

2023 Manufacturer Update

-ThereminGoat, 10/22/2023

If you've never had the opportunity to maintain a large repository of documents or a database of testing results, I would highly recommend that you stay as far away from that job as possible. In the recent weeks at work, I've been going through all the mind-numbing joy associated with that task as we've been overhauling what feels like every single document that has ever existed in the history of that company. As I have been going through all of this work, though, I came to realize that some of my own switch documentation and testing repositories were lagging behind the times a bit as well. In particular, I feel as if I've not been keeping the Scorecards, Force Curves, and Measurement Sheets up to date with the latest switch manufacturers that have made their debuts over the span of the last year or so of switch releases. Sure, I've been decently okay about mentioning names like Jerrzi and LICHICX in reviews as they've been coming up more and more recently, but the supporting documents which prop up the large reviews week in and out have not reflected such. In turn, this short article here is an announcement as to what I've done to directly address that.

As brands, manufacturers, and vendors that sell switches have been steadily increasing over the past few years, trying to keep straight exactly which manufacturers are truly unique and separate from exiting, known production houses has become increasingly more difficult. Its safe to say that identifying unique factories was never particularly easy in the first place, but shakeups in brand associations and a general growth in the mechanical keyboard switch market during those changes certainly hasn't made it any easier. However, some of these newer manufacturers have made themselves a bit more distinctively established and have helped separate themselves out from the crowd with documentation, proof of life, and general western-facing communication. As a result of these new pieces of information, as well as quite a bit of soul searching on the matter from myself due to the not insignificant amount of work it would have required for me to do so, I feel comfortable in formally recognizing 4 new distinctive manufacturers into my official list of switch production houses: Grain Gold, LICHICX, Jerrzi, and SOAI. To help introduce you to where in my existing documentation these brands have been inserted, as well as to some of the switches you can expect to be associated with them moving forward, I've gone ahead and provided some short sections below to each of these brands.

Grain Gold

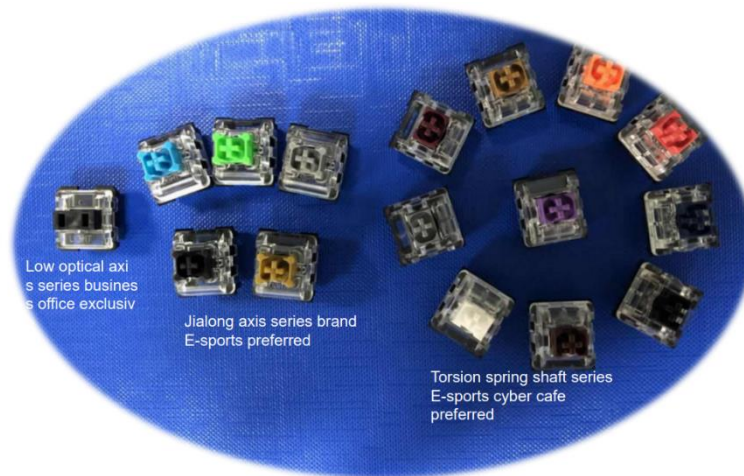


Figure 1: Have you seen these Grain Gold switches from their marketing brochure? I sure haven't...

Fully and formally known as “Dongguan Grain Gold Electronic Technology Co. LTD”, Grain Gold is a fairly new switch production facility first appearing to western facing switch collectors in late Q2 to early Q3 of 2022. While my earliest contact with them came by way of some of their collaborations with NextTime in the form of the Blue Star, Engine V3, Bamboo Shoot, and Watermelon Pro switches which you may have seen previously on AliExpress or Taobao, it was in July of 2022 that I received a marketing pamphlet directly from a sales contact at Grain Gold that outlined a lot more than just these switch collaborations. Obviously being a touch on the vague side, this document not only suggests that Grain Gold has significantly more broad connections with technology and computer companies around the world, but directly provides photographic evidence of a production facility as well as some switches which I have yet to see for sale anywhere else in the world. Using this document as well as further contact with the sales individuals directly, it's been positively identified by myself and other collectors that the recent CIY Evo and G-Square switches have been produced by Grain Gold, in addition to the NextTime brand which has had a few further releases beyond those mentioned above.



Figure 2: Photos of Grain Gold's switch assembly room and some associated machinery for such.

LICHICX



Figure 3: LICHICX Lucy silent linear switches displaying the stylized 'LICHICX' nameplate indicative of this manufacturer.

Honestly, there's not much that I can say in this introductory paragraph for LICHICX that hasn't already been previously covered in other articles on this website. As many of you may have seen by way of my HAPE Orange Switch Short or my full length review on the LICHICX Lucy switches, this manufacturer has been pumping out some incredibly fascinating switches over the past handful of months and is poised for a dramatic rise in market share should they continue producing switches in this fashion. While the list of associated LICHICX branded switches is short enough, existing documentation from the LICHICX sales team does seem to vaguely suggest that they may actually be the production house which makes Varmilo's electrocapacitive switches – something of which has somehow not been leaked by Varmilo in almost five years since the debut of their EC switch line. As a result of this, Varmilo EC V2 switches have officially had 'Varmilo' removed as a manufacturer on their documentation in favor of 'Unknown' status. While LICHICX switches have now picked up the LICHICX name as their official manufacturers, only time will be able to tell if the Varmilo EC switches will too...

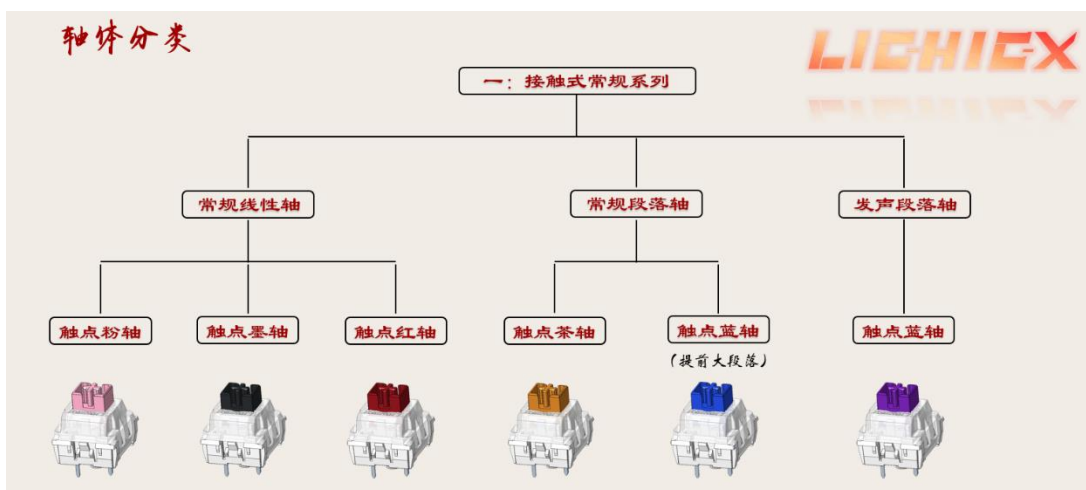


Figure 4: LICHICX switch family tree from their marketing brochure with a lot of switches that look eerily similar to existing Varmilo EC switches...

Jerrzi



Figure 5: Jerrzi OEM switch packaging as seen on KBDFans.

Of all of the new manufacturers on this list, Jerrzi is far and away the most productive and longest overdue of formal recognition on my behalf. Established in mid-2021 and showing up in the form of ‘JERRZI’ branded OEM style switch releases in early 2022, Jerrzi has gone on to produce over two dozen different switches in the year and change following this. In addition to a slew of Jerrzi-branded releases which have been graciously shuttled to me by my sponsor SwitchOddities, known collaborations between Jerrzi and existing brands have appeared in the form of a series of several RK switches, a pair of ‘Qeeke’ branded switches, and even a one-off collaboration with up and coming switch designer XCJZ which I covered in my XCJZ Jerrzi Lotus Stem Switch Review. In addition to an official website for Jerrzi, which formally names them as “Huizhou Jiuzi Electronic Technology Co. LTD”, several western and western-facing vendors have had extensive contact with their sales team to the point of me feeling confident that this is in fact a separate production facility from other established brands. Interestingly, though, it is rumored that the molds used in the production of switches at Jerrzi may be coming from a mold production house that is currently or was at one point used by Huano.



Figure 6: Picture of Jerrzi production facility from the front page of their website.

SOAI



Figure 7: Leobog Nimbus (Red/White) and Juggle (Blue/Green) original marketing render with accurate to real life packaging.

While there is a chance that you may have encountered at least a couple of the names on this new manufacturer list if you're a bit deeper into the newer mechanical keyboard hobby than most, I can say with pretty strong confidence that most people have not heard of SOAI by that name. SOAI, which is short for "Dongguan Suoai Electronics Co. LTD", is a general computer peripherals manufacturing facility which was established a very long time ago and only recently has begun producing mechanical keyboard switches in house. As per their rather extensive Alibaba page which details more than sufficient proof of their existence which is cross-verifiable, SOAI's largest brand of switches is that of 'Leobog'. Carrying funky names and strange colorways, over a dozen different Leobog switches have been released since the debut of the Nimbus and Juggle switches in November of 2021. While there is a good chance that other branded switches have been produced by SOAI over the course of the past few years in parallel with their Leobog releases, such as some of the winglatch Mengmoda branded switches, collectors are still on the lookout for where those may be. There is a strong possibility that AULA branded switches exist somewhere in the prebuilt keyboards being offered by SOAI on their Alibaba sales page, though no confirmation of such has been had quite yet.

There you have it – an introduction to four new switch manufacturers that you will likely hear me talk a lot more about in the coming months and years. If you're at this point in the article, then know that I've already updated the Force Curves, Scores, and Measurement sheets for all affected switches as a result of these formal recognitions and you should be able to directly see how they measure and shape up next to your current favorite brands. While a few of these switches were moved from other erroneous attributions, the vast majority of these switches from Grain Gold, LICHICX, Jerrzi, and SOAI existed with "Unknown" manufacturer attributions to them in their various documents in those repositories. In time, should a new manufacturer demonstrate sufficient proof of life to me to be deemed recognizable, expect that I will do something similar to this update again.