

■ PROGRAM ON LOCAL-REGIONAL STUDIES NETWORK

GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION FOR THE LA PAZ *BATCHOY*

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INTRODUCTION

A Geographical Indication (GI) is a sign or any indication on products having a specific geographical origin and have the quality, reputation, or characteristic that is attributable to the place of origin.²

This policy brief discusses the salient features of Geographic Indication and the prospects of having the La Paz *batchoy* GI registered. It also covers some of the related key findings from the *batchoy* stakeholders' forum, which was organized as part of the Center for West Visayan Studies (CWVS) project, "*Namit Gid!*"³: A Multi-Stakeholders' Collaboration for Ilonggo's *Batchoy*." The project is under the Panay Weaving and Culinary Heritage Program and funded by the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS).

LA PAZ *BATCHOY*

Batchoy—more popularly known as La Paz *batchoy*, with its origins from the La Paz district in Iloilo City—is a popular part of the culinary heritage of the city. "The soup is generally prepared with tender pork meat, innards, and flavorful broth. It is garnished with crushed chicharron or crispy pork rinds, scallions, and garlic. It is a tradition to request additional kaldo or broth refills, reflecting a genuine appreciation for this flavorsome Ilonggo delight."⁴ Some *batchoy* outlets also add a dash of the Ilonggo "*ginamos*" (shrimp paste)⁵.

La Paz *batchoy* recently received global recognition after being featured by Croatia-based online encyclopedia Taste Atlas as one of the world's best offal soups, being rated as the highest among them. Taste Atlas noted that while the origins of the dish have various stories, "there

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² World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), "Geographical Indications," n.d.

³ The English translation for this word is "very delicious."

⁴ Adobo Magazine, "Check out These Famous Dishes from Iloilo, The Philippines' First UNESCO Creative City for Gastronomy."

⁵ Vicente Salas, "How Iloilo Became a UNESCO Creative City for Gastronomy." Positively Filipino - Online Magazine for Filipinos in the Diaspora.

is no doubt that it was created in Iloilo, more specifically in the district of La Paz.”⁶

Batchoy is the Ilonggo signature dish that helped Iloilo City succeed in its bid to be part of the creative cities of UNESCO for gastronomy. In fact, according to Mr. PJ Arañador, a consultant of the city in vying for the designation, the logo of Iloilo City as part of the UNESCO creative cities originated from a bowl of *batchoy*.

THE NEED TO GI-REGISTER LA PAZ BATCHOY

During the *Batchoy* Stakeholders’ Forum, participants highlighted the need for geographic indication for La Paz *batchoy*. Concerns were raised about the misuse of the name, with some products being labeled as La Paz *batchoy* despite not originating from the area. This issue extends to commercial soup manufacturers, who market instant soup noodles under the name La Paz *batchoy*, further diluting its authenticity.

GEOGRAPHIC INDICATION

Geographic indication (GI) is a mark, sign, and/or indication on products that have specific geographical origin, and which have qualities or reputation that are attributable to that origin. Furthermore, the characteristics or reputation of the product should be due to the place where it originated. It enables those who have the right over the indication to prevent its use by a third party whose product is not in conformity to the corresponding standards. For instance, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), producers of the Darjeeling tea can exclude the use of “Darjeeling” for tea not from their tea gardens, or those not made based on the standards set for the geographical indication. Geographical indications may be used for agricultural products, food products, wine and spirit drinks, textile/clothing, handicrafts, and industrial products. In various special regimes of protection (*sui generis* legislations), GI registrations do not have a specific period of validity, which means that

the GI protection will continue to be valid unless there is a cancellation of registration. It should be noted that the producers in the defined geographical area who are compliant with the specific standards for production of the product have the right to use the protected GI. GI rights are enforced through application of national laws like all intellectual property rights.⁷

APPLICATION FOR GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION

Requests for GI may be made by a) group or producers of the product identified by the geographical indication through a representative cooperative or association that is supposed to ensure that the product is compliant with specific standards or requirements they have agreed upon; or b) a national competent authority, such as a local government unit. Protection for GI is granted usually by a special body responsible for geographical indications such as the national intellectual property office.⁸

BENEFITS OF GI REGISTRATION

Having products registered for GI will provide protection for these goods with distinct quality, characteristics, and reputation attributable to its place of origin. It also serves as a deterrent from third parties who may try to deceive the public as to the geographical origin of the products. Geographical indications will also strengthen consumer confidence since product quality is maintained through standards. Thus, it can boost competitive advantage and, in the process, enhance revenue generation.⁹

GUIMARAS MANGOES: THE PHILIPPINES’ FIRST GI

Guimaras mangoes are the country’s first registered geographical indication. It was in May 2023 that the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPIL) approved the Guimaras Mango Growers and Producers Development Cooperative’s application for GI. These mangoes are known to be the sweetest mangoes

⁶ Daily Guardian, “‘BET-CHOY’: Ilonggo Signature Dish Is World’s Best Offal Soup.”

⁷ Organization for an International Geographic Indications Network 2011

⁸ Federis 2022

⁹ “Geographical Indications.”

worldwide, and are shaped like an ellipsoid, thin-seeded, juicy and with meaty, smooth, firm, and non-fibrous flesh. These qualities are attributed to Guimaras province's soil, which is abundant in calcium and magnesium, promoting proper drainage. Its topography and elevation are also conducive to cultivating the "carabao" mango variety. Additionally, it is important to note that the Manual of Specifications (MOP) for Guimaras mangoes stipulated standard practices related to soil management, pre-planting preparations up to post-harvest handling, packing, and storage. Furthermore, there were defined rules on product labeling and control which the association members should comply with in order for them to continue use of the GI seal.¹⁰

GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION FOR LA PAZ BATCHOY

Batchoy in Iloilo is considered part of the cultural heritage. *Batchoy* is associated with Iloilo specifically with Lapaz as origin, which is why it is popularly known as La Paz *batchoy*. This was validated by the participants during the stakeholders' forum. There was the consensus that it is therefore imperative that La Paz *batchoy* be "protected" in terms of geographical indication, considering that commercial soup manufacturers for instant noodles use La Paz *batchoy* to name their products.

Mr. PJ Arañador, another resource person during the stakeholders' forum, mentioned the need for GI registration for La Paz *batchoy*. "I use the word La Paz as a prefix and specifier because of geographic indication. We need to register this similar to Guimaras GI for Guimaras mangoes, which have already been awarded to the province by the Intellectual Property Office."

Atty. Rheinart Pahila, a lawyer from the Iloilo City Government reiterated this during the workshop and suggested to check with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) if they still have a helpdesk for assistance on GI applications.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

As an initial step towards applying for GI registration, it is recommended that the Iloilo City Government facilitate the organization of a formal association or cooperative for *batchoy* business owners. There must be an official body from the *batchoy* sector who will have to collaborate and set the rules, guidelines, and standards on the *batchoy*. It should also be noted that standards should include food safety and sanitation, which is vital to prevent contamination. The government has to take the lead in acting as a facilitator, with the help of the academe. According to former Provincial Economic Development Officer Elena V. Quezon, there had been extensive meetings to reach a consensus on the characteristics of Guimaras mangoes. There were negotiations for production processes and standards that were attainable but still maintained the premium qualities of Guimaras mangoes.¹¹

Once standards are in place, they can collaborate and work together for the GI registration. According to the IPOPHL, geographical indications may be requested either by the organized association/cooperative representing the producers or the local government unit. Thus, they can decide on this after setting the guidelines for *batchoy*.

Batchoy is part of the Iloilo heritage; having geographical indication for this may indirectly contribute to preserving them so that future generations can continue to enjoy the dish. Based on the GI guidelines, this may be done through production standards for the *batchoy*, which may include traditional processes and knowledge.

The Iloilo City Government can also act as an enabler for businesses, in terms of creating certain incentives for the *batchoy*. It is a signature dish of Iloilo City, the first UNESCO Creative City for Gastronomy in the Philippines. It is also a definite part of the city's cultural heritage. Additionally, the government may undertake capacity-building projects to provide support to the *batchoy* sector. This is also a part of the initiative of registering the La Paz *batchoy* for geographical indication; businesses

¹⁰ Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL), "IPOPHL OKs Guimaras Mangoes as PH's First GI, Targets Legislative Reforms against Infringement."

¹¹ Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines, "IPOPHL OKs Guimaras Mangoes as PH's First GI, Targets Legislative Reforms against Infringement."

should be able to comply with standards so that they can continue to enjoy the right to use the GI protection.

A journey begins with a single step, and the step towards the protection of Iloilo's pride, the La Paz *batchoy*, can be through the Geographical Indication. However, it is crucial that the Iloilo City Government takes the lead to make this possible, particularly in the absence of an organized association for the *batchoy* sector.

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