

Sponsored by Metrics:

How Platforms Organize Immigrants into an Industry

1 Introduction

The sociological literature on ethnic economies has long documented a characteristic model of immigrant labor market incorporation: workers enter industries through co-ethnic networks, where prior relationships reduce employers' screening costs, community reputation substitutes for formal credentialing, and cumulative causation densifies network ties over time (Wilson and Portes 1980; Waldinger 1994; Massey et al. 1993). This relational logic gives ethnic economy incorporation its constitutive features: entry that is narrow and contingent on accumulated social trust, organization anchored in co-ethnic firms embedded in community reputational circuits (Light and Bonacich 1988), and mobility that is slow and path-dependent, constrained by the same network infrastructure that enabled entry (Hagan 1998; De Genova 2005). The organizational coherence of the ethnic economy, in this account, rests on the density of relational ties that hold it together, a foundation that simultaneously provides workers a degree of protection against rapid displacement.

This article examines an industry that was assembled by a different logic entirely. Within three years, the U.S. vertical drama industry, a mobile-first cultural sector built by Chinese entrepreneurs operating in the United States and staffed primarily by Chinese international film students and recent graduates, recruited thousands of workers, differentiated a full production value chain, achieved internal consensus around metric-oriented production norms, and then began displacing the same workers it had incorporated. Co-ethnic networks were present and operative, as they are in virtually every immigrant labor market. What they cannot explain is the speed and

scale of what happened: an industry assembling within three years at a pace no prior wave of relational recruitment had achieved. The mechanism at work was something the ethnic economy literature has not theorized: dual-legibility, the capacity of platform metrics to be simultaneously recognized as credible evidence by distinct institutional systems, each applying its own evaluative criteria. In the vertical drama case, the same view counts and rankings that determined commercial investment decisions also served as primary evidence in O-1 extraordinary-ability visa applications. This institutional coupling between immigration governance and commercial market evaluation produced a motivational infrastructure that co-ethnic networks alone could not generate, drawing workers in at a scale and speed that prior models of incorporation cannot explain.

Platform metrics, by becoming simultaneously legible to immigration governance and commercial evaluation, transformed immigrant labor incorporation from a slow, relationally-mediated process into a fast, metrically-mediated one, creating both unprecedented speed of entry and unprecedented speed of disposal. The organizational form that dual-legibility assembled did not protect the workers it mobilized: because both the commercial value and the immigration credential of practitioners rested on the same metric foundation, erosion in either domain destabilized both simultaneously, with no relational infrastructure to absorb the shock. What dual-legibility produced, in other words, was not simply a faster version of ethnic economy incorporation, but a structurally different one: the very openness that lowered entry barriers and drew workers in at scale was the same property that made their displacement equally rapid. The apparent accessibility of platform-mediated incorporation was inseparable from its fragility.

This article develops this argument through a four-stage analysis of the U.S. vertical drama industry: aggregation, configuration, alignment, and self-reinforcement, each characterized by a different relationship between platform metrics, actor behavior, and organizational structure. The

analysis draws on in-depth interviews with ten industry practitioners, participant observation in Los Angeles and in co-ethnic digital communities, and platform data from ReelShort (the leading U.S. vertical drama platform) covering its first fifty U.S. productions. The theoretical contributions span three bodies of scholarship. For research on ethnic economies and immigrant labor, the analysis shows how platform infrastructure reconfigures the classic mechanisms of incorporation, replacing relational gatekeeping with metric-based selection, and in doing so creates a new form of disposability structurally encoded in the same mechanism that enabled entry. For research on algorithmic management, it distinguishes between the governance function of metrics within existing organizations and their infrastructural function as the generative condition for organizational genesis. For research on commensuration and platform metrics, it shows that when quantification crosses institutional boundaries, its organizational force is not merely extended but transformed: cross-institutional legibility mobilizes the resources of multiple evaluative systems at once, producing organizational momentum qualitatively different from what single-domain commensuration generates. Section 2 situates the argument in relation to these three bodies of literature and develops the concept of dual-legibility. Section 3 describes the research design. Section 4 presents the four-stage analysis. Section 5 discusses theoretical contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Ethnic Economies and the Information Environment of Immigrant Incorporation

The foundational insight of ethnic economy and enclave theory concerns recruitment: co-ethnic networks function as the primary mechanism through which immigrant workers enter particular industries (Wilson and Portes 1980). Earlier immigrant workers act as proxies for

subsequent recruits; their established presence reduces employers' screening costs and risks; cumulative causation densifies networks over time, sustaining inflows through the same relational channels (Waldinger 1994; Model 1993; Massey et al. 1993). Entry into an ethnic economy is mediated by social ties, filtered through existing networks and conditioned on the trust that prior relationships have established. This relational mediation gives ethnic economy recruitment its characteristic stickiness: entry is neither open nor instantaneous but depends on the slow accumulation of co-ethnic credibility.

This relational logic shapes the organizational form of ethnic economies as well. Co-ethnic firms serve as the central organizational unit, generating an ecology in which ownership, employment, and informal finance circulate within co-ethnic networks (Light and Bonacich 1988). The organizational structure is inseparable from its relational basis: the firm is embedded in the community, and the community's reputational circuits impose reciprocal obligations on both employers and workers. Internal stratification is present: enclave owners may capture returns comparable to the mainstream labor market while ordinary co-ethnic workers do not (Sanders and Nee 1987), but the organizational coherence of the ethnic economy as a whole rests on the density of relational ties that hold it together.

The long-term trajectories available to workers within this structure reveal the stickiness working in both directions. Co-ethnic networks are path-dependent, channeling workers into specific sectors and roles that can reproduce gendered and racialized divisions of labor (Hagan 1998). Legal precarity intensifies these constraints: the condition of deportability fixes workers within sectors by making exit more costly than continued subordination (De Genova 2005), while legal violence channels immigrants into positions of structural vulnerability (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Mobility, in this account, is slow and heavily conditioned by the same relational

infrastructure that enabled entry. Workers become embedded in networks and obligations from which disentanglement is costly, a stickiness that constrains mobility even as it provides a degree of organizational coherence against rapid displacement.

Taken together, these three dimensions—recruitment through co-ethnic ties, organization through relational embeddedness, mobility constrained by network path-dependence—reveal a common foundation: the ethnic economy’s organizational logic presupposes a particular information environment, one in which knowledge about a worker’s capabilities and reliability is expensive to acquire, relationally held, and locally circulating. This foundational assumption was never made explicit in the ethnic economy literature, because the information environment it presupposes was the only one available when the tradition was developed. Yet in an era when digital platforms make worker performance publicly quantifiable and continuously updated, the information problem that made co-ethnic network intermediation necessary may be solvable through other means, and the protective stickiness that relational embeddedness provided may be absent when metrics substitute for relationships as the organizational infrastructure of immigrant incorporation. The ethnic economy literature, however, treats this organizational infrastructure as given rather than as something that metrics might constitute. A separate body of scholarship examines precisely how metrics reorganize production.

2.2 Platform Metrics and Cross-Institutional Legibility

The sociological study of quantification has long been concerned with commensuration: the transformation of disparate qualities into comparable quantities through shared metrics, producing objectivity and legitimacy under uncertainty (Espeland and Stevens 1998; Porter 2021). Platform infrastructures have compressed and transformed this process. Through continuous, automated data capture, platforms render engagement metrics visible in real time, without

institutional intermediaries (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013). Helmond (2015) describes this as platformization: the process by which data are made extractable and deployable across sites, rendering metrics portable beyond the platforms that generate them. Bucher (2012) shows that the resulting threat of invisibility compels users to adjust continuously to the governance regime that metrics implicitly signal; Nieborg and Poell (2018) extend this to cultural production, showing that platformized commodities are structurally contingent; their value is continuously renegotiated through metric performance.

This line of research has substantially illuminated how platform metrics govern behavior through visibility, but its analytical frame is implicitly closed: the possibility that platform data might be recognized and mobilized by other institutional systems remains outside the analysis. The commensuration literature presupposes that quantification occurs within a single institutional domain; the visibility literature presupposes that the governance effects of metrics circulate within the platform ecology. Neither framework was designed to ask what happens when metrics cross institutional boundaries: when numbers produced for one evaluative system become readable and actionable within another. Scott (1998) introduced legibility to describe how states render complex social realities into standardized, measurable forms that permit administrative intervention. Platform metrics depart markedly from Scott's state-centered account: they are produced continuously and automatically, rendered visible in real time, and, crucially, portable across institutional settings. A view count is not generated for a specific institutional audience; it is a publicly accessible, machine-readable quantity that multiple audiences can simultaneously evaluate, each on its own evaluative terms. This property, the capacity to satisfy the distinct evaluative criteria of multiple systems simultaneously without requiring translation or negotiation, is what existing frameworks have not theorized, and what the analysis that follows develops.

A related but distinct limitation appears in research on how metrics reorganize production within organizations. The algorithmic management literature treats metric governance as contested terrain: platforms impose datafied control, while workers develop strategies to interpret, game, and resist these systems (Kellogg, Valentine, and Christin 2020; Rosenblat and Stark 2016). Studies of newsrooms show that audience analytics redistribute authority and reconfigure professional priorities (Anderson 2011; Christin 2018). Stark and Vanden Broeck (2024) synthesize these strands: algorithmic management constitutes a distinct organizational logic that co-opts heterogeneous actors through continuously updated metrics rather than formal command. These frameworks share a founding assumption that has gone largely unexamined: in all cases, an organization is already in place before metrics arrive. The newsroom, the ride-hailing fleet, the platform firm; each is a pre-existing entity that metric governance subsequently enters and reshapes. The theoretical question this empirical foundation forecloses is whether metrics can function not as a variable that reshapes organizations, but as infrastructure that makes organizational formation possible in the first place. In the sociological sense developed by Star and Ruhleder (1996), infrastructure is the taken-for-granted substrate that enables action, understood here as the condition of possibility for a range of practices rather than a determinant of any particular outcome. When platform metrics operate as infrastructure in this sense, actors can orient their strategies, investments, and collaborative decisions around the anticipation of metric outcomes before any stable organizational form has crystallized. The organizational field does not precede the metrics that govern it; the metrics precede and partly constitute the field.

2.3 Dual-Legibility: Mechanism and Theoretical Stakes

Each of the three bodies of literature reviewed above illuminates a part of the organizational process documented in this study, yet each stops short of what the vertical drama case requires.

Ethnic economy scholarship explains how co-ethnic networks drive recruitment, organization, and mobility, but treats the informational infrastructure of incorporation as given rather than as something that metrics might reconstitute. Research on platform metrics and commensuration explains how quantification produces objectivity and legitimacy within institutional domains (Espeland and Stevens 1998), but confines its analytical frame to single institutional domains, leaving untheorized what happens when a metric crosses institutional boundaries and becomes legible to a second evaluative system. The algorithmic management literature explains how metrics reshape existing organizations, but presupposes that an organization is already in place before metrics arrive.

Two existing concepts come closest to what the vertical drama case requires, yet neither captures it fully. Espeland and Stevens's (1998) commensuration framework shows how quantification produces institutional authority, but by design addresses legitimacy within a shared evaluative domain; it does not theorize what happens when a single metric simultaneously satisfies the criteria of two distinct systems, each operating on its own terms. Star and Griesemer's (1989) concept of boundary objects offers a partial analogy: artifacts that coordinate action across social worlds through interpretive flexibility, maintaining enough common identity to enable coordination without consensus. But platform metrics do not coordinate through interpretive ambiguity. Their cross-institutional power derives from a different property: not flexibility in meaning, but precision of fit—the capacity to satisfy the distinct evaluative criteria of multiple systems simultaneously, each on that system's own terms, without translation or negotiation.

Dual-legibility is proposed to name this property and explain its organizational consequences. Dual-legibility refers to the capacity of platform metrics to be simultaneously recognized as credible evidence by distinct institutional systems, each applying its own evaluative

criteria. Building on Espeland and Stevens's insight that commensuration produces legitimacy, but extending it across rather than within institutional domains, dual-legibility shows how the same quantified output can satisfy the standards of both immigration governance and commercial market evaluation at once, mobilizing the resources of multiple institutional domains simultaneously and providing organizational momentum that neither system could generate independently and that co-ethnic networks alone cannot produce. This cross-institutional property explains both the extraordinary speed of incorporation documented in this study and the structural fragility that incorporation produces: when the metric foundation that satisfied both systems simultaneously begins to erode, it erodes in both directions at once, leaving workers without the relational buffer that ethnic economy embeddedness would have provided. The analysis that follows traces how this mechanism operates across four stages of organizational formation, documents its dual capacity as incorporation accelerator and disposability engine, and develops its implications for understanding a new form of inequality in platform-mediated immigrant labor markets.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Setting

This study examines the U.S. vertical drama industry, a highly platformized cultural sector whose production networks are staffed primarily by Chinese international students and recent graduates, as a strategic site for observing dual-legibility in operation. Vertical drama, also called short drama or micro drama, originated in China as a mobile-first content format with episodes of one to two minutes per installment. It achieved rapid commercial scale in the Chinese market during the COVID-19 period and has since expanded aggressively into the United States, led by

companies such as ReelShort and DramaBox. The production economics of the format (low per-episode budgets, short turnaround cycles, and publicly visible engagement metrics on platform interfaces) make metric performance both the primary signal of commercial value and a readily documentable record of individual achievement.

This industry constitutes a theoretically strategic case for three reasons. First, the coupling between immigration governance and commercial evaluation is unusually direct: the same platform metrics that determine whether a project is commercially viable are also the primary evidentiary basis on which practitioners build O-1 visa applications. This makes dual-legibility not an occasional feature of the industry but its structural condition. Second, the industry is sufficiently recent and organizationally fluid that its formation processes remain visible; practitioners can describe the emergence of roles, firms, and production norms from within living memory, allowing the organizational genesis that the theoretical framework targets to be traced in real time. Third, because the workforce is composed almost entirely of Chinese international film students, the industry offers an unusually focused lens on how a specific immigrant population navigates the intersection of platform labor and immigration governance, without the confounding variation that more demographically diverse industries would introduce.

3.2 Data Collection

The study draws on three types of data, each designed to capture a distinct dimension of the dual-legibility mechanism. Together they constitute a triangulated design in which no single data source could sustain the analysis alone: interviews access the actor recognition through which dual-legibility is activated; participant observation captures the industry norms and informal knowledge through which that recognition circulates; and platform data provide structural evidence of the cross-institutional reach of metrics.

In-depth interviews were conducted with ten practitioners occupying diverse positions within the industry, ranging from directors and scriptwriters to producers, editors, and technical crew (see Table 1, below). Respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to maximize variation across role, seniority, employment arrangement, and immigration status, the axes along which dual-legibility operates differently. Interview duration ranged from one to three and a half hours. The interview sequence was designed to achieve theoretical coverage across the principal axes of variation in the dual-legibility mechanism (role, seniority, immigration status, and entry timing) rather than distributional representativeness (Small 2009). Across the ten interviews conducted to date, the core organizational dynamics identified in the analysis recurred consistently across respondents occupying different positions, providing a basis for theoretical elaboration. Additional interviews are ongoing to extend coverage, particularly among practitioners in later career stages and those who have exited the industry. Participant observation was conducted over two weeks in Los Angeles, focused on production settings, informal professional gatherings, and direct interaction with practitioners across role types. This initial fieldwork phase is supplemented by extended online observation of WeChat communities used by industry practitioners for crew recruitment, information exchange, and peer assistance, which provided direct evidence of how immigration concerns, including O-1 application strategies, circulate within professional networks in real time. A second phase of on-site fieldwork is planned for May through August 2026, which will extend observational coverage to include production sets, post-production workflows, and industry events, with particular attention to the displacement dynamics identified in the self-reinforcement stage of the analysis.

Platform data were collected directly from publicly accessible sources, including ReelShort, IMDb, and LinkedIn, covering the first fifty U.S. vertical dramas produced for ReelShort. These

include performance metrics such as view counts and engagement indicators, and descriptive metadata including crew lists, genre tags, and release dates. From these primary data, derived analytical variables were constructed: collaboration frequencies calculated from crew co-participation, and genre distinctiveness operationalized as cosine distance between each drama's tag vector and those of dramas released in the preceding six months. These computational measures serve not as a parallel quantitative study but as structural corroboration for the organizational patterns identified in qualitative analysis. Additional informants were consulted outside the ten core respondents, including legal professionals with direct knowledge of O-1 adjudication practice in the entertainment industry; their accounts inform the analysis of the institutional coupling between platform metrics and immigration governance but are not included in Table 1.

TABLE 1

List of Interviewees and Key Attributes

No.	Name	Role	Gender	Entry	Visa	Current Position
1	Oliver	Director	M	2023/03	O-1	Long-term contract (resource exchange); art film director
2	Anna	Director	F	2023/10	F-1	Part-time; ultimate goal commercial films
3	Derek	1st AC	M	2024/02	CPT (applying O-1)	Freelancing in vertical drama
4	Owen	DIT & Post-Production Supervisor	M	2023/12	O-1	Freelancing; running film culture podcast
5	River	Camera Operator	M	2025/03	F-1	Part-time; considering return to China
6	Tanya	Scriptwriter	F	2023/09	O-1	Freelancing in vertical drama scriptwriting
7	Sandy	Art/Production Asst. & Casting	F	2025/01	OPT	Part-time
8	Agnes	Editor & Post-Production Supervisor	F	2023/12	O-1	In-house supervisor; owner of editing studio
9	Kathy	Producer	F	2024/09	O-1	Freelance producer

No.	Name	Role	Gender	Entry	Visa	Current Position
10	Brenda	Producer	F	2023/03	O-1	Head of Studio

Note.—All names are pseudonyms. Visa statuses reflect self-reported status at time of interview.

3.3 Data Analysis

The study adopts an abductive analytic strategy, treating theory-building as an iterative movement between empirical observation and conceptual interpretation in which unexpected patterns prompt reorientation of the analytical frame rather than linear accumulation of coded categories (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The initial empirical puzzle—the extraordinary speed at which a cohesive immigrant labor network assembled around vertical drama production—was not anticipated at the outset; it emerged from the interview data and redirected analytical attention toward the cross-institutional properties of platform metrics as an organizational force.

Although the study is based on ten interviews, the analytical claim is not about distributional prevalence but about mechanism: how dual-legibility operates, through what processes, and with what organizational consequences. For this purpose, the relevant criterion of data adequacy is theoretical coverage rather than numerical representativeness (Ragin 1992; Small 2009). The ten respondents span a wide range of production roles, immigration statuses, and career stages within which the mechanism operates, a purposive diversity that is more analytically informative than a larger sample drawn from a narrower range of positions. The platform data provide independent structural verification that the patterns identified in interviews are not idiosyncratic to individual accounts but are grounded in observable organizational and institutional realities. The epistemological core of the study remains qualitative: the central aim is to theorize the organizational logics through which platform metrics, immigration regimes, and cultural production intersect, not to estimate the frequency of any particular outcome.

4 Findings

The analysis that follows traces the organizational formation of the U.S. vertical drama industry across four stages: aggregation, configuration, alignment, and self-reinforcement. These stages were not imposed on the data as a prior theoretical scheme; they emerged from the interview material as analytically distinct moments in a process of organizational genesis, each characterized by a different relationship between platform metrics, actor behavior, and organizational structure.

The four stages map onto, but do not collapse into, the three dimensions of ethnic economy formation developed in the literature review: aggregation onto recruitment, configuration onto organizational form, and self-reinforcement onto mobility. Between configuration and self-reinforcement, however, the analysis identifies a fourth stage, alignment, that ethnic economy theory has not theorized: the process through which metric-driven evaluation reorganizes professional judgment from within, creating the shared organizational consensus that makes inflationary dynamics possible.

4.1 Aggregation: How Dual-Legibility Assembled a Labor Pool

The rapid assembly of a Chinese immigrant labor pool in the U.S. vertical drama industry cannot be explained by co-ethnic network recruitment alone. Network ties were present and operative: most practitioners entered through classmates, friends, or co-ethnic professional contacts, but they are a constant feature of immigrant labor markets, not a variable that can account for the unusual speed and scale of this industry's growth. What changed was the motivational infrastructure that metrics provided. Because vertical drama platform metrics were legible to both commercial evaluators and immigration authorities, participation in the industry offered a dual reward unavailable in any prior context to Chinese film students in the United States: high compensation from a rapidly expanding commercial sector, and a publicly verifiable record of

achievement usable as primary evidence in O-1 visa applications. It is this dual-legibility of metrics, not network density alone, that transformed a niche opportunity into a mass convergence.

The institutional coupling between platform metrics and immigration governance was not structurally predetermined; it emerged through a specific sequence of legal practice. Before the vertical drama sector existed, Chinese film students pursuing the O-1 visa faced a single dominant pathway: accumulating festival awards from internationally recognized competitions. Owen, a digital imaging technician who obtained his O-1 through this traditional route, described the process as demanding and highly selective, requiring more than ten festival-winning short films, a level of achievement confined to graduates of top programs such as AFI. As Owen noted, most of his peers would not even attempt an O-1 application under these conditions, knowing their chances were negligible. The emergence of vertical drama altered this evidentiary landscape. As Nina, a paralegal at an immigration law firm specializing in entertainment industry clients, explained, attorneys initially introduced vertical drama projects into O-1 applications as supplementary evidence for applicants who lacked sufficient festival credits. The tactic proved effective: unlike festival awards, which depend on opaque jury evaluations and institutional gatekeepers, platform metrics are publicly accessible, continuously updated, and numerically precise. A drama with hundreds of thousands of views constitutes a transparent, independently verifiable claim of audience reach and commercial impact, criteria that map directly onto the O-1 standard of demonstrated extraordinary ability. Once this evidentiary mapping was established and began producing successful applications, vertical drama metrics ceased to be supplementary and became a primary pathway to O-1 status for an entirely new population of applicants. Table 2 summarizes the key institutional differences between H-1B, O-1, and EB-1A visa pathways that shape the dual-legibility mechanism analyzed in this study.

TABLE 2

Key Institutional Differences between H-1B, O-1, and EB-1A Visa Pathways

Dimension	H-1B (Specialty Occupation)	O-1 (Extraordinary Ability/Achievement; commonly O-1A)	EB-1A (Extraordinary Ability—Immigrant)
Legal nature	Nonimmigrant (temporary worker status)	Nonimmigrant (temporary worker status)	Immigrant category (employment-based first preference—permanent residence pathway)
Core purpose	Fill a specialty occupation role (position requires specialized knowledge and typically at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent)	Enable work in the U.S. for individuals with extraordinary ability/achievement in specified fields, tied to the petitioned work/activities	Grant permanent-residence eligibility for individuals with extraordinary ability and sustained national or international acclaim; applicant must show intent to continue work in the area
Employer required?	Yes. Petition is filed by a U.S. employer (petitioner) on the worker's behalf	Requires a U.S. petitioner (employer or agent); no true self-petition. In practice, many project-based or self-directed workers use an agent (or, where applicable, a beneficiary-owned U.S. entity) as petitioner, making O-1 much less employer-dependent than H-1B.	No. Self-petition is allowed (file Form I-140 yourself); no job offer required
Dual intent	Permitted	Permitted (recognized in DOS Foreign Affairs Manual)	Not applicable in the same way (it is an immigrant category)
Evidentiary center of gravity	Proving the job qualifies as a specialty occupation + the worker's degree/credentials fit that role; petition is employer-centered	Proving the beneficiary's extraordinary ability/achievement (sustained acclaim/top of field) + that they are coming to perform the petitioned work; petition is employer/agent-centered	Proving extraordinary ability + sustained acclaim through required evidentiary criteria (e.g., major award or meeting criteria) + intent to continue work in the field; petition can be self-directed

Note.—This table summarizes U.S. government guidance and rules from: USCIS overviews for H-1B, O-1, and EB-1/EB-1A (including relevant USCIS Policy Manual chapters and USCIS policy alert on extraordinary-ability evidence), plus U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual (9 FAM) provisions on dual intent for O visas and H-1B dual intent distinctions. “Dual intent” refers to the permissibility of holding both immigrant and nonimmigrant intent simultaneously.

The transmission of this dual-legibility through the co-ethnic community unfolded in three analytically distinguishable phases, each corresponding to a different barrier to entry and a different motivational trigger. In the first phase, concentrated in 2023, the primary obstacle was informational and aesthetic: most Chinese film students were aware neither of the commercial opportunity nor of its immigration implications, and those who were aware often dismissed vertical drama as a low-status cultural product incompatible with their artistic aspirations. Entry in this phase was driven primarily by compensation. Anna, invited into the industry through her prior connections in Chinese film and television, encountered no aesthetic resistance; her commercial orientation made vertical drama a natural fit. Oliver, introduced by classmates, was more ambivalent; he placed significant weight on his artistic ambitions, but found the pay impossible to refuse. An eight-day shoot plus post-production, roughly a month of work, yielded approximately USD 7,000 at a moment when Chinese international students had almost no access to paid commercial film work in the United States. The first entrants were those with the relevant skills and networks to be recruited, for whom the financial reward was sufficient to overcome whatever cultural reservations they held.

The second phase, concentrated in 2024, was activated by the emergence of successful O-1 applications using vertical drama evidence. Once it became known within professional networks that platform metrics could anchor a viable immigration pathway, the motivational calculus shifted

for a broader population. Derek had heard about the commercial opportunity as early as 2023 but had deliberately held back, prioritizing his own creative projects. By late 2024, facing the end of his degree program and the onset of post-graduation visa uncertainty, he reconsidered. The combination of income and immigration credential, each individually attractive and together structurally compelling, overcame the aesthetic resistance that had previously kept him out. The key change was not that vertical drama had become more artistically respectable; it had not. What changed was that the immigration value of participation had become legible and credible through documented cases. Dual-legibility, in this phase, operated less as an abstract structural property and more as a form of community knowledge circulating through co-ethnic networks and progressively lowering the threshold of entry for those who had previously prioritized other goals.

The third phase, concentrated in 2025, saw the industry absorb workers who lacked the technical qualifications that earlier phases had required. By this point, the dual rewards of vertical drama participation had been so thoroughly transmitted through the community of Chinese film students that the industry had become a structuring feature of everyday social life, a near-ubiquitous topic of conversation, a shared reference point, a default career consideration. Sandy, an animation major at CalArts with no production background in live-action film, entered as a set production assistant, a role requiring no specialized skills, after a friend suggested she join a crew. River, whose limited English proficiency had prevented earlier participation, finally entered through a classmate's introduction as a camera operator, a position executable almost entirely in Mandarin. Neither possessed the profile that the industry's earlier phases had demanded. Their entry was made possible not by any change in their qualifications but by the progressive lowering of threshold roles as the industry expanded and differentiated its labor needs.

Taken together, the three phases reveal dual-legibility operating as a phased attractor: in the first phase attracting those with relevant skills through financial reward; in the second drawing in the reluctant through the addition of immigration value; in the third incorporating even the unqualified through the saturation of community information. At each phase, co-ethnic networks remained the channel through which recruitment occurred, but the motivational force was supplied by the dual institutional legibility of platform metrics, not network density alone.

4.2 Configuration: Expansion, Formalization, and Selective Consolidation

The rapid assembly of a labor pool created a second organizational problem: how to convert individual resources and skills into durable positions within an industry whose stability depended on continuous metric output. Dual-legibility shaped the solution in a specific way. It simultaneously rewarded organizational forms that could scale metric production efficiently, satisfying the commercial logic of a platform economy premised on high-volume content, and those that could maximize the immigration-legibility of individual metric records. The interaction of these two pressures produced a characteristic two-phase dynamic: a period of organizational expansion in which practitioners extended the industry's value chain and formalized their participation through firm-level structures, followed by a period of consolidation in which the platform's demand for sustained metric output eliminated organizational forms that could not meet it.

In the expansion phase, the growth of the labor pool created space for practitioners to occupy positions along the production chain that the platforms had not originally structured. The earliest model was direct and thin: a platform company refined a script, contracted a director, the director assembled a crew, and the company arranged post-production. As the industry scaled, this model gave way to a more differentiated value chain. Some practitioners established scriptwriting

studios to develop and revise scripts in bulk; others formed production companies that contracted with directing teams and interfaced with platforms as firm-level counterparties rather than individual creators; others opened post-production studios employing several regular editors; still others set up equipment rental operations supplying the standardized gear that vertical drama shoots required. Each of these organizational forms was anchored in the same commercial logic: in a platform economy where metric performance drives content investment, the ability to produce more content faster creates competitive advantage. Practitioners who could contribute to this throughput, whether by supplying scripts, equipment, or post-production capacity, had a viable position in the emerging ecosystem.

Alongside this value-chain extension, practitioners systematically formalized their participation through firm-level structures (LLCs, studios, and production companies) in ways that reflected the immigration dimension of dual-legibility as much as the commercial one. A company could serve as the O-1 petitioning entity; firm-level achievements constituted recognizable evidence of leadership; and credits registered under a studio name aggregated dispersed platform data into a cumulative, institutionally legible record.

The expansion phase, however, generated organizational redundancy as well as capacity. Some small studios attempted to develop scripts and produce finished dramas independently, then sell the completed products to platforms. This model proved unsustainable: without the direct feedback loop between platform data and production decisions that in-house or closely contracted teams maintained, independently produced content could not reliably meet the performance thresholds that platforms demanded. As Agnes noted, these studios gradually exited because their individual deliverables could not compete with platform-aligned teams that had already internalized production standards optimized for metric performance. The consolidation phase thus

operated through a selection mechanism: organizational forms capable of sustaining high-volume, high-velocity metric output were reinforced, while those that introduced friction into the feedback loop between content and data were eliminated. On the company side, this pressure produced a structural bifurcation: key production and post-production roles were progressively fixed as in-house positions, while creative and technical roles remained on a freelance basis. The logic was not aesthetic but operational: execution-oriented positions required continuous alignment with platform-driven imperatives, while creative roles could be sourced from the rotating labor pool that aggregation had assembled.

This structural bifurcation is visible in the collaboration network constructed from the crew lists of ReelShort's first fifty U.S. vertical dramas (Figure 1). Nodes represent production workers; edges indicate co-participation in the same production team across two or more projects. The network exhibits a highly centralized structure in which a small number of nodes occupy positions of high connectivity. Cross-referencing these central nodes with LinkedIn profiles identifies them predominantly as producers and post-production supervisors holding stable, full-time positions within vertical drama companies, with earlier entry dates and longer continuous tenure than peripheral nodes. Peripheral nodes represent directors and technical crew operating on a flexible, project-by-project basis. The network pattern thus provides structural corroboration for the interview-based account: the consolidation phase produced a stable organizational core of execution-oriented roles and a flexible periphery of creative and technical labor, with metric performance determining the boundary between them.

Vertical Drama Network (cooperation ≥ 2)

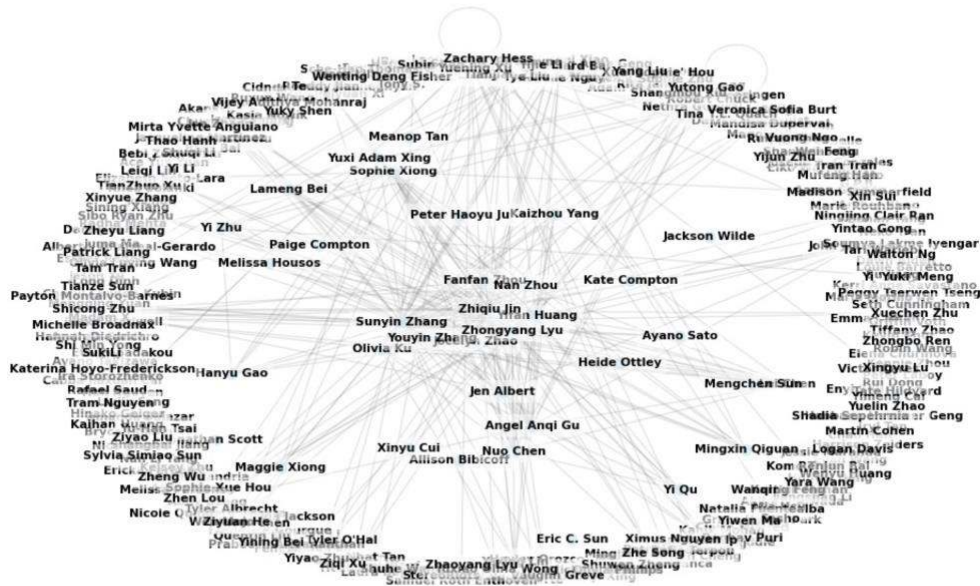


Figure 1. Collaboration Network of the Vertical Drama Production Field. Nodes represent production workers involved in ReelShort's first fifty U.S. vertical dramas (released May 1, 2022–October 1, 2024); edges indicate co-participation in the same production team (≥ 2 collaborations). Central nodes indicate individuals with higher collaboration frequency, predominantly occupying in-house production and post-production roles. Peripheral nodes represent more loosely affiliated creative and technical personnel.

4.3 Alignment: Metric Logic as Shared Professional Standard

The organizational structure established in the configuration phase set the stage for a deeper transformation: not merely of how the industry was organized, but of how its participants understood good work. The practitioners who entered the vertical drama sector brought with them heterogeneous professional standards, including directors trained in art cinema, scriptwriters schooled in narrative complexity, editors committed to documentary realism. These standards were not immediately abandoned; early accounts describe friction, resistance, and self-doubt. Yet

because platform metrics were simultaneously legible to commercial evaluators and immigration authorities, they functioned as the industry's only cross-role evaluative currency, a standard that practitioners with divergent backgrounds and commitments each had independent reasons to adopt. Over time, this convergent pressure produced alignment: a shared metric-oriented logic of production that operated not through formal compulsion but through the iterative feedback of rewards, gradually reorganizing professional judgment from within. The result was an organizational consensus that made high-volume metric output not only structurally possible but professionally intelligible across roles.

The aggregate effect of this alignment is visible in the genre patterns of vertical drama content over time. Figure 2 plots the distinctiveness of each of ReelShort's first fifty U.S. releases, measured as cosine distance between each drama's genre tag vector and those of dramas released in the preceding six months. The figure reveals a recurrent dynamic: pronounced peaks of high distinctiveness featuring novel genre combinations that generate strong metric performance are consistently followed by convergence in which subsequent releases cluster around the successful formula. This innovation-imitation cycle is the structural signature of an industry in which professional judgment has been reorganized around metric feedback: distinctiveness is sought instrumentally, exploited rapidly, and abandoned once its metric yield is exhausted (Hirsch 1972; Caves 2000), compressed here by the real-time feedback that platform metrics provide.

and structural blueprints derived from their highest-performing titles; the writer's task is to integrate and recombine these elements, not to originate. A script she produced combining a BDSM premise with an alpha-CEO formula—explicitly modeled on one of the platform's most successful titles, differing primarily in the addition of the BDSM element—was produced and went viral. That drama subsequently became the primary evidence in her O-1 visa application. The same work that demonstrated commercial metric performance simultaneously demonstrated extraordinary ability under immigration law. The dual-legibility of the outcome was not incidental to the process that produced it; it was the motivational infrastructure that had made Tanya willing to produce it in the first place.

Alignment reshaped not only individual creative standards but also the authority relations between roles. Oliver, one of the earliest directors in the industry, described a structural subordination that metric accountability had produced: producers, responsible for delivering view counts and revenue to platform executives, had effectively become the primary decision-makers on set, while directors were positioned as replaceable executors within a workflow defined by metric imperatives. When Oliver revised scripts independently, a standard practice in conventional film production, a producer arranged for his behavior to be monitored. The episode was revealing: directorial autonomy, understood within film school training as a professional prerogative, was here a threat to metric accountability. Only a prior hit record granted a director leverage in this system. Professional authority, in other words, had been recalibrated around metric performance rather than craft credentials, completing the alignment that metric-driven rewards had initiated across the organizational hierarchy.

By the time organizational positions had stabilized and role-specific metric logics had been internalized, the vertical drama industry operated as a highly coordinated production system in

which disagreements about quality had been subordinated to a shared metric language. This organizational coherence was the condition of possibility for the high-velocity output the industry's commercial model required, and, as the following section shows, for the inflationary pressures that coherence would generate.

4.4 Self-Reinforcement: Metric Inflation and the Fragility of Dual-Legibility

The alignment of professional judgment around metric performance transformed the vertical drama industry into a highly efficient production machine, and in doing so set the conditions for its own instability. A system in which all participants optimize for the same metric outputs, coordinated by the dual-legibility that makes those outputs simultaneously valuable across commercial and immigration domains, generates a positive feedback loop: more practitioners producing more content generates more metric data, which attracts more entrants and more institutional recognition, which in turn intensifies the pressure to produce. This self-reinforcing dynamic is what drove the industry's remarkable organizational velocity. But self-reinforcement is not self-sustaining. The same mechanism that accelerated organizational formation also accumulated two interlocking forms of systemic fragility: metric inflation within the industry, and a parallel erosion of institutional credibility in the immigration domain. Because the two were coupled through dual-legibility, their deterioration was not independent: it unfolded simultaneously across both domains, leaving the organizational structure with no stable ground to fall back on.

The commercial dimension of this fragility emerged from the logic of the feedback loop itself. As the labor pool expanded and alignment standardized production toward metric-optimized content, the total volume of vertical drama output grew rapidly. Platform algorithms that had initially rewarded novel content combinations, the distinctiveness peaks visible in Figure 2, faced

an increasingly crowded content environment in which the same formulas were being executed simultaneously by multiple competing production teams. View counts that had represented genuine audience reach in the industry's early phase became progressively harder to achieve as audience attention was distributed across a larger content supply. The metric thresholds that practitioners used to benchmark success, and that immigration attorneys had calibrated O-1 applications around, were becoming simultaneously more demanding to reach and less reliable as indicators of genuine extraordinary ability. The industry had inflated its own evidentiary currency.

The immigration dimension of this fragility developed through a parallel process of institutional learning. As successful O-1 applications using vertical drama evidence multiplied and became known within the practitioner community, USCIS adjudicators encountered an increasing volume of applications centered on platform metrics from the same narrow industry. Nina, whose firm had handled a significant number of these applications, described a discernible shift in adjudicator responses over the study period: requests for evidence became more detailed, scrutiny of platform data sources intensified, and approval rates for applications relying primarily on view counts without supplementary indicators of professional recognition began to decline. The institutional logic was straightforward: when a large and growing number of applicants from the same professional community present similar metric profiles as evidence of extraordinary ability, the claim that such metrics demonstrate extraordinary ability rather than ordinary participation in a metric-rich environment, becomes harder to sustain. The evidentiary value of platform data was being eroded not by any change in the data itself but by the very success of the mechanism that had established its credibility. Dual-legibility had created its own adversarial condition: the more practitioners exploited the institutional fit between platform metrics and O-1 criteria, the more

visible that exploitation became, and the more incentive adjudicators had to revise the evidentiary standard.

What makes this dynamic theoretically significant is that the two forms of fragility (commercial metric inflation and immigration credibility erosion) were not independent developments that happened to coincide. They were structurally coupled through the dual-legibility of the same metrics. In an ethnic economy organized around relational embeddedness, the deterioration of one dimension of worker security (say, the loss of a co-ethnic employer's business) does not automatically propagate to other dimensions; the community network, the accumulated trust, the co-ethnic firm in a different sub-sector can absorb the shock. In the vertical drama case, the organizational infrastructure rested on a single metric foundation that was simultaneously the basis of commercial value and immigration credential. When that foundation began to erode, it eroded in both directions at once. Derek, reflecting on the state of the industry in early 2025, described having entered at what he now recognized as the peak of the dual-reward cycle: the projects he had worked on were producing lower views than comparable projects from a year earlier, and the O-1 applications his peers had submitted were encountering more resistance than the cases that had circulated as success stories when he decided to enter. The same information infrastructure that had recruited him into the industry, peer accounts of successful dual-legibility, was now transmitting accounts of its failure. The organizational momentum that alignment had produced was intact; the metric foundation it had been built on was not.

The self-reinforcing dynamic also produced a structural shift in the composition of the workforce that ethnic economy theory would recognize as a mobility consequence, but whose mechanism differs from classic accounts. As the industry matured and metric inflation compressed the returns available to any individual practitioner, platform companies and large production firms

began selectively replacing Chinese immigrant workers in above-the-line creative roles (directing, producing, scriptwriting) with locally recruited practitioners who did not carry visa-related costs and constraints. Oliver noted that by late 2024, ReelShort had begun hiring American directors for certain projects, citing the ability to avoid the administrative overhead associated with international workers. The stickiness that ethnic economy theory associates with relational embeddedness, the friction that slows both entry and exit, was absent. Workers who had been rapidly incorporated through dual-legibility could be just as rapidly displaced when the metric rationale for their incorporation weakened. The organizational form that dual-legibility had assembled did not protect the workers it had mobilized; it rendered them replaceable at the same speed at which it had recruited them.

5 Discussion

The foregoing analysis advances two interconnected arguments. The first is that digital platforms function as a qualitatively different organizational infrastructure for immigrant labor than ethnic economy theory has theorized: not merely faster, but structurally distinct in how they recruit, organize, and dispose of workers. The second is that dual-legibility explains this difference: when the same metrics are simultaneously recognized by immigration governance and commercial evaluation, they generate cross-institutional momentum that co-ethnic networks alone cannot produce, and cross-institutional fragility that co-ethnic embeddedness would have cushioned.

5.1 Platform Metrics and the Cross-Institutional Reach of Commensuration

This study extends the sociology of quantification by showing that platform commensuration can generate organizational effects that exceed the boundaries of the institutional domain in which metrics are produced. Existing research has documented how platforms govern

user behavior through visibility mechanisms (Bucher 2012), how they render cultural commodities structurally contingent through continuous metric renegotiation (Nieborg and Poell 2018), and how commensuration produces legitimacy under uncertainty within organizational fields (Espeland and Stevens 1998). These accounts treat the organizational effects of metrics as bounded by the evaluative system that produces them: platform metrics govern platform participants, and the authority of commensuration extends as far as the institutional domain within which it operates.

The vertical drama case reveals a different possibility. When platform metrics acquire cross-institutional legibility: when the same quantified outputs are recognized as credible evidence by a second institutional system operating on independent evaluative criteria, their organizational force is not merely extended but transformed. In the ethnic economy context examined here, this transformation took a specific form: metrics that would otherwise function as commercial performance indicators became simultaneously immigration credentials, mobilizing the organizational resources of two institutional systems at once. The result was an organizational velocity, measured as the speed and scale at which a labor pool was assembled, structured, and aligned, that neither system could have generated independently. This finding suggests that commensuration theory needs to account not only for how metrics govern within institutional domains, but for how cross-institutional legibility amplifies the organizational power of quantification in ways that single-domain analysis cannot capture.

5.2 Metrics as Organizational Genesis, Not Only Organizational Governance

The findings also challenge a foundational assumption of the algorithmic management literature: that organizations precede the metrics that subsequently govern them. Research in this tradition has shown how platform-mediated quantification reshapes existing organizations, redistributing authority in newsrooms (Anderson 2011; Christin 2018), producing contested terrain

between workers and managers in gig platforms (Kellogg, Valentine, and Christin 2020; Rosenblat and Stark 2016), and constituting a distinct logic of co-optation through continuous metric updating (Stark and Vanden Broeck 2024). In each case, the analytical question is how metrics transform a pre-existing organizational entity. The organization is the given; metrics are the intervening variable.

In the vertical drama case, this sequence was reversed. Platform metrics were present in the motivational and strategic calculations of individual actors before any stable organizational form existed; the industry's production chains, role structures, and firm-level arrangements emerged in response to a metric-defined opportunity structure that preceded them. Metrics did not govern an organization; they constituted the infrastructure within which an organization became possible. This finding points to a broader theoretical revision: algorithmic management research should distinguish between the governance function of metrics: how they regulate behavior within existing organizations; and their infrastructural function: how they can serve as the generative condition for organizational genesis. The vertical drama case represents an extreme instance of the infrastructural function, made possible by the specific properties of dual-legibility, but the broader pattern: platform metrics as organizational precondition rather than organizational modifier, may obtain wherever metrics acquire sufficient cross-institutional reach to make participation individually rational before collective structure is in place.

5.3 Platform Legibility and the Transformation of Ethnic Economy Dynamics

The most direct theoretical contribution of this study is to the ethnic economy literature, which has theorized immigrant labor market incorporation primarily through the mechanism of relational embeddedness. The four-stage analysis of the vertical drama industry provides a systematic comparison of how each dimension of ethnic economy formation (recruitment,

organization, professional consensus, and mobility) unfolds differently when the organizational infrastructure is metric-based rather than relational. Table 3 summarizes this comparison.

TABLE 3

Ethnic Economy Formation vs. Platform-Mediated Formation Across Four Stages

Stage	Traditional Ethnic Economy	Platform-Mediated Industry	Dual-Legibility Mechanism
Aggregation (Recruitment)	Gradual, individual-level recruitment through co-ethnic referral chains; entry conditioned on prior relational trust	Phased mass convergence: skilled workers first, reluctant workers second, low-threshold workers third; rapid saturation within three years	Dual reward structure (financial + immigration) emerges sequentially and is transmitted through co-ethnic networks, progressively lowering entry barriers across successive cohorts
Configuration (Organization)	Firm-based incorporation; workers join co-ethnic companies as employees; organizational form stable and community-embedded	Value-chain extension in both directions; individual firm formation (LLCs, studios) followed by platform-led consolidation into core/periphery structure	Commercial pressure rewards scale and efficiency; immigration pressure rewards firm-level credit aggregation; interaction produces expansion then selective consolidation
Alignment (Professional Consensus)	Professional standards cohere slowly through community practice, mentorship, and long-term co-ethnic socialization; not theorized as a distinct organizational stage	Rapid convergence of heterogeneous professional standards toward metric-oriented logic through iterative reward feedback; shared evaluative framework achieved across roles within years	Metric rewards operate simultaneously as income and immigration credential; dual-legibility makes metric optimization individually rational across all role types, accelerating consensus formation
Self-reinforcement (Mobility)	Mobility constrained by legal precarity and network path-dependence; workers difficult to exit due to relational stickiness; exploitation possible but community friction slows disposal	Metric inflation compresses returns; USCIS credibility erosion undermines immigration value; local worker substitution begins; fast-in fast-out displacement as productivity surplus triggers sorting	Dual-legibility couples commercial and immigration fragility; collapse is simultaneous across both domains; absence of relational infrastructure removes friction that would slow worker disposal

Note.— ‘Traditional Ethnic Economy’ refers to the organizational dynamics theorized in the ethnic enclave and ethnic economy literature (Wilson and Portes 1980; Waldinger 1994; Light and Bonacich 1988). ‘Platform-Mediated Industry’ refers to the dynamics observed in the U.S. vertical drama sector. ‘Dual-Legibility Mechanism’ identifies the specific property of platform metrics that accounts for observed differences between the two.

The comparison reveals that the differences between ethnic economy and platform-mediated dynamics are not matters of degree (faster recruitment, more efficient organization) but of kind. The ethnic economy literature has identified relational embeddedness as the constitutive basis of immigrant incorporation: it is what enables recruitment, shapes organizational form, and provides the friction that slows both entry and exit. The vertical drama case shows that when platform legibility substitutes for relational embeddedness as the organizational infrastructure, each of these functions is transformed. Recruitment becomes a phased, mass-scale process driven by the information transmission of dual rewards rather than the slow accumulation of co-ethnic trust. Organizational form is shaped by the interaction of commercial and immigration pressures rather than by community-embedded firm structures. Professional consensus is achieved through metric feedback rather than community socialization. And mobility is governed by metric credibility rather than network path-dependence, a condition that enables rapid incorporation and equally rapid disposal.

The most consequential theoretical implication concerns the relationship between incorporation and protection. Ethnic economy theory has recognized that co-ethnic incorporation does not guarantee favorable outcomes: enclave workers may earn less than mainstream counterparts (Sanders and Nee 1987), and legal precarity can intensify exploitation (De Genova 2005; Menjivar and Abrego 2012). But in these accounts, the relational infrastructure that recruits workers also provides some organizational friction against their most rapid disposal: community reputation circulates, co-ethnic obligation constrains, and the stickiness of network embeddedness slows exit even when it also constrains mobility. Platform legibility removes this friction. The same property that makes metric-based incorporation fast, rooted in its independence from relational trust, makes metric-based disposal equally fast. When the dual-legibility of platform

metrics erodes, through commercial inflation or regulatory revision, the organizational basis of workers' incorporation can dissolve simultaneously across both institutional domains. The result is a form of immigrant labor incorporation that is structurally inclusive in its recruitment logic and structurally exclusionary in its consolidation logic, a pattern of apparent openness that conceals the conditions of rapid disposability.

5.4 Limitations and Boundary Conditions

This study's findings should be understood as an account of a specific mechanism operating under specific institutional conditions, not as a general theory of platform-mediated immigrant labor. Three boundary conditions define the scope. First, dual-legibility depends on the O-1 visa's particular evidentiary logic, specifically evaluating extraordinary ability through demonstrated audience reach, which platform metrics can plausibly satisfy; visa categories that weight relational sponsorship more heavily may not generate the same dynamic. Second, vertical drama represents an extreme case of metric-platform coupling: short production timelines, natively digital content, and publicly accessible real-time data. Industries with longer cycles or stronger professional credentialing may exhibit weaker versions. Third, the qualitative design is suited to theorizing mechanism rather than estimating prevalence, and the rapid evolution of USCIS adjudication standards means the specific configuration analyzed here may already be shifting.

5.5 Future Directions

Three directions follow from this study. First, comparative research should examine whether dual-legibility operates in other platform-mediated cultural industries (music, gaming, influencer content) and how variation in immigration legal frameworks across national contexts shapes the conditions under which it can emerge. Second, future work should examine within-

industry inequality: this study identifies the structural conditions of disposability but does not trace how the benefits and risks of dual-legibility are distributed across practitioners who differ in role, seniority, gender, and immigration status. Third, the vertical drama case contributes to research on precarious work by showing how an ostensibly inclusive organizational form, one that lowers entry barriers and expands immigrant opportunity, can simultaneously structure rapid, systemic worker disposal through a mechanism less visible than conventional employer-employee precarity.

6 Conclusion

The vertical drama industry assembled a cohesive, organizationally differentiated immigrant labor force within three years: a pace that neither co-ethnic network recruitment nor conventional labor market mechanisms can account for. The analysis traced this process across four stages (aggregation, configuration, alignment, and self-reinforcement), and identified dual-legibility as the mechanism that explains both the speed of formation and the structure of fragility.

The core finding is that platform metrics, when simultaneously legible to immigration governance and commercial evaluation, function as a cross-institutional infrastructure for organizational genesis. They lower entry barriers by making dual rewards visible, shape organizational form by rewarding structures that can aggregate and amplify metric outputs, align professional standards by making metric optimization individually rational across all roles, and ultimately destabilize the organizational edifice they have built when the credibility of metrics erodes across both domains simultaneously. This is not an account of platform disruption of an existing ethnic economy; the vertical drama industry had no prior organizational form to disrupt.

It is an account of how a new form of legibility, portable, real-time, and institutionally fit, can constitute an organizational field de novo, and how the workers it mobilizes are exposed to a form of disposability that is structurally encoded in the mechanism that recruited them.

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