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# Dawn of Geographical Indications in Japan: Strategic Marketing Management of GI Products Candidates

Junko Kimura<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hosei University, Japan

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**Dawn of Geographical Indications in Japan:  
Strategic marketing Management of GI Candidates**

**Junko KIMURA**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

This research aims to clarify how Geographical Indication products candidates are working on Marketing activities to be successful in unique market in Japan. In April 2014, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries filed the Diet the Law on Geographical Indications (hereafter “GI”) and it was approved. Enforcement of GI Law is to start in June 2015, which means that dawn of GI in Japan is just around the corner. Since there are no GI products in Japan yet besides five alcohols which are under the control of Patent Office, this study argues the present strategic managements of a several national and foreign GI candidates.

GI in Japan is closely related to Regional Branding. Japan is 377,923 km<sup>2</sup> and has four distinct seasons, and its climate varies from cool temperate in the north to subtropical in the south, which results in agriproducts’ territorial uniqueness with natural, historical and cultural characteristics. Regional Branding is to, by making use of the uniqueness, create added value on each agriproduct.

**1.1 Geographical Indications in Japan**

Let us first understand the objectives of the Japanese Geographical Indications.

**1.1.1 Objectives of GI**

In June 2015, Geographical Indications will be activated in Japan. Why Ministry of Agriculture, Forest, and Fisheries decided to hand in a draft bill to National Assembly? What are the objectives of GI in Japan? There are four major effects. 1) Premium prices for producers by differentiating their products as territorially branded ones. 2) Administrative organization maintains strict supervision on counterfeits, and the producers can avoid litigation costs and defend their branded products. 3) Consumers can obtain quality-controlled products. 4) Producers can export products as authentic Made-in-Japan products. Table 1 summarizes the expected effects.

Table 1 Expected effects of GI in Japan

	Direct Effects of GI introduction	Effects of combination of GI and other policy	Future effects after law is settled
For Producers	(1) Enhance sales capabilities from price-competition to quality-competition	(1) Discover new regional brand with added value with higher	(1) Establish versatile enterprise with putting GI product as a core. Not only primary producers’ diversification into

	<p>(2) Develop internal system by deciding code-of-practice and quality agreement, internal system is organized and increase motivation and sense of unity</p> <p>(3) Decrease of counterfeits</p>	<p>prices along with promotion of primary producers' diversification into processing and distribution, so called sixth sector industrialization.</p> <p>(2) Promote exports of GI products at trade fair, exhibitions and business talks</p>	<p>processing and distribution, but also tourism industry can be developed by putting GI product as core of the diversification of business.</p> <p>(2) Promote exports as global standard of the Japanese GI system.</p> <p>(3) Reduce fake products in foreign markets and increase imports of Made-in-Japan products</p> <p>(4) Enhance self-confidence and pride of producers/processors as exports increase</p>
For Regional Economics	<p>(1) New economic subject is emerged, and employment and income would increase.</p>	<p>(1) Regional economics will be activated by employments in tourism and other new industries.</p>	<p>(1) Regionally branded products sales and increase tourists for rural development maintain regional society.</p> <p>(2) Self-confidence of rural community members</p>
For Consumers	<p>(1) Clarify product information which is closely related to geographical origin.</p> <p>(2) Decrease counterfeits because official institution takes a role of auditing.</p>	<p>(1) Expand opportunities to purchase regional brands</p>	<p>(1) Emerge of good eating habits and lifestyle</p>
For Global Market	<p>(1) Consumers in foreign countries can recognize authentic Japanese brands.</p> <p>(2) Consumers in Japan can recognize foreign historically and traditionally authentic regional branded products.</p>	<p>(1) Diffusion of Made-in-Japan brands by joining trade fair or trade show.</p>	<p>(1) Increase demand on high quality Made-in-Japan agriproducts</p> <p>(2) Increase understanding of Japanese history and traditional culture by consuming products.</p> <p>(3) By registering GIs in foreign countries, Japanese products will be protected and counterfeits will be decreased, which gives the foreign consumers to purchase authentic agriproducts from Japan.</p>

**Source: Ministry of Agriculture (2012a)**

Research question of this research would be as follows: How are the present

strategic managements of GI products candidates?

### 1.1.2. Differences between GI and other certifications

The major differences are that under GI Law, Ministry practices quality control by checking description and code of practice, and audits counterfeits.

There are three other certification systems, including original certification system by local government and Regional Collective Trademark in Japan.

#### (a) Original Certification System by Local Government

Almost all of 47 prefectures in Japan have their own certification system, and some prefectures have producers' councils or similar organizations. Certification standards vary; some follow EU's GI system and form code of practice for each product, and others use sensory analysis for quality control inspection. The reason each prefecture sets certification system was due to the increase of social problems, including false food labeling, menu misrepresentation, and food fraud. Regional original certification is supposed to clarify traceability and improve safeness of foods. When producer passes the inspection/examination of quality control, the local government puts regional specific collective brand mark.

Nagano Appellation Control system, for example, is designed to authenticate agricultural products produced in Nagano Prefecture that exhibit exceptional taste and quality. The screening committee consists of representatives of producers, consumers and distributors. Only those products that have followed the strictest criteria are allowed to bear the sticker of authentication (FIGURE 1). In 2002, the system was initially launched to screen Japanese sake and wine brewed, and gradually the scope of products has expanded to cider, shochu liquor and rice.

FIGURE 1 Mark of Nagano Appellation Control<sup>1</sup>



Source: Nagano Prefecture<sup>2</sup>

#### (b) Regional Collective Trademark

Cooperative groups can register product which consists of a region name and a product name for Regional Collective Trademark when a certain degree of fame has

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pref.nagano.lg.jp/kokusai/government/english/introduction/food.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nagano-wine.jp/>

been regionally established. Registration requirements are 1) eligibility of the group, 2) close link between the name of the region and the product, 3) well-known due to the prior usage by the applicant, and 4) not solely consist of common name of the product.

The numbers of registered products are 566 (April 2014), and 304 are agricultural, forestry and fishery products and foodstuffs.

FIGURE 2 Certificate of Collective Trademark for Nagasaki WAGYU issued by Patent Office



Source: Nagasaki branch of National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations<sup>3</sup>

When infringements are found, there are two ways to solve the problem. First is civil claim. In case of an infringement of the trademark, the trademark holder has rights to claim for stopping and/or preventing infringements<sup>4</sup>.

Regional brand system faces two major problems; quality control and infringements. The present trademark system, which the government takes charge of registering the name of the product, has difficulties in solving these issues. There is an example for the former problem of non-unified quality, which leads to decrease of brand value. The boom of Product X emerged and the name of the region became well known, but since quality standard varied vastly among producers, the low quality products discouraged consumers' appreciation. Authorization sticker was established by the local community and producer groups tried promoting sales through their website, however, it was not very effective for eliminating the low quality products. This case indicates that securing product quality is simply voluntary under the present trademark system and institutional liability for quality is requested.

The second problem is free riding on brands. Here is an example. Due to the

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nagasakiwagyu.com/?p=805>

<sup>4</sup> Criminal penalties of infringement are imprisonment with work of not more than ten years or a fine of not more than ten million yen or a combination of these two. A person who have infringed on a trademark will be imprisonment of not more than five years or a fine not more than five million yen or a combination of these two.

unsuitable soil conditions of volcanic ash, compost from livestock had been utilized to improve fertility of the soil in order to improve product quality. Product Y gradually gathered nationwide fame, but substandard products, using its name, were riding free on the fame of the brand. Regional municipalities, together with the agricultural cooperative, are currently considering countermeasures, but are not successful. The problem of Product Y shows that as trademark rights are private ones and infringements must be dealt independently, there are limitations for agricultural, forestry, or fishery producers to take an action. In order to solve these two issues, the present trademark system faces, Ministry of Agriculture has been claiming the necessary of establishment of a new system.

### **(c) Three Characteristics of Japan's Geographical Indication Protection**

In June 2014, Acts for Protection of Names of Designated Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Products and Foodstuffs was enacted. First major objective is protecting the producers' interests as intellectual property of the region. Adequate evaluation of agricultural, forestry and fishery products and foodstuffs retain and the value of the product would increase. Second objective is protecting the consumer's interests. Protection of authenticity of the highly value added agricultural, forestry and fishery products and foodstuffs will respond their demand and needs.

The flow for application would be as follows. 1) Application for registration of the names of agricultural products and foodstuffs and groups of producers/processors, 2) Registration of the names of agricultural products and groups of producers/processors, 3) Ministry of Agriculture monitors group's ability of quality control, and 4) Ministry audits producers/processors that violate the law. The major uniqueness of the Japanese, in sum, that the direct monitoring and inspection of Ministry on products' quality.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Consumer Values**

Product evaluations are decided depending on consumers' sense making of values. Nobeoka (2008) categorized two types of values: functional value and non-functional value. Functional value is determined by evaluation of product functions according to objectively fixed criteria, whereas non-functional value is created when customers attach subjective significance or meaning to the product. A difference is that while functional value exists according to objective criteria, non-functional value is attached to the product according to individual customer's subjective criteria (Nobeoka

2010, pp19-20)<sup>5</sup>.

Non-functional value corresponds to the difference between the standard prices determined by functional value and the actual prices of the products. Products which have only functional value are prices in consideration of their basic functions. Customers pay for functional value determined according to objectively fixed criteria. Products with non-functional value deviate from the dominant trend of function-price correlations. Non-functional value is subjective customer interpretation of a specific function and can be created when manufacture produces something that touches their hearts (Nobeoka 2010, pp20-21).

## **2.2. Characteristics of the Japanese Consumers**

Miura (2013) argues that consumer behavior in Japan has two binomial characteristics of “tough” and “easy”. Tough side is represented in four behaviors; 1) hostility towards product lack, 2) importance of good originality, 3) consumer preference towards new products and new functions, and 4) preference for extremely high diversity in services, assortments and functions. At the same time, the Japanese consumers are seen as “easy”, especially in prestigious brands consumption as 1) preference on famous and relatively expensive brands, and 2) preference on trendy products in which consumers get to know from information by mass media (Miura, 2013).

By reviewing the previous literatures, this study constructs its hypothesis as follows: Successful strategic Marketing management of the GI candidates in Japan is practiced by adjusting and responding to unique characteristics of the Japanese consumers, using functional value and/or non-functional value.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology consisted in semi-structured interviews to the most representative actors involved in each GI candidate. In specific, the representatives of Kobe Beef Marketing and Distribution Promotion Association, National Livestock Agriculture Cooperative Federation, Professional Cheese Association, and Colombian Coffee Growers Federation. We also interviewed Director of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries who is in charge of GI Law in Japan.

The domestic products are WAGYU, KOBE beef and TOKACHI Cheese, and the foreign product is Café de Colombia.

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<sup>5</sup> Nobeoka (2010) pointed out that concepts similar to non-functional value have already been presented in a various terms, including experiential value (Schmitt, 1999), psychic value (Khalifa, 2004), exclusive value premium (Groth, 1994), and hedonic value (Hirshman and Holbrook, 1982).



**FIGURE 5 Informants data**

Informant	Title	Organization	Interview Date
Daisuke Terao	---	Kobe Beef Marketing & Distribution Promotion Association	Jan 7, 2015
Koji Matsumoto	---	National Livestock Agriculture Cooperative Federation	Jan 13, 2015
Shojiro Tsuyusaki	Director	National Livestock Agriculture Cooperative Federation	Jan 13, 2015
Shigeki Shiraiwa	Managing Director	National Livestock Agriculture Cooperative Federation	Jan 13, 2015
Katsuhisa Saka	Director	New Business and Intellectual Property Division, Food Industry Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Jan 19, 2015 February 5, 2015 March 7, 2015 March 14, 2015
Yoko Takagi	Senior staff	New Business and Intellectual Property Division, Food Industry Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Jan 19, 2015
Kensuke Asahi	Associate Director	New Business and Intellectual Property Division, Food Industry Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Jan 19, 2015
Santiago Pardo	Director Asia	Columbian Coffee Growers Federation	Jan 22, 2015
Katsuhiro Saka	Director	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Feb 5, 2015
Yuko Sato	Director	Japan Cheese Professional Association	Feb 18, 2015

## 4. CASE STUDIES

### 4.1. WAGYU

In June 2014, EU allowed to import Japanese WAGYU for the first time. It would surprise consumers in EU because they have already consumed WAGYU by then. WAGYU has been imported from other countries such as Australia and the USA into EU. Australia is successful in breeding and selling of WAGYU, as sales revenue of 2013 was 503,113 dollars and that of 2014 increased to 708,148 dollars.

In Japan, there are only four types of WAGYU; KUROGE (Japanese black

cattle), AKAGE (Japanese brown cattle), TANKAKU (Japanese shorthorn) and MUKAKU (Japanese polled). WA means “Japanese” in Japanese and GYU means cattle in Japanese. There are 229 kinds of regional WAGYU in Japan (March 2005), and some of them are registered as Regional Collective Trademarks.

History of eating beef is not that long in Japan. After 300-year of locked country, Meiji era started in 1868, and the British who lived in Japan asked for eating beef. It was the time cattle have been consumed as foods in the country. The foreigners gave the compliment on richly marbled Japanese beef. In 1944, native species are sorted out and four kinds above were registered. Hybridization was strictly prohibited and natural selection gradually completes the Japanese specific WAGYU.

PICTURE 1 Richly Marbled WAGYU beef



Source: photo taken by the author

Today, WAGYU is popular among other countries from Asian countries such as Macau and Hong Kong to European countries such as Germany. Marketing activities of Japanese WAGYU in the global competition was not successful because each WAGYU competes over prices one another in EU Market<sup>6</sup>.

In beef market in Japan, consumers are not educated and some even do not understand differences between WAGYU and “domestically grown cattle”. The later refers to any kinds of cattle which stayed longest in Japan. For example, if cattle is raised in Australia for 300 days and brought and stayed in Japan for 301 days, it can be domestically grown cattle. Beef are consumed both at restaurants and at home. There are ranks of WAGYU, and each region has different conditions to evaluate the rank.

After BSE was recognized in 2001 in Japan, traceability becomes important. WAGYU has functional value in terms of Made-in-Japan beef, but consumers do not recognize characteristic of each regional WAGYU.

Some distributors try educating consumers by communicating producers’ information and characteristics of WAGYU. For example, DAICHI, the organic foods

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<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Australian WAGYU is successful functionally and non-functionally.

e-commerce retailer, promotes TANKAKU (Japanese shorthorn), emphasizing its functional value as well as non-functional value<sup>7</sup>. It might help the consumers to put non-functional value and mental attachment to TANKAKU, which results in increase of sales. Small but continuous consumer education is important for non-functional value creation.

#### **4.2. KOBE Beef**

KOBE beef emphasizes its functional value to the consumers. The product's objective and essential authenticity is quite obvious, and Association keeps conducting strict inspection and quality control, which makes it possible for the premium price of baby cow and its beef. In specific, from 1983, distributors are strictly limited and selected under the conditions of 1) retail store has to sell at least 12 cattle a year, and 2) restaurant has to purchase at least 720 kilo a year. Every distributor needs to file documents, pass the examination and complete contracts with Association. When the distributor passes the exam, Association gives statue of cattle and certification which will be shown at store/restaurant. Association keeps monitoring and auditing each distributor and conducts interviews periodically. In 2001, Kobe beef is registered for ordinal trademark, and in 2007, Regional Collective Trademark is registered. In 1983, numbers of the registered distributors were 119 and in 2007 the numbers increased to 192, which results in sales increase of Kobe beef. Premium price of baby cattle was realized from 370,000 yen in 2001 to 530,000 yen in 2007.

In contract, MATSUSAKA beef, another premium regional beef in Japan, emphasizes its non-functional value to the consumers. MATSUSAKA beef cows are raised with unique methods. For example, in order to aid digestion and rise its appetite beer is fed, the cows are massaged with Japanese sake (wine) to aid blood circulation, and they are raised with listening to Mozart. These stories are appreciated by consumers.

#### **4.3. TOKACHI Cheese**

History of cheese consumption is quite short and shallow in Japan. At the beginning, the consumers could find only processed cheese at retail stores.

Tokachi is the city located in the northern island Hokkaido in Japan, where 26,000 tons of cheese is produced in one year. Tokachi Natural Cheese Council is founded in 2006 by volunteers from each cheese factory in Tokachi for cheese making technology dissemination. Council went affiliated to Tokachi Foundation. Working on

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<sup>7</sup> <https://store.daichi.or.jp/NewsDetail/index/contentscd/21/year/2012/no/105>

with Hokkaido Tokachi Regional Food Processing Technology Center, the Council created a standard for natural cheese authentication system. In 2012, it organized Tokachi Quality Group and started working on GI application. Nine cheese factories developed a new product of TOKACHI FRESH, which need to be manufactured by following Tokachi original rule.

Hirata, Associate Professor of Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine and member of Tokachi Natural Cheese Council, pointed out that though he and his students worked on application development of TOKACHI FRESH, including recipe, the Council does not consider the way of its usage and consumption scene. Packaging design is not sufficient. Price is about 400 Yen which is too expensive for daily consumption but too low for gift-giving.

Ideologically, it is similar to European GI; however, the producers and related organizations/institutions are not successful for creating cheese market, partly because they do not understand consumers' needs and their image on cheese. Yoko Sato, Manager of Cheese Professional Association, believes that Heidi, TV animation by Hayao Miyazaki in 1970s, gave an enormous influence on the Japanese consumers and they constructed solid image that tasty cheese should be melting.

PICTURE 3 Heidi with melting cheese



Source: Hayao Miyazaki

PICTURE 4 Actualization of Heidi cheese at home



The Council members used to gather for the meetings once a month, but they stopped seeing one another for last six months. Each factory cannot sell TOKACHI FRESH well and factory workers' and managers' motivations went down. Presently the factories are more enthusiastic on producing Raclette which is more popular among the Japanese consumers.

#### **4.4. Café de Colombia**

Café de Colombia obtains values of both functional and non-functional. In 1928, Columbian Coffee Growers Federation (hereafter “FNC”) actively conducted sales promotion and advertisements in the world. For example, in order to improve product quality, FNC technically supported the farms from 1928. In 1931, FNC dispositions inspectors at harbors for quality control. In 1938, FNC founded National Coffee Research Center called Cenicafe, where not only coffee but also regional natural environments were studied. From 1931 to 1932, FNC regulated product quality for exports, constructed brand and cooperative branding, and managed coffee bean variations. In 1939, FNC conducted tin promotion. As initial results are as follows. 1) Recognition of consumers on Columbia as coffee production origin went up to 47 percent in 1959, 2) coffee growers obtained premium price of Columbia coffee, and 3) income of growers increased.

For functional value, it has highly strict on quality control in exporting process, and by using catchphrase of “100% Made in Columbia” it constructed Ingredient Brand. In Japan, FNC pays incentive money for promotion toward roasting companies, emphasizing not only product characteristics and origins but also coffee culture. It used consumer advertisement, which promotes the roasting companies to use Columbia coffee beans, which results in market expansion in Japan. In 1989, its trademark was registered.

For functional value to respond to the Japanese consumers' tough characteristic,

FNC keeps working on strict inspection through overall distribution process from the farm to the retail stores as well as educating the sellers. It also responds to the Japanese consumer's easy characteristic. Many Japanese like characters, from domestic Hello Kitty and Pokemon to foreign Disney's Mickey Mouse and Dick Bruna's Miffy. FNC makes use of its original image character of Juan Valdez in order to give the Japanese consumers emotional attachment to Columbia coffee.

PICTURE 6 Image character of Columbia coffee



Source: FNC

Canned coffee is unique consumer culture in Japan. The Japanese consumers drink 1.5 canned coffees a day on average. UCC (Ueshima Coffee Co.) is well known for pioneering canned coffee with milk in 1969. In 1973, Pokka Coffee Company introduced hot and cold beverage sold with vending machine. In 1983 canned coffee makers sold more than 100 million cases (thirty cans in one case). In 1990, three billion cases of canned coffee were sold, which was one fourth in volume of all beverage Market in Japan.

Japan Coca-Cola, one of the biggest tin coffee companies in Japan, has been working on promoting Columbia Coffee since it first launched canned coffee brand known as Georgia. FNC and Coca-Cola work hard on product quality improvement for years for satisfying the Japanese tough consumers, and at the same time, they make use of easy characteristics of the Japanese consumers who prefer animation and manga characters. In 2014, for example, FNC and Coca-Cola practiced sales promotion of Georgia brand using Hatsune Miku character<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Miku Hatsune is a humanoid persona voiced by a singing synthesizer application developed by Crypton Future Media, headquartered in Sapporo, Japan.

PICTURE 7 Coca-Cola Georgia Brand with animation character



Source: Coca-Cola Company

FNC first introduced Emerald Mountain coffee to Japan at Osaka EXPO held in 1970. Emerald Mountain is coffee bean in Columbia, which FNC conducts numerous checks on quality and examination, and only about one percent among Columbia coffee production can become Emerald coffee. Coca-Cola launched Emerald Mountain Blend series of Georgia brand from 1994. Coca-Cola uses this bean in order to improve quality including aroma. Coca-Cola Japan sells more canned coffee than Coca-Cola. For 2015, the company already purchased 11,000 tons of Colombia coffee beans.

FIGURE 5 Marketing Mix of GI Candidates

	WAGYU	Kobe Beef	TOKACHI Cheese	Columbia Coffee
Product (Value)	Functional value	Functional value	Non-functional value from Heidi	Functional and non-functional value
Price	Price competition among regions	Highest in WAGYU category	480 Yen (Too high for daily consumption, and too low for gift-giving)	Canned coffee is 130 Yen
Place	Opened channel Starts export	Closed channel Starts export	Direct selling	Opened channel, mainly vending machine
Promotion	Consistent promotion toward hotels & restaurants	Emphasis on authenticity	Cheese fair, and collaborative work with Cheese Professional Association	Promotion to roasters For consumers, emphasizes functional value and non-functional value, using original

				character
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Based on interviews

## 5. CONCLUSION

The gathered data of four cases show that, first, the GI candidates in Japan except TOKACHI Cheese fairly understand unique characteristics of the Japanese consumers, adjust themselves to them, and thoroughly respond to consumers' needs in different ways, which results in Market expansion.

Secondly, in order to be successful in GI, expanding the existing Market is not enough, and creating totally new Market is important, as Columbia Coffee created consumer culture of canned coffee. TOKACHI cheese could not make breakthrough from the culture of melting cheese image to fresh cheese yet.

For future research, as Geographical Indication Law is going to be activated in June 2015, and Ministry of Agriculture assumes that around 1,000 products will apply to be registered, continuous research, by gathering real time data, is needed to clarify the characteristics of GI in Japan.

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