



# **Exploring Relationship Dynamics: the Care of Vietnamese Migrant Caregivers in Taiwanese Households**

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# Labour Migration in Asia-Pacific



# History of Migrant domestic Workers in Taiwan

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- Live-in Caregiver Program (launched in 1992)
  - assisting elderly people's daily functioning (main focus)
  - statistics
    - 189,000 (50% of blue-collared foreign labour)
    - 12.4% of elderly  $\geq 65$
  - renewable contracts, not allowed to stay permanently (max. 9 years)

# Study Objectives

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- (1) To unfold different units of analysis in the context of migration and family elder care
- (2) To explore gender, social and power dynamics in families hiring a foreign worker who provides around-the-clock care to the dependent elder.

# Research Design- Ethnographic Fieldwork

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## □ **Methods**

- in-depth interview

  - November 2010 to April 2011

## □ **Samples (Case Study)**

- 23 Vietnamese migrant caregivers and 23 Taiwanese employers

- Sample Size: 46 (snowball sampling)

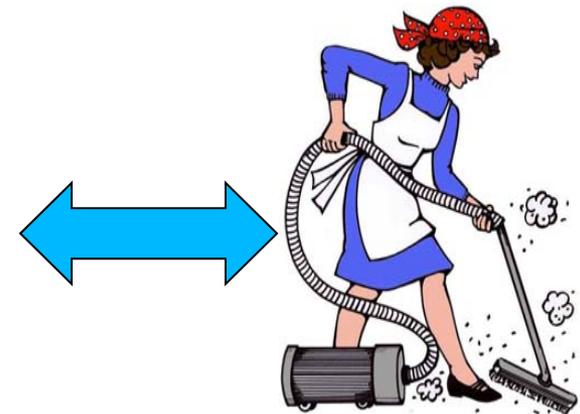
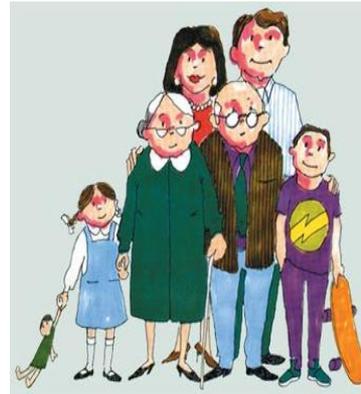
# Unit of Analysis

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**Household as a basic unit of analysis**

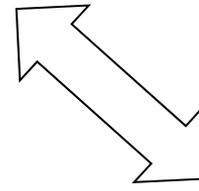
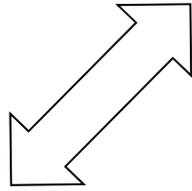
**Household members in relation to  
the domestic worker  
(dyadic vs. triadic relationships)**



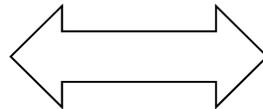
# Dyadics within the Triangulated Relationship

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**The Employer/Other Family Members**



**The Migrant Caregiver**



**The Elderly Care Recipient**

*-Different voices/perspectives*

# Perception of good Care

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Mr. Feng couldn't speak and his children were too busy to take care of him. I am the only person who can keep him company every day and bring him happiness and positive energy. I showed my true love to him, hoping that he will get better one day. (A-jin, 51 years old)

*'Labour of Love'* (Folbre and Nelson, 2000).

# Employer's Dependency

One time, A-ma (the elder) dirtied her pants when I was away. Then, Mr. Ji (the employer) freak out. As soon as I walked into the house, he asked my help immediately. He said that I'm his life saver! Ha ha. I think men cannot handle this kind of task. (Xiao-ba, 38 years old)

*Gendered body carework* (Twigg, 2004)



# The Elder's Dependency

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While I went back to Vietnam for a short visit, I phoned Mrs. Song and made sure everything was alright. Her husband stayed in the hospital when I was away, but I knew that it was not good for him. He talked to me on the phone and asked me to come back as soon as possible! (A-tsuen, 37 years old)



# Intimacies, Quasi-Familial Bonds and Family Integration



When I first arrived, I knew it was not appropriate to call him “A-pa” (father in Taiwanese) right away, so I waited and wanted to find out if I could develop some kind of familial relationship with him....It was not until the time when he made me feel very close to him and then I decided to call him “A-pa”. He treated me just like his own child. (A-mei, 44 years old)

*Social Family* (Connidis, 2010)

# Little Surveillance and Control

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Because A-sheng is far away from her home country, I've never put her into a difficult situation. I only ask her to finish her job duties, and I don't monitor or control her. I've never given her a deadline.... We all eat together and sometimes I tell her to eat first if I am busy or asleep. She knows that I don't care who eats first, but she always asks anyway. (Mrs. Liu, 41 years old)



# Negotiation

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At first, we didn't know each other well, so I was afraid that she might run away. I told A-chao if she ran away, I had to deal with many problems. When I first hired her, Vietnamese workers had the highest runaway rate in Taiwan. She came with three other Vietnamese workers. They all ran away from their employers even though the elderly people cared by those who ran away were relatively healthy. (Mrs. Chen, 49 years old)

# Power Bargaining

On my arrival in Taiwan, I was passive, compliant and afraid of my employers. Gradually, I learned how to bargain with them. They knew how well I cared for A-pa and did domestic chores. Thus, whenever I argued with my employers, I was able to pressure them by threatening to quit, and they would stop arguing with me. Ever since then, everyone in the family has treated me well and respectfully. (A-rong, 46 years old)



# Employer's Peacekeeping

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My mother-in-law does not see A-xian as part of the family. She thinks that A-xian is supposed to do what she is told when hired. She often complains about her job performance. Now, they don't get long with each other. If I show more concerns toward A-xian, my mother-in-law will show jealousy and resentment to her. To keep my mother-in-law happy, I pretend to dislike A-xian and then my mother-in-law will feel better for a week. One time I said to A-xian in front of my mother-in-law, "A-xian! Just do what I tell you to do. Let A-ma do whatever she wants. A-ma is always right no matter what." If she wants to sleep longer instead of eating or exercising, don't worry about her. Do you understand?? Then, my mother-in-law said, "Alright, that's enough! Don't be so harsh with her. By scolding A-xian, my mother-in-law would feel better. After that, I said to A-xian privately, "A-xian, from now on, when I ask you to do anything for A-ma, just say yes and you don't need to say anything else!" Then A-xian knew that I was acting in front of A-ma. (Mrs. Lin, 51 years old)

# Conclusion

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I argue that the migrant caregiver represents a new social 'dimension' that expands the pre-existing family caregiving relationship; this dimension complexifies the family tie by creating both intimacies as well as tensions which are intertwined within both triadic and dyadic caregiving dynamics.

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**Thanks for your Attention!**