

“Zou Di”: Even From Rock Bottom, We Will Find a Way Forward

Project presentation for the documentary Keep Going, No Matter What! held in Markham - the true story of a Fujian woman and the unyielding will of a generation of overseas migrants

On June 21, a project presentation for the documentary Keep Going, No Matter What! was held at the Wangfujing Sports Centre in Markham, Canada. Falling on Father's Day, the event brought together the creative team, industry professionals, and members of the community interested in Chinese migration stories. They listened to the film's central figure, known as “Sister Ping,” recount a life spanning several decades, and discussed the project's purpose, narrative themes, production schedule, and potential forms of collaboration.

Keep Going is more than a story of one person's departure and struggle for survival. It also looks back at the path travelled by a generation of Fujian people - and by countless migrants overseas: leaving home when reality and fate seemed to offer no room to breathe, beginning again amid unfamiliar languages, institutions, and cities, and rebuilding a life piece by piece without surrendering or turning back, even in the hardest moments.



From a Breath Inside a Shipping Container to a Lifetime Abroad

Keep Going follows the life of Sister Ping, a woman from Fujian. In the 1990s, she travelled through several places on an irregular migration journey lasting several months. She spent 47 full days inside a shipping container, praying continuously in darkness, overcrowding, and near suffocation. She was also pursued in the waters near Taiwan and escaped by jumping into the sea. Years later, she put down roots abroad, began with the most basic work, gradually built businesses, and continued to hold one aspiration close to her heart: “to give every elderly person a home.”

At the presentation, Sister Ping recounted these experiences herself. When she described the 47 long days in the container - pressing her mouth and nose against a narrow crack to draw breath, then praying until she was finally pushed into a corner where light and air could enter - the room fell silent.

What the audience heard was not only one person's escape from death, but the will to survive of someone who refused to give up even at the limits of human endurance. From fighting for a breath inside the container to escaping at sea near Taiwan; from taking the most basic jobs abroad to establishing a life and building businesses, Sister Ping's journey traces a path from survival to dignity, and from saving herself to bringing light to others.



Sister Ping (far left)

“Zou Di” Is Not a Source of Shame, but a Shared Experience of a Generation

For many Fujian families, “going out” meant more than leaving home geographically. It was a decision to seek a way forward for themselves and their families.

Some crossed oceans to find work. Some started at the very bottom so the next generation could have more choices. Some gradually found their footing in restaurant kitchens, factories, construction sites, or small businesses abroad. Others endured anxiety over status, language barriers, financial pressure, and cultural separation, yet never stopped moving forward.

This experience shaped a kind of life force associated with Fujian people, but also shared by migrant communities everywhere: a refusal to bow easily, and a refusal to treat one's starting point as the end of one's destiny. Even from the lowest point, one must find a way forward; even when no road already exists, one must fight for a breath of possibility for oneself and one's family.

Through Sister Ping's experience, *Keep Going* seeks to enter the broader memory of Fujian migration and the lived reality of overseas Chinese communities. Journeys that were once silenced, misunderstood, or dismissed often carried the weight of family responsibility, personal dignity, and the courage of a generation rebuilding life from the ground up.

The Creative Team, Production Plan, and Directions for Collaboration

Director Ming Yang explained that *Keep Going* does not seek to package suffering as spectacle, nor does it simply retell a dangerous smuggling journey. The project aims to show how an ordinary woman survived when fate left her almost no room, how she stood up again, and how, years later, she gained the capacity to help others.

For Ming Yang, what is most moving about Sister Ping is not only the number of dangers she survived, but her refusal to submit: fighting for a breath in the most suffocating environment, starting again with the most basic work in an unfamiliar country, and ultimately transforming her experience of survival into both the desire and ability to help other people.



Director Ming Yang

The screenwriter introduced the film's point of entry, thematic expression, and narrative structure. She explained that the heart of *Keep Going* is not only "irregular migration," but "breath." The suffocation inside the shipping container, the prayers, and the thin seam of light and air are among the most concrete and emotionally powerful moments in Sister Ping's life. That breath represents both physical survival and a person's refusal to surrender her fate at the edge of despair.

The film will be structured around the prayers and struggle for breath inside the container, the escape at sea near Taiwan, and survival and entrepreneurship after arrival abroad. It will also broaden its lens to the contemporary realities of Fujian migrants overseas: low-paid labour, insecurity over legal status, relationships within hometown networks where mutual aid and exploitation may coexist, family obligations, and the long process of reclaiming dignity and a voice.

The creative team emphasized that the film should not end with the legend of one person. It should allow audiences to see that behind many ordinary overseas Chinese lives lies an experience rarely spoken about, yet decisive in shaping a person: learning to survive again in unfamiliar languages, systems, and circumstances; and continuing to work, shoulder responsibility, help others, and move upward even when looked down upon, misunderstood, or exploited. This is one of the most truthful and powerful portraits of migrant life.

The team also presented the film's production timetable, phased filming plan, allocation of funds, and potential partnership models. Its goal is to complete a documentary with social depth, emotional force, and the capacity to reach international audiences.

Father's Day Reflections Resonate with the Audience

The event took place on Father's Day. For many overseas migrant families, "father" and "family" evoke responsibility, departure, and sacrifice. Some left home to support parents and children. Some worked quietly for years in another country so their families could enjoy a more stable life. Others gave the best years of their lives to unfamiliar cities in the hope that the next generation would not have to travel the same difficult road.



Former Ontario MPP Vincent Ke

During the guest remarks and audience discussion, former Ontario MPP Vincent Ke, New Power Media Group Chairman James Wang, and Yan Jun, Executive President of the Hometown Associations Federation, spoke in turn. Their remarks addressed the collective memory of Fujian migrants, women's experiences of survival in migration, intergenerational responsibility in Chinese families, and the contemporary value of the documentary.



New Power Media Group Chairman James Wang

Several attendees also came forward voluntarily to share their own or their families' experiences of going overseas, the hardships of beginning life in a foreign country, and the gradual process of finding stability through restaurant kitchens, factories, construction sites, or small businesses. Their stories transformed Keep Going from Sister Ping's story alone into an echo shared by many Fujian and overseas Chinese families.



Yan Jun, Executive President of the Hometown Associations Federation

Going to the Bottom Is Not the Same as Going Toward Failure

It belongs to Sister Ping. It belongs to those who struggled inside shipping containers, factories, kitchens, restaurants, construction sites, and on the streets of foreign cities. It also belongs to everyone who, even at the lowest point in life, refused to stop moving forward.

In Keep Going, “zou di” does not mean falling. It means beginning at the bottom and walking one’s life back into being.

Keep Going is currently open to collaboration with industry partners and investment institutions. The team looks forward to working with partners who bring both human concern and a long-term perspective, and together carrying this Chinese migrant story to a wider stage.