Revitalizing Rural China: Research on The Development Status and Communication Strategy of Geographical Indication Brands with A Case Study of Jingyang Fu Tea

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Abstract. Geographical indications of agricultural products are legal signs used to identify distinctive agricultural products from specific regions, with the product's name being linked to its geographical origins. Since 2008, China has been managing the geographical indications of agricultural products, turning ordinary crops such as fruits and vegetables into geographical indication brands. This management approach not only promotes rural economic development but also accelerates rural industry development. This research aims to analyze factors that limit agricultural product development and present a communication strategy using the case of Jingyang Fu Tea to explore how to promote the long-term development of the tea industry in the specific context of China's rural revitalization.

Keywords: Geographical Indication brand, Rural Revitalization, Jingyang Fu Tea.

1. Introduction

Geographical Indications of agricultural products is a form of intellectual property, that serves as an important measure to strengthen the construction of agricultural trademarks, cultivate regional characteristic brands, and support the development of Rural Revitalization strategies. Tea, as a typical geographical indication (GI) of agricultural products, tea is well-suited for building place branding and enhancing market competitiveness.

Shaanxi has a long history of tea and was one of cultivation and stands as one of the earliest tea-growing centers in China. On November 29, 2022, "Traditional Chinese tea-making techniques and Their Related Customs" were included in the "Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity", encompassing the art of making Fu tea. Fu tea is Dark Tea, produced from dark green tea or coarse green tea through a tightening process and originating from Jingyang County in Shaanxi Province. Due to the local geographical location, water quality, and climatic conditions, making Jingyang Fu tea held a long-term monopoly in the border market, known as "a mysterious tea on the Silk Road ".

In recent years, Jingyang Fu tea has gained prominence. In September 2019, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China approved Jingyang Fu tea as a geographical indication of agricultural products. Labeling the GI brand on Fu tea is conducive to the protection and promotion of the cultural connotation and production process of Jingyang Fu tea. However, as one of the geographical indications of agricultural products, Jingyang Fu tea still faces challenges in its promotion and development. Consequently, the study aims to explore the developmental path and enhancement strategies of Jingyang Fu tea as a geographical indication of agricultural product brand within the context of rural revitalization development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Review of the international literature

Geographical indications of agricultural products are a certification mark applied by agricultural production operators to develop specific regional specialty products. It marks the subdivision of homogeneous agricultural products into differentiated specialty goods. By developing GI agricultural

product brands, stable consumer groups and market shares can be established, enabling agricultural products to gain higher market competitiveness. The first agricultural product quality policy measures, which dealt with GIs and designations of origin, were laid down in Council Regulation (EEC) No 1601/91 of 10 June 1991. [1] Previous literature related to agricultural products mentions geographical indications and origins.

In addition to legislation dealing with agricultural quality, many researchers have stressed the relationship between geographical indications or origin, product quality, and consumer demands.

Barrena et al. (2003) believe that the country of origin is an important feature of the product and a crucial factor for consumers to consider when deciding to purchase. [2] Becker (2009) thinks that geographical indication is a guarantee of the production quality of products. [3] Bardaji. B- Iraizoz, M. Rapun (2009) has shown that agricultural product varieties certified by geographical indications.

have fewer price fluctuations than uncertified products, and geographical indications are crucial for identifying agricultural product quality information. [4] Geographical indication branding is another important direction of geographical indication research. Strengthening the association between agricultural brands and specific regions can improve consumers' recognition and awareness of agricultural brands (Voyce 2007). [5] It can also stimulate people's pride in the natural and human elements inherent in GI brands (Moschini et al., 2008). [6]

2.2. A Review of the domestic literature

The brand communication of GIs of agricultural products is an important part of developing agricultural industrialization with regional characteristics. Although many scholars in China have already participated in the construction of agricultural product brands, research on the dissemination of GIs brand of agricultural products is still lacking.

To summarize previous research, studies on agricultural products brand communication from the perspective of geographical indications can be roughly divided into three categories: Most people analyze the overall dissemination of geographical indications of agricultural products brands in the stated areas, by defining regions, namely provinces, cities, or autonomous prefectures. Wang Yin (2011), taking representative geographical indications of agricultural products in Liaoning Province as the research object and feasible development strategies have been proposed for the management and protection of agricultural products brand. [7] Chen Hui (2021), taking the geographical indication brand of Huangshan City, explore the countermeasures to solve the current dilemma of GI brand communication. [8] Zhang Fengmei, Fan Xuefeng, Zhang Hongyu (2016), based on the Lasswell model, analyze the brand communication strategy of Qingdao's geographical indication of aquatic products represented by Lingshan Island Sea cucumber. [9] Wang Yi, Zhang Qing, Dou Anqing (2022), using SWOT to analyze Qidong Daylily and analyze the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and threats of brand communication. Others analyze the impact of the communication environment on GIs brand from a macro perspective. [10] Zhang Youdong (2021), by analyzing the current situation of online live streaming, the paper proposes communication strategies for geographical indications of agricultural products brand in the live streaming mode. [11] Xu Lu (2021), She studied the "Quality products of Huanggang", which brand in the context of the Media era, using SWOT analysis as the research framework to explore the strategies that the brand can adopt for its future development. [12]

In conclusion, it is particularly necessary to explore the current situation and problems of geographical indications of agricultural products brand development from a communication science perspective. This paper will analyze the development status and constraints of the Jingyang Fu tea brand, to propose a reasonable strategy for improving the communication of the GIs brand. In order to make the GIs agricultural products brand empowering for comprehensive rural revitalization.

3. Research Background: GIs of agricultural products enabling Rural Revitalization

3.1. Political Impact

In the 21st century, China has consistently focused on strengthening the certification and promotion of GI for agricultural products to encourage agricultural diversity. In 2001, China re-enacted the Trademark Law, which for the first time provided a clear definition of geographical Indication. In 2007, the Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China issued the "Measures for the Administration of Geographical Indications of Agricultural Products", which employed GI for the certification of geographically specific agricultural products. It is called "Geographical Indication of Agricultural Products". The practice of naming agricultural products with regional names primarily serves two purposes: first, indicating the differences in agricultural product production regions; and second, highlighting the exceptional quality of agricultural products. [13] GIs of agricultural products can enhance the reputation of characteristic products, help underdeveloped regions in consolidating poverty alleviation accomplishments, and generate economic value for the agricultural industry. This approach has significantly advanced China's rural revitalization efforts. From a long-term development perspective, GIs of agricultural products also establish place branding for agricultural products with regional protection and production uniqueness for specific areas.

3.2. Economic Impact

The economic value of agricultural GIs for rural revitalization is primarily manifested in four aspects: product regionalization, market differentiation, production specialization, and industrial clustering. First, product regionalization. Since GIs indicate the origin of agricultural products, they inherently contain natural ecological and environmental factors as well as human historical and cultural values, distinguishing a single agricultural product from similar offerings. Second, Market Differentiation: given the country's large population, vast territory, and abundant resources, it can not only meet planting needs but also adjust crop layouts to cultivate the same crop in different areas. Consequently, it is possible to differentiate the quality of agricultural products based on their physical characteristics and create targeted marketing measures. Third, Production Specialization: GIs of agricultural products can promote local agricultural production specialization, improve crop production efficiency, and drive the agricultural industrialization process. Fourth, Industrial Clustering: specialized production of agricultural products fosters regional industrial clusters, stimulating the development of related industries like agricultural and sideline product processing, trade services, catering, and transportation. This dynamic creates opportunities to expand the agricultural industry chain.

3.3. Cultural Impact

Agricultural GIs serve as crucial carriers for showcasing the traditional farming culture and the living heritage of specific regional folk customs. Establishing GIs for agricultural products encourages the formation of regional brands, which can, in turn, bolster industrial prosperity and stimulate local economic development. [14] However, it is challenging for a single low-value agricultural product to maintain long-term consumer interest, making it necessary to enhance the added value of agricultural products and extend the agricultural industry chain. From the cultural perspective, integrating agricultural GIs with tourism can create a new pathway for the combined development of rural culture and tourism. This approach can broaden leisure tourism channels, empower rural industry development, and boost the countryside’s visibility. It also promotes the market recognition of agricultural products in an alternative way. At the same time, employing convenient online sales channels can break the constraints of time, space, and geographic area, enabling agricultural products and rural tourism to reach the public more swiftly and generate benefits.[15]

4. A Case Study of Jingyang Fu Tea

4.1. The Current State of GIs Brand Development

4.1.1 Policies Support

Currently, Shaanxi Fu tea production is concentrated in Jinghe New City, Jing Yang County, Qindu District, and Weicheng District of Xianyang City. The annual production of the comprehensive output value of Fu Tea is nearly 3 billion. As a characteristic industry in Shaanxi, Jingyang Fu tea has always been highly valued by the government. In recent years, The Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Shaanxi Province has focused on enhancing capabilities, building brands, and driving typical examples. The government will vigorously promote the development of the tea industry in “The 14th five-year plan of tea industry development in Shaanxi province”. Xianyang City put focused on the construction of the whole industry chain of Fu tea, adopting the layout of "Two parks and one center" to promote and create a high level of "capital of Fu tea". Jingyang County, the birthplace of Fu tea, introduced the "Management Measures for the Use of Geographical Indications in Agricultural Products of Jingyang Fu Tea", and has set up Jingyang Fu tea development service center. In addition, it has also organized multiple training sessions for Jing Yang Fu tea to guide the development of the Fu tea industry.

4.1.2 Industrial Development

Tea is a traditional agricultural industry in Shaanxi. The Fu tea industry and the tea-growing areas in Southern Shaanxi are an essential part of the Industrial chain for regional economic development, becoming a powerful measure to support the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy in Shaanxi. There are currently 70 Fu tea production and processing enterprises, more than 120 distribution enterprises, and more than 20 thousand employees in Xianyang City. By the end of 2022, there are two Common Brands, named Xianyang Fu Tea and Jingyang Fu Tea, 4 leading enterprises, where an annual production of nearly 30000 tons. Shaanxi has opened up two tea tourism integration tourism routes, carried out 32 special promotion and tea event events, and built 5 direct stores, specialty stores, and experience stores. [16] In addition, Fu Tea Cultural Tourism Integration Project and its derivatives, represented by Fu Cha town, have made outstanding contributions to the widespread dissemination of Fu tea culture and the promotion of Fu Tea regional brand awareness and reputation.

4.1.3 Tea-making Technology

Fu tea belongs to fully fermented tea, which has the most complex processing of all tea types, the longest production cycle, and the process of the most unique products of dark tea. It has a variety of nutritional health benefits such as eliminating greasy food, strengthening the spleen and stomach, reducing fat and weight loss. The "golden flowers" is considered to be the specific identification mark of Fu tea. Jingyang Fu tea's traditional production technology was restored at the beginning of the 21st century, and the modernized Fu tea industry has been gradually built, with most enterprises having mechanized and standardized production capacity. Leading enterprises have mastered the key technology of tea processing, achieving intelligent, mechanized, standardized production. Their management level is in a leading position in the province and advanced in China. New technology, new equipment, and new products are also emerging, laying a solid foundation for the development of the industry.

4.1.4 Communication Status

Jingyang Fu tea's unique external image and tea-making skills have gradually developed into a representative regional cultural symbol, driving the development of regional culture. To promote the GI brand, the mass media has had a significant impact on communication. Traditional mass communication mainly uses content to promote the brand and usually takes the form of introducing people to the background of Fu tea for telling its development. For example, Xinjiang Satellite TV once produced a program named "The Secret in Fu Brick Tea" to popularize Fu tea. In addition, it

has also told the story of Jingyang Fu tea by producing films and television dramas. New media use web for brand promotion. Social platforms can quickly achieve product line transactions and advertising precision, increasing the sales and visibility of Jingyang Fu tea. One of the most common ways to spread is through short videos and live streaming.

In this study, a large number of questionnaires were distributed on the Internet and at the Fu tea event venue to evaluate the awareness of the Jingyang Fu tea brand. From the 391 questionnaires collected, it is evident that the main age group participating in the questionnaire is the youth group, i.e., young people aged 18-30 account for more than 70%. They contact or buy Jingyang Fu tea channel mainly through online stores, live streams with products and physical stores. It shows that whether online or offline, Jingyang Fu tea specialized stores have a certain market awareness.

4.2. Constraints on brand development

4.2.1 Historical Issues: Tea production disruption

In 1958, Fu tea enterprises in Shaanxi came to a complete halt, resulting in an interruption in the production of Fu tea. Consequently, Jingyang Fu tea gradually faded out of the market and did not re-emerge until 2008. This has adversely affected the popularity of Jingyang Fu tea. While the Fu tea industry in Shaanxi has since recovered and attracted an increasing number of tea merchants, it continues to grapple with numerous challenges, such as weak public brands and disorganized product branding. Additionally, the late adoption of e-commerce in the Shaanxi tea industry and intense sales competition on individual platforms have led to an overabundance of products and brands online, making it difficult for consumers to differentiate between them.

4.2.2 Industrial Issues: Lack of integration awareness

Owing to the tendency of most tea companies to operate independently, the Fu tea industry has failed to establish a close alliance. So, the brand of Jingyang Fu tea lacks the consciousness of integration, preventing it from achieving strong synergy. To some extent, this hinders the brand's market exposure and influence. Moreover, these tea enterprises are predominantly small- and medium-sized, with a late start and small scale. They typically lack professional technical personnel and senior management talent, resulting in uneven processing levels and inconsistent product quality.

4.2.3 Product Issues: Low brand recognition

Currently, the Chinese tea market has established a stable consumer base, with young consumers preferring tea beverages or ready-made tea drinks. Therefore, it is challenging to attract individuals who already have tea-drinking habits. Owing to the significant gap between Shaanxi and leading provinces in the tea industry, Jingyang Fu tea still lags in terms of market competitiveness compared to other similar geographical indication teas. [17] As a result, it is difficult for Jingyang Fu tea brand to address its deficiency of famous products and weak brand impact in the short term.

Furthermore, the collected questionnaires reveal that the awareness rate of Jingyang Fu tea among Chinese residents is 68.29%. Wherein the rate of awareness of Shaanxi native place or residents is 33.76%, elsewhere is 34.53%. Fewer than 8% of loyal consumers who purchase Fu tea for a long time. It indicates that Jingyang Fu tea does have a certain awareness rate, but its popularity still has a lot of room to improve.

4.2.4 Dissemination Issues: Poor communication initiative

The given questionnaire was distributed among individuals involved in Fu Tea-related activities, suggesting that the interviewees should possess a better understanding of Jingyang Fu tea than general consumers. However, when asked about their willingness to purchase Jingyang Fu tea products, recommend Jingyang Fu tea brands to others, follow Fu tea online accounts, or participate in Jingyang Fu tea activities, the proportion of respondents selecting "strongly agree" was relatively low. In contrast, when questioned about the online communication effectiveness of Jingyang Fu Tea, over 60% of users considered it satisfactory. This indicates that the group with a relatively higher

awareness of Jingyang Fu Tea exhibits a cognitive imbalance toward the brand, leading to a lack of initiative in promoting and disseminating the brand.

5. The Communication Strategy of Jingyang Fu Tea

5.1. Environmental Strategy: Creating a cultural atmosphere

From a macro perspective, Jingyang Fu tea requires the establishment of an atmosphere imbued with Fu tea culture. It is suggested to adopt a Point-Line-Surface Structure to create the tea culture ambiance. “Point” refers to the GI brand of agricultural products. In the product introductions, the emphasis should be placed on Jingyang Fu Tea as a nationally certified GI of agricultural products, leveraging the authority and credibility of the identification to gain consumer recognition and trust, thus establishing the brand image of Jingyang Fu tea. “Line” represents the regional cultural atmosphere. “Surface” signifies the region's cultural ambiance. Creating an urban life circle with a strong cultural atmosphere can closely integrate the city with tea, leading to regional characteristics of “Fu Tea City" and “Fu Tea Source", allowing people to personally experience Fu tea culture.

5.2. Content Strategy: Tell the Fu tea story

Tea is a distinctive industry that integrates the primary sector of planting, the secondary sector of manufacturing, and the tertiary sector of tourism. From a content perspective, the dissemination of Jingyang Fu tea needs to show the historical image and unique regional symbols. It is necessary to elaborate on the history and culture of Fu tea, as well as the unique geopolitical culture. Only in this way can we effectively tell the Fu tea story. Specifically, this should be addressed from two aspects. On the one hand, the government should strengthen the construction of the Fu tea communication environment, emphasizing the relationship between tea culture and the city so that the city becomes permeated with Fu tea culture, reflecting the regional value of Jingyang Fu tea. On the other hand, Fu tea cultural works should highlight the attribute of GI. Whether in pictures, text, videos, or live broadcasts, the focus should be on telling the Fu tea story, underlining cultural and regional value, and leaving a lasting impression on consumers as a GI, driving more people to understand and choose the Jingyang Fu tea.

5.3. Audience Strategy: Comprehending their demands.

In terms of audience segmentation, the target consumers of Jingyang Fu tea can be divided into domestic and foreign consumers. Within China, further segmentation is needed. For audiences living in Shaanxi, it is necessary to enhance the promotion of Fu tea culture to strengthen their understanding, fostering a sense of "ownership" among residents and encouraging spontaneous dissemination. Targeting individuals from the surrounding provinces, the focus should be on promoting Fu tea boutique tourist attractions, such as Fu tea town and Fu tea museum, to attract tourists to experience Fu tea culture. For ordinary consumers, online communication can be utilized to promote tea products, conveying the core advantages of GIs to consumers. It can effectively stimulate purchases and spread brand culture, ultimately achieving an increase in their visibility. For international audiences, while expanding overseas consumer markets, attention should be paid to aligning with local consumer values. Additionally, leveraging the Belt and Road market and the influence of border-sale tea, Jingyang Fu Tea can utilize cross-border e-commerce to establish a foothold in the international market.

From a psychological perspective, Jingyang Fu tea can cater to both younger and elder consumer groups by emphasizing its health benefits. Because long-term consumption of Jingyang Fu tea can regulate the gut microbiota, which is in line with the health and wellness needs of the elderly who need homology of medicine and food. And Fu tea can alleviate obesity caused by a high-fat diet, which is in line with the dietary needs of young people who pay attention to low oil and low fat.

5.4. Place Strategy: Constructing a propagation matrix.

Traditional mass media has been the main channel for the dissemination of Jingyang Fu tea, attracting attention through publishing books and producing television programs. However, this approach imposes cultural literacy requirements on the audience, which invisibly limits the popularity of Fu tea among the public. In the era of new media, the communication strategy of Jingyang Fu tea needs to be adjusted. While utilizing traditional media to spread history and culture, it also needs to attract consumers in a more down-to-earth manner. Firstly, integrate enterprise resources. Open official direct sales stores using the geographical indication brand, such as websites, online stores, and e-commerce live streaming rooms. Secondly, expand brand influence. Building accounts on various network platforms and releasing different contents according to the communication characteristics of platforms. For example, focusing on promoting geographical and historical factors on TikTok's domestic accounts and spreading tea culture on international accounts. Finally, integrate media resources by constructing a brand communication matrix and promoting Jingyang Fu Tea through a media combination.

6. Conclusion

The unique geographical environment has given rise to a historical tea with special qualities. Nowadays, Jingyang Fu tea not only represents a natural resource showcasing regional characteristics but also serves as a window for spreading cultural history. It is a major engine for promoting comprehensive rural revitalization and plays an important role in enhancing the competitiveness of agricultural products. As a certified GI of agricultural products Jingyang Fu tea, in the context of rural revitalization, urgently needs to emphasize its brand card, seize the opportunity of Shaanxi tea revitalization, and revitalize the Jingyang Fu Tea industry.

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