



HUNGRY for the HILLS

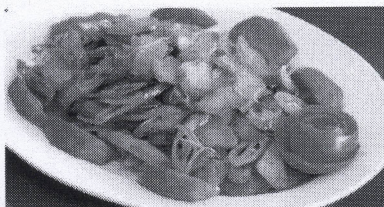
YOUNG RESIDENTS OF A CHIANG RAI VILLAGE SET OUT TO
TURN THEIR HOME INTO A FOODIE'S PARADISE

KHETSIRIN PHOLDHAMPALIT
THE SUNDAY NATION

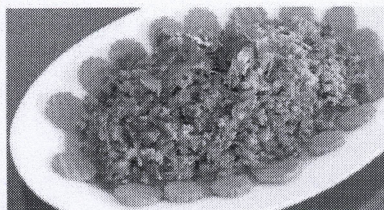
THE VILLAGE of Doi Mae Salong in Chiang Rai's Northern highlands has long been a popular destination with winter weekenders eager to enjoy some chilly weather, savour the local Chinese cuisine and sip the Oolong tea for which its plantations are known.

But once winter is over, the tourists tend to disappear and now the residents, with the help of a group of academics, are trying to woo them back throughout the year by promoting the area as a gastronomic village whose local cuisine tracks the legacy of the Chinese who found refuge here.

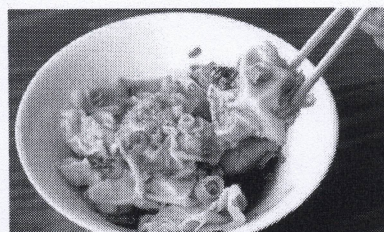
"Many of the residents of Doi Mae Salong are descendants of the anti-communist Kuomintang (KMT) forces who were granted citizenship in return for policing the area against communist infiltration. Their unique cuisine was born out of struggle, bravery, tolerance and love, and speaks loudly about the history and culture," says Pollavat Prapatpong from the School of Liberal Arts, Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai.



Salted, air-dried pork sautéed with green pepper and onion



Stir-fried minced pork with pickled cabbages



Spicy and sour wonton

Pollavat has joined young residents to research the roots of Doi Mae Salong foods in a bid to promote sustainable tourism and instil a sense of pride among the local people.

"We want to develop our home in a sustainable way based on our own roots and culture. After completing secondary school here, most young people head to the urban centres to find work. Only the old generation remains in the highlands. The pilot project to promote their traditional comfort foods aims to be easily accessible to the public," says Danita Tantivanit, 35, a granddaughter of Gen Tuan Shi-wen, leader of Kuomintang's 93rd Division, which sought asylum in Mae Salong.

With funding and academic support from Mae Fah Luang University, the five-month research project undertaken last year has produced a Thai-pocket paperback titled "Ros Mae Salong: Moo Baan Aharn" ("Taste of Mae Salong: The Gastronomic Village"). One thousand copies have been printed and distributed to restaurants and institutions in Doi Mae Salong and various tourist attractions in Chiang Rai