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UNESCO



Wild tea grows among a variety of plants on Mount Wuyi in southeast China's Fujian Province. — Wang Yong

like a masterpiece of oil painting.

“Masu is the ‘Shangri-la’ of Mount Wuyi,” Zhang Biqing wrote in his book “Masu in My Eyes.” He is an expert in tea science and an inheritor of a special intangible culture — the making of black tea. He said the rich diversity of plant species in Masu and nearby villages had attracted European researchers as early as in 1699. Even British poet Lord Byron (1788-1824) wrote favorably about black tea from Mount Wuyi, Zhang noted.

As tea lovers, we came to Masu mainly to study old, uncontaminated tea trees. The first day we arrived there, however, we realized the village was a haven not just for tea connoisseurs, but also for wildlife.

Silver pheasants are one of more than 7,000 kinds of wild animals found in Wuyishan National Park, which spans 1,280 square kilometers.

One night in Masu, I heard a strange sound from a forest near our inn. I could not tell what it was. The next morning, a fellow traveler who lived next door told me he had also heard the same strange sound in the wee hours, but could not make it out, either. We went to consult some local people, who said it must have been the howl of a muntjac deer, a rare animal. Worldwide, some types of muntjac deer are classified as critically endangered species.

I have been to many tea gardens on low-lying hills, where tea plants usually predominate over the landscape. They look beautiful, but an overgrowth of one particular type of plant at the expense of many others runs counter to biodiversity. As a result, pesticides are often used because tea pests lack natural enemies that grow on other plants.

Rachel Carson (1907-1964), an American writer and ecologist, wrote in her best-selling book “Silent Spring” that insect problems arose with the intensification of agriculture — the devotion of immense acreages to a single crop. She said single-crop farming “undoes the built-in checks and balances by which nature holds the species within bounds.” A mixed growth of various plants, then, allows different insect pests to check each other, thus obviating the need for chemical pesticide or fertilizer.

If Carson were still alive and came to Masu, she might have been able to discover more “evidential support” from Eastern ecological wisdom for her conclusions.

A unique biosphere

Mount Wuyi owes its natural biodiversity to scientific management as well as its geographic advantage. Its

unique *danxia* landforms which help conserve subtropical evergreen forests have been well protected over the past few decades. *Danxia* refers to rugged landscapes developed on continental red terrigenous sedimentary beds.

UNESCO inscribed Mount Wuyi on its World Heritage List in 1999: “Mount Wuyi is one of the most outstanding subtropical forests in the world. It is the largest, most representative example of a largely intact forest encompassing the diversity of the Chinese Subtropical Forest and the South Chinese Rainforest, with high plant diversity. It acts as a refuge for a large number of ancient, relict plant species, many of them endemic to China and rare elsewhere in the country. It also has an outstanding faunal diversity, especially with respect to its reptile, amphibian and insect species.”

UNESCO also noted that Mount Wuyi has a long history of management as a protected area.

“It has had strict protective status since 1979, prior to which provincial and central governments had issued protective edicts over the area for more than 1,000 years,” UNESCO noticed on its official website.

Mount Wuyi's management got a shot in the arm last year when the national park was created. It became one

of China's first batch of five national parks established toward the end of last year. A national park system helps better protect wild flora and fauna by breaking administrative barriers across different regions.

In Masu, I had a deeper understanding of why Chinese President Xi Jinping said “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.” Invaluable indeed were the silent moments I experienced every night in Masu, as I tasted fragrant tea made from antique trees while listening to sporadic wildlife sounds from near and far, which sometimes wafted with soft drizzles.

Better biodiversity, better life. In many ways, lucid waters and lush mountains bring about more happiness than a linear accumulation of material wealth. Yes, tea farmers' life in Masu is much simpler than that of many urban dwellers, but I would not hesitate to trade my mundane hustle and bustle for the loveliness of spirit that goes with a rustic life in the midst of a rich biodiversity.

In a sense, to know how a tea mountain is protected in Wuyishan National Park is to know how China will boost biodiversity in its effort to modernize.

Come to Masu, and feel for yourself how our modern life is made better, not by wanton material pursuits, but by unreserved respect for bioreserves.