Notes on Artisanal Blacksmithing in Villalimpia, Loay, Bohol

Kenneth N. Tagupa, Danica L. Damalerio, Hannah Nicole Dumapias, Mary Grace Montajes, Mark Joseph Salvo, and Mark Steven A. Pandan
Bohol Island State University

Abstract. This report presents initial findings from one recorded interview with a practicing blacksmith in Villalimpia, Loay, Bohol (16 April 2025). The paper documents staffing (three core workers + two interns), typical output (18–20 blades/day), input conversion (≈2 blades per kg scrap metal), local input prices (≈₱65–₱75/kg), and a retail example (≈₱500). Key patterns are noted. Electric grinders speed some tasks but hand-finishing remains central; metal and charcoal supplies are seasonally fragile; institutional or government support is absent; intergenerational skill inheritance is inconsistent. These exploratory data intend to guide small, practical initiatives i.e. pooled buying, provenance labelling, targeted apprenticeships.

Keywords: blacksmithing, craft continuity, artisanal, community-based production, hand-finishing

Introduction

Artisanal blacksmithing in Villalimpia, Loay touches on culturally-relevant issues. Studies have been written on Bohol's art, including the Bohol school of painting (Tse, 2005), the *asin tibuok* artisanal salt (Pandan & Poquita, 2025), and raffia weaving (Centillas et al., 2024). Blacksmithing in Dumaguate and in Cebu has been studied, yet this has remained underexplored in Bohol (Mascuñana, 1998; Gerra, 2013).

This paper opens with an account of one maker's practices gathered by a team of researchers who immersed themselves in Villalimpia, Bohol, in April 2025. Field interviews were conducted to record exactly what is made, how it is made, what it costs, who buys it, and what would help keep the craft alive. This is meant to inform future initiatives in its preservation (Khan, 2016).

This manuscript presents initial exploratory field data. The base is one recorded interview with a practicing blacksmith in Villalimpia. This manuscript aims to contribute to the growing field of Boholano studies

(Mojares, 1980; Urich & Edgecombe, 1999; Mijares, 2023; Gementiza, 2023; Moral & Pandan, 2024).

Background

Resil Mojares (1986) provides the primary theoretical frame for this paper. He traces how crafts move across modes of production. He shows shifts from self-directed, apprenticeship-based making to merchant-led and capitalist arrangements. His work names the social effects that follow market expansion. These effects help explain what small technological changes can mean for a craft's future. Mojares (1986, 186) states the core risk directly:

> There has been a degradation in the value of human skills. In earlier times, the premium on such skills was expressed in the formal apprenticeships and the rituals that attended the practice of craft. A market-driven technology has displaced or degraded such skills. The standardization of work has diminished areas for individual expression as art is reduced to craft and craft becomes common labor.

From this statement flow three linked theoretical claims that guide the analysis. First, the premium on manual skill sustains apprenticeship rituals and the social identity of makers. Second, market centralization and exporter concentration can withdraw value from household workshops. Third, merchant-led supply and credit relations can strip producers of control over inputs and distribution. These three claims become a diagnostic lens for reading the initial data from Villalimpia.

Mojares (1986) bolsters these claims with sustained empirical attention to Philippine cases. His account of Cebu's shellcraft industry shows how layered markets and concentrated exporters can centralize value and marginalize small workshops. As he documents, the industry has a multilayered structure: gatherers, small household workshops, networks of middlemen and contractors, larger factories, and a few exporting firms. He notes that

> There are around 250 shellcraft 'factories' in Cebu Province... The industry is multilayered, beginning with the shell gatherers and traders of specimens, to the small household workshop of 3 or 4 workers, to a network of middlemen, contractors, and agents, to the larger factories... to the large exporting firms ... in Cebu, there are less than 10 large

> shellcraft exporting firms that control more than 80 percent of the total shellcraft exports (Mojares, 1986, 183–184).

Mojares' historical discussion of Iloilo's textile and cottage industries highlights a related mechanism: loss of control over inputs and distribution when merchants or traveling agents dominate trade. He recounts how weavers in Iloilo shifted from producing for local patrons to becoming linked to merchants who supplied raw materials and directed export trade. As Mojares puts it, "The weavers, therefore, were no longer in full control over the production and distribution process" (Mojares, 1986, 178).

Taken together, these cases identify (a) market centralization and exporter concentration, and (b) input- and credit-based capture by merchants, as two principal mechanisms that can erode craft autonomy. Mojares' framework clarifies specific vulnerabilities and points toward targeted interventions that preserve maker control, apprenticeship rituals, and signature handwork.

Method

The empirical base of this paper is a single semi-structured interview with informant I1, conducted on April 16, 2025. There are two more blacksmiths who refused to be interviewed. The interview guide addressed history, daily practice, tools, materials, markets, pedagogy, institutional relations, and future prospects. The conversation was recorded and transcribed verbatim; translations were prepared immediately after transcription. Analysis proceeded through iterative close reading, open coding, and grouping of codes into seven themes that align with the interview schedule. The method prioritizes verifiable, operational detail—times of day, number of pieces produced, and prices reported. This is a report on the initial immersion of researchers studying at Bohol Island State University, Main Campus. Bersales' (1999) ethnographic notes on the Alona Beach in Panglao is the genre this study adopts.

Findings

The interviewee situated the arrival and establishment of blacksmithing in Villalimpia within a history of migration and succession. He recalled that "the first workers who worked here were from Camiguin… they are dead now, so we are the ones who continued" (Cebuano: "*Naa may kanang… ang unang mga trabahante nga nagtrabaho ani sauna kay taga Camiguin… pero patay naman, maong kami na ang nagsunod*," 0:00:04). He also pointed to an earlier site of production and noted that "the original shop used to be over there … but it's not the same now; it has been rebuilt"

(0:00:19–0:00:24). These remarks anchor the shop's memory and place-identity in the village and indicate a localized settlement of the craft rather than an always-indigenous lineage.

Daily work practices are tightly routinized. The shop follows an approximate 06:00–14:00 schedule: "*magsugod mig alas sais mahuman mig mga alas dos*" (0:02:25–0:02:31). Typical daily output is stable and team-dependent: "usually we make at least 18 pieces; sometimes it reaches 20" ("*Kasagaran... gaminimum mi og mga dise otso kabook... onya naa poy masobra... moabot baynte,"* 0:02:39–0:02:44). Staffing also reflects a small, multi-member workshop: the owner reports three core workers and two interns ("*Tulo... Tulo mi [ka trabahante], naa koy intern duha*," 0:04:31–0:04:34), and he insists that one person cannot meet the work target ("*Dili mabuhat og kanang kuan... kinahanglan nga tulo jud mi*," 0:04:38–0:04:43). Taken together, these facts model the shop as a micro-production unit operating a team-based division of labour with explicit daily productivity expectations.

The toolset described in the transcript shows selective mechanization rather than wholesale technologization. The informant enumerated hammers, clamps, tongs and an electric grinder ("*kaning maso, kumpit, pakpakan... og kanang grinder... mao rana... kuryente*," 0:02:03–0:02:16) and contrasted this with earlier, fully manual practice ("*Pero sauna dili man kuryente gamit sauna gud... kuan ra man... mano-mano*," 0:02:17–0:02:21). The recording itself contains the background whine of grinders at several points, corroborating the claim that electric tools now punctuate the shop's soundscape.

Material inputs and conversion metrics are given with precise, operational detail. The artisan reported that "from one kilo you can make at least two blades" ("Sa isa ka kilo duha ka sundang jud ang minimum ana," 0:16:40–0:16:46) and supplied per-kilo price ranges from local junkshops—approximately ₱65–₱75 depending on supplier ("*Depende naay saysentay singko, naay sitenta, kinamahalan sitentay singko*," 0:16:37–0:16:46). He also linked fuel availability to local agro-ecology: charcoal scarcity in dry months arises when coconut yields fall ("...*ting-init, mominus man ang among ginagamit na uling... Pag mominus ang bungag lubi, mominus sad ang ngana*," 0:10:20–0:10:36). These statements permit direct arithmetic budgeting (e.g., eighteen blades ≈ 9 kg metal; at ₱70/kg ≈ ₱630 daily metal cost) and identify concrete seasonal supply vulnerabilities.

Market relations and pricing practices are similarly concrete. The shop's principal buyers are market vendors and agricultural workers ("Kasagaran mamalit ani kay kana jung mga...trabahante... mga farmers,"

0:06:28–0:06:45), and a displayed retail item is priced at roughly ₱500 (“kung binook… tag 500,” 0:03:10–0:03:13). The artisan contrasts his hand-made goods with factory alternatives—criticizing factory pieces as less sharp or standardized—and links quality directly to repeat patronage (“kung maayo jud kag agi kay magbalik-balik nimo,” 0:07:42). Together, these claims describe a segmented market: a price-sensitive mass segment competes with cheaper factory products, while a smaller, quality-seeking niche sustains the shop’s reputation.

Labour arrangements are governed by batch incentives and reputational management. Helpers are paid per batch contingent on completing the daily minimum (“Ang sweldo ani nila kay pinakyaw depende ug mahuman nang dise otso,” 0:08:58–0:09:07). The owner explicitly refuses to undercut price or accept rushed orders that would compromise workmanship, reflecting an intentional strategy to preserve long-term client loyalty over short-term volume.

Institutional ties are essentially absent. When asked about government or organizational support the artisan answered flatly, “Wa” (“None,” 0:09:31), and elaborated that the work is sustained “on our own” (“Wa… ako-ako ra ni. Amo-amo ra gud…,” 0:09:38–0:09:42). Finally, intergenerational skill inheritance appears partial and fragile: the informant entered the trade young and became a master by seventeen, yet he reports limited familial succession—his son did not persist—while he continues to train a son-in-law and interns (“Dose anyos pako…,” 0:01:33–0:01:55; “Wala namay gasunod nako ani…,” 0:12:15–0:12:23; 0:18:00–0:18:07).

Discussion

The empirical narrative above invites interpretation along two related vectors: (1) the ways selective mechanization reconfigures labour and value within the workshop, and (2) the structural vulnerabilities that derive from input dependence and market intermediaries. Read through the historical lens advanced by Mojares (1986), these vectors correspond to the twin mechanisms he identifies, market centralization and input/credit capture, which can, in aggregate, erode the premium on skill and the social institutions that sustain craft life.

First, the evidence indicates that mechanization in Villalimpia is adaptive rather than totalizing. The presence of electric grinders shortens certain time-consuming, strenuous tasks and alters the auditory and temporal rhythm of the workshop. Yet the artisan insists that final shaping remains hand-driven, and he refuses rush orders that would compromise this finishing work. This co-existence of machine-assisted steps with hand-

finishing matters because, as Mojares argues, the retention of signature manual techniques preserves both market differentiation and the moral economy of apprenticeship. If mechanization were to fully supplant the visible markers of individual skill, the shop's capacity to command quality premia and to reproduce apprenticeship rituals would be jeopardized.

Second, the Villalimpia shop is structurally exposed to the input- and market-related dynamics Mojares documents in his Philippine case studies. The Cebu shellcraft example shows how layered markets and a small number of exporting firms can centralize design knowledge and buyer access, thereby capturing margins that once accrued to household producers (Mojares, 1986, pp. 183–84). The Villalimpia shop already services bulk orders and market vendors; this positioning could permit intermediaries to expand their control over demand and thereby compress the workshop's price-setting power. Likewise, Mojares's discussion of Iloilo's textile and cottage sectors warns that when merchants dominate inputs and distribution, producers lose autonomy over production choices and market channels (Mojares, 1986, p. 178). Villalimpia's reliance on junkshop-sourced metal and on coconut-husk charcoal, both variable and externally mediated, creates concrete entry points for supplier leverage through price volatility, stockouts, or tied-credit arrangements.

These theoretical mappings yield a mixed prognosis. On the one hand, the persistence of hand-finishing and the owner's reputational stance moderate the immediate risk of proletarianization: there remains a visible, market-recognizable skill that sustains repeat buyers. On the other hand, the structural facts, dependence on centralized junkshop supply, seasonal fuel vulnerability, and the absence of institutional support, instantiate the precise mechanisms that Mojares identifies as eroding craft autonomy. The result is neither inevitable decline nor secure continuity, but a contingent equilibrium vulnerable to shifts in buyer concentration or supplier power.

From this combined reading of empirical data and historical theory three policy-relevant priorities follow. First, preserve the time, incentives, and ethical space for hand-finishing. Interventions should avoid measures that simply maximize throughout at the expense of finishing work that signals individual skill. Second, strengthen producer control over inputs. Collective procurement, supplier mapping, and small buyer clusters can reduce price variance, limit supplier leverage, and lower the risk of tied-credit relations. Third, protect and amplify direct maker–buyer recognition. Simple provenance devices, product cards, shop signage, and brief buyer-facing narratives, can keep value visible at the point of sale and thus constrain intermediary capture.

These priorities directly inform the short-cycle, low-cost pilots proposed in the Conclusions and Recommendations. They also explain why modest organizational fixes (pooled buying, targeted apprenticeships, fuel substitution trials, provenance labeling, and low-barrier barangay outreach) are not merely incremental technicalities but tactical defenses against the structural processes Mojares describes. In sum, the Villalimpia case demonstrates how attention to small, operational details (conversion rates, per-kilo prices, shift patterns) can be combined with historical diagnosis to design interventions that both preserve artisanal value and reduce exposure to market and supply-side capture.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

First, the workshop uses both machines and hand tools: electric grinders speed some steps, but hand-finishing still determines final sharpness and buyer trust. Second, output depends on a small team, three core workers plus interns, and targets (about 18–20 blades/day) are not met by a lone worker. Third, inputs are a clear vulnerability: scrap-metal price swings and seasonal charcoal shortages directly raise costs or slow production. Fourth, the market is narrow and price-sensitive: most buyers are local farmers and market vendors, and cheaper factory blades compete on price while handcrafted quality secures repeat customers. Fifth, there is no visible institutional support; the craft survives on owner initiative and informal training.

There are five main limits to this report. First, the evidence comes from one interview and cannot support broad generalizations. Second, two nearby blacksmiths refused interviews, so the account may not represent local variation. Third, translations from Cebuano to English may lose nuance or local terms. Fourth, the data captures a single visit in April 2025 and may miss seasonal shifts in fuel availability or demand. Fifth, the study did not include extended participant observation or independent buyer interviews to triangulate claims.

Notwithstanding these limitations, certain recommendations may be made. First, protect the hand-finishing that buyers recognize. The owner stated that grinders shorten tasks but that final shaping—what customers trust—remains manual; the workshop's reputation depends on that finish. Require that any production or sales change preserve a hand-finishing step tied to the maker's name. Practically, every blade should carry a simple provenance card naming the maker, the village, the production date, and the phrase "hand-finished." Use that card at sale to show why a hand-finished blade commands a higher price than factory pieces. When negotiating bulk

orders, the maker should refuse terms that demand machine-only finishing or that transfer finishing to outside plants; any contract must state who performs the finishing and fix a minimum unit price that preserves the margin implied by the observed retail price (~₱500) and the recorded input costs (≈2 blades per kg scrap at ≈₱70/kg).

Second, reduce supplier leverage with collective procurement while keeping decision-making local. The transcript gives conversion and price numbers that make pooled buying sensible: at roughly two blades per kilo, an 18-blade day uses about 9 kg of scrap metal, so weekly purchases are predictable. Begin with an informal buying circle of 3–6 nearby shops that pool funds for weekly bulk scrap and charcoal purchases to smooth price swings and avoid stockouts in dry months. Keep a visible ledger (paper or a shared spreadsheet) that records kilos bought, per-kilo price, and member contributions so every artisan can audit costs against output. If the circle moves toward formal cooperative status, draft bylaws first that assign procurement and branding control to the artisans before any registration so that legal form does not transfer control to outside managers.

Third, make learning paid, structured, and documented. The owner learned young and now trains interns, but successors have not always stayed. offer a short-paid apprenticeship—three months with a modest stipend—paired with a brief learning contract that names the master, lists daily hours aligned to the workshop's 06:00–14:00 rhythm, and records core skills (forging, shaping, finishing). Keep a short daily log of apprentice tasks and milestones; this log both values the apprentice's time and creates a record that supports future stipends or recognition. Avoid unpaid internships that replicate extractive labor; insist that apprentices sign informed consent for any photos or recordings and that masters retain authority to declare when the apprentice reaches independent competence.

Fourth, build maker-led market practices that reveal value to buyers. The interview shows the market is narrow and price-sensitive: most customers are farmers and market vendors, and price competition with factory blades is fierce. Test direct sales one day a week in nearby Tagbilaran or the municipal market with the maker or a designated representative on the stall. Use one-page stall material that explains the provenance card, the hand-finishing step, and basic care; pilot sales will reveal whether customers pay the implied premium. For larger intermediated orders, require written contracts that set minimum unit prices and specify payment timing; include an explicit revenue split so artisans see their share of final retail value rather than opaque middleman margins.

Fifth, guard against tied-credit and supplier capture. The artisan currently sources scrap from junkshops and faces seasonal charcoal problems; avoid any supplier credit that requires repeat exclusive purchases. If financing is needed, prefer microloans to the individual maker or to a democratically run producer group, and write terms in Cebuano with oral explanation. Reject loans that convert into input-forced arrangements or that grant suppliers rights to brand or inventory control.

Sixth, archive and control access to knowledge. The workshop's single-informant record and the informant's memories matter. Place transcript excerpts, a short how-to note, and selected photos in a barangay-controlled file or a local university repository under a simple agreement that names permissible uses and benefit sharing (e.g., copies for the makers, a small training session). No external commercial use of recordings or images should occur without signed permission.

Seventh, form governance that rotates power and keeps brand rights with artisans. If a producers' group forms to pursue pooled procurement or shared branding, elect a small artisan committee with clear minutes and a published monthly summary. Rotate roles annually and require a two-thirds artisan vote for any transfer of brand ownership or for contracts that cede long-term control to external managers.

Eighth, set ethical research and tourism rules now. Before interviews, require a brief agreement that states how materials and photos will be used and what the community receives; for demonstrations charge a fee and let artisans set schedules. This prevents unpaid extraction of knowledge and respects the maker's right to refuse visitors or publication.

Finally, each recommendation must be tested against the numbers recorded: pilot pooled buying should be evaluated by comparing per-kg prices before and after pooling against the baseline ₱65–₱75/kg; apprenticeship pilots should track whether one paid apprentice stabilizes labor availability for a target output of 18–20 blades/day; a market pilot should record whether direct sales at market stalls raise average realized retail above the shop's baseline of ~₱500 or increase repeat customers. These small, measurable pilots keep control with the makers, let the community reject what fails, and avoid handing craft control to outside actors.

References

Bersales, J. E. R. (1999). Life's a beach: Notes on everyday life in a tourist resort community, Panglao Island, Bohol. Philippine quarterly of culture and society, 27(3/4), 223-247.

Centillas, J. R. C., Inocian, R. B., Amper, R. M. B., & Bacalso, J. P. (2024). Unveiling the art and crafts of raffia weaving: A cultural theory and instructional model development. Culture & Psychology, 30(4), 983-1016.

Gementiza, C. M. (2023). Preserving Heritage:“Gurung-gong” Beat of Panglao, Bohol. Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal, 16(4), 1-1.

Gerra, J. B. (2013). An ethnoarchaeological study of the blacksmithing technology in Cebu Island, Philippines. Peter Lang.

Khan, K. (2016). The risks and gains of a single case study. In Researching Multilingualism (pp. 74-86). Routledge.

Mascuñana, R. V. (1998). Blacksmiths and gaffs in Dumaguete. Philippine quarterly of culture and society, 26(1/2), 227-253.

Mojares, R. B. (1980). Research prospects in Bisayan studies: History, anthropology, and literature. Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society, 8(1), 28-43.

Mojares, R. B. (1986). Artist, craftsman, factory worker: Concerns in the study of traditional art. Philippine quarterly of culture and society, 14(3), 177-188.

Mijares, B. (2023). Funeral Tradition Alterations Due to COVID-19 Pandemic Health Protocols Among the Filipino Catholics in Tagbilaran City. International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 5(1), 72-91.

Moral, R., & Pandan, M. S. (2024). Dramaturgical Analysis of Tagbilaran's Household Fiesta: Basis for Fiesta Teaching Model. EIKI Journal of Effective Teaching Methods, 2(2).

Pandan, M.S. & Poquita, K.D. (2025, forthcoming) Salt Making in the Visayas: A Review on Asin Tibuok Artisanal Salt. LUMINA Interdisciplinary Research and Scholarly Journal.

Tse, N. (2005). Artistic practices of the Bohol school of painting: an analytical and archival study of nineteenth-century panel paintings in the Philippines. In Scientific Research on the Pictorial Arts of Asia, In: Proceedings of the Second Forbes Symposium at the Freer Gallery of Art. London: Archetype Publications Ltd (pp. 16-20).

Urich, P., & Edgecombe, M. (1999). Bohol's indigenous social institutions: a development perspective. Philippine quarterly of culture and society, 27(3/4), 178-201.