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DEEP TIME, FAST THREADS: NEO-FOLK ART AND PLATFORM TEMPORALITY IN GUIZHOU

Ye, Funa

Slade School of Fine Art, UCL / Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA)

Guizhou is widely known for its mountainous terrain, ethnolinguistic diversity, and historically limited infrastructural connectivity. Yet over the past decade it has undergone rapid transformation into one of China’s major **cloud-computing and data infrastructure hubs**, marketed nationally as “Cloud Guizhou.” Large-scale investments in data centers, fiber networks, solar installations, and logistics corridors have reoriented the province toward national digital circulation. This infrastructural shift has coincided with the rise of **short-video platforms**, particularly Douyin and Kuaishou, which have brought unprecedented visibility to rural festivals, handicrafts, and everyday cultural expressions. These developments have produced a new cultural formation in which **traditional craft temporality**—marked by *slowness, repetition, intergenerational memory, and embodied skill*—comes into tension with **platform temporality**, characterized by *acceleration, circulation metrics, and algorithmic time discipline*. To conceptualize this formation, the paper distinguishes between **hyper-folk** and **neo-folk**. Wu (2015) uses *hyper-folk* to describe a mode of cultural production in which “folk” is continuously staged, simulated, and mediated across tourism, heritage display, and cultural policy, such that originality and reproduction become indistinguishable. Hyper-folk refers to the **political economy of representation**, where folk culture circulates as symbol rather than situated practice. Building on this, **neo-folk** is proposed here to designate folk practices **produced directly within platform infrastructures**: forms natively shaped by platform gestures, editing grammars, audio templates, and visibility algorithms. Neo-folk does not simply display tradition; it **reformats** tradition as an *ongoing compositional process* under conditions of media acceleration.

This distinction is particularly visible in **Hmong embroidery** (commonly known as Miao embroidery in China). Traditionally, ceremonial garments are produced over months or years, accumulating dense symbolic layers linked to kin lineage, cosmology, and the moral aesthetics of care. This is a world of **deep craft time**—what Freeman (2010) describes as embodied temporal rhythms that structure social belonging and intergenerational continuity. The gesture-by-gesture pace of embroidery indexes not only labor but also **relation**: an offering to the future and to one’s descendants. However, in livestream embroidery shops across Guizhou and Southeastern Sichuan, this temporality is now **compressed and narrativized** for platform visibility. The camera

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focuses on the hands, while the artisan recounts personal stories or motif origins to cultivate emotional attachment. Viewers interact through scrolling comments, parasocial intimacy, and impulse purchase cues. Yet the deeper material temporality of the craft is reorganized around **camera-readability** and **algorithmic retention curves**. As Yi (2023) argues, platform affordances encourage “a patterned logic of performance” that privileges spectacle, clarity, and affective hooks over the slow accumulation of process. Likewise, Li (2025) shows that traditional motifs are increasingly presented as **visual units** for circulation rather than as embedded aesthetic structures shaped by local moral worlds.

This reorganization has material consequences. Gift-economy modes of exchange—where embroidered pieces circulate among relatives, neighbors, and brides as life-cycle markers—are **partially replaced** by **livestream market logics**, where scarcity and urgency are deployed to stimulate rapid purchase decisions. At the same time, **machine-embroidery production** is adopted to meet platform-induced demand. Rather than interpreting this as a loss of authenticity, the paper argues that the **tension between machine speed and hand time** is symptomatic of a broader **temporal contradiction** under platform capitalism. Machine embroidery is not inherently opposed to cultural meaning; however, when evaluated through the platform’s metrics of novelty, virality, and turnover, the *value* of hand-time risks becoming subordinated to *speed*. This dynamic is also visible in the **Village Super League (Cun Chao)**, an amateur football tournament in Rongjiang that integrates halftime drum performances, embroidered displays, and Hmong ceremonial procession. As Zhang and Qian (2024) show, the event’s virality emerges not only from festive joy but from its **platform-native choreography**: crowds arrange themselves for drone shots, dances are repeated for clip extraction, and local pride becomes performable through loopable, shareable sequences. Here, folk culture does not merely survive digital mediation—it is **co-produced with the platform**.

Yet the story is not one of unilateral acceleration. Across Guizhou, **women-led craft cooperatives** (e.g., *Mama Zhizao*) and community studios (e.g., Baopu, Halo) experiment with **alternative temporalities**. These groups prioritize **collective rhythm, mutual learning, and sustained making**. They sometimes use livestreaming to establish connection rather than urgency, deliberately slowing pace, refusing aggressive sales tactics, or limiting production volume to maintain quality. Such practices constitute a **temporal refusal**—a reassertion of craft’s right to unfold at the speed of life rather than the speed of circulation.

The paper concludes by revisiting the figure of the 桃花源 (**Peach Blossom Spring**), often invoked to describe Guizhou as a “hidden world” outside time. In contemporary media culture, this pastoral imaginary is not lost; it is **reformatted**. Guizhou becomes a **future-past hybrid zone**—a “rural futurism” where data centers sit alongside terraced fields, and embroidered patterns circulate as both ancestral memory and global meme. The question is not whether machine embroidery “replaces” hand embroidery, but how **new sustainable relations between machine time and hand time** can be cultivated. Neo-folk art, understood properly, is neither decline nor revival—it is a **temporal negotiation**, a struggle over how life is paced, valued, and shared.

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