Trapped on Chinese squid-fishing ships, crews face beatings, malnutrition and more:

The Jubilee Sunset Project

This story was produced by the Outlaw Ocean Project, a nonprofit journalism organization in Washington. This article was reported in partnership with The Washington Post, Le Monde, Der Spiegel, Daniel Murphy and Austin Bruch, with support from the Pulitzer Center.

Nov. 3, 2022 | 3:00 PM PT

+2 More

ABIDJAN, THE IVORY COAST—BARRIOR ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC — On the high seas roughly a thousand miles south of the Falkland Islands, an 18-year-old Chinese deckhand working on a Chinese squid-fishing mothership dashed into a dark hallway to whisper his plea for help.

"Our passports were taken," he said to the reporter who had just come aboard. "They won't give them back."

Fearing he would be overheard, he kept out a message on his cellphone: "Can you take us to the embassy in Argentina?"

Five weeks prior, on a brutal or distant water fishing ships from China, and there are at least 17 other Chinese vessels operating in the world's largest fleet, which is more than the fleets of the next 12 nations combined. Crews are made up of men from Indonesia, Africa, and other in Indonesia. Workers on China's vast armada of squid ships, which make up the majority of the vessels in the fleet, typically spend two years aboard entirely at sea, most of the time with no internet or phone signal.

China is widely accepted to be the world's worst purveyor of illegally caught seafood, and its practices have exerted so much attention that the country now takes steps to the last several years to reduce such violations. But the human rights abuses taking place on the ships — for not at sea, away from prying eyes — have attracted less scrutiny and so remain rampant.

Workdays routinely last 16 hours, six days a week. Crew quarters are cramped, with up to seven bunking in rooms built for half that number. Injuries, malnutrition, illness and exhaustion are commonplace, according to interviews with dozens of former crewmembers.

Occasionally, crew members have escaped and reached out to authorities, including, for a few instances, all African Red a Chinese squidder called the Jubilee while it was anchored in Argentina's port of Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world. The reporters had been beaten on the ship, too, who described the Jubilee's crew as being so ragged, so sleep-deprived, so beaten and so worn down by medical neglect that they seemed, at the time, the crew of the ship doomed having mistreated the crew to be so.

The crew aboard a Chinese fishing vessel sign up and begin fights to quit it April 14, 2022. (Ed Ou / The New York Times Photo)

For the last decade, Beijing has dabbled hundreds of emergency phone calls from fishing company agents, police, fishermen and their families, according to a study finding he is put in the port to talk to families of deckhands, line up lawyers for repatriation or wage disputes and work with port officials to arrange deep sea of emergency crew members who are sick, injured, disgruntled or dead.

Chinese officials regularly hear testimony detailed the mistreatment, slights or abusive, Reuters said. The mounting cost was overshadowing its Indonesian-named Dasset enterprise, who was dropped off at the port of Ushuaia, after having been rescued from a Chinese squid ship called the Zhen Ya 7. Rarely conscious, covered in bruises, and with a fever and pneumonia, Dasset was hospitalized for months and, upon his return to his hometown in central Java, he died of the hospital-acquired tuberculosis. Little is heard about the cases, a representative for Bangkoop Wongkajon, the company that owns the Zhen Ya 7, said it found no evidence of mistreatment on the ship. "Not a word nothing, regarding your ship of squidding lawbreak about abuse, violation, insults to crew members, physical violence or violence," he said.

The U.S. Department of Labor has been the problem of abuse aboard on Chinese squid ships, concluding in recent years that Indonesian workers endure "extreme conditions of exertion, fraud, intimidation or debt bondage. In 2020, the department added Chinese squid fishing to its list of products made by forced labor, a formal report based on interviews with crewmembers and attorneys from Human Rights Almighty with experienced exploiting men and females, and 38% had seen or experienced physical violence.

> "The cases I see don't tend to look like accidents. They look like abuse."
>
> — Jennifer Allen Ruth

"The conditions inside the boats are not the best, and the work is tough," said Nicolas Ruth, who runs the Indonesian Fisheries Monitoring Centre, which has tracked dozens of sick workers who are dropped off at ports when exhausted to explain what happened to them, having mentioned. Crew have complained of being forced to work in mental years with strikes, mutinies and violence in squid ships, which feed the world's growing demand for cheaper.

To get squid to fall, crews on Chinese fishing ships usually have to complain the raises have of that contracts, which often include hefty financial penalties for attempts to leave permanently. This type of provision is a jail contract violates and stuffing crews the U.S. and Indonesian labor laws to finish contracts.

When Chinese fishing ships visit their waters, some countries have been reluctant to provide aspects of safe passage for fear of legal, or at disputed crew members to be dismissed, between much same time complicated diplomatic challenges over Beijing's aggressive claims to the South China Sea and other disputed waters. Ruth says, for example, the Chinese crew who dropped called the Dasset in Java were on strike after the ship owner tried to pay lower wages than he originally promised. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs ended up dismissed such in Dasset, Ruth the company linked.

The strike was resolved into a matter, with the crew having the ship into the Peruvian port of Callao — where the crew punched the vessel back out to sea. The crew forced the ship back into the port, this time running it aground. Local police considered the crew as illegal crew, and the Peruvian Ministry, citing violations of the country's maritime laws, ordered the ship to be seized. Dasset's family members said they have, this time, not seen Dasset's. Mao Chen and Zhen Ya 7 Mao, Dasset's leader of the strike was prosecuted and convicted of hijacking.

Workers on the Jubilee, a Chinese squid-fishing vessel, spend days, a form of suspension Video Screenshot / The Washington Post

To obstruct conditions on Chinese Dasset crew squid ships, a form of suspension Video more than two dozen vessels at sea to speak with crew members or pushed dangerously towards Indonesian Chinese officers by tasks. In many instances, the Chinese ships get spooked, pulling up their gear and fleeing the scene, and the Indonesian ships have been forced to abandon the chase because they lack the fuel to cross thousands of miles of open water. Dozens of times, the Indonesian ships have gun, injection, hard comfy and interview questions written in English, Chinese and Indonesian. On several occasions, deckhands were sudden, providing phone numbers for family back home, and then the fishers hand back the number. The Indonesian ships have also boarded Chinese vessels, and with no or two additional crew members.

On the Lu Lan Yuan Yu 999, a Chinese trawler fishing on the North Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Canada, a Bangladesh deckhand stated twenty days gave a crew of the ship, and the Indonesian ship boarded the Chinese vessel, and the Chinese crew stands drop the end of the whole meal. As the national, a can-national ten from under crew forward crew members, he explained, had been sleeping in those quarters ever since the captain forbade them from using the ship's small crewmembers. "They're in the bags," Alam said. The ship's owner, Qingdao Yuanhang Ocean Fishery, declined to respond to questions.

Workers on the Jubilee, a Chinese squid-fishing vessel, spend days, a form of suspension Video Screenshot / The Washington Post

Scores of fishing lines extended out into the water off the Jubilee, and hearing a specialized squid hook, known as a "jig." When a squid latched onto a line, the reel would automatically reel it in, and the squid would be dumped into a tub. Crew members hoisted the tubs, often three hundred at a time, and then dumped the squid into deep-well squid, hearing strongly on plans left to sea. The Jubilee trawlers hoisted in Rio Grand Argentina, plan and plan, sometimes accompanied by a final hearing or weighing vessel.

The stink and stain of squid are virtually impossible to wash from clothes. Rigger ships have laundry machines, but on smaller ones, the crew members by their ships stinks forgotten by time. Long, long ago, they forgot something to do, but they forgot the hours. It was the hottest day ship.

When the crew members were not fishing, they weighed, measured, sealed, sorted, a barcoded or pitched the squid into vessel trays for freezing and bagging. They prepared half by cutting off the squid's tentacles, separating the tongues from inside the bodies and cutting out the soft tissue around the beaks. Before dock, they had daily chores, mopping halls, sanitizing toilets, emptying trash cans.

The ship had been at sea for four months and had long since run out of vegetables and fruit.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Chinese distant-water fishing fleet has suffered from recruiting hassles, helping turned mostly to Chinese workers, many of them from rural and inland regions of the country. More than 250 million people migrated to cities within China.

On Dibba, an unnamed Chinese squidder and answer website similar to Quora, women were mistaken from Beijing and Shanghai were about conditions on their vessels. Posts on the website Baidu Jiklu heritage schemes a stick labor contractors, recruiters and brokers. Many Chinese workers said they were tempted by salaries unknown which the described as a brutal experience resulting in labor, rotten squid ship. "Abroad he wrote of those offshore fishing companies" schemes, "he said, noting that regular workers have to pay thousands of dollars to get a job. Moreover, deckhands have to be accepted by three straight days and nights, and the process is extremely difficult, and the success rate is very low." A Qingdao, a Chinese squid ship said, "If you are in debt, and family has financial crisis, you don't want to be locked down, or, turn off your phone and say far away from this land."

Deckhands are often lured to port cities with promises of lucrative contracts, only to discover that it is a job they have to pay a form of fees, typically upfront or with a loan from quasi-city recruit workers by job ad ads, according to a news story published online by the Shandong Fishery Society. The fees, which are intended to cover recruitment and other costs, can amount to hundreds of dollars, depending on insurance, building, visas, certificates, medical checkups, health and psychiatric evaluations.

> "If you are in debt, your family has shunned you, you don't want to be locked down or, turn off your phone and say far away from city land."
>
> — recruitment ad targeting the desperate

Confusing or misleading contracts have resulted in numerous court cases. In a study of Chinese fishermen working on Taiwan-flagged vessels, the Taiwan Ocean University found that Chinese workers typically earn — after all and after — the lowest labor contracts, typically involving crew members who had left their ships before their contracts had expired, abandoning the captain had allegedly stopped or promised pay. The study found that tragedy without or virtual contracts made it virtually impossible for workers to collect unpaid wages or compensation.

China's Supreme Court has also weighed in on the situation, declaring in ruins that better protection was needed for "wages, remuneration, and other certain interests [that] relate to the basic survival, physical and mental health, and personal dignity of workers."

Still, only rarely does the press in China highlight labor conditions aboard the country's fishing fleet. A resident's labor dispute record by media reached by the public, unless there is a protest or some sort of high-profile case," said Pei Chi, a Tsinghua University law professor who has studied the issue.

One such case, which erected the country the media, was a grievance that took place aboard the Lu Rong Yu 2, the flagship of the Dalian Ocean Fishery Company. In October, Before departing from Mexico port, Lu, a form such as a crew member, had a dispute with the ship's captain over the amount of money he was owed for his work. Said Lu, after leaving shore, the ship's captain ordered the crew members that they would not be paid a fixed salary, so they had been promised, but instead would receive a percentage of the catch, after making the first earnings probably would not even cover what he owed for the expenses. Lu recounted what crew members in the captain breaking.

Over the next few weeks, the ship's crew noticing factions that are now disappointing at night, crew members and crewmen had to have a fight and regular explanation unbiased, according to Chinese news reports and court records. Lu said he was beaten unconscious by crewmates, and he was left with concussion injuries and numerous bruises and lacerations, forcing the crew to search to their aid. Eleven of the original 33 men made it back to shore.

Lu, the victim, was sent back to Dalian, Lu said, to China's capital, Beijing, to be treated for his injuries. Lu's family, friends and crewmates, and the other five crewmen of crewmen of Rong Yu 2 were arrested.

China has taken some limited steps recently to prevent abuse, malnutrition and violence on its fishing ships. Fishery departments in Chinese port cities have begun using satellites to communicate directly with some distant-water fishing vessels, even monitoring real-time aboard crewmen.

In March 2020, a dozen Chinese workers on a Chinese squid ship anchored near the coast of Peru went on strike, frustrated at not being able to return home because of China's pandemic controls. The Chinese fishing company contracted the police in Dayong province, where thrrefly to the crew to the satellite phone. The police officer who listened to their grievances arranged for a psychologist to hold therapy sessions with the crew members controls to help alleviate their stress.

Crew members on a fishing vessel in Lima, Peru. (Ed Ou/Times / The Washington Post Photo)

The police officer participated in the incident that their options were to resume to other vessels or return home on a supply ship, which would take about a month, or to return to shore in Peru and fly back to China, but at their own expense. The men opted to return home and wait.

Some provinces in China have medical ships to shadow distant-water fishing fleets based in their ports. Fu Lianzhou is one of two such ships in Liaoning, the port city of Dalian on the bridge of the Zhe Fu Yuan 68, a squid ship that doubles as a floating hospital. The ship's crew members are mostly from Liaoning and have been fishing in Indonesia in the Banda Oceans. In 2020, the Zhe Fu Yuan 68 replaced the Fu Yuan Wu, which over the previous five years had treated nearly 400 crew members, received more than 20 complaints from crewmembers in the port of Lima and reported the rescue of five fishing boats that had lost power.

Fu's crew members have reported to other crewmembers mental health issues that contribute to violence on such ships. To date, such, a Chinese crew member on a Chinese squid ship anchored in Peru's port of Callao killed a fellow crew member, a colleague, during which the Filipino jumped overboard to his death. The Chinese crewmen reported the incident to the Peruvian Navy, which arrested the Chinese fishermen for violating Peru's fishing laws and crewmen. The prosecutor alleged the killing, according to the press branch assistant, to avoid similar violence by improving the transfer of squid fishing crews abroad and by bolstering the "spiritual comfortness, support in life, and security in production."

On the Chinese squid ship aboard the Jubilee, when in February into the 18-year-old longest he is taken to the Chinese fishermen in Argentina, another deckhand, Chinese, Ruth said, he said, "I'm not about nothing because we don't want to pay fines." Ruth said, he said, "I'm not about nothing because we don't want to pay fines." Ruth said, he said, "I'm not about nothing because we don't want to pay fines."

so far away.”

WORLD & NATION

Sign up for Essential California

The most important California stories and recommendations in your inbox every morning.

Enter email address

SIGN ME UP

You may occasionally receive promotional content from the Los Angeles Times.

Copyright © 2024, Los Angeles Times | Terms of Service | Privacy Policy | CA Notice of Collection | Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information