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Том III



5-7 ноември 2026 г.

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INDUSTRY-ORIENTED CHINESE CRAFTS: AN EXPECTATIONS PERSPECTIVE

Katarzyna Mazur-Włodarczyk, PhD[1]
Katarzyna Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska, PhD[2]

Abstract: *Historically, craftsmanship and industry were viewed as opposing paradigms defined by distinct production methods. Today, technological evolution and economic shifts have increasingly blurred these boundaries, integrating craftspeople directly into modern industrial environments. Based on the „Made in China 2025" strategic framework and the revival of the „craftsman spirit," this article examines the role of industry-oriented Chinese craftsmanship. Despite recent economic headwinds, demographic challenges, and post-pandemic slowdowns, China's central policy leverages skilled industrial craftspeople as a vital pillar for transitioning the nation toward a technologically advanced, independent, and sustainable manufacturing powerhouse. By analyzing the duality of traditional versatility and specialized industrial labor, this paper characterizes the nature of contemporary Chinese industry-oriented crafts and explores the strategic expectations placed upon them in shaping the country's modern economic landscape.*

Keywords: *craft, great craftsmen, model craftsmen, craftsman spirit, Made in China 2025 strategy*

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1. Introduction

In the past, the workshop and the factory represented two opposite poles because of their different production forms. H. Graszewicz(1980) characterized the features of craftsmanship as the direct opposite of those of industry, contrasting the two: one-off and small-batch products ←→ mass and batch production, distributed production ←→ concentrated production, manual production ←→ automation and excessive mechanization of production, a diverse product range (across sectors and types) ←→ a homogeneous product range, versatile skills ←→ narrow specializations. Nowadays, the boundary between them is becoming increasingly blurred, and industrial workers are also craftsmen. As E. Klekot (n.d.) notes, the workshop and the factory are two work environments for craftsmen where technology, specifically the use of machinery—is present. However, craftsmen control the entire production process within their sphere, rather than just a segment of it; specialized workers operate in these segments (Klekot, n.d.).Industrial craftspeople also perform a range of maintenance and technical tasks. Their duties include, among other things, overseeing the upkeep of specific factory areas, including equipment, tools, and

[1] k.mazur-wlodarczyk@po.edu.pl, Opole University of Technology
[2] k.lukaniszyn-domaszewska@po.edu.pl, Opole University of Technology

materials, to ensure they remain in good, reliable working order; conducting inspections; manufacturing, upgrading, and operating machinery (including assembly and disassembly); performing support tasks; and handling various administrative duties related to internal communication and the execution of assigned tasks. However, much depends on the craftsperson's versatility and specialization, as well as their experience and specific job title, such as craftsperson, specialist craftsperson, senior craftsperson, master craftsperson, etc. Technological and economic progress fosters closer cooperation between the craft sector and industry; however, the concept of craft services is somewhat ambiguous in this context (Graszkiewicz, 1793), and products manufactured in factories with craftsman participation are not always ultimately classified as craft goods.

China has a centrally planned economy. It is ranked as the world's second-largest economy, and the country is characterized by rapid economic development. In 2021, the industrial sector accounted for 39.4% of its GDP(The World Bank, n.d.). Among medium-sized and large industrial enterprises, the largest numbers are engaged in manufacturing computers and communication and electrical equipment, machinery and electrical apparatus, non-metallic products, automobiles, and textiles, clothing, and accessories. These enterprises are most frequently located in provinces: Guangdong, Jiangsu, Henan, Zhejiang, Shandong, and Fujian. Meanwhile, the highest number of private industrial enterprises are located in provinces: Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Guangdong, Anhui, Hunan, Hebei, and Henan (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2019). Almost all heavy industry is in the public sector.

In 2022, China's economy slowed; industrial output and retail sales declined, and unemployment rose - trends driven in part by the persisting COVID-19 pandemic. This has led not only to slower GDP growth (with the private sector accounting for about two-thirds of the total) but also to lower profits for foreign companies. Demographic forecasts, pointing to a falling birth rate and a shrinking working-age population (15–59), also signal future labor market challenges. On a broader scale, a contracting Chinese industrial sector affects not only the PRC but also the global population. An analysis of the current economic situation and a focus on strategic management have led China to introduce a new economic growth model; a key element is an increased emphasis on skilled craftspeople (including those in industry-oriented trades) and other industrial workers. The implementation of the 'Made in China 2025' strategy, coupled with a revival of the 'craftsmen spirit', is becoming a priority in efforts to build a future manufacturing powerhouse, an ideal socialist nation with Chinese characteristics. It is envisioned as an independent, modern country, technologically advanced and committed to sustainable development, resting on the solid pillar of increased domestic consumption.

This article aims to characterize Chinese industry-oriented craftsmanship and examine the expectations placed on it.

2. Craftsmanship in Chinese Industry

China's manufacturing sector currently needs transformation and modernization. The ultimate goal is to establish the country as a manufacturing powerhouse and the world's leading economy. Regarding the role of craftsmanship in this process, two primary paths have been chosen: revitalizing the spirit of craftsmanship and implementing the 'Made in China 2025' strategy.

The status of the craftsmen and of manual production had been undermined long before the pandemic, partly due to industrial development (Trojan, 2018). Craftsmen, functioning as industrial workers, perceive their occupational group as having low social status, and their earnings differ significantly from the remuneration of management personnel employed in the same organizations. This situation results not only in dissatisfaction within this occupational group but also in craftsmen failing to encourage subsequent generations—including their own family members—to pursue training in the same trade(*Five Master Craftsmen Discuss the „Return of the Craft Spirit*, 2016). It is a profession that fails to satisfy craftsmen's higher-order needs while proving not only difficult but also economically unviable. The concept of the „spirit of craftsmanship" [工匠精神] - proposed and implemented in China since 2016 - is intended to serve as an ideological remedy for the aforementioned problems. Far from being a new idea, it harkens back to China's era of technical excellence, the great craftsmen of past generations, and the professionalism of their services; it emphasizes an innovation-oriented mindset alongside diligence, dedication, and commitment to the work. The initiative aims to develop highly skilled, motivated, and committed craftsmen. Furthermore, it seeks to boost consumer confidence in the products and services they offer, ultimately making Chinese manufacturing less dependent on exports by ensuring its products are the first choice for the vast domestic market. Craftsmen-made goods—and products involving such craftsmen - are envisioned as branded items (ideally luxury goods) that are environmentally friendly and highly sought after by a broad consumer base. At the same time, the initiative aims to supply the labor market with specialists possessing concrete vocational qualifications while providing high-quality employment opportunities.

The strategies currently being implemented, strengthening the nation through talent and fostering innovation-led growth, signal a shift in the PRC's existing development model. The strategy of strengthening the nation through talent focuses on highly qualified individuals and is viewed as a key element in promoting modernization by enhancing the value of human capital, a vital strategic asset for gaining an international competitive edge. This strategy also entails improving training systems, including introducing new vocational internship programs, aligning workforce skills with labor market needs, and promoting higher-quality employment. It also involves efforts to improve the treatment of skilled workers by addressing both their economic circumstances (e.g., through

higher wages, bonuses, and clear career advancement opportunities) and their social status (e.g., through awards and distinctions)(*Forging Master Craftsmen, Building the Dream of National Rejuvenation…*, 2022).The strategy being implemented is linked to a specific vision in the form of(The General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, 2022):

- development and implementation of a superior training system,
- rational staffing based on reliable supply and demand forecasts,
- scientific assessment mechanisms (based on financial results, skill quality, and contribution to performance),
- strong motivation,
- a strong social atmosphere of respect for skills and work,
- higher employee qualification levels,
- continuous improvement of product quality,
- steady income growth.

The new talent training system involves, among other things, linking industrial enterprises with vocational schools, introducing online educational platforms, organizing skills competitions, and improving digital literacy. These measures also aim to support the rural revitalization strategy and the formation of „technician-engineer“ teams. The incentive system is designed to rely on both guaranteed steady income growth and the introduction of various allowances (for skills, team leadership, apprenticeships, and contributions to innovations or technological breakthroughs). The plan also entails fully leveraging next-generation information technologies and strengthening international exchange and cooperation. The goals and tasks associated with implementing this strategy are set to be achieved by the end of the 14th Five-Year Plan (i.e., the end of 2025), paving the way for China to attain technological and material self-reliance by 2035(The General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council,2022) - a level competitive with leading manufacturing nations, and by 2049 – the level of the world's leading manufacturing power.

The „Made in China 2025“ strategy is inspired by the German „Industry 4.0“ concept. However, Industry 4.0 represents only one component of this strategy. It focuses on developing high-tech sectors and an advanced manufacturing base, modernizing China's industrial capabilities—and fostering more effective cooperation with industrialized economies. It responds to the domestic and international challenges facing China's manufacturing industry(European Chamber, 2017). However, the primary goal of „Made in China 2025“ is to reduce reliance on foreign technologies. Targets set for 2025 include, among others, having 70% of core components and materials produced domestically in China; reducing operating costs, production cycles, and product defect rates by 50%; and establishing up to 40 innovation centers. This ten-year strategy leverages specially created government subsidies and targeted incentive systems—including those aimed at state-owned enterprises. It focuses primarily on sectors such as next-generation information technology, advanced numerical control tools, aerospace equipment, modern railway equipment, marine engineering

equipment, new materials, biopharmaceuticals and high-performance medical devices, agricultural machinery, new energy vehicles, and energy-efficient equipment. Meanwhile, key areas for which performance targets have been set for 2025 include(European Chamber, 2017):

- innovation capacity (R&D revenue: 1.68%, patent revenue: RMB 1.10 billion),
- quality and value (production quality competitiveness: 85.5 index score, growth in manufacturing value-added: 4%, and average annual labor productivity growth: 6.5%),
- IT-industry integration (broadband penetration: 82%, penetration of digital R&D and design tools: 84%, rate of key process control: 64%),
- green industry (reduction in energy consumption: 34%, CO2 emissions: 40%, and water consumption: 41%; industrial solid waste utilization: 79%).

To achieve this, the following measures were planned: practices involving forced technology transfer in exchange for market access; restrictions on access to the Chinese market and government procurement for foreign-invested enterprises; the setting of international standards; the granting of subsidies; the formulation of financial policies; the creation of government-backed investment funds; the provision of support by local governments; technology-oriented foreign investment in future-oriented industries; mergers and the politicization of state-owned enterprises (strengthening the role of Party committees within them); and public-private partnerships(European Chamber, 2017).

The above is not addressed directly to craftspeople; nevertheless, it also encompasses this professional group insofar as they engage in industrial production. Modern industrial conditions require industrial craftspeople both to acquire skills from their masters and to introduce innovations(*The Spirit of Craftsmanship and Its Contemporary Significance,* 2021).

3. Chinese craftsmen in industry

As with the creative economy, quantifying the value of skilled craftsmanship within the industrial sector is challenging. This difficulty stems, in part, from a lack of published data—specifically, it is unclear which workers identify as, or are classified as, ordinary industrial workers (工人) versus skilled craftsmen (工匠人), as well as from the lack of standardized definitions where the terms might otherwise overlap. However, the Communist Party members' portal (共产党员网) cites 2020 data showing over 200 million skilled workers and 50 million highly skilled workers (*People's Daily Commentator: Vigorously Promote the Spirit of Craftsmanship…,* 2021).These texts refer to implementing the spirit of craftsmanship, but they do not clearly indicate whether the group of skilled workers includes only craftsmen. It is also unclear whether this group includes all Chinese craftsmen working in the industry or only the better-skilled

ones. Although the number of traditional craftsmen is steadily declining, many people continue to educate themselves in industrial crafts. For example, in 2019, 8.6 million people obtained professional qualification certificates, of which 284 thousand were awarded professional qualifications as technicians and senior technicians (*Enabling Skilled Talent to Fully Realize Their Potential…*, 2020).

3.1. Distinguished Chinese craftsmen

When researching prominent Chinese craftsmen, technicians, and engineers, one can find references to three groups of craftsmen: great craftsmen, master craftsmen, and exemplary craftsmen.The group of great Chinese craftsmen includes historical masters, both practitioners and theorists, such as Lu Ban [鲁班], Yu Wenkai [宇文恺], Ma Jun [马钧], Li Chun [李春], Lu Zigang [陆子冈], Ou Yezi [欧冶子], Li Bing [李冰], Song Yingxing [宋应星], and Li Jie [李诫]. Except for Lu Zigang, these individuals were craftsmen engaged in practical crafts. They were not only great minds of ancient China but also inventors. Their specializations and general characteristics are presented in Table 1.

In the context of craftsmanship, the term „master“ can denote either a professional qualification or an honorary title. A master is defined as someone who has passed the master's examination; the title also applies to a craftsperson authorized to independently run a workshop and employ Staff (WielkiSłownik JęzykaPolskiego PAN, n.d.). It is also a title held by individuals with extensive professional experience who can teach others and help them solve complex problems. Today, the figure of the Chinese master craftsman is associated with two distinct concepts: the master of arts and crafts (工美大师) and the master craftsman (工匠大师).

Chinese masters of arts and crafts are affiliated with Chinese craft associations. For instance, in 2021, the China Arts and Crafts Association [中国工艺美术协会] compiled a list of 1,290 traditional craftsmen who had been awarded this title. The China National Light Industry Council [中国轻工业联合会] created another list of arts and crafts masters, classifying 538 individuals working in the consumer goods manufacturing industry under this category (China National Light Industry Council, n.d.).

As the concept of the ‘craftsman spirit’ is implemented, Chinese media have begun featuring reports on exemplary industrial craftsmen. Through ideological messaging, these stories aim to shape perceptions of craftsmen and their work, boost the ranks of high-quality technical personnel and skilled craftspeople, thereby supporting the construction of a modern socialist state, and ultimately transform the country into a manufacturing powerhouse. According to the available accounts, these individuals combine extensive theoretical knowledge with practical operational skills. In their work, they overcome technical

Table 1. Great Chinese craftsman

Craftsman	Lifespan	General characteristics
Lu Ban [鲁班]	507 to approximately 444 BC.	- carpenter and builder, - inventor of woodworking tools and the kite, - regarded as the forefather of Chinese craftsmen and even as the god of craftsmanship, - Carpenter's Day is celebrated in China on his birthday (the 13th day of the 6th lunar month).
OuYezi [欧冶子]	Spring and Autumn period (770–480 BC)	- blacksmith, swordmaker, - among the most famousswords he craftedare: Zhanlu [湛卢], Juque [巨阙], Shengxie [胜邪], Yuchang [鱼肠], Chunjun [纯钧], Longyuan [龙渊], Tai'a [泰阿], and Gongbu [工布].
Li Bing [李冰]	Warring States period (480 to 221 BC)	- hydraulic engineering, - creator of the Dujiangyan water conservancy project [都江堰水利工程].
YuWenkai [宇文恺]	555-512	- architect and urban planner, - creator of tents that can accommodate thousands of people, - builder of the Guangtong Canal [广通渠], - supervised the construction of the formerChinesecapitals: Xi'an [西安] and Luoyang [洛阳].
Ma Jun [马钧]	The Three Kingdoms Period (220–262)	- mechanic, - inventor of mechanical devices, - improved, among other things, the weaving machine, a waterwheel useful for irrigation [dragon-bone water lift], the south-pointing chariot, and a repeating projectile weapon.
Li Chun [李春]	Sui Dynasty (reigned 581–618)	- bridge builder, - creator of the stone arch bridge over the Xuehe River in Zhaozhou, Hebei Province.
ShenKuo [沈括]	1032-1096	- multidisciplinaryresearcher, - author of the work*Mengxibitan* [《梦溪笔谈》], coveringtopicssuch as the naturalsciences and technology.
Li Jie [李诫]	Northern Song Dynasty (reigned 960–1279)	- architect and builder, - author of the workYingzaofashi [《营造法式》] devoted to the architecture of thattime.
Lu Zigang [陆子冈]	The Ming Dynasty (reigning from 1368 to 1644)	- sculptor specializing in jade inlay, jeweler, - known as the patriarch of jade.
Song Yingxing [宋应星]	1587 to approximately 1666	- researcher of agriculture and craftsman production technologies, - author of the work *Tian gong kai wu* [《天工开物》]—dedicated to Chinese science and technology—which is regarded as the Chinese encyclopedia of technology of that era.

Source: own study.

challenges, optimize production processes, and secure patents for their inventions. Furthermore, they earn national awards and distinctions while passing on their expertise to future generations. Consequently, contemporary industrial craftsmen are being highlighted across the online landscape (*Recipient of the „July 1 Medal": Ai Aiguo…,* 2021):

- Ai Aiguo [艾爱国] – welder,
- Peng Xianghua [彭祥华]–tunnel blasting technician,
- Pan Congming [潘从明]– engaged in the refining of precious metal melts,
- Li Kaijun [李凯军] – foundry process engineer,
- Gu Qiuliang [顾秋亮] –manned submarine assembler,
- Xu Liping [徐立平]– aviation technician,
- Xu Zhenchao [许振超]–responsible for container handling,
- Li Bin [李斌]–CNC technology engineer,
- Wang Qinfeng [王钦峰]–technician specializing in mechanical machining and electronic systems,
- Xu Qiang [徐强]–specializing in gear machining,
- Gao Fenglin [高凤林] – thermonuclear welding technician,
- Hu Zhonghui [胡中辉] – machinery production technician,
- Gong Jiuhong [龚九宏] –mechanical equipment maintenance technician,
- Deng Jianjun [邓建军] – working with textile machinery,
- Zhao Jing [赵晶] – CNC lathe technician,
- Liu Li [刘丽] – working in the oil production industry,
- etc.

Exemplary craftspeople appear in online media under titles such as „super technician," „senior technician," „model worker," „outstanding worker," „technical expert," and „master craftsman," representing various age groups. Men predominate among the exemplary industrial craftspeople showcased online.

4. Summary

China's manufacturing sector is undergoing a strategic transformation toward becoming a global industrial powerhouse, driven by two complementary pillars: reviving the „spirit of craftsmanship" and executing the „Made in China 2025" strategy. Historically undermined by low social status and income disparities (Trojan, 2018; Five Master Craftsmen..., 2016), industrial craftspeople are now central to national growth. The „craftsman spirit" serves as an ideological and economic remedy to foster innovation, elevate quality, and build domestic brand confidence. Simultaneously, traditional crafts operate at the intersection of consumer demand, heritage policy, and artisanal production (Xu et al., 2025;

Yan et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025). To balance commercial viability with cultural authenticity (Meng & Hitchcock, 2020), craftsmen adopt adaptive co-creation and responsible technological innovations (Meng, 2023; Hu et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Aligned with national strategies to strengthen the country through talent (Forging Master Craftsmen..., 2022; The General Office..., 2022), systematic incentive mechanisms aimed at improving the economic and social status of industrial craftspeople and highly skilled talents involve identifying them by name and showcasing their professional backgrounds and achievements. Consequently, the exemplary industrial craftsperson is becoming increasingly less anonymous, celebrated publicly for their technical breakthroughs, patents, and role in training future generations. These human capital initiatives directly reinforce „Made in China 2025," which aims to reduce foreign technological dependency through state subsidies, public-private partnerships, and ambitious performance targets, including 70% domestic core component production, a 50% reduction in defect rates, and strict R&D, digital, and green manufacturing metrics (European Chamber, 2017). Together, these measures pave the way toward technological self-reliance by 2035 and global industrial leadership by 2049 (The General Office..., 2022).

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