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REVIEW ARTICLE

A Systematic Review of Theoretical Frameworks in Chinese Mother-in-Law/Daughter-in-Law Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of China's ongoing social transformation, research on mother - in - law/daughter - in - law (MIL - DIL) conflict discourse encounters a central theoretical dilemma: a persistent disconnection between dominant Western paradigms and the specificities of Chinese cultural practice. This systematic literature review, conducted in accordance with PRISMA guidelines, critically examines 24 eligible studies (1990–2025) retrieved from CNKI, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The analysis reveals that while existing scholarship has evolved into a multidisciplinary domain encompassing seven major theoretical perspectives—with politeness/impoliteness and language/communication frameworks being most frequent—it remains disproportionately reliant on Western models. These imported frameworks demonstrate significant limitations in elucidating the culturally embedded, dynamic interplay among Confucian ethical norms, complex face (*mianzi*) strategies, and intergenerational power reproduction that characterize Chinese family conflicts. The study further identifies a pervasive binary dilemma in current research, manifesting as fragmented analytical dimensions and a lack of systemic integration capable of addressing the nested nature of ethics, face, and power. In response, this review proposes a conceptual, dynamic three-dimensional model integrating ethics, face, and power (EFP) as a more culturally congruent analytical framework. It concludes by underscoring the imperative for future research to advance indigenous theoretical construction and employ multimodal methodologies, thereby furnishing a robust, context-sensitive foundation for developing effective family conflict intervention strategies in China.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary Chinese family studies, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship (MIL-DIL) has long been regarded as the most tension-laden intergenerational dynamic (Chai & Hou, 2024). The uniqueness of this relationship stems from its cultural embeddedness: unlike the direct negotiation conflict patterns observed in Western individualistic cultures, Chinese MIL-DIL interactions exhibit characteristics of restraint and indirectness, with their conflict discourse deeply nested within the tripartite contexts of familial collectivism (a), Confucian ethics, and modern social transformation (Guo et al., 2025; Ding et al., 2024). In recent years, alongside the nuclearization of family structures (Gui & Arundel, 2024), the diversification of female roles (Wang, 2022), and the restructuring of intergenerational power relations (Zhou & Ahmad, 2025), MIL-DIL linguistic interactions have transcended the realm of private communication, emerging as a microcosmic window for observing the collision between traditional Chinese family systems and modern individualistic ideologies (Chen & Tian, 2023).

Existing research has made preliminary progress in the field of MIL-DIL conflict discourse (Chai & Hou, 2024; Han et al., 2023; Chen & Tian, 2023), but significant theoretical limitations remain. Current findings predominantly rely on Western theoretical paradigms, such as Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Culpeper's (1996, 2011) impoliteness strategies, frameworks that face cultural adaptability challenges when applied to Chinese contexts (Grishin, 2021; Mao, 1994). These limitations manifest specifically in: (1) conceptual disjunction: Western face theory emphasizes individual autonomy, whereas face negotiation in Chinese MIL-DIL interactions is deeply intertwined with family reputation and filial obligations (Gu, 1990, 1992); (2) unidimensional analytical approaches: While speech act theory (SAT) focuses on discourse forms and critical discourse analysis (CDA) emphasizes power structures, neither adequately addresses the nested system of Chinese family ethics-face-power dynamics (Stevens et al., 2025; Kyeong et al., 2025); (3) absence of cultural logic: Existing theories struggle to accommodate indigenous social grammars such as Confucian differential mode of association (Fei, 1947). This theoretical impasse highlights a crucial proposition in cross-cultural research: how to establish dialectical dialogue between universal frameworks and local knowledge (Pan, 200; Fei, 1947).

Based on this, the present study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to achieve three theoretical breakthroughs: (1) critical integration: examining the application status of Western theories in Chinese MIL-DIL conflict research; (2) deconstruction of binary dilemmas: reflecting on the explanatory limitations of oppositional frameworks such as individualism-collectivism and formal analysis-cultural substance; (3) model construction: attempting to synthesize indigenous concepts, ultimately proposing a dynamic three-dimensional analytical model encompassing ethical norms, face negotiation, and power reproduction.

The academic value of this study is reflected in two aspects. on one hand, it fills the research gap in cultural adaptability through theoretical localization; on the other hand, it provides an analytical tool with both theoretical depth and cultural sensitivity for family conflict intervention. Following the PRISMA framework, this paper will systematically analyze Chinese and English literature from 2010 to 2025 (see Section 2 for methodology), ultimately forming a discourse system of status quo-critique-reconstruction.

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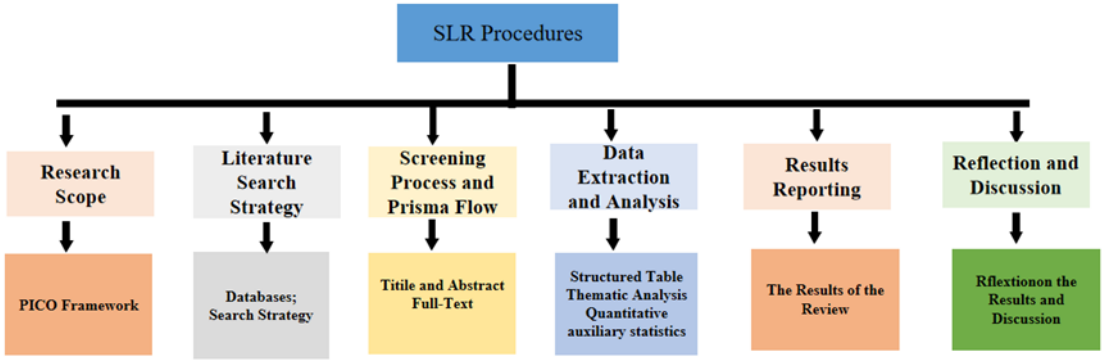
2. Methods and Data

2.1. Research Design

The purpose of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is to identify, evaluate, and integrate the existing academic knowledge coverage produced by global scholars on a specific topic. By comprehensively reviewing all topic-related literature resources from multiple perspectives, this study systematically examines the theoretical applications in contemporary Chinese MIL-DIL conflict discourse research across six main stages, based on relevant guidelines (Page, 2021; Moher, 2009) and combined with qualitative literature review standards in the field of social sciences (Gough et al., 2017) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Procedures of SLR in the Present Study



2.2. Research Scope

A clearly defined research scope serves as the cornerstone of the entire review, directly determining the direction of subsequent literature retrieval and screening (Moher, 2009). This study delineates the research scope based on the PICOS framework:
(1) Population: Focusing on discourse practices in MIL-DIL interactions within Chinese families;
(2) Intervention/Context: Multidimensional theoretical models of conflict discourse;
(3) Comparators: Differences between Chinese and Western theoretical explanations;
(4) Outcomes: Theoretical application validity and cultural adaptability, construction of cultural adaptability model;
(5) Study design: PRISMA systematic literature screening (statistical distribution of literature); thematic coding (extracting theoretical adaptability themes through coding).

2.3. Literature Search Strategy

This study synthesizes literature from three authoritative databases—China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Scopus, and Google Scholar—to construct a comprehensive and multi-dimensional research literature system. The aim is to identify relevant studies on the application of the MIL-DIL discourse theory application within the Chinese context, as referenced in Table 1 (Li et al., 2022; Harzing & Alakangas, 2016).

Table 1: Database and keyword selection criteria

Database	Keywords	Rationale for Selection

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CNKI	*婆媳话语(MIL-DIL discourse);* *婆媳对话(MIL-DIL conversation);* *婆媳关系 AND 话语分析 (MIL-DIL relationship AND discourse analysis);* *婆媳沟通(MIL-DIL communication);* *婆媳吵架(MIL-DIL quarrel)*	**Localization Coverage:** Precise alignment with research on MIL-DIL interactions in the Chinese context. **Conflict Expression:** The Chinese keyword "*吵架" (quarrel)* capture the implicit characteristics of family conflicts in China (contrasted with direct confrontation in Western contexts). **Ethical Correlation:** Embedded Confucian family norms (e.g., Chinese keywords like "*关系" (relationship) and "沟通"(communication)*).
Scopus	*Chinese OR China Mother-in-law AND Daughter-in-law*	**International Perspective:** Screening studies on Chinese MIL-DIL relationships in international journals. **Theoretical Comparison:** Identifying the application and limitations of Western theories (such as politeness theory) in the Chinese context.
Google Scholar	*China OR Chinese mother-in-law AND daughter-in-law discourse AND theory*	**Interdisciplinary Supplementation:** Incorporate literature from multiple fields such as linguistics, sociology, and family studies. **Theoretical Focus:** Strengthen theoretical framework analysis through *discourse AND theory*.

CNKI, as the most representative Chinese academic database in China, encompasses a wealth of Chinese literature resources, including core journals, master's and doctoral dissertations, and conference papers (Li et al., 2022). Conducting systematic searches on CNKI enables the comprehensive inclusion of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings from local scholars, offering cultural contextual support for research. We performed a systematic search on CNKI using the following Chinese keywords and Boolean operators: "婆媳话语(MIL-DIL discourse)" "婆媳对话(MIL-DIL conversation)" "婆媳关系 AND 话语分析(MIL-DIL relationship AND discourse analysis)" "婆媳沟通(MIL-DIL communication)" and "婆媳吵架(MIL-DIL quarrel)." This process yielded N = 57 relevant records (31 + 1 + 4 + 16 + 5).

Secondly, as the world's largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature, Scopus statistics indicate that in 2024 it covers 48,473 source publications globally. Its rigorous inclusion criteria and comprehensive disciplinary coverage (including research-related fields such as social sciences and humanities & arts) ensure the quality of literature. Preliminary searches of the Scopus database reveal that research literature on MIL-DIL interactions in China remains relatively limited. To capture available studies, we used the keywords: Chinese or China Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law. This search returned N = 35 records.

Furthermore, supplementary searches on Google Scholar expanded the scope of literature retrieval. Its unique algorithm captures gray literature, such as preprints and working papers, as well as interdisciplinary fringe research findings, effectively mitigating potential omissions inherent in traditional database searches (Harzing & Alakangas, 2016). Google Scholar provides a relatively extensive collection of academic resources.

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Our search keywords were China or Chinese mother-in-law and daughter-in-law discourse and theory, which yielded 6,550 results. Since this database primarily ranks results by relevance, we preliminarily included the top 100 entries from the filtered results. In summary, the initial dataset obtained through keyword searches across the three major databases totaled 57+35+100, equaling N=192.

2.4. Screening Process and Prisma Flow

The literature screening criteria and procedures of this study are divided into the following three stages, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion for the systematic review

Stages	Inclusion & Exclusion
Stage1 Deduplication	Deduplicate the same documents
Stage 2 Titles and Abstracts Screening	Inclusion: Interaction between Chinese MIL-DIL; discourse analysis or theoretical application; scientifically sound and of certain academic value; as full text; 1990-2025 Exclusion: The research content has extremely weak relevance to the theme or only marginally mentions aspects such as attitudes, behaviors, etc.; unable to provide effective support for the research; cannot be downloaded\Severe data loss; before 1990
Stage 3 Full-text Screening	Application of specific theoretical frameworks Empirical data supports

Stage 1: Based on the search results, initial deduplication and preliminary manual screening were conducted using Zotero, resulting in N=153. Stage 2: Formal screening commenced. The inclusion criteria comprised: the research topic must involve discourse interactions between MIL-DIL in the Chinese context; the content must include explicit discourse analysis or relevant theoretical discussion; the methodology must be scientifically rigorous with academic merit; the literature must be complete with accurate and reliable data; and the timeframe was limited to publications between 1990 and 2025. Exclusion criteria were: studies discussing only the MIL-DIL relationship without analyzing specific discourse interactions; research set in non-Chinese sociocultural contexts; lack of clear theoretical framework or methodology; unavailable or inaccessible literature; and publications predating 1990. This stage yielded N=42 valid studies. Stage 3: The screened literature underwent full-text screening with stricter inclusion criteria: mandatory application of specific theoretical frameworks (e.g., politeness theory, power discourse analysis); requirement of empirical data support (e.g., interview transcripts, dialogue records). The final count of valid literature was N=24. To ensure objectivity, two researchers independently conducted the screening, resolving discrepancies through discussion. Only literature unanimously approved by the researchers was included in the final analysis.

The entire search and screening process will be presented in a PRISMA flow diagram (adapted from Moher et al., 2009). The specific procedure is shown in Figure 2.

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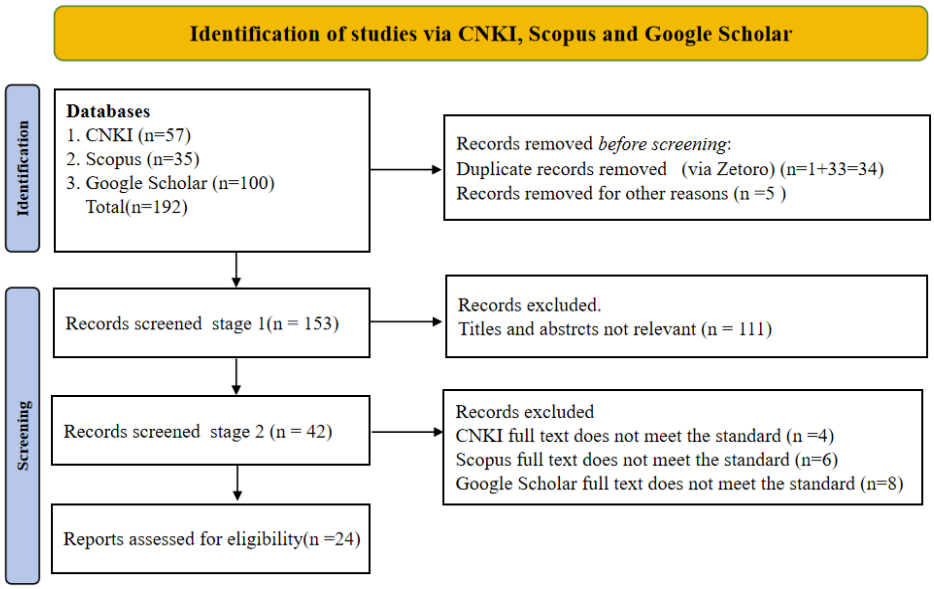
Figure 2: The PRISMA flow diagram



2.5. Data Extraction and Analysis

2.5.1 Data Extraction

Data collection is crucial in research, as perspectives not only stem from data but also necessitate validation through it (Dey, 2003). This study has developed a standardized preliminary data extraction form, which includes basic literature information (such as the author, publication year, and title. A detailed analysis of the literature will be provided in the subsequent research results section. Table 3 encompasses a total of 24 studies that fulfill the screening criteria.

Table 3: Relevant Documents of the SLR

NO	Author	Title
1	Wang (2011)	A Pragmatic Analysis of the Conversations Between Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law in Chinese Context
2	Zhang (2011)	An Adaptive Study of Conflict Discourse Between Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law
3	Liu (2012)	On the Conflict Talk Between Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law: Based on the Conflict Talks in *Shuang Mian Jiao*
4	Zhong (2012)	A Pragmatic Analysis of Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Discourse
5	Meng (2013)	Third-Party Discourse Intervention Strategies Based on Features of Conflict Talk Between Chinese Mothers and Daughters-in-Law
6	Li and Gao (2013a)	Attitude Construction in Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Discourse From the Perspective of Appraisal Theory
7	Li and Gao (2013b)	An Attitude Study on the Conflict Between Mother and Her Daughter-in-Law in the Novel *Double-Sided Adhesive* From an Appraisal Theory Perspective

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8	Liu (2013)	A Pragmatic Study on Chinese Mother and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Talk
9	Xu (2013)	Conversation Analysis on Chinese Conflict Talk Between Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law
10	Li (2014)	An Analysis of Attitude Construction in Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Discourse From the Perspective of Appraisal Theory
11	Tang (2014)	A Study of Conflict Talk Between Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law From the Perspective of Politeness Principle and Face Theory: A Case Study of *Mother-in-Law Is Coming*
12	Mao (2015)	A Pragmatic Analysis of Response Strategies in Conflict Discourse Between Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law
13	Wang (2015)	A Study on Impoliteness Strategies in Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Discourse
14	Wang and Yang (2015)	Politeness Strategies in Persuasive Discourse Between Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law: A Case Study of TV Dramas
15	Zhou (2015)	An Analysis of Chinese Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Discourse
16	Yao (2016)	An Analysis of Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Discourse in the Novel *Cold Nights*
17	Yu (2017)	A Study on Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflict Discourse From the Perspective of Impoliteness Principle
18	Ren et al. (2018)	A Study on Conflict Discourse Between Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law and Mothers-in-Law and Sons-in-Law Based on Impoliteness Theory
19	Sun (2019)	A Rational Choice Study on the Mother-in-Law's Discourse in *Spicy Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law*
20	Li (2021)	A Study of Conflict Talk Between Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law From the Perspective of Adaptation Theory
21	Cheng and Zeng (2021)	An Analysis of Conflict Discourse Between Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law From the Perspective of Relevance Theory
22	Han et al. (2023)	Mother/Daughter-in-Law Conflict: Communication in Family Intergenerational Relationships in Chinese Culture
23	Chen and Tian (2023)	Research on the Application of Family Systems Theory in Improving Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Conflicts Among Migrant Families
24	Chai and Hou (2024)	Scrambling for Power or Cooperation for Stability: A Case Study of Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Relationship in China

2.5.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis in a SLR refers to the comprehensive synthesis of extracted data, which may include qualitative synthesis and quantitative synthesis (meta-analysis). It is necessary to report the statistical methods and consistency indicators used (Moher, 2009). The data analysis in this study primarily employs qualitative thematic analysis to systematically refine the theoretical framework, theoretical perspectives, and insights into the application of specific theories regarding contemporary Chinese MIL-DIL conflict discourse. A multi-level thematic analysis method can be adopted, deconstructing the discourse layer by layer from macro perspectives to micro theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, some quantitative elements (e.g., frequency statistics) can be

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incorporated into the analysis process for descriptive supplementation. The specific analysis procedure is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis Procedure of the Present Study

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	The above 24 numbered documents
2. Generating initial codes:	Systematically encoding interesting theoretical framework features throughout the dataset, such as the theoretical framework of Wang (2011) being the *Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983); Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)*
3. Searching for themes:	Organize the codes into potential themes, such as *the Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983) belonging to the theoretical perspective*
4. Reviewing themes:	Examine whether the potential topics and theoretical frameworks correspond to specific theories
5. Defining and naming themes:	Continuously analyze to refine the specific details of each topic, as well as the context presented by the overall analysis; generate clear definitions and naming for each topic, supplemented by data statistics
6. Producing the report:	Presentation of the analysis

3. Results: Application Status

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks Application

An in-depth analysis of 24 pertinent literature pieces from three major databases reveals that research on contemporary Chinese MIL-DIL conflict discourse has progressively incorporated multidisciplinary perspectives, encompassing pragmatics, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, and family systems theory. The specific theoretical applications are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: Theoretical Frameworks of the SLR

NO.	Author	Theories
1	Wang (2011)	Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983); politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)
2	Zhang (2011)	Conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974); adaptation theory (Verschueren, 1999)
3	Liu (2012)	Adaptation theory (Verschueren, 1999); politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987); conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974)
4	Zhong (2012)	Brown and Levinson (1987)
5	Meng (2013)	Speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969)
6	Li and Gao (2013a)	Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005)
7	Li and Gao (2013b)	Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005)

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8	Liu (2013)	Conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974); memetics (Dawkins, 1976)
9	Xu (2013)	Conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974)
10	Li (2014)	Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005)
11	Tang (2014)	Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983); politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)
12	Mao (2015)	Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)
13	Wang (2015)	Impoliteness theory (Culpeper, 1996)
14	Wang and Yang (2015)	Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)
15	Zhou (2015)	Conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974); politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)
16	Yao (2016)	Conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974); impoliteness theory (Culpeper, 1996)
17	Yu (2017)	Impoliteness theory (Culpeper, 1996)
18	Ren et al. (2018)	Impoliteness theory (Culpeper, 1996); impoliteness theory (Bousfield, 2008)
19	Sun (2019)	Rational choice theory (Simon, 1957)
20	Li (2021)	Adaptation theory (Verschueren, 1999)
21	Cheng and Zeng (2021)	Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986)
22	Han et al. (2023)	Communication accommodation theory (Giles, 1973); conflict management theory (Zhang et al., 2005)
23	Chen and Tian (2023)	Family systems theory (Bowen, 1978)
24	Chai and Hou (2024)	Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987); impoliteness theory (Culpeper, 1996); critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015)

3.2 Thematic Perspective and Specific Theoretical Applications

This section will elaborate in detail on the theories employed in existing research and analyze them according to different theoretical perspectives. The foundational theoretical applications primarily encompass seven major approaches: politeness and impoliteness theory, language and communication theory, social psychology and interaction studies, social power and critical discourse analysis, cultural and cognitive communication, family and social systems theory, as well as evaluation and review.

3.2.1 Politeness and Impoliteness Perspectives

From this perspective, the study primarily relies on two major theoretical frameworks: Brown & Levinson's (1987) Face Theory and Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle. It also incorporates Culpeper's (1996, 2011) and Bousfield's (2008) impoliteness theories to systematically examine the linguistic strategies and interpersonal dynamics in MIL-DIL conflicts.

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Based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) face theory, relevant findings can be found in studies by scholars such as Chai and Hou (2024), Mao (2015), Zhou (2015), Wang and Yang (2015), Tang (2014), Liu (2012), Zhong (2012), and Wang (2011). Research indicates that negative faces in interpersonal interactions require individuals' actions or thoughts to remain free from interference by others, while positive faces expect one's desires to gain recognition from others (Fathi, 2024; Soubki & Rambow, 2024). Positive politeness strategies aim to preserve a positive image, manifested through techniques such as exaggerated expressions, intensifying shared interests, using in-group identity markers, seeking consensus, avoiding disagreement, and presupposing common ground. Additionally, negative politeness strategies—including indirect expressions, the use of interrogatives or hedges, pessimistic formulations, minimizing imposition, and showing deference—serve to maintain negative faces (Chai & Hou, 2024).

Mao (2015) revealed that MIL-DIL conflict discourse is not only closely related to the three independent factors proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) (social distance, relative power, and degree of imposition), but is also constrained by contextual factors such as cultural traditions, emotions, and individual personalities. Tang (2014) and Zhou (2015) indicated that both parties involved in MIL-DIL conflicts inevitably encounter threats to their face, which endanger both positive and negative faces. Wang (2011) discovered that to avoid face threats, both parties often employ off-record politeness strategies, such as hints, metaphors, irony, and rhetorical questions; alternatively, they use positive politeness strategies to foster good relationships, such as seeking common ground and avoiding disagreement. Wang and Yang (2015) analyzed the politeness strategies in persuasive discourse between MIL-DIL in television dramas, finding that positive politeness strategies manifest as both parties using intimate terms to shorten the distance between them. There are significant differences in the use of off-record politeness strategies between MIL-DIL: first, MILs rely more on this strategy due to their higher status and authority in conversations; second, MILs perceive themselves as more experienced. Both parties also employ negative politeness strategies to satisfy each other's negative face needs. Zhong (2012) summarized and conducted pragmatic analyses of MIL-DIL conflict patterns in films and TV series, identifying four resolution methods: withdrawal, third-party intervention, one-party victory, and violence.

From the perspective of Leech's (1983) politeness principles, Tang (2014) conducted a quantitative study to meticulously analyze conflict utterances between MILs-DILs that violate politeness principles in the TV drama When Mother-in-law Is Coming, providing detailed statistics on the forms and frequencies of such conflicts during their confrontations. The qualitative research aimed to investigate how MILs-DILs breach politeness principles during interpersonal communication, leading to conflict-laden utterances and the underlying face-threatening acts within these communications.The findings indicate: 1) Violations of the tact maxim and generosity maxim lead to rejection, blame, and verbal abuse; 2) Violations of the approbation maxim and modesty maxim trigger accusations, sarcasm, and irony; 3) Violations of the agreement maxim and sympathy maxim result in opposition, disobedience, and subsequent arguments. Wang (2011) also employed politeness principles as a framework to conduct a diachronic comparative study of the linguistic characteristics between MILs-DILs in feudal-era and contemporary Chinese contexts, aiming to reveal the evolution of their verbal interactions across different historical periods.

Secondly, from the perspective of impoliteness theory, existing research primarily focuses on Culpeper's impoliteness theory, proposed in 1996 and expanded in 2011, with a total

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of five related studies. In contrast, based on Bousfield's impoliteness theory, as outlined in 2008, only the study by Ren et al. (2018) is involved.

The core concepts of Culpeper's impoliteness theory include five aspects: direct impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock or sarcastic impoliteness, and the withholding of politeness (Chai & Hou, 2024; Ren et al., 2018). Yu (2017) identified four impoliteness strategies within the discourse corpus of MIL-DIL conflicts: the direct impoliteness strategy, positive impoliteness strategy, negative impoliteness strategy, and sarcasm strategy. However, instances of withholding politeness were not observed. Yao (2016), through an analysis of the novel Cold Nights, was the first to identify two positive impoliteness strategies: distorting facts and rejecting others' goodwill. The study noted that MILs employed more impoliteness strategies than DILs, with conflicts predominantly initiated by MILs. This indicates that MILs typically occupy a more dominant role in such interactions. Wang (2015) identified five categories of impoliteness strategies, with the positive impoliteness strategy encompassing twelve sub-strategies and the negative impoliteness strategy including four. Furthermore, two sub-strategies of the sarcasm strategy were identified for the first time: feigned praise of the other party and feigned self-deprecation. Ren et al. (2018) also referenced Bousfield's (2008) expanded model to differentiate between overt and covert impoliteness strategies. In summary, within the theoretical framework of politeness and impoliteness, the study of MIL-DIL conflict discourse encompasses four types of theories, with a cumulative analysis of 16 instances: Brown & Levinson's face-saving theory (8 occurrences), Leech's politeness principle (2 occurrences), Culpeper's impoliteness theory (5 occurrences), and Bousfield's impoliteness theory (1 occurrence).

3.2.2 Language and Communication Perspective

From the perspective of language and communication theories, research on MIL-DIL conflict discourse primarily involves four major theoretical frameworks: conversation analysis, speech act theory, relevance theory, and communication accommodation theory. In the field of conversation analysis, relevant studies have drawn upon Sack et al. (1974) theory, focusing on structural features of conversation such as the turn-taking system, adjacency pairs, and preference in organization. Research by Xu (2013), Liu (2012, 2013), Zhang (2011), and Yao (2016) indicates that MIL-DIL conflict discourse often exhibits specific conversational patterns, such as turn-taking competition, interruptions, repetitions, etc. These interactional characteristics reflect the power and stance confrontation between the two parties.

The Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) offers a crucial theoretical framework for analyzing linguistic strategies in conflicts between MILs-DILs. Meng (2013) observes that quarreling constitutes a form of conflictive speech act, often initiated by divergent interpretations of words, actions, or events among the parties involved, with considerable variations in intensity, linguistic expression, and behavioral intent. This study differentiates between quarrel speech, abusive language, and conflict discourse, and through an analysis of MIL-DIL conflicts in *When the Mother-in-Law Is Coming* drama, it unveils the entire process of quarrel speech acts. Liu (2013) further notes that family conflict discourse typically involves complex combinations of speech acts rather than isolated speech acts. Within these, speech acts such as demanding explanations and unfavorable comments are likely to exacerbate tensions, while typical manifestations in family conflicts, such as threats, accusations, and provocations, are particularly prominent.

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Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) elucidates the causes of MIL-DIL conflicts from a cognitive standpoint. The research by Cheng and Zeng (2021) indicates that the core of linguistic communication is its purposefulness and intentionality, and the accuracy with which the listener comprehends the speaker's intention hinges on their shared cognitive environment. When the cognitive backgrounds or communicative goals of MIL-DIL differ, misunderstandings or information processing biases can readily provoke conflicts. This theory offers strategic support for mitigating tensions and fostering effective communication.

The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT, Giles, 1973) examines the mechanisms that improve the relationships between MILs-DILs through the lens of linguistic accommodation. Empirical research conducted by Han et al. (2023) indicates that the use of linguistic accommodation strategies, such as open dialogue, can diminish the psychological distance between MILs-DILs, thereby improving the quality of their relationships. On the other hand, the application of linguistic non-accommodation strategies (e.g., maintaining linguistic differences or deliberate distancing) may intensify conflicts. Further research by Richards et al. (2024) supports the notion that accommodation strategies, including open dialogue, have a significant impact on alleviating intergenerational communication conflicts.

The research under this perspective involved four theoretical frameworks, cumulatively analyzing nine times, revealing the communicative characteristics and adaptive mechanisms of MIL-DIL conflict discourse from structural, cognitive, and affective dimensions.

3.2.3 Social Psychology and Interaction Studies Perspective

From the perspective of social psychology and interaction studies, the emergence and evolution of MIL-DIL conflict discourse involve complex psychological motivations, social role perceptions, and interaction strategies. Research in this field is primarily based on three major frameworks: The Adaptation Theory, the rational choice theory, and conflict management theory (Zhang et al., 2005), which reveal the psychological mechanisms and socio-cultural dynamics underlying these conflicts.

The Adaptation Theory was proposed by Verschueren (1999) and encompasses three core concepts—variability, negotiability, and adaptability—along with four analytical dimensions: 1) contextual correlates of adaptability, which refers to the adaptation to contextual factors; 2) structural objects of adaptability, which involves the selection of linguistic structures for adaptation; 3) dynamics of adaptability; and 4) salience of the adaptability processes (Liu, 2012). Li (2021) posits that this theory includes making choices, the three key properties of language (variability, negotiability, and adaptability), and four research perspectives. From the perspectives of the physical world (temporal reference, spatial reference, and nonverbal behavior), the social world (values, communicative norms, social background and status), and the psychological world (personal emotions, desires, motivations, personality, etc.), Li explored the causes of MIL-DIL conflict discourse but did not sufficiently address additional contextual variables such as age, power, social distance, and personal traits. Zhang (2011), on the other hand, examined in terms of contextual relation adaptation (social world, psychological world) and structural object adaptation (e.g., extreme case formulations, rhetorical questions, puns, etc., as proposed by Pomerantz).

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Sun (2019) approached the analysis of the MIL's discourse in the drama Spicy Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law with a Rational Choice, focusing on two dimensions. First, from a narrow perspective, the analysis affirmed that within the traditional family structure prioritizing filial piety, the power center is concentrated in the MIL. She serves as the representative of paternal authority, with her role being in opposition to that of the DIL. Second, from a broader perspective, the analysis explored the interactive relationships between women in the MIL role and other characters throughout the TV series, specifically examining the verbal behaviors exhibited by this role in most scenarios within the drama. The research indicates that the MIL's discourse exhibits distinct rational characteristics, making it challenging for those present, particularly the DIL, to raise objections. By utilizing her senior status and the authority and psychological dominance inherent in her speech, the MIL frequently occupies the moral high ground in verbal exchanges, dominating dialogues with overwhelming force.

Han et al. (2023) examined the discourse on MIL-DIL conflicts in Taiwan, China, from the perspective of conflict management frameworks. Han suggests that individuals may adopt various management strategies when conflicts arise (Witteman, 1992). Scholars have identified four distinct conflict management approaches in intergenerational communication: competing, obliging/accommodating, avoiding, and problem-solving (Zhang, 2005). Competing is characterized by high self-interest and low concern for others. Typical communicative behaviors associated with this style include fault-finding, rejection, questioning, and denial of responsibility. Conversely, obliging/accommodating demonstrates low self-interest but high regard for others. This style involves acknowledging others' needs, affirming their stance, apologizing, and taking responsibility for the conflict. Researchers have found that women in Asian contexts tend to adopt compliant and suppressive behaviors (i.e., obliging) when embroiled in conflicts with their mothers-in-law (Buja, 2024; Derdar, 2018). Methodological differences may account for some inconsistencies. To our knowledge, there remains limited understanding of the respective conflict management styles employed by MILs-DILs.
Research in this field encompasses a total of 3 theories and 5 occurrences, effectively revealing the psychological mechanisms and cultural motivations behind discourse conflicts.

3.2.4 Social Critique and Power Analysis Perspective

Chai and Hou (2024) conducted an in-depth exploration from the perspective of critical discourse analysis for the first time. The study explicitly pointed out that power is the core concern of critical discourse analysis (CDA), as noted by Fairclough (2013), Van Dijk (2015), and Wodak and Meyer (2015). CDA can clearly reveal the complex relationships between language, power, and their underlying social contexts, as evidenced by Butt et al. (2024) and Statham (2022).

From the perspective of social critique and power analysis, research on MIL-DIL conflict discourse primarily employs CDA theory, with 1 analysis conducted.

3.2.5 Culture and Cognitive Communication Perspective

The field of Memetics reveals the causes and avoidance strategies of MIL-DIL conflicts from cultural and cognitive perspectives (Dawkins, 1976). Liu (2013) analyzed from the perspective of memes, noting that the main conflict meme triggering confrontational discourse between MILs-DILs is the conceptual conflict meme. In the meme competition

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of conflict discourse, both parties consciously or unconsciously absorb more memes and incorporate them into their respective meme repertoires. To avoid conflict discourse, these memorized memes can be consciously left unexpressed or untransmitted in new contexts. This field is with one analysis conducted.

3.2.6 Family and Social Systems Perspective

Chen and Tian (2023) based their study on family systems theory to conduct an in-depth analysis of the underlying causes of conflicts between MILs-DILs within migrant families. Family systems theory posits that each family member assumes specific roles and must adhere to corresponding rules. Based on their designated roles, individuals respond to others in particular ways, where maintaining consistent behavioral patterns helps preserve the equilibrium of the family system but may also lead to family dysfunction (Bowen, 1978). Chen and Tian argue that interpersonal issues among family members primarily stem from poor overall family communication. Their proposed resolution strategies include regulating the emotional system of the nuclear family, establishing and collectively abiding by family rules, constructing stable family triangular relationships, and enhancing communication among family members.

From the perspective of family and social systems theory, existing research has conducted one analysis, primarily based on Family Systems Theory.

3.2.7 Evaluation and Review Perspective

Li (2014) and Li & Gao (2013a, 2023b) utilized the attitudinal system from Martin & White's (2005) Appraisal Theory as their framework. They selected discourse fragments from the drama Double-Sided Adhesive Tape that depict MIL-DIL conflicts as their corpus to explore the similarities and differences in the expression of attitudinal meanings and the strategies for constructing attitudes between the two parties. The analysis revealed that attitudinal meanings in MIL-DIL conflict discourses are predominantly expressed through affect and judgment, indicating that speakers focus more on the affective domain and the evaluation of human behavior rather than on the material world. In terms of the affect system, the MIL tends to use resources of unhappiness to highlight her emotional responses, aiming to establish a psychological alliance with the DIL and maintain a positive interpersonal relationship. In contrast, the DIL employs a significant amount of unhappiness resources to express dissatisfaction, thereby rejecting the MIL's attempt at alliance and asserting her own authority within the family. Regarding the judgment system, the MIL tends to make negative evaluations from the perspective of social sanction, particularly concerning the propriety of behavior, whereas the DIL is more inclined to make negative evaluations based on social sanction, with a focus on the normality of behavior. In the appreciation system, value resources constitute a substantial proportion, revealing that differences in aesthetic and value-related perceptions also contribute to the discourse conflicts between MILs and DILs. The study further found that the differing strategies for constructing attitudes between the two parties are influenced by their distinct views on marriage, family, and ethics, reflecting the clash between traditional family ethics and modern egalitarian ideals, as well as the manifestation of urban-rural disparities.

From the perspective of appraisal theory, three analyses were conducted (Li, 2014; Li & Gao, 2013a, 2013b). The research was based on the attitude system in the appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005), analyzing the attitudinal meanings and

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expressive strategies of MIL-DIL conflict discourse from three dimensions: affect, judgment, and appreciation.

3.3 Evaluation of Theoretical Applications in MIL–DIL Conflict

The theoretical application in the study of MIL-DIL conflict discourse in contemporary China demonstrates a trend of interdisciplinary integration, with research approaches spanning pragmatics, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, family sociology, and cultural communication. The overall research has formed seven major theoretical directions, encompassing 15 theoretical frameworks, with a total of 36 theoretical analysis applications (Table 6), reflecting the richness and complexity of this topic in terms of theoretical adaptation and analytical dimensions.

Table 6: Frequency and Proportion Statistics of Theoretical Applications

No.	Perspectives	Types	Occurrences	Percentage	Frequency
1	Politeness and Impoliteness	Four types (Face Theory (8 times), Politeness Principle (2 times), Impoliteness Theory - Culpeper version (5 times) and Bousfield version (1 time))	16	44.4%	High
2	Language and Communication	4 types (conversation analysis (5 times), speech act theory (2 times), relevance theory (1 time), communication accommodation theory (1 time)	9	25.0%	High
3	Social Psychology and Interaction Research	3 types (Accommodation Theory (3 times), Rational Perspective (1 time), Conflict Management Theory (1 time))	5	14.0%	Middle
4	Social critique and power analysis	1 type (CDA)	1	2.7%	Low
5	Culture and Cognitive Communication	1 type (Linguistic Memetics)	1	2.7%	Low
6	Family and Social Systems	1 type (Family Systems Theory)	1	2.7%	Low
7	Evaluation and Review	1 type (Appraisal Theory - Attitude System)	3	8.3%	Low

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Total	15	36	100%

4. Reflection on Challenges: Binary Dilemma of Existing Theories

As a key dimension of intergenerational family relationships, research on discourse conflicts between Chinese MILs and DILs has made certain progress (Chai & Hou, 2024; Chen & Tian, 2023; Li, 2021; Sun, 2019). However, due to theoretical divergences and methodological limitations, this field still faces explanatory dilemmas: studies almost entirely rely on Western theories, which often exhibit inadaptability in cross-cultural applications, resulting in fragmented theoretical explanations that struggle to systematically analyze the dynamics.

In addition to the cultural adaptation issues discussed earlier, Western theoretical frameworks have another fundamental limitation: they exhibit structural deficiencies when systematically addressing the interwoven dimensions of ethical perspectives, facework, and power dynamics within Chinese intergenerational discourse. When analyzing conflicts in Chinese MIL-DIL discourse, the structural flaws of existing Western theoretical frameworks are primarily manifested in the fragmentation of analytical dimensions and the lack of systemic integration. This fragmented characteristic is mainly reflected in three aspects.

Firstly, existing studies frequently regard ethical norms, face strategies, and power dynamics as parallel variables (Han et al., 2023; Sun, 2019; Tang, 2014), neglecting the fact that within Chinese familial contexts, these three elements essentially form a nested system where ethics provide the foundation, face serves as the function, and power constitutes the substance. For example, when a MIL invokes old customs (ethical norms) to insist that her DIL follow traditional child-rearing practices, the latter might use deferential phrases such as You're right, Mom, but the doctor suggested... (facework) to subtly resist. Such interactions simultaneously perpetuate intergenerational power dynamics (power) and redefine the contemporary interpretation of filial piety (ethical norms). Western theories either concentrate on speech act forms (e.g., SAT) or highlight power structures (e.g., CDA), yet they lack conceptual tools that can elucidate these multidimensional dynamics (Stevens et al., 2025; Kyeong et al., 2025).

Secondly, this fragmented analysis results in an inadequate interpretation of the mechanisms behind conflict evolution. On the other hand, Chinese intergenerational discourse conflicts within families typically display cyclical patterns of accumulation, eruption, and repair, along with behaviors involving multiple speech segments (Liu, 2013). In contrast, Western frameworks tend to focus on static interaction segments. Consider the conflict over festival rituals as an example: the MIL insists on traditional practices based on rules inherited from ancestors (traditional authority), while the DIL contends that civilized rituals are now the norm (modern discourse). The superficial debate over the forms of rituals (ethical dimension) actually masks struggles for familial discourse power (power dimension). The escalation of these conflicts often arises from the superposition of multi-dimensional contradictions, yet prevailing frameworks lack systematic models to explain diachronic transformations.

The deeper dilemma lies in the limitations of methodological individualism. Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory of face is grounded in rational choice presuppositions, while Fairclough's (2013) CDA focuses on institutional power analysis—both approaches struggle to capture the uniquely Chinese relational rationality within family contexts.

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Here, individual decision-making is neither fully autonomous nor passively submissive, but dynamically negotiated within the differential mode of association (Fei, 1947), where qing-li-fa (sentiment-reason-law) intertwines. When a MIL employs pretended compliance (surface ethics) to gain actual decision-making power (substantive authority), her behavioral logic must be interpreted within the familial relational network—a dimension where existing Western frameworks demonstrate inadequate explanatory power for such relational strategies (Niu et al., 2024; Aaltio & Huang, 2018; Yang, 2016). This theoretical blind spot often reduces complex intergenerational negotiations to an oversimplified oppression-resistance binary narrative, obscuring the cultural specificity of power reproduction in Chinese families.

5. Future Directions: A Dynamic Model of Ethics, Face, and Power

The seven identified themes indeed reveal cultural adaptability and systemic integration in the modern Chinese MIL-DIL conflict discourse to some extent, (as seen in Table 7). This underscores the necessity and urgency of constructing a localized analytical framework at the same time. Future studies must move beyond the dichotomy of Western universalism and cultural essentialism (Kwak, 2025), and within the dynamic interplay of power and culture, develop a more explanatory localized analytical framework to deeply understand the complex dynamics of intergenerational discourse conflicts within Chinese families (Cai & Hu, 2025). Furthermore, based on the essential characteristics of Chinese MIL-DIL interactions outlined in the aforementioned literature review, future analytical models should systematically integrate certain Western theories and ethical norms, face-saving strategies, and power dynamics to reveal the unique cultural mechanisms and power reproduction processes within intergenerational family interactions in China, propelling the field towards deeper and more comprehensive development.

Table 7: Evaluation on Contributions of Seven Themes Found

No.	Perspectives	Types	Adaptability	Systemic Integration	Contributions
1	Politeness & Impoliteness	4 types	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆	Micro tools; needs localization
2	Language & Communication	4 types	★★☆☆☆	★★★★☆	Reveals patterns; low cultural fit
3	Social Psychology	3 types	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	Mid-level view; lacks depth
4	Social Critique & Power	1 type (CDA)	★★★★☆	★★☆☆☆	Power focus; weak system
5	Culture & Cognition	1 type (Memetics)	★★☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆	Limited explanation
6	Family & Social Systems	1 type	★☆☆☆☆	★★★★☆	Systemic; cultural mismatch
7	Evaluation & Review	1 type	★★☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆	Sentiment useful; one-sided

Based on this, the study proposes utilizing Confucian ethics as the foundation, incorporating Western face theory and power analysis theory into indigenous theories as bridging elements to construct a systematic cultural adaptability analysis framework (Rao et al., 2024; Villalobos et al., 2020). First, a modern interpretation of Confucian filial piety ethics is employed to establish the core analytical dimension of the ethicized face (Zhou & Ahmad, 2025; Han & Cheung, 2025). Second, Brown & Levinson's (1987) face

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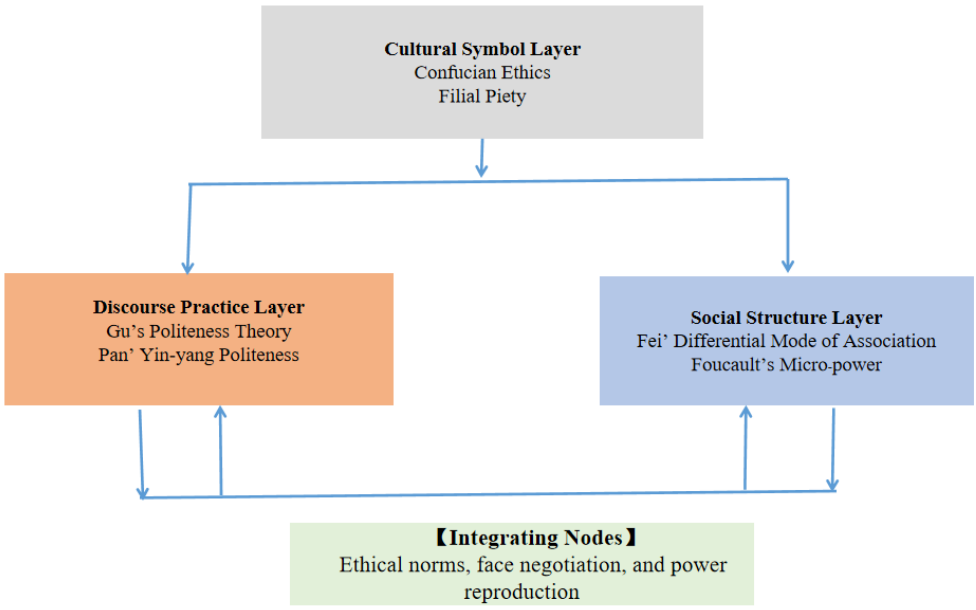
theory is used as a framework for micro-interaction analysis, in conjunction with Gu's (1990, 1992) indigenous politeness principles and Pan Yuling's (2000) concept of yin-yang politeness, to highlight the cultural uniqueness of Chinese ethical politeness. Finally, Foucault's (1977) micro-power theory and Fei's (1947) differential mode of association are introduced to elucidate the power mechanisms underlying discourse. The theoretical integration matrix is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Integrating Nodes of Western and Indigenous Theories



Confucian ethics serve as the core cultural interpretive framework for this study, with the family ethical system, centered on filial piety, establishing the normative foundation for intergenerational interactions within Chinese society (Zhou & Ahmad, 2025; Han & Cheung, 2025; Zheng et al., 2024). However, local empirical studies indicate that MIL-DIL conflicts frequently arise from the tension between traditional ethics and contemporary egalitarian values (Chai & Hou, 2024). The theoretical significance of this issue lies in the ethicalization of the concept of face, forming a unique dimension of filial piety face—where an individual's social reputation depends not only on immediate impression management during interactions but, more crucially, on adherence to the hierarchical order of seniority and juniority (as exemplified in The Classic of Filial Piety: In daily life, demonstrate reverence; in providing care, bring joy). This ethicized face achieves intergenerational control through a culture of shame (Yakeley, 2018). For example, a DIL' public rebuttal might be seen as inappropriate behavior that tarnishes her family's ethical image (Chai & Hou, 2024; Han et al., 2023). The Confucian concept of rectification of names further reinforces the power dynamics of discourse, stipulating that role behaviors must align with the hierarchical expectations of parental benevolence and filial piety (Gu & Li, 2023; Fei, 1947), thereby providing the cultural foundation for model construction. This multidimensional integration transcends the constraints of traditional facial research, which bifurcates politeness and power, and establishes a three-dimensional analytical framework encompassing cultural symbols, discursive practices, and social structures.

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6. Conclusion

6.1 Key Research Findings

This study critically integrates the theoretical frameworks of contemporary Chinese MIL-DIL conflict discourse research through a systematic literature review, with the main findings as follows.

Finding 1: Research on contemporary Chinese MIL-DIL conflict discourse has evolved into a multidisciplinary theoretical system encompassing a range of theoretical frameworks. This system comprises 15 theoretical frameworks within seven major theoretical perspectives. Among these, politeness and impoliteness theories have been utilized 16 times (accounting for 44.4%), language and communication theories 9 times (25.0%), and social psychology and interaction studies 5 times (14.0%). Social critique and power analysis, cultural and cognitive communication, family and social systems theories, as well as evaluation and review applications were less frequently employed, ranging from 1 to 3 times each (2.7% - 8.3%). High-frequency theories such as face theory (utilized 8 times) and conversation analysis theories (utilized 7 times) uncover conflict interaction mechanisms and act as theoretical cornerstones in this field. Low-frequency approaches like critical discourse analysis provide fresh perspectives with significant theoretical extension potential. Future research should aim to further enhance theoretical integration and criticality (Tian et al., 2022).

Finding 2: Although Western discourse analysis paradigms offer foundational frameworks for studying MIL-DIL conflicts, they fall short in fully accounting for the dynamic interplay of ethical norms, face negotiation, and power reproduction within Chinese familial contexts (Stevens et al., 2025; Kyeong et al., 2025). These theories overemphasize individual autonomy and neglect Confucian filial obligations, relational hierarchies, and implicit conflict management strategies, such as indirect communication and compromise through forbearance, within China's collectivist family culture (Zheng et al., 2024). Theoretical Dilemma of Cultural Adaptation: Current research confronts dual challenges of inadequate localization of Western theories and fragmented analytical frameworks. For example, in Chinese MIL-DIL interactions, face (*mianzi*) encompasses not only personal dignity but also family reputation and intergenerational obligations (Gu, 1990, 1992). Furthermore, discursive forms and power dynamics are not manifested as unidirectional domination but rather through dynamic negotiation between Confucian ethics (such as seniority hierarchy) and modern egalitarian ideals (Zhou & Ahmad, 2025).
Finding 3: This study, based on critical integration, proposes the feasibility of a dynamic analytical model for EFM—encompassing ethical norms, face negotiation, and power reproduction—to more comprehensively capture the cultural specificity of Chinese MIL-DIL conflict discourse. The model emphasizes that ethical norms (such as filial piety and family responsibilities) constitute the deep constraints of conflict discourse; face negotiation (such as superficial harmony and implicit confrontation) regulates the expression of conflict; and power reproduction (such as resource control and discourse power struggles) reflects the modern transformation of intergenerational and gender roles (Pan, 2000; Gu, 1990, 1992; Fei, 1947). But the model is a try, further research and validation are needed.

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6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

At the theoretical level, existing research urgently needs to transcend Western-centric analytical paradigms by incorporating indigenous concepts—such as differential modes of association and relational orientations—into international academic dialogues. This approach would promote more culturally sensitive theoretical constructions (Tian et al., 2022). Future studies should focus on exploring the dynamic interplay between ethical obligations and individual demands within family conflict discourse (Kyeong et al., 2025). Such exploration would not only enrich the theoretical spectrum of global family research but also provide new explanatory frameworks for the modernization processes of families in non-Western societies. This theoretical direction both responds to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2001) classic discussion on the tension between individualization and family institutions and engages with the negotiated modernity paradigm recently proposed by Asian scholars (Mushtaq et al., 2024; Kyung-Sup et al., 2010).

At the practical level, a deeper understanding of the impact of cultural factors on family conflicts can provide new insights for cross-cultural family mediation. Future research should focus on the implicit cultural logics in intergenerational power negotiations, (such as the face mechanism (Ruan et al., 2024)), which will help develop intervention strategies more aligned with local contexts. The concept of negotiated filial piety proposed by Kyeong et al. (2025) is particularly enlightening, as it reveals the adaptation process of traditional filial piety norms in modern families, offering culturally adapted theoretical tools for social workers dealing with intergenerational conflicts. Such research not only enhances the cultural relevance of family services but also contributes non-Western practical experiences to the international field of family therapy.

6.3 Limitations and Future Directions

This study has certain limitations: First, the literature review primarily focuses on core Chinese and English publications, potentially overlooking significant research findings in other languages; second, the current theoretical integration remains predominantly qualitative, and future studies could incorporate quantitative methods (such as meta-analysis) to enhance the generalizability of conclusions; finally, the three-dimensional model has not yet been fully analyzed or empirically validated, requiring further verification of its explanatory power through field studies or discourse experiments (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

The research can be expanded in three aspects: First, by deepening the construction of indigenous theories, we can further operationalize concepts such as Confucian ethics and differential modes of association to form systematic analytical tools. Second, we can strengthen cross-cultural comparisons to explore differences in MIL-DIL discourse across urban-rural divides, generational gaps, or varying family structures (McIntyre & Lough, 2021). Third, we can develop dynamic research methods, (such as longitudinal studies or multimodal discourse analysis, to capture real-time conflict negotiation processes (Lacko et al., 2022). Additionally, artificial intelligence technologies, such as natural language processing, could be employed to analyze large-scale family interaction corpora, revealing the operational mechanisms of implicit cultural norms, such as face strategies (Kumar & Ratten, 2025; Chen et al., 2024).

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Based on the above discussion, future research can innovate through dynamic approaches such as theoretical localization verification, deepening, and expansion, while also leveraging emerging technologies to promote multidimensional development in this field.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval and participant consent were not required for this study. This is because the research is based entirely on a systematic review and analysis of previously published literature. No new data involving human participants or animals were collected.

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Conflict of Interest

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