

# Status and Skills: Production Form and Changes of Pottery Handicraft Industry in Guanyao Town, Qichun County

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## **Abstract:**

This paper mainly expounds the production form and changes of pottery handicraft industry in Guanyao Town, Qichun County. In the process of change, the production form has gradually formed the diversified production form in the hire-dominated era with historical characteristics, the planned production form in collective economy of "worker status" and the skill inheritance form of "inheritor of intangible cultural heritage" status. In order to promote the normal development of the production form of pottery handicraft industry, we must mobilize the production initiative of potters who master the core skills. In fact, in these production forms, the overall interests of potters and pottery handicraft production are consistent, that is, they objectively inherited the traditional skills, the fundamental purpose of which is to increase income and improve the quality of life. The case study of production forms shows that increasing the job income of potters through effective methods and achieving the social identity of potters plays a strategic role in promoting the production of pottery handicraft industry. The conclusion is that in the diachronic system, economic and technological level and other social environments, although potters are irreplaceable, the production form only conforms to the needs of potters and does not take into account other factors, meaning the pottery handicraft industry in Guanyao Town likewise faces the uncertain factors of development.

**Keywords:** Pottery-making skills; Status logic; Production form; Production initiative; Income distribution.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In social and economic relations, production form refers to the form of organization and distribution adopted in production. The production form of handicraft industry refers to the organizational form adopted in the production and resource allocation of the production process of handicraft industry based on production capacity and market demand. In the production form of handicraft industry, as the key main factor, artisans and their craftsmanship play a decisive role. When the initiative of artisans is aroused, the production form presents a benign development, thereby promoting the inheritance and innovation of skills and products, and vice versa. So, how to mobilize the initiative of craftsmen? From the history of pottery handicraft industry, it is manifested in two aspects: on the one hand, increase the income of craftsmen and make them satisfied at and off work; On the other hand, enhance the status of craftsmen and promote social identity with the profession. The commonality of these two aspects is fully reflected in the production form of pottery handicraft industry in Guanyao Town, Qichun County, Hubei.

Guan Kiln in Qichun County is one of the three major traditional folk kilns in Hubei [1], and a

representative kiln for folk pottery firing in Eastern Hubei [2]. In 2007, the pottery making technique of Guan kiln was successfully included in the first batch of intangible cultural heritage list of Hubei Province. With the continuous attention of the industry to folk skills in recent years, the Guan kiln's pottery-making technique has been highlighted, especially by growing books related to pottery making at Guan kiln. As a local folk art, Guan kiln is indeed different from other folk kilns. According to this, the text horizon mainly focuses on the history, process flow, pottery shape and other characteristic contents of Guan kiln's pottery making. However, in the context of contemporary intangible cultural heritage, where is the way out for the folk kilns with skills, especially the characteristic skills with intangible cultural heritage value, as its active development met future uncertainties. Therefore, taking stock of the production form and historical changes of pottery making in Guan kiln under the background of the times obviously has practical reference value and enlightening significance for an effective, objective and reasonable continuation of the intangible cultural heritage skills,. From the beginning of pottery-making technique, the development process of pottery making in Guan kiln went through two major historical periods, namely, from the early Ming Dynasty to the Republic of China and from the founding of new China to the current period. After the founding of new China, due to the specific historical background and marked by deepening reform, Guan kiln was roughly divided into two development periods. Moreover, the era-specific status and skills of potters are closely connected with the production form of pottery making in Guan kiln. In view of the corresponding relationship between different historical periods, the production of pottery handicraft industry in Guanyao Town will be summarized into three production forms, namely, the diversified production form in the hire-dominated era, the planned production form of "worker status" in the collective economy and the skill inheritance form of " inheritor of intangible cultural heritage" status. Each production form has distinct characteristics of specificity and complexity due to tremendous differences based on historical background.

## **II.DIVERSIFIED PRODUCTION FORMS IN THE HIRE-DOMINATED ERA**

In the historical period from the early Ming Dynasty to the end of the Republic of China, the diversified production forms of pottery handicraft industry were mainly embodied in the production forms of state-run, privately-run and household handicraft industry. Although there is no exact record of officially-run kilns in Guanyao Town, the Ming Dynasty followed the craftsman registration system of the Yuan Dynasty and formulated the production norms for hired handicraft workers at that time. Potters belonged to the category of registered craftsmen, and their status was lower than that of ordinary farmer households [3]. Craftsmen in the Ming Dynasty must be hired to serve the government officials. The status of hires was determined in the Law of the Ming Dynasty. The hired workers were called "hired men", and their employers are "patriarch". Craftsmen in the Ming Dynasty were semi-free craftsmen. So far, it is certain that under the regime at that time, the hired status of potters in Guan kiln was unconsciously shaped in the original stage of the skills.

The constraints of craftsman registration system on the handicraft industry were gradually weakened in Qing Dynasty and soon abolished [4], but the craftsman's hired status already existed in the period of the Republic of China, and has specific objective rationality under the diversified production form. The officially-run production form of handicraft industry tended to shrink in the latter part of Ming Dynasty, and the production of privately-run handicraft industry grew, gradually getting rid of the control of the government and becoming a folk handicraft industry with household as the unit. By that time, the pottery

industry in Guanyao Town entered into the private production form and the household production form, the former of which was the main production form. In the pottery production form of Guan kiln, private production and household production coexisted, which can be reflected in the way of wage payment, that is, first, hired workers were paid according to the number of semi-finished products in the kiln; Second, hired workers worked at the living expenses of employers and were paid on a daily basis, with wages paid in the form of finished products; Third, self production and self marketing. The first two kinds of pay systems, with the existence of hired workers, generally belonged to the form of private production, while the latter is household production. The private production scale of pottery was larger than that of household production, making up the main part of the production form of Guan kiln at that time. Private production of Guan kiln often encountered numerous complex factors at the beginning of the construction of dragon kiln. If it involved the use and transfer of land, the money required by the transaction is often beyond the reach of one household, and there would inevitably be joint-stock operation of two or three households. Scale operation is the main feature of private production, making it necessary to hire workers when the operation grows to a certain extent. The process of pottery making in the kiln is complicated and onerous, as the clay selection process alone would require people to sift, clarify and refine clay. Therefore, hires were required to keep the kiln operations running. At that time, clay molding relied solely on the blank drawing technique, making skilled blank drawing craftsmen seriously undersupplied in the kiln area. Guan kiln’s potters relied on their skills to work as hires, earning a quality of life much higher than that of farmers, which can be corroborated by the potters. According to the available data, before 1949, there was an employer/hire relationship between the kiln owners, masters and helpers in kiln areas of Guanyao Town (see Table 1), and the Guan kiln workers volunteered to be hired for the sake of living. According to the recollections of master Wan Zhengfu at Lijia kiln [5], there was no personal bondage between hires in Guan kiln and the kiln owners, but the two sides had written contracts. As potters had increasing elbowroom, there were no obstacles to personal freedom. Even if the means of production and living in the hands of hires were far less than those of kiln owners or private business owners, it would not hinder the achievement of new employment relationships.

**TABLE I: Kiln owners versus hires in Guanyao Town [6]**

KILNOWNER	HIRED WORKERS	SKILLS
<b>Li Rucheng</b>	Unknown	Unknown
<b>Wang Qishu</b>	Wang Fuquan	Kiln making
<b>Wang Youyun</b>	Li Likang	Clay stomper
<b>Li Lihan</b>	Li Yunxiang	As a master
<b>Li Ronghan</b>	He Chunyuan	As a master
<b>Wang Xianglai</b>	Li Guangguo	Generation pottery

Under the diversified production form in which hires played a dominating role, the historical background factors constrained the development of pottery production. In addition to institutional and economic factors, technical means could not be ignored. The tools used for blank drawing and forming were wooden turning

plates and stirring rods, all operated manually using wood ash glaze for glazing. The mode of transportation appeared primitive in Guanyao Town for its small capacity and sales volume, with land transport relying on carriages; Wooden boats were used for water transport, too small to travel in Yangtze River and capable to reach no more than eastern Hubei. In short, the fact that craftsmen volunteered to be hired instead of being forced to do so shows that hired workers could only solve the labor shortage problem of pottery making, but could not fundamentally change the traits of slow development, low production efficiency and inconsistent product quality of pottery handicraft industry in Guanyao Town under the diversified and decentralized production form.

### **III.PLANNED PRODUCTION FORM "WORKER STATUS" INTHE COLLECTIVE ECONOMY**

From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the 1980s, the pottery handicraft industry in Guanyao Town developed and formed a planned production form of "worker status" in the collective economy. "The field of handicraft was once a prominent school after the founding of the People's Republic of China, because the country needed it in exchange for foreign exchange to develop the national economy." [7] As the handicraft industry plays an important role in economic relations, it is endowed with its historic vision and future development direction. Through the "cooperative" movement [8], the national support for the handicraft industry, especially the exploitation of traditional handicrafts with a long history, has achieved results. In this transformation movement, pottery making business in Guanyao Town of Qichun County has regained its vitality. At first, the form of mutual assistance and cooperation in the pottery industry laid the foundation for the operation of the planned production form of "worker status" in the collective economy of Guan kiln. In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the pottery practitioners in Qichun County were all self-employed, mostly concentrated in Guanyao Town. When the country subsequently began socialist transformation of all economic operation modes, the private enterprises and individual handicraftsmen in Qichun County, including the workshops of pottery owners in Guanyao Town, were included in the transformation [9]. In 1953, pottery makers in Guanyao Town began the mutual aid and cooperation movement, as kiln owner sin Guanyao Town successively established a number of pottery cooperatives, as well as mutual aid groups, primary cooperatives and senior cooperatives. Then they merged and established the "Qichun County pottery production cooperation factory", and some of individual handicraftsmen formed collective industrial enterprises. In 1958, the individual handicraft industry ceased to exist in urban and rural areas, and the Guanyao pottery production cooperation factory was established, which was later named Qichun state-owned pottery factory [10]. The deconstruction and reorganization of Guan kiln from cooperatives to state-owned factories is conducive to the planned production mode featuring division of labor, cooperation and overall arrangement.

The application of pottery making skills and the determination of "worker" status created an excellent incentivizing atmosphere for the planned production form, and stored up and ensured the main production forces. This was mainly reflected in the following three points: (1) the technique was communal [11], as having skills in rural China means the ability to make a living, but in order to respond to the call of collectivism, the Guan kiln's pottery making technique has to be made public, form cooperatives according to regional distribution, and turn into shared technique. (2) The qualification examination [12] for learning skills requires strict examination and approval to work as a potter in Guan kiln. The son of Li Ruhe, the

former manager of Lantouji craft factory, originally studied carpentry, but later had to be collectively approved in order to learn pottery skills in the factory. (3) Household registration is different. With the transformation of rural individual handicraft industry into the socialist collective economy, the handicraft businesses in urban and rural areas turned into state-run factories. The pottery cooperatives in Guantao Town gradually became state-owned enterprises, in which employees' incomes were calculated monthly by wages, and households were designated as entitled to commodity grain[13], an indication of “worker status”. Li Pufa, the incumbent manager of Lantouji craft pottery factory in Guanyao Town, is proud to acknowledge this. The worker status directly expanded the status distance from the neighboring rural agricultural cooperatives, making the pottery techniques of Guanyao Town valued, greatly satisfying the sense of social presence, completely bidding farewell to the original humble social perception, with strong political significance, strengthening the professional identity of potters, who felt their relevance to the collective and the country.

Unified purchase and marketing is the main operation mode of the planned production form of “worker status” in the collective economy. In the 1950s after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the housing and daily necessities of Guan kiln workers were allocated and arranged by the state-owned pottery factory, which purchased the machinery and equipment, clay and glaze. Even in the ups and downs of establishment of the four pottery factories in Guanyao Town (Lantouji, Lijia kiln, Lujia kiln and Guanxia kiln), the purchase and sales of pottery raw materials and products were arranged by the competent authorities. Although a series of new production, operation and management policies were tried out after the 1980s, in fact, in the overall operation of pottery industry in Guanyao Town, the products were still subject to unified purchase and marketing. Especially from the 1960s to the mid-1980s, Lantouji pottery factory in Guanyao Town was under the jurisdiction of Qichun County Light Industry Bureau and accepted the technical appraisal by Hubei Provincial Science and Technology Commission. Except for some of products intended for self-sale, most of the products were ordered and sold by Qichun Foreign Trade Company Ltd and China National Arts & Crafts Imp. & Exp. Co., Ltd Hubei Branch. Based on the demands of the international markets, the pottery products produced were constantly renewed from the appearance glaze to the shape of pottery. The craft pottery products were exported to Japan, US, Southeast Asia and other countries and regions in batches, earning foreign exchange for the country, and highly valued by the light industry authorities of Qichun County and Hubei Province.

**TABLE II: Statistics of sales, profits and taxes from 1969 to 1985 [15] (Unit: RMB 10,000 Yuan)**

Year	Total cost	Sales revenue	Total profits	Cost of sales	Tax on sales	Sales profits
1969	8.33	11.50	0.2396	9.95	1.28	0.16
1970	8.9157	11.49	0.4504	9.71	1.27	0.39
1971	11.3711	18.16	1.7796	14.37	2.06	1.55
1972	16.3819	20.98	1.9189	16.56	2.36	1.80
1973	16.8102	22.016	1.7761	17.81	2.21	1.73



1974	18.7219	21.93	1.9364	17.62	2.30	1.78
1975	24.3637	23.22	-2.9576	23.41	2.47	-2.87
1976	23.2040	22.41	-3.6285	24.27	2.33	-3.42
1977	13.6077	7.341	-5.4179	12.06	0.832	-5.25
1978	22.3750	10.87	-9.9440	19.11	1.31	-9.55
1979	25.8636	24.93	-3.8221	25.04	2.99	-3.34
1980	25.4373	27.10	0.7750	21.90	3.20	1.70
1981	26.4325	26	0.5352	22.40	3.10	-0.4
1982	35.4449	36.44	0.4035	30.24	2.79	0.84
1983	45.3530	84.9	2.0373	70.48	2.80	4.29
1984	80.8995	84.7	3.0184	84.63	5.30	3.32
1985	98.0818	100.76	6.3856	83.19	6.19	6.38

It should be emphasized that the planned production form centered on "workers" did promote the development of pottery handicraft industry in the early stage, but in the later stage, many adverse effects became apparent, especially the dependence of raw materials, equipment and product purchase and sales on competent authorities; Information asymmetry led to a large backlog of products; Unclear division of rights and responsibilities led to excessive scraps and defective products, resulting in excessive input costs. These consequences seriously constrained the pottery production in Guanyao Town. Especially in the period of rights and duties adjustment from 1976 to 1979 (see Table 2 above), the production and sales costs were inversely proportional to the profits, resulting in operational difficulties of the entire kiln and financially overstretching workers. Nevertheless, the operation mechanism of production form driven by planned production, especially the high recognition of professional status and techniques, greatly stimulated pottery production. Its direct effect was the progress of technique and product innovation. For example, Guan Zhibin[14] developed "cobalt-free mask clay" in the 1970s, which eliminated the harms of lead glaze. At the same time, the trial firing of green pickle jar and craft pottery was successful, which made a major breakthrough in the handicraft of pottery making in Guanyao Town in a short time and won a good external reputation.

#### IV. THE INHERITANCE FORM OF TECHNIQUE HERITAGE IN THE "INHERITOR OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE" STATUS

Since China's accession to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the multi-level Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Inheritor System spearheaded by the government was established in 2007, when the attention to intangible cultural heritage made substantial progress. In the same year, the pottery making technique in Guanyao Town was successfully included in the first batch of intangible cultural heritage list of Hubei Province [16], signifying that the pottery technique in Guanyao Town has entered the era of intangible cultural heritage designation, and that Qichun's pottery handicraft industry began transforming into a form of inheritance of technique heritage with the "inheritor of intangible cultural heritage" status. First of all, designation of the inheritor of intangible cultural heritage provides the carrier for the inheritance form of technique heritage. The past "worker" status of Guanyao potters is no

longer mentioned, and they prefer to be called "representative inheritor of pottery making technique in Guanyao Town" (see Table 3). Indeed, for Guanyao's craftsmen, this title is a symbol of the transformation in contemporary civilization, a status symbol of transition from secularity to elegance and from technique to profession, which has a strong sense of imagination and belonging. The social existence experience of intangible cultural heritage inheritors is different from that of past hires or workers, who continued the skills of survival and production; The former not only carries skills, but also incorporates the responsibility of conservation, inheritance and innovation of regional traditional cultures, which is the consciousness of national traditional culture. Inheritor studios were soon established. At present, studios were set up for inheritors in Guanyao Town in order for them to contribute their skills and pass on their skills. There are also distinctive pottery workshops funded and operated by inheritors with their own funds.

**TABLE III: Representative inheritors and skills in Guanyao Town [17]**

Name	Gender	Date of birth	Representative skills (year)
He Liangfa	Male	1946	Blank drawing (2007)
Xiao Chunjiao	Female	1952	Engraving (2012)
He Jianjun	Male	1965	Pile-up (2014)
Fan Qide	Male	1956	Jiggering
He Ximing	Male	1963	Blank drawing (2014)
Li Weidong	Male	1966	Calligraphy and painting (2014)

At present, in the context of technique as intangible cultural heritage, the technique inheritance form of pottery business in Guanyao Town has formed three characteristics due to the different composition of kiln factory's advantages: (1) typified by Lijia kiln pottery factory, which has the largest scale and the longest history, with towering ancient trees inside the factory. The only well-preserved dragon kiln with a length of about 100 meters in Hubei Province is located in this kiln factory. Similarly, Lujia kiln pottery factory, which is not far away, has a profound historical meaning, with several dragon kiln relics remaining on the ridge of the hill. (2) Typified by Hubei Mingyao Pottery Art Co., Ltd, a company founded by inheritor He Liangfa, which produces and sells pottery products with a large footprint. The inheritor's studio is located in the factory, presenting "eight techniques of Guan kiln" normatively as a showcase. The factory has become a model combination of traditional skills and markets; (3) Typified by Lantouji craft pottery factory in Guanyao Town, which has built an exhibition hall of intangible culture and skills in Guanyao, poised to inherit and carry forward the pottery art of Guanyao Town by promoting intangible cultural concept and skill brand of Guanyao. In recent years, Lantouji craft pottery factory approached provincial and municipal cultural authorities and held large-scale creations and exhibitions of firewood-fired earthenware. In particular, in collaboration with colleges and universities, Lantouji craft pottery factory regularly sends

pottery inheritors to give lectures in colleges and universities while bringing in pottery students in a way that not only inherits skills but also generates economic benefits, a landmark achievement in the effort to construct rural areas artistically.

## V. CONCLUSION

By looking closely at the various production forms of pottery handicraft industry in Guanyao Town, a conclusion can be reached that it is feasible to promote the development of pottery handicraft industry and pottery techniques from the aspects of status experience and craft knowledge of potters. However, supporting factors related to pottery production should also be considered, such as the transportation, sales and product information of pottery products, which are essential. A fundamental factor cannot be ignored if at all, that is, the distribution of earnings from the development of pottery business. This involves the peripheral problems with the production of pottery products, a fundamental factor given its self-evident importance. As mentioned earlier, potters exercise their initiative at work, but in an ideal state, but they can improve efficiency, quality and even production capacity only in the ideal state. In fact, regardless of specific production form, pottery technique and production involve or need a lot of areas of benefits. In terms of the inheritance form of technique heritage in the "inheritor of intangible cultural heritage" status, the stakeholders including potters, as well as the local government, kiln managers, pottery workshops, local materials owners, publicity media and cooperative colleges and universities. If the core issues cannot be effectively addressed, then production will inevitably be constrained and delayed. In addition, the pottery production must display handicraft achievements, and it is far from enough to focus solely on improving the knowledge level and skill performance of inheritors, but instead it is essential to find the right direction to present the characteristics of the traditional pottery production base as they are.

## REFERENCES

- [1] The three major folk kilns in Hubei are Guan kiln in Qichun County, Makou kiln in Hanchuan and Caijiashan kiln in MachengSongbu.
- [2] According to the records of Guan's genealogy, the pottery making technique in Guan kiln began in the second year of Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1369). Guanyaotown of Qichun county is located in the Eastern Hubei region, adjacent to Jiujiang River in Jiangxi to the east, close to the north bank of the Yangtze River to the south and right across the river from Huangshi port, enjoying easy access by land and water and profound historical origin. The dragon kiln clusters of Guanyao are scattered along the shore of Chixi Lake, which was originally a waterway of the Yangtze River and later silted up by river mud. Potters built kilns on the hills along the lake shore, burned pottery using miscellaneous trees on the hills, and excavated the yellow and white clay unique to Chixi Lake to make clay. With sufficient resources and continuous kiln smoke, the kiln fire never dies out for more than 600 years.
- [3] "Households are classified into three categories, folk, military and craftsman", see page 21 of Volume 53 of the History of the Ming Dynasty.
- [4] The craftsman registration system was abolished in the second year of Shunzhi reign of the Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1645), when craftsmen were set free. "All craftsmen in the Ming Dynasty were included into the craftsman's register and subordinate to the government For intergenerational inheritance. They worked in shifts or served the country... From 1562 onward, all shift craftsmen were taxed in the form of silver, and the government hired workers with silver." The Qing regime decided to abolish this system, "all provinces shall abolish the craftsman



registration system." See Fan Wenlan, the General History of China, Title V, page 128, People's Publishing House, March 2004.

[5] Born in Lijia Kiln, Guanyao Town in 1946, now retired with the professional title of technician.

[6] It can be found in the Records of Lantouji Craft Pottery Factory in Guanyao Town (1985), pp. 178-180.

[7] "Modern Changes of Chinese Traditional Handicrafts -- Interview with Dr. QiuChunlin", see page 36 of National Arts Bimonthly (June 25, 2010).

[8] In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, in order to realize the socialist transformation of handicraft industry, the government began transforming handicraft industry by means of "institutional revolution" in 1952, that is, the "cooperative" movement. See the Annals of Qichun County, page 127, Compilation Committee of Qichun County Annals of CPC Hubei Province.

[9] From 1953 to the end of 1954, under the guidance of the national economic situation at that time, the main private enterprises were transformed into public-private joint ventures through public-private partnership. Same as page 127 of 6.

[10] It can be found in the Records of Lantouji Craft Pottery Factory in Guanyao Town (1985), pp. 128.

[11] Born in Lijia Kiln, Guanyao Town in 1946, now retired with the professional title of technician. page 36.

[12] It can be found in the Records of Lantouji Craft Pottery Factory in Guanyao Town (1985), pp. 65.

[13] Different from agricultural hukou, it is the Hukou of urban residents who rely on the state to distribute rations. The state issues food stamps for buying food on a monthly basis. In the years of unified purchase and marketing in the planned economy, the status of commodity grain was so high that having a Hukou entitled to commodity grain is equivalent to having a stable, lifelong job.

[14] Male, born in 1953 in Guanyao Town, Qichun County, senior craft artist.

[15] It can be found in the Records of Lantouji Craft Pottery Factory in Guanyao Town (1985), pp. 22.

[16] "VIII. Traditional handicrafts (5 items), 91 VI-5 pottery making technique in Guanyao Town, Qichun County", the "notice on publishing the first batch of intangible cultural heritage list Efa [2007] No. 5-91" issued by Hubei Provincial People's Government.

[17] See the Culture and Art of Pottery in Guanyao Town, edited by Wu Huajun and Yang Zhenwu (publishing permit No.: E.H.N.T.Z, 2016, No. 11, pp. 58-81).