

海上人生

无论是在超市还是在饭馆里，你都能看见很多冒着气泡的水族箱，里面有各种各样的海鲜供人挑选。中国人对海鲜的热爱可见一斑。据统计，中国人每年人均会消费掉25公斤海鲜，而世界范围内这一数字只有16公斤。中国还拥有世界最大的捕鱼船和超过八百万渔民，捕获量是美国的4倍。

天津是中国北方重要的捕鱼区，提供了许多就业机会，丰富了本地人民的餐桌。今天，天津的沿海地区大多以旅游资源闻名，滨海航母公园、大沽口炮台和水上世界都吸引了很多游客。但其实在沿海公路的后面还存在着许多的小渔村。来到北塘，你就能看到天津渔民捕鱼盛况，买到刚从海里打捞上来的新鲜海货。

老郭就是其中一位渔民，他和妻子靠打渔为生已经有20年了。他领我参观了他的渔船。驾驶室不大，但设施一应俱全，有GPS，无线电和声纳仪。他们吃住都在船上，每天夜里出海，转天下午回来。他们收获的大都是皮皮虾，收成好的话一天能捕上200公斤。老郭夫妻俩每年要在船上生活九个月，但船上陈设十分简陋，完全没有家的感觉。我问老郭，孩子是否也愿意从事这个职业。老郭说他不愿意孩子再重复这样的生活，太苦太危险了！

老郭打来的鱼大都卖给了中间商。其余的时间，老郭夫妻还要修补渔网、做卫生以及购置生活必需品。总之，每一天都很忙碌。

在渔港附近有很多小饭馆，许多城里人都慕名而来享用新鲜又便宜的海鲜。老郭也会和其他渔民一起吃饭，互通有无。我以为他们之间是竞争的关系，但老郭说结伴打渔更安全些。拜祭妈祖娘娘，祈求一帆风顺也是必要的功课。

之后我打车来到大神堂，这是天津最古老的一个渔村了。老李家几代人都住在大神堂村，他介绍说，每到公共节假日他们经营的小饭馆都非常忙碌，因为要接待来自北京和河北省的大批食客。我们穿过这个拥有600多年历史的村子来到港口。这里比北塘还要大，停靠了130多艘渔船。

老李的渔船和老郭的差不多，因为港口就在村子里，所以他不必住在船上。村民老刘说，现在村里只有些上了年纪的人还在留守。每次打渔回来，家人都会热情迎接他们，女人们帮忙补渔网、把鱼拿到市场去卖，孩子们在一旁玩耍。

他们告诉我，现在打渔越来越难了。政府出台了各种措施，向海里增补鱼苗。老刘说，只要工作努力，收入还是不错的。

回去的路上我再一次经过那一段荒无人烟的小路。虽然这条路把这个古老的村庄和城市隔开，仍然抵挡不住现代文明的入侵。过度捕捞的压力和污染令他们的营生更加艰难。但只要肯吃苦，你会获得丰厚的海洋馈赠。对海洋的保护不仅关系着渔民的生计，还关系着这种古老的生活方式能否继续传承下去。

Life on the Sea

By Robert Watt



Beitang harbour

design, their wooden hulls painted cobalt blue and their decks crammed with a paraphernalia of rust coloured tools, faded buckets and sun bleached ropes. Red flags flutter vigorously from each mast in the breeze. It looks traditional and picturesque.

Mr Guo has been fishing with his wife for 20 years. Despite looking as though his boat had been made decades ago, it's less than 5 years old. In the corner are a dozen Mantou being steamed on a charcoal stove and behind, a raised platform just large enough for a bed. He shows me the simple controls in the wheel house and I'm surprised to see among the worn woodwork; a GPS, short-wave radio and sonar. They live on the boat, sailing out daily after midnight and returning in the afternoon with their catch. Predominantly Pipixia, of which 200kg can be harvested on a good day.

Despite being their home for 9 months of the year, there are few personal effects. A fan screwed into the ceiling above the bed and a transistor radio are the only concessions to comfort. There are no pictures of the family that they rarely see outside of the three month summer fishing moratorium when they go home. I ask if their children are interested in fishing, but Mr Guo doesn't want this life for his children; it's too hard and dangerous, he says.

Most of the catch is sold to agents who sell it on to restaurants and markets. Selling directly to the public gets a higher price but, it takes time. Time where and boat net maintenance as well as cleaning, as well as shopping and restocking is needed. It's a long, busy day.

Opposite the moored boats are a string of open fronted restaurants where you can wash down freshly cooked cockles with some cold beer. A group of Engineers, who have driven from downtown, sit among a litter of empty shells enjoying a bottle of Baijiu - the traditional accompaniment. I asked Mr Guo if they eat in the restaurants with the other crews. He says they often dine together discussing where to fish. I expected fierce competition over their favourite fishing areas, but he says they share information because it's safer together. He points out a low hut where they gather every new moon and pray for protection to Mazu, the Chinese goddess of the sea.

Further along the coast, is the old village of Dashentang. I take a taxi, from the nearby city of Hangu, along the straight road into the hazy horizon. The land either side stretches out in an expanse of flat dirt and salt water ponds, their surfaces almost level with the land. The ponds are shrimp farms. Farmed fish is flourishing due



to subsidies supporting aquaculture as an alternative to marine fishing. The sector has grown enormously and all around the Binhai area there is a patchwork of ponds dug out of the low lying mud.

I'm meeting Mr Liu, whose family has lived in Dashentang for several generations. We meet near a huddle of restaurants. He tells me they are very busy during public holidays, with people coming from Beijing and all over Hebei to eat seafood. We walk through the 600 year old village towards the harbour. It's larger than Beitang harbour with over 130 boats tied up along the quay side. He shows me his boat. It's the same blue wooden construction, much larger and crewed by 5 family members. Despite the bigger hull, the wheel house is about the same size as Mr Guo's and similarly equipped with modern electronics and a stove.

Because the harbour is in the village the crew don't live on the boat, but many families don't live in the village either. The local school closed last year, so all the young families have moved to Hangu. Mr Liu tells me the population is mostly old and middle aged people now. When the boat comes in their families meet them, the women help with selling the fish and mending the nets and the kids play alongside. I ask a boy if he wants to be a fisherman when he is older, he tells me he wants to be a policeman.

The harbour is busier than at Beitang; nets are strewn out and a line of boats have been hauled from the water for repair. Mr Liu says that

they used to build their own boats in the village, but that work has moved away. The boats venture further out to sea and the catches are larger and more varied. A refrigerated truck is being loaded with squid destined for Korea, another boat is laden with sacks of cockles. The crew tell me there are around 200 bags, each weighing 30kgs.

I'm told it's getting harder to fish, the catch is now mostly shellfish. The government is helping with release programmes to re-stock the sea. But while the fleet size has reduced, Mr Liu thinks there are more unlicensed vessels. It suggests a good living can be made and Mr Liu agrees you can make a reasonable income if you work hard. I remember the cargo of shellfish and calculate its value at RMB50,000.

I ask him about Mazu, but he doesn't worship the goddess. I feel the proximity of his family gives the comfort and protection that Mazu provides to the Guos. Here they celebrate the start of the fishing season in September with fireworks launched from the boats and of course lots of Baijiu. It feels a more positive attitude to the long season ahead; to celebrate it rather than seeking protection from it.

When I return from the village, I pass again through the flat no mans land that separates the close community and the anonymous city. As one fades into the hazy horizon behind, the other looms out of the horizon ahead. The horizons separate the two places, but while parallel lines never meet, the division here doesn't prevent the modern world's encroachment. Pressures from over fishing and pollution make the work harder, city life is more glamorous and the booming fish farms less dangerous and easier. But, so long as there are people willing to work hard, there will be work satisfying the demand for fresh food from the sea. Last year, the government performed the largest release of sea-life into the Bohai to maintain fish stocks. Over 70% of the people in the village rely on fishing for their livelihood. Preservation of fish stocks isn't just about saving jobs, but a way of life that has continued for generations.

On the way back, I take a detour along a desolate causeway to the new Mazu statue. Although part of the tourist area, it's also a reminder of the regions links to fishing. As the largest statue of Mazu in the world, her gaze and protection reaches far out to sea. Traditionally, her protection for the fishermen is from the threats from the water, I am hoping she can turn her attention to include more modern threats to their culture.