Home. Objects. Transitions.

Fei Gao

Jewelry + Metalsmithing Graduate Thesis Writing

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Abstract

As migratory life challenges traditional understandings of "home," can domestic objects, materials, or substitutes transformed into portable art forms soothe migratory anxiety, navigate connections to home, and become alternatives to the ideal home?

This thesis is an investigation of the value of domestic objects as transitional markers of "home" and their ability to foster positive emotional connection among those whose lives are in flux migrating people. Based on British psychiatrist Donald W. Winnicott's research on "Transitional Objects" or "Transitional Phenomena" such objects not only represent "comfort objects" for infants but also foreshadow the many roles assigned by individuals throughout their lifelong journey.

Introduction

I graduated from high school in 2016, relocated from Hangzhou, China to Brooklyn, New York to attend college, and then began wandering through life, exploring the world. However, during the process of multiple international migrations, I often pondered where my home was and what kind of place could give me a sense of home. This nomadic lifestyle deepened my longing for a warm and welcoming home and a sense of belonging. As a result, I began to explore the possibility of immigrants carrying the atmosphere of home or family emotions during their relocation.

Despite many homes sharing similar architectural structures, the objects chosen to fill the living space are intimately reflected in our inner emotions.¹ I reevaluated the possessions that I was unwilling to part with during the migration process, such as the doll that accompanied me since childhood, the cup I had used for five years, and the cards gifted by friends. These items transcended their functional purposes; they became the ties that connected me and served as reference points in my transient life, helping me establish a sense of home.

This understanding aligns with James J. Gibson's concept of "Object Affordance."² Objects provide not only their physical attributes but also possibilities for individual behaviors
and emotions. In this case, these non-essential items activated the emotions and memories of migration, providing spiritual support during temporary living and balancing the cultural differences and the connection between temporary housing and the concept of “home.” As I gaze upon the domestic objects in my home (Fig. 1), each one represents not only its functional use, but also symbolizes my identity and life journey, serving as an emotional anchor.

As the traditional notion of home faces challenges in the immigrant life, I sought to incorporate the familiar forms of domestic objects and the wearable characteristics of jewelry to create a portable home for the migrant population, establishing connections with familiar homes, cultures, and identities.

Figure 1. A Few Of The Objects I Kept During The Migration Process, Fei Gao, 2023.
Generation Z

Generation Z specifically refers to individuals born in the late 1990s to the early 2010s. This group of individuals grew up during a time of rapid development of various internet, communication tools, and search engines. Not only are they concerned with the people and events around them, but they also pay attention to news and trends from all over the world, earning them the moniker of the first "global citizens." 

Against this backdrop, China's Z generation is ordinary and unique. China's Z generation is vastly different from the preceding generations, growing up during a period of rapid economic development and the strict "one-child policy" in the context of globalization. They benefited from economic prosperity and were influenced by elite education. Today, approximately 15% of China's Z generation are college students, with 2% of the elite studying abroad. One-third of the one million international students in the United States come from China. Most of them were born into single-child families and were the center of attention and protection of the entire family. They are more idealistic, simplistic, and nationalistic than the preceding generations. They are more open, direct, and casual in expressing themselves, and are more concerned with humanistic values and environmental awareness. Clearly, improving material conditions is no longer the primary goal of China’s Gen Z in pursuit of the meaning of life. Instead, faced with a social climate that is vastly different from that of their ancestors, they envision a different way of living while seeking the value of life. Unlike the previous generations, Gen Z are pursuing experiences over material wealth. All these factors have contributed to China’s Gen Z. As a typical member of this group born in 1997, I am a native of the Internet age and have always maintained a strong curiosity about world culture. With the guidance and help of my family, I discovered my interests and explored ways of life through travel and study.

China’s Gen Z is known as the "lonely generation" because we are the descendants of the first batch of the only child, and most of us are the only child, and we are the last generation under this policy which ended in 2015. This inherent sense of loneliness is amplified by the power of the internet. There is a special presence in my family, a little bunny doll named Bomi(Fig.
2), who has been with me since birth. In my childhood, she played the role of a sister and friend. Even today, she never misses any of my camping, traveling, studying, working, or leaving home experiences (Fig. 3). She has a unique voice, personality, and soul. With her company, I have become more certain of the profound emotional value that exists between humans and objects, as well as the emotional value that objects carry.

Figure 2. When Bomi and I were 1 year old. 1997. Hangzhou, China

Figure 3. Bomi and her companions in America with me. 2020. Brooklyn, New York.

Transitional Objects

Donald W. Winnicott, an early influential psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist, first introduced the concept of "Transitional Objects" in 1951. It was originally defined as a substitute for the baby when separated from the mother. It is inanimate, commonly seen as plush toys, small blankets, pillows, and other soft items. When infants confront the anxiety of separation from the maternal body, transitional objects provide a sense of familiarity and security similar to the mother's, while serving a role for the infant that is meaningful beyond its own basic
function. Such objects constitute a defense against depressive anxiety.9

On my constant journey of migration, I treasure many items like Bomi. They may not directly contribute to my daily life, like everyday necessities, but they provide me with endless emotional support. In the field of psychology, the term "Transitional Objects" usually represents an important transition from attachment to the past to embracing the future. They help us establish a connection and a sense of security with our old lives when facing new stages. When facing unfamiliar environments, these personal belongings become my medium to alleviate migration anxiety. I express my acceptance and recognition of new life by decorating the interior of my new home. This sense of ritual has become a way for me to establish a sense of security and belonging in my fluid life. These items are not just decorations, they carry my emotional projections of home and security, providing me with a sense of continuity that connects the past and the future.10

**Domestic Objects**

Transitional objects foreshadow the various roles that one assigns to objects throughout their life. Domestic objects exist in the time frame of everyday life and naturally constitute the medium between people and "home".11 In the frequent process of moving, filling an empty house with familiar domestic objects, and turning the house into a home, I thought along the way of the spirit and soul that are given to domestic objects.

In *The Comfort of Things*, anthropologist Daniel Miller examines the transitional relationship between household objects and their owners' personal experiences, psychology, and cultural backgrounds in arranging household objects to compensate for spiritual absence and develop a space of familiarity and security.12 When faced with change and uncertainty, it's natural to seek a sense of safety and stability. Recalling past experiences and settings is a common response, as these memories represent places where we once felt secure and stable. In psychology, this phenomenon of finding comfort and stability through reminiscing is known as "comfort-backtracking" or "regressive protection."13 It's a normal, self-protective behavior
that can help us maintain emotional balance and stability when facing new environments and unknown challenges. I have found that all the rooms I have ever lived in have striking similarities to my childhood home. Whenever I discover similarities between my current home and my past ones, I feel a sense of stability. The feeling of finding comfort through reliving protected memories is precious.

The work of Chinese artist Song Dong can serve as a powerful example of this need for security. In *Waste Not*,¹⁴ Dong presents a collection of domestic objects collected by his mother Zhao Xiangyuan, over the course of her fifty years of life(Fig. 4). Zhao Xiangyuan's compulsive hoarding of household objects reveals her unease with the severe material scarcity she experienced during China's Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. Zhao had designed her living environment through accumulation to balance her fear of material lack. She saw these objects as symbols of her own history, her memories, and her personal identity.

The *Waste Not* installation reflects the complexity of the relationship between domestic objects and personal identity. The objects are not merely functional items, but also carriers of emotional and cultural meanings. They represent the history of the family, the social and economic context in which they were acquired, and the psychological need for security and continuity. In conclusion, domestic objects are not only functional items but also symbols of personal and cultural identity. They serve as transitional objects that help individuals cope with change and uncertainty and create a sense of familiarity and security.

In our increasingly mobile and fast-paced world, the role of domestic objects in shaping our sense of identity and belonging is more important than ever. As we move from place to place, we carry with us the memories and emotions attached to our favorite possessions, creating a sense of continuity and stability in an ever-changing environment. The Waste Not installation reminds us that domestic objects are not just disposable commodities, but precious and meaningful items that reflect our personal and cultural history. By cherishing and preserving these objects, we can maintain a connection to our past and create a sense of home wherever we go.

**Souvenir**

The definition of a souvenir is a memento with associations to a place that is made tangible to preserve a valuable experience, place, and feeling. When I think of the word "souvenir", my mind conjures up images of neatly arranged products in the windows of small tourist shops - which is different from its definition. Indeed, before purchase, the souvenir is just a product manufactured on a factory line, varying in durability and quality. At the moment of purchase, the owner adds its meaning and narrative. The ownership of the product makes it a real souvenir.

Susan Stewart in *On Longing*\(^{15}\) mentions that narratives of souvenirs cannot encompass everyone's experience, but only the owners. “The souvenir displaces the point of authenticity as it itself becomes the point of origin for narrative.”\(^{16}\) As proxies for carrying the memories of their owners, souvenirs usually carry much more practical significance to their owners than
their own material value. I regard souvenirs as precious possessions, as they serve as a tangible reminder of a time or place that holds significant meaning to the owner. They act as a proxy for the experience, and through the souvenir, the owner is able to revisit the emotions and sensations they felt during that time. The sentimental value of the souvenir lies in the memories and associations that it evokes, rather than its physical attributes.

I began to reflect on the objects I own or carry around in different countries, cities, and addresses. When I move them from one place to another, in a way, they become souvenirs of the last home. I looked again at the non-essential objects I had collected: a miniature Statue of Liberty, a Christmas card printed by Seven Feathers, a magnet made from my old student ID card… They did not serve the same purpose or function in my home as they were created anymore, while the narrative of these souvenirs ties together my family, experiences, and memories of the past few years, they play a transitional role in the distance between the present and past experiences. I realized that what I am enamored with is not the objects themselves, but the physical distance I have traveled from my past experiences. For me, these objects share different temporalities.

Souvenirs also have a portable size, making them ideal for carrying a piece of "home" with us. Many international students have home mementos, such as family photos or a jar of soil from their homeland. These souvenirs serve as a tangible representation of home, providing a sense of continuity and connection to our past.

Souvenirs carry rich narratives and personal meanings for their owners, preserving memories and experiences and providing a sense of continuity and connection to our past. For those who have left their homes to pursue new opportunities in foreign lands, souvenirs take on an even deeper significance, serving as a comforting reminder of the places and people they have left behind. Whether it's a small trinket or a family heirloom, souvenirs will always hold a special place in our hearts as cherished reminders of the people, places, and experiences that have shaped our lives.
Relocation With Tangible Memory

In today's mobile social environment, personal objects have become a part of our daily lives, accompanying their owners both physically and mentally on their life journeys. These objects not only serve as functional tools but also hold sentimental value and reflect the experiences of their owners.

Renowned artist Do Ho Suh has long been fascinated with the idea of home, which is rooted in his peripatetic life. In his artwork, Passage/s, (Fig. 5) he meticulously replicates the doors of his residences in various countries. Through this piece, Suh creates a timeline of his life, where each space holds its own significance and memories. These objects reflect moments of life's transitions, and their delicately precise, weightless impressions seem to exist between imagination and reality, past and present.

Figure 5. Passage/s, Do Ho Suh, From the exhibition at Bildmuseet, Umeå University, Sweden 2017-2018. Curator: Katarina Pierre. https://www.bildmuseet.umu.se/en/exhibitions/2017/do-ho-suh--passages/
Suh describes his foldable sculptures as "suitcase homes"\textsuperscript{18} that are lightweight and portable, facilitating his nomadic lifestyle. As a jewelry artist, I reflect on the importance of convenience, size, and weight in my pieces and how they relate to my lifestyle. Jewelry, as wearable art, has the unique ability to offer a sense of comfort and familiarity, particularly to those without a fixed habitation. When individuals are constantly on the move, they often lack a sense of stability and security. However, jewelry provides a physical connection to a place, a memory, or a person, offering a sense of grounding and familiarity.

Jewelry can serve as a personal talisman, carrying with it the energy and memories of the wearer. It can also act as a symbol of one's identity, expressing one's values and beliefs to the world. The physical nature of jewelry, such as its weight, texture, and material, jewelry can be a portable form of self-expression that is easily transportable. When a piece of jewelry carrying the information of "home" is taken from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one, it can create new understanding, dialogue, and function like a souvenir. My jewelry works aim to create a portable sense of home for the migrant population, like myself, who borrow familiar shapes from everyday objects, that evokes personal memories of home for the wearers, and provides them with the comfort of home in unstable environments.

**Family and Inheritance**

**Coincidence**

My indescribable familiarity and affection for printed products come from my ancestry. Through China's tumultuous social changes, my grandfather, who was passionate about oil painting, calligraphy, and graphic design, founded the FUYANG PACKAGING AND COLOR PRINTING HOUSE(Fig. 6). My uncle grew up immersed in the printing house and later undoubtedly devoted himself to graphic design. In 1994, for his bachelor’s thesis project, he rebranded the printing house as HANGZHOU FUYANG SEVEN FEATHERS PRINT CO., LTD. (Fig. 7) In 2000, my father began overseeing the expansion of the export business and created a Westernized product line that included greeting cards, festival decorations, and party supplies.
that were made in the family's factory and shipped to stores throughout the United States.

Figure 6. **FUYANG PACKAGING AND COLOR PRINTING HOUSE**. Fuyang, Hangzhou. Photo taken in the 1990s.

Figure 7. **HANGZHOU FUYANG SEVEN FEATHERS PRINT CO., LTD.**
Fuyang, Hangzhou. Photo taken in the 2000s
Throughout my childhood, I developed a home-like familiarity with the color blocks of print, the smell of ink, and the thickness of the paper. Growing up, I had an understanding of import and export printing materials. The printers came from Germany, the paper came primarily from my homeland, and the designs came from all over the world. They met in an obscure printing house and eventually traveled across the Pacific Ocean to the United States.

Since arriving in 2016 to the U.S., I have been helping with market research for my family's printing factory. I often visit local vendors such as Party City, Dollar Tree, Target, and others to make price comparisons for Seven Feather Printing's products. Over time, I have accumulated a box of printed materials in my small apartment in the United States. I know that there is no practical reason why I collect these items from local stores. However, I find companionship with products that originated from the very place I am from. The act of buying this product brings me sentimental value and comfort while being fourteen thousand miles away from home. As children of the Seven Feather, encountering these printing products made me involuntarily yearn to possess them once more (Fig. 8).

Figure 7. Logo of HANGZHOU FUYANG SEVEN FEATHERS PRINT CO., LTD.
Necessities For Home

My practice is founded on a deep emotional bond with materials and a yearning for a home in a foreign land. Printed products bear witness to my family's heritage, and have unexpectedly allowed me to reconnect with my roots in the US. It bridges the distance of reality and connects me to home. Almost instinctively, I am drawn to integrating these childhood and familial materials into my work.

In the process of relocating, I found myself deeply attached to the spaces of my childhood home. Whenever I move to a new place, I subconsciously recreate the same arrangement of furniture, color scheme, or other design elements that resembled there. My childhood home was always filled with numerous printing products from Seven Feather. I had become accustomed to their presence. Due to travel restrictions, cultural differences, or other reasons, I was unable to replicate these cluttered spaces. I thought of the monkey doll I used to use to fix the curtains every morning, and then I would look out the window to see the clothes hanging on the balcony, something that seemed awkward to do in the US, where everyone uses a dryer… These objects, like the printing products I collected in my small studio, no longer serve a practical purpose, yet as a foreigner leaving home for the first time, I yearn to replicate the forms and spaces of these familiar everyday objects. These personal items hold strong emotional significance for me and serve as a remembrance of my family and past.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard asserted in his book The Poetics of Space that our childhood homes are deeply ingrained in our psyche as a set of organic habits. Recreating these spaces can provide us with comfort and stability in a rapidly changing world, and can serve as a means of reconnecting with our past, preserving memories and emotions that would otherwise fade away. In many ways, the act of recreating these spaces is a form of self-expression, allowing us to shape our environment in a way that reflects our personal history and experiences. Given my limited living space, I sought to turn printing products from Seven Feather into direct forms related to home. By grinding these prints into pulps and preserving the familiar colors (Fig. 8), I created replicas that serve as tangible representations of my intangible family memories. This
process reflects a conscious effort to preserve and celebrate my family's heritage, while also expressing my own personal journey as a migrant. Through this artistic approach, I seek to bridge the gap between the past and present, and to create a sense of rootedness and belonging in my current environment.

Figure 8. A photograph of the material samples.
Necessities for Home
“Good Morning!”
60 x 21 x 6 cm
Paper pulp, scenery flocks, velcro
Sun-kissed Quilt Smells Like Sunshine
33 x 30 x 2.2 cm
Paper pulp, PETG, acrylic paint, galvanized steel wire
Dad’s Real Private Space
65 x 19 x 6.5 cm
Paper pulp, PETG, acrylic paint, cable
A Decoration Of the Study
60 x 2 x 1.6 cm
Paper pulp, PETG, wool, nylon cord
Only Cactus Survives
60 x 20 x 6.5 cm
Paper pulp, PETG, scenery flocks, cotton thread
Figure 9. Fei Gao, *Necessities For Home*, from *No Longer Transparent* at RISD Mueseum, Rhode Island School of Design, Rhode Island, 2022. Photography by Yuxuan An, November 2, 2022
In conceptualizing *Necessities For Home*, I reflected on the relationship that develops between personal objects and their owners, as well as the correlation between personal space and individual perception. I also found a strong resonance between the act of wearing jewelry and the function of transitional objects. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is possible that the wearer uses jewelry as a tool to cope with the complexities of the world and strengthen their psyche.\(^{20}\) As an artist who has moved to a foreign land, I aim to capture the sense of comfort and familiarity that is often associated with our childhood homes. By incorporating personal objects and family materials, I create tangible reminders of the intangible memories and emotions that are so closely tied to our sense of home. Personally, when memories of my childhood come flooding back to the home surface of my mind, I have reconnected with a familiar sense of stability and happiness no matter the geographical distance.

**Portable Home**

**Miniature**

Susan Stewart wrote in *On Longing* that "every narrative is a miniature"\(^{21}\), highlighting the power of small objects to contain and convey meaning. As a newcomer, I have found that miniatures and other transitional objects play a crucial role in my sense of belonging and security. In particular, miniature versions of domestic objects such as the abundant Chinese tableware, traditional holiday decorations, and picture frames that hold memories are difficult for me to carry and keep with me at all times. By shrinking things, we can amplify our connection to them, particularly when it comes to our sense of home and the passage of time.

How do people experience and define time? I am persuaded by the English philosopher John Locke's description of time as the measure of all existence\(^{22}\), like the annual rings of trees and the age of people. When I reminisce on my time in different cities, I always begin with a sentence in Chinese like "That period of time I lived in Brooklyn...". "A period" is the unit of time that I experience, not "a moment," nor a precise "minute," "hour"... In other words, the passage of time that I feel is not entirely perceived by the clock, but more by the changes in my surroundings. Compared to the clock or the calendar, a Type A plug\(^{23}\) seems a more accurate
representation of "the period of time that I lived in Brooklyn." It reminds me of the feeling I had when I bought the miniature souvenir – it felt like a passport to a particular part of the world.

For newcomers like myself, miniatures take on even greater significance. When we move to a new place, we often feel disconnected from the familiar objects and spaces that used to define our sense of home. Miniatures allow us to replicate and project those spaces, preserving their meanings and memories. When I look at a miniature of a favorite chair or a souvenir from a former city, I feel a sense of continuity and connection to my past.

Miniatures also serve as transitional objects, bridging the gap between our old and new lives. When I moved from one home to another, for example, I brought my old chair with me. Sitting in that chair in my new space helped to anchor myself while I transitioned into a new chapter. Even when I eventually had to leave the chair behind, I was able to create a miniature version of it that served as a reminder of that period of my life.

As a newcomer, I have often yearned for a sense of home that feels small, convenient, and controlled. The world can seem overwhelming when you're starting over in a new place, and miniatures provide a sense of intimacy and security that can be hard to find otherwise. My own experiences with miniatures and transitional objects have led me to explore this concept further, resulting in my creation of The Untethered Home, a miniature space designed to evoke feelings of safety and belonging for immigrants and others in times of transition.

**Charms**

The miniature world provides a unique form of transcending the timeline of reality. Charms, as a traditional form of jewelry, also possess the ability to encapsulate time and narratives. The history of charms can be traced back to ancient Egypt when they were used as talismans, protecting the wearer from malevolent forces. Since then, charms have played a significant role in transcending the material world, symbolizing personal beliefs and values.

I often listen with curiosity to my American friends' charm necklaces as they clink and jangle, eager to hear the significance behind each charm. Some are fortunate enough to have
inherited charms from their ancestors, integrating these cherished memories into their necklaces. These collected charms act as a diary of sorts, akin to the concept of "Transitional Objects" put forth by Donald Winnicott, bridging the gap between the past and present. Charms not only transcend the constraints of time but also establish an intimate connection with the wearer's identity and emotions, providing a lasting means to commemorate their personal journey.

The process of moving often requires people to leave behind or lose some of their possessions, even if they are cherished and meaningful. Yet, this does not diminish their importance or value. To help alleviate the regret of leaving cherished belongings behind, I have decided to create miniature domestic charms. These tiny replicas of beloved objects allow people to keep a part of their past with them as they move forward, serving as a source of comfort and continuity.

**The Untethered Home**

The life of migration is often filled with uncertainty and changes, requiring them to constantly establish new homes through frequent relocations. *The Untethered Home* serves as a souvenir of my journey in rebuilding a home in a new environment. By transforming these intimate domestic objects into charms, they become more portable, which allows me to showcase the emotional bond between myself and my home in the smallest of spaces.

These charms include different types of plugs used in various regions, damaged suitcases from travels, chairs and picture frames that carry memories of family and friends, as well as festive decorations and tableware reflecting cultural differences. Whenever I wear these charms, they act as talismans, reminding me of the warmth of home and my own resilience. Regardless of where I am, these charms empower me and provide a sense of security, allowing me to feel the presence of home.

By creating miniature versions of these objects, creates a space for memories and emotions to live on while demonstrating. How migrants and travelers stay strongly tied to their roots. These charms have become a medium that connects different cultures and resonates
with people, allowing us to feel the enduring warmth and sense of belonging of home, even in unfamiliar environments, through the form of jewelry.

*All charms are made in sterling silver or 18k gold. Images on p.54-62 are to scale.

Figure 10. A graphic design of The Untethered Home, 2022
ceramic tea cup
tianhe huayuan, hangzhou
2017

milk glass
longshan huanyuan, hangzhou
around 2002

enamel mug
605 pavonia ave, jersey city
2021

ceramic coffee cup
tianhe huayuan, hangzhou
2019

measuring cup
504 myrtle ave, brooklyn
around 2019

ceramic goblet
riverhouse, providence
2022
wooden frame for headshot
  tianhe huayuan, hangzhou
  2021

black round frame
  longshan huanyuan, hangzhou
  around 2002

oak frame
  tianhe huayuan, hangzhou
  2021

vintage oval frame
  longshan huanyuan, hangzhou
  around 2006

wooden round frame
  longshan huanyuan, hangzhou
  around 2002

natural wooden frame
  chunjiahu Yue, hangzhou
  around 2010
woven lounge chair
hanam-dong, seoul
2015

vintage wood chair
461 dean st, brooklyn
2020

floor pillow
504 myrtle ave, brooklyn
2019

lathe back chair
baiziwan, beijing
2017

mint metal stool
105 grand ave, brooklyn
2016
spherical paper lantern  
shanshui huating, hangzhou  
2008

velvet lantern 01  
stuytown, east manhattan  
2018

cylindrical paper lantern  
shanshui huating, hangzhou  
2008

velvet lantern 02  
180 franklin ave, brooklyn  
2017
christmas ornaments: silver
longshan huanyuan, hangzhou
around 2002

christmas ornaments: gold
longshan huanyuan, hangzhou
around 2002

christmas ornaments: star
stuytown, east manhattan
around 2018

christmas ornaments: bell
504 myrtle ave, brooklyn
around 2018
About Eating

In China, there is an old saying, “People regard food as their heaven (民以食为天),” which emphasizes the importance of food in the lives of the Chinese’s traditions and customs. Tableware that is used for eating and drinking also holds great significance in my family. When I was growing up, my family has specialized tableware and utensils for rice, noodles, dumplings; vegetables, meats, soups; pastries, breads, cakes, and ice cream; red tea, green tea, floral tea, milk tea, milk, soda, and different types of alcoholic beverages; everyday meals and special occasions; steaming, boiling, frying, stewing, braising, simmering, cooking, and more. Reflecting on this now, I realize that even the organization of these utensils and tableware can be considered a part of Chinese culture.
Compared to my childhood, my current lifestyle as an immigrant has streamlined my tableware and utensils to the bare essentials. While minimalism has its advantages in terms of eco-friendliness and convenience, I still can't help but complain about the metal chopsticks in Korea not being as easy to use as wooden ones when I slurped up noodle soup in Seoul; Similarly, when I drank osmanthus black tea in Providence, the sensation of my lips touching the mug suddenly reminds me that this drink should be enjoyed in a ceramic tea cup instead. Sometimes, I worry that people like me who have simplified their tableware will lead to the loss of China's rich food culture.
Frames

Photos are the physical abode of memories, while picture frames provide them a dwelling. I always yearn for the photo wall in my childhood home. However, during the process of migration, the size and weight of the picture frames seem to become a burden.
Chairs

During a move, one of the items I am most reluctant to leave behind is my chair. Although they are not as excessively heavy as mattresses, sometimes it is just not possible to take them with me. They carry memories of me and many friends. It is incredible to think about how many people have sat in these chairs over the years and what stories we shared while sitting in the chair.

There's a funny story I have to share: a friend of mine who was studying industrial design gifted me a handcrafted wooden chair because she no longer had space for it in her home. I treasured it dearly, but due to my habit of sitting on the floor, I never sat on it more than a few times. I repurposed the cushions for a floor ottoman.
New Years

Both the Chinese New Year and Christmas are the most important holidays for people from their respective cultures.

"Having lived in the US for over 6 years, I haven't celebrated the Spring Festival with my family for 6 years. But I also haven't spent Christmas in the US. I wonder when I'll get the chance to see the Rockefeller Christmas Tree?" This is a conversation that I and other Chinese international students repeat every year as the end of the fall semester approaches. As soon as the fall semester ends, we eagerly go back to China to visit our families during winter break. But by the time the Chinese New Year arrives, our break is often over and we have to return to school. These holiday decorations, purchased in a country different from my own, serve as a symbol of the unique and special experiences that we have shared.
Plugs

After creating a series of plugs, I was struck by the realization of how much I have traveled and lived in different places. The various types of plugs I have collected along the way almost serve as trophies of my multi-regional life. At times, I would take advantage of exchange rates or tax benefits and buy certain products in a particular location, only to realize upon arriving in another country that I need to spend more money on an adapter. Nonetheless, I have come to appreciate the diversity of experiences and the memories these plugs represent.
Suitcase

Generally, the luggage allowance for international flights is two pieces of checked baggage and one carry-on bag. This is the maximum that I can carry alone and that can fit into my rented house. My luggage has always been essential to me during every move. Some have been damaged and thrown away during the violent handling of transportation.

When I lived in New York, I followed local customs and purchased a small trolley. It was essential for grocery shopping, especially since most of my friends and I didn't own cars in New York.

*Photography by Fei Gao, 2023*
As I laid out all the completed charms in a row, these miniatures brought back memories of my multiple moves over the years, overlapping and spreading out. The homes they once furnished became three-dimensional and coherent once again. It was as if I could step into a virtual household space and converse with the past. I felt keenly that these small pieces of furniture possessed the power to prevent the fading, distance, and decay of the familial atmosphere during travels.

**Immigration**

**Roots**

German writer Winfried Georg Sebald, in his work *The Emigrants*[^27], points out that every migrant who leaves their homeland is in search of their "roots." When an individual departs from familiar territory and embarks on an unknown journey, an inevitable longing arises deep within...
them for the place that once granted them a sense of identity and belonging.

Immigration is a complex and challenging process that involves difficulties in establishing a sense of belonging and adapting to a new environment. Just as I reminisced with an old friend, recalling a stool from *The Untethered Home* that accompanied us. She remembered our fondness for its vintage, mint-green color, since it was just same as the door of our campus building. As we reminisced about our campus life, I realized that, as an outsider, my sense of belonging extended beyond the confines of my home spaces and encompassed the gradual integration into the campus, nearby parks, riverside, and the community.

Inspired by these insights, I began to express my experiences as an immigrant adapting to different cities through my ability to capture the precious moments of acceptance and adjustment to new environments. The journey of migration is a quest to find self-orientation and establish a new sense of belonging. Through drawings, I strive to depict those moments of embracing and adapting to new surroundings, delving deep into the emotional world and inner journey of migration.

**So You Don't Get Lost In The Neighborhood**

For migrants, leaving their homeland and adapting to a new environment is an inevitable transitional process. Both temporary tattoos and the transitional phenomena share the characteristic of temporality. Temporary tattoos gradually fade and disappear during use, aligning with the transitional process of immigration. I primarily consider *So You Don't Get Lost In The Neighborhood* as a temporary memento for migrants. In the process of adjusting to a new environment, newcomers can use temporary tattoos to express their nostalgia and longing for familiar spaces, as well as their pursuit of personal identity and sense of belonging. Just like how band-aids provide protection and healing for wounds, I drew inspiration from the design of band-aid packaging to convey this idea. As time passes, immigrants gradually adapt to their new environment and establish new connections and a sense of belonging. The fading or replacement of temporary tattoos can reflect this transformation.
So You Don't Get Lost In The Neighborhood consists of six packs of inkjet temporary tattoo stickers, including refreshers, love letters, and an instruction book. They each my distinctive journey of assimilating into six cities as a newcomer. These tattoos carry my experiences and emotional connections during my journey of migration, reminding me of my resilience, and providing me with courage and motivation to adapt and integrate into new environments. Wherever I may be, these tattoos serve as a source of empowerment and inspiration for me to embrace my new surroundings and embark on new chapters of life with confidence.
*Photography by Nina Liu
Modeled by Fei Gao
Conclusion

My three jewelry series, *Necessities For Home, The Untethered Home*, and *So You Don't Get Lost In The Neighborhood*, serve as transitional objects of home, bridging the gaps between my family, the interior space of my new home, and the city I reside in. Through the creation of these three series, I have not only witnessed personal growth and transformation brought about by a nomadic lifestyle but also explored the evolving concept of home in contemporary society.

In today's world, the trends of globalization, advanced transportation, and communication technologies offer people greater freedom in choosing their travel and living environments. However, this mobility also presents new considerations and challenges regarding the notions of home and belonging. For individuals who frequently migrate and experience different cultures, finding a stable home and a sense of belonging becomes increasingly eager.

By incorporating the concept of home into wearable jewelry pieces, I aim to break the boundaries of traditional homes and extend the idea of home to portable items, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging for individuals living a nomadic lifestyle. These jewelry pieces instill confidence and reassurance, allowing people to experience the warmth and familiarity of home regardless of their physical location. They serve as my response to the fluidity of life and a redefinition of the concept of home.
Notes


16. Stewart, *On Longing*, 136. Stewart suggests that our relationship with the object's owner or unless, as we shall see later, we transform the souvenir into the collection. This vicarious position is that of the owner of the heirloom.

18. Suh, *Passage/s*. Each piece from *Passages/s* can be folded down to the size of a suitcase, which Suh believes in a way facilitates his drifting lifestyle.


21. Stewart, *On Longing*


23. Type A plug refers to the plug that is used in North and Central America, and some parts of South America, the Caribbean, and East Asia. It is also known as the NEMA 1-15 or the North American 2-prong plug.


Bibliography


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