Global Hierarchies of Care: Understanding the Experience of Filipina Domestic Workers in Taiwan

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Recommended Citation
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Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College
by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2019
Acknowledgements

I would like to take the time to thank my advisor Professor Robert Culp for his endless support and patience in leading me through this intense year-long process. I would also like to extend my thanks to the entirety of the Chinese Department--Professor Li Hua Ying, Professor Xia Liu and Wah Guan Lim, who is no longer here at Bard, but continues to inspire me as a lifelong mentor.

Everything that I have accomplished during my four years at Bard would not have been possible without my parents, Edgar and Siobhan Bigornia. Although I’m not quite sure that they understand what my major is or what it is that I study, they have supported me in all of my endeavors nonetheless.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all of my friends, family and mentors back home in the Philippines--all of my titas and ates at the Center for Migrant Advocacy in Quezon City, as well as my family at the Christian Language Study Center. Salamat po sa inyong lahat!

To my dear friends-- Christopher Long, Madeline Qi, Nina Tanujaya and Alexis (Hao) Zheng--thank you for staying by my side in all emotional, psychological, academic circumstances and for allowing me to be vulnerable with you. Olivia Donahue--I am so incredibly thankful for our friendship. Thank you for sacrificing your sleep in order to help me get through this final push.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Mamang and Papang.
# Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

Chapter 1: Precipitating a Filipino Care Force: Taiwan’s Political, Economic and Social Milieu 1960s-Present

Chapter 2: The Politics of the Filipina Body in Taiwanese Households

Concluding Remarks

Bibliography
The above photo was taken in 1967 at Manila Airport. The family made a seven hour-long journey from their small hometown of Bangued in the mountainous region of Abra to the nation’s capital city to say their last farewell to my father and grandfather (both center and wearing dark-toned suits). My father and his father, who I call Papang, were about to immigrate the United States. The rest of the family, besides my father and Papang, would stay behind in the province until they accumulated enough money to send each of the Bigornia children to America. The family immigrated in three waves—each time pasting pieces of the family back together. It was not until almost a decade later in 1976 that my Papang, Mamang, and their nine children would be reunited and living under a single roof in Queens, New York.
As a child, family members told me stories of the circumstances back home, explaining the political corruption, street violence and the way in which local barangay (neighborhood) officials relied on fear and intimidation to gain political support. These stories were recited to remind us, the new generation born in the United States, of just how lucky we were to be born in America. From an early age, my relatives insisted that the Philippines is a place of departure, and not one of return. Despite my paternal family’s nostalgia for the homeland, nothing could reverse the fact that the political and economic state of their country is what compelled them to leave and establish home elsewhere.

This past summer I had the opportunity to travel to the Philippines for the first time as a balikbayan (“homecoming Filipino”) traveler. During my summer in the Metro Manila area, I interned for a local non-governmental organization in Quezon City, The Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA), an organization that seeks to promote the rights of overseas Filipinos, land or sea-based migrant workers, and Filipino immigrants and their families. In participating in their advocacy work, I met and heard the stories of “dating-OFWs” (ex-OFWs). It has been over forty years since my grandparents left the Philippines and immigrated to the United States, yet hearing the narratives of these OFWs made it strikingly clear that the political, economic and social state of the Philippines has remained unchanged; Filipino citizens must still leave home in order to pursue a life that simply cannot be found nor created in the Philippines. It was not until I traveled there myself that I realized the pervasiveness of this cultural mindset; it was not unique to my own family history, but instead, has become woven into the fabric of Filipino life and society. Only when I began to realize that my family’s story is merely one of many, did I

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1 OFWs: Overseas Filipino Worker(s)
understand the necessity of further academic inquiry and research, so that these stories do not remain dormant and hidden within each individual, but are rather expressed and serve as a point of cultural awareness, community, and historical understanding.
**Introduction**

The writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels first introduced the concepts of productive and reproductive labor, distinguishing the labor that produces goods in the economy from that which sustains the productive labor force. Since the genesis of these concepts, such terminology has remained inextricably connected to the idea of a sexual division of labor. Over time our collective imaginations surrounding the significance of productive and reproductive labor have undergone continual renegotiations. In the United States, amidst growing female labor force participation rates in the 1970s, debate surrounding the validity of this ideology began to emerge. During this time scholars and socialist-feminists alike began to reevaluate Marxist economics through a more contemporary lens; they challenged the rigidity of the Marxist “reproductive” and “productive” labor paradigm for its constraints of reductionism and economic functionalism. Most significantly, this cohort of scholars presented an intersectional alternative perspective that recognized both the unpaid and paid labor done by women: “Everything and almost anything women do is work: labors of love, housework, childcare work, and paid labor market work. Whether visible or invisible, in the home or in the labor market, for their families or for their employers, women work.” As shown in the previous quotation, this strain of discourse vehemently challenged the theoretical subordination of women’s role in the productive economy and asserted the societal necessity of such work.

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Still today women across the globe are still being confined to employment in sectors traditionally perceived as “women’s work.” Gendered divisions of labor have been exacerbated by the development of the global capitalist economy, and such dynamics are reflected in recent global migration patterns. While women have been a part of global migration flows for more than four centuries, over the past few decades, scholars have marked the post-1960s period as defined by the growing prominence of female global migration. The “feminization of migration” describes the phenomenon in which global women begin to migrate from their home countries independently, presumably for reasons of employment or livelihood. Data shows that the number of female migrants worldwide doubled between 1960 and 2015. As women leave their home countries to find work abroad, they are pressured into areas traditionally considered to be “women’s work,” leading them to join the ever growing global care industry. The global care economy’s reliance on migrant women workers has increased drastically, as women who migrate into care work constitute the single largest female occupational group migrating globally at present.

The global movement of migrant care workers does not only reveal the nexus of globalization and capitalism, but is rather also indicative of even broader geopolitical hierarchies of power. It is through studying the flow of migrant care labor that we can see the growing disparities separating the world’s richest nations from the poorest. Over the past few decades, many scholars have drawn attention to the close relationship between the global capitalist economy and the international division of reproductive labor. One of the most influential

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6 Mary Romero et al., When Care Work Goes Global, (London: Taylor and Francis), 1.
scholars to theorize this correlation is American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild. In 2000, Hochschild solidified many of these overlapping conceptions into her groundbreaking theory she calls *global care chains*: “Global capitalism affects whatever it touches, and it touches virtually everything including what I call *global care chains*—a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring.”  

Hochschild’s writing does not only highlight the global socioeconomic hierarchies at play in global care labor migration, but delves into an even deeper, seemingly invisible, hierarchy—the hierarchy of emotional care and love. Hochschild’s theoretical foundation of *global care chains* closely analyzes the three categories of women involved in neoliberal care practices: the women who employ care workers, the women who migrate as care workers, and the women who care for the children back at home for the migrant care worker. Hochschild’s *global care chain* theory succinctly encapsulates the far-reaching implications of the commodification of care and the way in which reproductive labor, primarily provided by women of color, has long been a commodity purchased by class-privileged women.

In this paper I utilize Hochschild’s *global care chains* paradigm as a framework for my examination of the gendered care labor migration from the Philippines to Taiwan. Within the global care economy, the Philippines is one of the major sources of foreign care workers. Filipina women not only represent a large population within the global migrant community, but most notably, constitute a large percentage of the worldwide care economy. These statistics are not coincidental; over the past few decades the Philippines government has actively promoted

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8 Ibid, 140.

labor migration to its citizens as a means of funneling prized foreign remittances back into the 
country. These labor migration trends are so profound that they have become embedded in 
Filipino culture, and as these patterns occur across generations, female labor migration is now a 
defining aspect of Filipino culture. Their undeniably large presence necessitates scholarship to 
unpack and understand the ways in which Filipina women are treated by and impacted by the 
global care industry. These women stand out in the global context because a majority of them are 
middle-class and well-educated women who often leave professional jobs for lower-status jobs 
abroad. That these women are willing to exchange a middle-status experience at home for a 
low-status working existence abroad is what makes the narrative of these women even more 
compelling.¹⁰

In this paper, I apply Hochschild’s universalized theoretical framework of *global care 
chains* to the localized context of feminized care labor migration from the Philippines to Taiwan. 
It is important to note that in this paper, I do not explore the full cycle of Hochschild’s *global 
care chains* paradigm. It is beyond the scope of this paper to include a discussion of care and 
affect work in both the labor-sending and labor-receiving countries. While I focus primarily on 
care labor in the localized context specific to Taiwan and am not dedicating as much attention to 
the Philippine context, it is still imperative to acknowledge the correlation between these two 
moving parts within the larger context of the globalized phenomenon. Through these migratory 
patterns Taiwan and the Philippines define each other through necessitating and providing labor; 
it is this gendered migratory labor pattern that not only defines life experiences of individuals, 
but defines aspects of broader cultural trends and international relations.

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In Chapter One, I historicize the political, economic, and social milieu of Taiwan, the labor-receiving nation, from the 1960s to present. This section serves to highlight how Taiwan’s economic development trajectory precipitated a pressing demand for outsourcing the Filipino care labor force. Chapter Two then focuses on the politics of the Filipina body in the Taiwanese household. Through my discussion of two specific forms of paid nurturant care work—eldercare and childcare—I explore the complex interplay of affect within the constraints of the wage-labor relationship.
Chapter One: Precipitating a Filipino Care Force: Taiwan’s Political, Economic and Social Milieu 1960s-Present

The 1960s in Taiwan marked the beginning of political, economic and social transformations that would continue into the twenty-first century. The interwoven processes of industrialization, urbanization and economic liberalization coalesced to create Taiwan’s economic miracle and its rise as one of the “Four Asian Tigers,” alongside Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea. In this chapter, I historicize the internal developments shaping the labor-receiving country of Taiwan. I will begin my discussion by first presenting the macro-level economic changes in Taiwan’s political economy from the 1960s to present. Then, I will analyze how these changes manifested in the social sphere of Taiwanese life, with particular attention to shifts in demographics and the evolving modern-day Taiwanese family unit. Lastly, I will demonstrate how these domestic transformations created a nation-wide “care deficit” and a pressing demand for outsourced care labor. I hope to contextualize the political, economic and social milieu of Taiwan, as well as concurrent global developments, in order to better understand the conditions from which Taiwanese families began to integrate migrant care labor into the once private household.

Taiwan’s Economic Restructuring and Growth

Before we delve into the case study of gendered care labor migration from the Philippines to Taiwan, it is essential that we first gain an understanding of the specific local economic context in which Filipina care workers were absorbed into Taiwanese society. Economists identify the period from the 1960s to the 1990s as the era in which the world’s “East Asian
Miracles” experienced dramatic economic growth.\textsuperscript{11} Taiwan rose as one of these “miracles” as the result of planned economic strategies devised by the government. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Taiwanese government implemented a series of incentives and benefits to turn away from agriculture and transition towards a more export-oriented economy. This shift was fundamental in sparking Taiwan’s exponential industrial growth and development in the subsequent decades. The immense success of this economic planning can be seen in the following table, which outlines the trajectory of Taiwan’s post-war export structure from 1952-1999:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agriculture (raw and processed)</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
<th>Heavy and chemical</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source:}
\textit{Taiwan Statistical Data Book, various issues.}

As shown above, at the beginning of the 1950s agriculture was the backbone of the Taiwanese economy with the industry representing 91.9\% of the nation’s exports. By the end of

\textsuperscript{11} "The Key to the Asian Miracle: Making Shared Growth Credible," Jose Edgardo Campos and Hilton L. Root, Brookings Institute, Published June 7, 2001, Accessed May 1, 2019, \url{https://www.brookings.edu/book/the-key-to-the-asian-miracle/}

the late 1990s, agricultural exports dramatically decreased, representing 1.8% of the nation’s exports.

Taiwan strategically realized that its potential to industrialize was entirely dependent on its abundant labor force, rather than capital investment.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, in the path of industrialization, the Taiwanese state centered its efforts around developing the nation’s labor-intensive industries:

The shift to manufacturing was successful largely because economic planners chose to focus on the textile and apparel industry, a sector known for playing a large role in the early development of countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan. Textile and apparel manufacturing is recognized as an important driver of economic growth in developing countries because making fabrics is the most labor-intensive of all major industries, and such countries typically possess a large amount of unskilled labor.\textsuperscript{14}

In order to encourage the development of these specific sectors, the state offered tax benefits, tariff rebates and low-interest loans to relevant industries. While in the 1960s the economy was primarily dominated by light industry, such as consumer goods, by the end of the 1970s, the economy expanded to include more heavy industries, such as petrochemicals and steel.\textsuperscript{15} The role of Taiwan’s developmental state initially did one of two things: promoted industrial growth and generated more low-skilled jobs which needed to be filled. As will be discussed later, revenues generated from this surplus would later be invested in capital intensive industries such as technology sectors. \textbf{In the following section, I will unpack the complexities of Taiwan’s}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{14} Chen, Been-Ion. “Inside the Taiwan Miracle.” \textit{Taiwan Today}. Published on June 1, 2011. Accessed May 1, 2019. \url{https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=8.8.29.32.32.45&post=13965}.
\end{footnotesize}
developmental state with particular focus on gender and the role of Taiwanese women in these larger macro-level shifts.

**An Evolving Labor Force: Taiwanese Female Labor Participation in the Age of Industrialization**

Taiwanese women played a momentous role in Taiwan’s industrial growth of the 1960s and 1970s. Taiwanese women were able to fulfill the demand created by these labor-intensive industries, such as the manufacturing of consumer goods, and could be found in factory work positions across the island.¹⁶

While the infrastructure created through urbanization and industrialization enabled women to enter the labor force more easily, many scholars and writers acknowledge that cheap and unskilled female labor ultimately propelled Taiwan economically to join the ranks of the other “Asian Tigers.”¹⁸ Taiwan’s economic restructuring and growth in the post-1960s era created the conditions that made it undeniably necessary for the state to incorporate women into the labor

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force. However, such a transition was not instantaneous as the Taiwanese state repeatedly negotiated and renegotiated women’s role in the labor force. In the face of these changes, Taiwanese women were expected to enter the productive labor force while simultaneously still fulfilling their traditional unpaid reproductive roles in the private household as wives, mothers, and caretakers.

Beginning in the 1960s, the Guomindang introduced two programs in response to the nation’s rapidly growing export-led economy: 客厅即工厂 keting ji gongchang (“living room as factories”) and 妈妈教室 mama jiaoshi (“Mother’s workshops.”) In the “living room as factories” model, the government offered households low-interest loans to purchase the mechanical equipment necessary for the manufacturing of handicrafts, garments, toys, ornaments, etc in the private home.¹⁹ Women were paid on a piece-rate basis, were offered low wages and were not eligible for protections, such as health insurance. The latter model, “mother’s workshops,” were community workshops meant to teach skills, such as healthy cooking, sewing, other miscellaneous household tasks. Despite undergoing rapid industrialization, the Taiwanese state continued to reinforce patriarchal values and sponsor programs and projects that perpetuated women’s traditional household roles.” ²⁰ Through the creation of such programs, the Taiwanese state expected women to maintain their reproductive labor roles, while simultaneously contributing to the industrial labor force. Women were not relinquished from any work, instead more was asked of them. Therefore, the state’s initiatives to

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informally incorporate women into the labor force was not indicative of a progressive agenda, but rather a means of leveraging women’s productive labor force potential for the nation.

Although the government was encouraging women’s participation in the informal labor force, the state was still funneled them into gendered divisions of labor within the domestic sphere in which they were already doing unpaid work of a similar capacity: “Workshops were conducted and housewives were trained. Many families’ living rooms were converted into ‘factories,’ housewives became workers, and work became domesticated.” 21 In promoting such programs, the Taiwanese state delineated the boundaries of both women’s productive and reproductive obligations to their families, as well as to their country. During this stage of transforming the Taiwanese economy, the state and the family ultimately exploited Taiwanese women both through their unpaid labor in the private home, as well as through their transient presence in the labor force. 22 In 1961 Taiwanese female labor participation accounted for 35.81% of the nation’s total labor participation rate. By 2009 this same indicator was measured at 49.62%. 23

While Taiwan’s industrialization accelerated during the 1960s, it was during the 1980s and 1990s that industrial production truly took off as the technological intensity of its exports drastically increased. 24 As Taiwan became more industrialized and developed its heavily export-oriented economy, there was increasing internal migration from the remote northern regions to the burgeoning urban centers in central, southern and eastern Taiwan. Yet, over the

21 Ibid, 52.
years the Taiwanese economy has shifted away from manufacturing and reoriented itself towards becoming a service economy, “striving to restructure the economy by switching the focus of industrial development from unskilled labor-intensive manufacturing to capital-intensive and high-technology areas” \(^{25}\) Taiwan, as well as other East Asian countries, were able to successfully undergo this transition by utilizing surplus accumulated from manufacturing/labor intensive industries (such as light consumer items,,manufacturing i.e. textiles) and investing this capital into capital-intensive industries (such as high-tech industries.)

Rising levels of educational attainment and income levels created the conditions from which Taiwanese women begin to predominantly enter capital and skill-intensive industries. As local Taiwanese entered the service-oriented economy, there became an inevitable labor shortage in necessary low-skilled jobs. In the early 1990s, Taiwan faced labor shortages that pressured the government to open its borders to foreign contract workers, mainly from Pacific Asia. \(^{26}\) These low-skilled workers were absolutely fundamental to Taiwan’s infrastructure projects pushing the nation forward in its efforts of development, as well as fueling what was left of Taiwan’s labor-intensive industries. \(^{27}\) Taiwan’s transition to a high-skilled, capital-intensive economy allowed South East Asian workers to replace Taiwanese women’s role in low-skill, labor-intensive jobs.

Such upward developments continued past the turn of the century. Taiwan’s interior has continued to deindustrialize with corporations increasingly relocating their operations offshore, a

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trend prevalent among other developed countries. Additionally, at this point, Taiwan realized that it had lost its competitive advantage in labor-intensive manufacturing as the abundant and cheaper labor forces of other developing countries grew. Yet, the government reshaped this export-oriented economic model and applied it to the country’s burgeoning science and technology industries. In this process, industries become more specialized at home while relocating more labor-intensive components of production abroad, therefore allowing production at home to focus more on capital or skill-intensive production. Presently, the service industry fuels the domestic market and information technology products constitute large percentage of exports.

Demographic Transitions and The Modern-Day Taiwanese Family

The overlapping long-term economic developments described above converged and ultimately ended up influencing the most basic societal unit--the family. In the following section, I will outline the most significant demographic shifts that revolve around the makings of the present-day Taiwanese family unit. Woven into this discussion is an inquiry of the role of traditional value systems in the face of these modern-day transformations. The below writing serves to explain the demographic shifts within Taiwanese society, particularly the family unit, the precipitated the demand for outsourced care labor. One of the most pronounced changes that has occurred is that over the course of the past two decades, the Taiwanese family unit has


become both smaller in size, as well as diversified in living arrangements. The figure below shows the demographic composition of family structures in Taiwan from 2000-2015:\(^\text{31}\)

Despite its slight decrease over time, the nuclear family structure has still remained as the most common family structure, only falling from 47.9% to 37.7% over this fifteen year period. Secondary to this pattern, the traditional stem family, in which parents live with their married sons and other family members, has become less common and continues to decline.\(^\text{32}\)

This patrilineal form of co-residence is a direct reflection of traditional Chinese ideals; The Confucian notion of filial piety assigns care for the elders of family as a familial duty. These traditional values surrounding the family unit manifests in modern-day household structures. Even in the modern day, institutional care is unfortunately still deeply attached to the stigma of


filial failure. Despite this attached stigma, the rising context of shifting household patterns in modern-day society has pressured Taiwanese households to “outsource part of their filial duty,” particularly in protecting this ideal of a three-generation Taiwanese household. Yet this is not to say that the fall of the extended family and the rise of the conjugal family structure does not necessarily mark the death of such value systems. Rather, globalization, industrialization, and other parallel processes, have pressured modern-day Taiwanese families to make compromises and alter these deep-rooted values.

Care within the Taiwanese household does not only include childcare, but also care for the elderly. Beginning in the 1990s, government officials and scholars began to raise concerns regarding the country’s quickly aging population: “Taiwan’s demographic circumstances are very similar: its population is still younger than Japan’s, but in barely two decades, it has moved from an ageing to an aged society and in 10 years time, it will be a ‘super-aged’ state.” Despite this alarming demographic challenge, the Taiwanese government has not responded to the issue in the form of providing support for workers who also need to care for those in their respective households, as well as not improving its public welfare services. Through public policy the government reinforces the notion that care for the elderly is a private and familial obligation, rather than a public or state-provided right. The care deficit in Taiwan, particularly in relation to its elderly population, has become intensified by both the lack of public provision and the deep-rooted values that family care take place in the private home. In the modern-age, a live-in

35 Ibid., 90.
migrant care worker has become a popular choice for middle-class three-generation Taiwanese families as a means of successfully “subcontracting filial piety.”

In stating that care work is a familial obligation, the state passes the care responsibility to the female of the house. Taiwanese values and ideals are strongly rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Within this framework, the filial obligation of females in a household contributes to the family economy in the form of unpaid care labor. Traditionally, women’s reproductive capabilities, rather than economic contributions, has defined their status within the household and society as a whole: “Women were brought into the family for the purpose of bearing and rearing a new generation: whatever their other achievements, their position in the family depended on fulfilling this expectation.” These same values are then reflected in public policy. Since 1949, Guomindang policymakers have established a family-centered welfare ideology in Taiwan in which the family is expected and assumed to be the primary socioeconomic unit for taking care of the elderly and the young. In the present-day, the Taiwanese government continues to passively reinforce gendered expectations related to care. Women, the assumed care takers of their in-laws, parents, and children, still to this day receive little-to-no social benefits from the state for carrying out this unpaid work in the private realm of society.

Taiwan’s shrinking family structure, rise of dual-income households and aging population all force Taiwanese families to find substitute care for the household’s young and elderly. Taiwan began recruiting migrant domestic care workers in the early 1990s during a pivotal shift in the economic, political and social development of Taiwan. Since then, hiring foreign migrant care workers has become a lucrative option for Taiwanese households unwilling

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36 Lan, Global Cinderellas, 94.
to make compromises between care for their loved ones and their career, and looking to save money in the process.\textsuperscript{39} Within the literature, scholars agree that Taiwanese households are not relinquishing their care duties to a foreign care worker, but instead, transforming the nature of their care role: “This arrangement does not entirely relieve their situation; rather, it transforms their role from direct care provider to indirect care manager, and managing the migrant care worker becomes another task to be carried out alongside their own paid work.”\textsuperscript{40} For both individual families and policy makers, importing migrant care workers presents itself as an easy and immediate solution to the pressing care deficit.

\textit{Taiwan’s “Care Deficit” and the Pressing Demand for Outsourced Care Labor}

The growing prevalence of nuclear households, increased female participation in the labor force and Taiwan’s aging population all define the transformation of the modern-day Taiwanese family unit. Furthermore, these same societal shifts are the same patterns that have contributed to Taiwan’s present-day “care deficit.” This term, introduced by American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, describes the rising numbers of dual-income households within developed countries and the inevitable shortage of care for the household’s loved ones. Increased levels of female educational attainment and active labor force participation both drew Taiwanese women further away from their traditional role as unpaid care providers within the household. Authors of “The Family and Demography in Contemporary Taiwan,” Lee and Sun analyze how increased labor force participation transformed women’s role as carers for the family:

\begin{quote}
The proportion of married women who take care of children themselves declined since the increase of labor force participation of women. Between 1984 and 1990, the proportion of women who take care of children themselves during the day time decreased
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} Wang, “Struggling for Recognition,” 92.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 97.
from 80 to 75 percent, particularly among the highly educated women: the proportion decreased to only 28 percent.\textsuperscript{41}

With these shifts on the societal level, who is left to care for the elder-generation and next generation of Taiwanese citizens? Who fills the gap left by these changes spurred by globalization? While Taiwanese women are entering higher paying and higher-skill jobs, they are creating opportunity for women of the “global south” to flood these available low-skill job markets. Women of the “global south” are not only filling in low-skill work, such as factory work, but instead, Taiwanese women have also begun to outsource their paid reproductive labor to female migrant workers in a paid capacity. In the following chapter, I explore how Filipina care workers fill Taiwan’s pressing “care deficit,” which resulted from these aforementioned larger demographic shifts.

Chapter Two: The Politics of the Filipina Body in Taiwanese Households

The Global Politics of Care

In recent years, “care work,” “domestic work,” and “reproductive work” have become buzzwords within the care economy literature. Although each of these terms is rooted in their own respective theoretical backgrounds, such histories have been widely ignored, leading authors to conflate these overlapping, yet simultaneously distinctive, terms into one. The International Labour Organization (ILO) broadly defines “care work” as “looking after the physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of one or more other people.” The organization further divides the larger category of care work into “direct, personal and relational care activities, such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner; and indirect care activities, such as cooking and cleaning.”

Sociologist and author Mignon Duffy critiques the way in which past literature reduces “care work,” “domestic labor,” “reproductive labor” and other related terms into a homogenous entity. While Duffy acknowledges the overlap of these terms, she still challenges scholars to confront these ambiguities in their writing. Scholars responded in various ways to the global commodification of care work; while some scholars define care work with more consideration to its role in the larger economic structure, Duffy and other scholars give more attention to the emotional dimensions of this field of work. Duffy remolds a definition of “care work” originally proposed by Cancian and Oliker, renaming this definition as what she calls the “nurturant care

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perspective:” “feelings of affection and responsibility combined with actions that provide responsively for an individual’s personal needs or well-being, in a face-to-face relationship.”

Duffy’s definition of nurturant care work extends to professional positions, such as nurses, doctors, teachers, child care workers, social workers, psychotherapists, etc.

From this point on in my writing, I will apply Duffy’s nurturant care perspective to the case study of Filipina caregivers in Taiwan engaging with two specific forms of paid care work--child care and elderly care. These industries within the larger Taiwanese care economy were greatly impacted by the societal-level changes and demographic shifts discussed in the previous chapter. The transformation of the modern-day Taiwanese family, including the rise of dual-income households and the dissolution of the extended family structure, have led to the creation of a massive care deficit for two populations within Taiwanese society--young children and the elderly. In the past, these two groups of people relied on the unpaid care work of the household’s mother and/or daughter-in-law. Filipina migrant workers, alongside many other groups of Southeast Asian migrant workers, have provided a solution to Taiwanese households’ acute care deficit.

The global commodification of care complicates the very definition of care itself. Today’s global capitalist system has transformed something as organic and intangible as nurture into something transactional. Under the modern-day global capitalist system, the “labor of love” once given freely within the household has quite literally become a commodity to be bought and sold. What does it mean to essentially purchase care, and can genuine care exist within the constraints inherent to the wage-labor relationship? The case study of Filipina caregivers in

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Taiwan is symbolic of a much larger global phenomenon. In the course of this chapter, I analyze primary and secondary ethnographic material to explore the dynamics that distinguish eldercare from childcare. Within this larger discussion, I examine the role affect plays within commodified care provided by the Filipina worker within the Taiwanese household.

_Eldercare: A Labor of Maintenance_

An increasingly popular alternative for Taiwanese households looking for assistance with elderly care for a loved one is domiciliary care or care that is provided in the home. As discussed in the previous chapter, the traditional valued ethic of filial piety presents caring for one’s parents in old age as a reciprocation of their parent’s care and therefore, strictly a familial duty. In Mainland China and Taiwan, this deep reverence of elders is then reflected in the society’s handling of elderly care. While Confucian ideology attaches significance to the image of the ideal filial son, in actuality, this domesticated labor has historically been relegated to a lower-ranking female figure of the house, such as a daughter or daughter-in-law. These Confucian family values have persisted in the modern-day societies of Mainland China and Taiwan and are reflected in the long-term elderly care preferences of both populations. In the past institutional care or care alternatives outside of the nuclear family have been stigmatized and perceived as a marker of filial failure. However, over the past two decades, nontraditional forms of elderly care have become increasingly popular with public attitudes becoming more and more aligned with Western values towards long-term elderly care. This gradual shift in public

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attitudes towards long-term care solutions for the aging population can be seen in the following composite data from Taiwan’s 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population and Housing Census:

**Living Arrangement of the Resident Population Aged 65 (and over)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>LIVING ALONE</th>
<th>WITH SPOUSE ONLY</th>
<th>WITH CHILDREN</th>
<th>WITH RELATIVES</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the most significant findings from this data is the decline in the percentage of Taiwanese elderly who cohabitate with their children. In fact, over the course of this twenty year period, the “with children” category was the only living arrangement in decline. Furthermore, all other living arrangement forms (“living alone,” “with spouse only,” “with relatives,” and “other”) actually grew in prominence.

This gradual decentering of the traditional three-generational family structure is what ultimately necessitated the entrance of Filipina caregivers into Taiwanese households and society. The Filipina caregiver is entering the life of the aging Taiwanese care receiver during a major transitional period of life; They are performing care for people who are experiencing a loss of autonomy and becoming increasingly dependent of others. Despite the necessity of receiving such level of care, many elderly persons still feel as if they are relinquishing their independence to a complete outsider. Many associate paid elderly care work with palliative care and portray it

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as a highly medicalized form of care work in which the caregiver serves a very functional purpose in the life of the cared-for.

While it is true that bodily care and what would traditionally be considered “dirty work” is indeed a significant component of this field of work, there is a great degree of emotional labor put into this labor that goes largely unnoticed. Families hiring paid care workers for their aging loved ones are doing so with the expectation that they will not only carry out routinized tasks, but will provide their relative with genuine care:

There is generally little expectation that the service provider should be anything more than courteous and efficient in performing their task. With care, however, there are other expectations that arise because the person being cared for rather than just being serviced is someone in need, someone potentially suffering, someone who does not have their everyday capabilities of a working person, parent or senior citizen. Their identity is shaped by their moral dimension of care and its echoes with ‘family’.47

This assumption of affect in the case of elderly care, is intensified by the fact that employers, typically relatives of the elderly, are expecting “person-centered” and individualized care that would not otherwise be available in a nursing home or other institutional settings.48 Many Taiwanese families are forced to rely on long-term care options for their aging loved ones within the private realm in the absence of adequate public alternatives provided by the Taiwanese government.

Within the particular context of the elderly--with their experience of feeling increasingly unsafe, less secure in both their bodily and mental faculties, emerges the assumption that care providers are going to provide the care receiver with emotional care and nurture. The nurture of the caretaker is inevitably shaped by the particular challenges affecting the cared-for. A major

47 Paul Higgs and Chris Gilleard, “Care Work,” in Personhood, Identity and Care in Advanced Old Age (Bristol, UK; Chicago, IL, USA: Bristol University Press, 2016), 106-107.
48 Ibid., 109.
role of the Filipina caregiver is to maintain the care recipient’s physical and emotional livelihood despite their natural state of decline. However, Rivas asserts that caregivers create the illusion of the cared-for’s independence at the expense of their own invisibility:

For all that, however, personal attendant work consists of literal, physical acts—things one can see and touch. How can that labor be transformed into something unseen? In fact, what is made invisible is not the labor itself, but the workers. When workers are invisible, consumers of personal attendant services can feel that they have accomplished their daily activities by themselves. The best care workers, according to some disabled individuals and attendants, are those whose presence is barely felt. 49

The above quote astutely draws attention to the hidden labor performed by elder care workers. However, are the interpersonal relationships of employer (care receiver) and employee (caregiver) always defined by this independence and invisibility dichotomy that Rivas presents in her writing? Do these dimensions of labor relations manifest in the case study of Filipina elderly care workers in Taiwan? In the following section, I will challenge the depiction of labor relations within the realm of care work proposed by Rivas. The internet provides a vast supply of video resources that give us a transparent view into the lives of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan. With just a simple search on youtube in Tagalog, such as OFWs sa Taiwan (“OFWs in Taiwan”) endless pages of video blogs or vlogs following the day-to-day lives of Filipina elderly caregivers living and working in Taiwan flood the screen. In the following section, I will utilize these online materials to explore the complexities shaping labor relations within care work, as well as the way in which Filipina caregivers imbue meaning in caring for the Taiwanese elderly.

In one video, entitled Caretaker, Taiwan, Kayang Kaya (“Caretaker, Taiwan, You Really Can Do It!”) an enthusiastic twenty-something year old describes her experience caring for an

elderly man in the city of Taichung. In the video, she describes the family background of the 
man she is caring for and states that it is geographical distance that keeps his children from 
caring for their aging father. Although the elderly man is in pain and is faced with many medical 
issues, she does not judge them for their absence and explains that they are working and building 
their professional careers. Immediately after this discussion of the man’s family dynamic, the 
speaker begins to describe her role as the caregiver in the life of the elderly man she is caring for. 
While she briefly mentions the functional responsibilities of her job, such as giving medication, 
taking blood, etc., it is clear to the viewer that she personally sees affect and the quality of 
interactions with the cared-for to be a central part of her job description. Multiple times 
throughout the video the speaker repeatedly emphasizes the importance of her role in ensuring 
may kasama lagi siya (“that he always has a companion.”) In one particular illuminating moment 
in the video, the speaker smiles and prides herself for deeply understanding the particular needs 
of the elderly man she is caring for:

Medyo malilimutin...Siyempre, matanda na.  
Ako lagi pinakalala araw-araw: “Ilang taon 
nasa ya? Anong pangalan ko? Ilang anak 
niya? …ulit-ulit ’yan.” 50  

“He’s a bit forgetful….Of course so, he’s old 
now. Everyday I always ask him: “How old 
are you? What’s my name? “How many 
children do you have?” ….over-and-over 
again, just like this.”

This video also reveals to us the “echoes of family.” In this video and many other similar videos 
posted on youtube, Filipina care workers use familial terms when describing those they are 
caring for. For me and my personal experience living in the Philippines, this aspect was 
particularly illuminating. Filipino culture is very title-conscious and it is important for people,

50 “Caretaker, Taiwan, Kayang Kaya ,” Youtube, last modified October 31, 2018,  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6FiEULaVyc.
especially who are not close, to recognize the social positions of other in the form of addressing them by their full titles. “Sir” and “ma’am” are customary and are used as a sign of respect not only to superiors, but to elders in general. In the Philippines, familial terms, such as Ate (“sister,”) Kuya (“brother,”) Lola (“grandmother,”) or Lolo (“grandfather”) are used as a sign of respect, but tend to be reserved for more intimate relationships. The use of ang lola ko (“my grandmother”) or ang lolo ko (“my grandfather”) by Filipina migrant workers to describe the Taiwanese elderly that they are caring for reveals that these women are not viewing these interactions as simply service, but instead, work that is imbued with emotional value. This is not to say that all Filipina caregivers working with Taiwanese elderly experience/feel a kind of familial connection for those they are caring for. This range can be seen in the varying degrees of language that women uploading these videos online are using to describe the care recipient. While some women describe those they are caring for as their aalaga (“subject of caring,”) others rely on more familial language, such as lola (“grandmother”) or lolo (“grandfather.”)

How do we make sense of Riva’s independence-at-the-expense-of-invisibility paradigm in relation to the analysis of the above online resources? While Riva’s theoretical framework brings attention to the structural hierarchies shaping the labor relations of care work, my own personal analysis of these vlogs, Filipina caregivers do not see themselves as invisible. In fact, she envisions herself as a companion to the man she cares for and in a sense positions herself as his substitute family. While Rivas’ invisibility-independence paradigm is strongly molded by an oppressive undertone, I am understanding this same dynamic of invisibility as a form of invisible/unseen emotional labor on the part of the Filipina caregiver. I do not believe that caregivers are being stripped of their own personhood in order to safehold the independence of
the care recipient in the way that Rivas is subtly implying. Instead, I would argue that caregivers are willingly positioning themselves on the periphery, in relation to the cared-for, as a task intertwined with many of the other unseen functions of the work they are performing. In listening to the voices of Filipina caregivers themselves explaining their interactions working with Taiwanese elderly, I would argue that Filipina care workers are entering this relationship with their Taiwanese employers with the knowledge that affect is essential to their job performance. In many cases, within these videos, it seems that women--in providing personalized and familial-like care--are making the difficult work they are doing into something more enjoyable, fulfilling in the long term. In fact, as seen in the example analyzed earlier, this Filipina caregiver is insisting that it is indeed the emotional labor, notably what she is not technically getting paid to do, is the most valuable to her.

Analyzing the role of Filipina migrant workers in relation to elderly care proves to be quite difficult because this work is end of life care. However, the growing prominence of Taiwanese households outsourcing elderly care labor reveals to us the broader social implications and shifts in societal values of Taiwanese families. In hiring a Filipina elderly care worker, Taiwanese households are not relinquishing their care duties to a foreign care worker, but instead, transforming the nature of their care role: “This arrangement does not entirely relieve their situation; rather, it transforms their role from direct care provider to indirect care manager, and managing the migrant care worker becomes another task to be carried out alongside their own paid work.” On a surface level, importing migrant care workers presents itself as an easy and immediate solution to the pressing care deficit. On a moral level, through

hiring a care worker to take care of the household’s elderly, relatives can therefore feel relieved that they have not gone against filial duty. Furthermore, while this arrangement is technically lifting the burden of filial piety off of the entire household, in reality, it is specifically relieving this pressure off the female/daughter-in-law of the household.

_Childcare: A Labor of Creation_

While the elder caregiver is primarily consumed with sustaining the life of an aging adult in decline, the child caregiver is tasked with forming a human being who will grow up to become a member within the next generation of Taiwanese citizens. Similar to performing care work for elderly, with paid childcare there is also the assumption of affect. Once again, the employer assumes nurture and care as an assumed and integral task on the part of the household caregiver:

> Whether individual child care workers actually love the children they care for or not, emotional attachment and care by woman is an assumed and integral part of child care labor. The assumption that this emotional attachment exists is part of the gendered and micropolitical character of the work; gender is both a rationale for and an outcome of the arrangement.  

While the expectation of nurture in elderly care is shaped by circumstances of the population being cared-for, the assumption of nurture in paid childcare is influenced by what employers perceive as an innate quality possessed by the Filipina caregiver. In the case of childcare on a global scale, it is assumed that women are defined by their innate capacity to nurture; it is this quality that makes all women, no matter their training or educational background, highly qualified candidates for this field of work.

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This assumption of care is explicitly demonstrated by Taiwanese employers, and is the subject of Taiwanese sociologist and scholar, Pei Chia Lan’s ethnographic research. Lan interviewed and spent time with dozens of Filipina and Indonesian migrant workers in and around Taipei, focusing intently on the relationship between the migrant workers and their Taiwanese employers. Her ethnography illuminates the stratification of “Mothering Labor,” as she quotes a Taiwanese mother describing the work of her Filipina childcare worker,

The way she takes care of the baby is just feeding her, watching her, getting her to sleep...really just basic needs. Not like us, we want the children to learn; we want to play together with her; we want to be part of their lives. She doesn’t enjoy this or understand this. She doesn’t give more, you know, love.53

The Taiwanese mother believes that her hired help merely performs rudimentary tasks that she deems “basic,” asserting that the Filipina nanny does not want to be an active part of the child’s life, and that she “doesn’t understand” what the more loving labor of the mother. After presenting the Taiwanese mother’s revealing sentiments, Lan questions this brash statement. Skeptical of the Taiwanese mother’s dismissive remarks of her care provider’s role, Lan shines a light on the emotional labor performed by Filipina caregivers in Taiwan. She imagines a scenario in which the Filipina caregiver provides too much love to the point of challenging the primacy of the Taiwanese maternal figure. She writes,

Mothers who hire childcare workers face an emotional dilemma: they want nannies to love their children so they can mitigate their anxieties about leaving their children with others; yet they feel uneasy if the children develop strong attachments to nannies or even confuse nannies for mothers. Mother’s solution is to stratify the division of mothering labor: how can they recruit childcare workers to be their partners in mothering yet only a part of it?54

53 Pei-Chia Lan, Global Cinderellas,113.
54 Ibid.
Lan is drawing out the household politics and interpersonal power dynamics that may or may not be present in the relationship between the mother employer and migrant care provider. Taiwanese mothers need their nannies, but then feel uncomfortable with the hired help’s prominent role in their child’s life. The mother that Lan previously quoted chose to deal with this discomfort by refusing to acknowledge the emotional labor that is inherent to care work, a tactic which Lan then deems a stratification of labor. This allows the mother to retain authority and understand herself to be the primary source of love for the child, positing her motherly love labor to be unique to her and not shared with the migrant worker nanny.

When a both a mother and caregiver are present in the home, the divisions of authority become incredibly blurred. This is further complicated by the fact that the maternal figure and the substitute maternal figure (the caregiver) are competing over something as immeasurable as nurture. Authors Utall and Tuominen argue that the relationship and often terse interactions between between mother and paid child care workers is not necessarily based on disagreements relating to their respective relationships to the child, but instead, point to larger issues pertains to authority and expertise in deciding who claims the right of being the “maternal expert.” While the authors are drawing out this potential for conflict, the main thesis of their writing conceptualizes paid child care labor as rooted in an exploitative structure with the potential for employers and employees to imbue such work with emotional value and personal fulfillment.

The interactions between the paid caregiver and the maternal figure of the home reveals the stratification of care that exists. It was very common for care workers to be designated to carry out the “dirty work,” such as changing diapers, giving baths, doing laundry, etc, while the

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mother of the household is afforded the luxury of basing their interactions with their children on purely emotional care. Yet, this dynamic in which privileged higher class women hire paid care workers to perform “dirty work,” while they, themselves, can fully dedicate their time to just engaging in emotional and moral education of their children is not a new modern day phenomenon. In fact, this theme is woven throughout Chinese cultural history. Anthropologist Francesca Bray has extensively studied the “reproductive hierarchies” found in Late Imperial China. While maids and concubines were responsible for the management of the household economy, in cooking, cleaning, weaving, etc., the elite woman and official wife was solely responsible for the reproduction of family members through caring for the family’s elders and producing the next generation of kin. 56 The modern-day phenomenon of Taiwanese households outsourcing Filipina care labor echoes the same motifs present in this long-standing cultural history; It reveals to us the differences of elite womanhood versus lower-class womanhood and the divisions of reproductive labor that follows this hierarchy. It is this dynamic of stratified motherhood that distinguishes the household politics of childcare from elderly care, as when an OFW cares for an elder, there is less pressure to assert one’s relationship as a child is perhaps less likely to feel threatened by another’s love of their parent, whereas a mother is concerned with demonstrating her love as she creates and builds a relationship with her child.

While paid childcare, similar to elderly care, also requires a great deal of unseen emotional labor, the role of the Filipina caregiver in performing paid childcare labor is simultaneously very functional. In Taiwan and global care labor destinations abroad, Filipina workers are in high demand because of their highly desirable cultural capital that lies in their

56 Francesca Bray, “Reproductive Hierarchies,” in Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 366.
English proficiency. The Philippines has a deep-rooted colonial history including years of close interactions with the English language. English is taught alongside Tagalog—the national language of the Philippines, making a majority of the population bilingual in both languages. Taiwanese households are not just hiring Filipina caregivers to complete the basic functional tasks of bringing the children to school, cooking meals, and cleaning the home, but rather also want their childcare providers to help in education, as they want their nannies to converse in English with their children. Filipina caregivers, then, do it all: they cook, clean, feed, play, love, and teach.

This prioritization of the linguistic capital of Filipina caregivers in the field of childcare, but not elderly care, can be seen on the official job posting website of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA.) While job listings for childcare positions list requirements, such as “have obtained a college degree” and “English Fluency (Reading, Writing, Speaking,)” the requirements for elderly care positions are far less demanding, as the basic requirements include only a high school level of education. These prerequisites of linguistic capital and higher educational background are extremely telling of the nature of the care that Taiwanese household heads are expecting of their Filipina caregiver watching for their child. Conversely, as Filipina women are hired to work with Taiwanese elderly despite possible language barriers reveals of the degree of care expected. Filipina caregivers must teach Taiwanese children, instilling not comfort with the English language and conferring cultural capital. More is expected of OFW childcare providers as they are tasked with building the whole child (whether the

Taiwanese mother admits it or not), whereas less intellectual labor is demanded of the eldercare giver.

In addition to education, Filipina women also play a significant role in the moral upbringing of the cared-for during the most significant developmental state of the child’s life, as scholars Uttal and Tuominen write,

As a result of these responsibilities, the adult caregiver interacts with children, exposing them to a variety of ideas and experiences, teaching them basic living skills, and socializing them to cultural values and norms. Macdonald suggested that paid child care is distinct from paid housework because ‘children are considered more socially valuable than clean houses.’

Filipina caregivers are of utmost societal and cultural importance in the Taiwanese home as they fashion and foment the identities of the Taiwanese youth. However, in their labors to build up the identity of the child, their own identity is suppressed as they are unappreciated financially and are alienated. These women are taking on a maternal role within the Taiwanese household while they themselves are unable to be a mother to their own children back home. The irony is inescapable. As Filipina care workers are tasked with raising the next generation of Taiwanese citizens, they themselves never gain citizenship, as their labor is only temporary. They are molding and shaping autonomous beings, while not have full autonomy over the child: they are not appreciated as full humans and are ultimately reduced to their labor identity.

As explored earlier, invisible emotional labor becomes a major task of the Filipina caregiver in caring for the Taiwanese youth. In my analysis of these two forms of paid nurturant care work, it is clear that the role of the Filipina caregiver in childcare requires far more emotional navigating and maneuvering in comparison to elder care. In the case of elder care, the

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family members of the cared-for are ultimately hiring the worker to carry out the more functional and palliative tasks, such as administering medication and taking the cared-for to doctor visits. However, when hiring the caregiver, family members are inevitably implicitly interested in how the caregiver performs these tasks. Despite not overtly demanding emotional labor, there is the unspoken and implicit assumption of humane and sympathetic nature.

In the case of child care, the scope of the functional tasks asked of Filipina caregivers is dramatically widened. They are assigned the responsibility of maintaining the domestic sphere of the Taiwanese family and are expected to not only share their nurturing capabilities with the children they care for, but to additionally pass on their linguistic skills as well. It is in this childcare context that the Filipina OFW’s cultural capital becomes highly valuable, whereas English fluency is tangential and not necessary the case of elderly work. Due to the fact that caregivers are working with children during peak developmental phase of their lives, even the functional components of their jobs, inevitably takes on greater significance. While the elder caregiver is primarily consumed with sustaining the life of an aging adult in decline, the child caregiver is tasked with forming a human being who will grow up to become a member of the next generation of Taiwanese citizens. These differences separating end-of-life care and childcare are what inevitably influence the expectations of care and nature of care in both contexts.
Concluding Remarks

What does it mean to essentially purchase care? Can genuine care exist within the constraints inherent to the wage-labor relationship? These are the two vital questions explored throughout this writing. Yet, there is so much more discourse worthy of our attention: What does this care migration mean for the future of the Philippines? For the future of the Filipino family identity? What does it mean for Filipina women to raise the next generation of Taiwanese citizens? While I have only had the opportunity to briefly allude to these inquiries within the scope of this writing, these questions are still crucial aspects of understanding the case study of Filipina care workers in Taiwan, as well as the globalized phenomenon of commodified care.

These two forms of nurturant care work--paid childcare and elderly care work--reveal the intersections of market and intimacy as well as the larger implications of the commodification of care:

When care is commodified, the care receiver becomes an independent purchaser of services to which he or she feels entitled. The care receiver does not experience the caregiver as generously expressing affection and concern through his or her work; rather the worker is simply doing a paid job.60

The commodification of something as intangible and immeasurable as care evokes many complications: Both of these forms of care bring up the following questions: What are the limits to the commodification of care? What are the boundaries of care? What constitutes the “end product” of these two forms of work? Above all, what are these workers being paid to do?

Filipina caregivers in Taiwan influence far more than just those they are caring for. They fundamentally change the inner workings of the Taiwanese family unit and household. The

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60 Rivas, “Invisible Care and the Illusion of Independence,” 188.
Filipina caregiver relieves the Taiwanese mother of her traditional role as the designated unpaid caretaker of both the elders and children of the family. Despite the evolving dynamics of the modern-day Taiwanese family, female domesticity within the private household remains unchanging. The pre-existing paradigm of the traditional family has simply attached itself to this modern-day phenomenon with the Filipina caregiver taking on the role that was once held by the Taiwanese mother and/or daughter-in-law of the three-generational household. In the past the mother-in-law of the paternal family would criticize the unpaid reproductive/domestic labor performed by her daughter-in-law. Now, with the dissolution of this three-generation family structure, the Taiwanese daughter-in-law has been absolved of this daily and habitual external criticism. Instead, now the Taiwanese housewife subcontracts this labor to the hired Filipina caregiver. Therefore, the object of scrutiny of the household is no longer the Taiwanese daughter-in-law, but instead, the Filipina migrant worker. 61

The positionality of the Filipina care worker in the private home and Taiwanese society is at odds with the societal weight and gravity of the necessary reproductive labor that these women are performing. These women relentlessly invest their time, energy and strength into the families they serve. These Filipina caregivers, alongside many other Southeast Asian care workers in Taiwan, are completing a combination of emotional, physical and intellectual tasks for which they are not properly remunerated for—both in terms of their perceived societal value, as well as the measurable factors of salary, benefits and legal protection beneath the state. Despite the social gravity of the work, in both paid child and eldercare, both forms of work are ultimately reduced as they are understood as “unskilled labor;” the workers are not perceived as

professionals with valuable expertise. Although Filipina caregivers are seen as merely
performing menial tasks, in reality they alleviate Taiwanese families, particularly mothers, of
their filial duties to the traditional family unit and thus play a significant role in raising Taiwan’s
next generation of citizens.
Bibliography


