

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Marginalization of Women in Chinese Proverbs

Çince Atasözlerinde Kadının Ötekileştirilmesinin Toplumdilbilimsel Bir İncelemesi

Adilcan ERUYGUR¹ 



¹Selçuk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü,
Konya, Türkiye

ORCID: A.E. 0000-0001-8156-004X

Corresponding author/Sorumlu yazar:

Adilcan Eruygur (Dr.),
Selçuk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü,
Konya, Türkiye
E-mail: adilcan.eruygur@selcuk.edu.tr

Submitted/Başvuru: 16.05.2025

Revision Requested/Revizyon Talebi:
10.09.2025

Last Revision Received/Son Revizyon:
17.09.2025

Accepted/Kabul: 25.09.2025

Citation/Atıf: Eruygur, Adilcan. "A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Marginalization of Women in Chinese Proverbs". *Şarkiyat Mecmuası - Journal of Oriental Studies* 47 (2025), 1-22.
<https://doi.org/10.26650/jos.1700900>

ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study that examines the phenomenon of the Marginalization and marginalization of women in Chinese proverbs from a sociolinguistic perspective. Drawing its theoretical framework from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, the study argues that femininity is a social construct rather than a biological one, and that women are subjected to dual oppression in a patriarchal society. The methodological approach of the research is based on the integration of descriptive analysis and discourse analysis methods. In this context, it investigates the manifestation of patriarchal norms in Chinese proverbs through the Confucian principles of *three obediences and four virtues* as well as the *Yin-Yang* philosophy. The findings reveal that women are systematically represented as dependent, weak, and instrumental in proverbs. The descriptive analysis aspect identifies how linguistic and cultural elements in proverbs reflect social gender inequality, while the discourse analysis aspect uncovers the meanings of these elements in social contexts and the mechanisms through which patriarchal values are reinforced. The results document the role of Chinese proverbs in producing and sustaining gender inequality, highlighting that women's social value is confined to marriage, motherhood, and domestic roles. Furthermore, sexist metaphors and symbols position women as passive and unreliable beings.

Keywords: Chinese proverbs, marginalization, gender, sociolinguistics, women.

ÖZ

Bu nitel çalışma, Çin atasözlerinde kadınların dışlanması ve marjinalleştirilmesi olgusunu, toplumdilbilimsel bir perspektiften derinlemesine incelemektedir. Simone de Beauvoir'ın İkinci Cins eserinden esinlenerek oluşturulan teorik çerçeveye dayanarak, kadınlığın biyolojik bir gerçeklikten ziyade toplumsal bir kurgu olduğunu savunur ve ataerkil toplum yapısında kadınların hem cinsiyet hem de toplumsal roller üzerinden çifte baskıya uğradığını vurgular. Araştırmanın metodolojik temeli, betimsel analiz ile söylem analizi yöntemlerinin bütünlük bir şekilde uygulanmasına dayanır. Bu çerçevede, Konfüçyüsçü felsefenin üç itaat ve dört erdem ilkeleri ile Yin-Yang felsefesinin ikili karşıtlık yapısı üzerinden, Çin atasözlerindeki ataerkil normların nasıl tezahür ettiğini sistematik olarak araştırır. Bulgular, kadınların bu atasözlerinde tutarlı bir biçimde bağımlı, zayıf

ve araçsal bir konumda temsil edildiğini ortaya koyar. Betimsel analiz boyutu, atasözlerindeki dilbilimsel ve kültürel unsurların toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliğini nasıl yansıttığını somut örneklerle belirlerken, söylem analizi bu unsurların sosyal bağlamlardaki katmanlı anlamlarını ve ataerkil değerlerin nesiller boyu pekiştirilme mekanizmalarını açığa vurur. Araştırma sonuçları, Çin atasözlerinin cinsiyet eşitsizliğini hem üretme hem de kalıcılaştırmadaki kritik rolünü belgeleyerek, kadınların toplumsal değerinin salt evlilik, annelik ve ev içi sorumluluklarla kısıtlı tutulduğunu net bir şekilde vurgular. Dahası, atasözlerdeki cinsiyetçi metaforlar ve sembolik imgeler, kadınları pasif, itaatkâr ve güvenilmez varlıklar olarak konumlandırarak bu baskıyı ideolojik düzeyde güçlendirir. Bu bulgular, geleneksel dil yapılarının modern cinsiyet eşitliği çabalarına yönelik potansiyel engellerini de gündeme getirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin atasözleri, ötekileştirilme, toplumsal cinsiyet, sosyodilbilim, kadın.

Introduction

Language plays a central role in the formation and perpetuation of patriarchal culture. The linguistic expressions of societies not only reinforce the hierarchy between women and men but also shape and reproduce gender roles.¹ Language functions as more than just a communication tool; it serves as a mechanism that guides thought and reflects the societal norms and values.² In this context, language contributes to the institutionalization of gender inequality while reinforcing male dominance. This situation profoundly affects how individuals perceive their gender identities and position themselves within these roles. Chinese society has had a deeply rooted patriarchal structure throughout history, and which is clearly reflected in the linguistic practices that shape gender roles. One of the fundamental philosophical systems of Chinese culture, Confucianism, provides the theoretical foundation for the patriarchal order.³ Confucian thought defines the foundation of social order through the family structure, centering on male dominance. This understanding is concretized through principles such as “The father is superior to the son, the husband is superior to the wife,” creating a hierarchical system that extends from the family to society. In this system, the woman is positioned opposite men and does not hold equal status. Historically, societal expectations have often confined women to roles centered on obedience and service, resulting in both social and individual marginalization. These norms foster psychological impacts, such as internalized feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, which limit women’s autonomy and agency. They also restrict personal development by hindering access to education, career opportunities, and self-expression, preventing women from realizing their full potential, pursuing ambitions, or developing independent identities. Socially, these roles relegate women to secondary status in public and private spheres, diminishing their influence in leadership, decision-making, and cultural narratives while undervaluing their contributions.⁴

This approach to women’s social roles is strongly reflected in Chinese proverbs. Proverbs are a reflection of a society’s collective consciousness and historical experiences. In Chinese proverbs, women are often depicted as negative, weak, unreliable, or inferior positions. For example, the proverb “*If a woman is the head of the household, the house will collapse*” (女人当家，房倒屋塌, Nǚrén dāngjiā, fáng dǎo wū tā)⁵ is a concrete reflection of Beauvoir’s concept of “*The Other*” in Chinese society. The proverb reflects a patriarchal mindset that does not even recognize women as subjects within the family, positioning them as subordinate to

-
- 1 Gülsüm Doğan, “Düşünce İnşacıları Olarak Dilin Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizliği Üzerindeki Rolü” (master’s thesis, Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Kadın Çalışmaları Anabilim Dalı, 2020), 3.
 - 2 Volkan Kılıç, *Dilin İşlevleri ve İletişim* (İstanbul: Papatya Yayıncılık, 2002), 16.
 - 3 Fan Bai, *Technology and Gender: Power Relations in Late Imperial China*, trans. M. Jiang et al. (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 2006), 21.
 - 4 Qianhong Long, “Female Images in Chinese-English Proverbs and Their Causes,” *Journal of Guangzhou Normal University*, no. 1 (2000), 6.
 - 5 Duanzheng Wen, *Comprehensive Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs* (Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2011), 561.

men. The expression portrays a woman in a leadership role as a disruption of the natural order while positioning the male authority as “natural” and “necessary”. This linguistic practice is a manifestation of the patriarchal mentality that confines women to a supporting role and limits their potential. Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes that women have historically been defined as “*The Other*” for men. The woman is positioned not as an individual in her own right but as the opposite of man, his Other, and a being subordinated to him (Butler, 1986, p.37-38).⁶ The patriarchal linguistic practices in Chinese society affirm this thesis of Beauvoir. Women are pushed into a passive position both individually and socially, and their existence has been used as a tool to reinforce men’s superiority.⁷

Sociolinguistics studies how language shapes and reflects social structures, focusing on proverbs, gender, and cultural transmission. It views proverbs as tools that convey cultural values and norms, reinforcing or challenging societal beliefs. It examines how language constructs gender roles through terms and conversational patterns, revealing power dynamics and influencing gender perceptions. Additionally, it explores how language, including proverbs, transmits cultural knowledge and identities through storytelling and education, shaping traditions across generations. When evaluated from a sociolinguistic perspective, Chinese proverbs not only shape the gender perceptions in the minds of individuals’ but also function as discourses that reproduce the patriarchal social order. These proverbs illustrate how language functions as a social power and legitimizes unequal relationships between individuals. For example, the proverbs “*Men manage the outside, women manage the inside*” (男主外女主内 - Nán zhǔ wài nǚ zhǔ nèi) and “*Men superior and women inferior*” (男尊女卑, Nán zūn nǚ bēi) (Wēn, 2011, p. 530-536)⁸ are potent linguistic tools that reinforce traditional gender roles within societal structures. The first proverb delineates a clear division of labor, assigning men to external, public spheres (e.g., work, politics) and women to domestic, private spheres (e.g., home, family), embedding the notion that these roles are natural and fixed. This binary framing limits individual agency, discouraging women from pursuing public roles and men from domestic responsibilities, thus perpetuating gender-based segregation. The second proverb explicitly establishes a hierarchy, positioning men as inherently superior and women as subordinate, which normalizes power imbalances and justifies discrimination in social, economic, and cultural contexts. Through sociolinguistic lenses, these proverbs, as culturally transmitted expressions, reinforce patriarchal norms by embedding gendered expectations into everyday language, shaping perceptions and behaviors across generations.

The phrase “a historical phenomenon” regarding the marginalization of women in Chinese proverbs refers to culturally entrenched practices rooted in Confucian ideology and folk

6 Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 37-38.

7 Qin Jiang, “An Introduction to Beauvoir’s ‘Other’ Theory and an Application to the Contemporary Chinese Context,” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 615 (n.d.), 645.

8 Duanzheng Wen, *Comprehensive Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs*, 530-536.

traditions across multiple historical periods. Confucian values, prominent from 551 BCE and reinforced through dynasties like Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing, emphasized women's subordination, as seen in proverbs like "A woman's virtue is to have no talent." Folk traditions, predating and coexisting with Confucianism, reflected patriarchal agrarian values, evident in sayings like "Men are superior, women are inferior." These proverbs span pre-Confucian eras (Shang and Zhou), Han to Tang (codifying gender roles), and Song to Qing (intensifying restrictions). This layered history, continuing even into the People's Republic of China period with persistent gender inequality, shows how language perpetuated gender disparities, shaping modern gender dynamics in China.

1. Conceptual And Theoretical Framework

1.1. Conceptual Framework

1.1.1. Proverbs

Proverbs are a special form of language and a a special form of language, distinct from idioms. They are meaningful, visually impressive, and easily understood sentences that circulate among people. They are also a genre of folk literature. Proverbs are a product of human wisdom and a concise reflection of language.⁹ Wolfgang Mieder, Henl P, Sapir, Morian, Humboldt etc. Linguists have metaphorically defined proverbs as the "mirror of the nation" and "living language fossils."¹⁰ In *Explaining Writing and Analyzing Characters Dictionary*,¹¹ it is states that *Proverbs are a heritage passed down from generation to generation.*¹² Proverbs come from the people; they are both a concise summary of social experiences and expressions that have been passed down orally through generations. In the *Chinese Sea of Words dictionary*, proverbs are explained as follows: "*Proverbs are concise, clear, and meaningful expressions that circulate among people...*"¹³

Proverbs are collections of concise sayings that carry the cultural DNA of a society, reflecting life experiences and worldview. These sayings not only display the cultural characteristics of a particular society but also reveal the similarities and interactions between different cultures. The simple, concise, and impressive structure of proverbs makes them important tools for cultural transmission. Language, and especially proverbs, is like mirrors of social values and judgments.¹⁴ The gender hierarchy that exists in society naturally manifests itself in these

9 Ömer Asım Aksoy, *Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: İnkılâp Yayınları, 1993).

10 Alikulova Kholniso Urol, *Analysis Of The Syntax Of English Proverbs*, 366-368

11 说文解字? Shuō wén jiě zì

12 Shen Xu, *Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2013), 366.

13 Feikui Lu, *Sea of Words* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Library, 2019), 656.

14 Ruth Finnegan, "Proverbs in Africa," in *Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*, ed. Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 10-42.

linguistic structures. As sociologist Ian Robertson (1981)¹⁵ points out, at the foundation of gender hierarchy lies the view of male dominance as a natural process, and this thought has taken root within thousands of years of cultural traditions.

In recent years, studies in sociolinguistics have begun to examine gender differences and hierarchy in language more thoroughly. Chinese proverbs, in particular, provide important data they reflect social experiences and thought structures from different periods throughout their long history. Examining gender hierarchy in proverbs, especially the othering of women, contributes to a better understanding of gender issues.

1.1.2. Sociolinguistics And Gender

Language reflects social relations, with men and women exhibiting gender-specific speech patterns. Gender language encompasses the linguistic differences and discriminatory aspects tied to gender. Gender culture refers to societal beliefs, values, and behaviors assigned to genders, shaping individuals' identities through socialization and communication. This is also described as “*the culture of communication between the sexes*.”¹⁶ The sociolinguistic perspective examines the interaction between language and society, highlighting how language reflects and reproduces social structures and power dynamics. Linguistic practices not only mirror gender hierarchies but also actively sustain and reinforce them, shaping and maintaining gender roles.¹⁷

By emphasizing the dynamic nature of language, the sociolinguistic approach also provides a useful framework for predicting how gender inequalities in language may change and how these changes may be reflected in gender perceptions (Cameron, 1989, p.208).¹⁸ Moreover, by bringing together various disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology and psychology, it allows for a multidimensional analysis of gender hierarchies in language. This holistic analysis allows us to link micro-level interactions in everyday language use with broader social structures. Thus, we can better understand how individual language use contributes to the shaping and maintenance of macro-level social structures such as gender hierarchies.¹⁹

Gender and language studies are a field that examines gendered linguistic behaviors, predominantly from a gender perspective. This field, which started with Jespersen's deficit theory in 1922, gained a new dimension with Lakoff's feminist approach in 1975, and then developed with the contributions of researchers such as Spender, Butler and Ochs. Gender manifestations in language are analyzed in four categories: grammatical, lexical, referential

15 Robert Ian, *Sociology* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1981).

16 Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, “Some Thoughts on Gender and Culture,” *Development in Practice* 5, no. 4 (2002), 367-368.

17 Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, “Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 462-466.

18 Deborah Cameron and Jennifer Coates, “Some Problems in the Sociolinguistic Explanation of Sex Differences,” in *Women in Their Speech Communities*, ed. Jennifer Coates and Deborah Cameron (New York: Longman, 1989), 208.

19 Robin T. Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

and social.²⁰ While grammatical gender in Indo-European languages is absent in languages such as Turkish and Chinese, other gender categories manifest themselves in different ways. The overt, covert and subtle types of sexism classified by Swim, Stangor and Mallet generally exhibit a male-centered (androcentric) and anti-feminist structure.²¹

In the analysis of the gendered marginalization of women in Chinese proverbs and its impact on the devaluation of women, the use of a sociolinguistic perspective stands out as a methodological imperative for examining the multifaceted interactions between language and society. As Moser (1997)²² points out, this approach allows us to systematically analyze the complex relationship of gendered linguistic structures to gender roles and hierarchies by placing Chinese usage in a sociocultural context. This analytical framework provides a rich research ground for understanding the linguistic manifestations of gender hierarchies and the dynamics of cultural transformation in China's historical process.

As Trudgill (2001)²³ emphasizes, the sociolinguistic approach is not limited to examining the social implications of linguistic practices in Chinese, but also provides a methodological basis for deciphering the ideological structures underlying these practices and assessing the effectiveness of language policies in promoting gender equality.

1.1.3. Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchal culture establishes a hierarchy where men hold dominant positions in public spheres like politics and business, while women are confined to domestic roles such as motherhood and housewifery. This dynamic reinforces male authority and diminishes women's societal visibility. Social norms dictate gender-specific behaviors, which individuals internalize, perpetuating the power imbalance. Women, influenced by these norms, may also enforce them on others, further entrenching the limitations imposed by patriarchal culture and exacerbating its impact on women's lives.²⁴ Chinese culture has maintained a male-dominated social structure throughout history. This structure has been shaped and reinforced through generations via elements such as Confucianism, social hierarchy, mythology, language, and literature. Patriarchy has determined individual and social behavioral norms, ensuring the continuity of a system that limits women's position in society while elevating men.²⁵

20 Grammatical: Relates to the rules of sentence structure and word forms in a language. Lexical: Concerns the choice and meaning of words or vocabulary used. Referential: Involves how language points to specific entities, concepts, or ideas in context. Social: Pertains to language use shaped by social context, norms, or relationships.

21 Özge Başay, "Cinsiyet Değişkeni Bağlamında Bilimsel Makalelerin Toplumdilbilimsel Açısından İncelenmesi" (master's thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Dilbilimi Anabilim Dalı, 2023), 13-20.

22 David Moser, "Covert Sexism in Mandarin Chinese," in *Sino-Platonic Papers*, ed. Victor H. Mair (Philadelphia: Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, 1997).

23 Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

24 Yuliana Kristi Benedikta and Agus Riyanto, "The Impact of Education on Patriarchal Culture and Gender Equality," *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology* 4, no. 1 (2022), 81-82.

25 Luyuan Zhang, *Comprehensive Dictionary of Ancient Chinese Proverbs* (Shanghai: Shanghai University Press,

Confucianism, the cornerstone of Chinese society, has endured for over 2500 years as the main philosophy of social order and hierarchy. This system of thought proposed that social harmony and order could only be maintained through a hierarchical structure. In Confucian teaching, every individual occupies a specific social position and is obligated to fulfill the responsibilities of that position. This understanding was reinforced by principles such as “*The loyalty of minister to ruler, son to father*”²⁶ Women were defined in a subordinate position to men in this system. The central Confucian concepts of “*men superior and women inferior*”²⁷ and the view that “*women and petty men are difficult to nurture*”²⁸ combined with rigid hierarchical order, have left deep ideological marks on Chinese social structure. This hegemonic structure inevitably brought about systematic discrimination against women.²⁹ Another element that regulates and controls women’s social roles is the concept of *Three obediences and four virtues*,³⁰ based on Confucian teachings. This understanding presented a strict moral code system expecting women to obey first their fathers, then their husbands, and finally their sons. The *Three Obediences*, dictated that women should show loyalty to all male figures in their lives, while the *Four Virtues*³¹ consisted of expectations such as women displaying modest behavior, speaking moderately, taking care of their beauty, and developing handicraft skills. This ritual further limited women’s social status, shaping their individual identity according to men’s needs.

The Famous female writer Ban Zhao, who lived during the Han Dynasty, systematized views supporting the Confucian patriarchal system in her work *Precepts for Women*.³² Ban Zhao advocated humble, obedient, and hardworking behavior for women, promoting an understanding that confined women’s place in society to serving men. The work elaborates on the idea that women should be subordinate to men, arguing that this arrangement is aligns with the natural order.

2011), 14.

26 君君臣臣父父子子- Jūn jūnchén chén fù fūzǐ zi

27 男尊女卑- Nánzūnnǚbēi

28 唯女子与小人难养- Wéi nǚzǐ yǔ xiǎo rén nán yǎng

29 Jingjing Geng, “A Perspective on Ancient Chinese Female Culture Through Proverbs,” *Journal of Social Sciences of Hebei University* (2005), 26.

30 三从四德- Sāncóngsidé: the “three obediences” (三从) and the “four virtues” (四德). The three obediences principle established that women must remain subservient to male authority throughout their lives, following a strict hierarchical structure: obeying their father before marriage, their husband during marriage, and their son after their husband’s death. This system explicitly denied women the right to act independently. The four virtues originated in the Zhou Dynasty as part of the palace women’s education system, overseen by the Internal Administrator. The “nine consorts” were responsible for teaching these virtues - women’s virtue, speech, appearance, and skills/abilities - to palace women. Eventually, these two systems merged to form the “three obediences and four virtues” (三从四德), which became the comprehensive standard for women’s moral conduct, behavior, capabilities, and personal development in traditional Chinese society (Jiāo & gěng, 2011, p.4)

31

32 女诫- Nǚ jiè: Precepts for Women, a special book written by Ban Zhao during the Eastern Han Dynasty to teach principles of human behavior to the women of the Ban family. (Accessed June 6, 2023). <https://baike.baidu.com/item/女诫>

*The philosophy of Yin and Yang*³³ is one of the fundamental concepts explaining the order and balance of the universe in Chinese culture. However, this concept has been used to legitimize the power imbalance between women and men. While Yang is defined as strong, noble, active, and supreme like the sky; Yin is positioned below like the earth, passive, secondary, and soft. This understanding presented women's dependence on men as a requirement of nature, further reinforcing the patriarchal structure.³⁴

Chinese mythology and legends are filled with stories where women are often portrayed as negative figures. Evil female characters like *Daji*³⁵ and *Baosi*³⁶ are depicted as figures who disrupt social order and cause disaster. These portrayals further weakened women's position in society and led to the formation of negative perceptions of women. The relationship between women and talent in Chinese culture has been shaped within a patriarchal understanding crystallized in proverbs such as "*talent is virtue for men, lack of talent is virtue for women*"³⁷ and "*woman is disaster*".³⁸ Confucian thinkers defended women's lack of talent as a virtue with three main justifications. First, as exemplified in Wang Shifu's *Western Wing* during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), there was concern that women's talents would shake traditional rituals. During the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties, the fact that most women successful in literature were prostitutes led to the association of female talent with immorality. The second reason is the belief that women's talent would lead to tragic consequences, expressed in the proverb "*talent is misfortune for a woman's life*"³⁹. Third, the belief that talented women cannot live long became established, as exemplified by the early death of the character Lin Daiyu in *Dream of the Red Chamber*⁴⁰. Otherwise, the three guiding principles of social order— "*the ruler-subject bond*" (君为臣纲, jūn wéi chén gāng), "*the husband-wife bond*" (夫为妻纲, fū wéi qī gāng), and "*the father-child bond*" (父为子纲, fù wéi zǐ gāng) strengthened the patriarchal structure by defining women's roles as weak, dependent, and submissive individuals. While the authority of men was exalted, women's identities were shaped through their relationships with male figures, with their access to education, property, and the right to voice their opinions being restricted. These principles turned women into symbols of "*conformity and sacrifice*" viewing them not as individuals but as complements subordinate to male authority, thereby narrowing their societal roles and perpetuating a system that disregarded their potential.⁴¹

Confucian women's ethics in traditional Chinese society both restricted women's freedoms and promoted values like patience and obedience. The patriarchal structure, rooted in the

33 阴阳

34 Jie Zhang, "Gender Discrimination in Chinese Traditional Culture," no. 6 (2013): 107.

35 妲己

36 妃褒姒

37 男子有德便是才、女子无才便是德-Nánzǐ yǒu dé biàn shì cái, nǚzǐ wú cái biàn shì dé

38 红颜祸水-hóngyán huòshuǐ

39 红颜薄命-hóngyán bómìng

40 红楼梦-hónglóumèng

41 Aiguo Le, "The Original Meaning, Evolution and Correction of Confucian 'Three Guidelines and Five Constants,'" *Study and Practice*, no. 12 (2018), 38.

belief of “*men superior, women inferior*” limited women’s roles in education, work, and public life, hindering their development. Practices like foot-binding exemplified bodily control and restricted freedom.⁴² This multifaceted system, shaped by Confucianism, mythology, and social hierarchy, continues perpetuate gender inequality today.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Woman as Other

Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of *Woman as Other* provides an important theoretical framework for explaining women’s perception and status in society. This theory expresses that throughout history, women have been defined as *Other* by men in social, philosophical, and cultural contexts, and this situation has been continuously reinforced by social structures. Women have been forced to shape their own existence through man’s reference point; in a system where man is defined as the absolute being (subject), woman has been positioned as object or other. Beauvoir explains this situation as follows: “*Woman is defined and differentiated with reference not to herself but to man; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute; she is the Other*”.⁴³

This theory emphasizes that women’s social roles cannot be explained solely by biological differences, but are shaped by historical and social processes. Beauvoir’s famous statement, “*You are not born a woman, you become a woman*” summarizes this clearly. This view states that womanhood is not a biological destiny but a social construction. The roles imposed on women from childhood lead to their being relegated to a subordinate position in the gender hierarchy.

Beauvoir’s ideas are inspired by Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic and Sartre’s Theory of the Gaze.⁴⁴ Hegel’s approach of analyzing the conflict of individuals in their attempt to get to know each other was influential in Beauvoir’s understanding of the imbalance of power in male-female relationships. Similarly, Sartre’s theory of the gaze provided a theoretical basis for the objectification of women by men. In this context, Beauvoir addressed a power

42 Shusheng Li et al., “Demographic Consequences of Gender Discrimination in China: Simulation Analysis of Policy Options,” *Population Research* 30, no. 4 (2013), 2.

43 Simone de Beauvoir, *Kadın “İkinci Cins” 1 Genç Kızlık Çağı*, trans. B. Onaran (İstanbul: Payel Yayınları, 1993), 17.

44 Hegel’s Dialectic: This is a philosophical method developed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to describe how ideas or historical processes evolve through conflict and resolution. It involves three stages: a thesis (an initial idea or state), an antithesis (a contrasting idea or opposition), and a synthesis (a resolution that combines elements of both, leading to a new, higher understanding). For example, in social progress, a traditional system (thesis) might face rebellion (antithesis), resulting in a reformed system (synthesis). Sartre’s Gaze Theory: Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of “the gaze” explores how being observed by others shapes one’s self-awareness and identity. When someone looks at you, you become aware of yourself as an object in their perception, which can lead to feelings of alienation or self-consciousness. For instance, if you’re dancing alone and suddenly notice someone watching, their gaze might make you feel judged, altering your behavior or sense of freedom. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, substantive revision Fri Oct 2, 2020.*

relationship in which men are defined as “*the beholder*” and women as “*the beheld*”. This situation shows that women are deprived of subjectivity and come into existence according to the perceptions and needs of men.⁴⁵

2. Methodology

This study aims to examine the marginalization of women in Chinese proverbs from a Sociolinguistic perspective. The methodological framework employs qualitative research methods, integrating descriptive analysis with critical discourse analysis, one of the key approaches to discourse analysis. The study was designed within the scope of qualitative research model and the linguistic and cultural elements in proverbs about the marginalization of women were analyzed with a Sociolinguistic approach. In this context, how language reflects and reproduces gender roles is analyzed. The data set of the study consists of 50 proverbs about women in the Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs (中国谚语大辞典-Zhōngguó yànyǔ dà cídiǎn) written by Wen Duanzheng in 2011. The data were collected through document analysis, scanning key words and expressions used in the proverbs (e.g. woman, girl, wife, beautiful) and focusing on the relationships between these expressions. In addition, examples of sexist and marginalizing discourses were specifically identified. The collected proverbs were analyzed through descriptive analysis and discourse analysis methods; themes and categories expressing the marginalization of women (e.g. subordination, worthlessness, dependency) were identified within the scope of content analysis, and how the linguistic structures in proverbs reflect gender roles and patriarchal values were evaluated within the scope of discourse analysis. Limitations of this study include the fact that it is based only on a specific pool of proverbs and that variants of proverbs from different regions were excluded.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1 Proverbs In The Context Of Women Being Other Beings

Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of the Other defines women as “outsiders” in society, existing as “*The Other*” of men, with their social roles shaped by their relationships with men. □ Women are viewed as “property” or “portable beings,” while men’s social positions are permanent. This creates a structure where women are not recognized as individuals and remain in the shadow of men. Beauvoir’s thesis, “*Woman is constructed as an object*” argues that women have historically been positioned as “*The Other*” with their social existence defined by their subordinate role in a male-dominated system. Chinese proverbs confirm this by portraying women as controlled by men and limited by their status, reflecting their reduction to objects or social commodities.⁴⁶

45 Simone de Beauvoir, *Kadın “İkinci Cins”*, 133.

46 Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003). 232.

The proverb “*Brothers are like hands and feet, and a wife is like a garment*” (兄弟如手足，妻妻子如衣服, xiōngdì rú shǒuzú, qīzi rú yīfú) creates a contrast between brothers and wives. Brothers are likened to hands and feet, symbolizing inseparable, natural parts of the body, while a wife is compared to a garment, indicating her interchangeability, disposability, and objectification. This metaphor supports Beauvoir’s thesis of women being positioned as “*The Other*” while also highlighting the superiority of male kinship based on blood ties in China’s patriarchal family structure.

The proverb “*A bought bride is like a bought horse*” (娶到的媳妇买到的马, qǔ dào de xīfū mǎi dào de mǎ) positions women as property, comparing them to a commodity that can be bought, owned, and transferred, supporting Beauvoir’s thesis of the objectification of women. It also reflects the tradition of bride price in China’s marriage practices. The proverb “*You can beat your wife, you can scold her, but if there is no money left, you can sell her*” (打老婆，骂老婆，手内无钱卖老婆, dǎ lǎopó, mà lǎopó, shǒu nèi wú qián mài lǎopó) normalizes physical, verbal, and economic violence against women, portraying them as property under male control and reinforcing Beauvoir’s concept of women as “*The Other*”. The proverb “*The three treasures of the home: the ugly wife, the barren field, the old coat*” (家有三件宝，丑妻，薄田，破棉袄, jiā yǒu sān jiàn bǎo, chǒu qī, bó tián, pò mián’ǎo) ranks women alongside other property objects, reducing them to an objectified position in China’s patriarchal system. This reflects Beauvoir’s idea of the marginalization and objectification of women.⁴⁷

The proverb “*Long hair, short mind*” (头发长，见识短, Tóufǎ cháng, jiànshi duǎn) associates a woman’s physical trait (long hair) with a lack of intellectual capacity, reflecting the reduction of women to their body and nature as emphasized by Beauvoir. The opposition between “*long*” (长) and “*short*” (短) adapts the yin-yang dualism, reinforcing gender discrimination by linking rationality to men and reducing women to their physiological characteristics. The proverb “*Women’s understanding is shallow*” (妇人家，见识浅, Fùrén jiā, jiànshi qiǎn) directly devalues women’s intellectual abilities, with the character “*浅*” (shallow) suggesting women’s lack of depth. This reflects the systematic exclusion of women from the subject position, as described by Beauvoir, and aligns with the Confucian tradition that restricts women from education and intellectual activities.⁴⁸

The proverb “*It is difficult to deal with women and morally low people*” (唯女子与小人难养, Wéi nǚzǐ yǔ xiǎo rén nán yǎng) illustrates the systematic marginalization of women within the patriarchal structure of Confucian tradition, aligning with Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of “*woman as the other*.” By categorizing women alongside “*小人*” (morally inferior people), the proverb reflects the moral devaluation of women and their association with negative traits. The term “*难养*” (difficult to handle/manage) further legitimizes male dominance and denies women’s subjectivity, positioning them as objects to be controlled, thus exemplifying the

47 Simone de Beauvoir, *Kadın “İkinci Cins”*, 150-155.

48 Nan Rong, “Gender Discrimination in English and Chinese Proverbs” (master’s thesis, 2007), 10-15.

exclusion of women from the subject position as described by Beauvoir.⁴⁹

The proverb “*Women have no bones in their tongues*” (女人舌头上没骨头, Nǚrén shéttou shàng méi gǔtǒu) reflects the systematic devaluation of women’s discursive credibility, aligning with Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of “woman as other.” By using the metaphor of “boneless,” it portrays women’s speech as unprincipled, inconsistent, and unreliable, supporting Beauvoir’s thesis that women are not seen as rational or reliable subjects. This bodily metaphor reflects patriarchal discourse that reduces women to biological traits, marginalizing them and legitimizing their exclusion from public discourse.

The proverb “*Mischief destroys the country, a jealous woman stirs up the house*” (谗言误国, 妒妇乱家, Chán yán wù guó, dù fù luàn jiā) reflects the marginalization of women as a “disruptive” and “threatening” element, positioning them as harmful to social and familial order. In line with Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of “woman as the other,” the proverb portrays women as passive and negative figures, portraying their roles as unreliable. In China’s patriarchal structure, this reinforces the idea of women as threats, justifying their social oppression and denying their subjectivity.⁵⁰

In the proverb “*There is nothing so cruel as a woman’s heart*” (狠毒莫过妇人心, Hěndú mòguò fūrén xīn), the direct association of the characters “狠毒” (cruel/poisonous) with the female heart positions woman as an essentially malevolent being. This linguistic structure reflects the process of constructing women as the “dangerous other” emphasized by Beauvoir. The proverb’s absolute judgment (莫过- no more) presents the malevolence of women as a universal reality. The proverb “*Even bees and scorpions are not as poisonous as a woman’s heart*” (蜂蚕犹未毒, 最毒妇人, Fēng zhà yóu wèi dú, zuì dú fūrén xīn) compares women to the most poisonous creatures in nature and positions them as more dangerous than them. This linguistic structure supports Beauvoir’s thesis that women are associated with nature and marginalized through this association. The gradual comparative structure in the proverb (犹未- not even, 最- most) places the malevolence of women above all the dangers in nature. The use of the character “心” (heart) in both proverbs points to a malevolence that is assumed to be inherent in the essence and nature of women. This linguistic structure legitimizes the distrust and fear of women in China’s patriarchal system and supports Beauvoir’s thesis that women are systematically excluded from the subject position and positioned as the “dangerous other”. The metaphorical structures in proverbs function as linguistic tools that legitimize patriarchal domination by positioning women as a threat to be controlled, avoided and feared.⁵¹

“*The heart of a woman is as changeable as the crescent moon*” (阴晴鬪缺月, 易变女子心, Yīn qíng dòu quē yuè, yì biàn nǚzǐ xīn) is a proverb that emphasizes the positioning

49 Jie Zhang, “Gender Discrimination in Chinese Traditional Culture,” no. 6 (2013), 215.

50 Aiguo Le, “Zhu Xi’s Interpretation and Implications of ‘Only Women and Petty Men Are Difficult to Nurture,’” *Jianghuai Tribune*, no. 4 (2019), 82.

51 Jin-Tai Zhuang, “A Study of Chinese Gender-Words and Cultural Phenomena with Their Pedagogical Applications” (master’s thesis, Republic of China, 2013), 42.

of women as unstable and unreliable beings, associated with nature. This proverb contains a metaphor that equates a woman's heart with the changing phases of the moon, suggesting that a woman is inherently changeable and indecisive, linked to the "yin" (阴) principle. This linguistic structure supports Beauvoir's thesis on the reduction of women to nature and their othering, while also providing an example of how women are not regarded as rational and consistent subjects. The proverb characterizes women as "changeable", "unreliable" and "uncontrollable" beings, which creates a discourse that legitimizes gender-based prejudices in China's patriarchal society. "The heart of a man is easy to understand, but a woman's deceit is hard to guard against" (男人心肠易测, 女人诡诈难防 - Nánrén xīncháng yì cè, nǚrén guǐzhà nán fáng) presents contrasting value judgments regarding male and female nature linguistically. From a sociolinguistic perspective, defining men as understandable and reliable while women are characterized as deceitful and dangerous reflects the acceptance of men as the "norm" and women as "the other". This proverb legitimizes the perception of women as an insecure threat within China's patriarchal societal structure, supporting Beauvoir's thesis on the construction of women as "dangerous others".

The proverb "*A sprout cannot become a pillar; a girl cannot be a leader*" (豆芽弗好做柱, 丫头弗好作主, dòu yá fú hǎo zuò zhù, yā tou fú hǎo zuò zhǔ) reflects the naturalization of women's exclusion from leadership roles. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it uses the metaphor of a "sprout" to suggest that women, like plants, are biologically unsuitable for roles like leadership. This aligns with Beauvoir's critique of the naturalization of women's social roles, reinforcing the belief that leadership is incompatible with women's nature and denying their potential in public and leadership spaces within China's patriarchal system.

The proverb "*A big one does not fight with a small one; a man does not argue with a woman*" (大不与小斗, 男不与女争, dà yǔ xiǎo dòu, nán bù yǔ nǚ zhēng) reflects the naturalization of gender inequality, positioning women as subordinate to men. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the proverb uses the metaphor of "a big one does not fight with a small one" to legitimize the hierarchical view that men are not to engage with women in discussions, reinforcing the idea that women are not equal partners in public discourse. This aligns with Beauvoir's concept of "*The Other*" systematically excluding women from intellectual equality and reinforcing their marginalization in society.

The proverb "*A daughter is not considered part of the family*" (养女是外性, Yǎng nǚ shì wài xìng) illustrates the othering of girls within China's patriarchal society. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it positions girls as external and temporary members of the family, with the term "外性" (external nature) highlighting their exclusion. This reflects Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women as the "Other," where women are relegated to predefined roles and denied subjectivity. The proverb thus linguistically mirrors patriarchal structures that marginalize girls both socially and biologically.

The proverbs "*A beautiful face is a disaster*" (红颜祸水, Hóng yán huò shuǐ), "*Beautiful*

women bring trouble” (类貌佳人惹祸端, Lèi mào jiārén rě huò duān), “Beauty is the agent of disaster” (色为祸媒, Sè wéi huò méi), “A beautiful woman is always a source of evil” (美色从来都是祸胎, Měi sè cóng lái dōu shì huò tāi), and “Beauty is a deadly knife” (色是杀人刀, Sè shì shā rén dāo) present a linguistic structure that legitimizes the portrayal of female beauty as a societal threat, source of disaster, and evil. In these proverbs, the term “beauty” (色, 美色) reflects the belief that the physical attributes and allure of women possess the potential to create not only individual but also societal and political threats.⁵²

The expressions “Beauty is the agent of disaster” (色为祸媒) and “Beauty is the seed of calamity” (美色从来都是祸胎) depict women’s physical existence and its societal impact as dangerous and disruptive forces. Within Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of “The Other,” these proverbs reflect the construction of women as “dangerous others,” with female beauty viewed as a threat to social order and male dominance. The metaphors in these proverbs portray beauty as a tool of calamity, reinforcing the marginalization of women’s subjectivity and positioning their bodies as objects to control. They highlight the systematic belittlement of women in China’s patriarchal society, framing their sexuality as a source of danger that undermines male authority. Such expressions legitimize gender inequality, sustain patriarchal structures, and reinforce the exclusion of women as active subjects. These proverbs reflect the social positioning of women as secondary and passive, in line with Beauvoir’s understanding of their exclusion from equality in societal structures.

3.2. Proverbs in the Context of Subject-Object Duality

These proverbs clearly show how women are socially positioned in the context of Simone de Beauvoir’s subject-object dualism. In proverbs, the role of women is defined as passive, dependent and marginalized, while the role of men is framed as an active, leading and decision-making subject. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such statements reveal how language constructs and perpetuates gender inequality. For example,

Proverbs like “The husband leads, the wife follows” (夫唱妇随, fū chàng fù suí) and “If the husband is worthy, the wife is honored” (夫荣妻贵, fū róng qī guì) position men as active subjects and women as passive followers, aligning with Confucian *Three obediences* and legitimizing women’s subordination. Spatially, proverbs such as “Men manage the outside, women manage the inside” (男主外女主内, nán zhǔ wài nǚ zhǔ nèi), “The girl child is a flower, always crawling by the hearth” (女儿是朵花, 总在灶前爬, nǚ’ér shì duǒ huā, zǒng zài zào qián pá), and “Even if a man is ugly, he always walks outside” (男人生得丑, 总在外边走, nán rén shēng dé chǒu, zǒng zài wài biān zǒu) reflect the “inside-outside” (内外, nèi wài) dichotomy. This reinforces Beauvoir’s thesis that women are confined to the private sphere, illustrating the space-gender dynamic in China’s patriarchal structure.⁵³

52 Zhuozhi Cai, “From Chinese and Japanese Proverbs to Female Images” (master’s thesis, Xi’an International Studies University, 2012), 10-12.

53 Xiaoli Zhang, “The ‘Scapegoat’ in Patriarchal Society: Tracing the Origin of ‘Beauty Leads to Disaster’ Stories,”

The proverb “*A man’s heart is as deep as the ocean, a woman’s heart is like a needle*” (男子心, 海一样深, 女人心, 一枚针, *nán zǐ xīn, hǎi yīyàng shēn, nǚ rén xīn, yī méi zhēn*) metaphorically applies the yin-yang dualism to gender hierarchy, associating men with depth and women with limitation, aligning with Beauvoir’s theory of women’s objectification. Similarly, the proverb “*Man finds strength in the earth, the tiger in the mountain, the woman in the house, and the man in his courage*” (人凭田地虎凭山, 女人凭里男子汉, *Rén píng tiándì hǔ píng shān, nǚrén píng lǐ nánzihàn*) ties women’s existence to the home and men’s to courage, reinforcing Beauvoir’s thesis on the denial of women’s subjectivity and illustrating how language perpetuates gender-based power relations in China’s patriarchal system.

The proverbs “*Ten women cannot be equal to one man*” (十个妇人人敌不得一个男子, *shí gè fù rén dí bù dé yī gè nán zǐ*) and “*Men superior and women inferior*” (男尊女卑, *nán zūn nǚ bēi*) reflect the Confucian hierarchical social order applied to gender, legitimizing male supremacy and aligning with Beauvoir’s thesis of women as the “other.” Similarly, the proverb “*A man’s foolishness is temporary confusion; a woman’s foolishness is helpless*” (男子痴, 一时迷; 女子痴, 没药医, *nán zǐ chī, yī shí mí; nǚ zǐ chī, méi yào yī*) attributes men with potential for change while reducing women to static, unchanging objects. These linguistic structures illustrate Beauvoir’s theory on the denial of women’s subjectivity and highlight the linguistic reflection of gender-based discrimination in Chinese society.⁵⁴

The proverb “*One should not be born a woman; a woman’s pain and happiness for a hundred years (her whole life) depends on the decision of others*” (为人莫作妇人身, 百年苦年苦乐由人定 *wéi rén mò zuò fù rén shēn, bǎi nián kǔ lè yóu rén dìng*) is like a negative reflection of Beauvoir’s thesis “*One is not born a woman, one is made a woman*”. While this proverb shows that femininity is a social construction and that this construction systematically subordinates women, it also reveals the depth of gender-based discrimination in China’s patriarchal structure.

The paradoxical structure of the proverb “*In men, virtue is talent, in women, incompetence is virtue*” (男子有德便是才, 妇人无才便是德, *nán zǐ yǒu dé biàn shì cái, fù rén wú cái biàn shì de*) illustrates how the Confucian tradition systematically ignores the subjectivity of women by creating different definitions of virtue for men and women. In the proverb “*If a woman’s mind is consulted, defeat is inevitable*” (谋及妇人, 宜其败也, *móu jí fù rén, yí qí bài yě*), the intellectual capacity of women is systematically devalued. While the linguistic structure of this proverb supports Beauvoir’s thesis of the denial of women’s ability to think rationally, it also serves to legitimize the exclusion of women from decision-making mechanisms in China’s patriarchal tradition. Here, the woman is completely removed from the position of a subject and reduced to the position of an object whose thoughts lead to defeat. The proverb “*To value males and belittle females*” (重男轻女, *zhòng nán qīng nǚ*) is remarkable both for its linguistic structure and its conceptual metaphors. The use of the characters “重” (heavy/valuable) and

Journal of Beijing Radio and TV University, no. 1 (2008), 44.

54 Wang Dechun ve Yang Yingsu, *Çin Atasözleri ve Kültürü (Hànzi yànyǔ yǔ wénhuà)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Yabancı Diller Eğitim Yayınevi, 2003), 36.

“轻” (light/worthless) refers to the yin-yang dualism of Chinese thought and applies this binary opposition to gender hierarchy. In the context of Beauvoir’s subject-object dialectic, this proverb exalts the male subject with the metaphor of “heavy/worthy” and subordinates the female object with the metaphor of “light/worthless”.⁵⁵

These proverbs show that women are excluded from social subjectivity and confined to a limited sphere of existence defined by men. Within the framework of Beauvoir’s subject-object dualism, the role of language in the construction of social inequalities becomes evident in these expressions. The reproduction of such expressions not only perpetuates existing inequalities, but also contributes to the reshaping of the social structure in accordance with patriarchal norms.

3.3. Patriarchal Control Mechanisms in Proverbs

The proverbs “*A dull knife is useless; an unrefined woman turns into a demon*” (菜刀不磨成死铁，女人不打成妖孽, Càidāo bù mó chéng sǐ tiě, nǚrén bù dǎ chéng yāo niè) and “*An unrefined woman is like a chili pepper that cannot dry in the sun*” (打不死的婆娘，晒不死的辣椒, Dǎ bù sǐ de pó niáng, shài bù sǐ de là jiāo) provide a deep linguistic insight into the societal role and positioning of women in China’s patriarchal culture. These proverbs express a cultural framework in which women are shaped not only physically but also emotionally and mentally. From a sociolinguistic perspective, both proverbs utilize metaphors drawn from everyday objects (knife, chili) to normalize and naturalize violence. These linguistic strategies legitimize patriarchal power’s control over women’s bodies, presenting violence as a practice of “healing”, “correcting” or “onlar”. The parallel structures in the proverbs (knifewoman, chili-woman) serve to perceive violence as a systematic and inevitable process.

The proverb “*A dull knife is useless; an unrefined woman turns into a demon*” (菜刀不磨成死铁，女人不打成妖孽, Càidāo bù mó chéng sǐ tiě, nǚrén bù dǎ chéng yāo niè) reflects the belief that women need to be disciplined and controlled physically through violence. The idea that a woman can only become “proper” through “beating” and “refining,” otherwise she will turn into a “demon,” parallels Simone de Beauvoir’s understanding of women’s positioning as “*The Other*”. Beauvoir notes that women are often defined not as “*beings*” but as “*The Other*”. This proverb serves as a linguistic reflection of the deprivation of women’s subjectivity and their continuous limitation by societal norms. Women are seen as passive beings in society, with their personal desires and wishes being overlooked. This proverb also implies that women’s demands for independence and freedom are perceived as “wrong” and “dangerous”.

The proverb “*An unrefined woman is like a chili pepper that cannot dry in the sun*” (打不死的婆娘，晒不死的辣椒, Dǎ bù sǐ de pó niáng, shài bù sǐ de là jiāo) is another proverb that emphasizes women’s resilience and “durability” against harsh conditions. However, the resilience highlighted here is shaped by the continuous oppression and exclusion of women

55 Hong Ma, “Analysis of the Causes and Effects of Marriage Squeeze,” *Science and Technology Information*, no. 30 (2009), 22.

by social structures. Like chili peppers that cannot dry in the sun, women are also “shaped” and “refined” to endure challenging circumstances. This situation expresses not only the external and societal shaping of women but also the internal pressures regarding the roles and behaviors expected from them. According to Beauvoir, such pressures prevent women from discovering their own identities and subjectivities, forcing them to act according to the demands of a male-dominated system.⁵⁶

The proverb “*Obey your father when at home, your husband when married, and your son when your husband is dead*” (在家从父，出嫁从夫，夫死从子, Zài jiā cóng fù, chū jià cóng fū, fū sǐ cóng zǐ) illustrates the complete dependence of women on male authority throughout their lives and their exclusion from subjectivity at every stage. Reflecting Confucius’s doctrine of “three obediences,” this proverb legitimizes women’s continuous subordination to the authority of male figures (father, husband, son) that define their lives. This situation supports Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of the “Other,” reinforcing the view that women are deprived of the right to determine their own destinies and must exist as “Others” in the shadow of men. Particularly, the fact that a woman remains subject to her son’s authority even after her husband’s death completely eliminates the possibility for her to exist as an independent subject. This proverb serves to culturally and linguistically normalize the perpetual dominance of men over women in a patriarchal society.⁵⁷

The proverb “*Married to a chicken, follow the chicken; married to a dog, follow the dog*” (嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗, Jià jī suí jī, jià gǒu suí gǒu) demonstrates how women’s absolute obedience is naturalized within China’s rigid patriarchal culture. From Beauvoir’s perspective, this proverb reflects the complete abstraction of women from their will and subjectivity. The linguistic structures in these proverbs (the hierarchical triplet and animal metaphors) function as discursive strategies that legitimize and normalize patriarchal control over women.

The expression “*Marry a guy and he’ll provide*” (嫁汉嫁汉，穿衣吃饭, Jià hàn jià hàn, chuān yī chī fàn) reflects the economic dependence of women on men within the context of Beauvoir’s theory of women and China’s patriarchal structure. The repetition of the phrase “to reach a man” serves as a linguistic example of how marriage is presented as essential for a woman’s survival. The association of basic needs such as “to wear clothes and eat” with marriage demonstrates the systematic denial of women’s economic autonomy. This proverb conveys the message that women have no possibility of existence outside of marriage, revealing how women’s economic dependence is normalized through language in China’s patriarchal society.

The proverb “*A wife with children is considered a partner; one without is regarded as a servant*” (有子方为妾，无子便算婢, Yǒu zǐ fāng wéi qiè, wú zǐ biàn suàn bì) illustrates how a woman’s status in China’s patriarchal system is determined by her fertility. In the context of

56 Weijie Xu, “Gender Discrimination in Chinese and Japanese Proverbs,” *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University*, no. 5 (2004), 117-118.

57 Zhang, Luyuan (张鲁原). *Çin Antik Atasözleri Büyük Sözlüğü [Zhonghua gu yanyu da cidian]*. Shanghai: Shanghai Üniversitesi Yayinevi, (2011), 369.

Beauvoir's thesis on "defining women through their bodies," this proverb reflects that a woman's social value is limited to her biological function. This proverb presents linguistic structures that define women's economic autonomy and social status within a male-dominated system. The discourses constructed around marriage and fertility negate women's potential for economic independence, continually placing them in a dependent "Other" position relative to men.

The proverb "*Women on board a ship, bad luck for the year*" (女人上船, 晦气一年, Nǚrén shàng chuán, huìqì yī nián) is a linguistic reflection of the exclusion of women from public spaces and the association of their presence with misfortune. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the attribution of "晦气" (misfortune) to women presents a linguistic structure that positions them as dangerous and polluting "Others." This supports Simone de Beauvoir's thesis on the exclusion of women from the public sphere and how this exclusion is legitimized through superstitions. Particularly, if ships symbolize a male-dominated public space and economic activities in traditional Chinese society, the exclusion of women from these areas signifies a societal and economic inequality. The expression "一年" (one year) emphasizes that the negative impact of a woman's presence is long-lasting and permanent.⁵⁸

The proverb "*If the bride does not speak, she will not prosper*" (新娘不开口, 开口一世不发财, Xīnniáng bù kāikǒu, kāikǒu yī shì bù fācái) further confirms Beauvoir's thesis on "the silencing of women." Both proverbs present linguistic structures that restrict women's presence and voice in public spaces by employing cultural codes such as superstition and economic threat. These proverbs illustrate how the exclusion and silencing of women in China's patriarchal society are systematically carried out and how this exclusion is normalized through language.

The proverb "*A man's talent and a woman's beauty are determinants*" (郎才女貌, 赖汉配妻 - Láng cái nǚ mào, lài hàn pèi qī) confirms Beauvoir's analysis of the fundamental dynamics of gender inequality. While male talent and success are emphasized, women are evaluated solely based on their physical appearance. The saying "Beauty is everyone's toy; ugliness is the treasure of the home" (俏是万人戏, 丑是家中宝, Qiào shì wàn rén xì, chǒu shì jiā zhōng bǎo) is a striking example of Beauvoir's thesis on the paradoxical positioning of women. Beautiful women are objectified in public spaces, while ugly women are valued in private spheres. The proverb "*The treasures of the home: an ugly wife, a barren field, an old jacket*" (家有三件宝, 丑妻, 薄田, 破棉袄, Jiā yǒu sān jiàn bǎo, chǒu qī, bó tián, pò mián ǎo) further supports Beauvoir's thesis on the objectification of women as the "absolute Other". Women are evaluated in the same category as property objects like fields and jackets.⁵⁹

China's patriarchal culture. Beauty is presented as a desirable trait while simultaneously being coded as dangerous and unreliable. Conversely, ugliness is associated with controllability and loyalty. The metaphors and comparisons used in these proverbs (treasure, toy, property)

58 Fang Yang, "Traditional Chinese Views of Women Through Proverbs," *Chizhou Teachers College Journal* (1999), 3.

59 Feipeng He, "Semantic and Rhetorical Research on Discriminatory Proverbs Against Women," *Modern Linguistics* 12, no. 9 (2024), 130.

reflect a multilayered system of devaluation and objectification that determines women's social status. This system, established through the beauty-ugliness dichotomy, continuously subjects women to the value judgments of a male-dominated society and obstructs their potential to be subjects. These proverbs reveal how women's bodies and sexuality are utilized as tools of social control and how women's sexual identities are shaped to maintain social order.

The proverb "*If a woman marries, she will have clothes to wear and food to eat*" (嫁汉 穿衣吃饭, Jià hàn jià hàn, chuān yī chī fàn) reflects the economic dependence of women on men within the context of Beauvoir's theory and China's patriarchal structure. The repetition of the phrase "to reach a man" serves as a linguistic example of how marriage is presented as essential for a woman's survival. Associating basic needs such as "to wear clothes and eat" with marriage demonstrates the systematic denial of women's economic autonomy. This proverb conveys the message that women have no possibility of existence outside of marriage, revealing how women's economic dependence is normalized through language in China's patriarchal society.

The saying "*A wife with children is considered a partner; one without is regarded as a servant*" (有子方为妾, 无子便算婢, Yǒu zǐ fāng wéi qiè, wú zǐ biàn suàn bì) illustrates how a woman's status in China's patriarchal system is determined by her fertility. In the context of Beauvoir's thesis on "defining women through their bodies," this proverb reflects that a woman's social value is limited to her biological function. This proverb presents linguistic structures that define women's economic autonomy and social status within a male-dominated system. The discourses constructed around marriage and fertility negate women's potential for economic independence, continually placing them in a dependent "*Other*" position relative to men.

The proverb "*A good woman cannot be found in a second marriage*" (再刷无好布, 再嫁无好, Zài shuā wú hǎo bù, zài jià wú hǎo fù) similarly reveals how women's sexuality and marriage are controlled by rigid norms. This proverb implies that women's preference for a second marriage after being married once diminishes their social value. These proverbs exemplify the societal control over women's bodies and sexuality and how they are shaped within moral norms. Through Beauvoir's concept of the Other, these proverbs demonstrate how gender norms impose continuous surveillance on women, illustrating how power operates at a micro level and strengthens social structures through women's sexuality.⁶⁰

Conclusion

This research presents significant findings at the intersection of sociolinguistic perspectives by examining the representation of women in Chinese proverbs through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir's theory of "*The Other*." The fundamental paradigm of the study is based on the proposition that language is not merely a tool for communication but a complex ideological system in which social power relations and hegemonic structures are produced, maintained,

60 Lihua Li, *Sexual Culture of Ancient China: Man and Woman* (Beijing: Zhongguo Hehui Chubanshe, 2003), 57.

and legitimized. In this context, the systematic analysis of representations of women in Chinese proverbs demonstrates how patriarchal norms are institutionalized and normalized through linguistic practices.

The methodological framework of the research combines critical discourse analysis and feminist theory perspectives, revealing the multilayered structure of representations of women in proverbs. The positioning of women in the examined proverbs predominantly revolves around themes of obedience, dependency, and devaluation, which exposes the reflections of patriarchal hegemony on a linguistic level. These representations function as linguistic mechanisms that reduce women to passive objects in the social realm while ensuring the sustainability of male-dominated structures. The theoretical contribution of the study lies in its in-depth analysis of the role of linguistic practices in the reproduction of gender inequality.

Othering discursive structures found in proverbs emerge as a systemic mechanism that shapes individual perceptions at a micro level while determining social power balances at a macro level. In this context, the subordinate position attributed to women transcends mere linguistic representation, becoming an ideological tool that serves to institutionalize gender hierarchy. The findings of this research illustrate the dialectical relationship between language and gender, showing how patriarchal values are normalized and legitimized through linguistic practices. The positioning of women not as individuals but as objects of societal expectations highlights the critical role language plays in perpetuating gender-based biases and stereotypes within collective consciousness. This situation underscores the necessity for systematic examination of the role linguistic practices play in the reproduction of gender inequality.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

References/Kaynakça

Books and Book Chapters

Aksoy, Ömer Asım. *Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü*. İstanbul: İnkılâp Yayınları, 1993.

Bái, Fēng (白峰). *Jìshù yǔ xìngbié: Wǎnqī dìzhì Zhōngguó de quánlì jīngwěi* [技术与性别：晚期帝制中国的权利经纬] *Teknoloji ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet: Geç İmparatorluk Çin'inde İktidar İlişkileri*. Çeviren Jiǎng Mèng 江萌 vd. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2006.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *Kadın "İkinci Cins" 1: Genç Kızlık Çağı*. Çeviren Bertan Onaran. İstanbul: Payel Yayınları, 1993.

Butler, Judith. "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex." *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 35-49.

Cameron, Deborah ve Jennifer Coates. "Some Problems in the Sociolinguistic Explanation of Sex

- Differences.” *Women in Their Speech Communities* içinde, editörler Jennifer Coates ve Deborah Cameron, 13-26. New York: Longman, 1989.
- Eckert, Penelope ve Sally McConnell-Ginet. “Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 461-490.
- Finnegan, Ruth. “Proverbs in Africa.” *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb* içinde, editörler Wolfgang Mieder ve Alan Dundes, 10-42. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.
- Lakoff, Robin. *Language and Woman’s Place*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Wang, Dechun ve Yangsu Ying. *Hànzì yànyǔ yǔ wénhuà* [汉字谚语与文化] *Çin Atasözleri ve Kültürü*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2003.
- Wēn, Duānzhèng (温端政). *Zhōngguó yànyǔ dà cídiǎn* [中国谚语大辞典] *Çin Atasözleri Büyük Sözlüğü*. Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2011.
- Xǔ, Shèn (許慎). *Shuōwén jiězì* [說文解字] *Grafiklerin Açıklanması ve Karakterlerin Analizi*. 2. baskı. 2 cilt. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2013.
- Theses
- Başay, Özge. *Cinsiyet Değişkeni Bağlamında Bilimsel Makalelerin Toplumdilbilimsel Açından İncelenmesi*. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2023.
- Cài, Zhuózhǐ (蔡卓指). *Cóng Zhōng-Rì yànyǔ kàn Zhōng-Rì nǚxìng xíngxiàng* [从中日谚语看中日女性形象] *Çin ve Japon Atasözlerinde Kadın İmajları*. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Xi’an International Studies University, 2012.
- Doğan, Gökçe. *Düşünce İnşacısı Olarak Dilin Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizliği Üzerindeki Rolü*. Yayımlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara Üniversitesi, 2020.
- Zhuang, Jin-Tai. “A Study of Chinese Gender-Words and Cultural Phenomena with Their Pedagogical Applications.” Master’s thesis, Republic of China, 2013.
- Journal Articles
- Hé, Fēipéng (何菲芃). “Nǚxìng qíshì lèi yànyǔ de yǔyì yǔ xiūcí yánjiū” [女性歧视类谚语的语义与修辞研究] *Kadın Ayrımcılığı İçeren Atasözlerinin Anlambilim ve Retorik İncelemesi*. *Modern Linguistics* 12, no. 9 (2024): 129-134.
- Jiāo, Jié (焦杰) ve Gēng Guànjìng (耿冠静). “Cóng Lǐjì kàn Zhànguó yǐhòu fūquán de qiánguà” [从《礼记》看战国以后夫权的强化] *Savaşan Devletler Sonrası Kocanın Otoritesinin Güçlenmesi*. *Collection of Women’s Studies* 4 (2011).
- Kristianti, Benedikta Yulianti ve Agus Riyanto. “The Impact of Education on Patriarchal Culture and Gender Equality.” *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology* 4, no. 1 (2022): 79-104. <https://doi.org/10.24071/jaot.v4i1.4223>.
- Lè, Àiguó (乐爱国). “Zhū Xī duì ‘Wéi nǚzǐ yǔ xiǎorén wéi nán yǎng yě’ de quánshì jí qí yìnyùn” [朱熹对“唯女子与小人为难养也”的诠释及其意蕴] *Zhu Xi’nin “Yalnızca Kadınlar ve Küçük İnsanlar Zor Yetiştirilir” Yorumu*. *Jianghuai Tribune* 4 (2019): 82.
- Lóng, Qiānhóng (龙千红). “Hàn-Yīng yànyǔ zhōng de nǚxìng xíngxiàng jí qí chéngyīn” [汉英谚语中的女性形象及其成因] *Çin-İngiliz Atasözlerinde Kadın İmajları ve Nedenleri*. *Journal of Guangzhou Normal University* 1 (2000): 1.
- Yang, Wanjuan. “Atasözlerinden Geleneksel Çin Kültüründe Eş Seçimi Görüşü.” *Çin Ulusal Üniversitesi Dergisi (Felsefe ve Sosyal Bilimler Bölümü)*, no. 2 (1992): 1-10.