



侗鼓錦音  
THREADS OF SONG  
ECHOES OF WEAVE



白鷗  
向我  
泊孤舟



GULLS  
CALL TO  
MY SOLITUDE

白鷗問我泊孤舟，  
是身留，是心留？  
心若留時，  
何事鎖眉頭？

WHITE GULLS ASK ME, MOORED HERE ALONE ON A BOAT,  
ARE YOU TRAPPED HERE IN BODY OR IN SOUL?  
IF YOUR HEART TRULY STAYS,  
WHY DOES WORRY CREASE YOUR BROW?





## CHAPTER 1 THE DREAM 梦里不知身是客

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I was born in a small town in northern Guizhou, China.  
Like many children in rural lands,  
my early life followed a well-worn path,  
quiet, structured, and unchanging.

My hometown is a place where multiple ethnic minorities  
live together.  
The Dong people, my people, are divided by geography into  
Northern and Southern Dong.  
I come from the north.

Over time, many of our traditions faded into silence.  
What little remains lingers in fragments:  
The songs my grandmother hummed softly when she worked.  
The old wind-and-rain bridge stretching across the river.  
And the three-story drum tower,  
standing sentinel at the crossroads of memory.

My grandparents brought my parents from their village to  
the county town,  
and my parents carried me into the provincial capital.  
We kept moving forward.

In a society that worships meritocracy,  
we were taught that success meant leaving.  
For better education, more opportunities,  
higher wages, or perhaps,  
simply a wider world.

I followed the path.  
I studied. I moved further away.  
Eventually, I crossed borders and oceans.  
Now, thousands of miles away,  
in a place that, for many, represents opportunity and  
progress.

Gazing out at the vastness I once dreamed of,  
it feels like a dream.  
A blurred echo of childhood fantasies,  
Imagined in the stillness of night.

When I close my eyes,  
I hear the clamour of street markets,  
See my grandfather,  
A bamboo basket on his back,  
Little me nestled inside,  
Cradled in the warmth of home.

Somewhere along the way,  
I began to erase traces of my origins.  
My food, my accent, my habits.  
Avoiding the stories of where I came from.  
For I am not one of the lucky ones,  
born with privilege.

Yet the farther I roam,  
the more this dislocation clings,  
Shadows of home return unexpectedly,  
flashing through my mind in ordinary moments.  
Now, in this "wider world,"  
standing at a brief pause,  
at a fork in the road,  
I find myself uncertain,  
No longer knowing which direction to take.



So I turn around,  
And there it stands a drum tower.  
I walk closer,  
from within, I hear singing.  
**I have returned,**  
**to the land of the Dong.**



## CHAPTER 2 THE RETURN

### 此心安处是吾乡



Did everyone have to leave home to chase success?  
I did not have the answer.

So I decided to return. Physically, not just theoretically.  
I went back to Rongjiang County in Guizhou Province,  
to the villages where the Dong people still live and work.

I was not sure exactly what I was looking for.  
Maybe I wanted to see what had stayed the same.  
Maybe I wanted to find the stories I had not listened to  
before.  
What I did know was this.  
I had spent too long looking at hometown through the eyes  
of others.  
Measuring it by what it lacked,  
by how far it was from the "better" places.  
But this time, I wanted to look with my own eyes.





In Fengdeng Village, I stayed with Yishanren Studio, where local Dong women work with traditional textiles. I saw the whole process. Planting and harvesting cotton. Spinning, weaving, dyeing with indigo. Brushing egg white onto the cloth. Beating it to strengthen the texture. Drying it in the sun. To make just one 24-meter roll of Dong cloth, it takes six or seven women almost a month. Every step is done by hand. It is slow, precise, and built on shared knowledge.



Photo courtesy of Buqu Studio

In the evenings, I would sit with villagers under the old drum tower in Dali Village. We gathered around a fire and sang Dong Grand Song. Polyphonic songs passed down through generations. These songs are rich in metaphor and emotion. They are not meant to be performed on stage. They are part of life.

Sitting there, surrounded by these voices, I felt calm. At the same time, I felt a quiet conflict I had not faced before. I started thinking about my own position. I had done everything I was supposed to do to succeed. But what did that actually mean? And what had I given up along the way?





Left: Yang Fengfan | Right: Yang Neiruo

During this time, I met two elderly women, Yang Fengfan and Yang Neiruo. Both had spent their lives farming and weaving. Even though they were over seventy, with limited strength and fading eyesight, they were still making handwoven ribbons to support their families. Their children had left for the cities. They stayed. Not because they saw themselves as cultural preservers, but simply because this was their way of life. They don't appear in galleries or museums. But their work holds a kind of intelligence and value that I think we have overlooked.

That realisation changed my project. I began to ask. How can I translate these moments into a design language? How can I show others what I have seen and felt? Not as a problem to solve, but as something to recognise and remember.

CHAPTER 3  
THE TOWER  
侗鼓锦音



*Threads of Song  
Echoes of Weave*

I began to think about how to turn the materials, techniques, and stories I had encountered into a design that could be touched, heard, and experienced.

I did not want to make an object that only looked beautiful. I wanted it to make visible the people, the hands, the knowledge that are so often overlooked. The rhythms of labour, the quiet presence of those who stay. The time and care embedded in every thread, every gesture. This is what I wanted the installation to hold.

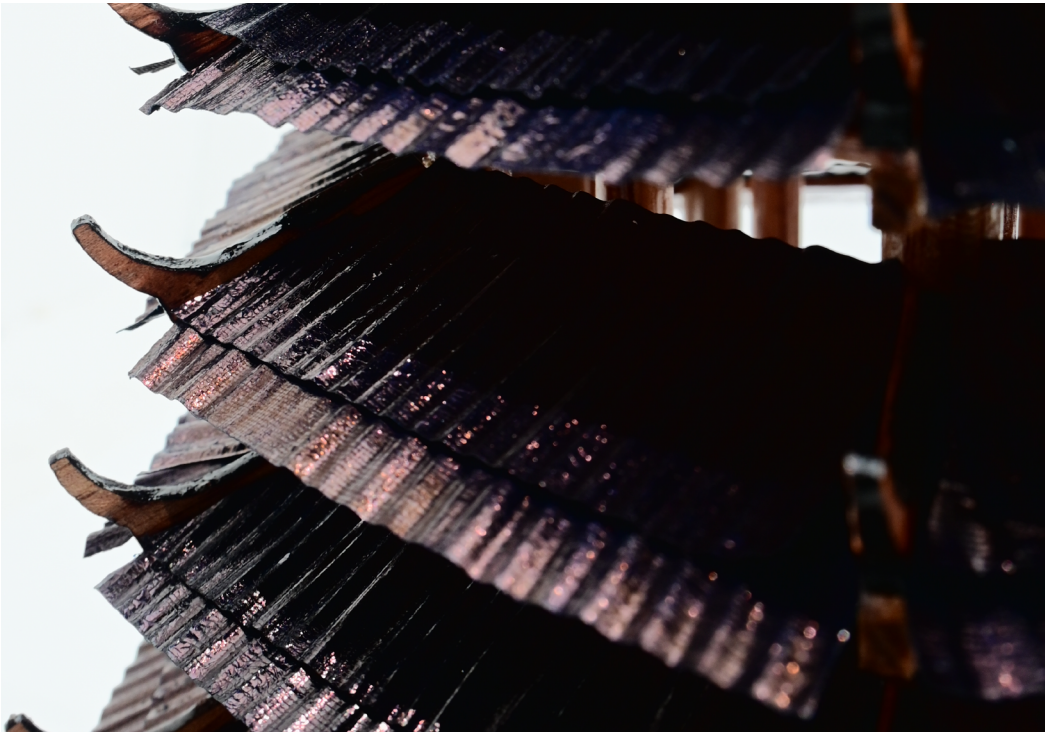
The installation is inspired by the traditional Dong drum tower, The drum tower is the heart of the Dong village. A place for gathering, singing, and meeting. But it is not a direct replica. It is a re-interpretation, a structure that brings together three core elements of Dong culture: architecture, textile, and song.

The main body is handcrafted from red cedar by local Dong craftsmen, joined with mortise-and-tenon techniques, without nails or glue.



The handwoven ribbons are made by local Dong women, tied carefully around the tower's frame. Each ribbon is a trace of their labour, a small story woven into the structure.

The outer body of the tower is clad in layers of Dong cloth, dyed with indigo, brushed with egg white, pleated by hand to mimic the folds of a traditional Dong skirt. Like the rooftiles catching light and shadow, the surface reflects the time and care embedded in the fabric itself.





Beside the tower, there is a small Dong drum, carved from fir wood, stretched with yellow cattle hide. When you tap the drum, it activates a hidden speaker embedded in the roof of the tower. The sound of the Dong Grand Song rises. the same polyphonic harmonies I heard in the village. Voices layered in the open air, woven into the night. Each tap switches the song, cycling through different songs. Two taps in a row turns the system on or off.

Around the tower, under the eaves, there are scrolls housed in a 3D-printed shell, with a spring-loaded mechanism that lets it gently retract after reading. The scrolls hold stories: about the meaning of the drum tower, the history of the Grand Song, the patterns of the ribbons, the festivals, and the everyday life of the Dong people. You pull a scroll out by hand, read slowly, then let it return.



There are no screens, no projections, no digital interfaces.  
The technology is minimal.  
Just wood. Just cloth. Just sound.

The interaction is intentionally simple:  
Tap. Listen. Read.  
I designed this tower to slow down the act of interaction,  
to encourage users to pause,  
to touch the material,  
to hear the voices,  
to read the stories.

The form itself carries the message:  
a space where sound, touch, and memory come together.

For me, this project is not only about nostalgia for the past.  
It is about recognising what has been here all along.

The tower does not explain.  
It does not solve.  
It simply holds,  
**inviting you to come closer.**



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