

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A 20/01/2026) - IRSA 02 - THE RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE: LIVING CONDITIONS, WELL-BEING, WORK AND VITAL TRAJECTORIES IN RURAL AREAS

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN MOTHER-IN-LAW/DAUGHTER-IN-LAW CONFLICT AMONG RURAL MIGRANT WOMEN IN CHINA: A “COMPROMISE–EXIT” STRATEGY GROUNDED IN THE EXPERIENCES OF TWELVE RURAL-BORN WOMEN

Yao Qin (evaqin0102@163.com)

Drawing on 12 semi-structured interviews (2024–2025) with rural-born migrant women born between the 1960s and the early 2000s, this study traces the evolving nature of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law (MIL/DIL) conflict across two generations. Findings reveal a structural shift from disputes over traditional patriarchal authority to clashes between residual family power and emerging individualistic aspirations. Everyday friction now operates on two intertwined axes: (1) inter-generational power contests (fertility control, resource allocation, child-rearing sovereignty) and (2) quotidian micro-conflicts (living habits, cultural taboos, emotional boundaries). Husbands, positioned as key mediators, recurrently fall into three dysfunctional patterns: (a) “traditional-order defender” in overtly ruptured dyads, (b) mother’s “invisible accomplice” in ostensibly peaceful households, and (c) “conflict intensifier” who, prioritizing filial piety,

colludes economically with the mother, evades mediation, and off-loads care/child-rearing duties onto the wife, reinforcing the latter's sense of grievance and outsider status. In response, rural-origin daughters-in-law craft a "compromise–exit" repertoire: compromise via economic dependence, bundled care obligations, and conflict avoidance; exit via labor-market mobility (occupational empowerment framed as "rational career moves"), residential separation, emotional detachment, or complete relational rupture. Younger cohorts increasingly mobilize occupational mobility to achieve spatial-economic exit, signaling an individualized coping trajectory amid inadequate welfare. Ineffective husband mediation thus displaces care burdens onto women, widening the rural–urban well-being gap. Policy must reconfigure family mediation mechanisms and co-design inclusive care infrastructures with affected groups to redress gendered spatial injustice in care provision.

Palavras-chave: mother-in-law/daughter-in-law conflict; rural migrant women; intergenerational transformation; compromise–exit strategy; gender–spatial justice.