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Investigation on the Regional Branding Mode of Modern Agriculture in Guanzhong – Tianshui Economic Zone——From the Perspective of Country-of-origin Image

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Abstract The theory of the country-of-origin image is discussed and the natural relations between county-of-origin image and the regional brand are explored. The paper points out that the dispersion of agriculture has intensified the natural relations to a large extent. The paper probes into the branding status of agriculture in Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone and points out the problems of it. In the first place, the agricultural industrial system is complete but there is no unified agricultural regional brand; in the second place, the weak awareness on protecting brand leads to the irrational behaviors on damaging brand. From the perspective of the image of the country of origin, the branding mode of agriculture is established and the countermeasures on improving the competitiveness of agricultural products are put forward. Firstly, the leading role of the government should be fully displayed; secondly, the image protection of original production place and regional brand promotion of the agricultural region should be intensified; thirdly, the functions of local pillar industries in protecting image and regional branding should be fully made use of.

Key words Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone, Image of country of origin, Agricultural regional brand, Cooperative marketing, China

The guidance function of country-of-origin effect becomes more and more important in international marketing and brand internationalization. In the academic circle, the scholars have built consensus in the existence of country-of-origin effect. That is, the origin country of brand and the origin country of product will affect consumers' evaluation on special products, and then affect consumers' recognition on the faith of the brand, in the end, achieves the aim of affecting consumers' purchasing inclination and purchasing behaviors^[1]. Under the industrialization background, most efforts are paid on researching the manufacturing industry and the brand of industrial products with clear ownership, rare scholars probe into the country-of-origin effect of agricultural regional brand, let alone the establishment and management of regional brands from the perspective of country-of-origin. In the design of Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone, the developmental scale and quality of modern agricultural industry has attracted the attention of decision-makers. So it is necessary to lead the overall development of modern agriculture in the economic zone by the competitive regional brand. However, the regional brands have the feature of "public goods" and deep cultural connotation, so the improper handling will lead to the entangling effects of brands. Therefore, the paper tries to explore the functional mechanism of image of country-of-origin on agricultural regional branding from the perspective of country-of-origin. Based on the research, the countermeasures on establishing and managing the agricultural regional brand are put forward, at the same time, some specific measures and improvement on the internationalization of agri-

cultural regional brands.

1 The natural correlation between image of country-of-origin effect and regional brand

The concept of image of country-of-origin derives from the term of "Rules of Origin" in the international trade in WTO, and a large amount of researches focus on the "national phase" -focusing on the general national effects. Few scholars studied the potential effects of country-of-origin image standing from the point of smaller geographic and political region. With the development of economy, people have more and more opportunities and the image of country-of-origin becomes an external clue that affect the evaluation and purchasing tendency of consumers. To be specific, people will consider the origin of the products and brands to determine whether to buy. For example, the "Maotai" in Guizhou Province and "Wuliangye" in Yibin, have fully tapped the country-of-origin image of white wine products, at the same time, the image of Guizhou Province and Sichuan Province is improved.

Researches show that brand has great spillover effect, it forms the regional brands shared by a large number of enterprises. But the regional brands have the features of publicity and dispersivity and the dispersed agricultural production aggravate the image. If we can not tap the cultural connotation of products and brand from the perspective of culture and the basis of country-of-origin image, the disaster of marketing will be caused. In other words, the country-of-origin image has close relations with single enterprise brand and regional brand in particular. The regional brand will inevitably reflect the image of the country-of-origin. The image we referred to is the positive image, as for the negative image, we should try to avoid it. Only

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by this way, the loyalty of consumes can be established, but if we entrap consumers by brand, the image of country-of-origin will be damaged greatly, let alone use the positive image effect of the country-of-origin to affect consumers' purchasing decisions.

2 The status quo and causes of agricultural regional brand building in Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone

Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone includes Xian of Shaanxi Province, Tongchuan, Baiji, Xianyang, Weinan, Yangling, Shangluo (Shangzhou District, Luonan District, Danfeng County and Zhashui County) and the areas administrated by Tianshui of Gansu Province, with the area of 79 800 km² and by the end of 2007, the total population three was 28.42 million. The economic zone locates in the center of Eurasian continental bridge, and it connects the east and west, south and north. The zone is the area with great developmental potentials for its good economic basis and deep humanities and histories^[2]. The economic zone, which relies on the national agricultural high-tech demonstration zone of Yangling, develops new agricultural production mode and constructs the promotion service platform of modern agricultural technology, aims at establishing the agricultural base with high technology. But the developmental strategy demands branding of products, that is fully tap the core image of country-of-origin of Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone. We will take the country-of-origin image as the core contents of the agricultural regional brand and then popularize the brand. But the reality is that the brand construction of modern agriculture in the economic zone is not so optimistic and many problems and obstacles still exist. The paper will analyze the reasons that cause the problems and obstacles of agricultural economic zone on the basis of the status quo of the branding of agricultural economic zone. Generally speaking, the status quo of the branding in economic zone is reflected on the following aspects.

2.1 Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone has complete agricultural industrial system but lacks of unified agricultural regional brand With the implementation of the Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone, the agricultural economic strength in the area has increased greatly, farmers' incomes have increased and many competitive agricultural products have obtained good scale interests. Led by the government, the position of agriculture in Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone becomes clear and the five agricultural industrial belts have been formed, including food industry belt, vegetables and fruits belt, forests and special flowers belt, animal husbandry belt and urban agro-tourism belt. The promoting effect of the Yangling national high-tech technology demonstration area is well displayed. While facing the consumers, the economic zone does not have the unified brand, which can not give consumers deep impression and can not increase the added value of agricultural products. Through investigation and on-the-spot interviews, it is found that farmers' operation behaviors in the area are not well organized and consumers are sensitive to prices and have low loyalty to products. The reason is that there is no

unified regional brand to guild farmers, agricultural products, the development of low end agricultural enterprises and intensive processing enterprises of agricultural products. Sometimes, the enterprises compete disorderly with each other, which lead to unnecessary consumption. Notably, the geographic and political division of Guanzhong and Tianshui makes the branding more difficult, for each district only its own benefits. So it greatly blocks the unified image of country-of-origin.

2.2 The weak awareness on protecting brands leads to the irrational behaviors on damaging the brand on a certain degree Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone locates in the inland, so farmers' thought patterns are backward and the small-peasant concept has rooted in farmers' mind. Besides, there is no such operation concept that suits the modern large scale production, so the brand consciousness is weak and some farmers even have deep opportunism mentality and behaviors. Some even can not aware of it after damaging the famous brand. For example, the Xianyang apple was a famous products, but due to the dispersed agricultural operation, the market main body can not form an unified or semi-official organizations to conduct effective management on brand. The pillar industries lack not only the awareness of trade mark and brand, but also the capability to protect the regional brand. It is pitiful that the local government can not direct and stimulate farmers to create regional brands. Besides, the expansion of brand publicized the features of the brand. Many people just use the brand but do not invest the brand, let alone expand the brand to other agricultural industry and agricultural products, so they may lose the opportunity of branding.

3 The establishment of agricultural regional brands in Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone-from the perspective of country-of-origin image

Regional brand refers to the aided brand awareness and brand favorite formed by an industry or several special industries, which have large scale, strong production capacity, have certain market share and influences in a certain administrative region or economic region. Regional brand, the comprehensive exemplification of the collective performance of enterprises in the area, contents with three elements: industrial fundament, regional features and brand connotation. Among the three, industrial fundament is the basic content of regional brand. The industrial strength reflected on production scale, market share, and technology and quality level and inside work division and cooperation of industries has positive relations with the influences of the regional brand. Regional feature refers to the regional brand is closely connected with special region and has strong regional distinct. Brand connotation refers to the regional brand not only has historical culture and distinctive local futures, but also represents the main body and image of the industries and image. Regional brand has close relations with modern agriculture. From the above analysis, it can be known that the image of country-of-origin has natural relations with the

regional brand. So for one thing, we can explore the image of country-of-origin from the dimensions of location features, cultural distinction and industrial distinction of Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone, and then extract the brand element to create distinctive regional brand; for another thing, as for the existing brands of agricultural products in the economic zone, we must seek common ground while reserving the differences and find out the common features with new regional brand. The common features include cultural similarity, similarities of features of products, similarities in package and then conclude them under the title of "made in Guanzhou – Tianshui economic zone". The brand will be popularized by using traditional media and new media. When using the internet to build the brand, the English network should be established as well to transmit the brand to the world. According to this, the correlation graph among the local brand elements, regional brand and country-of-origin image can be drawn, which can be seen on Fig. 1.

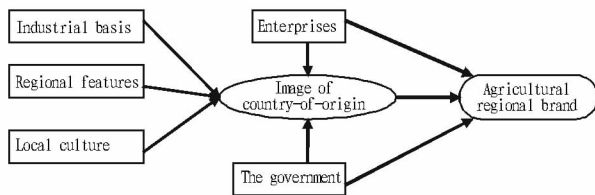


Fig. 1 The regional agricultural branding mode around the image of the country of origin

According to the above mode, the industrial layout and the establishment of regional brand should be constructed simultaneously and neither is dispensable. There is no such question "whether chicken comes first or egg comes first". The overall adjustment of industrial layout is conducive to the rapid formation and enhancement of regional brand, and the well-known regional brand should be underpinned by the distinctive agricultural industry^[3]. The cluster tendency of rural households, agricultural enterprises and agricultural demonstration basis can enjoy the spillover effect of brand so as to motivate the development of other industries. It can be seen from Fig. 1 that we can explore the image of the country-of-origin from the special location, industrial basis and local culture of the economic zone, and then eliminate some negative descriptions of the image while promoting the positive side of the image of country-of-origin. When necessary, we can consult the experts to fix the refined image by written forms and then by using various media, especially the internet to popularize the image. It is found that in the process of managing agriculture and the country-of-origin image of agricultural products, the autonomy of enterprises should be well displayed. The government will encourage the enterprises to cooperate with the country-of-origin image to create and popularize famous brand. If the information transmitted by the two parties is complementary and conducive to protecting the overall, integrated and positive country-of-origin image, they can register the regional brands and public brands into legal trademark. However, in the process of protecting the regional brand on the basis of country-of-origin image, the gov-

ernment will intensify its functions on guidance and adjustment, or even use its authority to guild, thus help the enterprises get profits on the basis of improving the brand awareness. In the end, the building and maintenance of regional brand should take the country-of-origin image as the center. In the due, the government will introduce the regional brand to the world through promoting the country-of-origin image by using the e-commerce and internet marketing.

4 Countermeasures on improving the competitiveness of agricultural regional brand

In order to well construct the agricultural industrial system of Guanzhong – Tianshui economic zone; cultivate the international country-of-origin image and agricultural regional brand; launch the cooperative marketing with a completely new idea to improve the core competitiveness and scale degree of modern agriculture in the economic zone to a maximum degree, the mode for constructing regional brand can be seen on Fig. 1. On the basis of Fig. 1, we will adopt targeted measures to extract, manage and maintain the agricultural regional brand. Through concluding the above analysis, the following countermeasures can be adopted.

4.1 The leading role of the government will be fully displayed

4.1.1 The government will provide all-around public services. Usually, the government is the decision-maker of industrial policies. It takes the responsibilities of infrastructure construction, personnel training and education. Local government is inevitably duty-bound in the construction of the local industrial edge and regional brand, at the same time, the construction of regional brand can not be conducted without the guidance and support of local government. The public policies made by the local government should fully display its guidance and supervision functions^[4]. The government should provide various high-efficient administrative services, which include the services on solving the problems of enterprises and providing elements. In the first place, The government should care more about the hardship of the enterprises and foster favorable environment for the enterprise through adjusting market and using social elements, such as the land, information, social reputation, *etc.* in the meantime, the government will intensify the functions of government in making market rules, guiding the industries and providing information services to create favorable outside conditions for the development of regional industries. In the second place, the government will stipulate reasonable industrial policies; plan the industrial zone; guide the rational development of local industry and avoid the appearance of "lemon market" caused by excessive same products. Besides, the government will perfect the infrastructure construction of the local area and create favorable system environment. The government will set up marketing centers of retail and wholesale in the areas with good conditions to form the collecting and distributing center of distinctive products. The government will create smooth logistics platform and effective information sharing platform to create industrial edge and regional brand.

4.1.2 The government will create favorable developmental environment for regional brand of agricultural products. Good institutional and transaction environment is the guarantee for the formation of regional brand and the continuous improvement of brand favorite. The government has the advantages in the establishment of institutions. At present, the local governments' works are: including the construction of regional brand into the overall plan of regional economy; collecting the necessary policy resources through institutional innovation to provide support for the formation and development of regional brand; exploring the resources or history resources of the local areas and then cultivating the resources to enhance the country-of-origin connotation of local agriculture; making local laws and regulations on maintaining quality and market order; protecting the legal rights of enterprises; severely punishing the behaviors of fake and poor products and protecting intellectual property rights.

4.2 The protection of the country-of-origin image and the promotion of agricultural regional brand should be intensified The so called brand image is the characteristic of the brand in the market and social masses. It reflects the recognition and evaluation of consumers on products. In the relatively dispersed operated agricultural industrial system, the country-of-origin image represents the image of regional brand to a large degree. Therefore, only by including the country-of-origin image into the brand image and transmitting the information to consumers through marketing or promoting, then the brand can be of significance. For one thing, the enterprises in the enterprise of the economic zone should handle well the public relations and form the favorable country-of-origin image as soon as possible; for another thing, the government can introduce the country-of-origin image to the masses through media to affect consumers' decision when buying the same kinds of products. According to the local agricultural development, the government can combine the country-of-origin image with the agricultural products and enterprises with local distinctions to fully display and stimulate the imagination of consumers on the brand, so as to change their recognition on brand and win over their trust on the brand. To be specific, after constructing the country-of-origin image, the government will consider the following approaches to promote the regional brand; oral communications of regional consumers, big ceremonial activities, conferences on introducing the brands, face to face discussion and negotiation, trade fair, exhibition, internet among various industries, building books, newspapers and magazines and holding professional forums and lectures, etc.

The country-of-origin image is a crucial intangible property and great asset of its owner. But its feature of publicity makes it easy to be used for free and damaged by the opportunists. Therefore, in order to protect the intangible assets, the related department should implement effective protection strategies on brands. Actually, the publicity of regional brand stimulates the enterprises in the region, as well as the opportunities for enterprises within and without to make poor quality products to sold as the high quality products. In the end, the overall image of

the regional brand will be damaged. In order to effective prevent and control the behaviors that violate the brand, the enterprises within the area should stipulate various protection measures to protect the regional brand and country-of-origin image.

4.3 Displaying the leading role of pillar agricultural industries in protecting country-of-origin image and constructing regional brand Regional brand is the comprehensive expression of the collective behaviors of a certain area and it presents the main body and image of the industrial products in a certain area. The regional brand plays an important role in protecting the country-of-origin image and economic development. In fact, creating and developing the agricultural regional brand on the basis of country-of-origin image is a commercial operation behavior, so it needs the collective participation of a large number of enterprise and industrial brands in the area to enjoy jointly the interests and share the risks and fight against competition and challenge of market jointly. Only by this way, the core competitiveness of enterprises can be enhanced and the differential operation can be realized. And then, the loyalty of consumers on the products can be improved and more and more consumers will be attracted by the brand^[5]. However, all the success relies on enterprises, for enterprises are the main bodies in creating and developing regional brand, at the same time, they are the biggest beneficiaries in the development of regional brand. The products and brand image of enterprises are the life of image of country-of-origin, or else, the negative image of country-of-origin will be formed. What's worse, once the negative image is formed, the core interest and overall image of the whole regional agricultural industrial system will be damaged. The entangling effect may be triggered that the brands and interests of other industries may be affected. Therefore, each enterprise in the area should form and intensify the strong brand awareness; continuously improve the quality of products and services; improve the scientific innovation strength; explore the connotation of the brand to fit it to the image of country-of-origin; enhance the comprehensive competitiveness of products and promote the upgrade of industrial. At the same time, the self-innovation capability of enterprises should be improved and the famous brands should be cultivated to promote the development of regional brand and the upgrade of country-of-origin image.

5 Conclusion

Through normalizing the research mode, the paper puts forward the mode for constructing agricultural regional brand on the basis of brand and country-of-origin image, as well as several specific countermeasures. The credibility of the above analysis needs testing through empirical research. Notably, the questionnaires and on-the-spot interviews should be applied to collect the recognition data of the enterprises, the government to the country-of-origin image, and to the agricultural regional brand, and then gathering and analyzing the statistics. The approach can help to construct the mechanism mode of micro-functions between country-of-origin image and agricultural regional brand.

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Support family" is the highest. This may be because that with the increase of educational levels, farmers have more experiences of living in cities and towns, and increasingly comprehend that multifarious conveniences brought by certain fixed income and permanent urban residence certificate, while the low-level educational background farmers are in the other way around, and they long live in rural areas. As long as the basic needs of family life are answered and they can survive, they can abandon farmland, which indicates that the economic status of arable land in farmers' heart is not high to some extent.

3.3 Analysis of conditions the farmers need to abandon farmland according to different ages As can be seen from Table 3, the proportion of choosing each option among youth group, middle-aged group and elderly group is all similar, and basically there is no difference. The proportion of choosing "A Only obtain permanent urban residence certificate" among youth group, middle-aged group and elderly group is all lowest, and the proportion of choosing "B Certain fixed income and permanent urban residence certificate" among youth group, middle-aged group and elderly group is the highest, which indicates that the impact of age on the farmers' will to abandon all farmland is not significant.

4 Conclusion

By summarizing the different groups of farmers' will of farmland outflow, we get the following conclusion: first, regardless of which group of farmers, leaving home to seek jobs elsewhere is the most principal factor of impacting farmers' farmland outflow, especially for high-income group and middle-income group (these farmers are the biggest potential rural households of farmland outflow), therefore, we have to optimize the policy environment for migrant workers, and accelerate the transfer of rural labor force, in order to promote the outflow of arable land; second, currently, the low price of agricultural products is an important factor impacting the farming of rural households, especially for low-income group. As many as 40.5% of the farmers choose to cultivate all contracted farmland under the condition of "B The price of agricultural products increases greatly and cultivating farmland is lucrative", which indicates from another angle that the relatively low economic benefit of agricultural production is an important reason impacting farmers' expanding the operation scale and strengthening driving force of farmland inflow. Therefore, we should further strengthen the support for agriculture, farmer and countryside, optimize agricultur-

al production environment, reinforce the public input degree for agricultural infrastructure, and share the production costs of land operators; third, the permanent urban residence certificate is no longer the main factor to attract farmers' transfer, and the farmers have begun to become more rational to give up farmland. We should promote the rapid development of rural economy, gradually establish the rural social security system including basic old-age pensions and medical insurance system, subsistence security system, social welfare, social relief, social assistance and other social security undertakings. Only when the farmland is no longer as a kind of social security can it be as a kind of resource to be optimized and revived^[5], so as to promote the circulation of farmland.

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