

Comparative Study of Gender Discrimination in Chinese and English Proverbs

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ABSTRACT

Proverb is not only a special kind of rhetoric, also a particular reflection of cultural idealization as well as the common treasure of human thinking treasure house. Due to its cognitive function, unique cultural connotation and linguistic content, proverb is compared to “children of experience and fruits of wisdom” “bright mirror of every nation” “living fossil of language”, so from the perspective of proverb, the analysis of gender discrimination is representative and persuasive. This paper resorts to the comparative method and analyzes the concrete embodiment of gender discrimination in both Chinese and English proverbs from social positions, social division of labor and social power in social aspects as well as the idea of marrying a daughter quickly, different marriage concepts, issue of remarriage, preference for giving birth to boys over girls and restrictions on the age of marriage in marital aspect, in the hope of raising people’s awareness about gender discrimination, reducing or even eliminating gender discrimination gradually in language use and finally making woman gain due social recognition and respect.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Chinese and English Proverbs, Comparative Study, Social Status, Marriage.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a mirror of the real world, which can truly reflect various social customs and values. While as the essence of language, proverbs condense the connotation of culture, and as the carrier of condensing national cultural information, it involves all aspects of social life, reflecting a nation’s way of thinking, values and psychological characteristics from the side [1]¹².

For thousands of years, due to the influence of feudal patriarchal consciousness, it is not difficult to find many contents reflecting the trend of “men are superior to women” in proverbs of all countries where gender themes are involved. It can be said that proverbs are the culmination of linguistic sexism [2]²⁴⁵. Based on previous researches, this paper collects more comprehensive and detailed examples from such proverbs dictionaries as *ZHONGGUO YANYU DAQUAN* [3]⁶¹⁸⁻⁶²² (Chinese Dictionary of Proverbs), *Proverbs • Proverbes Sprichwerts • Proverbi • Proverbios • IIOCJI OBMILN* [4]²⁵³⁻²⁶² (Compilation of Proverbs in

English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian Language), *THE FACTS ON FILE DICTIONARY OF PROVERBS* [5]⁹⁹⁻³⁴⁹, and *YANYU SHOUCHE* [6]²⁷⁷⁻³⁸⁰ (Proverbs Handbook), to explore the concrete embodiment of gender discrimination in English and Chinese proverbs from social status and marriage in particular.

2. EMBODIMENT OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH PROVERBS FROM SOCIAL STATUS

In social aspects, the manifestation of gender discrimination in both Chinese and English proverbs is revealed from the perspective of social positions, social division of labor and social power as follows:

2.1 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from Social Positions

First of all, in society, men are in a dominant position, while women are in a subordinate and

secondary position. Men play important roles recognized and respected by society, while women are inferior citizens who are discriminated against and belittled by society. Besides, women cannot control their own destiny. Their status and life value are mainly reflected by their dependence on men, shown by next Chinese proverbs:

1. 男人是老婆头上的一重天。
2. 妇人无命，看她夫星。
3. 男人无妻家无主，女人无夫家无梁。
4. 男人不在家，女人乱如麻。
5. 男人不做主，扫帚颠倒竖。
6. 夫到天边妻要行。
7. 男以女为室，女以男为家。
8. 出嫁从夫，夫死从子。
9. 夫荣妇贵，子荣母贵。
10. 兄弟如手足，妻子如衣服。
11. 臣为君死，妻为夫亡。
12. 男人嫌女人一张纸，女人嫌男人只有死。

As is revealed by the above proverbs, first, a man is the head of his wife and the backbone of the family. When the husband is not at home, women will lose their ideas, and even the broom will be put upside down. Second, men are more important to women, while women is optional to men. Men take women as their rooms and women take men as their homes. A man without a wife has no housekeeper at home, while a woman with no husband makes no family. Brothers are like hands and feet (indispensable) while wives are like a piece of clothing (not essential, optional). Third, the destiny of a woman depends on her husband. The wife should follow her husband wherever he goes, obey her husband after her marriage and obey her son after her husband's death. As ministers die for the King, and wives die for their husbands. If a man hates his wife, he can write a divorce letter, but if a woman dissatisfies her husband, she has no choice but to die. Last, the wife is honored because of her husband's grace and the mother is honored due to her son's grace.

In English, proverbs with similar meanings include:

1. The husband is the head of the wife.
2. Every groom is a king at home.

3. If the husband be not at home, there is nobody.

4. A man of straw is worth of a woman of gold.

5. A man is a man though he have/has but a hose on head.

6. He that will thrive must first ask his wife.

7. Man, woman and devil are the three degrees of comparison.

First, the idea that men are superior to women is also expressed in English. The husband is the head of the wife, the king of the family, and has an absolute dominant position. If the husband is not at home, the family is like no one. Even if a husband is weak as straw, he is better than a woman made of gold. Even if the husband is a poor man, he is also a good man. Second, the prosperity of the husband means that his wife is virtuous. Otherwise, his wife has a cheap life and can not be a good helper to make him prosperous. Last, the status of a woman is only higher than the devil, but far lower than her husband.

2.2 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from Social Division of Labor

Secondly, in the social division of labor, women can only manage affairs in the family, such as taking care of her husband and educating children, doing laundry and cooking, boiling water and serving tea, cleaning, etc. Its scope of their activities is mainly limited within the house, and it is difficult to get out of the family restrictions. However, men have no restrictions:

1. 男有男行，女有女行。
2. 男人外边抓，女人内当家。
3. 男人走州又走县，妇人围着锅台转。
4. 女儿是朵花，总在灶前爬；男人生得丑，总在外边走。
5. 妇人家，四头忙：家头家尾，针头线尾，田头地尾，灶头锅尾。
6. 男人大手抓钱，女人手大抓柴。
7. 男人做官，女人能言。

“There are differences between men and women” and “Men have men's jobs and women have women's.” referring to the different division of labor between men and women. It seems to be an unchangeable truth that men deal with affairs

outside home and women take charge inside home. Men, though ugly, go from state to county, earn money outside and manage national affairs or even can be officials, while women though beautiful as flowers and able of speaking, can only manage domestic affairs and are always busy with house chores, needle works, plowing fields, and cooking stoves all day.

In English, there are following proverbs:

1. Wife is the key of the house.
2. Men make houses, women make homes.
3. Man's work lasts till set of sun; a woman's work is never done.
4. It is a sad house when the hen crows louder than the cock.
5. A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men.
6. Women in state affairs are like monkeys in glass shops.

In English, the division of labor between men and women is also stressed. Women can only keep their homes and manage their domestic affairs well. Day after day, the same thing is repeated from early morning to late evening such as cooking and cleaning. If a woman, like a man, whistles, takes charge of the country or handles state affairs, she will not be accepted by society.

2.3 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from Social Power

Finally, women are often socially disadvantaged groups, in a position of being beaten, oppressed and bullied passively as follows:

1. 少年新妇年年有，独怕铜钱不凑手。
2. 娶到的媳妇买到的马，由人骑来由人打。
3. 打老婆，骂老婆，手内无钱卖老婆。
4. 菜刀不磨成死铁，女人不打成妖孽。

It is shown that, on one hand, women are only goods that men can buy and sell, since young brides are born every year, the worry is not having enough money to buy one, and on the other hand, the married daughter-in-law is like the bought horse, she is at the disposal of her husband, being beaten, abused and humiliated by him at will, and even sold when her husband has no money on hand, as is believed that if the kitchen knife is not ground, it will be useless iron, and if the women is not beaten,

she will become an devil. Thus, women have no freedom and dignity of their own.

In English, proverbs conveying the same meaning are as follows:

1. Married man turns his staff into a stake.
2. A women, a dog and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they'll be.

Similarly, in English, women are still not recognized and respected. Once married, she can only be disciplined and beaten by her husband.

3. EMBODIMENT OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH PROVERBS FROM MARRIAGE

In marital aspect, the representation of gender discrimination in both Chinese and English proverbs is shown from the perspective of the idea of marrying a daughter quickly, different marriage concepts, issue of remarriage, preference for giving birth to boys over girls and restrictions on the age of marriage as below:

3.1 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from the Idea of Marrying a Daughter Quickly

First, the idea of marrying a woman quickly is emphasized. When a woman reaches due age, it's not suitable for her to stay at home with her parents. Instead, her parents should marry her in time. But for a man, he is not in a hurry to marry a wife, for example:

1. 儿大不能揍，女大不能留。
2. 女大不中留，留来留去结冤仇。
3. 娶媳不忙，嫁女易速。
4. 女大不嫁，如养贼在房。
5. 木大做栋梁，女人做填房。
6. 嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗。
7. 嫁出去的女，泼出去的水。

First, because of the traditional idea that men are superior to women, marrying a daughter-in-law is not in a hurry, but marrying a daughter should be as quick as possible. Thus, it is not proper to keep old daughters at home, living with their parents, otherwise, it will leads to quarrels and hate, and an old woman who doesn't marry is like keeping a

thief in the house. Besides, if daughters are too old in age, they can only marry a man who lost his wife. Last, married daughters, like splashed water, belong to someone else's family for their parents and after marriage, women should be contented with the men they have married regardless of his lot.

Proverbs expressing the idea of marrying a woman in time are not uncommon in English:

1. Daughters and dead fish are not keeping wares.
2. Marry you son when you will, you daughter when you can.
3. It is harder to marry a daughter well than to bring her up well.
4. Marry your daughter and eat fresh fish betimes.
5. A girl should get married on coming of.

3.2 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from Concept of Marriage

Second, the concept of marriage that men should have money and women should be beautiful is paid attention to. Being young and beautiful is the magic weapon for women to get a good marriage and happy love, and also men's pursuit since ancient times.

1. 男人以财为貌，女人以貌为财。
2. 郎才女貌，赖汉配丑妻。
3. 男人要身价，女人要身段。

This idea that men should have money and property, while women should have beautiful appearance and good figure, has long been ingrained.

In English, the same is also true:

1. Marry a wife of thine own degree.
2. A fair face is half a portion.
3. A woman of no birth may marry into the purple.

To get a wife, you should find one from families of equal social rank. As long as a woman is beautiful, she can give half of dowry in marriage. As long as a woman is good-looking, even if she was born in a humble family, she can climb to wealth by marriage.

3.3 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from the Issue of Remarriage

Third, on the issue of men remarriage and women remarriage, men remarriage is a natural thing; If women remarry, however, as a different kind, they are criticized, despised, and disparaged by the society:

1. 好马不配双鞍，好女不嫁二夫。
2. 再刷无好布，再嫁无好妇。
3. 男子回头金不换，女子回头落臭名。
4. 好马不吃回头草，好女不嫁二夫君。
5. 只有一船摇两橹，那有一女嫁二夫。
6. 忠臣不事二主，妇贞不嫁二夫。
7. 饿死事小，失节事大。
8. 寡妇门前是非多。

It is seen from above that, first, there is nothing wrong with men marrying again, but it is unacceptable for women to remarry: As a good horse does not deserve two saddles, a good woman does not marry two husbands. No good cloth can be painted again, and no good woman can be remarried. A good horse does not turn back to eat former grass, and a good woman does not marry a second husband. There is only one boat with two oars, and there is no woman married to two husbands. A loyal minister will not serve two masters, and a wife will not marry two husbands. Second, if men change their minds and repent for their mistakes in marriage, they are always forgiven and accepted with great consideration and tolerance, but when the same happens to women, it just makes them notorious. Third, there are many gossips in front of a widow's door. Last, it is socially believed that women would rather starve to death than lose their virginity. If a woman remarries, she will only be branded as unfaithful.

In English, the situation is a little better, but still:

1. He that marries for wealth sells his liberty.
2. He marries a widow and two daughters marries three thieves.

There is not enough respect for remarried women. Marrying a widow with daughters is like inviting wolves into the house and asking for trouble. While for a man, if he marries for money, he will lose his freedom after marriage.

3.4 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from the Preference for Giving Birth to Boys over Girls

Fourth, a serious preference for delivering boys over girls is mainly shown in Chinese proverbs, for instance:

1. 养男不养女，养女要受苦。
2. 养儿防老，养女赔钱。

Raise a son rather than a daughter, otherwise, you will suffer, because if you have a girl, you will have an extra mouth at home, which will increase the burden of life, while raising a son can take care of you when you are old.

3.5 Embodiment of Gender Discrimination in Proverbs from Restrictions on the Age of Marriage

Finally, strict restrictions on the age of marriage between men and women can be found in Chinese proverbs. In marriage, men's age doesn't matter very much, but women's matters a lot and there is nothing wrong with an old man and a young wife, but an old wife and a young husband are not accepted by society, such as:

1. 男儿三十而娶，女子二十而嫁。
2. 男子十八大悠悠，女子十八大丫头。
3. 男大两，黄金日日长；男大三，银钱堆成山。
4. 男大女三，黄金如山。
5. 男大十，不算大；女大十，像他妈。
6. 男大十岁不嫌，女大十岁扎眼。
7. 男人三十一枝花，女人三十豆腐渣。
8. 男过三十一枝花，女过三十烂冬瓜。

For one thing, it's not too late for a man to marry at the age of 30, but it's proper for daughters to marry at the age of 20. Second, at eighteen, the boy is still young, but the girl is a big girl. In their thirties, men are still handsome and romantic while women lose their charm. Last, at the time of marriage, it is normal for a man to be two-year older, three-year older, or even ten-year older than women. But if a woman is 10 years older than her husband, she looks like his mother. From all these, it can be seen that women are at a disadvantage in terms of marriage age, both physically and socially.

4. CONCLUSION

Previous studies on sexism in Chinese and English proverbs have also been done, but they are relatively incomplete. Thus, this paper collects more examples in details from different proverbs dictionaries, and makes a comparative analysis of them from aspects of social status and marriage. In social aspect, gender discrimination in social positions, social division of labor and social power can be found in both Chinese and English proverbs while in marital aspect, the idea of marrying a daughter quickly, different marriage concepts between men and women, and the issue of remarriage are seen in both of them, but for the preference for giving birth to boys over girls and strict restriction on the age of marriage seems obvious only in Chinese proverbs.

Through this paper, it is hoped that it can improve readers' awareness of gender discrimination, help them consciously reduce or even eliminate the phenomenon of gender discrimination in future language expressions, so that women can get due recognition and respect, and truly realize the equal social status between men and women.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Panpan Cao.

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