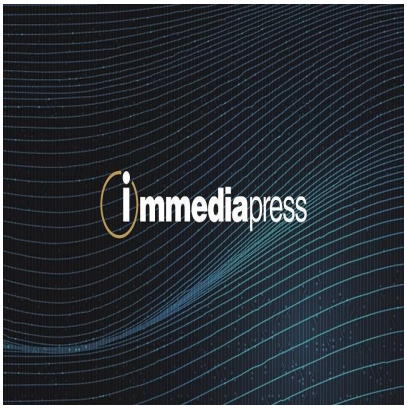


CGTN: Waiting for the Boats to Return: A Fishermanâ??s Family in the South China Sea

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BEIJING, Nov. 11, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) â??

In 1975, a fishing boat carrying 30 men went out to sea. It never returned.

Among those lost was Su Xianli, the husband of Fu Yuhua. More than half a century later, she still keeps the only portrait she has of him.

â??The three children were still young back then. They had already lost their father. What would they do if they lost their mother, too?â?• recalls Fu Yuhua.

Her son, Su Biaowei, grew up to become a fisherman. When he heads out to sea, Fu and her daughter-in-law, Lu Chunxiang, wait on shore.

â??I do worry about him, especially when the weather is bad or the sea gets rough,â?• says Lu Chunxiang.

For this family, the sea has brought both a livelihood and loss. The same disaster also took the life of Lu Chunxiangâ??s father. She and Su Biaowei were both five years old when they lost their fathers. Years later, they married and built a life shaped by the same sea.

Today, another generation still goes out to fish. And the family still waits.

A Life Shaped by the Sea

This pattern of departure and waiting is not unique to one family. In Tanmen, a fishing town in southern Chinaâ??s Hainan Province, generations of fishermen have made their living from the South China Sea.

Some inherited the routes and skills of their elders. Su Chengfen began going to sea with his grandfather at the age of 13. The traditional navigation books he kept, known as Genglubu, recorded routes used by fishermen long before satellite navigation.

â??If we want to know which course to take to a particular reef, we just look it up in the Genglubu,â?• said Su Chengfen, who died in 2021.

Others continue to dive among the reefs to catch fish, using skills learned over years of practice. But catches have declined, and fewer young people are taking up the traditional method.

On Jinqing Island, fishermen are adapting in other ways. Larger vessels carry smaller fishing boats farther offshore. Feng Ping, whom the documentary crew first met 12 years ago, now also transports supplies between islands.

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â??The sea we sail has not changed much. What has changed are the people,â?• says Feng Ping.

Their lives are different, but the connection remains. The sea is where they work, where knowledge passes between generations and where every departure and return is part of family life.

The Meaning of Home

As a child, Wang Zhenzhong would go to the shore with his mother to wait for his fatherâ??s boat. In those days, families had little way of knowing when the fishermen would return.

â??We saw a tiny dot on the horizon, slowly getting bigger. A boat was coming back. But when it reached the harbor, it wasnâ??t ours. So, we had to keep waiting,â?• recalls Wang Zhenzhong.

His memory echoes the story of Fu Yuhua and her family. Across generations, fishermen have gone out to sea, while their families have waited for them to return.

These are among the stories told in The Sea We Call Home, a CGTN documentary featuring five stories of islanders and fishermen in the South China Sea. Through their lives, the film explores traditional navigation, changing fishing practices and the ties between people and the sea.

For these fishermen, the sea is more than a place to earn a living. It carries the knowledge of their elders, the memory of those they have lost and the hope of seeing loved ones return.

â??Men venture far out to sea. They do it for home. Women wait for them and raise their children. That is home. When the children grow up, they follow in their fathersâ?? footsteps. That, too, is home,â?• says Wang Zhenzhong.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyxb8Ub0kSY

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