

Sea cucumber markets in the world: Hong Kong, Guangzhou and New York

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Hong Kong, Guangzhou and New York are the most important markets in the sea cucumber industry. Dried sea cucumber are brought from all over the world to be bought and sold in Hong Kong. Traders and wholesalers are set up shop along Nam Pak Hong Street in the Sheung Wan Area in the north-west of Hong Kong Island. Hong Kong and Guangzhou in Guangdong Province, China, have been tightly connected since the birth of Hong Kong in the 19th Century. Through this channel, most of the dried marine products imported into Hong Kong are re-exported to Guangdong, from which they are traded throughout China. Wholesalers gather along Yat Tak Lou (Yi De Lu) Street in Guangzhou. This presentation will explore the historical development of the sea cucumber market in China, with special reference to regional differences. A/The recent development in the New York market is explained in relation to the trade of the Galapagos sea cucumber, *Isostichopus fuscus*. The presentation will explore the characteristics of these three markets and will point out that management plans to take market preference into consideration.

In 2007, Hong Kong imported 5 296 metric tons of dried sea cucumber: Papua New Guinea exported the most to Hong Kong, 704t, of dried sea cucumber, Indonesia's 653t comes in second, and Japan's 585t is third in order of volume. According to the Monthly Statistics of Hong Kong, Hong Kong re-exported 4 149 tons of dried sea cucumber to 13 countries and regions in 2007. Among them, China imported 3 576 tons (86 percent of the total re-export volume from Hong Kong).

About 50 species, out of 1 200 species total, are currently commercially traded in the world. Sea cucumber can be classified by its form in two categories: *ci-shen* "spiky" and *guang-shen* "shiny". The spikes actually refer to the parapodia on a sea cucumber's back and sides that harden when dried.

The most common *ci-shen* species is *S. japonicus*, and can be found in the Bohai Sea and along the Korean, Japanese and Russian maritime coasts. The species shows regional variation in sharpness of its spikes, with the Hokkaido variety demonstrating the sharpest spikes. Several of the *ci-shen* sea cucumber species that are internationally traded have temperate seas as their natural habitat, while *guang-shen* sea cucumbers, the rest of the commercially traded species, are typically found in tropical sea environments. Some types of tropical sea cucumber found in the Pacific Ocean and around Southeast Asia, such as *Thelenota ananas* and *Stichopus chloronotus*, are also classified as *ci-shen*. *Isostichopus fuscus*, a species that is harvested around the Galapagos Islands and in other locations, is also considered *ci-shen*.

The differences in form of sea cucumber species also play an important role in sea cucumber foodways. Chinese cooking is largely divided into Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan and Cantonese cuisine, and regional differences are most pronounced between Beijing and Cantonese cuisine. Traditionally, in Beijing cuisine, *ci-shen* sea cucumbers are preferred, while the Cantonese prefer *guang-shen* species. While geographic location plays a part in the preference for the temperate *S. japonicus* in the north and the tropical *Holoturia fuscogilva* or *H. scabra* in the south, cooking styles also explain the difference. Pekinese prefer to serve food in small dishes, while the Cantonese use a large serving dish placed in the center of a round table, which explains the higher demand for small *ci-shen* species in Pekinese cuisine and large *guang-shen* species in Cantonese cuisine.

To my understanding, the New York market prefers *ci-shen*, especially *I. fuscus*. The species began to be commercially harvested in the late 1980s and became a very particular species in symbolizing globalization of the sea cucumber industry and sea cucumber conservation such as CITES. This presentation presumes that the New York market would have played an important role in the exploitation of *I. fuscus* in Central and South American countries such as Mexico and Ecuador. This is another reason why it is necessary to investigate the market preference and feed the result back to the management planning.