotypes

can help them present themselves in a nationally pluralistic setting. In the competitive labor market, certain positive stereotypes are also manipulated by some as an instrument to distinguish a national group from others, emphasizing their selectively constructed, marketable strengths and the relative weaknesses of other nationalities.

At the same time, a sense of hierarchy is not only embedded in the job structure but sometimes also believed in terms of nationality. One seafarer thought that "Europeans, Koreans and Japanese are higher than Filipinos." Another seafarer said, "Some Europeans look down upon Chinese. But such discrimination happens within Europe as well. Some Germans look down upon Polish." Racism and prejudices are, however, rarely expressed explicitly, though they can be a cause of minor social divisions on board. Such divisions happen on many ships, and are tolerated as long as there is no serious antagonism that emerges between nationalities and hinders shipboard operation. In this regard, crew composition is an important factor in influencing social politics on board ship. For example, a seafarer working on board a mainland Chinese ship with people from other provinces said, "Other mainland seafarers from richer provinces think that we are poor and not very civilized. So there is a pattern that those from Shanghai stick together and we Hubei (湖北) people stick to one another in daily interactions." Relational issues between ethnic groups of the same nationality may be embodied by seafarers, especially when they are working in a single-nationality crew. "After all, a single nationality crew will inevitably be some sort of microcosm of the society from which it is drawn and might therefore carry within it the conflicts of that society" (Lane 2001). But if seafarers of the same nationality and different provinces or places of origin are put in another setting, that of multinational crews, they are often driven by their collective national identities instead of regional ones to group together. This is reflected by the Hong Kong

seafarers and mainland Chinese seafarers of various origins mingling together on board a ship I researched which had Southeast Asian and European seafarers as well. At that time, their larger "Chineseness" became more obvious than their regional differences. Previously perceived internal differences were transcended before the apparently greater differences with other nationalities.

In general, ethnic and national consciousness is not necessarily reduced but more typically reinforced through seafaring employment, despite the diversity of nationalities in the industry: "homeland" and "roots" are rarely forgotten through working in the globalized industry of seafaring. Nonetheless, in spite of all the aforementioned potential tensions among multinational seafaring crews, when asked to talk about social relationships on board, a Filipino third engineer said, "there is a mix of them and it is good," a sentiment echoed by many other informants in different interviews. With regard to this, stereotypes can even be socially constructive in some situations: while gossips may affect the reputation of other nationalities, social disparity is sometimes attributed to the incompatibility of different national groups instead of focusing on individuals. In other words, if a certain national is not socially compatible with other crewmembers, the latter may refer to his nationality and cultural differences as the reason, instead of directing their criticism against the individual. Thinking "they are like that" and "that's why they cannot get along with us" explains and rationalizes these social divisions. Social harmony can thereby be maintained to some degree, since blame is diverted from the personal to the "unchangeable" national or ethnic. In exceptions, in which seafarers of different nationalities mingle well socially, the explanation is attributed back to the personal, that the personalities of these seafarers are agreeable and nationality is no longer a "barrier."

Seafarer informants said that they preferred to work with more nationalities because there would be "no majority and minority" in their crew. It is also because of the small crew size nowadays that, given more nationalities, it becomes "meaningless" to form isolating social groups among the multinational working teams, as a seafarer commented to me. When there are fewer nationalities, for instance on board a ship with a crew size of 20 people and two nationalities, each represented by 10 people, social separation is likely to be formed between these two groups of nationals. This is particularly obvious when the two nationalities are also divided by ranks: when officers and ratings are of two nationality groups and so national division parallels hierarchical division. But when there are, say, 5 nationalities on board a ship with 20 crewmembers and each nationality is represented by 4 people, if social separations are to be formed along nationality lines, there will be 5 social groups, each dividing themselves from one another. This kind of separation is what the seafarer informant described as "meaningless." Social divisions by nationality become less obvious as compared with binary crews. Most seafarers prefer to work in a crew with less internal opposition, and thus a crew with a broader blend of nationalities.

Photo 5.2: Engineers on their watch inside the engine room. Seafarers usually wear uniforms at work and the department they belong to can be noticed immediately.

The Familiar Strangers

Occupational socialization and enculturation into the seafaring world often started before seafarers join the industry, through education and training at institutes and job screening. "When we were third-year college students of a maritime academy, our employment agent visited our school to interview us. They were recruiting just before the end of the school year," said a Filipino seafarer. In this way, cultural shock will be less likely to happen when a new seafarer gets onboard.

Regulations and norms in the workplaces are explicitly laid down in written rules and implicitly understood as the way things are done in the company, on the ship and

within the shipping industry. Even if one's seafaring experience is shaped by job rank, nationality and many other factors, the nature of the seafaring industry invariably governs and affects everyone employed in a more or less common way. Making constant adaptations to new ships and new crewmembers is an example of this. Having been employed in the industry, most seafarers have come to accept the logic of their sea life. Although they generally do not know each other personally, they may find each other "familiar" as they are facing similar working, living and social scenarios which help them reconcile differences in a world of familiar strangers:

> Regardless of crew nationality, a fundamental feature of modern ships is that, although they do not house organic communities marked by population or social network continuities, crews of complete strangers nevertheless find familiar, integrating social mechanisms. The familiar and limited number of shipboard roles, the boundaries of permissible variation in role performance, the simplicity of formal and normative rules patterning shipboard conduct are universal and, therefore, create the essential conditions for making the transfer of people between ships possible – a necessary requirement in the context of discontinuous, casual employment contracts and mixed nationality crews of unpredictable permutations (Alderton et. al. 2004: 97).

Standardization thus plays a role in uniting various participants in a global industry, and is realized in shipboard ranks, job performances, conduct rules and seafaring experiences. Crewmembers live and work together in an environment that is characterized by "vibration, sea motion and engine noise" (Alderton et. al. 2004: 107), which can lead to discomfort, disturbances to sleeping quality and other physical and

psychological effects. They are all facing isolation while shouldering heavy workload pressures, physical and mental fatigue, and boredom from the monotony of work. These commonalities affecting everybody employed in the seafaring industry, if to different degrees, also form the foundation for seafarers to relate to one another. And most of the time, the ones they go through these conditions together with are their shipmates and nobody else. A sense of fellowship is thus likely to transcend much animosity within a crew as division of labor and cooperation are crucial for crewmembers to live on board. "In the case of fire you call the fire department, easy enough as long as you are ashore. On a ship we have to fight the fire ourselves" (Aladdin 2002). Another seafarer said, "Every day when we are on board, we have to be ready for 24 hours. Although there is the shift system, during emergencies, everyone still needs to work." Cooperation at work is not simply a matter of working for wages but also a matter of life and death at sea in the absence of immediate help and the presence of industrial dangers.

A shipboard crew is like a totality in that a mistake or contribution made by one crewmember may affect every crewmember on board. The structure of shipboard duties is such that every role is interdependent. Each worker is provided with a job title and this is how his role is defined; individual seafarers, regardless of their nationalities, are largely replaceable in the seafaring industry. One knows his scope of job responsibilities by the title, and the whole ship of three departments operates as a functional organization when enough entitled workmen are present. New crewmembers can easily familiarize themselves with their tasks in the new but familiar shipboard environment during their new voyages. Idiosyncratic characteristics, other than working qualities, are rather irrelevant to the basic functionality of a ship. In the end, what counts most in creating solidarity on board is

not individual agency but rather the different social roles in the shipboard social structure. This social structure is a sum of mutually defined social statuses of which seafarers are each individual embodiments.[46]

Photo 5.3: The mess room for ratings on shipboard, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 31 July 2006. There is usually one mess room for ratings and one mess room for officers; but in some cases, officers will choose to dine with their subordinates in the rating mess room, and these officers are often of the same nationality and department as the ratings.

[46] When asked to say which shipboard department is more important, a navigation officer said, "They are all important in their own sense. We cannot navigate without the engineers. They control the electricity and engine. A ship cannot operate without them. So are they unable to move the ship without us. And the cook is the one who gives us what to eat. So don't offend him or he will make us some nasty food."

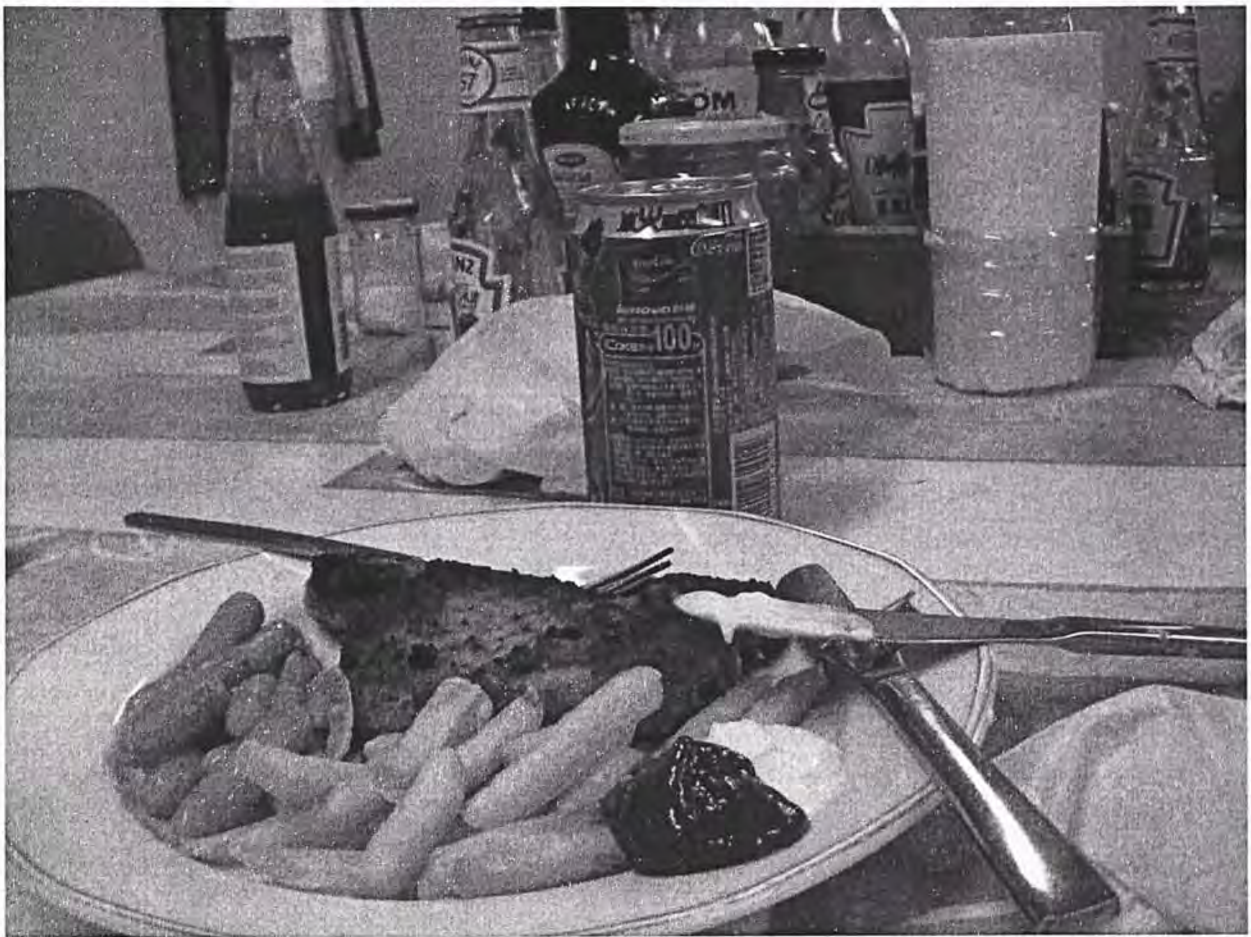

Photo 5.4: Potatoes or rice? Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 23 November 2006. Two major styles of meals are often prepared on board to cater for the dining tastes of different nationalities. Sometimes, more specific cuisines will be served, depending on the crew composition, food supplies and other factors.

Dining and Other Scarce Opportunities for Social Interactions

Based on the instructions and resources provided by the ship operator and higher-ranked crewmembers such as the captain, the cook in a seafaring team is responsible for ordering food supplies, menu design and serving meals on a daily basis. "The phasing out of chief stewards has meant that nowadays chief cooks are often responsible for ordering supplies as well as providing meals on a daily basis" (Sampson and Thomas 2000). On board some ships with reduced crew sizes, the cook

is the only one in the culinary department, catering for the dining needs of the whole crew. Many seafarer informants were quite expressive about the topic of food on board. One of them said:

> Good food really makes a big difference to our life on board. It makes you look forward to meal times after working. . . . What is good food? Basically more choices of reasonable qualities, more fruits and vegetables served fresh. But food quality varies from ship to ship. Sometimes the cook makes us a variety of nice food on board. Sometimes, after a long time at sea, the store runs out of fresh supplies and we keep eating frozen stuff day after day. In all cases, we have to depend on the cook to supply us something edible.

Although the quality of food varies from ship to ship and within a voyage, food on board is generally of reasonable quality as seafarers commented. Talking about food, one seafarer said, "There is a kitchen and a cook making food three times a day. . . . We eat in the mess room and this is the only time you have a chance to meet all the crew at the same time. Otherwise it's just sleeping and working, never any time for something fun. So the meals are important" (Aladdin 2002). This is supported by many other seafarers' emphasis on the food. "When shore people finish work, they can go to a restaurant, a karaoke club or bar, a supermarket or the cinema. We can't do that," said a seafarer.

Food on board, as in many other social contexts, is rich in symbolic significance. Dining is an official occasion for communal gatherings and informal chatting. Meal times are one of the few opportunities for social interactions on board. Especially in today's seafaring world in which isolation has been intensified, having meals together

becomes an important social ritual of the day:

> While issues of nutritional value and the provision of balanced diets aboard ships are undoubtedly important, dining also provides a crucial opportunity for social contact at sea. At a time when crewing levels are declining and ships are operating to tighter deadlines, seafarers frequently experience periods of isolation and loneliness. Modern seafarers often work alone or in conditions that prohibit conversation. After work they may be too tired to take advantage of whatever opportunities to socialise exist aboard which, in any case, may be limited. Meeting together at meal times may be the only situation where seafarers are able to converse, share a joke or story, and develop a sense of camaraderie (Sampson and Thomas 2000).

Seafarers typically have their meals in the mess rooms instead of their own cabins.[47] Since they spend the rest of the day working and resting individually, dining is one of the few chances for crew members to socially gather in the same space. Food is also a symbol of showing respect to diversified cultural needs and relieving the feeling of loneliness at sea. A director in a shipping organization said:

> The people on board always try to organize some social activities. But one thing they should make sure is that the right food is going to be prepared so that they don't feel too much alone. There are many different dining styles in the seafaring world. Normally the cook is the one who makes the decision on what to be prepared and what to be served. But the captain will instruct the cook. If the

[47] Another reason for seafarers not having their meals in their cabins is that their cabins are situated on different floors and it is not convenient for them to carry their plates up and down.

> captain has a multicultural crew, he'll make sure that the people get fed according to their needs.

Shipping companies, captains and cooks on board are usually aware of the diverse dining needs of multinational seafarers. To satisfy the tastes of an often ethnically diversified crew, two sets of food choices, "Western-style" (potato-based) and "Eastern-style" (rice-based), are typically prepared. But cooks also need to know how to prepare food of more specific styles when necessary, e.g. a Filipino cook may know how to make Polish food for the Polish crewmembers on board, as a seafarer said. Another seafarer told me:

> There are different kinds of food to eat on board different ships. The thing is, whether you are going to like it or not. In general, the food on board is provided according to the local flavors of a crew. Hence, local cuisines. On one of my ships, the lunch was Western and the dinner was Eastern. When I worked in another shipping company, it was different. There were more Chinese. Both meals could be Chinese.

Given food choices, seafarers tend to choose the one that is closer to the food style of their home country. Such choice can be an identity marker for a seafarer in a shipboard context that is non-ethnically specific. But a seafarer still has the freedom to try a dining style that is different and to learn about various cuisines from his colleagues. A British seafarer described his experience of tasting Indian cuisine:

> I used to sail with an Indian crew. It was absolutely fascinating. We had lot of

curries: curry for breakfast, curry for lunch and curry for dinner. The crew cook gets up at 3 o'clock in the morning, making freshly baked chapattis. They tasted wonderful. It gave you a very good understanding of the Indian cuisine. It's not so much a cultural shock to me at all.

In such cases, dining on board opens up opportunities for social contacts and learning about "others": their food and associated customs as well as memorable dining experiences. "Some captains bought special local food for us, for example, when we berthed in Mexico," said a Dutch cadet. The Mexican food he tried was one of the few cultural experiences achievable under limited shore leave. During a voyage, special social events with food themes are sometimes held. These barbeques and parties usually have high attendance rates, and are often elaborately prepared; crews may join in setting up the lights, tables and decorations (Sampson and Thomas 2000). Although these food occasions may not be frequent, they provide important opportunities for crewmembers to relax and socialize. Some food events are nonetheless considered as "ethnic" for a particular group and so do not involve everyone on board. For example, on board a ship under a Hong Kong shipping company which had Chinese, Filipino and European seafarers, only the Chinese seafarers celebrated the Eve of Lunar New Year by dining together at a table. Food, on occasion, can be a reason for social division on board. On one ship where there were mainly Europeans and Thais, Thai food was served by the cook but was regarded by the European seafarers as "too spicy" and "inedible." Out of "concern for different people's dining preferences," the Thais were arranged to eat in a separate dining area "to make all people happy and satisfied," as a seafarer said.

Menu content and dining settings are also reflections of the crew composition,

ethnic power and shipboard hierarchy. For example, most ships have two mess rooms, one for officers and one for ratings. Such an arrangement encourages seafarers of different job ranks to dine separately and reinforces rank division. On board one ship, certain officers and the electrician were ordered to dine together to "enhance relationships and efficiency of work." The relevant notice on the ship proclaimed, "To maintain the harmonious relationship amongst officers considering working efficiently as one team on board, Second, Third Officer . . . are hereby directed to dine and take their regular meals at the officer's mess and will occupy the third table effective 10 June 2006." Non-official dining times are sometimes manipulated officially to spatially arrange seafarers in accordance with work concerns. Moreover, captains often exercise control over the content of the menus. Their personal dining preferences are often catered for. The rest of the crewmembers, especially ratings, have little control over the specifics of the food provided. Some captains still have stewards serving them: on board one ship, the captain sitting at his table rang a bell to call a steward. But not all ships employ stewards and, based on my observation, cooks often serve the officers and captains with plates of food while ratings choose and help themselves.

Off-duty time after meals is often solitary for seafarers. Most seafarer informants seek social gatherings even if they are occasional. On one ship, a number of seafarers proudly showed me the photos of their fishing together. Playing music and singing karaoke are some other examples of communal activities at sea. The captain and senior officers among a crew play an important role in initiating social gatherings and social mixing for the crew as a whole. A seafarer said:

Normally there's a bit of separation between ranks. But if you find there's too

> great a separation, then it's because the people in charge don't really know what to do with that. So they maintain the separation, to maintain an aura of mystery for the higher-ranked. I have sailed on ships on which I have masters showing an aura of superiority. You can see they have no idea of what they are doing.

When lower-ranked seafarers like him happen to work on board a ship with a strong hierarchical sense, they are less likely to engage in more social mixing on board but rather try to adapt to whatever leadership style is played by the higher-ranked seafarers. But when the higher-ranked seafarers are encouraging socialization across ranks, the picture is different, as this Dutch seafarer indicated:

> We have barbeques on board. I sometimes help to prepare the potatoes. On special days, for example, the birthday of a crewmember or Christmas, we have parties. Some of us fish. I sit around, watch DVDs, play cards and play table tennis with others. The captain sometimes invites us to the swimming pool.[48] He's like "hey, let's go." And we drink beer together.

Indeed, a seafaring team that has socialization opportunities outside work is likely to establish stronger team spirit and morale in working. The hardware of the ship does not change during a social gathering, but the nature of the shipboard environment changes, which gives rise to deeper social interactions and relationships. It is also an occasion when other forms of communications take place:

A senior officer later told me that a party, including the New Year party, was not

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[48] Some of the most well-furnished ships have swimming pools. The quality of shipboard facilities and their settings differ from ship to ship. Since seafarers are not registered to be based on particular ships, they come across ships of different qualities in their working experiences.

limited to the release of physical fatigue but played a role in alleviating or removing psychological pressure caused by interpersonal or interdepartmental stresses. It was also a good time for the captain and chief engineer to pick up important information which they might not necessarily get through formal channels (Wu 2007).

As the shipboard hierarchy is blurred, ratings, for example, may find it more comfortable to chat with officers during a party. It also enhances communications among different crewmembers. These communications are beneficial for building better working relationships after the party, though all these construction of teamwork is, what I call, contractual.

End of Contractual Friendships

When asked whether nationality is important to him, a German chief engineer said, "No, not at all. I like Filipinos. They are friendly and hard-working. I can understand them well. Yes, I am a German. But I don't like Germans. They drink and when they get drunk, it's a problem." At this time he was just having lunch with the Filipino captain and chitchatting with Filipino shipmates who passed by. He was a seafarer from a developed country, paid at a higher wage level and at the senior officer position. Working in a shipping company that employed mostly Filipinos and others from developing countries, he was used to supervising them as his subordinates; he communicated with them in English, a second language to all of them. In spite of these factors, he managed to build up friendships with his non-German shipmates. Such cases of crossing nationalities to make friends and establish affinity are not rare in the seafaring industry regardless of all the potential economic and cultural tensions

among mixed-nationality crews. Nevertheless, there is usually a limit to every friendship made and also every incompatibility encountered.

Crews are isolated societies once a ship sets sail. The membership of a ship is decided every time it calls at a port, when there may be new seafarers who sign in and old seafarers who sign off. Then this newly formed seafaring group stays unchanged for days, weeks or even months before the ship calls at another port, and another round of compositional change may take place. The odds are that coworkers employed on different contracts may never meet each other again in their lifetime after one voyage. In other words, shipboard encounters are "contractual" as well, which can rarely substitute for the social support from home. A seafarer said:

> On board there must be some "friends." But are we opening hearts to each other? Not necessarily. Everyone works for a contract: nine months, eight months or seven months. You might not come across friends made in previous contracts. We could have been trained together and gone on board together. But when I returned, they hadn't returned. Our contract terms were different. Or the times we went aboard were different, and we needed to queue up to be appointed again after we returned.

As I earlier discussed, shipboard hierarchy, power controls, wage motivation, and the job nature of seafaring coerce social harmony on board. However, this does not mean that contract-based seafarers are ordered to make friends with their colleagues. Showing goodwill without hostility to others for practical reasons is not equivalent to feeling attached to others with affection and esteem during a voyage. However, given the fluidity of employment and appointment in the seafaring industry

and the international origins of seafaring labor, it is a fact that any friendships made on board can hardly be maintained after one shared voyage ends. A seafarer may make friends with others from different countries but when they leave the shipboard space and return to their respective home spaces, they are usually separated by thousands of miles. Even if they manage to keep in touch during this leave period through means such as the Internet, they will soon be working on board again, usually at different times and on different ships. Another round of social isolation begins with a new voyage. A seafarer said, "As we do not work together with the same group of people in every contract, people I meet on board can hardly become my intimate friends. Leaving the ship, we won't know when we can meet again. I only keep in contact with my previous marine schoolmates but not previous workmates." Friends he made on shore were the only friends with whom he could keep in touch. Characterized by discontinuities and transience, the social relationships on board, harmonious they may seem, are typically ephemeral and temporary as instrumental arrangements. "Friendships end at the gateway" is an aphorism in the seafaring world that embodies the reality of social relationships on board (Kahveci, Lane and Sampson 2002: 9). Frictional, distant or comradely, it all ends there.[49]

Chapter Summary

The distribution of nationalities in the shipboard job hierarchy is not completely random. While seafarers from developing countries are over-represented in the industry in all job ranks, a dwindling number of those from developed countries are

[49] Seafarers are not the only occupational group whose social relationships with colleagues are subject to contractual arrangements. Many other workers of companies, projects etc. who are bound together by contractual employment also face discontinuity of social relationships after their employment ends. The uniqueness I emphasize in this thesis is seafarers' recurring, short cycles of engagement with familiar strangers of a great variety of nationalities; and how the strong network of shipping ownership, management, states and economies contrasts with seafarers' tenuous links to every party in the neoliberal industry.

concentrated in more senior posts. Wage differentials in the international labor market increase the management's control over their workers. Disparity is also underlined when nationals from developed countries with higher wage levels are represented at the officer level, supervising a team of those with lower wage levels from developing countries. Hierarchical job rank then coincides with hierarchical wage scale in a "colonial" sense.

In the standardization project of shipbuilding, containerization and labor requirements, the language for communications has also been unified in the industry. English, the industrial language, is not a native language for most seafarers. As they conform to the formalization of communications at work, both "language" and "culture" are attributed as reasons for social distance in practice. Highest effectiveness in communication is typically achieved when conversers use a language of their highest proficiency, including contextual understanding of cultural knowledge. In most cases, this often does not apply to the shipboard English communications.

The punishment system in the seafaring industry, manifested in hierarchical surveillance and allied networks to blacklist disobedient seafarers, has rendered most seafarers docile and agreeable. Such industrial discipline has been internalized by seafarers as well through passive recognition of the industrial nature of seafaring and through their own self-disciplining. Through peacemaking strategies, obedience and discipline at work have also been actively practiced by seafarers themselves to maintain their own meanings of seamanship.

The constant interactions with new shipmates of diversified backgrounds do not always lead to greater inter-ethnic understanding. Various degrees of stereotypes still exist in the minds of many seafarers, acting as distinguishers in a world of diversity: they can be instrumental for differentiation of working qualities, emphasizing

imaginations of ethnic differences and de-emphasizing social incompatibilities. In practice, the social politics among a multinational crew depends on factors such as the number of nationalities and personality combinations. The overall atmosphere of shipboard crews tends to be harmonious though.

Shipping is a mega-scale industry, standardized and predictable. This fact does not merely facilitate business control but also assists seafarers in coming into terms in a world of familiar strangers, bringing coherence within tensions, and developing a sense of camaraderie through the crucible of sea life. It also enables some seafarers to establish cross-ethnic friendships and appreciation. Meal and party times are significant shipboard opportunities for social interactions and reinforcement of social solidarity. The end of a job contract, however, objectively puts an end to nearly every relationship established at sea.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

From Chapter I to Chapter V, this thesis has proceeded in its study of seafaring from the general to the specific at four levels: shipping developments, meanings of seafaring, social alienation and shipboard camaraderie. It has moved from an overall picture of shipping, through management and organization into the port, and onto the ship itself. To understand seafaring more comprehensively, I have briefly made diachronic comparisons of seafaring lives across recent decades, and synchronic comparisons across various nationalities and job ranks. I now recapitulate some of the major points of the thesis.

The Container Ship and Seafarers

A container ship is a unique man-made space, for it is moving yet bounded, global yet local, diversified yet unified, and a potent symbol of globalization and de-globalization. It is, in effect, a social experiment for humanity. Seafarers are a working class educated, trained and assembled from different parts of the world. They are controlled by networks of shipping management, by their own pursuits of improvement for their families, and by the nature of seafaring requiring cooperation on board.

The ocean-going shipping industry has itself undergone internationalization by forming more cross-national connections such as the establishment of Asia-Pacific trade routes and the extensive, yet footloose, recruitment of many different nationalities of seafarers: 150 in all, by one count (Wu 2002). After the Wars, dismantlement of trade barriers has helped create a global economy with unprecedented integration and exchange, and so growth of international trade and

freight rates. The 1970s to 1980s was, in retrospect, a period of fermentation of global time-space compression (Harvey 1989) and distanciation (Gidden 1990) of shipping in response to industrial economic crisis. Technologically, the international usage of standardized containers, mechanization and automation, and economically, flexible accumulation in the practice of flags of convenience and mixed nationality crewing based on the principle of neoliberalism, all transformed the shipping industry during the late 20th century. These economic and technological developments of the shipping industry and the ensuing rise in seaborne world trade have been mixed blessings for seafarers, as ship operators strategically deploy business capital to gain economies of scale, workers, on the other hand, do not enjoy a similar degree of flexibility but rather, have their employment terms being subjected to their citizenship and conditions in the labor market.

Shipowners of traditional maritime countries have outsourced much of their business operation to third-party shipping management, with representative crewing agencies scattered in different parts of the world to extract human resources. While it is mandatory to submit the operation of a ship to a legal regime, flag states are often utilized as a means to economic ends by the neoliberal shipping businesses. Such business organization reinforces the world order of economic division between the core and peripheral countries (Wallerstein 1974). It is a result of developmental changes in the larger modernization process of the market-oriented global economy, in the face of intensifying industrial competition and boosting by governments' policies of foreign trade.

Sea transport has always played a dominant role in cargo carriage throughout human history. Containerization is however a major breakthrough in modern logistic development. In recent decades, container shipping has established itself as one of the

most gigantic cross-national industries of the world. As an emblem of the global economy, container shipping is undoubtedly a lifeline in the worldwide traffic of imports, exports and re-exports. Container ships are one of the major production sites of shipping services that carry valuable merchandise for people on shore. Different container ships are like different locales with definite boundaries of physical territory. They are all, however, sailing in the same sea of globalized trade: an ocean-going container ship sailing on the labyrinthine routes of sea trade is embedded in a mega-system of maritime parties e.g. flag states, shipowners, shipping management, traders, port states and crewing agencies. On the sea of economic opportunities, a container ship is plying through the world oceans all year long until it stops functioning for maintenance and is finally scrapped. Not even situated in the lands where seafarers belong, the container ship is a factory that is always mobile on an open expanse.

Sourced and screened from different parts of the world, the global workforce for international shipping is distinguished by its diversity of composition. The composition of workers on board a particular ship is always changing. An individual seafarer is defined by his role in any of the three departments on board, which outlines his function, position, scope of activities and extent of say in a crew. The workplace is also the dwelling place for seafarers passing through the uncertainties of the nature, with other ships that occasionally pass by and very rare human interactions with anyone other than the shipmates they are confined with.

Ports, which are the bridging zones between a ship and the larger shore world, have their landscape, locations and nature altered under containerization. Efficiency of transshipping at intermodal container ports has truncated port stays from days to hours. Within this period, seafarers are under time pressure to finish all the necessary

operations for quick turnaround rates. Privatized ports are restricted and dangerous areas that usually lack infrastructural transportation. New ports are often constructed in remote areas far away from cities, which further limits seafarers' ability to experience life on foreign shores. Making a phone call inside or near the port areas has become one of the few affordable shore activities, in terms of time and money.

Globalization of freight has not only expanded international trade and information exchange, but also spread concerns over port security. International legislation set up with the aim of combating terrorism has sometimes labeled seafarers as potential terrorists while burdening them with extra security work to safeguard the industry. It does so without ruling out the possibility of seafarers themselves being attacked by e.g. pirates. In some cases, certain ethnicities are stigmatized as high-risk and their right for shore leave is deprived. The shipping industry has been facilitating the flows of shipments but not the international mobility of seafarers.

The standard of shipboard amenities has generally been improved but the isolation seafarers experience has been intensified. Crewing levels have been reduced to a minimum. Shift duties under the watch system and single-person tasking have further made seafaring work unsocial. Shipboard satellite communications with the shore world are too costly for many seafarers. Internet access is limited as it is often restricted to business uses and more available to higher-ranked seafarers. Telephone services are often absent at high sea, keeping many seafarers out of touch. With various controls on seafarers' working and living behavior in the shipboard space, the seafaring job entails a sense of imprisonment and de-socialization for many seafarers. The very process of containerization has also contained seafarers for maximum extraction of their labor in an integrated system of censorship on board. Captain's reports, blacklisting by agents, and other domination of labor are legitimized by

competition in the labor market and by the wages that seafarers receive. The containerized seafarers, like containers, are always being transported according to their job orders and constantly being checked until they leave the industry or until they become industrially worthless. Each single container has its own route of transportation and destination to be reached. For seafarers, their final destination is their home on shore.

In the information age, seafaring life has been disenchanted as a way to see and explore the world, partly due to other affordable alternatives. Its lustre of earning a high salary, particularly for people in developed countries, has also been reduced with the disclosure of hardships at sea and the economic opportunities on shore. This leads to a generational fault in the labor of the developed world, as their seafaring population is aging and new blood is lacking. Many elder and retired seafarers also do not encourage the younger generation to follow suit and live a solitary life away from home. The decaying industrial workforce of the traditional maritime countries is substituted by lower-wage labors who compete for the potentially hazardous and alienating job.

In exact details, the seafaring job can mean differently to, for instance, a Thai and a British. And yet, among a variety of contemporary meanings for seamanship, it is generally regarded as a sacrifice that is given meaning through earning income to support one's family --- a work ethic shared by seafarer employees of various nationalities. Filipinos, who have become the largest nationality group in the seafaring workforce, illustrate how familial background and the economic situation of their home country act as important background factors for them to become seafarers. This process requires financial and technical investments in advance. Although certification for qualification has been standardized, seafarers' promotion in the

industry is constrained by their degree of financial resourcefulness and company policies. And once they are enrolled, their specialization and professionalization in a highly skillful industry at sea limit their career choices on shore if they retreat.

In spite of the great diversity of nationalities in the seafaring workforce, the representation of nationals from developed and developing countries in the job hierarchy has been disproportionate. Developing countries are over-represented in all ranks of the job hierarchy and developed countries over-represented in the higher ranks. Multinational seafarers are also subject to contractual and wage differentiation, which means their wages and contractual terms are usually based on their nationalities. In addition, imperfect communications in English, an industrial language that is not the mother-tongue of most seafarers, is another problem contemporary seafarers encounter. Coming from different ethnic backgrounds and put together in the same seafaring setting, seafarers of different nationalities have different cultural knowledge, habits and identifications. This can also be a factor of social division on board. Perceived ethnic affinities often draw people with similar backgrounds together and repulse those of different backgrounds.

While communication gaps are not something that the employers engineer, they do serve the interests of those in command: adding to the difficulty of concerted actions for labor rights by the crews. And while containers are loaded and lashed onto ships, socio-cultural elements from the shore can also be transported by seafarers to the sea. Seafarers are themselves nationally and socio-culturally shaped beings. Working in the seafaring industry may enhance cross-cultural understandings, but it does not necessitate the breaking down of essentialist ideas about nationalities, greater acceptance of cultural differences or reduced ethnic consciousness. The contemporary working and living conditions on board have allowed few opportunities for

inter-ethnic understanding among seafarers except in, for example, exchanging dining choices and holding parties. The degree of social mixing on board is also subject to hierarchy: higher-ranked seafarers have more power to influence shipboard socialization.

Seafarers possess and exercise an interplay of occupational, socio-cultural, national and gender identities through their seafaring jobs. The actual social relationships on board ship depends on the social chemistry of personality mixes between different culturally-shaped individuals, as well as other factors in crew composition e.g. the number of nationalities. For example, crews with two nationalities are usually more oppositional than crews with many nationalities. Members of the same crew in the same shipboard environment can have different degrees of exposure to cultural differences. Subsequently, the effects on their worldviews vary. In any case, the shipboard space is hierarchical, multiethnic and usually more or less harmonious, a phenomenon that is actually conduced by the exigencies of the neoliberal system.

Seafarers are not footloose adventurers but deterritorialized workers reterritorialized and compartmentalized in the mobilizing spaces of ship factories (see Inda and Rosaldo 2002). They are migrant workers suspended in a floating machine at sea (McKay 2004), a large area of which is international waters that open and transcend physical and political boundaries, extended to the world's continents but belonging to no country. A seafaring crew resembles factory labor temporarily arranged to work and live together as a functional team. Employed seafarers are disciplined and self-disciplined to perform obediently at work, subdued by the norms and rules of the shipping industry. They are generally very conscious and informed of the job nature and industrial environment of shipping. Socialization and enculturation

into the seafaring world have usually started before a seafarer works on board through education at maritime institutes and other means. To fulfill their working goals, seafarers abide by industry rules, endure hardships at sea, and avoid causing disharmony within their crew, which is unsuitable given the investments and struggles many of them have made to be enrolled and promoted, or just to try to save up enough money to in order to leave the industry.

However, the similarities that multinational seafarers of all backgrounds and job ranks share by working in this standardized, international shipping world, e.g. the objective facts of dangers and hardships at sea, exert uniting power for many seafarers to support each other especially in times of distress and trouble. The fundamental meanings of seamanship are also one thing that most seafarers of different nationalities can relate to each other. The social costs of seafaring are also an issue all seafarers, regardless of job rank, nationality and background, bear in common. Seafarers make contractual encounters on board, and are separated by time and distance after one contract. From familiarity to acquaintanceship, to even friendship to the end at the gangway, multinational seafarers are working in cycles of arrival, departure and isolated hard work, until finally they are unloaded from the ship and land in their own separate worlds.

Sailing Forward

A shipowner spokesperson discussed the development of the shipping industry, saying, "It's always changing. It's a very dynamic environment. You shouldn't just compare the situation now to that in the 1990s. You really have to compare it now to the way that seafaring has changed over the decades, the last 40 or 50 years." To understand the seafaring situation, it is necessary to investigate the changing conditions of the

global economy, international trade, and power relations. The international shipping industry is founded on transnational networks of political economies with a web of maritime parties and organizations. Therefore, any changes in the political, economic and technological environment are likely to ripple their effects to the rest of the shipping industry, which then channels down to the lives and working conditions of seafarers.

The overall development of the shipping industry in recent maritime history appears to be a good augury for its foreseeable future. Unprecedented growth of international trade in the latest decades, rising world populations and demands, continuous techno-economic developments, and connections between polities all provide the industry with a long-standing impetus:

> Throughout the last century the shipping industry has seen a general trend of increases in total trade volume. Increasing industrialisation and the liberalisation of national economies have fuelled free trade and a growing demand for consumer products. Advances in technology have also made shipping an increasingly efficient and swift method of transportation. Over the last four decades total seaborne trade estimates have quadrupled, from just over 8 thousand billion tonne-miles in 1968 to over 32 thousand billion tonne-miles in 2008 (The Round Table of International Shipping Associations 2010g).

The global financial crisis since 2007 may, however, have new implications for the shipping and seafaring industries. As the global economy has started picking up, the world order is rearranging itself.[50] A Polish engineer said he would recommend

[50] The rearrangement of world order is accompanied by rethinking of neoliberalism and

the ship engineering job to others: "There is an increasing amount of cargo from China. We need engineers. This job is excellent for the moment."

While on the surface, the whole international shipping industry is prospering from expanding international trade and economic connections, it is important to identify and distinguish who are the relative winners and losers in this process. The intentions of all these winners and losers are hardly accessible and generalized, but the effects of their actions are discernible. There are those with the power to extract business profits and benefits from globalization, economic liberalism and technological advancements. They are, however, subject to the fluctuations of the international market and business variables; there are the middle persons scattered in different regions of the world bridging the employers and the employees while taking advantages in the process; and there are the laboring mass with less power and flexibility to decide on their working situations. Seafarers are the human motor for the lucrative shipping industry. Nevertheless, blacklisting, labor competition, wage differentiation and isolation have all made seafarers vulnerable to labor exploitation and neglect by the shore world. As Nash (1983: x) puts it, "What may, from the point of view of industry, represent risk diversification may translate, for workers, into political and economic 'risk maximization'." Clearly, economic globalization with neoliberalistic characteristics does not spread equal shares of benefit to its every participant, but compartmentalizes mixed nationality seafarers into container shipboard locales, enforces social harmony among these occupational teams, and renders their employment precarious. Yet, for the million of seafarers who toil on the deck, in the engine room and kitchen, their long-term endurance at sea is often worthwhile, as the best lives they can make for themselves and their families in a

hyperglobalization, after the disastrous international financial crises in 1997 and 2008, and loopholes of the free market system are revealed.

globalizing neoliberal world.

Photo 6.1: Two engineers in their overalls, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, August 2006.

Photo 6.2: A seafarer on his gangway watch at the port, guarding at the end of the ladder that allows people to ascend from the port to the ship, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, August 2006. Visitors are required to write down their personal information before they can enter the ship.

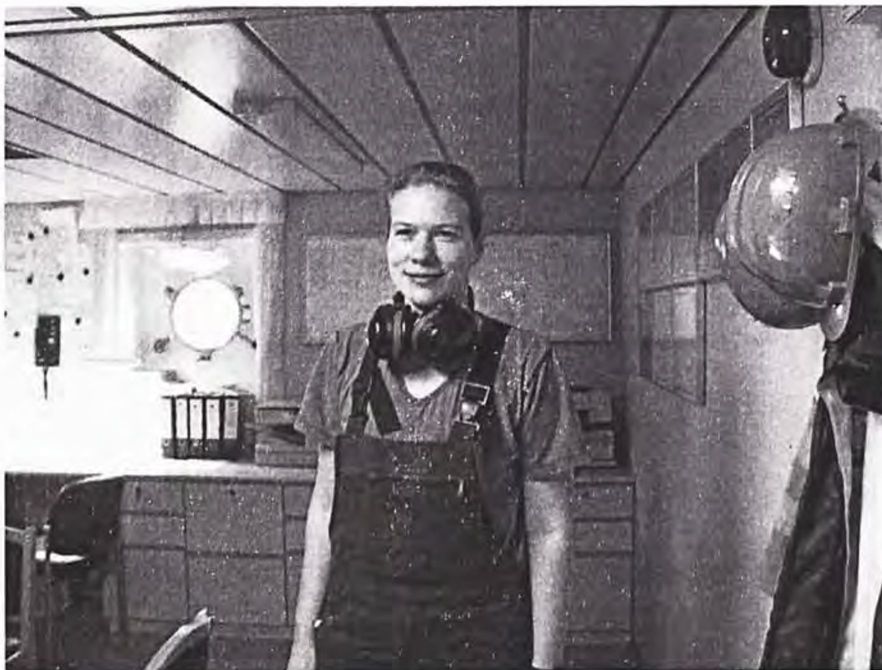

Photo 6.3: A female seafarer, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 6 November 2006.

Photo 6.4: A captain carrying out port duties, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, 6 November 2006. The badges on his shoulders, with specific number of stripes and other symbols, show his job position.

Photo 6.5: The maritime container terminals are operating day and night, Hong Kong Kwai Tsing Container Terminals, Hong Kong, October November 2006.

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Appendix

The following is a list of typical questions I asked in semi-structured interviews with seafarers. In actual interviews, questioning often did not exactly follow the sequence but depended on seafarers' responses and other factors such as the availability of time:

Living and Working Life

Labor
What is your job position?
What are your responsibilities on board?
What do you think about your job?
Why do you work as a seafarer?
How did you become employed?
What qualities one should have to become a seafarer?
Would you recommend this job to others?

Industry
How old are you?
How long have you been working in this industry?
How long will you continue working in this industry?
Did you see any changes of the industry over the years?[51]
What do you think about the shipping industry?

Management
What is the flag of this ship?
What are the facilities on board?
What do you think about these facilities?
Who are the owner and operator of this ship?
What do you think about them?
How much do you get paid?
What do you think about your wages?

[51] Even if the seafarer informant does not have many years of working experiences in the shipping industry, he may have heard and learnt about the changes of the industry over time e.g. from instructors at his maritime education and training institute or other seafarers in his family or community.

Social Life

Shore
What do you usually do at ports?
Can you leave the ship at ports and go out?

Dining
What do you usually have for meals?
Did you try out other cuisines?
Who do you usually meet at meal times?
What do you usually talk about with them?

Family
How do you keep in touch with your family?
What is it like when you return home?
What do your family and friends think about seafaring?

Shipmates
How many nationalities are on this ship and what are they?
How are the social relations on board?
Did you experience any cultural differences?
Is there any conflict or argument?
What do you think about your shipmates?
Did you make any friends?
Are there any social activities on board?
What do you think about other seafarers in the industry?

List of Abbreviations

AB	Able Seaman
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asia Nations
DIS	The Danish International Ship Register
EU	European Union
FOC	Flag of Convenience
GRT	Gross Registered Ton
ICS	International Chamber of Shipping
IDD	International Direct Dialing
ILO	The International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ISM	International Safety Management (Code)
ISPS	International Ship and Port Facility Security (Code)
ITF	The International Transport Workers' Federation
MET	Maritime Education and Training
NIS	The Norwegian International Ship Register
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFW	Overseas Filipino Workers
OS	Ordinary Seaman
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSC	Port State Control
SIRC	Seafarers International Research Centre
STCW	Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping 1978, Revised 1995

TEU	Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit
UMS	Unattended Machinery Space
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Table and Development

Glossary

AB	Able seaman. Unlicensed qualified seafarer of the navigation department. Junior to the Bosun and senior to Ordinary Seaman.
Admiralty Law	Maritime law.
Bosun	Unlicensed qualified seafarer of the navigation department. Also known as boatswain. Most senior among the ratings of the navigation department.
Bridge	The location with steering and commanding equipment on a ship.
Bunkering	Supplying fuel for the ship.
Cadet	Seafaring trainee who receives off- and on-the-job education and training.
Captain/Master	The person in charge of a ship. The highest position in the job hierarchy. The head of all departments.
Cargo	Can be bulk and non-bulk. Bulk cargoes are unpacked such as coal, grain and ore. Non-bulk cargoes are packed such as containers (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 33).
Charterer	Cargo owner or hirer of a ship from a shipowner (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 33).
Chief Engineer (Officer)	The head of the engineering department. Licensed qualified seafarer.
Chief Mate/Officer	The head of the navigation department. Licensed

	qualified seafarer.
Civil Ensign	The flag a ship flies through governmental or private registries which denotes its country of registration i.e. flag state.
Classification Society	A non-governmental organization that regulates the standards of ships.
Consignee	The receiver of shipment in a contract of carriage.
Consignor	The sender of shipment in a contract of carriage.
Container Terminal	Site for container transshipping with handling and storage facilities, information technology and berths for docking ships.
Crew	A functional team of seafarers, with respective job positions in the shipboard hierarchy.
Culinary/Catering/Steward's Department	One of the three major shipboard departments. Provide catering services to the rest of the crewmembers. Their main working area is the galley.
Engineering Department	One of the three major shipboard departments. Responsible for the proper functioning of marine propulsion and other mechanics on board. Their main working area is the engine control room.
Entrepôt	A centre for transshipping.
Fitter	Unlicensed qualified seafarer of the engineering department. One whose main responsibility is to "fit" the engine and other machinery i.e. to modify through machining.

FOC	Flag of convenience. Also known as open registry. Registry of a ship to a FOC state which is usually not the shipowner's country of origin.
Freight	Good to be shipped, with close meaning to cargo.
Freight Rate	An agreed, lump sum charge for cargo carriage. Expressed per ton(ne) of cargo. (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 34)
Galley	Shipboard kitchen.
Gangway	The opening to board a ship.
Intermodal Freight Transportation	The transportation of freight in intermodal containers carried by more than one mode of transportation e.g. rail, semi-trailer truck and vessel.
Lashing and Un-lashing	Binding and unbinding (of shipments on board a ship).
Messman	Unlicensed qualified seafarer in the culinary department. Junior to the cook. Also known as steward in some contexts. Provides assistance to the catering services on board.
Navigation/Deck/Cargo Department	One of the three major shipboard departments. Deals with cargo handling, navigation etc. Their main working areas are the bridge and cargo office.
Officer	Licensed qualified seafarer holding a senior job position in the shipboard hierarchy: navigation officer (e.g. Captain, Chief Mate, Second Mate, Third Mate) and engineer (e.g. Chief Engineer,

	Second Engineer, Third Engineer, Fourth Engineer).
Oiler	Unlicensed qualified seafarer of the engineering department. Senior to the Wiper. One whose main responsibility is to oil the engine and other machinery.
OS	Ordinary seaman. Unlicensed qualified seafarer of the navigation department. Junior to Able Seaman.
Pilot	Locally engaged navigation specialist with local knowledge to guide an ocean-going ship from the deep sea, through the harbor to its nominated berth for docking and the other way round (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 25).
PSC	Port State Control. PSC inspectors inspect the standards of ships at ports and have the right to detain a ship of deficiency.
Radio Officer	Handler of radio messages. Eliminated as the two-way radio technology became outdated.
Rating	Unlicensed qualified seafarer holding the junior job position in the hierarchy. At the support level. Examples are Bosun, Able Seaman and Ordinary Seaman of the navigation department; Oiler, Fitter and Wiper of the engineering department; Cook and Steward of the culinary department.
River Trade	Trade of cargo usually prior to sea trade.
Seafarer	Defined as a worker on the merchant vessel. Also

	known as "mariner," "seaman" and "sailor" in some other contexts.
Seamanship	The art of seafaring work.
Shipbroker	A middle person between a shipowner and a charterer.
Shipment	Cargo being shipped.
Shipping	Transportation of cargoes.
STCW	An international convention that sets standards for the training, certification and watchkeeping of seafarers
Steward	Unlicensed qualified seafarer of the culinary department. Junior to the cook.
Surveyor	Marine surveyor of ships to inspect and report their conditions.
TEU	Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit. An international measurement unit for the trade volume of containers, represented by a standard twenty-foot long container (Hong Kong Shipowners Association 2007: 36).
Transshipping	The intermediate process of shipping.
Watchkeeping	Involves the division of labor to constantly operate a ship.
Wiper	Unlicensed qualified seafarer of the engineering department. One whose main responsibility is to "wipe" i.e. clean the engine and machinery

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