Negotiating a sense of home: mainland Chinese student migrants' childhood education migration experiences in Singapore

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Abstract

As part of the rise in international student mobility, more children are venturing abroad for pre-tertiary education. These children are often embedded in the transnational social field, forging deep and ongoing familial, social-economic, and political connections across borders. Yet, to date, there have been limited explorations of young student migrants' experiences of home during their educational sojourn. In this context, this paper draws on in-depth interviews and photo elicitation with 18 mainland Chinese student migrants who migrated to Singapore during childhood to explore how construction of home intertwines with educational mobility. I argue that student migrants' complex transnational network has reshaped the geographies of their home, making it increasingly mobile and pluri-local. Their home is also associated with a set of meaningful relationships. However, this does not imply that they can produce a sense of home anywhere and everywhere. Emphasising the continuing salience of the physical qualities of a place in shaping one's sense of home, I explore how student migrants' home is simultaneously mobile, relational, and rooted materially.

Introduction

Since the 2000s, the number of mainland Chinese children and young people venturing abroad for pre-tertiary education has surged, with some as young as ten years old (Center for China & Globalization, 2016). These students are usually accompanied by their mothers and head towards Western English-speaking destinations (Tsong & Liu, 2008; Waters, 2012). However, scholars have observed that Singapore has become an increasingly popular destination for pre-tertiary students particularly those from middle-income families (Liu-Farrer, 2022; Waters & Brooks, 2021). This trend has been attributed to Singapore's liberalised student visa scheme enabling young students to pursue pre-tertiary education in Singapore with their female guardian's (mother or grandmother) company[1]. Coupled with Singapore's geographical proximity to China, migration is thus made more feasible (Huang & Yeoh, 2005).

Many of these Chinese students are transmigrants who have forged deep and ongoing cross-border social-economic and political connections (Gargano, 2009). As transmigrants 'construct and reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society', one can no longer assume that their sense of home is tied to a bounded

locality (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995, p. 48). Therefore, considerable effort has been expended by migration scholars to redefine notions of home that were previously conceived around territorial fixity (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002). While extant studies usually focus on adult transmigrants, more recent geographical research is refining ideas of home by considering migrant children and young people's (MCYP) perspectives (McDonnell, 2021). However, within MCYP scholarship, explicit discussion on the concept of home among student migrants who migrated to a foreign country during their formative years is lacking (Mazzucato & van Geel, 2022). The extant literature has thus far examined 1.5 or second-generation migrants whose families migrated for non-educational reasons (Boland, 2020; Ní Laoire et al., 2016). In international student mobility (ISM) scholarship, young student migrants' experiences of home in their study destination are under-investigated (for exception see Prazeres, 2018). Previous research primarily focuses on student migrants' role in their families' capital accumulation strategy and their experiences with transnational split household arrangements (Waters, 2005; Waters & Wang, 2023).

Hence, this paper joins scholars like Huang and Yeoh (2011) and Waters (2015) in their call to make young student migrants' transnational lives more visible in literature. Specifically, it aims to surface how these students negotiate meanings of home during their educational sojourn. As Waters and Leung (2013, p. 607) have observed, 'international students have been perceived as interesting and remarkable precisely because they are temporarily 'out of place', away from and yet constantly evoking 'home''. This paper therefore will demonstrate how young student migrants offer a unique vantage point to further our understanding on children's geographies of home and the ways in which they intersect with education mobility.

Based on interviews with 18 mainland Chinese students who migrated to Singapore before 12 years old, this study explores how student migrants construct a sense of home in three main ways. First, I extend Nowicka's (2007) relational understanding of home, presenting student migrants' sense of home as embedded in friendship and familial ties. Here, I further unpack which family member(s) and why they are more influential to the student migrants when they construct home around social ties. Second, I examine how student migrants' sense of home is mobile and multi-scalar, stretching from their house to nation-state(s). Third, I contribute to the ongoing debate over the extant migration literature's tendency to overemphasise home's mobility and relationality. I argue that student migrants' sense of home is shaped by a combination of home's *physical*, *mobile* and *relational* dimensions.

The next section offers a literature review outlining the conceptual development of the notion of home in migration research. This is followed by the methodology section before I present the research findings. Finally, I conclude by highlighting this paper's contributions to the migration literature.

Home and Transnational Mobilities

Transnational migration literature has long documented transmigrants' physical mobility across borders, the causes and the socio-economic outcomes of their dual embeddedness in home and host societies (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). However, living a transnational life is also an affective and transformative experience for the transmigrants. Scholars thus called for an embodied understanding of

transnationalism by exploring migrants' lived experiences and complex emotions engendered during transnational movement (Dunn, 2010; Wolf, 1997). Central to this academic project to understand transmigrants' lives is the discussion on themes such as ideas of home.

For much of the twentieth century, home was conceptualised as a 'a safe and still place to leave and return to (whether house, village, region or nation)' (Rapport & Dawson, 1998, p. 6). Home is often regarded as a significant place where its presumed stability, singularity and boundedness allow one to develop a firm sense of place-attachment, belonging and identity (Easthope, 2004). In contemporary research, however, scholars challenge the sense that home is fixed and sedentary. The theoretical discussion has shifted towards the 'threshold-crossing capacity of home', where home's boundaries are permeable, allowing people to foster connections with one another and places across time and space (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518).

This debate is particularly prominent in research examining the meaning of home for transmigrants. Rapport and Dawson (1998) argue that as migrants engage in extensive transnational activities, leaving one's country-of-origin is no longer a process of uprooting and disconnection from home and homeland (Basch et al., 1994; Glick-Schiller et al., 1995). Limiting their attachment to one particular place and calling it home also becomes impossible and unnecessary (Constable, 1999). In this regard, Al-Ali and Koser (2002) propose that notions of home be reconceptualised in terms of mobility, fluidity, and multiplicity. The place-based understanding of home as a stable point of origin is hence destabilised as focus shifts to the multi-dimensional, flexible and mobile geographies of home routed through migrants' complex transnational networks (Blunt & Dowling,

2006, 2022; Fouron, 2003).

Several geographers have explored how transmigrants cultivate a mobile sense of home. For example, in her research on South Asian migrants' display of material culture in their homes in London, Tolia-Kelly showed that these migrants transferred feelings of home into their material possessions by imbuing them with 'embodied memories of past landscapes and relationships with pre-migratory lives' (2004, p. 685; 2006). In this manner, home becomes portable, reproducible, and mobile (Boccagni, 2022). It stretches beyond one's physical dwelling, spans across transnational space, and binds one to their past and present life (Blunt, 2005). Similarly exploring the mobile geographies of home, Nowicka (2007) found that transmigrants can identify with multiple homes by organising their sense of home around relationships, like their family and friends. By attaching a sense of familiarity to these relationship networks and moving together with them, mobile individuals create a sense of home anywhere and everywhere (ibid). Home is, therefore, fluid and unfixed (Allen, 2008). This resembles Doreen Massey's (1992) understanding of home as 'open; constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it' (p. 14).

Nevertheless, in migration literature where the relational view of home is discussed, few scholars unpack the complexities of family relations. They seldom treat migrants' relationships with individual family members as distinct and assume all family members are equally important in shaping migrants' sense of home (Lam & Yeoh, 2004). In contrast, this research investigates which specific family member(s), if any, and why they are more influential to the transmigrants when they construct their sense of home in terms of their familial ties.

Furthermore, recent scholarship on the migration-home nexus has cautioned against extant literature's tendency to overemphasise home's mobility and relationality (Boccagni, 2017). They highlight the continued salience of a place's 'contextual physicality' in shaping migrant's sense of home (Boccagni, 2022, p. 151). Butcher (2010) argues that while positioning home as a set of relationships freed it from being associated with a fixed location, migrants, even those with thick transnational networks, need not feel at home everywhere and anywhere. Instead, they may want to ground their sense of home to a specific material place due to that place's 'imagined and concrete' characteristics (ibid, p. 23). Indeed, Liu (2014) found that Chinese transmigrants in New Zealand, while constructing ideas of home fluidly and relationally, anchor their sense of home to a specific location, New Zealand, due to their attraction towards its social-political characteristics. In this sense, home is simultaneously fluid, relational and materially rooted (Wiles, 2008). Therefore, Ralph and Staheli (2011) stress that these aspects of home must be seen as 'enmeshed and working together, without marginalising either of these qualities' (p. 525).

Adopting this perspective, this research explores how home's physical, mobile, and relational dimensions intersect and influence transmigrants', like the mainland Chinese student migrants' perceptions of home. The following section will discuss the methodology employed for this research.

Research Methodology

The data for this paper is primarily drawn from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 18 individuals who migrated from mainland China to Singapore before 12 years old to pursue their education in Singapore public school. The interviews were conducted between July and September 2023, originally for the purpose of an undergraduate thesis exploring mainland Chinese students' childhood education migration experiences in Singapore. The extant literature has focused mainly on tertiary students' experiences (Yang, 2014a; 2014b; 2016; 2017); this study examines those who experienced education mobilities during childhood[2] (Waters & Brooks, 2022).

The participants were recruited through snowball sampling, where I first contacted suitable individuals within my social circle. Subsequent recruitments were sustained through initial contact's recommendation. Since this research aims to capture individuals' lived experiences rather than to achieve representativity, the small sample size and sampling strategy were reasonable (Dworkin, 2012). Nonetheless, measures were taken to improve sample diversity by attending to participants' gender, age of migration and place of origin. In total, 6 males and 12 females, aged 21 to 25, were recruited. The participants originated from various Chinese cities and their age of migration ranged from 4 to 12 years old. All but one participant arrived in Singapore with at least one parent, though mostly with their mothers. Almost all participants who once held a student visa proceeded to obtain Singapore's permanent residency (PR), and many eventually became Singapore citizens at the point of the interview. Participants' citizenship and visa status affect their rights for indefinite leave to remain in Singapore and China and were thought to influence their perceptions of home. This turned out to be the case, as discussed later. The following table summarises the participant profile and participants were pseudonymised to protect their anonymity.

Table 1: Profile of interviewees

Pseudonym	Gender (F/M)	Current Age (Age of migration)	Hometown	Who moved together	Citizenship/ Visa status *
Kyla	F	21 (6)	Wuxi	Mother	SG
Hongwei	M	23 (10)	Foshan	Mother and sister	PRC
Molly	F	23 (10)	Zhuhai	Mother	SG
Autumn	F	22 (9)	Jilin	Parents	SG
Tiffaney	F	22 (8)	Liaoning	Mother	PRC/SG PR/ Applying SG
Bonnie	F	23 (10)	Guangzhou	Mother	PRC/ SG PR
Elly	F	22 (10)	Shanghai	Parents	PRC/SG PR
Winnie	F	21 (10)	Weihai	Mother	SG
Ze Kai	M	24 (10)	Wuhan	Mother	SG
Zixin	F	21 (10)	Putian	Parents and Siblings	SG
Zoey	F	21 (11)	Xian	Alone	PRC/ SG PR/ Applying SG
Will	M	25 (8)	Wuhan	Mother	SG
Yu	M	23 (12)	Chengdu	Parents	SG
Matthew	M	24 (8)	Beijing	Parents	SG
Mengmeng	F	22 (4)	Changchun	Parents	SG
Laurin	F	22 (7)	Fuzhou	Mother	PRC/ SG PR/ Applying SG
Tom	M	22 (10)	Yunnan	Mother (Left at 16)	SG
Rui	F	22 (11)	Wuxi	Mother and sibling	SG

*__SG__: Singapore Citizenship | **PRC**: China Citizenship | **SG PR**: Singapore Permanent Resident | **Applying SG**: Applying for Singapore Citizenship

Interviews generally lasted between 40 to 70 minutes. During the interview, I employed a grounded approach where participants first defined the idea of home in their own words, and I generated follow-up questions based on their interpretations. This approach helped me privilege participants' narratives and avoid imposing my opinions on them. After all, the definition of home is highly subjective. The interview language was in a mixture of English and Mandarin. Responses in Mandarin were later translated and transcribed into English for thematic analysis with Nvivo.

In addition, photo elicitation – the incorporation of photographs during

interviews, was conducted. I adopted a participant-driven approach (Bates et al., 2017) where participants were invited to find a maximum of three photographs they thought best represented their perceptions of home. Conscious of confidentiality and privacy, participants were reminded to select appropriate photographs that did not reveal any faces. During the interview, participants were asked to share their rationale behind choosing the photograph(s) and their interpretations of the photograph(s) in relation to their definition of home. Photo elicitation enriches in-depth interviews as photographs are powerful in evoking memories, which is particularly useful for this study that requires participants to reflect upon their childhood migration experiences (Copes et al., 2018). Photo elicitation also helped participants consider their understanding of home which could have been taken-for-granted (Harper, 1986).

Finally, as a mainland Chinese student migrant who moved to Singapore at age 7, I was situated in a privileged position as an insider. I shared many similar childhood experiences with participants, and this helped me better empathise with their 'cognitive, emotional, and/or psychological precepts' which was crucial for yielding rich responses (Chavez, 2008, p. 481). However, I recognise that my familiarity with the research community can pose challenges to untangling assumptions during the research process (Greene, 2014). Moreover, as Chhabra (2020) points out, one cannot assume that insiders have full knowledge of the research group's experiences as they might have 'distinctive personal and social features coupled with multi-layered identities' (p. 308). Thus, I was committed to reflexivity during data collection and analysis. I actively reflected upon my migratory experiences, biases and positionality so my insiderness benefits rather than hinders the research.

The following section will discuss how student migrants construct a sense of home in three themes that emerged during data analysis.

Home as social relation

In analysing the data, I wanted to understand how young student migrants define home, and if and how their childhood educational mobility shapes the way in which they construct home's meanings. I asked them to describe what home meant to them and many did not associate home with a fixed locality. They rejected a bounded imaginary of home and instead articulated a relational and emotional-laden view of home. Tiffaney presented a photograph of herself and her friends (see Figure 1) and explains: '[Home] is not about the country or geographical location, but the people that you are with [like her friends] that makes a place feel home'. Similarly, Zoey described her home as where her family is. Both Zoey and Tiffaney's accounts mirror Lam and Yeoh's (2004) observations of Malaysian-Chinese transmigrants in Singapore who construct home primarily through their social ties.

Figure 1: A picture of Tiffaney and her two closest friends. Her friends and spending time with them makes Tiffaney feels at home.

Furthermore, Zixin's account of her

migration experience with her parents and brothers adds another layer of complexity to the relational understanding of home:

> It [Home] feels the same to me, like when I was like 10 years old. Cause everybody is like moving together. It's not like I went to Singapore alone.

Unlike many other participants who migrated either alone or with their mothers, Zixin moved to Singapore with her entire family. As such, Zixin's family life did not change drastically, and she could continue cultivating a sense of home based on the togetherness of her family. In this sense, transnational migration did not engender ideas of leaving home or becoming uprooted (Ahmed et al., 2003). Instead, Zixin can feel at home regardless of where she goes so long as she is with her family. This echoes Nowicka's (2007, p. 69) observations of transnational individuals who define their home as 'a set of relationships' where its significance lies beyond the home's physical location or qualities.

Kinship and friendship have been suggested as significant to student migrants' understanding of home due to the emotional tenor embedded within these ties, specifically, the feeling of safety and familiarity commonly associated with home (Tuan, 2004). Winnie, for example, feels at home with her extended family as she saw these people as dependable, and they are her pillars of support. Only when Winnie is surrounded by these family members can she 'feel safe and protected', and as she emphasised, she can 'don't really need to think about anything else [and be] just like a child in the family'. Several others shared Winnie's sentiment where they derive a sense of safety and support from their tight-knit relationships with their kins, through which they can feel at home.

However, while family and friends are important, they do not contribute equally to the informants' feelings of home. For some, home is a relational space organised exclusively around their mothers. Zekai, who migrated with his mother, first defined home as where his family is located, but he quickly corrected his definition:

> Even though we have a house in China, and some other parts of my family are in China, but I am closer to my mum and I kind of think home is just where mum is.

In Zekai's account, physical dwelling and his extended family (including his father) are relatively unimportant compared to his mother in shaping his sense of home. Kyla, who also migrated with her mother, explained that home is associated with her mother as:

> I came to Singapore with her [mother] and my dad just drops by every now and then from China.

Both Zekai and Kyla's mother-centred ideas of home, I argue, stems from their experience with transnational split family arrangement, a strategy adopted by many young East Asian student migrants' families to secure better educational prospect for their children (Waters, 2005). Most informants were accompanied by their mother to study in Singapore at a young age and were separated from their fathers who continued to work in mainland China to finance their education. While all student migrants I spoke to, who grew up in such family arrangement, maintained regular contact with their fathers through video calls, they only saw their fathers in person once or twice a year during school holidays.

The absence of the informants' fathers contrasts sharply with the everyday presence of their mothers. As Kyla noted:

> my mum is the one who cooks for me, settle everything and basically keeps me alive. Not that my dad is not important, I still love him but he was pretty much non-existent in my daily life.

For Kyla, the mundane, everyday caregiving tasks performed by her mother are vital for constructing a sense of stability in her everyday experience of home (Ratnam, 2018). With her mother's support, she could thus overcome the disruptions of migration and re-establish a sense of home.

Overall, as young student migrants navigate their new life in Singapore, they rely primarily on meaningful social and familial relations to construct a sense of home. It is through their interactions with these relations, especially with their mothers, that created the safe, familiar, and stable environment where they can feel at home during their educational sojourn.

Home as mobile and transnational

Following the discussion in the previous section, this section argues that student migrants' home, as a set of meaningful relationships, is also mobile and stretches across boundaries. This is observed in Zekai, who commented that his home would not be a static one. Home will shift and evolve as he goes through life experiences, such as his mother's return migration and starting his own family in the future:

> If she [mother] is in Singapore, home is in Singapore. If she is in China, home is in China. But in the end, if I have my own family, I think home will just be where my family members are.

Here, Zekai's conception of home resonates with Boccagni's (2017, p. 34) that transmigrants' sense of home is an 'open-ended social process'. Home is malleable and need not anchor at the same place over time. Furthermore, Mazzucato and van Geel (2022) claim that migration places young migrants within the transnational social field where they forge connections with multiple locations and subsequently create a sense of home 'here' and 'there'. Bonnie drew attention to this multiplicity of homes:

> They [China and Singapore] are like my first home and second home […] It's [Singapore] more like a second home because I made a lot of friends in Singapore.

On the one hand, Bonnie is attached to her home of origin due to a strong familial network. This sense of home is sustained after migration as she engages in transnational activities such as spending time with her relatives in China during school holidays and keeping herself in touch with Chinese trends, so she has common topics with her relatives. These transnational practices help her maintain familial connections that strengthen her sense of home in her home society. On the other hand, as she experiences schooling in Singapore, her social network within Singapore densifies and engenders a sense of familiarity that makes Singapore home-like as well (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Bonnie's home is thus not restricted to a single site. Her home stretches across space in two countries, resonating with Massey's (1992) understanding of home as a place that is 'open; constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it' (p. 14).

Interestingly, Yu, who recognises home's plurality and shares Bonnie's attachment to Singapore, does not consider

the whole of China his other home. Instead, he saw his home, apart from Singapore, as Chengdu, a city in southwestern China where his grandparents live. Autumn, on the other hand, does not attach feelings of home to Singapore as a national entity but to her flat in Singapore, where she lives with her parents and conducts daily routines (see Figure 2). Here, Autumn, Yu and Bonnie demonstrate the multi-scalarity of home. It can be felt over a range of scales simultaneously, from house, city to country. Hence, as student migrants' establish and sustain transnational social ties, home is stretched across multiple scales, locations and becomes transnationalised (Blunt & Dowling, 2022).

Figure 2: Autumn's flat in Singapore.

Grounding a sense of home

While several studies highlighted that transmigrants' views of home are relational, mobile and multiple (Nowicka, 2007; Ahmed et al., 2003; Al-Ali & Koser, 2003), other scholars have cautioned against an overemphasis of these characteristics of home to the extreme where a sense of home can be produced anywhere without considering home's physical dimensions (Wiles, 2008; Butcher, 2010). My findings reveal an interconnection between the physical, relational and mobile aspects of home. While most informants conceptualised their ideas of home fluidly and relationally at the start of the interview, it became apparent as the interview

progressed that their home did eventually ground to a specific material place. Rui first defined home as 'somewhere where you have your social relations'. However, since most of her social ties are now in Singapore, she 'feel[s] more comfortable calling Singapore home'. Despite Rui's sense of home being geographically independent and relational, Singapore is the physical site of social ties which serves as the basis for manifesting and materialising their sense of home (Liu, 2014). The physical aspect of home thus ties in with its relational dimension when student migrants construct their understanding of home.

Besides being a central site for social ties, Singapore's tangible qualities such as economic prosperity and liveability also contribute to anchoring student migrants' sense of home in the city-state, albeit more pragmatically. Will claimed that he feels more at home in Singapore after considering the 'more realistic, more societal perspectives as to how the society is well going, how it is suitable for living and the kinds of privileges and advantages you have living in this country'. Several others shared Will's sentiments where they described feeling increasingly rooted in Singapore because:

> Tom: [Singapore] gives me more opportunities lah […] in terms of finding a local job.

> Mengmeng: [Singapore] is a very safe and a very fair environment. That everyone gets equal opportunity to work towards […] in my hometown, that isn't the case.

> Zekai: I do think Singapore is a more free country in the sense that I have more freedom and I feel more comfortable. In China, you know, like Instagram, google, all these is ban[ned]. You have to use VPN. I think this is a

big turnoff.

For these student migrants, a crucial aspect of perceiving Singapore as 'home' was the comparison between the positive perceptions of Singapore's socio-economic and political environment and the perceived negativity of living in China. They believed that Singapore offers them the opportunity to live comfortably, be free and thrive, all of which they felt could not be fully experienced in their country of origin. The student migrants' rationales for situating a sense of home in Singapore thus reveal the continued salience of 'the characteristics, imagined and concrete, of a place' in influencing one's home feelings (Butcher, 2010, p. 23). I argue that Singapore's socio-economic and political features underscore these student migrants' feelings of home as these features were what attracted their families to choose Singapore as a study destination in the first place (Collins et al., 2014). Evidently, Singapore has lived up to their expectations. As student migrants enjoy and become accustomed to Singapore's positive environment, they begin to view Singapore as not just a temporary study destination but as their ideal home to live in.

However, it is important to recognise that the tangible qualities which contributed to Will and others' grounding of Singapore as their ideal home, are only possible due to their position in Singapore's bifurcated immigration system. As student visa holders, informants are categorised as 'high-skilled foreign talent' who are eligible to apply for PR and subsequently, citizenship, to reside in Singapore indefinitely (Yap, 2015; Yang, 2014c). PR or citizenship application is not possible for low-skilled migrants on short-term work permits (see Yeoh, 2006). While Zhan and Zhou (2020) in their recent assessment of Singapore's immigration regime pointed out that it has become increasingly difficult

for high-skilled immigrants to settle permanently in Singapore, with pathways to PR and citizenship significantly narrowed since 2010, nearly all my informants have successfully obtained Singapore PR and/or citizenship. The secure residency condition (PR/citizen) provides student migrants a sense of permanence, which then makes it possible for them to situate their sense of home in Singapore (Boccagni, 2017). In this sense, student migrants' ability to ground their sense of home in Singapore needs to be understood in the context of wider immigration and settlement policy that regulates their life.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how young mainland Chinese student migrants' construction of home intertwines with their childhood educational mobility in Singapore. By focusing on students' childhood mobility experiences, this paper responds to calls from children's geographers and migration scholars to incorporate the perspectives of MCYP, like young student migrants, into the predominantly adult-centric migration research, recognising children's active agency in migration (Huang and Yeoh, 2011). In doing so, this research also moves away from the extant ISM literature's capital-centric accounts of education migration. Instead, it sheds light on the lived experiences of student migrants' transnational childhood and contributes to advancing our understanding of how home is created and experienced in migration.

The findings reveal that student migrants' transnational networks have reshaped the geographies of their home, making it increasingly mobile and plurilocal. This fluid view of home is not devoid of meaning; rather, it is infused with significance, revolving around student

migrants' friends and family, especially their mothers. I have shown that student migrants' mother-centric ideas of home stem from their experience with transnational split family arrangement. These students migrated to Singapore with their mothers for education and were separated from their fathers, who continued to work in China. I argue that as student migrants navigate their new life in Singapore, their mothers become a critical source of familiarity and stability, supporting them in re-establishing a sense of home abroad.

My research also reveals that while the meanings of home have become more flexible and relationally defined, the physical dimension of home remains salient in grounding student migrants' sense of home. The findings illustrate that students choose to situate a sense of home in Singapore because they are attracted to its socio-economic and political environment, which they perceive as more ideal than that of their home society. The finding is consistent with recent debates on the migration-home nexus, which caution against an overemphasis on home's mobility and relationality, and instead, remain attentive to a place's 'contextual physicality' in shaping migrant's sense of home (Boccagni, 2022, p. 151). Oftentimes, transmigrants' understanding of home is constructed out of the interactions between home's physical, relational and mobile dimensions.

Finally, I highlight the need to recognise student migrants' position within Singapore's bifurcated immigration regime. Their ability to obtain a relatively secure residency status has shaped their capacity to develop a sense of home in the city-state. Thus, migrants' narratives and experiences of home need to be analysed in relation to the wider migration regime that regulates their lives. Overall, by giving voice to

young Chinese student migrants and being attentive to how they perceive home, this paper has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of transnational educational mobilities and children's geographies of home.

Notes

[1] A Student's Pass is available to a foreign child/young person who is enrolled full-time in an educational institution (ICA, 2023a). Prior to July 2024, only the mother or grandmother of a Student's Pass holder could be granted a Long-Term Visit Pass to accompany the child/young person during their studies in Singapore (ICA, 2023b). However, currently, a male guardian of a child studying in Singapore on a Student's Pass may apply for a Long-Term Visit Pass (ICA, 2024).

[2] While there is a lack of consensus on the age definition of children, 'childhood' is defined as the period before a child turns 12-years-old in this paper.

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