

Friday, 04 January, 2013, 12:00am Keith Wallis keith.wallis@scmp.com

(a video is there)

<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1119312/commander-carmen-ready-take-charge>



Carmen Chan is looking forward to a life at sea. Photo: May Tse

Long periods away from family and friends, stormy seas and little scope for lengthy shore leave mean a sea-going career is not for every youngster, especially a woman.

But for Carmen Chan Ka-man, the lure and challenge of the sea has proved irresistible to the extent the 32-year old has become Hong Kong's first female master mariner.

Gaining her master's ticket last month means Chan can technically command the biggest container ships and tankers. In reality, Chan said she would remain chief officer for another three years to gain more seafaring experience before, hopefully, being made captain. Chan, who returns to sea next week, joined China Navigation, the shipping company controlled by John Swire & Sons, as a cadet. She has revelled in the challenge, enjoying the camaraderie and management responsibility on board, and looks forward to becoming captain.

Tony Yeung Pui-keung, manager of the Maritime Services Training Institute, said Chan was one of the first to enrol in the sea-going training incentive scheme when it was launched in 2002 by the Maritime Professional Promotion Federation. The initiative, which was taken over by the Marine Department in 2004, provides a HK\$5,000 per month grant to cadets to help with the costs. Yeung said Chan had "done the best of everybody" who joined in 2002 and said she was keen to prove herself during firefighting exercises early in her training.

He added that the first female river-trade master mariner, Ho Wai-yan, would get her ticket soon that would enable her to become a Hong Kong-Macau fast ferry captain. He said interest had increased in the two-year higher diploma maritime studies course as more young people learned about the benefits of a maritime career. These include a relatively high tax-free salary, travel and a secure career. He said where there used to be about 20 people on each course, now there are 40 to 60, including "three or five women". The International Labour Organisation estimates that only up to 2 per cent of the world's 1.25 million seafarers are women.