

Protecting the La Paz Batchoy: Pathways to Geographical Indication

Mary Rose Rebuena  and Ramon Benedicto Alampay 

Abstract

La Paz Batchoy is the signature dish of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. However, the proliferation of mass-produced instant noodle variants using the “La Paz Batchoy” name threatens to dilute its cultural authenticity and economic value. The enactment of a *sui generis* geographical indication (GI) system in the Philippines offers an opportunity to establish statutory protection of La Paz Batchoy.

This paper explores the feasibility, structural requirements, and policy mechanisms for securing GI protection to safeguard La Paz Batchoy as an intangible cultural heritage. Grounded in collaborative governance theory, this study synthesizes legal document analysis, key informant interviews (KI), and qualitative data from multi-stakeholder consultations involving local batchoy owners, Iloilo City local government unit (LGU), intellectual property and gastronomy specialists and the academe. Findings reveal two main bottlenecks to GI registration: the absence of a standardized Code of Practice defining technical specifications and the lack of a formal Batchoy association to enforce standards. Securing GI protection requires the Iloilo City LGU to act as an enabler by facilitating the formation of a unified Batchoy Association. As an interim strategy, local stakeholders can pursue an LGU-led Certification Mark or Collective Mark before finalizing full GI registration.

Keywords: La Paz Batchoy, Geographical Indication, culinary heritage, collaborative governance, Iloilo City

Introduction

La Paz Batchoy serves as the core signature dish supporting Iloilo City's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. However, it currently faces severe risks of cultural dilution and loss of heritage identity due to unregulated commercialization and mass-produced instant noodle variants. In the absence of a formal legal standard, the authenticity of La Paz Batchoy relies entirely on uncoded, traditional culinary practices—such as slow-simmered bone broth, fresh miki noodles, pork offal, and local *guinamos* (fermented shrimp paste)—passed down through generations.

While the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines' (IPOPHIL) Memorandum Circular No. 2022-022 provides a *sui generis* mechanism for safeguarding traditional food assets, La Paz Batchoy lacks statutory geographical indication (GI) protection. This legal vulnerability stems from two critical structural bottlenecks: the absence of a standardized Code of Practice providing objective technical specifications, and the absence of an organized producers' association or governance consortium to manage and enforce these standards. Without GI registration, the geographical name "La Paz" risks devolving into a commodity exploited by commercial manufacturers. This leaves local traditional broth-makers economically exposed and erodes Iloilo City's culinary heritage.

This study specifically asks:

1. How do commercial adaptations (e.g., instant noodle products) and culinary innovations impact the perceived authenticity, market value, and cultural heritage of La Paz Batchoy?
2. What baseline technical specifications—are required to draft a standardized Code of Practice for La Paz Batchoy under IPOPHIL GI guidelines?
3. What is the institutional readiness and collaborative capacity of local stakeholders—including batchoy establishment owners, the Iloilo City LGU, and regulatory agencies—to form a recognized producers' association capable of managing and enforcing GI protection?

Iloilo City

Figure 1. Iloilo City UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy Logo.



Source: Iloilo City Government, 2023, Wikimedia Commons,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iloilo_City_of_Gastronomy_UNESCO_logo.jpg.

Iloilo City is the highly urbanized capital of Iloilo Province. It is considered as one of the oldest colonial settlements in the country, dating back to the 1570s, with its establishment as the Spanish seat of government for the island of Panay (Sonza 1976). In the mid-19th century, the opening of its port to international trade coupled with a boom of sugar exports from the province made Iloilo the premiere trading port of the Visayas as well as the de facto second most important city of the Philippines (Oabel 2003).

This long history as a government center and global port city exposed Iloilo's people to different cultures from around the globe, as well as from other islands and ethnic groups of the Philippines. Thus, Iloilo's cultural heritage represents a diversity of influences on the native Ilonggo culture. Arguably, it is in Iloilo's cuisine where the city's Ilonggo, Spanish, Chinese, and other roots have been expressed most passionately and creatively.

In November 2023, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City. This made it only the third Philippine city after Cebu City and Baguio City to earn the honor, and the first in the category of gastronomy. In its successful bid to be listed as a UNESCO Creative City, Iloilo City highlighted La Paz Batchoy as a signature heritage dish that exemplified its diverse cuisine as well as its commitment to conserve and promote culinary heritage and sustainable food practices. The city's logo as a creative city of gastronomy adopted the image of a bowl of piping hot La Paz Batchoy to symbolize Iloilo as a "melting pot for local produce and home-grown cuisine coming from the sources of its supply chain" (Arañador 2023).

La Paz Batchoy

Figure 2. Freshly prepared La Paz Batchoy.



Source: Photograph by Aprille Danilly A. Guintibano.

La Paz was first established as an independent municipality in 1856 before being incorporated as an urban district of Iloilo City in 1937. Located along the banks of the Iloilo River, the district features key civic landmarks including La Paz Plaza, the district's public market, and the historic Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje Parish Church (Funtecha 1997). Batchoy refers to noodle soup with pig meat and innards, sprinkled with chicharon (fried pork rinds) bits and spring onions that originated from La Paz, hence the identification of “La Paz Batchoy.” It is said that customers traditionally request refills of kaldo (broth) (Adobo Magazine 2024). Some batchoy outlets sometimes add a dash of guinamos, an Ilonggo shrimp paste, for additional depth of flavor (Salas 2023).

There are issues, however, on the use of the name “La Paz Batchoy” by instant commercialized versions which do not represent the authentic La Paz Batchoy. Lucky Me! by Monde Nissin, for instance is the leading commercial brand of instant noodles that produces La Paz Batchoy variants (Lienesch 2014). These are widely available in regular packets (like 55g or 70g) and ready-to-eat Go Cup or mini cup formats. Thus, there is a need to protect La Paz Batchoy as a vital part of Iloilo’s gastronomic heritage.

Geographical indication or GI is a sign or name used for products that have a specific geographical origin and have qualities or a reputation due to that origin (WIPO n.d.). As such, GI represents an avenue for protecting the intellectual property and cultural heritage of La Paz Batchoy.

This policy paper provides a GI roadmap for La Paz Batchoy. First, it identifies issues which might justify the need for GI registration. It then describes the possible benefits and impacts of securing GI registration for batchoy, and reviews stakeholder efforts to conserve the heritage of La Paz Batchoy. Finally, the paper proposes practical legal and institutional steps to realize La Paz Batchoy's GI listing and create an enabling environment for the conservation not only of La Paz Batchoy, but also Iloilo City's gastronomic heritage in general.

This article is based on an earlier policy brief of Rebueno (2025a) published in CIDS. It also includes some of the key findings from the Batchoy Stakeholders' Forum, held on September 17, 2024 at District 21 Hotel, Iloilo City. This was part of the Center for West Visayan Studies (CWVS) project "*Namit gid: A Multi-Stakeholders' Collaboration for the Ilonggo's Batchoy*" under the Panay Weaving and Culinary Heritage Program and funded by the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS). A targeted review of literature was conducted to investigate the impact of geographical indications in various international contexts. This was done to evaluate the policy relevance and potential applicability of GI protection for the La Paz Batchoy.

This paper also employs the theory of collaborative governance in the context of the Iloilo batchoy industry where, in the absence of a formal association, the Iloilo City Government must act as enabler for the establishment of standards needed for the GI protection of La Paz Batchoy (Ansell and Gash 2007).

Culinary Heritage

Taste Atlas, an international food database, has named La Paz Batchoy as the world's best offal soup. It received the highest rating among offal soups worldwide (Taste Atlas n.d.). It recognized that while the origins of the dish have various stories "there is no doubt that it was in Iloilo, more specifically in the district of La Paz", where its journey from being a local delicacy to a national and worldwide popular dish started (Marzan 2024)

The dish is considered part of Iloilo's cultural heritage, with La Paz being the focal point of its culinary history. In 2018, the Iloilo City Council passed a resolution declaring La Paz district as the "La Paz Batchoy capital of the Philippines" (Watchmen Daily Journal 2018). In staking that claim, the City Council acknowledged the importance of gastronomy to the city's tourism development program, stating that it was the policy of the city to recognize and support activities and programs that sustain tourism growth (Panay

News 2018). The resolution's proponent added that La Paz Batchoy is part of the Ilonggos' intangible cultural heritage which needs to be protected and institutionalized.

La Paz Batchoy as Ilonggos' Own

Ilonggos, particularly those from Iloilo City identify with the La Paz Batchoy as their own, being part of the Ilonggo culinary heritage. A recent controversy involving a fine dining restaurant's creative deconstruction of La Paz Batchoy shows how passionately protective some Ilonggos can be when it comes to the authenticity of batchoy. A restaurant located in Makati City introduced a radically different version of La Paz Batchoy, which resulted in many comments on the restaurant's social media page that the dish as presented by the establishment had lost its recognizable characteristics. Many were quite upset at how different it was from the traditional recipes, particularly its non-use of pork scraps and offal. They called on the restaurant to be careful in deconstructing a dish like La Paz Batchoy, because it is very strongly linked with the local culture and identity (Yap 2024). It is worth noting, however, that there were also some supportive comments which acknowledged that culinary innovation can be done if the essence of the traditional dish is not lost (Tolentino 2024). All these signify that La Paz Batchoy is a dish Ilonggos treat as their own and is a part of their culinary heritage.

Within Iloilo City, variations among established vendors (e.g., broth sweetness, marrow richness, or offal ratios) are well-recognized by local consumers. But traditional preparations generally adhere to a shared set of core ingredients: fresh miki noodles, pork offal, bone marrow, chicharon, and broth seasoned with guinamos. Outside Iloilo, however, "La Paz" risks devolving into an empty geographical signifier when used on mass-produced or modified noodle soups that omit these fundamental techniques and ingredients. Pursuing formal geographical indication protection under IPOPHL guidelines does not aim to eliminate local recipe variations or to restrict non-Ilonggo cooks. Rather, it institutionalizes a unified Code of Practice that anchors the name "La Paz Batchoy" to verified technical specifications and geographical origin, preserving it as a vital part of culinary heritage.

Perhaps because of the high awareness and public support for Iloilo City's UNESCO designation, stakeholders have been more expressive about their gastronomic heritage and attempts to commercialize or innovate on the dishes that they grew up with. In light of these debates and stakeholder concerns, there was a need to explore strategies to protect the essential value of Iloilo City's gastronomic heritage dishes, while also providing room and balance

for stakeholder innovation and adaptation to changing times and tastes. This policy study responds to that need by focusing on batchoy as a heritage dish requiring protection.

The Need to Safeguard La Paz Batchoy

Participants during the Batchoy Stakeholders' Forum discussed issues and concerns regarding the La Paz Batchoy. This workshop included participation from the representatives of batchoy establishments, the Iloilo City Local LGU, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) Center, the Local Economic Development and Investment Promotions (LEDIP), the Heritage Council, the academe, and the private sector. The consultants of Iloilo City in its bid for the designation as UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy were also present. Concerns were raised about the misuse of the name La Paz Batchoy, with some products being labeled as La Paz Batchoy despite not originating from the area. The issues include the marketing of La Paz Batchoy by commercial soup manufacturers, further diluting its authenticity (Rebueno 2025a, 2). It is worth noting that the stakeholders also expressed fears that instant batchoy might lead to the erosion of the La Paz Batchoy as a heritage dish, where consumers—particularly the younger generation—might confuse the commercial version with the authentic traditional La Paz Batchoy, leading to the erosion of cultural heritage.

The stakeholder discussions also highlighted challenges facing the local batchoy industry. On the supply side, micro-entrepreneurs and established business owners face severe cost pressures on essential ingredients like pork and miki noodles, compounded by market disruptions such as African Swine Fever. To build resilience and lower production costs, participants urged the creation of a Common Service Facility alongside technical training programs in business operations and costing for start-ups. These supply chain vulnerabilities are further complicated by external operational bottlenecks, including frequent power and water interruptions, high commercial rentals, labor shortages, and tedious Department of Tourism (DOT) accreditation processes that collectively threaten long-term business continuity. Beyond internal operations, stakeholders identified significant gaps in marketing, governance, and heritage preservation. Local producers are currently constrained by high vendor fees at private commercial festivals and a lack of presence at major transport hubs like the Iloilo International Airport, prompting calls for a joint petition to secure dedicated space from the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) (Rebueno 2025b).

On August 11, 2026, another stakeholders' meeting at the Iloilo City Hall discussed the stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of what makes for authentic La Paz Batchoy. The meeting brought together stakeholders representing local batchoy establishments, the Iloilo City Government, Iloilo City Gastronomy Council, academe, the IPOPHL, and the DTI.

For the stakeholders at the meeting, authentic La Paz Batchoy is defined by its adherence to traditional ingredients, preparation methods, and its deep connection to the cultural and social fabric of Iloilo. The genuine version is centered on a pork and beef-based soup, containing classic ingredients such as miki noodles and pork offal (including liver), which are garnished with roasted garlic, green onions, and occasionally, egg, depending on the variety. The broth is traditionally rich and complex, sometimes elevated with local condiments like *patis* (fish sauce), soy sauce, black pepper, and occasionally guinamos, which contributes to its distinct aroma and flavor profile. However, these can be adjusted for customers with specific preferences or allergies. The serving method is important: La Paz Batchoy must be piping hot, and it is often enjoyed as a complete meal, sometimes alongside local bread like puto or pandesal. According to gastronomy consultant, PJ Arañador, La Paz Batchoy is also known for its use of chicharon., which adds a salty crunch and rich pork flavor as it softens in the hot broth of La Paz Batchoy.

Beyond its ingredients and preparation, authentic batchoy was described as a “democratic food”—inclusive, widely accessible, and a cornerstone of social and family gatherings, rather than a dish confined to home kitchens. Its origins trace to the markets of La Paz in Iloilo, influenced by Chinese culinary traditions and commercialized in the pre- and post-war periods. Ultimately, authenticity is as much about the sensory experience (distinct taste, aroma, and visual appeal) as it is about community, tradition, and the shared heritage celebrated in Iloilo's daily life and gastronomy.

Geographic Indication and Cultural Heritage

The characteristics or reputation of the product should be due to that place of origin. Geographic indication allows those who hold its rights to prevent its use by a third party whose product does not conform to the standards of the GI mark. Geographical indications may be used for agricultural products, food products, wine and spirit drinks, textile/clothing, handicrafts, and industrial products. GI rights are enforced through application of national laws like all intellectual property rights (Rebueno 2025a, 2).

Globally, GIs are registered following two main systems. The most common are *sui generis* systems where special laws are enacted specifically to refer to GI protection. For example, the name “Champagne” may only be used for sparkling wine that comes from the Champagne region of France, produced according to strict guidelines over the type and source of grape, methods for bottling and fermentation, and aging, among others. These are all specified under French and European Union law (WIPO 2021).

Some countries, notably the United States, Canada, Australia and China, use a trademark-based system for their GI. Geographical indications are treated as a trademark covered by the appropriate existing laws. Products may be issued collective marks or certification marks. Collective marks may only be used by members of an association that holds the GI. Certification marks may be used by anyone who complies with the standards set by the holder of the GI.

In 2015, the Napa Valley Vintners (NVV), a non-profit trade association of wine producers in California obtained a certification mark from the US Patent and Trademark Office for the name “Napa Valley” (NVV 2015). This meant that a wine producer could only attach “Napa Valley” to its label if it contained a minimum number of grapes from a specific area of Napa County officially designated as an American Viticultural Area (AVA). Napa Valley is not a collective mark because it is not exclusive to NVV members. NVV can grant use of the Napa Valley GI to any winery that complies with its production standards and grape content requirements.

Calboli (2020) also sheds light on why GI matters in the protection of cultural heritage. Through the promotion of local products, GIs serve to protect and promote the cultural aspect associated with these products. GIs does not only help in the safeguarding of cultural heritage and existing traditions but also help (re)affirm cultural identities.

For instance, GI has been instrumental in protecting Darjeeling Tea—the first product in India to be granted GI status. Cultivated in India’s Darjeeling district, along the foothills of the Himalayas, it is known for its distinct muscatel flavor and delicate aroma. These qualities have been attributed to Darjeeling’s unique mix of high altitude, cool climate, and fertile soil. Its reputation and quality have made it one of the world’s premium teas. Geographical indication has helped to preserve Darjeeling’s centuries-old tea-growing methods that include meticulous hand-picking of tea leaves, careful processing, and compliance with specific traditional processes. GI standards have prevented the use of artificial flavors or methods that could compromise the distinct quality and reputation of Darjeeling tea. GI recognition for

Darjeeling tea has raised the market value of the tea and led to higher profits for tea growers. It has also boosted tourism, bringing in many tourists who wish to experience the region's tea culture and enjoy the authentic Darjeeling tea (Atheeque 2023).

Another popular case of GI protection for a culinary heritage is Parmigiano-Reggiano, also known as Parmesan cheese. With GI, only the cheese produced in a specific cheese-making region of Italy and which adheres to that area's traditional cheesemaking methods can carry Parmigiano-Reggiano label. GI has helped protect it from imitation and contributed to ensuring that authentic Parmigiano-Reggiano can be enjoyed by consumers worldwide. Thus, GI has served to safeguard an important part of Italian culinary heritage, while simultaneously reinforcing the communities' connection to their gastronomic heritage. As with Darjeeling tea, GI protection has also led to increased value for the authentic cheese and increased income for the Parmigiano-Reggiano stakeholders (Atheeque 2023).

These cases of GI protection have important implications of GI's role in safeguarding cultural heritage. These illustrate the potential of GI having practical applications in the protection of the La Paz Batchoy as part of the culinary heritage. GI may also be explored for this signature dish of Iloilo City, a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

In the Philippines, there is already a legal framework and rules that would enable the enforcement of GI anchored in Republic Act No. 8293, otherwise known as the "Intellectual Property Code of the Philippines." Section 168 provides statutory protection against unfair competition, complemented by provisions governing collective marks and trademarks. On October 5, 2022, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines promulgated the Philippines' official rules and regulations for registering, protecting, and enforcing geographical indications when it issued Memorandum Circular No. 2022-022 on October 5, 2022.

GI Application and Benefits

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 (Rebueno 2025a, 2).

Having products registered for GI provides 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 also strengthen consumer confidence, since product quality is maintained through standards. Thus, it can boost competitive advantage and in the process, enhance revenue generation (Rebueno 2025a, 2).

Securing a geographical indication status offers a robust mechanism for the preservation of cultural heritage, effectively shielding traditional culinary icons like the La Paz Batchoy from the threat of commercial dilution and unauthorized imitation. Rather than functioning merely as a marketing tool, the GI framework codifies the specific qualities and reputation of a product that are essentially due to its place of origin. For batchoy, this includes the historical preparation methods and sensory benchmarks—such as the rich balance of slow-simmered broth, pork offal, *guinamos*, and chicharon—that anchor the dish's identity to Iloilo. By implementing a binding Code of Practice among local establishments, GI protection shifts the burden of quality assurance from consumer perception to systemic compliance with traditional standards. Consequently, while consumers may not focus on the legal intricacies of intellectual property, the resulting standardization serves as a vital signal that guarantees authenticity and sensory fidelity. Such institutional oversight is crucial for safeguarding the community's intangible heritage, protecting local stakeholders from market displacement by generic versions, and fostering the long-term economic vitality of the regional food tourism sector.

Presently, there is no geographical indication for the La Paz Batchoy. GI registration may be explored given the issues and concerns regarding the misuse of the name “La Paz Batchoy.”

Contribution of the Policy Study

The study contributes to exploring a Geographical Indication status for the La Paz Batchoy in order to protect it as part of the Ilonggo culinary heritage. It also identifies constraints to GI that may be addressed by the government and Batchoy stakeholders. Furthermore, this contributes to the practical applications of collaborative governance in relation to the Iloilo City governments' role as enabler for the formation of a formal batchoy association, considering that the feasibility of GI also depends on multi-stakeholder collaboration. This policy paper also helps Iloilo City in preserving its

culinary heritage, supporting its aim to remain a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

Geographical Indications in the Philippines

The Philippine system for geographical indications shifted to a *sui generis* system in November 2022 with the publication of the GI rules and regulations by the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines. The new rules define GI as:

...any indication which identifies a good as originating in a territory, region or locality, where a given quality, reputation, or other characteristic of the good is essentially attributable to its geographical origin and/or human factors (IPOP HL 2022).

Prior to the issuance of these new rules, GIs were covered by the regular framework governing trademarks. According to IPOP HL, *sui generis* GI registration provides stronger protection for the agricultural and handicrafts sectors, especially the traditional and indigenous products. With the shift away from the old trademark-based system, GI will now have a separate registration system as well as a dedicated Registry maintained by IPOP HL (San Juan 2022).

The Guimaras mangoes are the country's first registered Philippine product with a geographical indication. This recognition serves as an affirmation of the distinct quality, reputation, and specific characteristics of the Guimaras mangoes which are all attributed to the Guimaras province's specific environment and traditional farming practices (DTI 2025).

Guimaras mangoes are the country's first registered geographical indication. It was in May 2023 that IPOP HL approved the Guimaras Mango Growers and Producers Development Cooperative's application for GI. These mangoes are known to be the sweetest mangoes 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. In addition to this, it is important to note that the Manual of Specifications 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 (Rebueno 2025a, 3).

According to the DTI, the GI registration of the Guimaras mangoes has protected the premium value and identity of Guimaras mangoes in both domestic and international markets. This has further strengthened local farming, boosted regional economic growth, and has preserved the nation's rich agricultural traditions. In fact, to take advantage of this GI status, the DTI has expanded the distribution of Guimaras mangoes to larger markets (DTI 2025).

Admittedly, geographical indication for Guimaras mangoes are quite different from a culinary dish like the La Paz Batchoy, given that mangoes belong to the agricultural product category. However, the protection and benefits GI have brought for the Guimaras mangoes may be replicated for the La Paz Batchoy, considering that in other countries, GI status has already been granted for the purpose of protecting their culinary heritage. These include European delicacies such as the Turrón de Alicante and Turrón de Jijona (nougat confectionaries from Southern Spain); Asperges du Blayais (special vegetable delicacy produced in Southwest-France); and Prosciutto di Parma (aged raw Italian ham) (European Commission, Geographical Indications Food and Drink n.d.).

Literature on geographical indications often emphasize packaged commodities, which stand in contrast to the freshly prepared nature of La Paz Batchoy. Nevertheless, it is vital to acknowledge that domestic and international legal frameworks stipulate that eligibility for protection is based on geographical origin, established reputation, and tradition rather than a product's physical longevity. Under the guidelines of IPOPHL Memorandum Circular No. 2022-022, GI status is accorded to goods whose specific characteristics and heritage are fundamentally tied to regional practices and intergenerational knowledge. La Paz Batchoy aligns with these requirements through its historical roots in Iloilo City's La Paz district, its specialized assembly of miki noodles and slow-brewed broth, and a public identity exclusively linked to Ilonggo culture. This perspective was underscored by Intellectual Property Rights Specialist II, Marianne Tajanlangit-Bebit, during a presentation to the Iloilo City Government on June 23, 2026 regarding strategic pathways for batchoy (Tajanlangit-Bebit 2026).

The immediate preparation of the dish does not hinder its protection; instead, it entails a focus on safeguarding the technical specifications and intangible heritage within local kitchens. Rather than certifying a shelf-stable container,

a GI for this culinary heritage standardizes the essential broth-making and assembly benchmarks across authorized outlets, while allowing for slight artisanal differences among purveyors. To facilitate this, a dual-pathway roadmap is proposed: implementing an LGU-led certification mark to validate the authenticity of fresh preparation, while establishing the legal foundation to protect the La Paz batchoy as part of Iloilo City's culinary heritage.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative empirical design synthesizing documentary analysis, semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs), and qualitative outputs from multi-stakeholder consultations.

- **Documentary and Institutional Review:** A systematic analysis of Philippine GI legal frameworks (R.A. No. 8293; IPOPHL MC No. 2022-022) and international case studies was conducted, refining the policy analysis framework by Rebuena (2025a). This was enriched by technical insights from IPOPHL's formal presentation to the Iloilo City Government on June 23, 2026.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Semi-structured KIIs were conducted with Ms. Marianne Tajanlangit-Bebit (IPOPHL IP Rights Specialist) to examine statutory GI registration mechanics, and Mr. PJ Arañador (Iloilo City UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy Consultant).
- **Multi-Stakeholder Consultations:** Primary qualitative data were gathered across three consultation phases under the UP CIDS-funded project, "*Namit Gid!:* A Multi-Stakeholders' Collaboration for the Ilonggo's Batchoy": the Phase 1 Stakeholders' Forum (September 17, 2024; 40 participants across local brand owners, LGU, DTI, LEDIP, MICE, and Heritage Council), followed by subsequent stakeholder meetings on June 18, 2025, and August 11, 2026.

Data were triangulated using thematic analysis to evaluate stakeholder governance readiness and explore needed initiatives for La Paz Batchoy's formal GI application.

Conceptual Framework

Geographical indications and the collaborative governance theory were used as framework for the protection of the La Paz Batchoy as part of the culinary heritage.

Collaborative Governance as Enabler for GI

This policy paper also employs the theory of collaborative governance which refers to a governance mechanism where the government directly engages multiple stakeholders in a collective decision-making process with the objective of making or implementing public policy (Ansell and Gash 2007). Collaborative governance is vital in securing a GI for the La Paz Batchoy since it underscores the need for all stakeholders to define, protect, and sustain the authenticity of this dish as part of the culinary heritage. There has to be inclusive stakeholder engagement, with shared understanding and mutual goals particularly in the light of disputes as to what constitutes “authentic” La Paz Batchoy as well as quality standards for GI. It also gives emphasis to the value of cross-institutional collaboration—with coordination among legal bodies, certification agencies and the local government units. Ansell and Gash (2007) highlight the need for deliberative and inclusive processes that also build sustained commitment and trust-building to make GI work. Geographical indication, after all, is not just a one-time application; it entails long term management and enforcement of the GI standards to protect the La Paz Batchoy.

Ansell and Gash (2007) give emphasis to six vital requisites for Collaborative governance: a) a forum is initiated by public agencies; b) forum participants include nonstate actors; c) participants are not merely consulted but are actually directly engaged in decision-making; d) a forum is formally organized and hold collective meetings; e) a forum attempts to make decisions by consensus (even if consensus is not attained in practice); and f) focus of collaboration is on public policy or public management.

This study applies to this theory in the context of the batchoy industry where there is an absence of a formal association, making it crucial for the Iloilo City Government to act as the enabler for the establishment of an organization that will help define standards needed for the GI protection of batchoy. Thus, there is the collaboration and shared responsibility among them: the Iloilo city LGU, batchoy owners and suppliers, other batchoy stakeholders, the DTI, the academe, and the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL).

Discussion

La Paz Batchoy deserves GI protection

Indeed, La Paz Batchoy depicts Ilonggo heritage. According to UP Visayas Chancellor Clement C. Camposano, “A bowl of batchoy is not just noodles, spices and cheap animal bits—its broth is also thickened by stories about our relationship with Chinese immigrants, our historical ties to Mexico, and the New World and the everyday lives of the toiling masses. Its emergence in a public market and not the kitchens of the local elite speak volumes about its democratic character.” (Ong, 2024) Admittedly, there are those who say that batchoy has roots with the Chinese ramen, but various accounts trace batchoy being first concocted and sold at the La Paz market which is why as mentioned, the Iloilo City Council passed a resolution declaring La Paz district as the “La Paz Batchoy Capital of the Philippines” (Watchmen Daily Journal, 2018).

Being very much a part of the Ilonggo heritage, it is crucial that the La Paz Batchoy be protected amidst instant soup noodles’ manufacturers use of La Paz Batchoy, diluting the authenticity of the traditional dish of the Ilonggos. Being a signature dish of Iloilo City and a culinary attraction for tourists, it is more imperative that initiatives be in place to safeguard La Paz Batchoy.

Having the La Paz Batchoy GI registered will help prevent the misuse of the name “La Paz Batchoy” by other commercial establishments, particularly instant noodle manufacturers who may not adhere to the traditional La Paz Batchoy.

No Formal Batchoy Association

GI registration applications can be made by a) a group or producers of the product identified by the GI through a representative cooperative or association that is supposed to ensure that the La Paz Batchoy is compliant with specific standards or requirements they have agreed upon; or by b) a national competent authority such as a local government unit (Rebueno 2025a).

An interview with Ms. Marianne Tajanlangit-Bebit, an Intellectual Property Rights Specialist of the IPOPHIL clarified the issue regarding the need for a formal batchoy association which does not exist at present. Ideally, there should be a formal association who can set the necessary standards for GI registration. There can still be room for innovation, but there must be standards in place as criteria for GI registration. Only those who can comply with GI registration can use the term La Paz Batchoy.

Issues and Challenges with GI in the Local Context

There are various issues and challenges related to the Geographical Indication for the La Paz Batchoy. The first issue is the absence of a formal batchoy association for GI application and to set the GI standards for batchoy. Furthermore, many batchoy owners may not be aware of GI, as it is still a relatively new concept in the Philippines. As a result, there is limited understanding of the benefits it offers in protecting the batchoy industry and in the safeguarding of the local culinary heritage. Another possible issue is that there might be a need to have common suppliers for ingredients. Food safety standards specific for batchoy also have to be considered as part of the GI standards. A crucial issue is to set guidelines as to what makes batchoy distinctly “La Paz Batchoy” in terms of the traditional local culinary dish of Ilonggos. These should be a product of discussions of the batchoy stakeholders, the Iloilo City government, and related agencies, while keeping in mind that batchoy owners still get to keep their trade secrets and still have room for innovation.

Collaborative Governance

In the absence of a formal batchoy association, the Iloilo City LGU can act as the enabler by facilitating the organization of a batchoy association who can—by adopting the collaborative governance theory—formally meet face to face in meetings, for a deliberate attempt to reach consensus on matters re standards and other pertinent aspects needed for GI registration.

This collective body can then help in policy inputs to further safeguard the La Paz Batchoy.

As articulated in her presentation by IPOPHL Specialist Ms. Tajanlangit-Bebit, the Iloilo City LGU operates as a central driver within a collaborative governance framework for the GI registration of La Paz Batchoy, extending its responsibilities far beyond mere administrative filing. By serving as a convener, the LGU aligns diverse actors—including the batchoy owners, culinary historians, the academe, cultural agencies, government offices, and other batchoy stakeholders—under a unified governance structure. In its capacity as a Heritage Steward and Standards Facilitator, the Iloilo City LGU safeguards cultural heritage by commissioning archival, oral history, and anthropological research on La Paz batchoy, while simultaneously guiding batchoy owners and stakeholders to co-create a consensus-based Code of Practice that standardizes essential ingredients, preparation techniques, and serving benchmarks. Ultimately, as an Ecosystem Builder, the LGU embeds this legal designation into regional tourism circuits, airport branding, festival

programming, and the broader pasalubong economy, leveraging the GI as an active, living mechanism for sustainable economic development and cultural preservation of the La Paz Batchoy.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Protecting the La Paz Batchoy through geographical indications is a powerful step toward preserving Iloilo's culinary heritage while ensuring economic sustainability of the La Paz Batchoy and international recognition (Rebueno 2025a). However, the process to secure a GI for La Paz Batchoy will be more complicated than for the case of Guimaras mangoes. More specifically, the unique, place-based value of Guimaras mangoes is significantly determined by the quality and composition of its soil or what the French call *terroir*.

On the other hand, the territorial character or value of a dish like La Paz Batchoy is understood in more subjective terms because cuisine is a form of intangible heritage, and the basic ingredients of it may come from places other than La Paz itself. It may be argued that batchoy's broad geographic scope is Iloilo City, and the application of La Paz as a specific place marker has more to do with batchoy's roots in the district's historic public market.

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 (Rebueno 2025a).

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 (Rebueno 2025a). They may also explore having the Iloilo City Gastronomy Council (with private sector representation) apply for the GI for the La Paz Batchoy.

Batchoy is part of the Iloilo heritage; having geographical indication for this may indirectly contribute to preserving it 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 (Rebueno 2025a).

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 should be able to comply with standards so that they can continue to enjoy the right to use the GI protection (Rebueno 2025a).

The application for GI will not happen overnight. It will surely take time just like it took years to have the GI approved for Guimaras mangoes. The group can also explore first the protection of the “La Paz Batchoy” brand by applying for the collective mark (as a group or cooperative). If the LGU will serve as the focal applicant of the branding application, they can consider applying for a certification mark. These can be preliminary steps before actually applying for the geographical indication. But these can be made possible only if the batchoy stakeholders, with the Iloilo City Government, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines, and other relevant agencies take a concerted effort in initiatives to protect the La Paz Batchoy as a culinary heritage.

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 (Rebueno 2025a).

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