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Features and current status of Pu'er food culture:

Challenges toward cultural environment preservation

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ABSTRACT

Pu'er food culture is characterized by distinct uniqueness and diversity on three aspects: culture, material and skill under various influences of regional, ecological and border culture, which is based on tea culture in particular. However, food culture in Pu'er has been facing several problems and risks of gradual assimilation, lack of specific transmission carrier, and the urgent need of building sustainable support system for the preservation of Pu'er food culture.

This paper aims to introduce the characteristics of Pu'er food culture, its current situations and the results from the research conducted in Minamata, Japan^{iv}.

Key words: diversity, ethnic minority, food culture, Pu'er

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1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental and Historical Background of Pu'er Food Culture

Food culture is not only the most original and living culture, but also the most regional and national. It exists in society with high permeability and a variety of forms from the aspect of cultural inheritance. The meaning and function of food culture can be summarized in eight words, as stated in the “The Book of Rites”: “Diet is the beginning of all ritual activities”. Food culture is also the most important carrier of cultural gene of one nation or one area and is fully embodied in the social awareness and folk customs. With the process of immigration and reproduction, food culture exists both closely and independently with exchange and integration among numbers of nations. Any characteristic of food culture plays an important role in maintaining people’s reproduction, protecting its diversity and exploring proper lifestyle of sustainable development, especially on inheritance and its preservation.

Located in the southwestern part of Yunnan, Pu'er is an area, composed of one district and nine counties, which are all autonomous ethnic minorities, and is typically a multi-ethnically inhabited region. Nations have different phases of development and modes of production, accompanied by diversity and closure, due to long multi-ethnic integration history. This is both the cornerstone of the formation of and the main reason of Pu'er’s food cultural diversity. The population of ethnic minorities accounts for 61% of Pu'er. There are 14 residential ethnic minorities, which includes including Han, Hani, Yi, Lahu, Wa, Dai, Bulang, Muslim, Bai, Yao, Lili, Miao, Mongolian and Jingpo. Wa has one of the most distinct, original, ecological, traditional and national culture not only among the minorities but also in China and around the world.

Pu'er has an ecologically rich environment. Sixty eight point seven percent (68.7%) of the region is covered by forests and negative oxygen ions per cubic centimeter are as high as 8,000 or more. More than 5,600 species of higher plants and 1,496 species of animals make Pu'er a natural ecological park and gene bank. All of these Pu'er features provide a valuable environmental foundation for a diverse food culture for Pu'er.

Pu'er is located in the center of the Mekong sub-region and the forefront of opening to the world of border cities; its length runs throughout the Lancang-Mekong River with a long frontier line of 486 km. The area also shares borders with Vietnam and Laos and Burma. It is the only prefecture in Yunnan to border all three countries. Its geographical location makes Pu'er’s assimilate more the features of food culture of the Southeast Asian nations.

Yunnan is very famous for its original tea production site. In addition, Pu'er is an important gateway opening to Southwest China since ancient times and the birthplace of the Ancient Tea-Horse Roads. Its and tea culture has a long history and profundity. Pu'er is named after a prosperous tea and was introduced into the world through the name card. The caravans communication on Tea-Horse Roads helped the spread of this piece of tea and in the process penetrated both the cultural

and material levels of food culture, which is a core spiritual element of Pu'er.

Pu'er has always retained an authentic and ecological culture, not only in terms of material culture like clothing, house or production tools but also spiritual culture of language, literature, art, religion, custom and tradition. Thus, Pu'er gradually develops a distinctive culture corridor, integrated with the culture of NanZhao, Central Plain, Buddhism and Taoism. Because of the influences of all these cultural factors, Pu'er food culture has evolved uniquely and distinctively.

It has to be pointed out that although the diversity of Pu'er food culture was derived from natural and cultural conditions, tea culture promoted human exchange and regional diversity. A number of literatures record and show cultural exchanges between Pu'er, Tibet, Guizhou, India and other East Asian regions. This cultural interaction is said to have enriched the diversity of Pu'er, but the biodiversity in this area has been dramatically disappearing because of colonial administration, communism (or modernization) and the Chinese market-opening reform policy after the 19th century.

2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Despite the gradual decline and changes of many traditional ethnic cultures, the model diet of basic and simple survival which have been accumulated for thousands of years is still the most representative social custom and plays an important role in the merging of national identity and culture.

Any culture throughout human history leaves the imprints on physical and mental levels. Food culture does not only mean survival and social activities of production, storage, exchange, but also encompasses cultural phenomenon of etiquette and rite, custom and taboo specially for Pu'er where a number of ethnic minorities live. The diversity of food culture is embodied culturally and is manifested in concepts like mentality, policy and institutions. Material level of culture is manifested on the kinds of dishes and tableware used, by the cooking skill such as selection of raw materials, primary processing, cooking and preserving. Based on these three perspectives, this paper analyzes the main elements and origin of the diversity of Pu'er food culture.

2.1 Culture

Pu'er food culture demonstrates ethnic and regional features. It is very difficult to form regional and cultural combination because of the imbalance of regional and ethnic development and influences from the outside mainstream culture. This is the reason why Pu'er has no core regional food culture. This condition of no core dietary conception and system created diversity of Pu'er food culture based on national characters. This diversity allowed the opening and closing of food cultures between different nationalities on moral level. What represents the mental content of Pu'er food culture is dietary culture during festivals of ethnic minorities.

A festival is an important part of folk culture; this can be a religious activity and cultural phenomenon with sacrificial practices which is of comprehensive

nature and of holographic information. Some ethnic festivals are named after food, or held with the main theme of how to cook or eat special foods, which not only demonstrated thoroughly the shift and penetration into festival for activities of food, but also the display of the typical values and aesthetic habits of the ethnic minorities. These different festival activities will fully and strongly display the food as an important symbol.

Food does not exist simply only for living but also for communication, fraught with religious and social meanings. In many cases, dining with someone has a cultural importance.

Firstly, collective festivals of sharing meals and drinks are the best way to express human emotions, interact with others and express religious practices. In addition, food will only be presented on special and important occasions because only a number of food are produced on a high level of production. For the Zhuang people, glutinous rice plays a heroic role in their festival as staple food, a gift for family or friends and as a ritual object. On the other hand, in ordinary life, non-glutinous rice is considered superior because it is planted less. In the Third-Month Songfest and the Fourth-Month Cow Spirit Festival, the Zhuang prefer to cook five colors of glutinous rice. In case of Lahu people, if a family slaughters a pig, all villagers eat the pork and if one family brew wines, all villagers may drink until they get drunk.

Ethnic minorities in Pu'er practice shamanism, Buddhism and Tibetan or Thai Buddhism. Whatever religion they believe in, a close relationship between food and faith exists. They believe that food is a gift from God and their activities express their gratitude. Before or during the meal, they pray to God and this is true among the different ethnic groups.

There is a primary religious worship of nature, totem and ancestor for the ethnic minorities of Pu'er, who always express their worship through important holidays. This is one of the reasons why there are so many religious and sacrificial festivals for significant life events among the ethnic minorities. In order to pay their respects to the gods, please them and pray for blessing, food in sacrificial practices is more abundant than usual and somewhat prepared differently from the ordinary life. The content and implications of food in religion are more concrete and sustainable if accompanied with rituals. In the Sixth-Month Torch Festival of the Yi people, every family kills chickens and slaughters sheep, steams buckwheat rice with goat blood, and performs worship ceremony for good harvest and health by spreading rice. For the Hani, they gather into the dragon woods to kill chickens and pigs, brew wine, do Chung-Baba and cook glutinous dumpling during the Worship of Dragon Festival, in order to pray for a more abundant grain harvest.

Food is an essential means to connect people and build human relationship in all cultural aspects. Also, food creates a bridge between people and their ancestor, family and village, which is necessary social activity in each ethnic group.

The symbolic function and communication function of food intensify during year-beginning and year-end festivals on the basis of family reunion, kinship ties

and neighbor relations. On the First Harvest of the Year of the Miao, every member who is away must come home and gather to eat the festival dish, which is called “eating new”. A Long Street Banquet is held among the Hani people once a year to exchange cooking techniques and engage in competitions. The “Shan Kang” Festival of the Bulang is a holiday wherein young people express their gratitude to their elders by presenting elaborate food. Each family serves a number of special dishes and they gather to share a “unity meal”, which sometimes consists of 30 types of dishes and all sorts of delicacies aside from Baba, plantains and bean curd.

2.2 Material

Material content of food culture expresses its diversity visually and realistically as well, and the most definite forms consist of dishes, pastry, tableware, furniture for diet, painting and sculpture and other objects. The material content of food culture aims to issue answer issues on how to eat, what can be eaten during certain circumstance and how to record all activities relating to eating. For Pu'er, the material diversity of food culture is mainly displayed in dishes and tableware, and inscription about eating is minimal because of the limited development of their languages and the production level of food. Like other Chinese representative cuisines, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan and Guangdong, Pu'er food definitely expresses its own regional and ethnic diversity. Unique geographic location, complex climate and diversified ethnic convention have provided Pu'er a variety of food resources and favorite dishes, which are integrated with the food culture of Southeast Asia and thus formed an indigenous food culture system. Also, the nationality of Yi, Hui, Dai, Zhuang, Lili, Hani, Jinuo, Miao, Yao, Naxi, Lahu, Wa, Bulang have their own cooking style, especially the very original traditional eating habits and cooking skill, called “living fossil” which is roasted rice with bamboo of Dai and stone Baba of Dulong (Table 1). Although Table 1 does not describe all the types of cuisine, it has to be considered that 200 or more dishes are prepared abundantly which have different names in the local, national and regional languages and which are well-known to foreigners.

Owing to accumulated research and data in China, the enriched characteristics of tastes and condiments in Pu'er food culture have been documented. These features are very different from other ethnic groups because of the differences of the altitude of their locations but acidity and spiciness are quite common in a number of food. The origin of sourness and spiciness comes from relatively typical ingredients in China, like prickly ash, pepper and star anise and others and local people utilize the dried and fermented ones, which become sweet, salty, aromatic or pungent. Nowadays, people tend to avoid extremely distinctive odor, but it can be said that Pu'er food has that very rare and original smell. (Needless to say, food and medicine are the same in most ethnic minorities.)

The seasoning and flavor demonstrate the diversity of dishes. From yearly hot and humid weather, it is thought that Pu'er people prefer spicy and sour cuisine, which helps to increase the appetite and eliminate dampness. Abundance in

spices such as chili, anise, pepper which is quite common and lemongrass, which is not so common, sour bamboo shoots, hawthorn and pie food elicit different flavors of sourness, hotness, bitter, sweetness and saltiness, spiciness and hotness. It is apparent that there are numerous dishes with flavor of “sour” or “bitter”, such as sour soup, sour bamboo shoots, sow thistle and *sophora davidii* (Table 1). Furthermore, some food ingredients have special flavor of their own; for example, the Dai people treat important persons with the bitter dish called “Niu Sa Pie”.

Table 1. The Main Dishes of Ethnic Minorities in Pu'er

Nationality	Numbers	Representatives
Yi	10	1. Deep-fried Tu Haishen; 2. Rice grain with liver and gall of pig or cow; 3. Burnt Weishan liver; 4. Rice grain with Pigan 5. Fried dairy cake; 6. Steamed dairy cake 7. Roasted rabbit with Yi flavor; 8. Deep fried beer; 9. Fried ants; 10. Soup of Sani with mutton
Bai	17	1. Gongyu fish with peach blossom; 2. Spiced Gongyu fish; 3. Xizhou fish; 4. Snails salad; 5. Stewed snails and bean curd with crystal sugar; 6. Steamed pork head; 7. Rolled dairy fan with minced fish; 8. Saute sliced dairy fan; 9. Stewed gongyu fish with milk (dessert); 10. Braised dog with salt in jar; 11. Stuffed pear; 12. Fried cactus flower; 13. Bean soup; 14. Rolled pig's trotters of Midu; 15. Braised chicken with pawpaw; 16. Porridge with green bean; 17. BaBa with Wheat flour
Hani	24	1. Bamboo chicken; 2. Boiled beetroot with Shijiazhuang fish; 3. Clear soup with Chinese olive and fish; 4. Fried dog meat with banana flower; 5. Boiled snake meat rolling; 6. Deep-fried bamboo insects; 7. Saute sliced meet with pie root; 8. Bamboo shoot dumpling; 9. Chai flower salad; 10. Bee pupa sauce; 11. Sparrow meat sauce; 12. Baoyan banana heart; 13. Fermented soy with green beans; 14. Sour zha fish; 15. Sour snail; 16. Sour meat; 17. Preserved meat with fire; 18. Bai wang; 19. Porridge with yangchang; 20. Braised eggs with stone pot; 21. Sauna meet of Hani; 22. Braised bean curd with sauce; 23. Fried coupling clamp with black rice; 24. Braised meat with bamboo

Dai	21	1. Roasted chicken (fish ball or beef ball) with lemongrass; 2. Braised chicken with pawpaw; 3. Fire fish; 4. Steamed fish with chili pepper in lotus leaves; 5. Steamed beef with banana leaves; 6. Sour hedgehog meat; 7. Stuffed cicada; 8. Ant eggs with three-flavor; 9. Niu Sapie; 10. Deep-fried sliced moss; 11. Rolled meat with green pepper; 12. Saute eggs with rocket salad; 13. Boiled chicken with sour bamboo shoot; 14. Water parsley; 15. Green fern vegetables; 16. Rice dumpling with banana leaves; 17. Deep-fried Niupi Jiaotiao; 18. Roasted piglets; 19. Black rice with pineapple; 20. Sliced chicken with pineapple; 21. Boiled moss
Zhuang	6	1. Spiced blood cake; 2. Braised goose of Zhuang; 3. Saute frog with sanchiflower; 4. Huoba meat; 5. Rabbit meat with tender ginger; 6. Chicken with pickles (Bahang chicken)
Miao	5	1. Rice grain with chicken; 2. Stewed Jingaga with Tianqi; 3. Boiled crucian with sour soup; 4. Braised dog meat with casserole; 5. Saute sophora davidii with fermented soy beans
Lili	12	1. Saute cubed black chicken with sweat pawpaw; 2. Braised pork; 3. Braised beer meat; 4. Corn rice; 5. Corn baba; 6. Corn cake; 7. Buckwheat baba; 8. Porridge of corn grains; 9. Porridge with corn; 10. Tartary buckwheat baba with honey; 11. Fried bee pupa; 12. Boiled piglet with fresh water
Hui	10	1. Beef salad; 2. Yaqian beef; 3. Braised beef with soy sauce; 4. Stewed beef in jar; 5. Boiled tripe; 6. Saute shredded cow liver; 7. Saute beef with chili pepper; 8. Saute beef with pickles; 9. Saute beef with celery; 10. Steamed beef bun
Naxi	19	1. Piba meat (pork fat meat); 2. Glutinous rice with black pudding; 3. Sour fermented fish; 4. Soup with raw meat; 5. Fried noodles with bitter tea; 6. Naxi baba; 7. Feng Gan; 8. Salad of Jidou pea jelly; 9. Meat ball with lily; 10. Crispy meat with white kidney bean; 11. Lao Longpi; 12. Sanchuan ham; 13. Saute chicken with pine nut; 14. Gaoli meat; 15. Chayote cucumber; 16. Baba with spirulina; 17. Fried noodles with thick tea; 18. Muffin with walnut oil; 19. Preserved ribs with stone pot.

Jingpo	12	1. Sour bacai; 2. Chong Zhe ergeng; 3. Chong banba; 4. Bamboo fish; 5. steamed meet of Jingpo; 6. Saute yellow ant eggs with chicken eggs; 7. Deep-fried maemi; 8. Deep-fried bamboo pupa; 9. Assorted of green leaves; 10. Niu ganba with fire; 11. Boiled eel with bamboo; 12. Chong eel
Nv	5	1. Braised chicken with seed oil; 2. Corn rice; 3. Baba with stone; 4. Braised prawn of Nvjiang jinsha; 5. Stewed double materials of Gaoli Gongshan
Lahu	2	1. All kinds of roasted meat; 2. Braised rice with bamboo
Bulang	2	1. Chui paogan; 2. Saute pork ribs with ginger
Wa	5	1. Thick porridge with chicken; 2. Porridge with mouse; 3. Niu kuchang; 4. Sausage with dog; 5. Duosheng
Dulong	3	1. Baba with stone; 2. River fish with fire; 3. Sour bamboo vegetable
Pumi	2	1. Stewed pigeon with Gastrodia elata; 2. Drunken chicken
Yao	1	1. Salted pork ribs with pot

Note: This table was reorganized from Yunnan Ethnic Minorities History Series published by Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House.

Natural materials such as tableware are continued to be kept and used by minority groups because of limited production and historical accumulation and their distinct features of cooking and use in food spices. This is despite of the emergence of modern kitchen utensils. The diversity of tableware is the strongest factor to intensify the richness of Pu'er food compared to Han food. The people of Jingpo, De'ang, Hani, Dai, Dulong, Wa, Lili, on the other hand, used bamboo, wood and leaves to make buckets, jars, cups, bowls, spoons and chopsticks. Hani people, for example, boil frogs and chickens frogs in bamboo. Other minorities utilize stones and muds to make pottery and use rocks as cooking pan for rice and soup. Example of this is soup moss boiled in stone. Food becomes most special when the cooking utensils and materials used are also rare and special. An example of this is the "eight-treasures" rice pudding with pineapple which is served using a fancy dishware shaped like a pineapple also.

2.3 Art of Cooking

The method of how to make use of food resources, that is how to eat, embodies the diversity of food culture on a technical level. Broadly speaking, the contents of food culture on cooking skill level consist of series skill-based activities which include harvesting, slaughtering, selecting, sun-curing, salting, fermenting for food resources, dish cooking, fruit and vegetable carving, table servicing and establishing dining etiquette (Zhao and Xie 2000). For the minority in Pu'er, there is no art performance in table-service and dining manners due to the crude and primitive cooking process. The diversity of food culture on technical level is manifested through the crudeness of processing and cooking, especially on how to cook special ingredients such as tea which is the most influential among all activities.

“What is green is vegetables and what is living is meat”. This is a way of food resource selection of the ethnic minorities because there is an abundance of plants, flowers and other resources, less taboo in religion and different in knowledge of nature. There are staples like rice (wet and dry), crops of corn, tuber, beans and stuck-wheat; meats like cow, sheep, pig, chicken, duck, goose, varieties of hunting animals, ten kinds of edible insects, vegetables like roots, stem, leaves, shoot and fruit of 100 wild plants in addition to ordinary ones. Additionally, there are 40 kinds of edible flowers and 30 kinds of wild fungi (Li 2009).

The art of cooking is generally based on taking advantage of the regional nature. Cooking skills and utensils are still in primitive stage with imbalance of economic development. All of these are characterized by their peculiar flavors and extensive cooking (Table 2).

Compared to the people from Han, roasting, stone cooking and “chong” are generally one of the most unique cooking methods. Furthermore, raw food exist generally in minorities of Pu'er (Shi and Duan 2004) (Table 2). The cooking style of Bai, Hui, Yi, Hani, Dai including using of pestle, quick boiling, deep-frying, salad making, roasting, steaming, sauteing, braising, stewing are quite similar to Han. The people of Yao, Miao, Jingpo, Wa, Bulang cook by using water because they are influenced less by the outside and live in higher places. The people of Lahu directly roast their food. Stone-cooking is rare for the people of Dulong, Nv, Naxi.

Table 2. Pu'er Minorities Traditional Art of Cooking

Culinary Technique	Representative
Pestle	Chong ganba
Quick boil	Quick boiled meat ball
Salad/cold	Sapi of Dai, tree flower salad
Boil	Chicken with sour bamboo shoot
Stone cooking	Preserved pork ribs with stone, Baba with stone

Roast	Roasted fish of Dai
Steam	“Eight-treasures”black rice pudding with pineapple
Roast	Roasted fish with lemongrass
Braise	Braise eel,
Saute	Saute dry fungi with green pepper
Stew	Stewed duck
Deep-fried	Deep-fried fungi, deep-fired bamboo insect
Bittern	Bittern pig’s feet with lemongrass

Note: This table was reedited and based on the Yunnan Ethnic Minorities History Series published by Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House.

Pu'er tea culture is a comprehensive reflection of the material civilization of Pu'er minority and the intellectual civilization on the long history on how to use, domesticate, cultivate, produce, process, eat and drink tea. The Pu'er minorities are very good at planting and fond of eating tea. They are so interested in tea that they would rather not eat for the whole day rather than not have tea (Li 2009). Tea is now being used for drinking in populated area of Han in modern times, but originally, tea was used for ceremonial purposes or as part of traditional herbal medicine. In Yunnan, particularly, from a historical perspective, tea is used for cooking. Pu'er minorities still practice the original habits of eating tea and invent different ways of cooking ways. Tea can be pickled, made into salad, baked, warmed-up, fermented and stir-fried.

For example, the pickled tea of the people of Bulang is named sour tea. Green tea leaves are boiled tenderly and put in amphora while they are hot. They are then preserved in amphora in a dark area for ten days. This is then poured into a bamboo tube. When the tea leaves become moldy, these are then buried in the soil and after a month can be chewed to help the digestion and quench thirst. For the “tea salad” of the people of Jinuo, the tender areas of the tea leaves are rubbed to soften them. Seasonings such as Juicy of Huang fruit, garlic, chili, acid ants, salt and spring water are. This is now served as dish. The “Oil Tea” of Tu nationality is cooked by frying the tea leaves and then stewing them with a little water. This is repeatedly done until it becomes a brown, thick liquid, and then boiled once more with salt, garlic, pepper, fried rice, deep-fried tofu skin, vermicelli, egg slices (Table 3).

Table 3. Tea Making Methods of Minorities in Pu'er

Ethnic	Style
Dai	Fragrant Tea with bamboo; stewed tea, roasted tea
De'ang	Tea in jar, pickled tea
Hani	Stewed thick tea, sauteed tea, tea in olla, bamboo tea
Pumi	Light tea; buttered tea, tea in oil tree
Zhuang	Tea in oil tree; betel nuts tea
Dulong	Oil tea in bamboo; stewed tea, roasted tea
Nv	Buttered tea, salted tea
Miao	Light tea; rice insect tea; tea with vegetable; oil tea; tea porridge
Yi	Roasted tea, old tea; oil and salt tea; tea in jar
Yao	Tea in oil tree, Gunlang tea
Wa	Bitter tea; stewed tea; pounded tea, fried tea in iron hotplate
Lili	Oil and salt tea; boiled tea to thunder; dragon and tiger tea
Lahu	Roasted tea; fragrant tea with bamboo; pickled tea with wine
Jingpo	Bamboo tea; pickled tea
Jinuo	Tea salad; boiled tea
Bai	Three course tea; roasted tea; boiled tea to thunder
Buyi	Light tea; tea in oil tree
Bulang	Tea with green bamboo; sour tea

Note: This table was rewritten based on Yunnan Ethnic Minorities History Series and Observatory Image of Pu'er Tea Culture and published by Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House.

As a lifestyle of dining of Pu'er minorities, Pu'er tea and varieties of tea making are the most symbolic representatives of the diversity of Pu'er culture as a skill. Tea is not only for drinking but also considered as a cultural icon combined with religions, custom and emotions. Every nation has self-contained tea culture; even different places of the same nation have different tea diet and tea custom (Sun 2010). The characteristics of tea culture in the Pu'er are unique as well as distinct from the style of tea culture of the Jiangnan literati and “kongfu”.

In summary, what Pu'er food culture more original is the use of local ingredients and cooking methods or the manners it is prepared based on traditional local knowledge. Although the ways of preparing cuisine seems relatively simple compared to mainstream Chinese, it is completely adapted to the natural environment and much healthier and more original. In this sense, food and nature cannot be discussed separately and in isolation.

3. CONCLUSION

Towards Preservation of Food Culture

Pu'er food culture is at present, facing the following three challenges: food contamination by contaminated water, air and soil, lack of successors of traditional food culture, and lesser connection between higher living standards and tourism. This is despite the richness of its food culture. Due to space consideration, the conclusion deals only with some important insights culled from the research experience with GLOCOL (Global Collaboration Center, Osaka University) in Minamata, Japan.

In Minamata City, residents started suffering from chronic nervous illness caused by mercury poisoning (Chisso Minamata disease), which occurred in the 1950s when the city was experiencing high economic growth. Industrialization in Minamata city led water pollution first. Then, fishes died and local people and animals who ate these contaminated fishes were also affected. Results of environmental research and legislation from Kumamoto Prefecture paved the way for the city to become ecologically friendly in 1992. Minamata City made efforts for it to become a sustainable green society and practice ecological economy, such as organic farming and strict segregation of garbage. As a result, Minamata has been a model of environment friendly city for seven years.

These efforts of Minamata City, concerning the protection of food culture, can be compared to the efforts of two villages in Minamata: Koshikoba and Kagumeishi village.

In 2000, local people came up with a project which is called “whole village museum of living”. In this project, all the residents start looking for “something good in their village”. They set up village guides and connect them to green tourism, traditional foods served in traditional manner and any other activities related to the protection of environment and tradition to visitors. They regard their whole local living sphere as “museum of living”. The villagers are given the title

of the “living life staff” from Minamata city. Thus, Minamata certainly succeeded to enliven a community after the serious water pollution more than fifty years ago.

There is so much to learn from the Minamata-style green tourism. Nowadays, most of the food is industrialized and fast-food restaurants or stores are quite popular. In the process, it has become difficult to find “traditional” food cooked in a traditional way. When villages in Minamata set to work on green tourism, people were worried because they did not have enough recipes of the various traditional meals. What the villagers did was to collect recipes from grandmothers in the local area and started inquiring how to cook local food to these elderly women. They also took down notes to record these recipes resulting to abundance of listings.

Additionally, the quality of fresh local produce gets lost easily because of contamination. In Minamata, people stopped using insecticides or any other chemical materials in producing sites (forest, for example) and in cultivating plants. Adapting the organic agriculture, the village harvested safe food and recovered nature and saw the future for sustainable society.

As stated many times in this paper, the diversity of food culture is one of the main characteristics in Pu'er and it is this very rich food culture that maintains people's lives, living and culture itself. But tis richness can be lost if nothing will be done to preserve the local culture.

Before development of culture can be attained, it can be argued that there is a need to preserve culture. To learn from Minamata is to learn the value of looking from the inside instead of the outside. This is what the villagers have done.

Discovering the local living place can also be beneficial to Chinese people. In China, most of the development projects are decided by authorities, such as government officials and the businessmen and the elites. There is so much to be learned from the experiences of Minamata. Thinking locally, that is looking from the inside, can therefore offer new meanings and perspectives.

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