

Brand Construction of Characteristic Agricultural Products in Ethnic Regions under the Background of Rural Revitalization: A Case Study of Honeysuckle Industry of Mashan County

Shaohong MO*

Nanning Vocational and Technical University, Nanning 530008, China

Abstract The brand construction of agricultural products is a necessary path for agricultural development and an effective way to enhance the added value and market competitiveness of agricultural products. How to do a good job in building agricultural product brands under the background of rural revitalization? This paper takes the honeysuckle industry in Mashan County, Nanning as a case study for comprehensive analysis, forming a driving force for the high-quality development of characteristic agricultural industries.

Key words Rural revitalization; Local specialty agricultural products; Brand construction; Honeysuckle

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Brand is an important symbol of agricultural modernization, a realistic path to promote structural reform of agricultural supply side, a core element of agricultural competitiveness, and an important lever for implementing rural revitalization strategies. In 2024, the No. 1 central document of the Central Government requires that agriculture should be built into a modern industry, and it should encourage local governments to vigorously develop characteristic industries according to local conditions, and support the creation of local characteristic brands. During the inspection of Guangxi, Xi Jinping pointed out that it should give full play to the advantages of Guangxi's abundant characteristic resources such as forests, fruits, vegetables, livestock, and sugar, vigorously develop modern characteristic agricultural industries, and make more "Guangxi brand" agricultural brands well-known throughout China^[1]. With the support of relevant national policies, Mashan County in Nanning has implemented the "brand strong county" strategy, created distinctive brands, adjusted industrial structure, continuously improved the brand building mechanism of "government promotion, departmental linkage, and enterprise initiative", actively and continuously promoted the development of regional characteristic agricultural products industry, and strove to achieve industrial prosperity, laying a certain foundation for the realization of rural revitalization strategy.

Since the 1960s, Mashan County began experimenting with artificial cultivation of wild honeysuckle, and large-scale artificial cultivation began in the 1970s. In 2013, the government of Mashan County organized experts and technicians to conduct in-depth research on the cultivation and production of honeysuckle in the planting area. Eventually, Guzhai Yao Township and Jiafang were

determined into main planting areas throughout the county, laying the foundation for the development of the honeysuckle industry. Subsequently, the government established a 3.33 hm² of Guangxi authentic traditional Chinese medicine honeysuckle resource base in Gulangtun, Benli Village, Guzhai Yao Township, and established a 1.33 hm² of honeysuckle seedling base and artificial asexual rapid propagation base in the protected area, effectively protecting the resources of Mashan honeysuckle. According to statistics, the planting area of honeysuckle in Guzhai Yao Township has reached 2 333.33 hm² by 2023, accounting for 87.5% of the county. It is known as the "hometown of honeysuckle in Guangxi" along with Beigeng Township in Xincheng. At present, the honeysuckle industry in Mashan County has begun to take shape and has certain advantages. It has important practical significance for promoting rural revitalization by accelerating the development of the honeysuckle industry in Mashan and increasing farmers' income. Honeysuckle, an authentic medicinal herb from Guangxi, has become a typical representative of characteristic agricultural product brand construction under the background of rural revitalization due to its unique quality and medicinal value. In summary, this paper takes the honeysuckle industry in Mashan County, with Guzhai Yao Township as the core, as an example to analyze how to build characteristic agricultural product brands in ethnic areas, utilize the advantages of brands to promote the modernization of the agricultural industry, and provide reference countermeasures and suggestions for the brand construction of agricultural products.

1 Current situation of brand construction in the honeysuckle industry in Mashan County

1.1 Overview of Mashan County

1.1.1 Overview of natural resources. Mashan County is under

the jurisdiction of Nanning City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Its eastern part is the rocky mountainous area and has a relatively high terrain; the central and southwestern regions are hilly terrain with lower elevations. It belongs to the South Asian tropical humid monsoon climate, with abundant sunshine, warm climate, abundant rainfall, long summer and short winter, and a long frost-free period in the county. Honeysuckle is flower of perennial evergreen vine plant in Caprifoliaceae. Its functions in clearing heat and detoxifying are described in pharmacopoeias such as the *Shen-nong Bencao Jing* and the *Compendium of Materia Medica*. Guzhai, Jiafang, Lidang and other places in Mashan County are all planted, and most of these planting areas are distributed in the rocky mountainous area in the east of the county. The mountains are high and the rocks are abundant, the light is suitable, and the temperature difference between day and night is large, which is very suitable for the growth of honeysuckle.

1.1.2 Socioeconomic overview. By 2023, the total regional GDP of Mashan County reached 10.712 billion yuan, and the per capita disposable income of residents in Mashan County was 21 477 yuan. Among them, the per capita disposable income of urban residents was 34 569 yuan, and the per capita disposable income of rural residents was 16 333 yuan. Mashan County is a county inhabited by ethnic minorities, mainly composed of Zhuang ethnic group, with 11 ethnic groups including Zhuang, Han, Yao, Mulao, Miao, etc., accounting for 80.3% of the total population. At the end of 2023, the total permanent population of Mashan County was 383 400, with an urban population of 125 800 and an urbanization rate of 32.81%. The rural permanent population was approximately 250 000. In 2022, the total e-commerce transaction volume in Mashan County was 213.629 6 million yuan, of which the online retail sales of agricultural products amounted to 120.560 7 million yuan. The average annual growth rate of rural and agricultural product online retail sales in Mashan County from 2015 to 2023 was over 20%.

1.2 Current situation of honeysuckle brand in Mashan County

1.2.1 Unique natural environment and ethnic minority culture, exploring characteristics to promote integration. The core production area of honeysuckle in Mashan County, Guzhai Yao Township, is located in the rocky mountainous area in the east of Mashan County. The local wild honeysuckle has excellent varieties, high yields, a long planting history, and a long growth period. A single planting can yield more than 20 years of harvest. The high-quality management and protection can produce about 4 500 – 6 750 kg/hm² of fresh flowers, and the honeysuckle has fewer pests and diseases, strong adaptability, high survival rate, and simple planting. Honeysuckle can be used as medicine. According to relevant departments' testing, the content of chlorogenic acid in honeysuckle grown in rocky mountainous area is higher than that in honeysuckle planted on flat ground, exceeding the 1.5% of standard stipulated in the national pharmacopoeia. Guzhai Yao

Township fully utilizes this advantage, and the honeysuckle has become a "golden" industry, which can consolidate and expand the achievements of poverty alleviation and continue to promote rural revitalization. There is currently one demonstration base for honeysuckle planting and production, 4 honeysuckle processing factories, and 6 cooperatives specializing in planting and purchasing honeysuckle, which has driven employment for about 3 000 people in Mashan County.

The development of rural tourism can align with and serve the national development strategy of the new era, integrate new production factors, promote the deep integration of rural culture and tourism with ecological agriculture, processing and trade, leisure services, and promote the integrated development of rural primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. The township party committee and government relied on the honeysuckle industry, coordinated and integrated resources, and a honeysuckle theme park was created in Gulangtun that integrates sightseeing, tourism, agricultural entertainment, ethnic customs, and scientific and technological training. Since 2013, eight editions of the Guangxi Nanning Mashan · Guzhai Yao Ethnic Township Honeysuckle Festival have been held. With the help of intangible cultural heritage such as "hammering" and a group of folk art masterpieces such as Yao fire pond dance and long drum dance, the festival has received nearly 100 000 visitors and generated tourism revenue of more than 3 million yuan. The industrial scale continues to expand, achieving the goal of "promoting tourism through festivals and helping farmers increase their income". It actively integrates rural cultural and tourism resources, and integrates and develops unique natural resources, characteristic architecture, intangible cultural heritage, agricultural ecology and other resources in rural areas, providing strong support for the honeysuckle industry + tourism development, and gradually establishing the Mashan honeysuckle brand.

1.2.2 Strong support of the county and township governments, achieving the initial results of promoting agriculture through science and technology. In order to promote the optimization and upgrading of the Gulang honeysuckle industry and effectively increase agricultural income, the Mashan County government actively raised support funds to build a honeysuckle dehydration processing plant. Through policy support, capital investment, technological innovation and other means, the industry scale and development quality are continuously improved. In order to expand the scale of the honeysuckle industry, Guzhai Yao Township promotes the development of the honeysuckle characteristic industry through activities such as professor doctoral workstations for rural revitalization (the first in Nanning), research by the National People's Congress, representative inspections, and social services. Internally, through the promotion of the honeysuckle industry, it guides and drives villagers to join planting, unifies product quality, shares brand benefits, and purchases honeysuckle at a price that is favorable to villagers. Externally, it actively relies on the strength of expert teams. Experts provide on-site training and guidance to

cooperatives and farmers on new technologies for cultivating honeysuckle, in order to improve the emergence and survival rates of seedlings. The government takes the lead in contacting and connecting Chinese herbal medicine pharmaceutical companies, Guangdong – Guangxi assistance units, 832 poverty alleviation product sales platforms, *etc.*, establishing direct supply and marketing relationships, conducting unified packaging and sales, and enhancing pricing discourse power.

1.2.3 Farmers' professional cooperatives providing a development foundation for the brand construction of characteristic agricultural products. Against the backdrop of rapid development of modern agriculture and gradual transformation of agricultural product markets, in the process of building distinctive agricultural product brands, farmer professional cooperatives not only enhance the competitive advantage of agricultural products and establish brand awareness, but also further expand the breeding advantages, industrial cluster advantages, and natural resource advantages of different agricultural areas. Through in-depth investigation and research in Guzhai Yao Township, following the development concept of "branch guidance, party member guidance, and industry paving", the Gulang Yao Township Honeysuckle Professional Cooperative and its party branch were established. At the same time, "a group and two associations" of the party group, council, and household head (representative) association was established, and the branch was jointly established to plant honeysuckle seedlings. Under the leadership of the cooperative and "a group and two associations", adopting the business model of "base + cooperative + farmers", Gulangtun has built a complete industry chain of honeysuckle that integrates seedling cultivation, planting and processing, purchase and sales, and tourism and sightseeing. Poor households who join the cooperative process and dry self picked flowers at a lower cost, and use the "Gulanghua" trademark (currently under registration) to sell honeysuckle. This achieves unified seedling cultivation, planting, management, and sales in the cooperative, greatly increasing the added value of the honeysuckle industry. In 2022, Guzhai Cooperative sold 35 000 kg of dried flowers, earning over 7 million yuan, and sold more than 200 000 seedlings of honeysuckle.

2 Shortcomings in brand construction of honeysuckle in Mashan County

(1) The characteristic agricultural brands and their regional cultural features have not been fully reflected. "Mashan Black Goat" is the first animal geographical indication trademark in Nanning, and has been selected into the third batch of Guangxi characteristic agricultural product advantage zone creation projects. Although it is applying to the China National Intellectual Property Administration for the geographical indication certification trademark of "Mashan Black Goat" (category 29), the brand construction of characteristic agricultural products is still lagging behind.

At the same time, the agricultural production bases in Mashan County are generally small in scale, with low levels of standardization and specialization in production, and insufficient industrial accumulation. The local characteristic agricultural culture is not fully reflected, and the regional cultural characteristics are not significant. There is no better integration of industrial clusters, and the cluster effect of agricultural industry in Mashan County is not obvious, which could not give full play to the competitive advantages of characteristic agricultural products.

(2) Government guidance services need to be improved. The guidance on existing brand construction is insufficient. Currently, there are over 900 registered trademarks in Mashan County, including more than 150 agricultural product trademarks. "Jinlun Brown Sugar" and "Jinlun Black Sugar" have obtained the "Green Food" certification and successfully applied for the "Zhenpin" certification. However, the county government lacks effective guidance for its subsequent construction, market entities have insufficient participation in brand building, and there is a lack of professional brand operation agencies and teams to plan, package, and operate. There is insufficient coordination of resources, insufficient exploration of core values and cultural connotations, and a lack of influential publicity platforms and specialized promotion channels, and a more effective brand effect is not formed.

(3) The advantages of technological research and development have not been fully exploited. The cooperation mechanism among county governments, universities, research institutes, and enterprises in cultivating characteristic agricultural brands is not yet perfect, the connections are not close enough, and the transformation and application of scientific research achievements are not sufficient. In addition, agricultural enterprises, especially small and medium-sized agricultural producers, do not have strong identification ability for the application of scientific research technology and achievements in universities and research institutes, and are in a "follow the trend" and random state. The communication and sharing platform and mechanism need to be improved.

3 Related strategies for brand construction of Mashan honeysuckle under the background of rural revitalization

3.1 Focusing on building regional public brands for agricultural products Mashan County has completed the registration application for the regional public brand "Yuansheng Mashan", carried out peripheral design of product brand and brand protection, and developed an industrial network marketing standard system that has been applied in multiple leading enterprises and cooperatives. Based on the actual situation of Mashan County and its resources, it should make full use of its own resources and steadily promote the creation of regional public brands for geographical indication agricultural products in a single category. First, it needs

to establish a professional team. A public service platform is built by the county government. It should hire relevant experts and capable individuals, and guide and organize relevant enterprises and organizations to actively participate. Second, it needs to promote the institutional design of agricultural branding development. Based on the characteristics of county-level agricultural specialty products and market demand, it should fully utilize existing advantageous resources, and formulate brand development plans. It should clarify the brand positioning, overall goals, and development direction of county-level agricultural specialty products, build a brand system for coordinated development of regional public brands, enterprise brands, and agricultural product brands, strive to create a distinctive agricultural brand in Mashan, and establish a brand image with differentiated competitive advantages. Third, it is necessary to establish a brand image. It should design a unified brand identity, packaging, and promotional slogan, and cultivate new agricultural formats and models. Relying on big data of agricultural product transactions, and using content e-commerce, interest e-commerce, social e-commerce and other e-commerce formats as carriers, agricultural product supply chain management is dynamically matched, and the gaps in sales channels are filled. It should shape brand image on multiple platforms and channels, and improve brand awareness and reputation. Fourth, it needs to explore the traditional historical and cultural features. It should give full play to the folk cultural characteristics of the county, highlight the regional cultural value in brand building, strengthen the culture, storytelling, uniqueness, and intangible value premium function of the brand, and further increase the added value of agricultural products, so that the brand influence can more effectively benefit individual farmers' industries. Fifth, it must be guided by fiscal funds. It should mobilize social capital to participate, and allocate special funds for the creation, promotion, and evaluation of agricultural brands. It should establish and improve brand protection mechanisms, severely crack down on infringement behavior, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of brands.

3.2 Optimizing and enhancing the efficiency of government guidance services First, it needs to strengthen overall planning and promotion. It is suggested to establish a county-level agricultural brand building leadership group led by the agricultural and rural departments at the county level, with the participation of relevant departments such as publicity, market supervision, and finance. The specialized working groups for brand building management, cultural promotion, agricultural technology promotion, serving small and medium-sized agricultural economic organizations, and serving leading enterprises should be equipped. It should scientifically formulate agricultural brand development plans and cultivation plans, and provide targeted services to enhance brand building. Second, it needs to establish a specialized promotion channels. It should establish a professional operation team responsible for brand operation and promotion work, continuously in-

crease the promotion, production and sales coordination, and market cultivation of characteristic agricultural products, guide wholesale markets, large supermarkets, *etc.* to set up high-quality agricultural product sales zones and counters in urban areas, and use new media such as "three micro and one end" to strengthen production and sales coordination. It should pay attention to cultivating local agricultural brokerage talents, and select a group of excellent rural agricultural brokers and market talents in Mashan County. Around "promoting agriculture through digital commerce", live streaming sales, brand building, *etc.*, training efforts could be increased. It should commend and reward outstanding rural agricultural brokers and market talents, and promote the establishment of a system of pairing experts from universities and research institutes to assist and connect with dedicated personnel.

3.3 Promoting the development of characteristic agricultural industries through the linkage of scientific research institutions and enterprises First, it must fully leverage the scientific research resource advantages of Nanning City. It should effectively implement the system of dedicated contacts between the government and universities, research institutes, and strengthen public service guarantees. Second, it needs to guide the exploration of flexible cooperation models. Flexible and diverse cooperation mechanisms should be designed based on the needs of both parties, such as joint research and development, technology licensing, co building laboratories or innovation centers, *etc.*, to promote deep binding and win-win cooperation between both parties. Third, it needs to enhance the technological content and added value of agricultural products. Led by the county government, quality standards and testing systems should be established and improved, and brand value could be enhanced through participation and even leadership in the development of relevant agricultural industry standards, local standards, and other means.

3.4 Market oriented expansion of sales channels First, it needs to strengthen the strategy of promoting the market through the processing industry. The successfully cultivated "Mashan Black Goat" geographical indication agricultural products should be listed as part of the construction of an agricultural product processing industry cluster, and it should be promoted in conjunction with the creation of a public brand for agricultural product regions. This will facilitate the implementation of processing industry projects and closely integrate agricultural production with processing, sales, and other links. Second, it needs to cultivate new industries and business models in rural areas. It should adhere to the cultivation of a new form of agricultural cultural tourism industry with "agricultural brand construction as the core and research and learning as an important carrier", achieve the support of regional public brands and industrial brands, deeply explore the cultural characteristics of characteristic agricultural product brands, integrate with tourism, research and learning, embed the value connotation of research and learning elements such as historical culture, rural culture, agricultural culture, and consumer culture,

broaden the development ideas of the industry, win with uniqueness, focus on local characteristics, and create the "Mashan Business Card". By leveraging characteristic industrial cultural product platforms such as China Nongla, Guling Climbing Town, Xiaodubai, and Yongzhou Xuanhe, it aims to establish a number of agricultural cultural tourism integrated study and learning bases that are deeply associated with agricultural brands, enhance brand influence, and leverage the resources and platform advantages of agricultural brands. At the same time, the development of study and learning activities is taken as an important means to enhance the visibility and reputation of agricultural brands. Efforts will be made to strengthen digital intelligence empowerment, activate various cultural and tourism elements and traditional agricultural production methods through digitization and intelligence, and extend digital and intelligent agricultural production scenarios to the integration of agriculture, culture, and tourism industries. It should develop rural themed cultural and creative industries based on the industrial characteristics and brand empowerment of ethnic minority villages, innovate agricultural and cultural tourism product display modes guided by the market and people flow, and focus on enhancing individuals' personalized experiences in agricultural, cultural, and tourism products and services. Third, it needs to innovate the mode of publicity. It should strengthen the deep integration of agriculture and tourism, culture, other industries, widely use diversified marketing strategies, apply new media marketing methods such as live streaming and short videos, focus on shaping brand stories and exploring cultural connotations, such as

jointly organizing creative competitions with enterprises and universities to promote agricultural products such as honeysuckle, and carrying out marketing, advertising, and e-commerce cooperation projects with professional teachers and students to attract talents from universities to exert their intelligence and talents in promoting the agricultural product brand of Mashan. It should explore and cultivate talent in agricultural production brokerage, using their simplicity or humor as a characteristic for endorsing agricultural products, live streaming sales, *etc.* The role of platforms such as the China – ASEAN Expo Agricultural Exhibition should be fully leveraged. It should plan brand consumption activities, and expand the promotion of agricultural product brands.

4 Conclusion

In the context of rural revitalization, the brand construction of characteristic agricultural products in the honeysuckle industry in ethnic areas is of great significance. By strengthening regional linkage, resource integration, brand building and other measures, it could continuously promote the standardized and standardized development of the honeysuckle industry, jointly make the honeysuckle industry bigger and stronger, drive more people to increase income and become prosperous, and help rural revitalization.

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