

The Evolution of Folk Lacquer Participants in Fuzhou in recent 40 Years

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Abstract

This paper is based on few-year field investigation of lacquer participants (Works, Handicraftsmen, Artists) settlement in Fuzhou. Lacquer workers and handicraftsman are an indispensable role for the inheritance of lacquerware craftsmanship. The formation of lacquerware villages has influence by historical background, and it has characteristics that are close to the edge of the city and meet the spatial needs. There are four characteristics in the change of inheritance of lacquer workers' settlement. Firstly, Inheritance is not a generational process of equality and alienation. Secondly, is the non-active inheritance brought by market competition. Thirdly, inheritance of non-core skills. Finally, inheritance of social upbringing. In recent 40 years, the present folk lacquer participants' settlement is transforming into the lacquer artists' settlement. The inheritance mode is mainly social upbringing mode, supplemented by family inheritance mode.

Key words: Lacquer workers, Artists, Lacquer Settlements, Inheritance

The uniqueness of lacquerware technique is that the overall production of the lacquerware can be accomplished only with the cooperation of the lacquerers of multiple work and multiple process. In late Ming and early Qing dynasties, after artisan cadastral system was loosened, the folk lacquerware workshop began to spring up, such as Shen Shaoan's family workshops in Fuzhou, on this basis, the folk lacquerer tribe at that time was formed, and thereby, lacquerware entered into the peak stage. The folk lacquerer is the most fundamental human factor of lacquerware. The industrialization process and urbanization process promoted the social development and also changed their living status. The labor and living of lacquerers are combined together at specific form in the tribe, which influences the existence mode of lacquerware.

I. Lacquer village– tribe of folk lacquerer

The formation of folk lacquerer tribe always depends on lacquerware production and trade distribution center, forming the concentrated residence in the surrounding area and presenting continuous distribution status. Because lacquerware manufacture demands a lot of space, lacquerer tribe always appears in the urban fringe or near urban and rural villages, and consequently, the unique lacquerer tribe form of lacquer village is formed. As the tribe of lacquerers, lacquer village naturally forms the unique cultural phenomena. There are large amounts of lacquerers in Fuzhou, and consequently, the tribe is formed. The changes of tribe as the time develops are representative. The biggest lacquerer tribes formed in Fuzhou after 1949 are Gushanzhou Village and Houyu Village located in Minhou County, and it's less than 10 kilometers from the city center. Gushanzhou is the alluvial sandbank in the Minjiang River, with the present population being 1875 people; Houyu Village is a river peninsula, with the current population being 2130 people. [4] These two villages are separated by a bridge, it is both a historical mixed area and a common market, and therefore, these two lacquer villages can be regarded as the same tribe.

Starting from the first two or three hundred people in the 1970s, everyone is involved as lacquerers in this tribe in the most prosperous period. At present, the number of lacquerers from this tribe only has about 50 people remained. After 2010, Houyu Village was gradually removed because of metro and the third ring road construction, up to 2019, most lacquerers have moved out from tribe and retired.

1. The formation of folk lacquerer tribe

The formation of lacquerer tribe cannot be separated from the historical factors. In the 19th century, Fuzhou lacquerer tribe was coincided with production and marketing places of lacquerware, and most of them are distributed in provincial road, three lands and seven alleys, fame street, fan chuanpu, tower pavilion road, as well as mai yuan ding of urban areas in Fuzhou. During the period of great prosperity, there were a total of more than 300 stores, and

in 1933, there were 419 people engaged in this industry. Later, destroyed by years of war, the number of lacquerer in 1949 only was 149^[6], and the original tribe was disintegrated. Between 1957 and 1965, Fuzhou private lacquerer workshop established the first reborn lacquerware plant and the second reborn lacquerware plant in Fuzhou (hereinafter referred to as reborn 1 and reborn 2) after public-private partnership, forming the largest official lacquerer tribe in Fuzhou, and its productivity was recovered greatly, but later, the productivity regression was caused by disordered management.^[7] The productivity regression reached the peak in 1970, and in June 1970, Fuzhou Arts and Crafts Bureau was cancelled, reborn 2 plant was dismissed, and large amounts of personnel were scattered. Between 1972 and 1978, Mawangdui archaeology great discoveries need lots of technicians assigned by reborn 1 plant and reborn 2 plant to put efforts to repair and copy the unearthed lacquerware, thus the jobholders became more shortage. The conflict of supply and need between insufficient productivity and increased order number forced plants to seek for external assistance. Therefore, state-owned plants took the villagers with a certain technological knowledge in Gushanzhou Village and Houyu Village as lacquerers to supplement the productivity. From the late 1970s to the 1990s, there were a total of hundreds of villagers engaging in lacquerware industry in these two villages, forming the largest folk lacquerer tribe in Fuzhou.

2. Characteristics of folk lacquerer tribes

(1) Geographical advantages

Tribes of folk lacquerers basically appeared in the suburb villages of a large population with relatively little land. The geography characteristic of closing to city made lacquerer tribe be closer to the state-owned plant and location of foreign trade companies, thus to be easy for production, management and transportation. For Fuzhou, closing to city is to close to the reborn 1 plant and reborn 2 plant which need external assistance. These two villages are about 10km from reborn 1 plant and reborn 2 plant. The lacquerers of the plants conduct guidance and production, back and forth every day, the village plant sent lacquer bases to the city with a tricycle for inspection, and it also did not need half a day, which is an important geography condition that lacquerer tribe was established depending on state-owned plant. Meanwhile, lacquer villages are always the villages of a large population with relatively little land, and it is easier to attract the villagers who are struggling to make a living to transform and engage in lacquerer work.

(2) Meet the spatial needs

Lacquerer tribe demands a huge individual place to meet the production needs. At first, lacquerer tribe was to recruit the qualified villages to join in at the mode of village plant,

organizing the collective work by calculating the work point. The village plant used the public space of the village, these public resources were the collective property of the village, and therefore, the resources were not demanded for distribution, correspondingly, it was beneficial for the lacquerers who were recruited in the village plant.

From the end of 1970s to the early 1980s, the cooperative relation between village lacquerer plant and state-owned plant was ended, and the village plant was dismissed. At that time, the lacquerer tribes were no longer surrounded the village plant but changed into the lacquering workshop at the family unit. On the one hand, the mode of family workshop almost involved all useable labor resourced in tribes at that time. Because of small labor intensity of lacquerware comparing with that of farming, lots of old people and kids could engage in lacquerware production after simple training. On the other hand, the village collective public space was no longer enjoyed by the family workshop, and therefore, the resources such of family space of lacquerers turned to be the production factors.

Because the individual family space was joined into the production and distribution, the salary and income of lacquerers were far higher than that of other handicraftsmen at that time, and even higher than the salary and income of workers in the state-owned plants^[10].

Therefore, it promoted more villagers to engage in the lacquerware work, and objectively, it promoted the extension of lacquerer tribe and the inheritance of lacquerware technique after the state-owned plants were declined.

II. Inheritance change of folk tribe

Changes of time always lead to the structural changes of lacquer village, promoting the changes of the living styles in tribes, and having a profound impact on the development and existence of the lacquerware production. Therefore, discussing the changes of tribe inheritance in the past also has a direct meaning towards the possibility of the future inheritance.

1. Equal and distant non-generational (unrelated) inheritance

The traditional lacquerware adopted the inheritance mode of mentorship. Masters lead the apprentices, with unequal color of patriarchal relationship. The so-called “learn skills from master” was always conducted with the mode of “begging”. Generally, apprentices took tests after the age of 14, the examination was about the housework such as sweep the floor and wash water pipe, and apprentices didn’t possess personal freedom within seven and a half years.^[11] After the expiry, apprentices couldn’t finish their apprenticeship only after being recognized by their masters, and after finishing the apprenticeship, there was a certain ethic relation maintained between masters and apprentices, and namely, “He who teaches you one

day is your father for life". After 1949, this kind of inheritance similar to patriarchal clan relationship was changed to the collective inheritance of state-owned plants with the public-private partnership and skills publicizing.

After the folk lacquerer tribe appeared, the inheritance relationship was changed. Equal and distant non-generational inheritance was shown in two manifestations in the lacquer villages. The first manifestation, around 1972, the village plant master and apprentice mode of lacquerer tribe appeared in the village plant. Because of conceptual changes, the unequal patriarchal composition in the traditional master and apprentice relationship was diluted dramatically, and there was an equal and distant non-generational relationship between master and apprentice. There was the public relation between state-owned lacquer village and village lacquerer plant, and also the relationship of hiring and being hired of labor outsourcing. Masters guiding apprentices was to complete the organizational tasks, forming the co-worker relationship, and they were equal, without strict pecking order and patriarchal pressure of the traditional relationship between masters and apprentices. Different from the traditional relationship between masters and apprentices who were together in both production and living, the relationship between master and apprentice in the lacquer village was mainly maintained for months to half a year, and it was hard to have the original intimate master and apprentice relationship, thus masters and apprentices wouldn't have any connection naturally after they were separated.

The second manifestation, the mode of the same village master and apprentice was appeared, and it also presented the equal and distant relationship. The first batch of apprentices led by the masters of the state-owned plants already became the first batch of masters in the folk tribes, and they undertook the work of cultivating apprentices in folk tribes in the middle of 1970s. Masters and apprentices in tribes are all the villagers from the same village, and masters and apprentices were similar in age^[12], without the authority and pressure formed because of age.

The traditional handicraft changed into the co-worker relationship without organizational dependence of village lacquerer plant and state-owned plant lacquerers and also without the blood relationship of the traditional family at the mode of generational inheritance. This kind of changes made large amounts of core skills that were not exported originally be contributed, and objectively, it promoted the extension of lacquer work technique. However, without the blood and age constraints, this kind of "inheritance" was only the simple technology transferring, without the cultural continuity.

2. Passive inheritance brought by the market competition

After the reform and opening-up, the master and apprentice relationship in tribes became the pure market behavior, and the traditional technique inheritance system became weak, and the concept was more tenuous.

In the late 1970s, the village lacquerer plant was dismissed gradually, and lacquerers with good techniques were transformed into the individual workshop owner. In the 1980s and 1990s, the family workshop and individual workshop were mixed, and among which, the individual workshop mainly undertook foreign trade or domestic trade orders at the mode of masters leading apprentices.^[13] Sometimes, apprentices were introduced by the bosses of the foreign trade plant or the kids from relatives, with narrow source and small amounts. The workshop owners hoped to have more apprentices, because apprentice can help finish orders with low pay, and the mode of masters leading apprentices can achieve several times the output growth. Taking Master Lin in Houyu Village who makes peak gold lacquer tray in the interview as an example, in 1992, he made a tray which can be sold at RMB 2.5, and one person could make a total of 50 trays one day, if he led 4 to 5 apprentices, a total of more than 100 trays could be made one day, the monthly salary of apprentices was about RMB 400 to RMB 500, while the monthly salary of masters was about RMB 7,000 to RMB 8,000. The income of masters was directly related to the number of apprentices, but it made the master and apprentice relationship in tribe become weak. There were always the situations that the foreign trade plant bosses “dug out” apprentices with good techniques without notifying their masters. The inheritance relationship between master and apprentice was driven by benefits, and the ethnical ideas also hadn't the role of stipulating the mutual relationship. This kind of non-active inheritance relationship brought by the market competition made both masters and apprentices tacitly approved its rules and gradually formed a consensus.

3. Inheritance of non-core techniques

Lacquerware is included in lacquer art, thus there are differences between metaphysics and physics. Metaphysics normally is referred to the artists who are responsible for creativity, conception and design, and physics is mainly referred to lacquerers who are responsible for labor work and preliminary operation. In consideration of the complex procedures and physical power, the artists of metaphysics need the lacquerers of physics to share most of the processing procedures, thus to speed up the creation and improve working efficiency. Under this circumstance, the cooperation mode mutually combined by lacquer artists and lacquerers form the new tribe structure.

In the 1990s, when the foreign trade process was prosperous, the new generation of lacquerers could conduct the superficial pattern making such as peak gold after being trained by foreign trade. But it still made according to the factory's fixed drawings, and in the process

division, the jobholders could be competent for the work with only the technique of a link. Because of the division of labor, techniques of lacquerers in folk tribes are not complete. Under the circumstances of nonuniform layout and uncoordinated production, the folk lacquerers were unable to produce the complete lacquerwares with high quality. Manual segmentation procedure will inevitably damage the complete of the finished lacquerware, and meanwhile, it is also not conducive to understanding the complete process of the craftsman, it is not beneficial for the art promotion from craftsman to artists, and the harm is self-evident. However, this kind of inheritance with detailed division of labor and mastering non-core skills caused individuals increasing dependence on tribes, and the low turnover of lacquerers was beneficial for the inheritance of techniques on the contrary. These two seem to be paradoxes, but they are actually cause and effect.

4. Social care and inheritance of tribe

In lacquerer tribe, the working experience of lacquerers is not only taught to their own kids but also the kids from the same village in daily life at the mode of family workshop lacquering at home, and even the extraneous lacquerware apprentices, which is the typical social upbringing. The reason is that lacquerware serves as the daily necessity which is the closest thing to art and luxury, in the early days of reform and opening-up, lacquerers had high incomes, and therefore, they had a chance to upward flow, namely, having the possibility of changing from the general working class into the middle class.

Those leaders who became masters among lacquerers, namely, the lacquerers belonging to market competition winner in the tribe, always cultivate their offspring to engage in the related industry, and the desire of rising promoted them to hope their sons and daughters to become the artists with higher both income and social status.

Therefore, the social upbringing of the modern lacquerer tribe mainly gives priority to the intergenerational transition with blood connection, but there are no more rules in the traditional family of “only male can inherit and female has no right to inherit”, and the inheritance between uncles and nephews and between father-in-law and son-in-law is very common. This kind of inheritance is pretty stable in tribe, and the nurturers can gain the better social rising approaches in virtue of the contacts and resources of the elders, which is both the realization of social upbringing and also beneficial for the folk inheritance and social inheritance of lacquer art.

Conclusion

With the development of society, the lacquer Participants' community disintegrated and rebuilt, and the participation of lacquer workers also changed. Handicraftsmen, lacquer workers and lacquer artists all play different roles in Fuzhou lacquer art field. The original settlement was a family workshop relying on foreign trade orders, they dwindled with the collapse of the

Japanese economy in the late 1990s. The structure of the painters' settlement is changing. Therefore, the inheritance has become the social upbringing.

Stimulated by national policies, the lacquer workers' settlements showed signs of recovery until recent years, this recovery has been marked by the influx of young migrants. The structure of the lacquer workers' settlements is changing, which contains new entrants in new ways, the new settlements with artists as the surface and traditional workshops as the interior, and the place moved with the urbanization process.

Author's introduction:

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