



Ethnocultural Analysis of The Concepts 'Marriage' And 'Family' In Paremiology of Chinese Language

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Abstract

Proverbs are maxims that reflect the values, beliefs, and cultural heritage of a society. This study attempted to conduct ethnocultural analysis of two concepts, marriage and family, in the Chinese Paremiology. The topics of 'marriage' and 'family' are extensively covered in Chinese proverbs; hence this study aimed to find out how Chinese proverbs about marriage and family reflect the Chinese cultural view of these institutions. A sample of 333 proverbs from the Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs was chosen and was categorized into several categories like partner selection criteria, forms of marriage, divorce, remarriage, relations between husband and wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law and wife, parent-child relationship, and resolution of family conflicts. The study found out that most Chinese proverbs dealt with the concept of male superiority over women. A few proverbs presented the Chinese ethno-cultural practices adopted in choosing a spouse, marriage and family customs, and family values. The research has practical significance as the results can be used in compiling a guide to the study of proverbs, a dictionary of Chinese proverbs, and a corpus of proverbs in philological science.

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Introduction

Language serves as a vehicle for culture and can reflect a country's or nation's traditional culture and way of thinking (Mills, 2020; Steyer, 2014; Wu, Zhou, & Shao, 2023; Yule, 2010). The Chinese language of the Han people is widely spoken as the Han population in China far outnumbers the other ethnic groups (Dong, 2020). The Han population in China currently exceeds 1.2 billion, accounting for over 91% of the total population. Proverbs, which are formed and recorded over time, are highly ethnic and relatively stable. They are a significant part of cultural heritage and play a crucial role in reflecting the values, beliefs, and views of a society. They are familiar, fixed,

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sentential expressions that express well-known truths, social norms, or moral concerns (Gibbs & Beitel, 1995).

Proverbs are also considered as a living fossil for the study of history and culture in many ways (Lomotey & Csajbok-Twerefou, 2021; Utebaev & Sarsenbaeva, 2021). Firstly, they express universally accepted ideas and beliefs using simple but powerful language. This provides readers with interesting insights into people's geographical, religious, historical, and social views and attitudes. Secondly, proverbs are used to impart knowledge, offer advice, teach, reinforce morals, present arguments, ease interpersonal tensions, aid understanding, or comfort or inspire others. Thirdly, proverbs transmit tribal wisdom and embody codes of conduct. Additionally, proverbs reflect cultural differences, and can be used to explain cross-cultural differences in beliefs and behavior (Yao, 2022). They also serve to protect oral traditions. It is important to note that proverbs can be culturally specific, with different interpretations even among speakers of the same language from different regions. Overall, proverbs reflect the wisdom, values, and beliefs of the cultures from which they originate. They serve as an effective tool for communication, education, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Načisčione, 2020; Tamimy & Sahragard, 2021).

Studies have revealed the transformation of modern Han Chinese thinking and concepts, as well as a shift in their cultural values through proverbs (Kokhan, 2023; Weng, Zhang, Kulich, & Zuo, 2021; Yue-ling, 2022; Zhao & Wu, 2022; Zhu, Ren, & Li, 2023). Chinese proverbs are a reflection of these values, their culture and way of thinking of the majority of Chinese people. The concepts of 'marriage' and 'family' are imbued with rich historical and cultural connotations in Chinese proverbs. These proverbs emphasize the stability and harmony of family and marriage, which are considered important for social stability. However, as society develops and modernizes, people's understanding of 'marriage' and 'family' changes. Modern attitudes place greater emphasis on individual freedom and choice. Proverbs serve as both a record of social change and an inheritance of ideas. While some proverbs may have become outdated, the good qualities at the core of proverbs are still valuable for our lives today.

Very few studies have dealt with these two themes of 'marriage' and 'family' in the context of Chinese Paremiology (Bingbing & Kamensky, 2023; Huang). There is also a dearth of ethnocultural analysis of Chinese proverbs, specifically in the two themes of marriage and family. A need was therefore felt to fill this research gap. The main research objective of this study was to examine Chinese proverbs related to marriage and family, to understand and analyze Han Chinese perspectives on these topics. It was also aimed that this study of Chinese proverbs would emerge as a valuable tool for understanding and preserving the intricate interplay between language, culture, and the evolving ethos of the Han Chinese people in contemporary times.

Literature Review

Proverbs are an important part of traditional Chinese culture and occupy a special place in the treasure house of folk literature and art. Various studies have tried to define Chinese proverbs in multiple ways (Kokhan, 2023; Weng et al., 2021; Yue-ling, 2022; Zhao & Wu, 2022; Zhu et al., 2023). For instance, Jia (2012) asserts that Chinese proverbs are a kind of fixed phrases widely circulated among the general public, reflecting profound truths in simple and common words. Y. Jing (2021) believes that Chinese proverbs are rich in philosophy, revealing truths and teaching experiences to people in vivid artistic language, so that people can get enlightenment from them. Chinese proverbs about marriage reflect the strong male superiority of women in ancient society and are highly sexist (W. Jing, 22021).

The *Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs* (Yang Yan, 2007) is an authoritative tool co-authored in Chinese by some experts and scholars who have studied vocabulary for many years and have both professional theoretical knowledge and rich practical experience in compiling dictionaries. These experts added many new materials based on the Chinese Common Language Corpus Database, which is the result of the National Social Science Foundation project 'Research on Computer Processing of the Chinese Common Language Corpus and Related Linguistic Problems' (02BYYO17). It contained about 6,000 commonly used proverbs. These proverbs covered all aspects of life: politics, society, economy, life, culture, etiquette, marriage, family, ethics, meteorology, health care, mundane life, common sense, philosophy, and so on.

In this dictionary, each proverb is given a precise meaning and an example, and the proverbs that can be dated are labelled with the dynasty and the ancient book in which they appeared. This dictionary is an important resource and tool for understanding Chinese society and culture. Unlike other dictionaries that are arranged alphabetically, this dictionary is arranged according to the different themes of proverbs, and each theme has several sub-themes under it, making this dictionary more logical and easier for the user to find proverbs on a particular theme. However, this dictionary may not be able to meet the exact needs of all users, and not all proverbs can be accurately categorized, so we need to filter and select them ourselves in the process of using it.

In the fifth and sixth chapters of this dictionary, there are 333 proverbs, including 101 family proverbs and 232 marriage proverbs. Chinese proverbs on marriage are divided into several categories like Criteria for choosing a spouse; Marriage purpose; Marriage form; Divorce; Re-marriage. These categories are further sub-divided for the sake of understanding the socio-cultural impact of these two institutions. For instance, the category, 'Criteria for choosing a spouse' is subdivided into subcategories like age of marriage; appearance and moral character; emphasis on family traditions; bride price and dowry; choosing a suitable match. These sub categories reflect the fact that before marriage, people mainly examined the age of marriage, the appearance and character of the spouse, the morals of the family, the economic condition, and the degree of compatibility between the couple. Likewise, the category of marriage purpose reflects the difference in the purpose of marriage between men and women and the disparity in the status of men and women in ancient times. The category of marriage forms mainly reflects illiberal arranged marriages and polygamy in ancient times. Divorce and remarriage mainly reflect traditional Chinese attitudes towards divorce and remarriage and the oppression of women.

Proverbs about the family mainly focus on five themes: relationship between husband and wife, relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, relationship between sisters-in-law and wife, parent-child relationship, and family conflict resolution. Proverbs on the relationship between husband and wife mainly reflect the superiority of men over women in the family and advocate the promotion of harmony between husband and wife. Proverbs on the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law reflect the complex and typical relationship between them, and proverbs on the relationship between sisters-in-law and wife reflect the common phenomenon of conflicts and contradictions between them. Proverbs on the parent-child relationship reflect traditional Chinese concepts of child rearing and the way parents and children get along. Proverbs on the family conflict resolution reflect views and attitudes on dealing with internal conflicts within the family and advocate that when conflicts arise, they should not be made public, should not be spread, and should be tolerated by each other.

Methodology

Research Design

The current study utilized a qualitative research design with an ethnocultural approach (Mertens, 2012; Nagata, Kohn-Wood, & Suzuki, 2012). This approach ideally suited this study on proverbs as the study focused on examining the cultural beliefs and traditions behind the etymology of each proverb belonging to the category of 'marriage' and 'family.' In addition, this study also adopted the semantic approach as it necessitated highlighting the meaning of the proverbs.

Data Collection

The data was mainly collected from the Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs, which is an authoritative source of Han Chinese proverbs. The dictionary contains about 6,000 commonly used proverbs, covering all aspects of life like politics, society, economy, culture, etiquette, marriage, family, ethics, meteorology, health care, mundane life, common sense, philosophy, and so on. In the fifth and sixth chapters of this dictionary, there are 333 proverbs, sampled for this study, which comprises 101 family proverbs and 232 marriage proverbs. After collecting and organizing into categories, these proverbs were translated into English.

Data Analysis

The ethnocultural analysis patterns were used in this study to examine the proverbs related to 'marriage and family'. The content analysis method was adopted to analyze these proverbs, which required dividing them into categories and sub-categories according to their themes. Further, making use of the modelling approach to define the categories of proverbs on the themes, 'marriage' and 'family,' each proverb was analyzed in accordance with traditional Chinese ethno-cultural groups. The study also conducted a comparative analysis to reveal the evolution of the Chinese view of marriage and family, as well as the cultural differences and different concepts between China and the West (Pan, Wu, & Xue, 2013; Suecin, 2022). Last, but not the least, as a result of conceptual analysis, the concept of the superiority of a man over a woman in the proverbs of ancient China was considered.

Results and Discussion

Marriage Proverbs

The research made it evident that Chinese marriage proverbs mainly focused on five themes: Criteria for choosing a spouse, Marriage purpose, Marriage forms, Divorce, and Remarriage. These categories are presented in Figure 1.

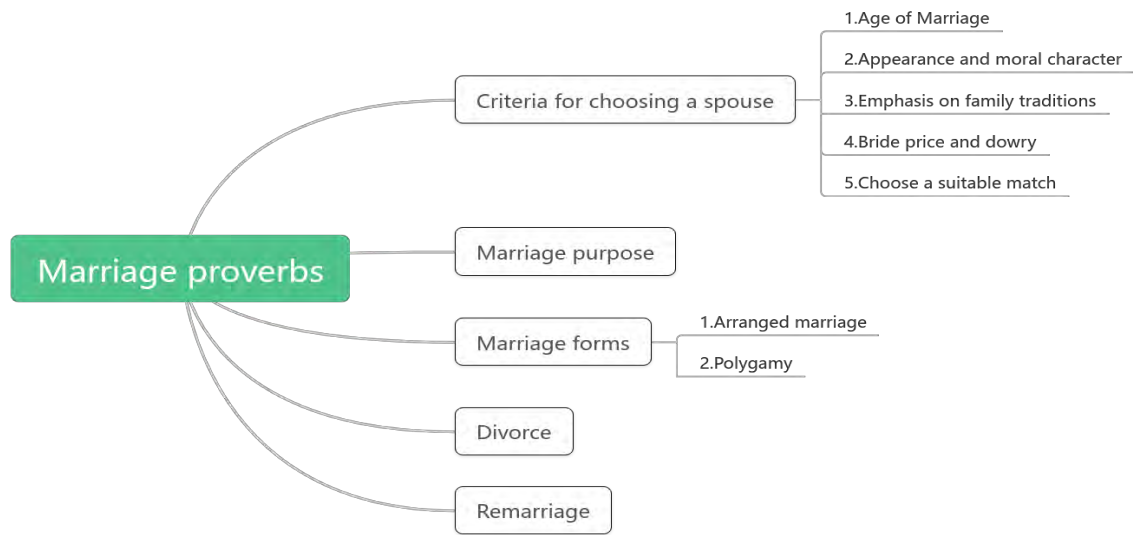


Figure 1: Marriage Proverbs.

Criteria for Choosing a Spouse

There are proverbs about marriage in all languages with varied perspectives. English proverbs, for instance, do not emphasize too much the age of marriage, but more on the need to think carefully and be ready before entering into marriage, e.g. "Marry in haste, repent at leisure". Economic situation is also considered when choosing a spouse, but it is not a decisive factor, e.g., "Never marry for money, but marry where money is". It is believed that marriages are long-lasting if both partners are well matched, e.g., "Unequal marriages are seldom happy". Bravery is a quality that women look for when choosing a spouse, e.g., "None but the brave deserves the fair".

Chinese proverbs are very different from English proverbs (Pan et al., 2013; Suecin, 2022). The criteria for choosing a spouse in the Chinese proverbs reflect the fact that before marriage, people mainly examined the age of marriage, the appearance and character of the spouse, the morals of the family, the economic condition, and the degree of compatibility between the couple.

Age of Marriage

The traditional Chinese view of marriage is that the earlier the age of marriage, the better, and that those who marry late are shamed by everyone. People also thought that the husband older than his wife is a perfect match. Many proverbs reflect this view, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Proverbs on the Age of Marriage.

| Chinese Proverbs | | Translation |
|------------------|------------------|--|
| — | 男大当婚，女大当嫁。 | Boys should be married when they grow up, and girls should be married when they grow up. |
| — | 人到三十把头低。 | When people reach 30, they put their heads down (because of shame). |
| — | 男大十岁不为大，女大十岁做妈妈。 | A man ten years older than a woman is not a big deal, a woman ten years older than a man would be a mom. |
| — | 娶妻要小，嫁汉要老 | Marry a younger wife, marry an older husband |

In China, changes in the age of marriage reflect the influence of factors such as socio-economic conditions, cultural attitudes, and government policies. From ancient times to modern times, the regulations and actual situation of the age of marriage have changed. For example, during the Tang Dynasty, men could marry at the age of twenty and women at the age of fifteen or older. During the Song Dynasty, men could marry at fifteen and women at thirteen or older. During the Ming Dynasty, men could marry at sixteen and women at fourteen or older. In modern China, the Civil Code of the People's Republic of China stipulates that the age of marriage cannot be earlier than twenty-two for men and twenty for women. In 1979, China began implementing a one-child policy to encourage people to marry and have children later, and although this policy was replaced by the comprehensive two-child policy in 2015, it has still had a significant impact on making marriage and childbearing a more deliberate decision.

According to China's State Council, the average age of first marriage in China is rising. In 2020, the average age of first marriage in China was 28.67 years, with 29.38 years for men and 27.95 years for women. This can be compared with the average age of first marriage in 2010, which was 24.89 years, and represents an overall delay

of almost four years. In addition, the number of marriages has generally declined in recent years. Reasons for this may include rising levels of education, rising costs of marriage, increased competition in employment and the workplace, and changes in the concept of marriage, with many people choosing to complete their studies, stabilize their careers, or reach a certain level of financial means before considering marriage and childbearing.

Appearance and Moral Character

Many Chinese proverbs reflect the fact that when parents choose a spouse for their children, they look for appearance and moral character. When choosing a spouse for their daughter, the parents' requirements mainly emphasize the man's good moral character and do not emphasize his appearance too much (see Table 2). However, when selecting a spouse for a son, the parents are more demanding and require the woman to have both good looks and good moral character, although they also believed that too many good looks can be a disadvantage.

Table 2: Proverbs on Appearance and Moral Character.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|--|
| — 不图砖地，单图好女婿。 | Do not want a good house, only a good son-in-law. |
| — 不贪人田地，只贪人。 | Do not want a man's field, only this man. |
| — 世上谁见男儿丑。 | There are no ugly men in this world. |
| — 爱美之心，人皆有之。 | Beauty is in the heart of mankind. |
| — 过美不善。 | Too beautiful and not good. |
| — 节省油盐米面布，是个巧媳妇。 | Saving oil, salt, rice and cloth, she is a clever daughter-in-law. |

It is evident that in ancient times, men were not expected to meet high expectations. Conversely, women were held to a multitude of expectations, including virtues such as hard work and thriftiness, as well as beauty that was not excessive. Men desired a beautiful wife but believed that a woman who was too beautiful was not the most suitable candidate, and they would be suspicious of a wife who was overly attractive.

Emphasis on Family Traditions

Many Chinese proverbs reflect the ancient people's focus on family traditions when choosing a spouse, believing that parents have a great influence on their children and that parents of high moral character will also produce children of high moral character, and likewise, parents of bad character will not produce good children. Therefore, examining a family's family traditions is a very important criterion for choosing a spouse (see Table 3).

Table 3: Proverbs on Emphasizing Family Traditions.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|--------------------|--|
| — 上梁不正下梁歪。 | If the upper beam is not straight, the lower beam must be crooked. |
| — 虎父无犬子。 | A tiger father will never have a dog son. |
| — 龙生龙，凤生凤，老鼠养儿会打洞。 | A dragon gives birth to a dragon, a phoenix gives birth to a phoenix, a mouse raises a child who will make a hole. |

These proverbs use metaphors to make them more vivid and interesting. In traditional Chinese culture, family traditions are regarded as the spiritual beliefs and character traits of a family, which have a profound impact on the character and behavior of its members. In ancient times, good or bad family traditions had a direct impact on the reputation and status of a family, and thus family traditions were highly valued when choosing a spouse. In modern society, although the criteria and considerations for choosing a spouse have become more diverse and complex, family traditions remain an important consideration.

Bride Price and Dowry

In ancient times, the bride price was an important aspect of Han Chinese weddings (see Table 4). Parents did not promise marriage for free; the groom was expected to provide a sufficient bride price to the bride's parents. Wealthy families would also prepare dowries for their daughters. Unfortunately, some parents were known to sell their daughters under the guise of receiving a bride price.

Table 4: Proverbs on Bride Price and Dowry.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|----------------------------|--|
| — 高山有好水，平地有好花，人间有好女，无钱莫想她。 | There is good water in the mountains, good flowers in the plains, and a good woman on earth, do not think of her if you do not have money. |
| — 老光棍满身钱，讨了老婆没裤穿。 | The old bachelor was full of money, married a wife will be poor without pants to wear |

The bride price is still a common phenomenon in modern China, but there are significant differences between ancient and modern bride prices. In the past, the bride price consisted of not only monetary demands but also gifts and essential items that held symbolic significance. It served as evidence of the marriage relationship and ensured the fulfilment of the marriage contract. However, in modern society, the bride price has acquired more economic significance, losing the rich spiritual connotations that it once held. The contemporary bride price is usually a monetary payment, with the amount varying from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of RMB that the man is required to pay to the woman's family. The required amount of bride price varies across regions, both rural and urban. In some regions, the bride's price is given to the woman's parents, while in others, it is given to the woman to be brought to her new family after the marriage.

Modern Chinese young people face significant pressure regarding the bride price. The high bride price, combined with the pressure of social opinion, has become an insurmountable mountain, preventing young people from finding a happy marriage. This issue is prevalent throughout China and continues to worsen with socio-economic development. To tackle these issues, the Chinese government has taken action by promoting reforms in marriage customs and legislating against high bride prices. The aim is to create a healthy and civilised environment for marriage.

Choose a Suitable Match

Chinese proverbs reflect the belief that the social status and economic situation of the families of the man and the woman should be comparable when people choose their spouse (see Table 5). This notion suggests that if the couple's family background, economic status, and education level are compatible, it is easier for them to reach a consensus and reduce conflicts in their married life, making the marriage more stable and harmonious.

Table 5: Proverbs on Choosing a Suitable Match.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|---|
| 看女配夫，量体裁衣。 | Match the husband by observing the woman, tailor the clothes to fit the body. |
| 鱼找鱼，虾找虾，青蛙找那癞蛤蟆。 | Fish find fish, shrimp find shrimp, frog find that toad. |

However, this concept has been criticized in modern times. Some argue that an excessive focus on 'family resemblance' may overlook personal emotions and choices and may even lead to economic interests overtaking love as the dominant factor in marriage. Therefore, while young people in contemporary society still consider 'the right family' when selecting a spouse, they also attach increasing importance to personal feelings and choices, but those who support this concept are still in the majority.

Marriage Purpose

The marriage purpose reflects the difference in the purpose of marriage between men and women and the disparity in the status of men and women in ancient times. Having a son was the main purpose of traditional Han marriage. For the ancient Han Chinese, no son was a very serious matter. No son meant no one to take care of them when they are old, no one to carry on a man's surname, and no one to remember them after they died. "No children" was the most vicious curse in the Chinese traditional concept. Many proverbs reflect this viewpoint (see Table 6). However, English proverbs suggest that people should marry for love, that fate is predetermined and that true love cannot be stopped, e.g. "Hanging and wiving go by destiny", "Love conquers all".

Table 6: Proverbs on Marriage Purpose.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|---|
| 不孝有三，无后为大。 | There are three kinds of unfilial acts, and no son is the most serious one. |
| 有子万事足。 | Having a son is enough for everything. |
| 不怕野种，就怕绝种。 | Don't be afraid of feral seeds, but of extinct ones (Seed means son) . |

In contemporary China, the purpose of marriage for young people has changed significantly. Although social expectations and parental pressure still play a role in motivating young people to start a family, traditional concepts such as succession and family responsibilities are no longer the only driving forces. Modern young people are more likely to seek personal happiness and fulfilment in their marriages, valuing the emotional connection and mutual understanding of their partners, as well as the desire to have their emotional and financial security legally protected. Improved socio-economic conditions have led modern young people to place greater value on economic and social status. Simultaneously, the rise of social media and online dating has given young people more options, allowing them to search for a compatible spouse in a wider range of situations. In general, the purpose of marriage among young people in contemporary China is multifaceted, encompassing both traditional

values and modern notions of individualism and liberalism.

Marriage Form

Marriage forms mainly reflect illiberal arranged marriages and polygamy in ancient times.

Arranged Marriage

In ancient times, Han Chinese parents decided who their children would marry. Young people could not choose their own spouses, and the decision to marry rested with their parents (see [Table 7](#)). This form of marriage was called an arranged marriage. The difference is that English proverbs reflect the freedom to choose one's spouse and the importance of long-lasting love, such as "Love me little, love me long".

Table 7: Proverbs on Marriage Form.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|--|
| 为族娶妇是重，为个人娶妻是轻。 | Marrying a wife for the family is important, but marrying a wife for oneself is not. |
| 父母之命，媒妁之言。 | Parents' orders, matchmakers' words. |

In China, the evolution of marriage forms reflects socio-economic, cultural, and value changes. In ancient times, parents or matchmakers mainly arranged marriages, considering the interests and social status of the family. However, modern society has significantly changed marriage forms. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, young people were able to choose their own spouses, with greater emphasis on individual freedom of choice and emotional fulfilment. This includes free love marriages, quick marriages, trial marriages, cross-border marriages, same-sex marriages, late marriages, and no marriages. These changes reflect a shift in social attitudes and the diversification of personal choices, revealing the influence of individualistic and liberal thinking in modern society.

Polygamy

In ancient times, a Han Chinese man could have a wife and several concubines at the same time (see [Table 8](#)), which was very inhumane. The status of the concubines was extremely low and despised, and the "wife" would live in misery. As a result, family conflicts were constant.

Table 8: Proverbs on Polygamy.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|--|
| 宁做庶人妻，不做官家姬。 | It is better to be a poor man's wife than an official's concubine. |
| 与人不和，劝人讨小婆。 | If you can't get along with others, advise them to take a concubine. |

With the promulgation of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China on May 1, 1950, monogamy was completely established in China.

Divorce

Divorce and remarriage mainly reflect traditional Chinese attitudes towards divorce and remarriage and the oppression of women. In ancient times, divorce was stigmatized, and divorced women were considered shameful. The Han Chinese men had the exclusive right to divorce, while women did not have the right to divorce (see [Table 9](#)), and a wife could not leave her husband even if he did something bad. Of course, a husband needed a reason to abandon his wife, such as she could not have children, cheated on him, disrespected her in-laws, etc.

Table 9: Proverbs on Divorce.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|---|
| 无故不休妻，无事不宰鸡。 | Don't repudiate your wife without a cause, don't slaughter a chicken without a cause. |
| 糟糠之妻不下堂。 | A wife who shared her husband's hard lot must never be cast aside. |

In modern times, divorce has become more common and socially acceptable. Recently, divorce rates have increased, and more people are recognizing it as a means of ending unhappy marriages.

Remarriage

In ancient times, people were very harsh on women, they believed that divorced women or widows should not remarry, and remarried women would be spurned, but there were no such requirements for men. Many proverbs

against women remarrying were popular (see Table 10) .

Table 10: Proverbs on Remarriage.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|---|
| 好女不嫁二夫。 | A good woman doesn't marry second husband. |
| 一女不吃二家饭。 | A woman doesn't eat two meals at the same time. |
| 生是夫家人，死是夫家鬼。 | Alive, she belongs to her husband's family; dead, she is a ghost of her husband's family. |

English proverbs reflect monogamy and suggest that it is normal to end a relationship and then start a second one, e.g. "It's best to break up with an old love before you start with a new one". Modern Chinese society no longer holds a stigmatizing attitude towards women marrying more than once, and more people believe that the pursuit of good love and marriage is everyone's right.

Family Proverbs

Family Chinese proverbs are categorized into five types: The relationship between husband and wife (which can be subdivided into two sub categories: Men are superior to women in the family; and Promoting harmony between husband and wife); The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; The relationship between sisters-in-law and wife; The parent-child relationship; and The family conflict resolution. Figure 2 presents this specific categorization.

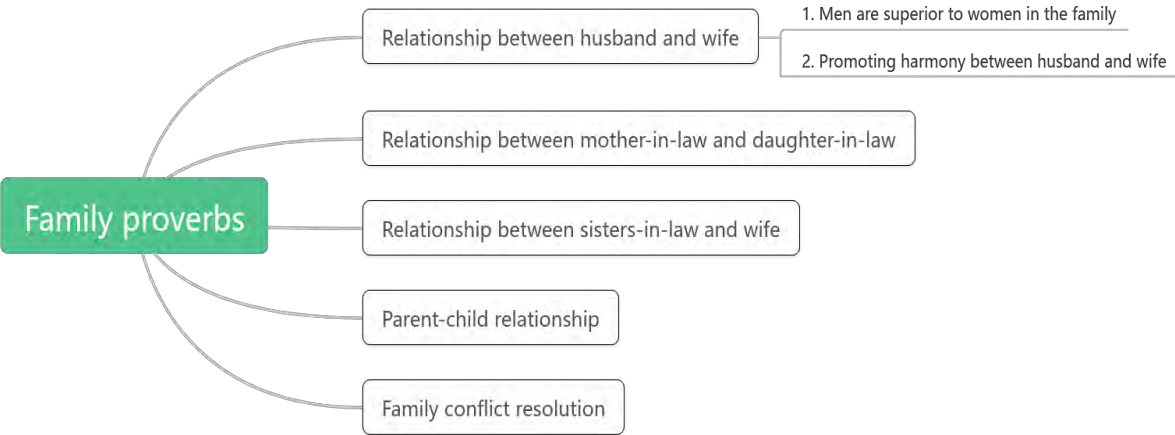


Figure 2: Family Proverbs.

Relationship Between Husband and Wife

Men are superior to women in the family

In ancient times, Han Chinese women had a very low status in the family. Women were under the domination of men all their lives (see Table 11). English proverbs present a different view from Chinese proverbs on this point, which often promoted gender equality, e.g. "Happy wife, happy life".

Table 11:Proverbs on The Superiority of Men Over Women.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------------------|--|
| 嫁出去的女儿泼出去的水。 | A married daughter is like water that is thrown out. |
| 夫唱妇随。 | The husband sings and the woman follow. |
| 男孩子落地，一家人欢天喜地，女孩子落地，一家人鼓嘴憋气。 | When a boy is born, the family is happy, and when a girl is born, the family is angry |
| 妇人从人者也，幼时从父兄，嫁从夫，夫死从子 | When a woman is young, she follows her father and brother; when she marries, she follows her husband; when husband dies, she follows her son |

In contemporary society, women have been afforded increasing opportunities to work and enjoy equal access to education, just as men do (Lee, 2015). As a result, the status and roles of men and women within families are becoming more equal.

Promote harmony between husband and wife.

People believed that the husband is the wife's lifelong dependence, and the happiness of the family requires mutual support between husband and wife (see Table 12). Modern society still promotes harmony and stability in the relationship between husband and wife.

Table 12: Proverbs on Promoting Harmony Between Husband and Wife.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|--|
| 好狗不咬鸡，好汉不打妻。 | A good dog does not bite a chicken, a good man does not beat his wife. |
| 无妻不成家，无梁不成屋。 | No wife is no family, no beam is no house. |
| 秤钩不离秤砣，老公不离老婆。 | A hook does not leave a scale, a husband does not leave his wife. |

Relationship Between Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law

In the past Han Chinese tradition, when a woman got married, she had to leave her parents' house and live in her husband's house, becoming a member of his family, thus forming a very special family relationship - the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (see Table 13). There was an emotional competition between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, in addition, they were the main operators of the household, but their different views in family life were prone to conflict.

Table 13: Proverbs on The Relationship Between Mother-In-Law and Daughter-in-Law.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|-------------------|---|
| 娶了媳妇忘了娘 | Married a wife and forgot his mother. |
| 公公当不了生身父，婆婆当不了自己娘 | The father-in-law cannot be the real father, and the mother-in-law cannot be my own mother. |

In modern society, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law tends to be one of equality and mutual assistance. Most young people move away from their parents' home to form a new family, and the young, independent women of the new era assert an equal voice in the family. The mother-in-law is no longer the absolute authority in the family, so the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is very different from that in ancient times, but conflicts still exist in many families.

Relationship Between Sisters-in-Law and Wife

The relationship between a wife and her husband's sister in a Chinese family is the most complex relationship among the peers in ancient times (see Table 14).

Table 14: Proverbs on The Relationship Between Mother-in-Law and Wife.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|---|
| 小姑是站着的婆婆。 | A Sister-in-law is a standing mother-in-law. |
| 大姑大似婆，小姑赛阎罗。 | The husband's older sister is like a mother-in-law; the husband's younger sister is like the boss of ghosts |

These proverbs reflect the authority and threatening power of the sisters-in-law. The social scope of Han Chinese women in ancient times was very small, before marriage is the mother's family, after marriage is the husband's family. Being imprisoned for life in these two small circles was also a tragedy for Han Chinese women in ancient times. Modern sister-in-law relationships are no longer as typical as they were in ancient times, and the One-Child Policy has left many families without such relationships. Although some families still have conflicts between sisters-in-law and wife, with the rise in educational and economic levels, relations between sisters-in-law have become more friendly and equal.

Parent-Child Relationship

In ancient times, the Han Chinese attached great importance to filial piety. Therefore, there were many proverbs in praise of mothers and to promote filial piety (see Table 15).

Table 15: Proverbs on The Parent-Child Relationship.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|--|
| 儿不嫌母丑，狗不嫌家贫。 | A child does not mind his mother's ugliness; a dog does not mind his family's poverty. |
| 天下无不是的父母。 | There is no wrong parents in the world. |
| 儿行千里母担忧。 | A child travels a thousand miles and his mother worries. |

The parent-child relationship in ancient China was based on principles of superiority and subordination. In modern China, this relationship has been influenced by modern educational concepts, with greater emphasis on respecting children's individuality and autonomy and encouraging equal dialogue and in-depth communication between parents and children.

Family Conflict Resolution

The ancient Han Chinese believed that conflicts in the family could not be told to others because it was a matter of shame (see Table 16). It is difficult to find English proverbs about conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and between sisters-in-law, but harmonious family relations are also promoted, e.g., "A house divided against itself cannot stand".

Table 16: Proverbs on Family Conflict Resolution.

| Chinese Proverbs | Translation |
|------------------|---|
| 家家有本难念的经。 | Every family has its own problems. |
| 家里事，家里了。 | Family matters should be settled at home. |
| 家丑不可外扬。 | Family shame must not be disclosed. |

It is widely accepted in society that family conflicts should be addressed through conscious adjustments in communication and interaction, prioritizing positive communication over negative communication. Conflicts should be resolved promptly to repair relationships.

Conclusion

Chinese proverbs about marriage and family are characterized by the use of simple and common words to reflect profound truths. These proverbs usually have an original meaning and a derived meaning, and the derived meaning is what the proverb really wants to express. Our study revealed the concepts of marriage and family reflected in Chinese proverbs and compared them with modern ones, summarizing how these concepts have changed and the reasons behind the changes.

In ancient China, marriage was often seen as a means of passing on the family name and perpetuating family property. People could not freely choose their spouses and had to obey the arrangements made by their parents. Women had a lower status in marriage and were often viewed as subservient to the family, compelled to subordinate themselves to their husbands and their husbands' families. The Chinese proverbs reflect the strong idea of male superiority over women. Men had many demands on women, they had the privilege of divorce, and they could marry one wife and many concubines. Ancient Han Chinese women lived in a tragic era of inequality and lack of freedom, with constant conflicts in family life.

There have been many changes in the contemporary view of marriage and family. With the rapid development of Chinese society and the influence of Western ideals and concepts, the modern Chinese view of marriage favors the idea that marriage should be a free choice of the individual, that emotional communication is more important in marriage, and that men and women should have equal status. People's attitudes toward divorce and remarriage are also friendlier. The modern Chinese view of the family is reflected in the fact that most young people in China choose to leave their parents' home after marriage and start a new family of their own. Equal dialogue, timely communication, and repairing relationships are also advocated when getting along with family members or when dealing with internal family conflicts.

As a result of our research, we found that although some concepts in proverbs may no longer be applicable in modern society, they still hold value for study. Proverbs reflect the history and culture of a nation and society, revealing past ways of life, ways of thinking, values, and customs. By studying proverbs, we can gain insight into the development and evolution of language. Comparing proverbs across cultures, we can understand the differences and similarities between different cultures and enhance our understanding and respect for different cultures.

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