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“Bulgaria, the Holy Land of Yogurt”: A Brand Myth and Management Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

If asked about traditional food in Bulgaria, Bulgarians almost always start their stories with yogurt. The emphasis will be on its Bulgarian origin, unique taste and health qualities, and old traditions and secrets of preparation. It will be pointed out that the yogurt produced in Bulgaria is the only genuine product; anything else is some form of unsuccessful imitation. Bulgaria, it will be explained, is the only place yogurt can be prepared with specific lactic bacteria that thrive nowhere else. Bulgarian yogurt will be touted for its health qualities and the great popularity it enjoys even in a faraway place like Japan.

It is true that, especially in the past two decades, yogurt has been in the limelight of Japanese public attention. In fact, in Japan one cannot help speaking about Bulgaria without touching upon the subject of yogurt. It is the creation of the Japanese top brand “MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt” that reinforces this association between yogurt and Bulgaria. Most of the brand’s commercials present Bulgaria as the homeland of yogurt, a paradise of incomparable beauty and serenity where “the wind is different; the water is different; the light is different.” It is the sacred birthplace of Japanese yogurt.

It is interesting to see what happens when such a narrative, created in Japan by one of its biggest dairy companies, leaves that country and enters the world of Bulgarian corporate strategy and mass media.

The aim of this paper is to reveal how traditional Bulgarian yogurt, through its transformation into “MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt,” has created new meanings and values for consumers in both Bulgaria and Japan. The case of “Bulgaria, the holy land of yogurt” shows how companies transform foods into culturally meaningful products, thereby doing much more than making profitable commodities of them. They “educate” consumers and offer them new lifestyles, and they change established systems of consumption and influence people’s imaginations.

FOOD, BUSINESS, AND CULTURE

The search for a new approach toward changing eating practices in consumer societies has engendered increasing anthropological interest in the market forces of food supply and

demand (Asher 2003, Pilcher 2002), the influence of the food industry on consumer tastes (Bruegel 2002, Bentley 2002), the connection between corporate interests and state policy (Nestle 2007), and various other aspects of the politics of food and eating (Belasco 2002, Lien and Nerlich 2004, Watson and Caldwell 2005, etc.). Some researchers of food history also consider the role of modern advertising and marketing in dietary change (Cwiertka 2000) and reveal various business strategies for encouraging consumption (Hine 1995).

Now that modern technology and sophisticated marketing forces have become powerful factors that successfully combine to “update and upgrade existing dietary staples” (Lysaght 1994: VII), there is no doubt that researchers must take corporate strategies into account in order to understand the internalization of tastes that changes consumers’ attitudes and preferences toward basic foods. As American anthropologist Mintz points out, however, most researchers today see the study of food mainly as a way to pursue their interest in meaning—meaning confined within the boundaries of consumption (Mintz 1997). In spite of their importance in the construction of new tastes, food-producing companies have rarely been objects of anthropological research in the field.

The work of product managers and marketing specialists at food companies involves transforming foodstuffs from raw materials into culturally meaningful products (Lien 2003). The concept they have (or create) of both product and consumer should fit a company’s values and identity, which are themselves constructed by its management in order to gain buy-in from employees (Wright 1994, Nakamaki 2006). Thus drawing attention to the processes by which basic dietary staples are gradually transformed into value-added commodities in accordance with a company’s business strategy, a manager’s life philosophy, or shared company ideals can take us beyond the surface of products’ nutritional uses and unveil what lies behind their contemporary, often taken-for-granted meanings.

YOGURT AS AN OBJECT OF RESEARCH

The basic food item that is the object of this research is yogurt, a product derived from the fermentation of milk. Yogurt has traditionally been an important part of Bulgarian diets. Relevant anthropological research has focused largely on the pre-industrial production of milk-fermented products, discussing their place in the milk processing culture and the traditional diet of the Bulgarian people (e.g., Hirata *et al.* 2010, Markova 2006a, Markova 2006b) while for the most part ignoring the changes that have occurred in their material and symbolic values under the influence of socialism and the transition to a market economy. Consequently, we understand little of how yogurt has acquired new meanings and utility values—and how it has been raised to the status of a national symbol for “real” Bulgarian culture and the country’s global success.

In order to complement existing studies on yogurt, this research focuses on such symbolic aspects of yogurt as are negotiated over its “social life” (Appadurai 1986) and through its ability to connect people, companies, and countries in networks of both production and consumption.

Through multi-sited fieldwork conducted during several periods between 2007 and 2012 at Bulgaria’s state-owned yogurt company, ELBY, at Japan’s biggest yogurt manufacturer,

MEIJI, and in consumer communities in both Bulgaria and Japan, this research follows yogurt’s steps through time and space to illuminate some key actors’ contributions to its transformation from a common dairy product to a branded commodity, all while considering the socio-political frameworks in which this process takes place.

More specifically, this paper focuses on how yogurt is conceptualized by managers of the Bulgarian state-owned yogurt company ELBY and the Japanese yogurt market leader MEIJI. It tries to explain how they convey these concepts to consumers and how “strategic exchanges” (Morean 2005) between the two companies have created the myth of “Bulgaria, the holy land of yogurt.”

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BULGARIAN YOGURT INDUSTRY

Dairy farming is part of a long agricultural tradition in Bulgaria. The country was an agricultural one during the first half of the twentieth century, with more than 80% of its population living in rural areas. Almost every family owned dairy animals (mostly sheep), whose milk they turned into a variety of products.

The earliest stages of dairy industrialization may be traced to the 1930s and 1940s. However, this was an unorganized process without a thorough strategy for industrial yogurt production, packaging, and transportation. Full-scale industrialization in the sector began during the socialist era (1944–1989) with the establishment of the state-owned dairy enterprise *Serdika* (renamed *ELBY* after the end of the socialist regime). *Serdika* functioned not only as a center of yogurt production but also as a major research and development center where traditional yogurt production technologies could be adapted to meet the needs of industrial large-scale production.

One of the first aims of *Serdika*’s research and development center was to collect homemade yogurt samples from various regions of Bulgaria and select the combinations of microorganisms best suited to the industrial production of yogurt. These laboratory-made but locally-derived bacteria strains were seen as guarantees of good taste and nutrition for the traditional product. Convinced of Bulgaria’s superior know-how, technology, and starter cultures in the field, Todor Minkov, general director of the socialist dairy enterprise at the time, began thinking of a strategy for exporting these assets to so-called “developed” countries.

THE BULGARIAN CONCEPT OF YOGURT

Born in a small rural village at the foot of the Balkan Mountains, Todor Minkov (82) rose to the position of general manager at the only dairy enterprise in socialist Bulgaria in 1969, at the age of 41. Colleagues recall his tenure there (1969–1985) as being “the Golden Age” of Bulgarian dairy industry. Even today, more than 20 years after the collapse of the communist regime and a quarter of a century after Minkov’s retirement, he has not been forgotten. Some, his former employees, respect him personally for his character; others know him as the “old manager” they see at important company events; most recognize him as “the man who made Bulgarian yogurt famous.”

As seen from the speeches Minkov gives at national dairy conferences and company events, he believes that yogurt occupies a special place in Bulgarian history and culture. He emphasizes the industriousness of the Bulgarian people and their long tradition of sheep-breeding as important factors in the evolution of yogurt fermentation techniques.

At the same time, he often speaks of yogurt as “a gift of nature.” It is this wonderful Bulgarian nature, he says, that gives to the product its unparalleled taste and nutritional qualities. Herbs on which sheep and cows graze, invisible worlds of microorganisms, energy from the sun — all these contribute to the making of “Bulgarian” yogurt. Due to its unique combination of climate, soil, and geographical position, “this small piece of land,” (as he calls Bulgaria) fosters a diversity of lactic bacteria found nowhere else in the world. He cites the flow of energy coming from the universe, without which life on Earth would be impossible, and thinks of Bulgaria’s land as a rare point of intensive energetic exchange between the Earth and the Universe. His world-view attaches great importance to Bulgaria’s mountains (especially the Balkan Mountains), “special energetic fields” that foster the most active strains of *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*¹⁾. Thus his spiritual understanding of the Bulgarian land forms the basis of his concept of sour milk and its specific taste, smell, and texture.

One basic characteristic of Bulgarian yogurt is that it contains large quantities of living bacteria. Charged with the energy of the Bulgarian mountains, yogurt is believed to bring health, youth, and strength to those who consume it because *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* is “alive”²⁾. In addition, the Bulgarian product is superior in taste and has a specific *natural* flavor—due again to specific strains of *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* that occur naturally only in Bulgaria. According to Minkov, Western companies add sweeteners and artificial flavors in order to hide imperfections in taste, while Bulgaria’s sour milk is *naturally* delicious and requires no added fruits or flavors. The presence of live bacteria has become an important criterion used to distinguish between Bulgarian sour milk and the heat-treated fermented milks produced elsewhere in Europe.

As seen above, Minkov’s concept of yogurt assigns special places to nature and *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*. Keeping the bacteria alive is a priority in yogurt production at ELBY, one so important that it was made the basis of the Bulgarian State Standard for yogurt production developed by Minkov’s employees in 1978. According to the Standard, 1g of yogurt must contain not less than one million living bacteria, and no sweeteners, flavors, dry milk, starch, or even fruit may be added at any stage of production. Thus the State Standard represents the very essence of Minkov’s ideal of yogurt: in his own words, “keep to the natural as our ancestors did.”

This standard was abolished after the collapse of communism, however, and following European principles of food production, decisions about how to produce yogurt were transferred to manufacturers themselves. Most of the newly established companies (especially those dominated by foreign capital) imported new technologies from Western Europe and developed their own “technical specifications” for yogurt production. They do not use Bulgarian-produced starter cultures, preferring imports from Denmark, Italy, Canada, and elsewhere.

ELBY, however, never strayed from Minkov’s principles. Its new management remains loyal to the “old” standard, and in spite of the company’s decreased production capacity³⁾,

it continues to produce starter cultures isolated from nature in Bulgaria and the *natural* sour milk cherished by Minkov. Actually, the bacterium *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* has become the basis of both the name⁴⁾ and the logo⁵⁾ of the company.

The appeal of *natural* taste and the indisputable nutritional value of “ELBY” yogurt, still produced by the “traditional” methods that existed under socialism, are two of the company’s strongest weapons in a market economy. Though the socialist period has contradicting connotations in Bulgaria (as in the rest of Eastern Europe), ELBY refers to its socialist past with pride. Its home page introduces the company as “the only successor to the intellectual property and licensing activity of the state-owned dairy enterprise Serdika.” Now “veteran” employees tell stories of the “Golden Age,” when Bulgarian starter cultures were exported to three continents, more than 20 license agreements were formed regarding the production of Bulgarian yogurt with companies around the world, and constant efforts were made to prove Bulgaria one of the biggest and most developed dairy centers in Europe.

Now only two of those licensing agreements (with Japan’s MEIJI and Finland’s Valio) have survived the chaos and drastic changes that accompanied the political and economic transition to democracy and a market economy. At the same time, relationships with MEIJI have intensified, thanks to new technical collaboration and joint research projects. The top managers meet annually (but usually twice a year), and almost half of ELBY’s research staff have visited MEIJI institutes for various training and research programs. These close relationships are emphasized at all company events as part of its PR and advertisement strategy⁶⁾.

THE STORY OF “MEIJI BULGARIA YOGURT”

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Russian scientist Elie Metchnikoff, a 1908 Nobel Prize winner, theorized that aging is caused by toxic bacteria in the gut and that sour milk fermented with *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* could prolong life. In his *Optimistic Studies* he explains the results of his research on various lactic bacteria and concludes that “the Bulgarian rod,” as he calls *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, is most effective in neutralizing the toxins in the body (Metchnikoff 1908). He recommended daily consumption of yogurt produced with that bacterium and for his part ate large quantities of yogurt every day. Metchnikoff’s theory founded a new era in microbiology. His work inspired many scientists to begin investigating the causal relationship between bacteria and good intestinal health, which efforts eventually led to the marketing of various fermented milks worldwide⁷⁾.

Yogurt is not a traditional food product in Japan, and like other dairy items it became part of the Japanese diet only after World War II, with Westernization and the establishment of the school lunch provision system. With the launch of “MEIJI Honey Yogurt” in 1950, MEIJI became the first Japanese company to produce yogurt industrially. Its yogurt was a hard, sweetened gelatin without living bacteria; the product was sterilized immediately after fermentation.

Inspired by Metchnikoff’s theory of longevity, researchers at MEIJI started contemplating the development of a totally new product for the Japanese market: yogurt containing live *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*. Their first encounter with “real Bulgarian yogurt” was at the

Osaka Expo in 1970.

The instructional video used for training new employees today tells the story of the product's development from the perspectives of key actors in that development. One of them (now a retired employee) told me that he had been shocked by the sour taste of the yogurt at the Bulgarian pavilion, considering it impossible to turn into a marketable product. But when employees reported these first impressions to the vice-president, he made an unexpected decision. According to the instructional video, he said, "We go for it. Sooner or later consumers will understand the genuine taste."

The decision to develop this revolutionary product was a strategic move with very good timing. It occurred during a period of stable economic growth when companies and individuals could afford to look for unusual, even challenging, tastes. Having fulfilled their basic nutritional needs, Japanese consumers were turning to food as a source of long, healthy, happy lives. Thus Metchnikoff's theory of longevity became grounds for the company's new project.

Pioneering the industrial production of yogurt (1950) and developing the world's first continuous fermentation machine (1964), MEIJI had sufficient technological confidence to produce plain yogurt like that produced in Bulgaria at the time. In 1971, MEIJI was ready to introduce Japan's first plain yogurt to the market. Since the Bulgarian Embassy did not grant it permission to use "Bulgaria" in the product name (alleging the cultural uniqueness of yogurt produced in Bulgaria⁸⁾), MEIJI decided to launch the product under a different name. According to the product development narrative, this greatly frustrated the project members and led them to conclude that yogurt production was not only a question of finding the best technology but also a matter of history, national pride, and culture.

Meanwhile, consumers who were used to sweet, firm yogurt reacted very negatively to the new sour variety. Hardly 300 packs of yogurt a day could be sold throughout the country. Under such circumstances, getting permission to use "MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt" to identify the new product was the only way to convince skeptical consumers that the new sour yogurt would be good for them. Negotiations were renewed, and at the end of 1972 a licensing agreement with ELBY ("Serdika" at the time) was signed, allowing MEIJI to develop one of its most successful brands.

In order to get the firsthand experience that was considered necessary in order to convey the "special" values of "MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt" to the public, a team of researchers and marketing specialists visited Bulgaria on several occasions. As some of them explained to me, these trips were essential because if they wanted to be convincing, they had to understand the full meaning of yogurt in "its homeland, Bulgaria."

In efforts to create the product's identity, MEIJI turned to its alleged place of origin, making full use of Minkov's concept of yogurt and its "Made in Bulgaria" story. Pilgrimages to Bulgaria were important elements of the company's branding strategy. Package innovation in the early 1980s and acquiring Japan's government-designated health food standard FOSHU⁹⁾ in 1996 were also major steps toward wider acceptance of "MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt." Furthermore, attaching strategic importance to microbiological research and technical cooperation with Bulgarian researchers was a key factor in matching new consumer needs and taste preferences. As a result, new strains of bacteria (LB51 and LB81) were adopted,

leading to further improvement of the product's taste and health qualities.

Serious investment in probiotics research¹⁰⁾ and clinical tests in the midst of the health fad age gained the Bulgarian brand government recognition as a probiotic food. This accomplishment was especially valuable in an age when “healthy lifestyles,” “longevity,” “eco-friendly,” and other such concepts became very important to the middle class.

It is now estimated that more than a million Japanese include Bulgarian yogurt in their daily diets. With 27% of the plain yogurt market, MEIJI has become the biggest producer of yogurt in Japan and a major contributor to new food preferences and a market worth 70 thousand million yen annually¹¹⁾. There are many other kinds of plain yogurt on the Japanese market now (kefir, Danish yogurt, so-called Kaspikai yogurt, etc.), but it is Bulgaria that is generally assumed to be the homeland of yogurt. For most Japanese people now, yogurt means Bulgaria, Bulgaria means yogurt, and yogurt stands for health and longevity, cherished ideals associated with personal happiness and the good life.

The ads of MEIJI show idealized pastoral scenery from Bulgaria, with large families and healthy senior citizens who lead peaceful and happy lives in harmony with nature. Beautiful pictures of Bulgaria decorate the walls of the only Bulgarian restaurant and yogurt bar in Japan, which MEIJI manages. A life-size mannequin of Koto Oshu (a Bulgarian and one of the most popular sumo wrestlers) welcomes customers at its entrance¹²⁾. One of the brand's commercials says, “The wind is different. The water is different. The light is different. In this land delicious yogurt was born.”

This is how “yoguruto no seichi Burugaria” (the holy land of yogurt, Bulgaria) was seen by MEIJI employees in the 1970s and how it is imagined by many Japanese now. This image of Bulgaria, created by a Japanese company for Japanese consumers, forms part of the success story of Bulgarian yogurt as it is told by ELBY in post-socialist Bulgaria.

A REFLEXIVE SACREDNESS

At the public celebration of the 40th anniversary of licensing activity in November 2007, the president of ELBY expressed gratitude to the chairman of MEIJI (who has been awarded Bulgaria's highest national order three times) for building “a positive image of Bulgaria” and for his constant efforts to popularize Bulgarian culture in Japan. In his review of the company's licensing activity, the president emphasized the success of Bulgarian yogurt in Japan and the good relationship between the two companies. The chairman of MEIJI explained retrospectively the hardships his company had had to overcome in order to convince Japanese consumers of the qualities of Bulgarian yogurt. At the end of his congratulatory address, the chairman pointed out that the two companies had a common mission: to discover new strains of bacteria that “thrive in Bulgaria, the homeland of yogurt,” and to develop new products that contribute to human health.

This event was the biggest that ELBY had organized since the collapse of the socialist state. It was widely covered by mass media and attracted a great deal of public attention. This illustrates how the image of “Bulgaria, the holy land of yogurt” created by a Japanese company is now being successfully communicated to Bulgarian consumers through ELBY.

The popularity of Bulgarian yogurt in Japan has always been a favorite topic for

Bulgaria's mass media. Whenever any aspect of Japanese life, economy, or culture is discussed, the story begins with the success story of Bulgarian yogurt in Japan. The titles of newspaper articles are very impressive, but what is even more impressive is that they are often direct citations from ELBY's home page¹³.

It is now taken for granted that Bulgaria is the homeland (and holy land) of yogurt. Most people know that Bulgarian yogurt is prepared using the "unique" *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* (imagined as a specific bacterium that can thrive only in Bulgaria) and believe only plain yogurt with live *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* is "authentic" and "genuine." This product is distinguished from other types of fermented milks (mainly sweetened yogurts produced with Western technologies) and considered a typical Bulgarian product of "unparalleled" taste and nutritional value.

Such discourse is a recent phenomenon, however. Under socialism, when yogurt was transformed from a seasonal food to an everyday one, it was valued primarily for its nutritional value. Because it was easily accessible, its per capita consumption increased to set a world record (64 kg per year/175 g per day) toward the end of socialist rule. But except for ELBY's managers and researchers, nobody thought of its uniqueness and "natural" taste; there were no public discussions about its authenticity; and of course, Japan was absent from the whole picture.

Since the end of the socialist era, consumption of yogurt has for a variety of reasons decreased by more than half (to 27 kg per year/70 g per day). At the same time, it has acquired many "mythological meanings" (Barthes 1972) and become "special," "unique," and "Bulgarian." Its taste is "natural," the methods used to prepare it "traditional." It is considered a "health food" with international (meaning Japanese) recognition, and Bulgaria is imagined as "the holy land of yogurt." This is what yogurt now means in Bulgaria.

This shared imagination recalls Minkov's idea of yogurt, which has established itself as a corporate value in ELBY and survived all the political and economical changes of post-socialist Bulgaria. The sacredness surrounding yogurt in Bulgaria today, however, is not solely a result of ELBY's work and does not reflect Minkov's concept in its original form. It stems rather from the sacred story of yogurt developed by MEIJI for its "Bulgaria" brand. It was in Japan that the image of Bulgaria as the "the holy land of yogurt" was born, and it was there that Minkov's concept of yogurt could be fully developed and communicated. Transformed into a meaningful cultural product for the Japanese consumer, Bulgarian yogurt comes back to its "homeland" to convince Bulgarian consumers of its uniqueness and sacredness. Ads for "MEIJI Bulgaria yogurt" show happy Bulgarians eating yogurt against backgrounds of picturesque scenery. Referencing the great success and recognition of Bulgarian yogurt in Japan, ELBY's commercial shows Japanese people enjoying their cups of Bulgarian yogurt.

CONCLUSION

It is in the "strategic exchanges" (Morean 2005) of words, ideas, and beliefs between the managers and employees of ELBY and MEIJI that the sacredness of Bulgarian yogurt was born. The nature of this sacredness is neither wholly Bulgarian nor wholly Japanese. In 40

years of relations between the two companies, various aspects of sacredness have crystallized, been submerged into products, and established themselves for consumers as yogurt’s secondary—in Barthes’ words, “mythological”—meanings.

At both official and informal meetings, Bulgarian and Japanese employees have learned from each other not only cultural meanings and product values but also how to communicate these to consumers. Once the sole player on the yogurt market, ELBY is now exposed to fierce competition. The company must adjust to the hard realities of a market economy, and Minkov’s concept of yogurt, deeply rooted in the company’s value system, is seen as its biggest resource. But it is not enough. The company needs a new strategy for product management and marketing; Minkov’s know-how does not match the new economic conditions. The company’s established relationship with MEIJI is another major asset. Intensified contacts and joint research projects strengthen this relationship and provide knowledge and know-how to both managers and employees at ELBY. Bulgaria’s positive image as “the holy land of yogurt” also has great potential for exploration and development in post-socialist Bulgaria, and ELBY makes full use of the brand narrative developed by MEIJI.

From another perspective, the creation of “MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt” tells of an unyielding corporate spirit, great persistence, and successful communication between MEIJI and Japanese consumers. Emblematic for the company, it is used by management to teach new employees one of their first lessons in “MEIJI rashisa” (the corporate spirit of MEIJI). The management uses three key words to describe this spirit: *heart* (pursuing the wisdom of nature), *wellness* (offering high-quality, tasty health products), and *news* (offering new food choices). “MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt” exemplifies these values, all of which employees are expected to cherish and sustain throughout their careers.

The connotations of “the holy land of yogurt” are taken for granted now, but they were created (and are constantly being upgraded) by the management and marketing strategies of the two companies. “MEIJI Bulgaria Yogurt” has proved itself a successful collaboration that has had great influence on consumers in both Bulgaria and Japan.

NOTES

- 1) One of the most common bacteria used in yogurt production. It is named “bulgaricus” after the homeland of Stamen Grigorov, the scientist who discovered it in 1905.
- 2) According to Bulgarian production practices, yogurt is never sterilized after fermentation. This is to avoid killing bacteria and destroying the yogurt’s taste and nutritional value.
- 3) After the collapse of the socialist state, all the regional dairy factories of “Serdika” were privatized. All that was left of the company were two R&D centers and a small production base in the capital city, Sofia.
- 4) The company’s full name is “LB Bulgaricum,” but it is often abbreviated to “ELBY.” The abbreviation is used in this paper for reasons of convenience.
- 5) Creation of a company logo was initiated by Minkov in 1976. The logo consisted of the letters “L” and “B.” The “L” is made of two parts in the form of the rod-shaped bacterium *Lactibacillus bulgaricus*. The “B” is made of three parts, one of which is also an image of *Lactobacillus*.

- bulgaricus. The other parts are two spherical bacteria (*Streptococcus thermophilus*), the other main factors in milk fermentation.
- 6) The main actor in ELBY's only commercial for yogurt is a Japanese man who is tasting yogurt while repeating "vkusno" ("delicious" in Bulgarian).
 - 7) Metchnikoff is considered one of the three most important persons in the history of MEIJI, and his birthday (May 16) is celebrated as the "Day of Yogurt" by the company. Metchnikoff's research is also presented in some of the company's commercials.
 - 8) The answer MEIJI received from the Bulgarian Embassy, as introduced in the company's video materials, is as follows: "Yogurt is the heart of the Bulgarian people. We can't give the country's name to a product made by a foreign company."
 - 9) FOSHU (Foods for Specified Health Use) is a Japanese government certification for functional food.
 - 10) According to the WHO's current definition, probiotics are live microorganisms that confer a health benefit when administered in adequate amounts. They are commonly consumed in fermented foods with specially added active live cultures, such as yogurt and dietary supplements.
 - 11) The data were provided to the author by MEIJI's International Business Department.
 - 12) Being healthy (i.e., eating health food, including yogurt) has become a way to achieve personal happiness. A personification of these values is Koto Oshu, who is considered "handsome," "good-humored," and "successful."
 - 13) For example, "24 million Japanese start their day with Bulgarian yogurt" and "In Japan Bulgaria means yogurt, beautiful nature, and healthy life."

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