

## Narrating Care and Its Silences: Gendered Care and Familial Responsibility in *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies*

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzes how the Thai film *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* employs narrative to reshape socio-historical understandings of aging and gender in contemporary Thailand. In a rapidly aging society with limited formal welfare infrastructure, eldercare remains predominantly privatised within the family. Rather than addressing this condition through policy discourse, the film makes it comprehensible through intimate, intergenerational storytelling. Through close narrative analysis of the film, this article examines how gendered responsibility is symbolically reorganised without being structurally redistributed. The narrative centres on a young man who becomes the primary caregiver to his grandmother, seemingly disrupting conventional gender expectations that associate caregiving with femininity. His transformation, from inheritance-seeking opportunist to emotionally committed grandson, invites viewers to reimagine masculinity as capable of tenderness and responsibility. However, this apparent reconfiguration does not entail a structural redistribution of care. Alongside his visible moral growth persists the quieter but indispensable labour of his mother, whose caregiving, marked by economic sacrifice, exhaustion, and filial obligation, remains narratively understated. Drawing on feminist care theory, moral economy, and masculinity, this study argues that the film performs a double movement: it renders male caregiving exceptional and transformative while normalising women's care work as ordinary and expected. In doing so, the narrative reshapes the moral imagination of responsibility without destabilising the familial regime that confines eldercare within kinship structures. By reading the film as a cultural site in which aging, gender, and obligation are negotiated, the article demonstrates how storytelling both reveals and obscures the sociohistorical conditions of care in late-modern Thailand. The film thus illuminates not only the emotional transformation of a grandson but also the enduring structural centrality of maternal labour.

**Keywords:** Narrative politics, Gendered care, Moral economy of care, Masculinity and maternal labor, Ageing and family

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, Thailand has experienced one of the most rapid demographic transitions in Southeast Asia, driven by persistently low fertility and rising longevity. The country entered the category of an ageing society in 2006 (National Statistical Office, 2018), when the proportion of individuals aged 60 and above surpassed 10 percent of the total population, in line with the UN classification. Within the ASEAN region, Thailand has one of the highest shares of older persons, second only to Singapore. Population ageing in the country has progressed rapidly, in 2021, Thailand had transitioned into a complete aged society, with more than one-fifth of its population aged 60 or older (National Statistical Office, 2018). Projections from the United Nations (2020) suggest that this figure will almost double proportionally, reaching nearly 30 percent by 2050. Such projections indicate not only Thailand's transition into a super-aged society, but also the exceptional speed of this shift relative to regional and global averages. This transition is particularly precarious, as Thailand is "getting old before getting rich," meaning that rapid population ageing is occurring while overall economic development remains limited—a pattern documented in analyses of ageing in resource-constrained middle-income contexts (Srikolchan et al., 2025).

Despite growing demographic pressures, formal welfare infrastructure for long-term eldercare remains limited (Khongboon & Pongpanich, 2018). The formal Long-Term Care (LTC) infrastructure in Thailand remains underdeveloped and medically centred, focusing primarily on curative hospital-based care while neglecting the broader social and daily living needs of older persons. Studies have shown that Thailand's LTC system operates with limited resources, heavily relying on family and community support while formal provision for comprehensive daily living assistance is still inadequate (Chuakhamfoo & Pannarunothai, 2014; Sudsawasd, 2023). Consequently, the Thai state largely relies on a "family-first" welfare model, whereby the burden of continuous and intensive caregiving is externalised to kinship networks with minimal public subsidies or institutional support. The LTC model is predominantly home-based and depends heavily on family members' unpaid labour, particularly female family members—wives, daughters, and daughters in law (Knodel et al, 2018) Responsibility is absorbed within kinship networks, where care is framed less as a social right and more as a moral obligation. In this context, eldercare is not merely a policy issue; it is a gendered and affective practice embedded in the familial moral economy (Tronto, 1993; Folbre, 2001).

Importantly, these arrangements are not only socially and culturally structured but also spatially organised. In urban contexts, shrinking household sizes, labour mobility, and rising living costs intensify the pressures of familial caregiving. The spatial configuration of care—whether in compact homes, intergenerational households, gated communities, or institutional settings—shapes how care is practiced, who performs it, and how it is recognised. Ageing in Thailand, therefore, unfolds not only through gendered expectations and moral obligations but also through the material and spatial conditions of everyday life.

Popular cinema provides a critical cultural arena in which these arrangements are narrated, normalised and emotionally legitimised. Released in 2024, *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* was a major commercial and cultural success. The film generated over 2,096 million baht in

global box office revenue, making it one of the highest-grossing Thai films of all time. It was distributed internationally, screened across Southeast Asia, and selected as Thailand's submission for the 97<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards in the Best International Feature Film category, where it advanced to a shortlist of 15 finalists. Its commercial success and critical acclaim have positioned it not merely as a sentimental family drama but as a culturally resonant text articulating contemporary anxieties about aging, inheritance, and responsibility.

This study suggests that *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* produces a gendered reconfiguration without necessarily unsettling the structural distribution of wealth. By centring a young male protagonist who undertakes intimate caregiving for his grandmother, the narrative complicates the feminisation of care. Yet this complication operates primarily at the affective level rather than at the level of political economy. While the film renders male caregiving transformative, it ultimately reinscribes eldercare within the familial sphere. In doing so, it expands the emotional boundaries of masculinity even as the structural conditions underpinning maternal labour remain largely unaddressed.

Care scholarship has long shown that caregiving is feminised, undervalued, and framed as a moral obligation rather than an economic contribution (Tronto, 1993; Folbre, 2001). In Thailand, daughters and mothers continue to bear disproportionate responsibility for everyday eldercare amid demographic strain and limited welfare provision. Families, therefore, remain the primary site through which ageing is managed. Narratives do more than mirror these arrangements; they shape how responsibility is perceived. In *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies*, the grandson's shift from inheritance-seeking opportunist to devoted caregiver anchors the film's moral arc. His care is framed as voluntary, redemptive, and transformative, rendering masculinity newly capable of intimacy and tenderness. In contrast, the mother's long-standing labour remains continuous and understated—structurally necessary yet narratively unremarkable. Male care appears exceptional; women's care remains expected.

By analysing the film through narrative analysis informed by feminist care theory and moral economy scholarship, this study examines how aging, gender, and obligation are negotiated in late modern Thailand. Rather than reading the film as a sentimental family drama, this study approaches it as a cultural text that reconfigures the moral grammar of care. The grandson's emotional transformation does not destabilise the familial welfare regime; instead, it renders that regime morally desirable. The film invites viewers to celebrate gender flexibility while accepting the structural continuity. In this way, *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* reveals the elasticity of masculinity and the durability of privatised care.

This article is organised into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section develops the conceptual framework underpinning the analysis, bringing feminist care theory, moral economy, and masculinity studies into dialogue to situate the film within Thailand's demographic transition and familial welfare regime. The third section outlines the qualitative narrative methodology and provides a brief plot summary to contextualise the analytical focus. The fourth section presents the analysis, examining how the grandson's caregiving reworks masculinity as

intimate yet exceptional, how maternal labour remains durational and structurally central yet narratively understated, and how inheritance mediates care as a moral-economic mechanism within a privatised regime of ageing. The final section discusses the broader implications of these findings, particularly the distinction between recognition and redistribution, and concludes by reflecting on what the film reveals about gender and eldercare in contemporary Thailand.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study develops an integrated conceptual framework that combines feminist care theory, moral economy scholarship, masculinity, and research on the privatisation of aging. These bodies of literature are not treated as discrete theoretical silos, rather, they are mobilised in relation to one another to interrogate how narratives mediate socio-historical conditions in contemporary Thailand. Feminist care theory has long argued that care work, particularly eldercare, has been historically feminised, naturalised, and rendered morally obligatory, while remaining economically undervalued (Tronto, 1993; Fraser, 2016). Care is frequently framed as an expression of love rather than labour, obscuring the material and bodily intensities it entails. This moralization of care contributes to its structural invisibility because it is seen as natural and relational. It is rarely recognized as socially reproductive labor that sustains households, economies, and intergenerational continuity. Within Asian contexts, caregiving is further embedded in the normative frameworks of filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity (Ikels, 2004; Lamb, 2017). These frameworks construct care not merely as emotional attachment but as a moral duty. In Thailand, eldercare remains deeply embedded in normative expectations of filial obligation and intergenerational reciprocity, with adult children, particularly female members of the family, bearing primary responsibility for ageing parents (Knodel et al., 2018). Consequently, women's care labour becomes structurally expected and narratively unremarkable. This dynamic can be understood through the lens of the moral economy of family care, in which caregiving is sustained by norms of obligation and affection rather than formal economic recognition (Folbre, 2001). Care circulates within kinship networks not only as labour but also as an obligation, gratitude, and deferred reciprocity. Emotional attachment and material support are intertwined, producing asymmetrical expectations regarding who gives and receives care. Within such arrangements, women's labor often becomes infrastructural—continuous, necessary, and unheroic.

Masculinity studies further complicate this narrative. Hegemonic masculinity identifies culturally dominant ideals associated with autonomy, economic provision, authority, and emotional restraint among men (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Care work, especially intimate bodily care, has historically been positioned as incompatible with these ideals. However, masculinities are relational and historically contingent (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Under conditions of demographic aging and economic precarity, the boundaries of masculinity may be renegotiated. Male participation in caregiving can thus appear as a departure from hegemonic norms, yet such participation may also be narratively framed as exceptional rather than as structural. In many Asian contexts, son preference and patrilineal inheritance further complicate the relationship between

masculinity and care. Sons may be symbolically privileged in matters of lineage and property, even as daughters disproportionately shoulder everyday caregiving. This asymmetry between entitlement and responsibility is crucial for interpreting the film's narrative arc.

Finally, this study situates the film within Thailand's broader political-economic transition into a super-aged society. Despite policy initiatives aimed at strengthening long-term care, institutional infrastructure remains uneven and limited (Khongboon & Pongpanich, 2018). This dynamic reflects what Fraser (2016) describes as a crisis of social reproduction, whereby responsibilities for care and dependency are increasingly privatised and shifted onto families. (Fraser, 2016). In such contexts, inheritance may function as a quasi-welfare mechanism within kinship structures, compensating for limited public provisions.

Synthesising these perspectives, this article conceptualises narratives as a medium of moral organisation (Somers, 1994). Stories do not simply depict care; they structure recognition, allocate virtues, and define what counts as responsible action. Through character development, affective pacing, and symbolic resolution, films shape the moral imagination of aging and obligation. This framework allows the analysis to interrogate *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* performs a double movement: it expands the affective boundaries of masculinity by rendering male caregiving visible and redemptive while simultaneously stabilising the privatised politics of aging by normalising maternal labour as structurally expected and morally self-evident.

## Methodology

This study employs qualitative narrative analysis to examine how *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* constructs meanings of care, gender, and responsibility. Rather than treating the film as a transparent reflection of social reality, the analysis approaches it as a cultural text that organises socio-historical conditions into morally intelligible narratives and relational identities (Somers, 1994). Narrative analysis is particularly suited to this enquiry because it foregrounds how stories organise experiences through temporal sequencing, character transformation, and moral evaluation. The focus is not solely on plot events but on how recognition is distributed—who is framed as virtuous, who is rendered invisible, and which forms of labour are narratively elevated or normalised in the narrative.

The analysis was conducted at three interrelated levels. First, it examines the plot structure and character transformation, paying particular attention to the grandson's shifting motivations and the moral arc of his caregiving journey. Second, it analyzes the distribution of visibility and recognition, focusing on how maternal labour is positioned within narratives. Third, it situates the film within Thailand's broader demographic and policy context, connecting textual interpretations to the material conditions of aging and familial welfare.

The film was viewed with detailed scene-based notes taken on dialogue, embodied caregiving practices, inheritance negotiations, domestic space, and affective pacing. Particular attention was given to moments of bodily intimacy, economic exchange, and intergenerational conflict, as these scenes illuminate how care is both moralised and gendered. Through iterative close reading, recurring

narrative patterns were identified and interpreted in relation to scholarship on feminist care theory, moral economy, masculinity and the privatisation of aging. The aim is not to assess the film's aesthetic quality but to analyse how its storytelling participates in broader cultural negotiations over gender, aging, and responsibility in late-modern Thailand.

### **Plot Summary**

*How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* follows the story of "M", a directionless young man who has dropped out of university and spends his days gaming and searching for quick financial gains. His decision to become a caregiver was not initially driven by affection. Rather, he is inspired by observing a young woman who devotedly cared for her terminally ill grandfather (A-gong) and was subsequently rewarded with a substantial inheritance from the family. Witnessing this sequence of care and reward, M begins to imagine caregiving as a strategic pathway to economic mobility. When his grandmother (Amah) is diagnosed with terminal cancer, M moves into her modest home in a Chinese-Thai neighbourhood, positioning himself as her primary caregiver. First, his labour is instrumental and calculated. He accompanies her to hospital visits, assists with bathing and bodily routines, and performs visible tasks of attentiveness. Care appears as an investment—an anticipatory claim on property and recognition.

The extended family reflects the uneven class trajectories and divergent moral positions. The eldest son, Kiang, demonstrates financial capacity by contributing money for hospital bills, proposing relocating his mother to his gated community residence, and gesturing toward material responsibility. The other son appears less reliable and more distant. In contrast, M's mother works long hours while continuing to shoulder financial and emotional responsibilities toward her natal family. These differing forms of involvement—economic provision, episodic presence, and embodied care—establish the moral terrain within which inheritance becomes a site of negotiation.

However, over time, M's motivations began to shift. Through intimate daily routines—shared meals, hospital corridors, late-night conversations, bathing assistance, and moments of silence—his relationship with his grandmother deepens. Care becomes relational, rather than purely transactional. The camera lingers on touch, fatigue, and vulnerability, allowing emotional proximity to replace strategic calculations. His presence is less about future rewards and more about shared time. While the grandson's transformation forms the emotional centre of the film, his mother's long-standing caregiving labour remains steady and understated. She continues to manage her work, financial obligations, and filial duties without a narrative climax. Her care is not framed as a discovery or redemption; it is assumed, continuous, and infrastructural.

Inheritance functions throughout the narrative, not merely as a material reward but as symbolic recognition. Questions of who deserves the house, who has sacrificed the most, and who has "been there" expose the moral calculus embedded in kinship. The film's emotional resolution centres on the grandson's awakening, but the underlying structure of the familial obligation remains unchanged. It is within this asymmetry—between visible transformation and enduring responsibility—that the politics of gendered care and privatised aging become legible.

## **From Breadwinner to Caregiver: Reconfiguring Masculinity Within the Moral Economy of Kinship**

The film's gender politics become legible through a contrast between two male roles within the family: The eldest son as the financial provider and the grandson as the embodied care provider. Traditionally, masculinity within Thai kinship structures is associated with economic contributions rather than intimate caregiving. The eldest son, Kiang, embodies this conventional view. His presence is marked by financial capacity. He contributes money for hospital expenses, offers to relocate his mother to his gated community residence, and gestures toward material responsibilities. However, his involvement in hands-on care remains limited. Material provision substitutes for physical proximity. This offer of relocation also reflects a spatial reconfiguration of care. While materially comfortable, such environments enable forms of responsibility that are less dependent on embodied, everyday proximity.

By contrast, the grandson, M, is narratively repositioned into the feminized domain of daily care. His entry into caregiving does not begin with filial devotion but with economic calculation. After witnessing a young woman inherit property following her attentive care of a dying grandfather, he imagines caregiving as a strategic investment. Care enters the narrative through transactional logic, embedded within the moral economy of kinship. This framing is significant. The film does not begin with virtue but with opportunism. M's masculinity is initially coded through aspiration, precarity, and self-interest—traits associated with neoliberal youth navigating unstable economic futures. His caregiving is chosen rather than assumed. Unlike his mother, whose labor appears continuous and unquestioned, M must decide to care. This establishes the first gendered asymmetry: Women's care is naturalized; men's care is elective.

As his relationship with his grandmother deepens, however, the narrative gradually reorganizes this instrumental logic. Through scenes of feeding, bathing, hospital visits, managing medication, and quiet companionship, bodily proximity destabilizes economic motivation. Emotional recognition emerges through embodied intimacy. Masculinity expands to include patience, tenderness, and attentiveness without forfeiting legitimacy. Yet, this transformation is framed as exceptional. Family members remark upon his change. Viewers are invited to witness and evaluate it. His care becomes narratively visible, admirable, and climactic. The emotional resolution of the film attaches primarily to his awakening. In line with masculinity scholarship, when men enter feminized domains of care, their labor is often framed as a transformative spectacle rather than a routine expectation.

Importantly, inheritance never disappears from the narrative. Property remains a lingering tension, reminding viewers that care in ageing societies is entangled with intergenerational transfer. Even as affection deepens, economic stakes remain present. The film thus situates male caregiving within a moral economy that moves from calculation to recognition—but never fully escapes material entanglement. What is redistributed here is not labor but recognition. The grandson's care becomes narratively redemptive; the broader structure of familial responsibility remains intact.

## **Daughters Who Were Always There: Maternal Care and the Gendered Distribution of Recognition**

If the grandson represents transformation, the mother represents continuity. From the opening hospital scene, the film subtly maps the gendered distribution of responsibility. When the grandmother falls and must be taken to the hospital, several family members are present. One by one, the male figures excuse themselves: one must pick up his daughter, another must attend to his own errands, and the grandson requests a ride to the subway. The mother remains. She becomes the sole figure who stays behind to manage the grandmother's immediate care. This early scene establishes a structural pattern. Male involvement is temporary and negotiable; female responsibility is residual and enduring.

M's mother works night shifts so she can spend her daytime caring for her own mother. She shoulders financial obligations not only for herself but also for her son. In a domestic exchange, when M asks to use her credit card to purchase a game, she reveals her own deferred aspirations—retirement at sixty, educational opportunities interrupted in youth in order to support her mother's livelihood. Her biography has been organized around obligation. Care is not episodic in her life; it structures her life course. Crucially, her labor is not framed as a transformation. It is neither redemptive nor surprising. The narrative does not build toward her awakening because none is required. She is already positioned as the dutiful daughter. Her sacrifice is not an arc; it is infrastructure. This reveals a second gendered asymmetry: male caregiving generates narrative drama; female caregiving sustains narrative stability.

Feminist care theory helps illuminate this dynamic. Women's labor becomes structurally central yet symbolically understated. The mother embodies what social reproduction scholarship identifies as the hidden labor that enables familial continuity without equivalent recognition. She is not portrayed negatively; on the contrary, she is competent, reliable, and morally upright. Yet this very positioning reinforces expectation rather than redistributing responsibility. She cares because daughter's care. A further contrast emerges in the character of Mui, M's cousin. Unlike the mother, Mui treats care as professional labor. As a nursing student, she provides intensive care to her bedridden grandfather and is ultimately rewarded through inheritance. For Mui, care is framed less as an emotional calling than as manageable, skill-based labour. In the scene where she describes looking after her grandfather as "easy" and relatively comfortable work, care appears routinised and practicable rather than sacrificial. It is presented as something that can be learned, organised, and materially rewarded. This framing initially inspires M's strategic calculation: if caregiving is light work that yields inheritance, it becomes legible as labour that can be compensated.

Through these three figures—the breadwinning son, the transforming grandson, and the infrastructural mother—the film stages a layered moral economy of care. Yet recognition accumulates unevenly. The grandson receives narrative culmination. The mother remains the quiet foundation. The redistribution occurring here is symbolic rather than material. Recognition shifts; labor does not.

## **Familial Welfare and the Privatization of Ageing**

In this film, ageing is framed as a moral test of kinship rather than as a political question of social provision. The narrative depicts exhaustion, sibling tension, and economic precarity, yet these pressures are resolved through intimacy rather than institutional critique. The relative absence of the state is neither explicitly interrogated nor dramatized. Within Thailand's rapidly ageing demographic context, such framing performs a form of affective stabilization, reassuring viewers that emotional transformation within the family can absorb structural strain. In this sense, the film resonates with Fraser's (2016) account of the crisis of social reproduction, in which care responsibilities are increasingly displaced onto households as public supports erode. The film thus reveals a paradox of late-modern gender politics: masculinity may expand affectively while the privatized structure of care remains structurally intact. The film's treatment of medical institutions further reinforces this privatization.

Public hospitals appear only briefly in the film, most notably through early-morning arrivals and long queues, acknowledging the presence of public healthcare. Yet as Amah's dependency intensifies, sustained caregiving shifts almost entirely into the domestic sphere. Bathing, feeding, emotional accompaniment, and nightly vigilance are performed within the home. Long-term public care infrastructure is not meaningfully represented; nor do community-based services or state-supported caregiving relief intervene in any sustained way. Instead, dependency is absorbed within kinship networks or temporarily managed through market substitution. When neither the grandson nor the daughter is available to provide care, Amah is placed in a private care home. However, the eventual scene in which M brings Amah from the care facility to his mother's house symbolically reaffirms filial piety and familial responsibility as the morally appropriate site of eldercare. Institutional care appears provisional, while the family home is reinstated as the legitimate locus of belonging and obligation.

Mui's caregiving of her grandfather exemplifies this structural ambiguity. Although framed within the narrative as an act of familial devotion, her care also closely resembles professional labour, drawing explicitly on her nursing training and clinical competence. The boundary between kin-based obligation and skilled service becomes blurred. In this context, inheritance appears less as a purely sentimental gesture than as a form of deferred compensation, linking affective commitment to material reward. This ambiguity becomes even more visible in the subplot involving an elderly woman whose only son has passed away. In the absence of kin, she hires Mui as a live-in caregiver. Here, care is fully commodified: what would otherwise be expected of family is reorganised as paid labour. The contrast between these two situations—kin-based caregiving and contractual employment—reveals a dual logic operating within the film. Under conditions of limited public welfare provision, care responsibility is either familialised or marketised. When family is available, dependency is absorbed into kinship as moral duty; when family is absent, care is purchased in the marketplace. In both scenarios, risk remains privatised. The burdens associated with ageing, frailty, and long-term dependency are not collectively managed but redistributed within households or

transferred to private providers. Ageing is thus domesticated—contained within intimate spaces and rendered a matter of personal responsibility rather than public infrastructure.

Perhaps most telling is what remains unspoken. The film does not explicitly address policy gaps, long-term care infrastructure, or demographic crisis. Structural insufficiency becomes narratively irrelevant. Conflict centers on sibling negotiation and inheritance distribution rather than institutional failure. This absence is not neutral. By centering love, reconciliation, and moral growth, the narrative stabilizes the family as the unquestioned site of eldercare. The grandson's transformation resolves tension at the level of intimacy, leaving intact the regime in which households absorb demographic strain. The film, therefore, completes its double movement. It expands the emotional boundaries of masculinity by rendering male caregiving tender and redemptive. Simultaneously, it reaffirms the privatized structure of ageing by naturalizing familial responsibility and obscuring structural alternatives. Apparent gender disruption coexists with institutional continuity.

## Discussion

### **Redistribution of Recognition without Redistribution of Labor**

The findings demonstrate that *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* does not fundamentally redistribute caregiving labor; rather, it redistributes recognition. This distinction is central to understanding the film's gender politics within Thailand's rapidly ageing society. While the narrative foregrounds a young man's transformation into a devoted caregiver, it leaves largely intact the structural organization of familial responsibility that places continuous eldercare within women's lives.

Feminist care scholarship argues that care is gendered as feminine, framed as a moral obligation rather than a political claim, and structurally undervalued within regimes of social reproduction (Tronto, 1993; Fraser, 2016). What the film reveals is not simply the persistence of feminized care but the elasticity of masculinity within that arrangement. The grandson's trajectory illustrates that men can inhabit caring roles without destabilizing the gendered architecture of social reproduction. Masculinity expands affectively—it becomes tender, patient, attentive—yet this expansion does not shift the infrastructural burden of care away from women. In this sense, the film stages symbolic gender flexibility without material redistribution.

From the perspective of moral economy, caregiving in the film circulates as both obligation and recognition. The grandson's initial instrumental logic situates care within intergenerational exchange and inheritance. Care appears as anticipatory claim-making. As emotional intimacy develops, this logic is reframed as moral awakening. However, the economic dimension never fully disappears. Property remains present as latent tension. Inheritance functions not only as material transfer but as symbolic adjudication: who has loved properly, who has sacrificed sufficiently, who deserves continuity. This entanglement reflects broader conditions of privatized ageing. In contexts where formal long-term care infrastructures remain limited, kinship absorbs risk. Inheritance may operate as quasi-welfare within the family, redistributing assets in the absence of robust public provision. The film does not explicitly articulate this structural condition; instead, it translates it into

a moral drama. The politics of social reproduction become narratively condensed into intimate scenes of caregiving and sibling negotiation.

In a rapidly ageing society, anxieties about demographic transition, declining fertility, and shrinking kin networks intensify uncertainty regarding who will care for whom. By offering a story in which male tenderness emerges within the family, the film provides affective reassurance. It suggests that generational transformation can compensate for structural insufficiency. Emotional growth substitutes for institutional reform. Yet the reassurance is partial. While masculinity becomes elastic, maternal labor remains durable. The mother's biography—marked by deferred aspiration, night-shift labor, and uncelebrated endurance—embodies the ongoing feminization of social reproduction. Her care predates and exceeds the grandson's transformation. The film does not critique her burden; it normalizes it. Recognition accumulates around change rather than continuity.

Ultimately, *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* reveals a paradox of late modern Thailand: as demographic ageing intensifies, gender boundaries may soften at the level of emotion, yet the privatized structure of eldercare endures. The film invites viewers to celebrate tenderness and reconciliation, but it does not invite them to imagine alternative infrastructures of care beyond the family.

## Conclusions

This article has examined how *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* narratively reorganizes ageing, gender, and responsibility within the context of contemporary Thailand's rapidly intensifying demographic transition. Rather than treating the film as a sentimental family drama, the analysis has approached it as a cultural text that mediates the moral meaning of care under conditions of limited welfare provision. What appears at first glance to be a progressive gender reconfiguration—the centering of a young male caregiver—reveals, upon closer examination, a more layered negotiation between affective transformation and structural continuity.

At the most visible level, the film expands the emotional repertoire of masculinity. The grandson's trajectory from opportunistic inheritance-seeker to attentive and intimate caregiver unsettles conventional associations between masculinity and economic provision alone. Through scenes of bathing, feeding, hospital accompaniment, and silent companionship, the narrative renders male tenderness both legible and legitimate. Masculinity becomes capable of patience, bodily proximity, and relational depth without being narratively diminished. In this sense, the film participates in a broader cultural moment in which younger men are imagined as ethically transformable subjects within intergenerational care.

Yet this symbolic elasticity does not correspond to a redistribution of caregiving labour. The grandson's transformation unfolds against the durable presence of maternal labour. His mother's biography—structured by night shifts, deferred aspirations, financial sacrifice, and continuous filial responsibility—anchors the familial regime that makes his entry into care possible. Her labour predates, exceeds, and quietly sustains the grandson's moral awakening. Unlike his care, hers is neither framed as discovery nor redemption. It is expected. Through this asymmetry, the narrative

performs a redistribution of recognition rather than a redistribution of responsibility. Male caregiving is dramatized and celebrated; women's caregiving remains infrastructural and narratively subdued. These dynamics suggest that care is not only gendered but also spatially organised, with domestic space functioning as the central site through which responsibility is enacted and naturalised.

By placing this dynamic within feminist care theory and moral economy scholarship, the article has shown how inheritance functions as a mediating mechanism within a privatized regime of ageing. Property operates not merely as material transfer but as moral adjudication—an evaluative device through which affection, sacrifice, and presence are weighed. In the absence of robust public long-term care infrastructure, intergenerational assets become quasi-welfare within kinship networks. The film does not explicitly theorize this political-economic condition; instead, it translates structural insufficiency into intimate moral drama. The tensions of demographic ageing are condensed into sibling negotiation, bodily proximity, and scenes of emotional reconciliation.

Crucially, the state remains peripheral throughout the narrative. Public healthcare appears only briefly, and no sustained institutional alternative to family-based care is imagined. Dependency is absorbed either through kinship obligation or through selective market substitution. This absence is not simply oversight; it is narratively consequential. By resolving conflict through emotional transformation rather than institutional intervention, the film stabilizes the family as the sovereign site of responsibility. Ageing is framed less as a collective policy challenge and more as a moral test of relational commitment.

The film's emphasis on intergenerational reconciliation can be read as part of a broader cultural negotiation unfolding across rapidly ageing societies in Asia. Rather than foregrounding institutional insufficiencies, such storytelling frequently recenters intimacy, moral virtue, and familial obligation. This narrative orientation resonates with scholarship on Asian welfare regimes, which highlights the enduring centrality of the family as a primary site of social provision amid welfare restructuring and demographic change (Goodman et al., 2012). By dramatizing the grandson's transformation, the film offers an image of generational renewal. Younger men—often portrayed in public discourse as disengaged or precariously positioned within postindustrial economies—are reimagined as capable of relational maturity and ethical responsiveness. This symbolic repositioning is significant. It suggests that caregiving capacity can emerge within masculinities historically associated with autonomy, authority, and emotional restraint (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Yet this expansion of masculine affect does not necessarily entail a structural redistribution of care labour. Rather, it reconfigures masculinity at the level of representation while leaving intact the familialized organisation of eldercare.

The broader implication is that cultural imaginaries may adapt more rapidly than welfare regimes. In late modern Thailand, masculinity can expand symbolically to include care without destabilizing the gendered architecture of social reproduction. Tenderness becomes imaginable; structural redistribution does not. The elasticity of male identity coexists with the durability of maternal labour. At the same time, this analysis acknowledges the limits of textual interpretation. Cinema operates within affective and commercial conventions that privilege intimate storytelling

over policy critique. Narratives organize moral legitimacy rather than institutional blueprints. The film's silence regarding welfare reform should not be read as direct endorsement of existing arrangements. Rather, it illustrates how storytelling participates in shaping the moral horizons within which ageing is understood and responsibility allocated.

This study contributes to scholarship on gender and ageing in three interrelated ways. First, it demonstrates that symbolic transformations in masculinity do not necessarily entail structural redistribution of care. Cultural recognition can expand while material burdens remain gendered. Second, it highlights how inheritance operates as a moral-economic device within privatized care regimes, mediating both obligation and reward. Third, it underscores the importance of narrative form in mediating demographic transition. Ageing is not solely a matter of policy; it is also a story through which societies interpret vulnerability, obligation, and continuity.

Future research might extend this inquiry beyond textual analysis to audience reception, asking how viewers interpret the grandson's transformation: as exceptional, aspirational, or normative? Comparative work across Asian ageing societies could further illuminate how cinema negotiates masculinity under demographic pressure. By situating the film within these wider transformations, the analysis points to a central paradox of contemporary ageing societies: cultural narratives may evolve toward gender flexibility even as the institutional foundations of care remain constrained. In this paradox lies the enduring tension between affective change and structural continuity.

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