
Sabrina takes the helm

Sabrina Chao has been formally appointed as chairman of Wah Kwong Maritime Transport Holdings.



Sabrina Chao

The 38-year-old takes over from her father George, who has been named president but will not resume day-to-day duties.

Vincent Lai has been appointed chief financial officer and a director of the company. Tim Huxley remains as chief executive.

Ms Chao has been running the day-to-day activities of the Hong Kong shipowner since her father suffered a stroke in late 2010.

Sabrina joined the family firm, which her grandfather founded in the early 1950s, in 2002 fresh from Jardine Fleming and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

She took on the financial side of the business while her father handled commercial aspects. By 2007 she had become vice-chairman.

The Imperial College, London graduate was last year named one of the top 50 shipowners in the world in the TradeWinds Power 2012.

Debuting at No 37 she is said to represent a new twist on the traditional Hong Kong shipowning model in that she clearly respects family values while having a modern outlook on the business world.

Recent reports suggest she is keen to keep Wah Kwong's focus on shipping but would not be averse to a little diversification if it makes sense.

She has been described as "determined" and "forceful" but "without being autocratic" —which has allowed her to build a good team and make what one observer dubs a "seamless transition" to the third generation.

Chao has also stepped up to a wider role in the maritime community. She has been active in the local branch of WISTA and Hong Kong's Young Shipping Professionals Network.

There is talk that she could also emerge one day as the first female chair of the Hong Kong Shipowners' Association.

Wah Kwong, one of the largest non-listed owners in Hong Kong, has a fleet of thirteen bulkers, five tankers and ten LPG carriers.