
The First Controversy over GI Registration in Japan and the Potentiality of Territorial Labels: A Case of Hatcho Miso

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Résumé

While GI is expected to promote the recognition of products, territories and agricultural production systems among consumers, the outcomes of GI systems depend on the way in which quality and code of practices of products are socially constructed. In recent years, several Asian countries integrated GI systems into their national legislations while these countries' private sectors also promoted territorial branding initiatives. Among them, Japan is an interesting example as it has established Geographical Indication System for alcohol products in 1995, Regionally Based Collective Trademark legislation in 2006, sui generis Geographical Indication legislation in 2015, as well as a private initiative Honbano Honmono certification in since 2005. The Japanese government is actively promoting these GI systems as tools to revitalize the agri-food sector and rural communities following the negative outcomes that economic, social, political and environmental changes have generated for decades. However, the government approach tends to emphasize these systems' economic role and their contributions in the export of agri-food products rather than their socio-cultural and environmental dimensions. Moreover, Japan faces limits in its territorial development due to diplomatically compromised design of its GI system (e.g., There is no PDO category in Japanese GI system).

In December 2017, this government posture caused the first nation-wide controversy over the registration of GI, namely "Hatcho Miso" in Aichi Prefecture. The government approved a code of practice proposed by the Aichi Miso and Soy Sauce Cooperative that employs modern techniques (e.g., temperature control devices in metal vats during the fermentation process) and the extended area of production (whole prefecture). Employing traditional knowledge (e.g. natural fermentation process in cedar vats) and limited area of production (Hatcho Village), the artisanal Hatcho Miso Cooperative faced competition with industrial Hatcho Miso labelled as GI and refused to be part of the GI. While the Hatcho Miso Cooperative and its associates raised an objection against the approval of the code of practice, the government responded by strengthening its control on the misuse of "Hatcho Miso" produced by the artisanal Hatcho Miso Cooperative. To seek alternative schemes for the Hatcho Miso Cooperative that would allow it to survive and limit the negative consequences of horizontal power relations, we analyze possible alternative programs, such as the third-party private certification for local products, Honbano Honmono.

In this context, the objectives of this paper is threefold: (1) to review the GI systems adopted in Japan in comparison with the European system; (2) to illustrate the contradictory process of Japanese GI certification employing a case of Hatcho Miso; and (3) to examine the potential roles of other territorial labelling systems, such as Honbano Honmono, that can

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contribute to the differentiation of quality under GIs. Our study is based on the field survey with semi-structured and spontaneous interviews conducted from 2015 to 2020 as well as on literature review and the analysis of available statistics.

Mots-Clés: geographical indication, Japan, Hatcho Miso, modernization, geographical delimitation, territorial label