


Social Institutions, Organizations, and Relations

A Home Away from Home: The Halfway-Return of Western-Trained Asian Scientists

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Return migration is typically framed as migration back to familiar territory. In contrast, onward migration does not presume any type of prior connection that the emigrant has with their new destination. This article proposes a new category of migration—"halfway-return"—that sits between return and onward migrations. Halfway-return refers to an emigrant's return to the broader geographical region from which they originated, rather than the specific country they were born or raised in. The ideal-typical halfway-return destination is a country that is more geographically proximate and also culturally similar to the emigrant's birth country, compared to their previous overseas destination. But the halfway-return destination also offers lifestyle and/or career opportunities that are better than what is available in the emigrant's birth country. In order to theorize the concept of halfway-return, this article draws from interview-based research conducted with thirty-four Asian-born, Western-trained bioscientists who, when they returned to Asia, chose to move to a different Asian country than their birth country. Most were Chinese- and Indian-born scientists who chose to move to Singapore rather than their birth country after spending several years training and working in the West. The concept of halfway-return helps shift the migration studies lexicon away from a methodological nationalism that assumes that an individual's birth country is the only lens through which to determine what counts as return. It also acknowledges growing regionalization trends in Asia and elsewhere, within more-studied globalization patterns.

1. INTRODUCTION

Return migration has been gaining increasing academic attention in the last two decades (King and Kuschminder 2022), due in part to evidence of growing numbers of high-skilled Asian migrants leaving their Western countries of immigration to return to their birth countries (Paul 2021; Saxenian 2005; Upadhyay 2013; Xiang, Yeoh, and Toyota 2013). Most of this new scholarship is focused on identifying the drivers behind voluntary return flows among the highly skilled (Hercog and Siddiqui 2014; Kōu and Bailey 2014; Wang, Tang, and Li 2014; Harvey 2009; Chen 2016; Constant and Massey 2002; Xiang 2013). In these cases, return is typically framed as migration back to familiar territory, even if the birth country has changed during the intervening years while the emigrant was overseas (Gmelch 1980). In contrast to return, onward migration typically references secondary migration to a *new* destination country, after some time spent in the initial destination the migrant traveled to (see Aydemir and Robinson 2008; Nekby 2006;

Paul and Yeoh 2021). Onward migration does not presume any type of prior connection that the migrant has to their new destination.

This article proposes a new category of migration—"halfway-return"—that sits between return and onward migrations. Halfway-return refers to an emigrant's return to the broader geographical region from which they originated, rather than the specific country they were born or raised in. The ideal-typical halfway-return destination is a country that is more geographically proximate and culturally similar to the emigrant's birth country than their previous overseas destination. But the halfway-return destination also offers lifestyle and/or career opportunities that are better than what is available in the emigrant's birth country. As a theoretical concept, halfway-return shifts our focus away from a methodological nationalism that assumes that an individual's birth country is the only lens through which to determine what counts as return. In this manner, this article contributes to the growing body of return migration studies that highlight the cultural and social dissimi-

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lation migrants may experience upon their return to their country of birth (Fitzgerald 2013; Upadhy 2013; Bhatt 2018), but it also extends this literature by identifying an alternative migration pattern that some potential returnees may pursue to mitigate these expected challenges.

In order to make this argument, I draw on research I conducted on the brain circulations of 119 Asian-born, Western-trained bioscientists. Of these 119 scientists, 33 were living in the United States and had no plans to return. The remaining 86 had returned to Asia, but only 52 of them had returned to their country of birth. The remaining 34 had chosen to move to an Asian country other than their birth country when they left the West. In this paper, I rely on the accounts of these 34 halfway-returnees—as one of these scientists called himself—to introduce the phenomenon of halfway-return and explain the factors that might encourage an emigrant to “return” to a nearby country in their birth region, rather than to their birth country.

In the rest of this paper, I first outline the existing literature on voluntary return migration among high-skilled migrants. I then discuss the particular methods I used to recruit my research participants, and provide some demographic data about my interviewees. I go through the key findings from my interviews with halfway-returnees, organizing this section according to the reasons why interviewees desired to return to Asia, the reasons why they were uncomfortable returning to their birth country, and finally, the factors that drove their interest in their eventual halfway-return destination. From this analysis, I am able to outline the key characteristics of a halfway-return destination as an ideal type.

The vast majority of the halfway-returnees I interviewed were Indian- and Chinese-born scientists who had chosen to move to Singapore, rather than India or China, respectively, when they left the West. Toward the end of the article, I identify additional countries that could similarly serve as halfway-return destinations for high-skilled emigrants in various regions of the world. I also consider if halfway-return is simply a pit stop before an eventual *full* return to one's birth country, or if it speaks to regionalization trends in Asia and elsewhere. Here I draw a comparison with stepwise migration (Paul 2011, 2017), which is in some ways the mirror image of halfway-return. I end by highlighting the ways in which studying halfway-return can contribute to migration studies as a whole.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within migration studies, return has often been framed as a signal of either the success or the failure of returnees' earlier migration projects (Cassarino 2004; Battistella 2018). It is less frequently viewed as simply the next, rather than the last, stage in their long-term mobility projects (see Xiang 2013 and Paul 2021 for exceptions).

DRIVERS BEHIND RETURN

Individual characteristics such as life stage, family background, and educational background, as well as emigrants'

degree of cultural assimilation and economic integration overseas, have all been found to influence the likelihood of return migration (Hercog and Siddiqui 2014; Harvey 2009; Ammassari 2009; Jeffery and Murison 2011; Jansen 2010). At the meso-level, return decisions have also been tied to the social networks and professional opportunities available in migrants' home countries (Wang, Tang, and Li 2014; Harvey 2009). The presence of family back home is another oft-cited reason for voluntary return migration (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Constant and Massey 2002). Part of this stems from migrants' sense of filial obligation toward their aging parents (Kōu and Bailey 2014; Harvey 2009). But desiring to be closer to family may also be linked to returnees' entry into a new life stage, such as parenthood or the dissolution of their marriage. Return migrants may choose to bring their children back to their birth country not only to raise them in their native culture but also to draw on childcare support back home (Bhatt 2018; Upadhy 2013; Ní Laoire 2008). Finally, at the macro-level, structural factors such as the changing economic conditions in the origin and destination countries and their shifting political and social environments also play a role.

In my research on Western-trained Asian scientists' voluntary return migrations (2021), I identified three key axes that drive the decision to stay overseas versus return home:

1. The emigrant's relative sense of cultural and social integration with their destination's society versus their birth country's society
2. The emigrant's sense of familial obligation to aging parents (who are often residing in the birth country) versus their sense of duty to the younger members of their family—namely, their spouse and children (if they have any)
3. The emigrant's personal and professional ambitions, which were either more individually focused versus more skewed toward their nation's development

These axes put the individual emigrant at the center of the return decision as it is through their perspective that micro, meso, and macro return drivers are viewed and interpreted (see also Chou 2021). An emigrant's individual positions on each of these three axes of return are independent of each other. For instance, they may be pulled to return to their birth country out of a sense of filial obligation, while simultaneously desiring to stay overseas (typically in the West) if they deem the West to be a better location for their professional advancement. The literature on brain drain has traditionally assumed that high-skilled emigrants from developing countries had only these two options to choose from—their current destination (typically a high-income country in the West) or their birth country (in a lower-income country in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or Eastern Europe) (see King and Kuschminder 2022). More recently, secondary migrations *within the West* have been acknowledged to occur when emigrants are unable to fully assimilate into their first destination country (Ahrens, Kelly, and Van Liempt 2014; Giral 2017). Transnational householding arrangements, as well as circular migration, between the two poles of the Western destination and the origin country

have also been studied as indicators of a growing transnationalism and cosmopolitanism on the part of the migrant (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Waters 2003; Ong 1999). What has not been considered to date is how halfway-return may be an alternative option for emigrants who find themselves pulled in different directions along different axes of return.

CHALLENGES UPON RETURN

One reason that emigrants may be wary about return to their birth country is that emigrants who spend a considerable amount of time overseas often experience a sense of alienation or disappointment upon return (Bovenkerk 1974; Gardner 2002). David Fitzgerald (2013) puts forward the idea of “dissimilation” to describe the ways in which emigrants grow apart from the culture of their home country, making reintegration difficult. The fear of experiencing dissimilation may discourage some emigrants from considering return. They may be worried about social or political changes in their home country that they do not like, or they may worry that not *enough* change has occurred in certain contexts. In comparing the return experiences of Chinese and Indian entrepreneurs, David Zweig and his coauthors (2021) find that Indian returnees viewed local bureaucrats as rent-seekers who were more of an impediment than a support to them, while Chinese returnees had better experiences working with their local government counterparts. Fears of a negative/disabling environment in their birth country with respect to their careers may thus make emigrants look favorably at a nearby country with a more welcoming context of professional reception.

In contrast, Paolo Boccagni writes about the pull of “home” that migrants often feel, and their acts of “homing” where they try to “(re)establish a sense of home on the move” (2017 xxiii). Boccagni writes mainly about low-wage migrants from labor-exporting countries, but I found that my scientist interviewees were also often searching for a sense of home while overseas. Studies of refugees’ repatriation further complicate ideas of home, distinguishing between returning to one’s country of origin—which Jeffery and Murison (2011) term “homeland”—versus returning to one’s place of origin, such as one’s town or former house, which they refer to as the true home. The authors note that refugees’ former homes may have been abandoned or destroyed, and so return to this location may not bring any sense of closure. At the same time, being repatriated to another part of one’s birth country may not feel like a true return either. This distinction is useful in problematizing the assumption that return to one’s former birth country should always be viewed as a return “home” (Jeffery and Murison 2011; Hammond 2004). A halfway-return location may appeal to emigrants because it allows them to selectively experience the particular cultural elements of whatever home means to them, without the dissimilation challenges that their birth country might also present. As Black notes, “home can be made, re-made, imagined, remembered or desired; it can refer as much to beliefs, customs or traditions as physical places or buildings” (2002, 126). In this sense, halfway-return can also be viewed as an act of “homing” as it allows migrants to more selectively recon-

struct the parts of their home country or culture they want to retain, while avoiding the less desirable elements of their origin country.

ENCOURAGING RETURN

Return has become more palatable among high-skilled emigrants in recent years, especially in the Asian context due to the steady economic development of the Asian region (Xiang, Yeoh, and Toyota 2013; Paul 2021). At the same time, different Asian countries have experienced different rates of development, making some more attractive destinations than others. For instance, select Asian governments have introduced policies to entice their native-born scientists to return home after several years’ training and working abroad (Paul and Long 2016; Paul 2021). China’s Hundred Talents program is perhaps the most well-known of these programs (Zweig and Wang 2013). While most of these programs are focused on wooing the native-born with the assumption that they would be more amenable to return, there also exist programs to recruit top talent at the global level. Top research institutions in Asia advertise globally when they have faculty vacancies to fill, leaving the door open for scientists from other countries to also apply (Paul and Long 2016). This is particularly the case for small states that cannot solely rely on their native-born population because their high-skilled citizens are too few in number. In this regard, Singapore can appear particularly attractive to nonnative Asian migrants given its multiethnic society, its reliance on English as its language of business and education, its high standard of living, its plentiful air links with other parts of Asia, and its reputation as a regional business and science hub (Chou 2021; Zhan, Aricat, and Zhou 2020).

The above macro-level factors in Asia are as important as the individual-level drivers behind the return decision, as they allow Asian emigrants to reconceptualize what return might look like. However, significant changes need to take place in the home country’s political, economic, or social context before return occurs in large numbers. Taiwanese engineers started returning to Taiwan in the 1980s only with the end of martial law and the increasing globalization of the country’s economy (Saxenian 2005). Indian IT professionals began returning to India in the 1990s after the Indian government began to liberalize the country’s economy and welcome foreign direct investment. Within my own study, the vast majority of the Asian scientists I interviewed returned in the first two decades of the 2000s, in response to the heavy investments in scientific research systems all four of my case countries made during this time as well as the transformation of their national universities from mainly teaching-focused to research-oriented institutions (Wong 2011; Paul and Long 2016; Ong 2016).

At the same time, macro-level changes in their current destination can also push emigrants to look kindly upon return. In 2001, then-US president George W. Bush banned federal funding for research on newly created human embryonic stem cell lines, significantly crimping the ability of scientists in the United States to carry out stem cell research (Murugan 2009). Though this order was revoked

in 2009 after Barack Obama took office, the first decade of the 2000s was a challenging period for bioscience in the United States, and 38 percent of my halfway-returnees moved to Asia during that period. (Another 41 percent returned to Asia in the 2010s.) Simultaneously, high-income Asian countries like Singapore announced a big push into the biosciences, and particularly genetic research, in the first decade of the 2000s (Ong 2016; Wong 2011). The rise in xenophobia within the United States, particularly against Muslims but also against South Asian immigrants, after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks was another development that encouraged return. More recently, the increase in hate crimes against East Asians in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the investigations of Chinese scientists for “economic espionage” under the Trump administration’s China Initiative, has also rattled Chinese scientists in the United States. In this manner, large-scale shifts in the global scientific terrain can directly impact individual scientists’ desire to return.

3. DATA AND METHODS

The data for this paper comes from a larger project on the return migrations of elite, Asian-born, Western-trained academic bioscientists, exploring the reasons behind the increasing return migrations to Asia reported in the mass media and in the academic literature. Individuals who were born in Asia and who had completed all or part of their scientific training—their doctoral and/or postdoctoral training—in the West and who were now working as faculty in an academic institution were eligible to participate in the study. To limit the scope of my analysis, I limited my interviews to academic scientists in the biological sciences. This provided immediate benefits as it allowed me to focus on the specific state-level initiatives to boost the bioscience sector in my case countries, and to better understand the developmental history of bioscience research in these countries (Paul 2021). However, it also meant that the migration patterns I observed might not necessarily extend beyond this population of life scientists. However my subsequent informal conversations with Asian scientists from other natural science disciplines confirmed that similar patterns do in fact exist in their fields as well, especially those deemed strategically important by high-income Asian countries. Further research is needed to assess if Asian academics in nonscience fields also adopt halfway-return migration.

Participants were recruited in four Asian countries—China, India, Singapore, and Taiwan (for returnees)—and also in the United States (for nonreturnees). Potential participants were identified by visiting the public websites of top bioscience research institutes and bioscience departments in top research universities in the five country fieldsites. These websites typically list all the faculty affiliated with the institute/department, along with their educational and employment histories. Scientists who possessed names associated with nationality/ethnic groups from Asia, or who had an undergraduate degree from an Asian university followed by a PhD and/or a postdoctoral

fellowship in a Western university, were sent an email introducing the study and its eligibility criteria, and asking if they would be willing to participate in a one-hour confidential interview. As a token of appreciation for participating in the study, scientists were offered a US\$50 [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) voucher.

My primary research method involved in-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted in English. The interviews were semistructured and covered the following topics: the interviewee’s family background and educational history, their decision to leave for scientific training in the West, their experiences in the West, their decision to return to Asia (or not), their experiences back in Asia (for those who chose to return), and their future plans. Given that my interviews about scientists’ migration decision-making were largely retrospective, I acknowledge the risk that interviewees were sharing post hoc justifications for their return destination decisions that were not rooted in reality. I made sure not to ask leading questions during my interviews about why they had chosen one destination over another. Meanwhile, I asked questions about paths not taken and about the differing destination preferences of their family members in order to capture a fuller picture of the various options they had considered and why they jettisoned some. The similarities in how the halfway-returnees I interviewed spoke about their reasons for not returning to their birth country, and the appeal of their particular halfway-return destination, reassured me of the veracity of their accounts.

Another limitation is that there could be a survival bias within the population of halfway-returnees I had access to. There likely were other scientists who had engaged in halfway-return but subsequently chose to move back to their home country, or even back to the West. My sample of halfway-returnees was drawn only from those who had chosen to stay on in their halfway-return destination at the time of my fieldwork. I discuss later in the paper how I tried to address this issue.

Overall, 119 scientists were interviewed for this project; 86 of them had returned to work in universities and research institutes in my four Asian country fieldsites. While 52 had returned to their country of birth, the remaining 34 had moved to a different Asian country (see [table 1](#)). The vast majority of these 34 scientists—over 90 percent—had opted to work in Singapore. One such interviewee, a China-born, US-trained scientist who moved from the United States to Singapore with his wife and daughter, called this decision a “halfway-return,” and I have adopted his term to describe this hybrid of return and onward migration.

In the remainder of this paper, I draw on my interviews with these 34 halfway-returnees to explain the motivations behind this type of return and its key characteristics. In order to keep the identity of my interviewees confidential, I do not indicate the particular institution where they trained or currently work, nor do I offer details about their research specialization when I quote them. All the personal names I use are fictitious. In certain cases, I also do not mention the specific Western country where my interviewees trained or their birth country, if their particular migration history is so unique as to be identifiable. While this detracts from

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Halfway Returnees (N = 34)

Country of Birth	Count	Marital Status at Return	Count
India	14	Married	27
China	14	Single	7
Other ¹	6		
Country of Halfway-Return		Parental Status at Return	
Singapore ²	31	Had children	21
Other ¹	3	Had no children	13
Decade of Return		Number of Years spent in Halfway-Return Country	
1980s	1	1-5 years	15
1990s	6	6-10 years	9
2000s	13	11+ years	10
2010s	14		

Notes:

¹ All other nationalities are grouped together under the “Other” category so as to retain the anonymity of these interviewees.

² This number includes two individuals who first returned to Singapore and worked there for several years before moving back to China, their country of birth. I interviewed them in China.

a fuller understanding of each interviewee’s story, these precautions are necessary given how tightly connected the community of bioscientists is in some of my country case studies.

4. TO RETURN OR NOT TO RETURN

The halfway-returnees I interviewed had felt a simultaneous desire to return as well as hesitancy regarding the negative implications of return on their careers and quality of life. This equivocation about a “full” return was what encouraged them to consider the idea of halfway-return. Halfway-returnees raised various factors behind their desire to return—a preference for being closer to aging parents, a degree of homesickness that could manifest in a longing for the cultural and social settings of their youth, and a growing disaffection with or a lack of full integration into Western society. But most critically, there was a growing sense beginning in the 2000s that their research ambitions might not be as hampered in Asia as they had been in the past.

THE PULL OF PARENTS

Many of my interviewees felt a strong sense of obligation to be personally taking care of their aging parents or at least living closer to them in their old age. This motivation was shared by practically all of my returnees—both those who returned to their birth country as well as those who engaged in halfway-return. For scientists who were the only child or the only son in their family, the pressure to return was further ratcheted up. This was the situation for Ajay, who had completed his PhD at one of the top tertiary institutions in India before leaving for a postdoctoral fellowship on the US East Coast in the early 2000s. He stayed in the US for more than five years, getting married and completing two postdoctoral fellowships, but increasingly feeling that he needed to return to India:

I’m the only son and I have three sisters. So I have to always keep in mind that my family is in India and I have to take care of my parents when they become old. For guys, that’s kind of like what they keep thinking. [...] Even my parents took care of their parents so, in that way, this is the general idea. That when they become old, it’s my duty to take care of them. Even when I went to the US, I always keep saying that I’m not going to stay there for a long time.

Biju, another Indian scientist who had moved to the United States for his PhD in the early 1990s and then stayed on for multiple postdoctoral fellowships, had hoped to convince his parents to settle down in the United States with him and his wife, but, at some point, his father refused to travel to the United States anymore to visit Biju:

He is old and he can’t move around anymore. He is in a wheelchair now. He said, “I am not coming to the US anymore. If you want to see me, come here [to India].” So there was that strong pull.

These pressures to return to care for elderly parents were not only felt by male scientists. Several female scientists I interviewed also spoke of the direct and indirect pressure they felt to return to care for aging parents and parents-in-law. Chinese scientist Xiaomei shared how her parents began gently suggesting she consider a career in her hometown in China as she was finishing up her US postdoctoral fellowship:

Every time I go home, they would be like, “Oh, why don’t you find a faculty position just in Nanjing?” You know, where I grew up. “Now research in China is not bad, right?”

Meanwhile, in the case of Indian scientist Deepthi, the pressure did not come directly from her parents but rather from her sense of guilt about living apart from them, especially after her father passed away while she was still working on the US West Coast:

My father died and it took me thirty-six hours to get to his funeral. So they had to keep the body in the ice. It was just thinking—“this is horrible.” [...] With your family getting old, you have to be closer because long-term, the US didn't seem—I didn't like it enough to want to stay there.

The second point raised by Deepthi in explaining her reasons for return had to do with her degree of social and cultural integration in the West, which I discuss next.

DISAFFECTION WITH THE WEST

Interviewees who trained in continental Europe in particular spoke of feeling that they would never be fully accepted as locals, no matter how many years they lived in their European country, and this drove some to consider returning to Asia. Tharun, who moved from India to a northern European country to pursue his PhD and then moved onward to Germany for postdoctoral training, shared that even though he was not actively discriminated against in Germany, he was still made to feel like a foreigner in his workplace:

It's a clear thing, if you are not European, you will be seen as an immigrant, right? I thought that I will never be a German, right? [...] Somehow I get this feeling that even if I devote my whole life here, I will be always seen as an immigrant.

Interviewees who trained in the United States reported feeling much more accepted by mainstream American society and their academic colleagues, but, over time, some began to feel a hankering for the cultural staples and lifestyle of their birth country. Jeremy, a Singaporean scientist who had moved to the United States to pursue first a PhD and then a postdoctoral fellowship, spoke of beginning to feel homesick after some years, even though he enjoyed his life in the United States:

You can only eat that many pizzas in your life. After a while, I just want my chicken rice, fried noodles, and all that kind of stuff. And the lifestyle [in the United States] is that they drive everywhere, you know, to buy food. But, in Singapore, I just want to go downstairs [to a hawker center], go sit down and have a cup of coffee that costs like sixty cents. It's not like five, six dollars for a cup of coffee. So it's really all these little things that started to creep in and that laid a foundation about me wanting to come back to Asia in general.

In certain cases, it was scientists' spouses who pushed them to consider returning, if the spouse had a challenging time trying to integrate into Western society. In the United States in particular, spouses on dependent visas are not permitted to work. Spouses who had been actively employed in Asia could find it quite alienating if they were not able to pursue a career in the United States (Purkayastha 2005). This was the case with the wife of Chinese scientist Chen. Chen had been educated at some of the top science and technology-focused universities in China and then moved to the United States (accompanied by his wife) to pursue a PhD in the early 1990s. After his PhD, he stayed on to pursue a postdoctoral position, but his wife kept pushing him to leave the United States because she did not feel so-

cially integrated into American society. Chen recalled that she “thought it was boring, isolated, missing home, this and that.” He noted that because he had been focusing on his graduate studies and various research projects, he could not devote as much time to her as she would have liked. “Basically she felt so lonely, so she said, ‘Okay, I am going home.’” She eventually went back to China with their child for a couple of years, and this separation compelled Chen to consider returning to Asia as well so they could be together as a family.

AMBITION IN ASIA

The final factor driving return was the increasing investment in scientific research in all four of my case countries. As the research infrastructure in these countries began to improve significantly, and as the funding levels (particularly at the top research universities and institutes in each country) became increasingly generous, Asian scientists in the West began to reassess the possibilities of pursuing their research ambitions in Asia itself. After the Great Recession of 2008, several Western governments tightened their research budgets, making the funding environment for scientists exceptionally competitive. Meanwhile, high-income Asian countries were still pumping significant sums of money into their national research priorities. From a comparative perspective, it was sometimes easier to access significant research funding in these Asian countries and institutions relative to the situation in the West. Richard, a scientist who moved back to Singapore from the UK, explained that the funding he was offered in his home country was more than he could have ever received in Europe:

I'm able to do levels of research here [in Singapore] that I was not able to do in [my UK university]. [My subfield] uses a technology that is not cheap, and in the UK, it needs to be rationed. [...] They do have a lot of money, it's true, but here, [Singapore] has far more.

Richard's decision to return to Singapore in the mid-2010s highlights the recent shift in the global scientific terrain that allows ambitious Asian scientists to pursue their professional dreams in Asia itself, rather than only in the West. As a native Singaporean, Richard was returning to his birth country, but other non-Singaporean scientists also spoke about the allure of the funding landscape in Singapore that was at times better than what was on offer in their home countries. Maha, originally from India, had spent most of his research career in the United States, and was recruited to head up a new research institute in Singapore:

They systematically laid out a red carpet. I got a chance to set up an institute with resources that are fabulous, and they were very persistent and open and welcoming. I see in that, sort of the US style, the anything-is-possible feeling that you get from the institutional lead, you get from the government. [...] In terms of the aspirations, the leadership, it is world-class. The whole “What can we do to make it happen?” [...] This cannot be matched by India.

For Maha, there had been no consideration of returning to India because he did not believe that country would have the resources or overall research environment he needed. But Singapore offered a viable alternative and a challenge that he appreciated at his career stage.

DISCOMFORT WITH A FULL RETURN

Even as they expressed a desire to return, a key reason why interviewees like Maha were not always keen on returning to their country of birth was their concern that it would offer them an inferior research environment linked to the third axis of return (ambition). This had been the primary factor behind their initial migrations to the West, and this well-founded concern had deterred most Asian scientists from deciding to return in the past (Paul 2021). This was particularly the case with interviewees from India, where improvements to the country's research system for the life sciences had started relatively recently and were proceeding at a slower pace compared to the pace in my other case countries. In sharing the concerns he had had about leaving the United States to go back to India, Ajay shared, "When I go back to India, there will be some cultural shock. There will be a research shock or something. The facilities I'm right now enjoying in the US won't be there in India, and the funding opportunities will be reduced." Ajay worried that his research career would suffer a significant setback if he moved back to India, and this concern made him look favorably at Singapore, where the research funding was on par with and, in some cases, exceeded what was available to him in the United States.

Other interviewees from China and India spoke about the research system in their respective birth countries as being too bureaucratic or imbued with corruption for them to be able to successfully reintegrate. Chen, who now holds a senior research position in a Singapore institute, explained why he had decided not to return to China:

In the early days after I decided to go back, I actually traveled a couple of times [...] back to China. I started to understand the system there, and I know how difficult it is. I know what advantages it can provide, but I also know what disadvantages are over there. So I decided—no, I will not go back to China full-time. I just think it's not a good model. [...] Because I spend long enough time in the US in terms of my research, I really enjoy the kind of academic environment they provided in the US system. So I am looking for some place where I can continue that environment. So going back to China is definitely a no. Even today, they don't have this American system. [They have] an old system, the old communist system setup, the management, the hierarchy.

Chen decided that, even while he wanted to return to Asia, he wanted to be in a research system that was more

closely aligned with the Western setup he had trained in, and so he started considering alternative locations in Asia that were outside mainland China. The same fears stopped Chinese scientist Wei Han from accepting any of the offers he received from Chinese universities when he began contemplating return. Wei Han had first left China to study in Singapore for his PhD before moving to the United States for a postdoctoral fellowship at a prestigious private university.¹ After completing his US postdoctoral fellowship, he applied for faculty positions in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, and received offers from top universities in all three locations. But Wei Han declined the Chinese offers because he was worried that he would run into difficulties if he went home:

The problem with China was the system. It's not a system for research; that's just not the right system. There's a lot of bureaucracy and a lot of corruption. [...] So then, you're so focused on corruption that you do not have time to research. So people are not discussing research. [...] In terms of funding, you have good proposal, you have brilliant idea, nice data—no, it does not promise big funding. Big funding is decided by some long table and in a small room. It's connection, all about connection. And if you are well-connected, then you are more likely to [get the funding], even if your proposal is talking about bullshit.

Wei Han's evocative metaphor of funding decisions being made by "some long table and in a small room" refers to both the rampant bureaucracy within the Chinese research system and the lack of transparency in funding decisions. After visiting the various Asian institutions where he had received offers, he decided to accept the offer from Singapore, which he saw as providing a more transparent and objective funding environment.

Wei Han had moved to Singapore in the 2010s, but interviewees who had finished their postdoctoral training in the West in the first decade of the 2000s or earlier had been even more nervous about returning to China or India. At that time, the research systems in China and India had not yet improved to a level that many interviewees were comfortable with. Tan Ming, who opted to move to Singapore rather than China after finishing his postdoctoral training in Europe in the 1990s, explained that this was the key reason why he had chosen not to accept any job offers in China:

So I went back to China quite often. I went for conferences, so I know the infrastructure is not there. In that moment, I prefer to have a really good, modern institute. Because if you do research, you really need a team, you need support, you need so many parts. And then, [at] that moment, I did not really prepare to go back to China.

¹ This stepwise pattern of intra-Asian migration to a stepping-stone country like Singapore, and then leveraging the time spent there to secure a good position in a university in the West, is an increasingly popular migration strategy among Asian students (Collins 2013; Zijlstra 2020).

In other cases, it was the particular subfield in which an interviewee specialized that was not as well-developed in their birth country, which ruled it out as an immediate return destination at that particular moment in time. This was why Biju decided he could not consider returning to India in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s:

By then, I also realized that no one was doing anything in genomics in India. There was barely any genomics research, and certainly, in my [sub]field [of genomics], there was nothing. So I said, “What do I do now?”

Biju eventually decided to accept an offer from a research institution in Singapore instead, where there was significant investment being pumped into genomics research at the time.

While concerns about inferior research infrastructures was a key factor dissuading interviewees from considering a full return, other factors also played a role. For women scientists, and the wives of male scientists, concerns about returning to a more patriarchal environment both in the workplace as well as within the broader home society made them less keen on a full return. Likewise, worries about the quality of schooling available for their children (if they had any) and how easily their children would adjust to life in the home country also made scientists more cautious about return. Being able to relocate to a halfway-return destination that was a global city with good international schools and a cosmopolitan lifestyle was therefore very appealing.

5. APPEAL OF THE HALFWAY-RETURN DESTINATION

By collating and then analyzing the destination decision-making explanations provided by the thirty-four halfway-returnees in my sample, the four main characteristics of an ideal halfway-return destination emerged (see [Figure 1](#)). These characteristics should be viewed in relative terms, in comparison with not only the emigrant’s birth country but also their Western destination country, in a triangular fashion. These characteristics are:

1. Greater geographical proximity to the emigrant’s birth country (compared to the Western destination)
2. More cultural similarity to the emigrant’s birth country (compared to the Western destination)
3. Higher standard of living compared to the emigrant’s birth country (and close to equivalent if not better than their Western destination)
4. Better career opportunities compared to the emigrant’s birth country (and, in some cases, even their Western destination)

I go through each of these characteristics below, and also discuss the selection of the halfway-return destination as a compromise decision when different members of the emigrant family have differing location preferences.

GEOGRAPHICAL PROXIMITY

The importance of the geographical proximity of halfway-return destinations to the birth country is self-evident. Interviewees repeatedly brought up the geographical proximity to their birth country that their halfway-return destination in Asia offered them relative to their previous Western country of residence. After Biju decided that he needed to seriously start considering leaving the United States, he applied to positions in both India and Singapore. As he put it, the advantage of Singapore was that “It’s close to India. [...] If I can’t go to India, I can still go closer to India.” During his interview, Biju shared that, after he moved to Singapore, he had been able to visit his parents in India two or three times a year (during pre-COVID times), which had helped reconcile them to the fact that he had not moved back to India itself. In fact, all my halfway-returnees spoke with satisfaction about the ease with which they could travel between their halfway-destination and their country of birth. Rakesh, who completed his PhD and postdoctoral training in the United Kingdom, compared the “twenty-two-hour trip” he previously used to undertake from his postdoctoral city in the United Kingdom to his Indian hometown, versus the four hours it now took him to fly from Singapore to India.

For interviewees from large countries such as India and China, the knowledge that even if they did return to their birth country, they might find work only in a part of the country where they did not have any family or connections, also made them more amenable to the idea of halfway-return. Indian scientist Manoj shared that in the northeastern Indian state where his parents lived, there were no well-funded research institutions in his specialization area, which meant that he would have had to live in a different part of the country if he returned to India, and then he would still not be able to see his parents all the time. So he chose to relocate to Singapore instead, given that it was not that much farther from his hometown in terms of total travel time:

Between Singapore and India, I don’t think there is much difference. Because I’m from Kolkata. In fact, there is no difference between working in Bangalore [in the south of India] or Singapore. It will take almost the same amount of time to fly to Kolkata if something happens.

Technically, it would take 2.5 hours to fly from Bangalore to Kolkata, while it would take 4.5 hours to fly from Singapore to Kolkata. But this difference of two hours was small enough that Manoj discounted it and so chose Singapore, which also offered him a much more generous start-up research package than what he could get from an Indian research institution.

CULTURAL SIMILARITY

Halfway-returnees were also drawn to places that they thought had more affinities—cultural, linguistic, etc.—with their own sociocultural background compared to their Western destination. Chen explained that, after he had decided that he would not return to mainland China, there

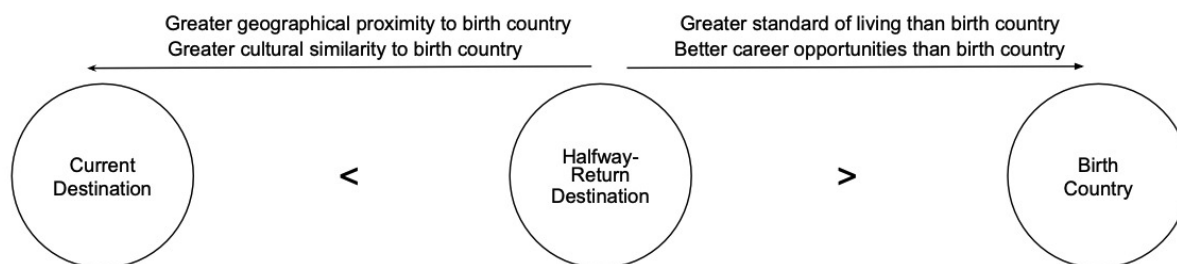


Figure 1. The Advantages of Halfway-Return Destinations vis-à-vis the Birth Country and Current Destination

were really only two options left in East Asia that offered him both a native ethnic Chinese community and linguistic familiarity:

There are only two places I can look at then. I don't want to go to Korea. I don't want to go to Japan. Because I don't want to learn another language. Learning English was already hard for me! I just got [the hang of] it. I don't want to do that again! [Laughs.] Then there is not much other choice left, right? It's Hong Kong [...] and then it will be Singapore.

In addition to its adoption of English as its language of business and education, Singapore's appeal for many of the Indian and Chinese scientists I interviewed lay in its multi-cultural and multiethnic society, which offered these scientists and their families a sense of cultural familiarity. While Chen's wife had not enjoyed life in the United States, she quickly assimilated into Singapore society, with its ethnic-Chinese majority:

She is very [much] enjoying it. She feels safe; it's clean; she has a lot of friends. I guess she just needs to be back to an Asian country, you know, with a lot of Chinese around. She still sometimes speaks English, and still has no problem handling it, but she wants to be part of a Chinese society. You know, she just wants to be around all her friends and Asians.

Likewise, Ajay's wife appreciated the fact that Singapore had a large and visible ethnic Indian (and specifically Hindu) population, making it easier for her to integrate:

In the US, her circle was very limited. She cannot go around unless I took her to a shopping center or mall or something. Her activity only expanded during the weekend. But here [in Singapore], she's totally independent and then, there are more temples, Indian temples, here. If she wants to go and visit anywhere, anytime, she can go to a temple. Any kind of prayer she wants to do, she can do everything independently. So I feel very happy after coming here.

Ajay's wife had felt unhappy and isolated in the United States, partly because she did not know how to drive. In Singapore, she loved the personal freedom and mobility she experienced given the country's high level of public safety and excellent mass transportation system, compared

to both American and Indian cities. And as Ajay noted, he felt "very happy" in Singapore because she now felt happy.

Meanwhile, Seungjin, a Korean scientist who had completed both his PhD and postdoctoral training in public universities in the United States, spoke of how Singapore represented a mix of both American and Asian worlds to him, and that he found this specific combination appealing. Seungjin had had little exposure to Singapore before applying to and then being shortlisted for a position at one of the country's top research institutions. It was his visit to Singapore for his job talk that made him decide to accept the job offer when it came:

I really had a good impression when I came here. So the thing that makes me comfortable to stay here was I stayed in the campus hotel and right in front of the hotel, there's a small convenience store which is open 24-hours. [...] So I was shocked. They also sell stuff that I like—Asian food. Whoa! I was kind of sick of American food. So that was a big thing—I can enjoy Asian food here. And also in terms of culture, I think Singapore—because they use English—I thought Singapore is somewhere between Korea and the States, [with] both good things and bad things. [...] That's why I did not have any hesitation to come to Singapore.

Like Seungjin, other interviewees repeatedly used language to describe their halfway-return destination as being positioned between their birth country and their previous Western destination, or as combining the best of both worlds, highlighting how interviewees did not want to completely turn their backs on their Western lives upon their return. Their framing echoes the relative position of these three locations in [figure 1](#), and reaffirms the choice of the term "halfway-return" to describe this migration decision.

STANDARD OF LIVING

But it was not only the halfway-return destination's cultural similarities with the birth country that was appealing, but also its standard of living. Typically, the lifestyle on offer at the halfway-return destination needed to be better than what an emigrant could expect to enjoy in their birth country. Chengjin, who had left China in the mid-1990s to pursue a PhD in the West, spoke of the "convenience" of Singapore as a key reason behind his decision to move there rather than back to China: "The weather is good and every-

thing is very convenient. It's a very comfortable place." Other Chinese scientists spoke approvingly about the lack of air and water pollution in Singapore.

Meanwhile, the wife of a Korean scientist I interviewed in Singapore shared how much she appreciated being able to secure legal employment in Singapore, whereas in the United States she had not been allowed to work because of the particular (F-1 and J-1) visas her husband had been on. She also did not think she could have found employment back in South Korea. The sense of self-worth she gained through her independent employment income made her appreciate her time in Singapore:

It's a very positive image to me because they gave me a chance to work. In Korea, maybe I couldn't get a job if I apply there after marriage. If I don't have a special professional degree or experience, it's very difficult to get a job more and more in Korea. So, it's [a] very good environment for women to work in Singapore, more than in Korea.

In this manner, the degree of welcome provided by different countries' immigration and labor policy regimes and their relative friendliness not only to the primary mover but also to the migrant's spouse and children were key factors that interviewees considered. However, other scholars have noted that the challenges with gaining permanent resident status in Singapore can actually push immigrants to eventually leave the country (Zhan, Aricat, and Zhou 2020).

Still, the stability and order that Singapore offered in contrast with the perceived chaos or messiness of their birth countries did appeal to several of the Chinese and Indian scientists I interviewed in Singapore. Chen spoke at length about the peace of mind that life in Singapore offered him, in contrast to the unpredictability he would have had to endure in China. He largely appreciated this difference, even though he did add that life in Singapore could be so predictable as to be boring at times:

It's a trade-off. Everything is peaceful and organized, and everything is structured. [...] Organized, planned, predictable. All of these words are associated with Singapore. But over in China, you don't know what is going to happen! You just go there and see from day to day. Every day has new things coming. Sometimes it's enjoyable and sometimes not. That is the way the society is organized [in China]. The [Chinese] society—it's chaotic!

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The final characteristic of the ideal-typical halfway-return destination relates to the better career opportunities it offers returnees. In the case of the Asian scientists I interviewed, they cared deeply about the overall research environment available to them, which included the research funding, administration, networks, staff, and infrastructural setup available to them in the particular institution and country they had moved to (Paul 2021). Viewing all of these factors as a whole, interviewees were attracted to countries that would allow them to maintain, if not increase, their research productivity. For interviewees with concerns that they would have to compromise on their re-

search ambitions if they returned to their birth country, the idea of moving to a different Asian country that offered a more robust research system closer to what they had enjoyed in the West was very appealing.

As already mentioned, Singapore's research funding levels were particularly critical in attracting senior Indian and Chinese scientists to this small island country. But the National Research Foundation (NRF) in Singapore also has a generous fellowship program for junior scientists to start their first independent principal investigator position at one of the country's research institutions, and this program does not discriminate on the basis of nationality. Some halfway-returnees I interviewed had decided to come to Singapore after winning this fellowship. But even without such a fellowship, Singapore's research institutions tended to offer very generous start-up packages for new assistant professors. Deepthi and her husband were both US-trained scientists looking to leave the United States and be closer to India; she spoke of how the research funds available in Singapore were better even than what was available in the United Kingdom at that time:

We thought about the UK, but there was just more money in Singapore to do research. [...] The biomedical science initiative had just taken off in 2001 [in Singapore], so it was flush with money at that point. [...] It was a good time to catch it. They were still handing out unlimited funding to labs, and you could hire as many students as you wanted as postdocs.

In this manner, Indian and Chinese scientists who wanted to return but were concerned about a lack of funding, endemic corruption, or a surfeit of bureaucracy in their origin country looked favorably at Singapore's research environment.

HALFWAY-RETURN AS A FAMILY COMPROMISE

In other cases, halfway-return represented more of a compromise stemming from an intrafamily negotiation when different family members had contrasting location preferences that pulled them in opposing directions, or when they came from different Asian countries. In the latter case, a return to their birth country for one half of the couple was inevitably a halfway-return for the other. Several scientist couples I interviewed fell into this category. In one case, the wife came from Taiwan while the husband came from another Asian country. Having decided that they wanted to return to Asia, they applied for positions in both their birth countries. When they both received an offer from a university in Taipei, they were happy to accept. As the husband noted:

We weren't really particular. Whichever would have been fine because the [two] countries are actually pretty close together. It's just a four-hour flight [from Taiwan to the other birth country], compared to a twenty-four-hour flight from the US. So we were fine.

Another dual-nationality scientist couple moved to India, which was the husband's birth country but not the wife's. The wife had not been keen on moving back to her

own birth country after they had completed their postdoctoral training in the United States because she did not see it as a good base for her area of specialization. In contrast, she was excited about the possibilities of making a real impact in India, where she saw the need for her specific skill set as greater, even though it was not her birth country. But among my other interviewees, India did not figure prominently as a desirable halfway-destination.

Singapore was more likely to function as a compromise choice for Asian scientists whose different family members were split over the decision to return or not. I have already written about the situation where a scientist's parents wanted them home, while the scientist was concerned about their career prospects in the birth country, leading to halfway-return as a compromise. Other migration scholars have written about transnational householding as the compromise decision in similar situations (Ong 1999). I found halfway-return to be an alternative compromise in such scenarios, especially when spouses had differing location preferences. As a case in point, Biju's wife had not wanted to return to India or to leave the United States, where she had a fulfilling career, while he felt pressured to return to India. As Biju put it jokingly, "No Indian woman wants to go back to India!" Biju and his wife had multiple arguments over his desire to return to India versus her desire to stay in the United States. In the end, they settled their differences by deciding to move to Singapore, which offered him a great career opportunity and proximity to his family in India, while it enabled his wife to continue with her US job remotely and maintain the Western lifestyle that she had enjoyed.

6. HALFWAY-RETURN AS STEPWISE MIGRATION IN REVERSE

Even as halfway-return may rise in popularity among high-skilled migrants from non-Western countries, a necessary question to ask is if this is a permanent or "final" move, or more like the penultimate migration before the migrant truly returns to their birth country. I conducted my interviews between 2014 and 2016, but my interviewees had moved to their halfway-return destination between 1993 and 2014, with the median number of years they had spent in the halfway-return destination at the time of their interview being six years (see [table 1](#)). As of 2022, nine out of my thirty-four interviewees (26 percent) were no longer working in their halfway-return country. In all but two of these nine cases, these scientists had eventually moved back to their birth country. In fact, I had interviewed two halfway-returnees in China, where they had moved after previously working in Singapore for more than five years. They had decided to "fully" return to China partly because they were offered a promotion with generous research funding at a national research institute in Beijing, but also because they had begun to feel that they were no longer as accepted in Singapore as they had been when they first arrived. Frustrations with the halfway-return destination that build up over time can be a key driver instigating a full return. But most of the other Chinese scientists I interviewed in Singa-

pore did not speak of many frustrations with the country, and several had already taken up Singaporean citizenship at the time of their interview with me. My sample size is too small to make any definitive claims about the permanence of halfway-return and how it compares with full-return, especially given that even a return to the birth country may not always be permanent (see Purkayastha 2005). For that, a longitudinal study would be required. A longitudinal research design would help shed more light on the halfway-returnees who opt to leave at some point, whether to move back to their origin country or to move onward to a different destination in the same region or re-return to the previous destination. In addition, such a study would help illuminate if the decision to leave is fully voluntary or forced upon the halfway-returnee because of an increasingly hostile context of reception. For halfway-returnees in migration hubs where the immigration pathways to permanent settlement are nonexistent or extremely limited, a further move at some point might seem unavoidable, and this will inevitably influence their approach to their halfway-return destination.

Along these lines, it is worth examining if halfway-return is effectively stepwise migration in reverse. Stepwise migration is a form of multinational migration that involves capital- and information-constrained migrants undertaking extended stays in "stepping stone" countries to accumulate new capital so as to gain access to more-desired countries that had initially been out of reach (Paul 2017, 2015). Stepwise migration was initially studied in the context of low-wage labor migrations (Paul 2017, 2011), but it has also been observed among higher-skilled migrants including international students, aspiring academics, and nurses (Carlos 2014; Collins 2013; Zijlstra 2020). Unlike stepwise migration, halfway-return is not driven by capital deficiencies; however, these two migration patterns still share parallels in how migrants may use their multiple migrations to get closer to their "ideal" destination for their particular life stage and level of capital.

The Korean couple I interviewed in Singapore shared how they were considering moving back to Korea and how they needed to move back at an age when the husband would still be able to put in twenty years of work in a Korean university before mandatory retirement at age sixty-five. This would enable him to access a full pension, and as such, they had a concrete deadline by which time they needed to leave Singapore and return to Korea. In this sense, halfway-return may serve as a transitional stage before a full-return for some migrants (either for retirement or a promotion in rank), while it could serve as an "end" destination for others who see themselves settling down in the halfway-return destination itself.

In some countries, however, halfway-returnees may not have the option of settling down if the immigration regime does not offer them a pathway to citizenship. Similarly, it is necessary to consider the challenges of academic life in Singapore—with the steadily rising tenure standards at Singapore's national universities making it harder for tenure-track faculty to feel certain that they will be able to build a long-term home there; the challenges of gaining perma-

ment residence and citizenship for non-Asian faculty and even non-ethnic Chinese faculty (Zhan, Aricat, and Zhou 2020); and the decreasing funding rates as the competitiveness of the grant cycles increases (Ortiga, Chou, and Wang 2020; Chou 2021). These difficulties were brought up by some of my interviewees in Singapore and could eventually have led some to consider leaving the country. As I noted earlier, a Chinese scientist couple I interviewed had done just that, choosing to move back to China after spending several years working in Singapore. I did not explicitly ask all my interviewees if they planned to eventually move back to their origin country, but I hope to explore this question in my ongoing research on halfway-return in Asia and elsewhere.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article introduces the concept of halfway-return into the migration studies lexicon as a way to expand migration scholars' approach to studying return. Moving away from a restricted understanding of return as referring only to moving back to one's birth country, halfway-return allows us to acknowledge emigrants' often-contradictory feelings toward their birth country. These feelings can simultaneously include a longing to be close to parents and other extended family members, and a nostalgia to immerse oneself in a culturally familiar environment, but also concerns that if they do go back, returnees might hurt their careers, become frustrated with the politics and social norms of their birth country, or have to accept a lower standard of living. These contradictory feelings can encourage an emigrant to move to a halfway-return destination that offers them geographical proximity to their birth country, a degree of cultural similarity, and career and standard of living opportunities that are better than what is available to them in their birth country. While halfway-return has elements of onward migration, classifying it as such fails to acknowledge how this move is viewed by the emigrant as getting themselves closer (geographically and culturally) to "home," while perhaps also being *more* comfortable than their actual home. They are able to do so because they are selectively choosing which elements of home they want to prioritize via their choice of destination. This insight into alternative homing strategies of emigrants is the key contribution of this article and is a reminder of the dangers of a methodological nationalism that assumes that return can only mean moving back to one's country of birth.

It is also important to consider how the appeal of halfway-return is directly linked to the perceived less-welcoming context of return reception in migrants' birth countries. If conditions in the birth country improve with time, there could come a time when full-return becomes increasingly attractive. However, as the Asian region continues to experience uneven development, with certain countries having moved into the high-income category while other countries remain in the middle- or lower-middle income category, we should expect to see halfway-return continuing to be adopted by high-skilled migrants from certain Asian countries who had moved to the West and are now

considering return. Singapore, in particular, is already home to many high-skilled Asian immigrants from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, who have moved to Singapore from their home countries via an intra-Asian migration. When taking the halfway-return of Asian migrants from the West to Singapore into account as well, Singapore emerges as a true multinational migration hub (Paul and Yeoh 2021). Hennebry et al. (2013) define "migration hubs" as places where internal and international migrants converge, driven by different motivators, and as sites that are simultaneously a point "of destination, transit, and departure" (72). By including return and halfway-return on this list of migration modalities that coexist within a single migration hub, we can see the vibrancy of sites like Singapore and the multifaceted migration patterns that can emerge in such locations.

Besides Singapore, other countries may be likely candidates to be (or to become) popular halfway-return destinations for high-skilled emigrants from their respective regions. The high-income countries in the Gulf, such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia—which are investing heavily in their higher education sector in order to position themselves as education and research hubs—are likely halfway-return destinations for not just Western-trained Arab migrants from the Gulf but also high-skilled return migrants originally from Africa and even South Asia. Within Africa, South Africa and Nigeria may serve a similar role. Meanwhile, in Latin America, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil may possibly also be halfway-return destinations. These sites for halfway-return speak to how specific countries or even cities serve as magnets, not just for global migration flows but also for more intraregional flows. In addition to the higher education and R&D sectors, halfway-return could be appealing to professionals in finance, information technology, and other sectors where global and regional hubs are rapidly emerging or already exist outside the West. More research is required on this front to confirm these hypotheses, but, by laying out the characteristics of halfway-return destinations, this article helps set out a future research agenda on this phenomenon.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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