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The Gift of Rivers and Mountains

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Abstract

Both belonging to the Yangtze River basin, Chenzhou and Hechuan abound in vast differences in geography and history which have given rise to distinct local product systems. The local products of the two places have been taken into consideration across four dimensions: geographical basis, product types, industrial models, and cultural connotations. The study reveals that based on a mountainous ecology, Chenzhou's special products, focused on poultry farming and aquatic product processing, have formed an industrial chain, while grounded in the alluvial plain of three rivers, Hechuan's local products, based on grain crops and traditional pastries, have built a distinctive industrial system. The two places exhibit different models in brand building, "regional public brand leadership" and "geographical indication matrix-driven development." These revelations can offer insights for the promotion of differentiated development of regional agricultural brands.

Keywords

Chenzhou and Hechuan local products; geographical indications; regional comparison; agricultural brands.

1. Introduction

The joint results of natural conditions and cultural accumulation in a particular region will lead to certain local products. The local products of Chenzhou, a city located at the junction of the Nanling Mountains and the Luoxiao Mountains in southern Hunan, include Linwu duck, Dongjiang fish, and Yongxing rock sugar orange, which show distinct mountainous ecological traits. Located in the northwest of Chongqing, Hechuan has been famous as the "Granary of Bayu" since ancient times. This is just the exact place where the three rivers, Jialing River, Fujiang River, and Qujiang River converge. Hence the name “Hechuan” (in Chinese, it means where rivers meet). The fertile soil of agricultural civilization has paved the way for the production of local products such as Hechuan peach slices, Hechuan meat slices, and Hechuan black pigs. The shaping mechanism of geographical milieu on local products is revealed through the comparison of the local products of the two places and that will provide insights for the differentiated advancement of regional agricultural brands.

2. Geographical Basis and Historical Origins of Local Products in these Two Places

2.1. Chenzhou: Ecological Gift of the Wuling Mountains

Located in the southeastern part of Hunan Province, Chenzhou’s terrain is characterized by mountains and hills. The dense forest coverage rate and excellent ecological environment and the premiun water quality of Dongjiang Lake, all these have provided terrific conditions for the growth of Dongjiang fish. The mid-subtropical monsoon humid climate and the huge elevation variation within its territory all lead to varied microclimatic situation. Linglong tea is just the perfect result of mist of Guidong and high mountain clouds, while rock sugar oranges are the impeccable produce of the unique soil and climate of Yongxing. "Four seasons in one mountain,

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different weather within ten li" is the geographical pattern of Chenzhou which results in the significant diversity of local products.

From the perspective of history, the main elements influencing Chenzhou's local product culture are the agricultural traditions of Hakka culture and southern Hunan. "The e-commerce development of the provincial intangible cultural heritage project Qifengdu fish noodles is not only an effective practice of living heritage transmission but also an essential path for rural revitalization" (Li, 2026). " “3,000 boxes, equaling 7 tons, of Qifengdu fish noodles successfully cleared customs and were sent to Uzbekistan under the supervision of Chenzhou Customs. This local specialty food, using its own brand, has been exported on a large scale for the first time. Qifengdu fish noodles, a highly representative traditional food in southern Hunan, seeks its name after the story of Pang Tong, a renowned literati of the Three Kingdoms period who stayed overnight at the ancient ferry. Included has been this noodle in the Hunan Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List” (Lin et al., 2026).

2.2. Hechuan: The profound agrarian heritage nurtured by the fertile land where three rivers converge

However, located in the northwest of Chongqing Municipality, Hechuan District is at the confluence of the Jialing River, Qujiang River, and Fujiang River. That has formed a shallow hill landform and typical alluvial plain. With numerous flat dams along the riverbanks, The terrain is mainly hilly. Belonging to the mid-subtropical humid climate zone, it also abounds in mild climate, frequent fog, distinct seasons, abundant rainfall and little sunshine. All of these are the good prerequsites for Hechuan's numerous local products.

The profound historical heritage has made Hechuan's local products enchanting. "There is a famous local snack in a small alley on Wuyong Road in Hechuan District, Chongqing. The slices of the snack, soft and delicate, are as white as clouds and as thin as paper. These are Tongdefu peach slices, a brand founded in 1898. Chongqing specialty and a Chongqing calling card are just Hechuan peach slices. The earliest enterprise in Hechuan, the 'capital of peach slices,' is Chongqing Hechuan Tongdefu Peach Slice Co., Ltd. which aims to manufacture peach slices. The company inherits tradition while continue innovating in spite of the long history of the traditional peach slices" (Liu, 2023).

3. Comparative Analysis of Product Types

3.1. Differences in Category Composition

Animal-based foods and mountainous cash crops are Chenzhou's main local products, complemented by aquatic processed products and specialty vegetables and fruits. Important positions in poultry and aquatic products have been occupied by Linwu duck and Zixing Dongjiang fish among the national geographical indication products, wheras another important section is constituted by Dongjiang Lake honey orange, Yizhang selenium-enriched navel orange, Rucheng small yellow ginger, and Guiyang five-claw pepper. This layout is imtimately connected to this area’s ecological consitutions of unaccountable mountains, frequent fog, andabundant water, which render the local products a distinct "mountainous ecology" footprint. Although relatively scattered are the varieties, every one of them is tightly linked to a particular geographical melieu.

On the other hand, Hechuan's local products are featured by traditional pastries and grain products, leaning more toward food processing and planting. Processed foods include Hechuan peach slices and Hechuan meat slices, while fruit and vegetable agricultural products cover Qingcaoba radish, Taihe yellow peach, and Hechuan loquat, and Fengshan rice is a grain crop. These are straightforwardly corelated to Hechuan's situation in the alluvial plain of tri-rivers with plentiful arable land: plain agriculture first garantees supply of grain, then advances

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refined pastries on the foundation of grain. Hence, the local products of Hechuan more demonstrate the trait of "accrued agricultural heritage," with an obvious plain agriculture direction.

3.2. Quality Characteristics of Representative Products

The features of Linwu duck include its large body size, high egg production, fast growth, tender meat, and delicious taste. Formed around it has been a comparatively complete processing industrial chain, marching toward a massive, uniformed modern industrial way. By contrast, Hechuan black pig is renowned for its soaring intramuscular fat material and persistence in natural slow upbringing. The time accumulation of old-fashioned slow rearing is characterized by fragrant, glutinous, and purified meat, which leads to the dual certification as a national well-know, particular, and impeccable new farm product and a national product of geographical indication. The distinction between the two lies both in breed traits and in farming paradigms: Hechuan black pig focuses on taste and time whereas Linwu duck emphasizes efficiency and standards.

Dongjiang fish, with regard to aquatic produce, depends upon the high-quality water of Dongjiang Lake to form a processing mechnism chiefly relied on dried and grilled fish. The merits lie in tender meat from clean water sources, with relatively simple processing that preserves natural flavor. The industrial chain has been formed, linking breeding, processing, and sales. Hechuan, though also has aquatic resources, the aquatic products are not outstanding. Traditional pastries and grain products are its best-known icon. The above demonstrates that despite each’s being close to water, Hechuan's rivers nourish alluvial plains and agricultural irrigation system, while Chenzhou's water is conducive to ecological cultivation and processing benefits.

3.3. Differences in Traditional Craftsmanship

The natural flavor of raw materials, with relatively simple processing techniques involved, is the features of Chenzhou's local products. Highlighting the fragrant, fresh, and intense flavor of southern Hunan, Qifengdu fish noodles uses local tea oil, fresh silver carp, ginger, garlic, chili, soy sauce, and other materials boiled in mixed broth. After gutting, Dongjiang fish grilling uses drying and steaming, then grilling again, to retain the soft and plump texture. This style, centering on the straightforward statement of wild being’s quality and taste, is in accordance with the tradition of Hunan cuisine: freshness and spiciness.

Refined processing and layered flavor are the features of Hechuan's local products. Renowned for being "sweet, soft, and fragrant," Hechuan peach slices have been elevated into numerous tastes covering rose, orange peel, sweet, salt-and-pepper, and eight-treasure tastes. Focusing on a "crispy outside and tender inside" composition, Hechuan meat slices, through innovation, have realized a "crispy and fragrant" taste enhancement. The raw material basis for refined pastries are the results of abundant grain output, and also reflected in this is the gentle and delicate Bayu cuisine. All of these are intimately connected to this area’s tradition of being the "Storage of Bayu".

4. Comparison of Cultural Connotations and Industrial Models

4.1. Differences and Similarities in Building Brand Paths

"Consumption structure upgrading and tourism recovery bring opportunities to the local products industry" (Du, 2026). Manipulating the "Chenpin Chenwei" regional public brand as the icon, Chenzhou brings to the market "as a group" such traditional noted products as Dongjiang fish, Yongxing rock sugar orange, Linwu duck, and Qifengdu fish noodles and allots particular funds to launch the tri-actions of "input + efficiency + brand". With benefits in

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unifying image, centralizing resources, and advancing panoramic regional efftcts, this route can be summed up as "regional public brand leadership".

On the other hand, Hechuan, through a geographical indication matrix, promotes brand development. This region, with the "Hemei Sanjiang" regional public brand as the icon, emphasize three main brands: "Hechuan loquat", "Hechuan fish", "Hechuan black pig". It also rears specialty brands incluging "Hechuan sweet potato", "Hechuan yellow peach", "Hechuan Lake wrinkled loofah", and forms a "1+3+X" grad cultivation scheme. An essential advancement in the internationalization of Hechuan's local specialties is the inclusion of Hechuan peach slices in the China-EU geographical indication mutual recognition list. Summarized as "geographical indication matrix-driven," this path encompasses vantages in gradient rearing, multi-point enhancement, and differentiated advancement. Each is a rational selection on the basis of resource gifts and industrial grounds, hence neither is inferior or superior.

4.2. Cultural Implications and Expression Means

The culture of Chenzhou's local products inclines to bind together local conventions and folk legends. Related to the historical story of the Three Kingdoms ancient ferry is the craftsmanship of Qifengdu fish noodles, and black rice dumplings have evolved from a seasonal snack into a whole-year relish, becoming an Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hunan. Chenzhou has conceived the "Chenpin Chenwei Renowned Shops and Famous Products Guide". The launch of specialty dishes and the construction of the culinary cultural narrative of "a table of Chenzhou food" contribute to the dissemination of local culture.

The culture of Hechuan's local product stresses the manipulation and rejuvenation of intangible cultural heritage and scene novelty. Many tourists have transformed Hechuan meat slices into a portable tourist snack, and promoted Hechuan peach slices to a dinner dish, realizing cross-border shift of two products retaining intangible cultural heritage. Time-honored brand shops and Intangible cultural heritage workshops have been established in Wenfeng Ancient Street, displaying a showcase and sales platform for Hechuan specialties. A "red cultural tourism + green agriculture" integration model is set up in Taihe Town which, depending on red cultural resources, unite a thousand-mu yellow peach sightseeing orchard and a modern canned food processing factory.

Hechuan, Compared with Chenzhou, has put more stress on revitalizing intangible cultural heritage, thus rendered local products an essential symbol of cultural tourism.

4.3. Differences in Industrial Driving Effects

Stronger scale effects is the prominent result of Chenzhou's local product industry. The total number of contracted farmers is relatively high, the local chili order agriculture planting area is relatively large and the Linwu duck industry has an astonishingly annual output. Also considerable is the general output of the Dongjiang fish industrial chain. The city's agricultural product processing industry output has reached a relatively high level, nurturing various regional public brands. All of this is collected with Chenzhou's strategy of "brand leadership and leading enterprise driving": outstanding enterprises inspire the advancement of the total industrial chain, and the regional public brand integrates specialty products from different districts and counties, shaping vital market competence.

A widder coverage is reflected through Hechuan's local products. Enjoying a comparatively large planting area, Hechuan loquat boasts comparatively high output annually, and substantial comprehensive output, and is the first branch of loquat production districts in Chongqing. The industry of Hechuan peach slice inspires peasants to plant walnuts, glutinous rice, peanuts, sesame, and other crops, straightforwardly increasing their income substantially. That is intimately collected to the region’s strategy of "geographical indication matrix and multi-point

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development." These effects enjoy various emphases: Hechuan highlights coverage and multi-point involvement whereas Chenzhou elevates whole scale and pioneering enterpriseship.

5. Analysis of Causes of Similarities and Differences

5.1. Shaping of Natural Geographical Conditions

Diverse natural geographical conditions account for the fundamental reason for the differences of local products of these two places. Located in the Nanling Mountains, with high forest coverage and large elevation differences, Chenzhou has shaped distinctive microclimatic enlieu that have cultivated local products such as Dongjiang fish and Linwu duck. The fertile soil, flat terrain, and abundant arable land have provided Hechuan with plentiful planting-based local products including yellow peach, loquat, and vegetables. A direct reflection of plain agricultural geography is the product structure of Hechuan's local products, mainly grain products and pastries.

5.2. Discrepancy of Humanistic and Historical Backgrounds

Situated at the junction of Hunan and Guangdong, Chenzhou is an area of convergence between Central Plains and Lingnan. The food culture there boasts apparent Hunan dish features---freshness, spiciness, and wok hei. The bold style of southern Hunan cuisine is reflected in the spicy seasoning of Linwu duck and the stong freshness of Qifengdu fish noodles. As the core area of Bayu culture, Hechuan takes fresh and spicy as its culinary tradition, but the "fragrant, sweet, and soft" Hechuan peach slices and the "crispy outside and tender inside" Hechuan meat slices also demonstrate the gentle and delicate part of Bayu cuisine.

6. Conclusion

The materialized expression of two geographical logics, Mountainous ecology and plain agriculture, are the local product systems of Chenzhou and Hechuan. Hechuan's native products take "rivers" as their soul, while Chenzhou’s take "mountains" as their pulse. The distinctions between the two places in processing techniques, product categories, cultural expression, and brand paths eventually originate from the diversification of natural geography and historical backgrounds. However, the two places also enjoy similarities: both increase market competitiveness and added value through brand formation, both are exploring "cultural tourism + local products" integration, and both manipulate geographical indication products to facilitate rural revitalization. Appreciation of the formation logic and evolution paths of diversified regional local product systems can offer insights for the promotion of differentiated enhancement of agricultural brands.

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