

# Building Food-Based Destination Image in Meishan City: Inspirations from Korean Kimchi

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**Abstract:** Meishan is a city in Sichuan, China. There is a traditional local food called Dongpo Kimchi. Compared with other kimchi, its production and sales are at the leading level in China, but its brand awareness in the international market is far less than that of Korean kimchi, which has a high international reputation and effectively drives the development of the Korean tourism industry. Amid the growing popularity of food tourism, many national and local governments have been developing food tourism-centred destination management. Meishan City attaches great importance to the tourism industry and is trying to build a food-based destination image. Employing qualitative research methods, this article analyses media information and public statistics related to the marketing of Korean kimchi, and conducts in-depth interviews with experts. The research conclusions are expected to provide inspirations for Meishan City to promote Dongpo Kimchi and build a food-based tourist destination image.

**Keywords:** Destination Image; Meishan City; Kimchi

## 1. Introduction

Food tourism is an element of destination marketing (Du Rand, G. E. & Heath, E., 2006)<sup>[1]</sup>. Meishan is a city in Sichuan Province, China. Pickled kimchi has a history of more than 1,500 years in Meishan. In honor of the local great writer and gourmet Su Dongpo, Meishan people collectively refer to the pickled kimchi as "Dongpo Kimchi". In 2006, Dongpo District, Meishan City was known as the "Hometown of Chinese Pickles", and established the only 4A-level scenic spot in the national pickle industry, "China Pickle City". In 2009, "Dongpo Kimchi" was rated as a national geographical indication protection product. In 2012, the China Kimchi Museum was officially completed and opened. In 2020, Meishan formulated and released the world's first international standard for kimchi. In 2021, the market share of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi will account for one-third of China's total market share and half of Sichuan Province's. Although Meishan Dongpo Kimchi has a long history and carries a rich culture, and its production and sales are already at the leading level in China, however, it has not yet become an important symbol that can represent Chinese food culture, and its brand awareness in the international market needs to be improve.

When it comes to kimchi, the one with the highest international recognition is Korean Kimchi. Kimchi is the representative of Korean food culture, and it has also become a symbol of Korean national image (Nobuko Hongu, Angela S. Kim, et al., 2017)<sup>[2]</sup>. Although kimchi was only a side dish for poor people in the past, after thousands of years of development, kimchi has become the soul of Korean food. Since the 1970s, Korean Kimchi has embarked on the road of industrialization and internationalization. The industrial chain includes the cultivation of agricultural products, the production of kimchi, preservation and storage, transportation, sales and services. The industrialization of kimchi has also enriched kimchi products: kimchi biscuits, kimchi pizza, kimchi instant noodles, etc. Koreans use the Olympic Games, World Cup and other precious opportunities to promote kimchi to the world. In 1996, the export volume of Korean Kimchi reached 294,000 tons. In 2013, Korean Kimchi culture was included in the list of the intangible cultural heritage of mankind by UNESCO. In 2021, the export value of kimchi reached nearly 160 million US dollars, and 89 countries imported kimchi.

Food tourism is a new niche market that is growing in Korea. According to the Korea Tourism

Organization, 41.7% of tourists indicated that food is one of the top reasons for visiting Korea. According to the Korea Tourism Organization, this percentage increased to 49.2% in 2009 (Choe, J. Y. J., 2017) [3]. From 2015 to 2018, the Korean government initiated food tourism-intensive strategies on the supply side (Chang, S., 2021) [4]. The traditional food represented by kimchi has stimulated the development of tourism in Korea. By analyzing the international marketing experience of Korean kimchi in recent years, it could provide inspirations for Meishan City to promote Dongpo Kimchi and build a food-based destination image.

## 2. Literature review

Whether it is about the marketing of Korean Kimchi or Meishan Dongpo kimchi, the academic literature is quite scarce. Although some scholars have begun to pay attention to the rise of Korean Kimchi since the 1990s, the areas of concern are limited to production techniques, cultural heritage, and exhibitions. The most representative piece of literature takes the Kimchi exhibition in the Korean Museum as an example to study the protection of dietary intangible cultural heritage (Lu Mengjia, 2019) [5]. There are only two literatures that study the successful experience of Korean Kimchi marketing and reflect on the marketing situation of the same type of product in China. An article takes the Korean Kimchi culture as an example, and systematically expounds the brand marketing strategy of Gan cuisine (Zhao Weihong, 2008) [6]. Another article draws on the successful experience of Korean Kimchi, and proposes solutions for the overall situation and outstanding problems of brand building of characteristic agricultural products in Shandong Province (Chen Guangzhe, 2018) [7].

In recent years, with the industrialization of Meishan Dongpo kimchi, some scholars have begun to pay attention to its brand image and product marketing. Because kimchi enterprises are quite different and the standards are not uniform, once individual enterprises have quality problems, it will affect the brand image of Dongpo kimchi. A set of perfect supervision system should be established to protect local kimchi enterprises and strengthen product quality management (Peng Mingxia, 2011) [8]. There are a series of problems in the marketing of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi. We should vigorously develop online marketing, including building an official e-commerce platform for Meishan Kimchi, and strengthening the integration of cultural marketing and event marketing (Chen Hongkun, 2016) [9].

Korean Kimchi and Meishan Dongpo kimchi belong to the same category, and have many similarities in marketing methods, but no scholars have compared the two. Therefore, the author tries to fill this gap.

## 3. Research design

This study is to solve two problems: First, what are the current status and problems of the brand development of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi? Second, what are the inspirations of Kimchi marketing and image construction of tourist destinations for Meishan City? The author mainly uses the literature research method and the expert interview method to carry out the analysis. First of all, the author learned about the global marketing communications and product sales of these two kinds of kimchi on world-renowned information search engines, video social networking sites, and e-commerce sites, such as Google, YouTube, Amazon, etc. Then, the author consults relevant media information and statistical data to further understand the brand marketing effect of the two. Next, the author conducted in-depth interviews with 4 marketing experts to investigate the relationship between Korean kimchi marketing and the development of Korean tourism. Finally, through the discussion, it summarizes the enlightenment of the Korean kimchi marketing and the image construction of the tourist destination to Meishan City.

## 4. The development history of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi

The development of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi has roughly gone through three stages.

The first stage is 1986-2005, the formation period of the brand. In the past 20 years, Dongpo kimchi manufacturers have successively registered product trademarks and formed a series of kimchi brands, but they have not yet formed a complete industrial chain. In 1991, Dongpo Kimchi went abroad for the first time during a local government visit.

The second stage is 2006-2017, the growth period of the brand. Since 2006, the local government has been inspired to make small kimchi into a big industry, so it has begun to build a "China Kimchi City" to improve the kimchi industry chain and kimchi industrial park. National Kimchi Quality Inspection

Center, Kimchi Industrial Technology Research Institute, China Kimchi Museum, etc. have been completed. The local government allocates 20 million yuan of special funds for the development of the kimchi industry every year to support the construction of the park and reward leading enterprises. After more than ten years of development, modern agricultural parks such as the Kimchi Processing Center, the Kimchi Quality Testing Base, the Kimchi Research and Development Base, the Kimchi Education and Training Base, the Kimchi Cultural Tourism Expo Base, the Kimchi Trading Exhibition Base, and the Kimchi Organic Raw Material Production Base have been formed here.

The third stage is the maturity period of the brand from 2018 to the present. In recent years, the brand communication method of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi has broken through the traditional offline communication, and began to pay attention to online brand exposure and e-commerce platform construction. Offline exhibitions are important communication channels. In 2018, with the approval of the Ministry of Commerce, China Kimchi Expo was officially renamed as "China Kimchi Food International Expo", becoming a unique festival brand in Meishan. The 12th China Kimchi Food International Expo held in November 2020 attracted more than 300 domestic and foreign kimchi food companies to participate in the exhibition. The cumulative sales amount of offline activities was 73.98 million yuan; a total of over 382,000 merchants and tourists were received. In May 2021, the official account of "China Kimchi City", which represents the Meishan Dongpo kimchi, opened a channel for short video dissemination, and entered the short video platform Tik Tok in China, attracting the attention of young consumers. A total of 48 short videos have been released so far, and the one with the most attention has received 385 favorites, 1,858 comments and 177,000 likes. In 2021, the annual sales revenue of Meishan Dongpo kimchi reached 21.78 billion yuan. Brands such as Jixiangju and Lijilebao have opened flagship stores on e-commerce platforms such as Tmall and JD.com, and have gained a certain reputation in China.

Despite the rapid rise of the Meishan Dongpo kimchi industry, there are still two problems in its brand development: on the one hand, the marketing methods are not rich enough, and on the other hand, the internationalization of the brand needs to be improved.

## 5. Marketing experience of Korean Kimchi

### 5.1. Given the concept of healthy eating

Table 1: 2017 Collection of books, film and television materials about kimchi in three famous schools in South Korea

University	Collection (books)	Collection Type	Language Type
University of Seoul	736	One-liners (345) Serial publications (26) Dissertation (151) Ancient Documents (131)	Korean, English, Japanese
Yonsei University	511	One-liners (324) Dissertation (103) Ancient Documents (38) Text Resources (27) Multimedia (19)	Korean, Chinese, English, Japanese, French
Korea University	262	One-liners (138) Serial journals (11) Dissertation (72) Audio-visual materials (8) Ancient Documents (33)	Korean, English, Chinese, others

Source: Korea Cultural Heritage Administration

The modern healthy eating concept is given to Korean Kimchi, so that consumers think that eating kimchi is supported by scientific evidence. Korea attaches great importance to the research on the nutritional value of kimchi, and provides support for the development of kimchi through scientific research. Korean health experts have proposed that Korean Kimchi has high nutritional value: regular consumption of kimchi can improve the body's immunity and ability to prevent diseases, and kimchi soup has antibacterial effects after fermentation; its alkaline properties are conducive to balancing the body's PH value; The main raw material of kimchi is green vegetables, in which a large amount of vitamins and minerals are of great value for preventing constipation, gastroenteritis and other diseases. In addition, kimchi can prevent the accumulation of fat in the body, and has a significant effect on weight

loss and blood lipid lowering. Kimchi is one of the top five health foods in the world listed by the authoritative health magazine "Health" in the United States. In the libraries of major universities in South Korea, a large number of books and video materials about kimchi are also collected for scientific research.

### ***5.2. Embedded in media products***

Ingeniously implant Korean Kimchi in various types of media products to expand its brand influence. Kimchi is one of the most frequently appearing Korean foods in Korean TV dramas, movies and variety shows, and is regarded as the "quintessence" of Korean food culture. Movie stars often share with the audience how to pickle kimchi. The method of making kimchi is not complicated, so the focus is not on the production process of kimchi, but on spreading the spirit of sharing and emotion conveyed in the food of kimchi. The Korean TV drama "Reply 1988", which is also very popular in China, has a lot of scenes to give the neighbors harmonious coexistence. The details include the gifts of kimchi from the neighbors to each other, which makes people feel very warm and has a deep impression on kimchi.

### ***5.3. Integrated into exhibition and foreign affairs***

Deep integration with exhibition activities and foreign affairs to promote brand awareness. As early as the 1988 Seoul Olympics, South Korea vigorously promoted the Korean food culture represented by kimchi. In many major sports events since then, kimchi has always had a place in the exposure. Every year at the beginning of November, the "Kimchi Culture Festival" all over the country is rich and colorful, which provides a broad platform for the promotion of kimchi culture. The Korean government does not forget to promote kimchi in almost all diplomatic activities, and kimchi has become an indispensable food on the table of Korean state banquets.

### ***5.4. Expanding communication channels***

Product perceptions can affect destination image (Lee, R., & Lockshin, L., 2012)<sup>[10]</sup>. Use popular network communication methods such as short videos for brand marketing to attract young consumers around the world to travel to South Korea and experience the kimchi culture. On international video sites such as YouTube, there are a large number of short videos related to Korean Kimchi, and they are updated frequently. On China's Bilibili, in June 2022 alone, 21 short videos of Korean Kimchi were released. Koreans are good at using emerging communication tools to continuously update the brand image of Korean Kimchi, so that this traditional national food is always brought to life.

### ***5.5. Encouraging public participation***

Encourage people to actively participate in the branding of kimchi. In South Korea, it's not just the government that is trying to build kimchi brands, ordinary people are also enthusiastic about promoting kimchi. For example, League of Legends is an online MOBA game that is popular all over the world. Among them, the Korean professional team SKT-I has always had a very eye-catching performance in the world arena, which has also attracted a large number of game lovers and foreign live broadcast platforms. The base of the Korean professional team was visited and broadcast live. During the live broadcast, the Korean team not only showed its base to foreign audiences, but also actively promoted kimchi to foreign audiences. It can be seen that Koreans have strong confidence in their own country's kimchi and have a strong sense of brand promotion.

## **6. Conclusion and Implications**

The brand development of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi has roughly gone through three stages, namely the formation stage, the growth stage and the mature stage. Despite the rapid rise of the local kimchi industry, there are still two problems in its brand development: the lack of rich brand marketing methods, and the need to improve the internationalization of the brand. The marketing experience of Korean kimchi provides the following inspirations for creating a food-based destination image in Meishan city.

Efforts should be made to explore the health value of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi. In the current environment of green consumption, consumers have more scientific requirements for diet. Nutritious and healthy dietary values are recognized and pursued by consumers. Meishan Dongpo Kimchi can learn from the marketing model of Korean Kimchi, strengthen relevant scientific research, increase the technological content and value connotation of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi, and inject the core

competitiveness recognized and pursued by consumers into the brand. Only on the basis of providing consumers with healthy value can we have competitiveness in the market.

Endow Meishan Dongpo Kimchi with rich cultural connotations and spread it relying on cultural products. Meishan East Slope Kimchi should be combined with local culture to form a unique Meishan Kimchi industry culture. The beautiful poems such as "Cai Geng Fu" and "Dongpo Geng Fu" left by Su Dongpo endowed the Meishan Dongpo Kimchi with a great cultural force. The most traditional is the most cosmopolitan. The richer the brand's cultural heritage and the closer it is to consumers' thoughts and emotions, the more competitive the market will be. By endowing the brand with cultural connotations and subtly implanting products in media products such as film and television, books, games, etc., it is beneficial to expand its brand influence.

Strengthen event marketing, especially tourism-related themed events. On the one hand, the local government can purposefully intersperse Meishan Dongpo kimchi in various public events. On the other hand, by strengthening the communication of exhibitions, the brand exposure of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi will be increased. Continuing to hold the China Kimchi Food International Expo will continue to increase its influence among the global counterparts. Organizing groups to participate in well-known overseas exhibitions and domestic well-known export-oriented exhibitions is conducive to enhancing brand awareness. Strengthen overseas economic and trade activities, select large overseas cities and sister cities to carry out activities such as overseas investment and special promotion of Meishan Dongpo Kimchi, so that Meishan Dongpo Kimchi can go abroad.

Expand communication channels to attract international tourists. First of all, vigorously expand the communication platform. Meishan Dongpo Kimchi needs to use more new media, including short videos and other online media. In addition to dissemination on domestic media platforms, it should also be disseminated on international media such as YouTube. Second, encourage local people to participate in brand communication. South Korea's promotion of kimchi to the world reflects a clear government-business-citizen integration strategy. Whether it is to expand the communication platform or increase the main body of communication, it is necessary to make an integrated marketing communication plan for the brand in advance.

### Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Sichuan Cuisine Development Research Center, a Key Research Base of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Sichuan Province (No. CC21W04).

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