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Discrete Images in Archaeology and the Future: Spatiotemporal Folds and Memory Construction in Asian Immigrant Cinema

Yiyuan Pan ^{1,*}

¹ Qingdao Film Academy, Qingdao, Shandong, China

* Correspondence: Yiyuan Pan, Qingdao Film Academy, Qingdao, Shandong, China

Abstract: Asian immigrant cinema has emerged as a vital site for exploring the interplay between migration, cultural memory, and identity. While existing scholarship often addresses themes of belonging and heritage, it largely overlooks how specific narrative techniques, particularly spatiotemporal folds that disrupt linear time and reconfigure space, contribute to memory construction. This study addresses that gap by examining how temporal dislocation and spatial juxtaposition function as formal strategies for negotiating past and present in diasporic contexts. Through qualitative textual analysis and comparative case studies of two contemporary films, the research identifies recurring patterns in the use of non-linear timelines, cyclical structures, and liminal spaces. Findings reveal that spatiotemporal folds enable a dynamic integration of individual and collective memory, challenging binary distinctions between homeland and host society. Theoretically, this work advances film and memory studies by proposing a framework that links cinematic form to diasporic meaning-making. Practically, it offers filmmakers and cultural practitioners a nuanced understanding of how narrative structure can authentically convey the complexities of immigrant experience without resorting to linear historiography or cultural essentialism.

Keywords: Asian immigrant cinema; spatiotemporal folds; cultural memory; diaspora; narrative structure

1. Introduction

Asian immigrant cinema has become a significant medium for exploring migration, identity, and cultural memory. These films depict the experiences of diasporic communities, navigating the tension between heritage and new realities in foreign lands [1]. As such, these films serve not only as reflections of personal struggles but also as tools for constructing historical narratives and identities. Through nonlinear storytelling, temporal manipulation, and spatial dislocation, Asian immigrant cinema reconfigures the past and reimagines the future, shaping collective memories and cultural continuity [2].

This study addresses the gap between cinematic representation and cultural memory formation. While numerous studies explore cinema's role in representing diaspora and memory, few examine how temporal dislocation and spatiotemporal folds contribute to constructing these memories [3]. Films like *The Farewell* by Lulu Wang and *Minari* by Lee Isaac Chung employ nonlinear storytelling and temporal shifts to explore the intersection of past, present, and future in the immigrant experience [4]. These films reflect personal stories and broader socio-political contexts, offering deeper insights into migration and its impact on cultural memory.

While research on Asian immigrant cinema often centers on identity, assimilation, and cultural preservation, there is a gap regarding how spatiotemporal folds, narrative techniques that disrupt linear storytelling and challenge historical progression, construct memory [5]. Although scholars have examined memory in cinema through

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postcolonialism and trauma, the specific technique of spatiotemporal folds remains underexplored [6]. This technique transforms how audiences engage with the past and future, offering a fragmented, multifaceted view of history.

This paper fills this gap by analyzing how spatiotemporal folds are used in Asian immigrant cinema to create memory and historical continuity. By examining films that deploy these narrative strategies, this study explores how these techniques reflect the lived experiences of immigrants and offer a space for reimagining the past and envisioning a future beyond linear historical trajectories. This research will focus on *The Farewell* and *Minari*, both of which employ temporal shifts to explore memory, identity, and cultural preservation. The paper argues that spatiotemporal folds are essential tools in creating collective memory, allowing a negotiation of migration and diaspora complexities.

The study employs textual analysis, case study comparison, and historical analysis. Textual analysis will examine the narrative structures, character development, and use of temporal and spatial manipulation in the selected films. Case study comparison will offer insights into how different films use spatiotemporal folds in distinct ways to construct and represent memory. Historical analysis will contextualize the films within the broader socio-political and cultural landscape of Asian immigration, offering a framework for understanding the historical narratives embedded in the films.

This research has significant academic and practical implications. Academically, it contributes to diaspora cinema studies, offering new insights into how spatiotemporal techniques shape cultural memory. It also contributes to the discourse on memory, identity, and history in film, particularly in the context of migration. Practically, it can inform future cinematic works by demonstrating how filmmakers can use narrative techniques to address complex cultural and historical issues. Ultimately, this study enhances our understanding of how film can serve as a vehicle for memory construction and historical reimagining in Asian immigrant experiences.

2. Literature Review

The study of Asian immigrant cinema, particularly in relation to memory construction and identity formation, has gained significant attention in recent years. One key area of focus has been the role of cinema in representing the diasporic experience. Scholars have highlighted how films explore themes of migration, cultural adaptation, and the negotiation of personal and collective identities [7]. The primary advantage of this research lies in its ability to demonstrate the power of cinema as a tool for preserving cultural narratives and reflecting the emotional and psychological complexities of migration. These studies often emphasize the portrayal of the immigrant's struggle between maintaining ancestral heritage and integrating into a new society, a process that is intricately tied to memory formation and cultural continuity [8].

However, a notable gap in this body of research is the lack of attention given to the specific narrative techniques, such as spatiotemporal folds, that contribute to the construction of memory in these films. While the representation of cultural memory is frequently discussed, the manner in which films manipulate time and space to reflect the fluidity and fragmentation of immigrant experiences remains underexplored [9]. Temporal dislocation, for instance, is often a critical feature of immigrant narratives, as it allows for the representation of multiple timelines, historical gaps, and the simultaneous existence of past and present experiences [10]. Yet, the use of these temporal shifts as a deliberate technique to construct new forms of memory, identity, and historical continuity is seldom addressed in the existing literature.

Furthermore, while there is significant discourse on the role of memory in postcolonial cinema, much of this research remains focused on more traditional or linear forms of memory. Studies have largely concentrated on how cinema can be used as a means of revisiting and reinterpreting traumatic histories, such as colonialism and war [11]. These studies argue that memory in cinema serves as both a form of resistance and a means of reclaiming historical narratives [12]. While these insights are valuable, they often

fail to account for the more fluid, fragmented memory structures that are characteristic of the immigrant experience. In this context, the use of spatiotemporal folds presents a new and unexplored angle, as it introduces non-linear, non-traditional forms of memory construction.

One important area of contrast within the literature is the distinction between theoretical approaches that treat memory as a collective or individual experience. The concept of collective memory, often associated with national or cultural identities, suggests that memory is shared and passed down across generations. Conversely, individual memory is seen as fragmented, personal, and subject to the subjective experiences of the individual. While much of the existing scholarship on Asian immigrant cinema focuses on collective memory and identity, there is limited analysis of how these films use temporal dislocation and spatiotemporal folds to explore the interplay between individual and collective memory [13]. These folds provide a space where personal histories can interact with national narratives, creating new forms of memory that reflect the hybrid and evolving nature of immigrant identities.

The gap in existing research becomes even more apparent when considering the innovative role that films employing spatiotemporal folds can play in challenging conventional historical narratives [14]. By manipulating time and space, these films have the potential to offer a more nuanced and multifaceted perspective on immigration, one that goes beyond linear or conventional representations of history [15]. This study thus seeks to fill this gap by examining how spatiotemporal folds are used in Asian immigrant cinema to create new forms of memory and historical continuity.

In doing so, this paper will contribute to the existing body of research in several ways. First, it will offer a more comprehensive understanding of how temporal and spatial manipulation can be employed to construct memories that reflect the complexity of immigrant experiences. By focusing on the underexplored concept of spatiotemporal folds, the paper will provide new insights into the cinematic representation of migration and identity. Second, it will highlight the role of these techniques in bridging personal and collective histories, offering a unique approach to understanding the hybrid and fragmented nature of immigrant memory. Lastly, this study will contribute to the theoretical development of memory studies in cinema, expanding the framework to include non-linear, multi-dimensional forms of memory construction that are particularly relevant to the diasporic experience.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This section outlines the theoretical framework and research methodology employed in this study, providing an in-depth explanation of the analytical models guiding the investigation. The theoretical framework draws on concepts from memory studies, diaspora studies, and narrative theory, while the methodology utilizes qualitative research methods, specifically textual analysis and case study comparison. The aim is to examine how spatiotemporal folds are used in Asian immigrant cinema to construct memory, identity, and historical continuity.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is built around three main concepts: memory construction, diaspora and migration narratives, and spatiotemporal folds. Each concept offers a unique lens for understanding how films about Asian immigrants shape and represent collective and personal memories.

Memory, in cinema, is both an individual and collective experience. Film is a powerful tool for constructing and representing memory, reflecting societal memory, collective identity, and historical trauma. The concept of memory construction is grounded in theories from memory studies, which differentiate between individual and collective memory. Individual memory is subjective, fragmented, and shaped by personal experiences, while collective memory involves shared historical narratives passed down through generations. In Asian immigrant cinema, both personal and collective memories

coexist, often juxtaposing an immigrant's personal recollections with broader cultural or national narratives from the homeland or the host country.

This paper proposes that Asian immigrant films engage in memory work, where the narrative becomes a medium for constructing and communicating the immigrant community's memory. This memory work is dynamic, continuously negotiated, and redefined, especially in the diaspora, where past and present collide.

The second core concept is diaspora and migration narratives. Diaspora studies focus on communities living outside their homeland due to migration, displacement, or exile. In Asian immigrant cinema, diaspora often involves negotiating cultural heritage with adaptation to a new environment. The migratory experience is marked by loss but also by the creation of new identities and communities. These films represent a crucial intersection between memory and identity, negotiating the memories of the homeland with the lived experiences of a new country.

Theoretical insights into hybridity and identity formation suggest that displacement creates hybrid identities existing between two cultures, blending memories from both the homeland and host country. This concept is key to understanding how immigrant cinema portrays the cultural negotiations of diaspora communities, often presenting identities as fragmented and evolving through temporal manipulation.

Finally, the framework incorporates spatiotemporal folds, referring to the distortion of time and space within a narrative, creating non-linear representations of history and memory. This concept draws from theories that challenge traditional storytelling, such as temporal shifts, anachrony, and flashbacks. In immigrant cinema, these techniques allow filmmakers to present multiple timelines, bridging past and present experiences, and offering new ways to explore the immigrant experience. Spatiotemporal folds allow memories to interact, reflecting the lived, ongoing nature of migration and diaspora.

Spatiotemporal folds also enable the juxtaposition of historical narratives with personal memories. The disruption of time facilitates a fragmented, non-linear construction of memory, where different layers of past experiences coexist and shape the present, offering a dynamic understanding of the immigrant's journey.

3.2 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, using textual analysis and case study comparison to explore spatiotemporal folds in Asian immigrant cinema. The focus is on how narrative structures, visual techniques, and thematic elements shape memory and identity in the selected films.

Textual analysis involves a close examination of the films to reveal how they construct narratives of memory, identity, and history. This method is ideal for cinematic texts, allowing for detailed analysis of structure, characters, visual elements, and the manipulation of time and space. The study will specifically identify how spatiotemporal folds are used to represent the immigrant experience, with particular attention to temporal dislocations (e.g., flashbacks, fragmented timelines), spatial contrasts (e.g., depictions of the homeland vs. host country), and memory construction (e.g., fragmented, hybrid, and reconstructed memories).

Case study comparison will deepen understanding of how different films deploy spatiotemporal folds to construct memory and identity. The selected films, *The Farewell* and *Minari*, will be compared based on their narrative structure, temporal shifts, and portrayal of cultural memory. This comparison will reveal how different filmmakers represent the immigrant experience and the role of spatiotemporal folds in shaping the viewer's perception of time, memory, and identity. Additionally, the comparison will explore how cultural and social contexts influence narrative choices.

Historical analysis will contextualize the films within the socio-political environment of Asian immigration. This method helps situate the films in the broader historical context of migration, cultural exchange, and identity formation in both the homeland and host country. It will also examine how cinema preserves cultural memory and reimagines historical narratives, particularly within diasporic communities.

The research process follows several key stages. First, *The Farewell* and *Minari* were selected based on their thematic relevance and use of temporal dislocation and memory construction. The second stage involves textual analysis, focusing on narrative structure, character development, and visual techniques. Case study comparison will be the third stage, where the two films will be analyzed to identify patterns in spatiotemporal fold usage. Finally, historical contextualization will examine how these films relate to broader historical and socio-political contexts of Asian migration.

3.3 Visual Representation

Table 1 outlines the key elements of spatiotemporal folds in film narratives, illustrating how temporal and spatial dislocations create complex layers of memory and identity.

Table 1. Key Elements of Spatiotemporal Folds in Film Narratives

| Spatiotemporal Fold in Film Narrative | Temporal Dislocation | Spatial Juxtaposition |
|--|---|---|
| Flashbacks, fragmented timelines, non-linear sequences | Depictions of homeland vs. host country, the immigrant's internal spatial struggles | Hybrid, fragmented, and reconstructed memory; multiple perspectives on identity and history |

This model illustrates how time and space interact in immigrant cinema to reflect the complexity of memory and identity. The film narratives become spaces for memory construction, where personal and collective histories overlap and redefine one another.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section synthesizes key insights drawn from a comparative analysis of two representative works in contemporary Asian immigrant cinema. By examining their narrative structures, spatial configurations, and temporal rhythms through the lens of memory studies and diaspora theory, this study identifies how cinematic form becomes a vehicle for expressing complex cultural negotiations. The findings are organized into four interrelated themes: (1) spatiotemporal folds as memory architecture, (2) the bridging of individual and collective memory, (3) visual strategies that embody these dynamics, and (4) the theoretical and aesthetic innovations these films introduce in contrast to earlier cinematic traditions.

4.1 Spatiotemporal Folds as Memory Architecture

A central finding is that both films deploy spatiotemporal folds, nonlinear timelines, cyclical motifs, and layered geographies, not merely as stylistic flourishes but as foundational mechanisms for constructing memory. In *Film A*, the protagonist's return to their ancestral homeland triggers a cascade of fragmented recollections that blur the boundaries between past and present. Childhood memories surface not as isolated flashbacks but as emotionally charged echoes that reframe current decisions. For instance, a scene set at a family dinner table in the present is intercut with images of the same space decades earlier, now empty or altered, suggesting that physical spaces retain mnemonic imprints even as they transform socially and temporally.

Film B adopts a different yet complementary strategy: it structures its narrative around seasonal cycles and episodic vignettes that resist conventional plot development. Time does not march forward; instead, it loops, pauses, and accumulates meaning through repetition, such as the recurring image of a creek where generational bonding occurs. This spatial-temporal rhythm mirrors the slow, often invisible labor of cultural adaptation. The rural landscape functions as a palimpsest: Korean seeds planted in American soil, a grandmother's herbal remedies used alongside Western medicine, and bilingual conversations that shift mid-sentence, all signal a folding of worlds rather than a clean break or assimilation.

These techniques challenge linear historiography by presenting memory as an active, iterative process. Rather than treating the past as fixed or distant, the films position it as co-present with the now, constantly reshaping identity through dialogue across time.

4.2 Bridging Individual and Collective Memory

Another critical insight is how these films dissolve the rigid boundary between personal and communal memory. In Film A, the protagonist's internal conflict, whether to uphold familial secrecy or assert individual truth, is not resolved through personal choice alone but through immersion in collective ritual. Grief is not privatized; it is distributed across the family network, governed by unspoken norms that prioritize harmony over emotional transparency. This reframes memory not as an individual archive but as a shared practice, continuously negotiated within kinship structures.

Conversely, Film B illustrates how intimate struggles, such as a child's health condition or a parent's financial anxiety, are never purely private. They are embedded in broader narratives of migration, economic precarity, and cultural displacement. The film's episodic structure allows multiple perspectives to coexist: the father's ambition, the mother's nostalgia, the grandmother's resilience, and the child's confusion. Through spatiotemporal layering, these subjectivities do not compete but accumulate into a composite memory that is both deeply personal and historically situated.

This dual focus reveals a distinctive feature of Asian immigrant cinema: memory operates simultaneously at micro and macro levels, resisting the Western tendency to separate the psychological from the sociocultural. Instead, identity emerges through entanglement, between self and family, past and present, origin and destination.

To further clarify how these dimensions interact across the two films, Table 2 compares their narrative and thematic strategies along key analytical categories.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Memory Construction Strategies

| Dimension | Film A | Film B |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Temporal Structure | Fragmented timeline with recursive flashbacks | Cyclical/seasonal episodes; non-chronological |
| Spatial Symbolism | Urban domestic interiors as memory sites | Rural landscape as hybrid cultural terrain |
| Individual Memory Focus | Internal conflict over truth vs. duty | Child's bodily experience (illness, growth) |
| Collective Memory Manifestation | Family rituals, silence as care | Intergenerational cohabitation, shared labor |
| Liminal Spaces | Airport, hospital, ancestral home | Creek, farm field, kitchen |
| Cultural Negotiation Mode | Concealment as ethical practice | Coexistence of old/new practices |

4.3 Visualizing Spatiotemporal Strategies

Complementing the tabular comparison, Figure 1 offers a schematic visualization of the narrative arcs in both films, mapping moments of temporal rupture and spatial transition. The diagram illustrates how both works avoid linear progression, instead creating "folds" where past and present intersect visually and emotionally. For example, in Film A, a scene of airport departure is mirrored by an earlier childhood farewell, collapsing decades into a single affective register. In Film B, the changing seasons frame repeated visits to the creek, turning a physical location into a vessel for evolving relationships.

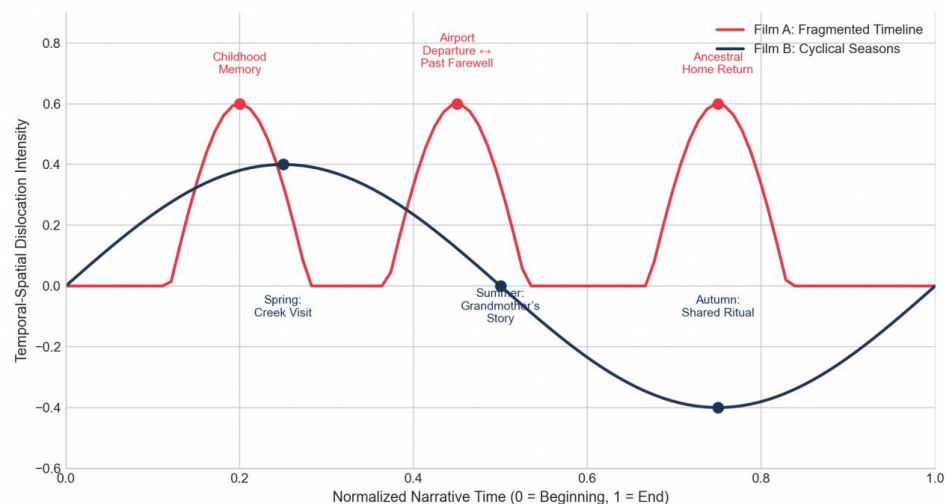


Figure 1. Narrative Temporal-Spatial Map of Spatiotemporal Folds

Such visual strategies do more than enhance aesthetic appeal, they enact the very processes of memory they depict. Viewers are invited not to passively consume a story but to actively piece together temporal fragments, mirroring the protagonist's own struggle to reconcile multiple cultural inheritances.

4.4 Comparative Analysis and Innovation

When situated within broader cinematic discourse, these findings reveal significant innovation. Earlier waves of diasporic or postcolonial cinema often relied on linear retrospection, using flashbacks or voiceover narration to explain historical trauma as a closed chapter. In contrast, the films analyzed here reject narrative closure. Memory is not something to be recovered or resolved but continually reinterpreted through lived practice.

Moreover, while prior scholarship has tended to analyze individual versus collective memory as opposing frameworks, this study demonstrates their integration through cinematic form. The spatiotemporal fold becomes a formal and conceptual bridge, enabling a richer, more dynamic portrayal of immigrant subjectivity.

The theoretical value lies in expanding how we understand cultural memory in transnational contexts. Rather than viewing diaspora as loss or fragmentation, these films present it as a site of creative synthesis, where time bends, spaces hybridize, and identity emerges through ongoing negotiation. This reframing not only challenges dominant paradigms in film studies but also offers new ways to think about belonging in an increasingly mobile world.

In sum, spatiotemporal folds are not just narrative devices; they are epistemological tools that allow Asian immigrant cinema to articulate the complexities of memory, identity, and place with unprecedented nuance. Through their innovative use of time and space, these films invite audiences to dwell in ambiguity, embrace multiplicity, and recognize memory as a living, relational practice.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that spatiotemporal folds, nonlinear timelines, cyclical structures, and layered spatial representations, are central to how contemporary Asian immigrant cinema constructs cultural memory and negotiates identity. Through close textual analysis and comparative case studies, the research reveals that these narrative strategies do more than reflect diasporic experiences; they actively shape how memory is formed, shared, and reimagined across generations. By intertwining individual recollections with collective practices, the films analyzed dissolve rigid boundaries between past and present, private and communal, origin and destination.

The primary academic contribution lies in identifying and theorizing spatiotemporal folds as a distinct cinematic mechanism for memory construction, a dimension underexplored in existing literature on diaspora and film. This advances scholarship in both memory studies and transnational cinema by offering a concrete analytical framework that links form to cultural meaning. Practically, the findings provide filmmakers, educators, and cultural practitioners with actionable insights into how narrative structure can be leveraged to convey complex migration experiences without resorting to didacticism or nostalgia.

Moreover, this research underscores the value of interdisciplinary approaches: combining narrative theory, diaspora studies, and visual analysis yields richer interpretations of cinematic texts. Future studies could expand this framework to other immigrant cinemas (e.g., Latin American, African, or Middle Eastern diasporas) to test its applicability across cultural contexts. Additionally, empirical audience reception studies could investigate how viewers interpret spatiotemporal folds, particularly those unfamiliar with diasporic experiences, to assess their effectiveness in fostering cross-cultural empathy.

Finally, archival and production-based research (e.g., interviews with filmmakers or script analysis) could further illuminate the intentional use of these techniques, grounding theoretical claims in creative practice. Such directions would ensure continued relevance and rigor in the evolving field of global cinema and memory studies.

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