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Lan's Garden

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Abstract
This is a film review of Lan's Garden (2023), directed by Jennifer Ru Zhou.

Keywords
Aging

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Lan’s Garden (2023), dir. Jennifer Ru Zhou

On one level this is a movie about the matriarch of a family. Lan has devoted her life to taking care of her children. Even now she tells her grandson: “You will always come to Laolao for help, okay? Laolao will always take care of you.” As Lan grows older, however, she is less and less able to care for her family. Indeed, now her children must take care of her. The reversal of care is difficult for Lan. She resists this reversal by trying to continue to care for herself. As time goes by, Lan retreats to her garden, the one place in the world where she still feels comfortable.

On another level, however, this is not a movie about families or the reversal of care between parents and children. On this level, the movie is about the circle of life. When we are born, the world consists of the small space in which we live. Life is a matter of expanding that world. The world can become quite large. Some people do it better than others.

As we grow older, the world begins to grow smaller. As the press notes say of Lan: “there is no dramatic plot point that leads to her downfall; she is simply growing old.” Whether we are
mothers or fathers, whether we have children or not, wherever we live, whatever our career, our politics, our religion, we all grow older and as we do the world in which we are comfortable becomes smaller. Each of us has our own Lan’s garden. The garden is a wonderful metaphor for the smaller world in which we live as we age. We may fight to keep our world large, which often brings us suffering, until there is a final acceptance of our inevitable death, the end of the circle of life. This is the nature of our humanity.