

CASE STUDY: PROMOTION OF GI PRODUCTS WITH AN EXTENDED TERRITORIAL STRATEGY

E 5.B

Example of Boseong tea in South Korea

General context

Under the Agricultural Products Quality Control Act passed in 1999 for implementation of the WTO's TRIPs Agreement, Boseong tea is the first protected geographical indication in South Korea, created in 2002. Thanks to a promotion strategy launched by the public authorities jointly with producers, tourism linked to green tea is one of the largest sources of income for the country.

1. Protection of the geographical indication in Korea

Korea passed its Agricultural Products Quality Control Act in 1999 in order to apply the articles on geographical indications stipulated in the WTO's TRIPs Agreement. The main objective of this law was to improve the quality of specific local products and raise producers' income levels. It also sought to provide consumers with precise information on the quality of the product. The National Agricultural Products Quality Management Service, which comes under the Ministry of Agriculture, is responsible for the administration of geographical indications.

2. Development of Boseong green tea

Green tea was first grown in Korea at the time of the Silla dynasty (from the seventh to the tenth centuries), but its more recent establishment in Boseong dates back to 1939. Since then, local universities and research institutes have sought to improve production methods, supporting the development of organic farming and ways of increasing the added value of products. The press and television have also told people about the beneficial medical effects of Boseong green tea. All this has enabled the Boseong green tea industry to turn into a multi-faceted activity that encompasses farming, processing and tourism.

Since the geographical indication was created, the reputation of the Boseong region and its attraction for the public have increased considerably. During a survey (Suh and MacPherson, 2007) producers and local officials agreed in their answers:

Since the appearance of the geographical indication, the number of tourists visiting Boseong has grown considerably, because of the improved image of the locality. Since 1999, a 300 percent increase in the number of tourists travelling to Boseong has been recorded. The expansion of plots of green tea following use of the geographical indication has turned Boseong into an increasingly popular tourist destination for Koreans. The fields, laid out on terraces and covered in the green leaves of the tea bushes, have often been used as locations for films, telefilms and advertisements.

In addition, according to the results of a survey carried out by the Korean Tourist Organization in 2004, Boseong is Koreans' favourite tourist destination. This confirms the major role played by the geographical indication not only in the marketing of the product, but also in promotion of the production territory or zone. In other words, the geographical indication helps to improve the image of the zone as much as that of the product.

The local government has profited from the improvement in the image of the zone to develop many tourist initiatives linked to green tea, such as the green tea festival, the green tea tourist station and train trips into Boseong's green tea fields. This has led to a rapid increase in the number of tourists visiting Boseong, which has risen from 14 000 in 1990 to 400 000 in 1995, then to 2.8 million in 2000 and 5.5 million in 2004. The increased desire for well-being is enabling Korea to make use of the geographical indication to link the image of the product and its benefits effectively to that of the zone.

The local government is also promoting a range of programmes linked to green tea in order to expand the synergetic effect (Suh and MacPherson, 2007). For example, it is trying to encourage tourists visiting the region to drink green tea in the cafés, eat dishes based on green tea in restaurants and purchase tea-based services in boutiques.

3. The Boseong green tea festival

Each year since 1974, the Boseong green tea festival has been held over five days at the start of May in a festival and exhibition centre built opposite the largest and oldest tea plantation, Daehan Dawon, established in 1939. Although tea production is a very ancient tradition in Korea, it did not start until recently in Boseong, which now holds first place in tea growing. According to the Korean Tourist Office, some of the most popular events in the festival, which are generally organized on green tea plantations, are practical programmes, such as the picking of tea leaves, the preparation of tea and the tasting of green tea. It should be noted that all the media are present. Other events, such as the exhibition and sale of tea and many celebrations also take place during the festival period. There is a specific web site with full information on the festival in Korean.

The same centre also houses a permanent museum of green tea, which is highly informative, providing detailed explanations on the various methods of tea-growing found in the world, the various ways of drying tea and the various ways of consuming it in tea-producing and/or tea-drinking countries. One room is devoted to the various types of certification and a panel explains that Boseong green tea was registered as a geographical indication in January 2002 by the municipality, which also registered a collective trademark. Another panel describes the quality control system.

Large numbers of visitors attend the festival and visit tea plantations in the same period in early spring. Many brochures (in Korean, English, Japanese and Chinese) are distributed concerning the Boseong county festival and the tea plantation. They present Boseong as a romantic place, stressing its natural attractions. However, it should be noted that these brochures do not mention the GI, perhaps because it is not seen as a concept encompassing the notion of terroir. Many school buses also visit the festival, and fine arts students are invited to paint the magnificent landscapes of the tea plantations.

The festival of course enables producers to sell their products in tents set up for the occasion, offering Boseong green tea with its GI, but also other less expensive teas without the Boseong GI, together with many tea-based products such as soap and other beauty items, food products such as cakes, green tea rice paste and green tea ice-cream, and even oil extracted from green tea. Lastly, tea ceremonies are organized for tourists, who can also relax in a tea bath and sauna at the end of the day. Green tea is thus truly the jewel of Boseong culture.

Reference

Suh, J. and MacPherson, A. 2007. The impact of geographical indication on the revitalisation of a regional economy: a case study of 'Boseong' green tea. *Area*, 39(4): 518-527.



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