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LINGUO-COGNITIVE AND ETHNOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS "MARRIAGE" AND "FAMILY" IN PAREMIOLOGY

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Scientific supervisor:
Doctor, professor
Gulnar Bekkozhanova
Foreign scientific supervisor:
Doctor, professor
Gao Yang

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DEFINITIONS

Paremiology – derived from the Greek "paroimia" (proverb), is the interdisciplinary study of proverbs at the intersection of linguistics, folklore, and cultural studies. It examines the definition, structure, origin, and functions of proverbs, as well as their roles in cultural transmission and social regulation. In addition, paremiology includes cross-cultural comparative analysis, such as the study of similarities and differences in the concepts of marriage and family reflected in English and Chinese proverbs. Contemporary paremiology also pays attention to the development of proverbs in modern contexts, including the emergence of neo-proverbs and digital proverbs in online communication.

Proverb – short phrases distilled from people's long-term production and life experiences, characterized by high generalization and fixed structures. They represent an important component of ethnic languages and cultures. Typically, they convey universal life wisdom, moral norms, and value judgments in a concise, vivid, and rhythmic manner, possessing broad prevalence and strong pragmatic functions.

Traditional proverbs – linguistic expressions that have persisted within ethnic oral traditions over extended periods, crystallizing through historical accumulation into stable forms with compact structures and fixed meanings. They possess verifiable origins or records of long-term folk transmission, and they usually convey ethical norms, life wisdom, and social consensus, carrying significant cultural symbolism. They are typically formally included in major proverb dictionaries and authoritative linguistic reference works.

Modern proverbs – expressions that have emerged and gained widespread usage in modern society, functioning as proverbs within contexts such as national policy discourse, media language, and urban life experiences. They typically retain the semantic integrity and admonitory function of traditional proverbs, but employ more colloquial expressions and carry meanings more closely tied to social realities, professional life, and public ideologies. They are progressively entering dictionaries, corpora, policy slogan collections, and written publications; they appear extensively in newspapers, radio, film, television, government documents, and mass media; they exhibit strong contextual specificity and modernity, yet demonstrate greater stability and longevity than digital proverbs.

English proverbs – common fixed phrases or sentences within the English cultural community, typically originating from religious texts, classical literature, folklore, and everyday social practices, etc. They embody cultural characteristics of Western society, such as valuing individualism, religious ethics, and the spirit of contract.

Chinese proverbs – fixed phrases widely circulated within the Chinese cultural system, possessing normative and educational significance, derive from diverse sources including agrarian culture, Confucian ethical systems, collective life experiences, and oral traditions, etc. They embody holistic thinking, human ethical order, and a family-centered cultural orientation.

Marriage proverbs – fixed and widely circulated expressions that encapsulate collective cultural understandings, value orientations, and normative expectations concerning marriage. They function as condensed cultural texts that reflect shared

beliefs about marital roles, gender relations, spousal obligations, emotional ethics, and the social institution of marriage within a particular community. As crystallized forms of collective experience, marriage proverbs reveal both traditional norms and evolving attitudes toward marital relationships in different cultures.

Family proverbs – fixed and widely circulated expressions that encode cultural knowledge, moral norms, and social expectations related to family life. They articulate widely recognized beliefs about family hierarchy, intergenerational relations, parental roles, household responsibilities, and family harmony. Family proverbs serve as cognitive and cultural frameworks guiding behavior within family structures, reflecting deeper ethnocultural concepts such as kinship obligations, filial piety, communal interdependence, and domestic ethics.

Digital proverbs – language expressions with proverbial functions generated and disseminated within internet contexts, social media, and instant communication platforms. Primarily used for identity affirmation, emotional resonance, and attitude expression. Characterized by rapid updates and dissemination, high structural variability, low stability, and strong humor. They often convey social sentiments through irony, borrowing, and other techniques. Most are not included in traditional dictionaries, commonly appearing on social media platforms and retrievable in online corpora.

Anti-proverbs – modified or creatively transformed versions of traditional proverbs in which the original structure, wording, or semantic content is intentionally altered to produce new meanings and communicative effects. Primarily used for humor, irony, criticism, social commentary, and value negotiation. Characterized by deliberate deviation from canonical proverbial forms, high contextual dependency, semantic innovation, and strong rhetorical expressiveness. They often preserve partial lexical or structural elements of the original proverb while subverting its conventional meaning through parody, inversion, wordplay, or contextual adaptation. Anti-proverbs frequently emerge in both everyday discourse and digital communication environments and reflect the dynamic reinterpretation of traditional cultural wisdom in contemporary society.

Ethnocultural analysis – a methodological approach that examines linguistic units (such as proverbs, idioms, and metaphors) in relation to the cultural, historical, and social characteristics of the ethnic groups that produce and use them. It seeks to identify how values, worldviews, behavioral norms, and collective identities of specific cultural communities are encoded in language. In proverb studies, ethnocultural analysis uncovers how different nations conceptualize marriage, family, gender roles, and interpersonal obligations through culturally embedded linguistic expressions.

Cognitive linguistics – a branch of linguistics that views language as an integral part of human cognition and emphasizes its connection to conceptualization, categorization, and embodied experience. It assumes that linguistic structures reflect the ways humans perceive, interpret, and organize the world. Key notions include conceptual metaphor, conceptual blending, image schemas, frames, and mental models. In proverb research, cognitive linguistics provides tools for analyzing how abstract concepts such as marriage or family are understood through bodily experience and culturally shared conceptual structures.

Comparative analysis – a research method that systematically examines similarities and differences between two or more linguistic or cultural phenomena. In the context of proverb studies, it involves comparing the structures, meanings, conceptual metaphors, and cultural functions of proverbs across languages (e.g., English vs. Chinese) to reveal divergent value systems, shared cognitive patterns, and ethnocultural specificities. Comparative analysis highlights how different societies encode similar life experiences through distinct linguistic and cultural lenses.

Conceptual metaphor – a foundational concept in cognitive linguistics, proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which posits that human beings understand abstract or complex domains of experience through more concrete, embodied source domains. Conceptual metaphors are not merely stylistic ornaments but deep cognitive mappings (e.g., marriage is a journey, family is a tree, relationship is a container). In proverbs, conceptual metaphors serve as culturally grounded mechanisms for interpreting marital and familial relationships, shaping collective reasoning and influencing social norms.

ABBREVIATIONS

CL	Cognitive linguistics
BNC	British national corpus
COCA	Corpus of contemporary American English
CCL	Center for Chinese Linguistics (Peking university Chinese corpus)
BCC	Beijing language and culture university corpus center
EP	English proverbs
CP	Chinese proverbs
EMP	English marriage proverbs
CMP	Chinese marriage proverbs
EFP	English family proverbs
CFP	Chinese family proverbs
AI	Artificial intelligence
LLMS	Large language models
etc.	et cetera
e.g./E.g.	For example

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the research. Paremiology studies proverbs as a special form of linguistic and cultural expression. Within this field, proverbs about marriage and family deserve particular attention, because marriage and family are among the most fundamental institutions of human society and play an important role in shaping both individual behavior and collective cultural consciousness. As concise and stable units of folk discourse, proverbs preserve social experience, ethical principles, cultural concepts, and value judgments. English and Chinese proverbs related to marriage and family reflect not only common human concerns, but also different cultural views of marital relations, kinship structure, gender roles, and family ethics.

These proverbs were formed over a long historical period and are closely connected with specific philosophical traditions, social systems, and cultural patterns. They record culturally shaped ideas about spouse selection, marital duties, filial piety, intergenerational relations, and moral responsibility. In this sense, they can be understood as a condensed reflection of national ways of thinking. At the same time, proverbs are not fixed or isolated linguistic relics. Their meanings, functions, and patterns of use continue to change under the influence of social transformation, globalization, and digital communication.

In the contemporary world, intercultural communication has become increasingly frequent, while differences in the understanding of marriage and family often lead to difficulties in translation, value interpretation, and cross-cultural interaction. Against this background, a comparative study of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs makes it possible to examine more closely how language reflects cognitive patterns and cultural meanings. Such a study helps reveal both the common features shared by different cultures and the distinctive conceptualizations shaped by particular historical and cultural traditions.

The relevance of the present research lies in its focus on marriage and family proverbs as culturally embedded linguistic units that reflect deep cognitive and ethnocultural structures.

A systematic cognitive and ethnocultural analysis of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between language, cognition, and culture. At the same time, the research addresses both theoretical demands within linguistics and practical needs in translation studies, intercultural communication, and cultural interpretation, which makes it particularly relevant in the context of contemporary scientific and social development.

The object of the research is the paremiological system of proverbs about marriage and family in the English and Chinese languages.

The subject of the research is the cultural value orientation and the evolution of proverbs about marriage and family in the English and Chinese languages.

The purpose of the research is to construct an integrated analytical model based on an analysis of the similarities and differences in the cognitive models and ethnocultural foundations of English and Chinese proverbs about marriage and family, and to identify their dynamic development within the framework of cognitive linguistics and ethnocultural studies.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

– to construct an integrated theoretical and methodological framework for the study of English and Chinese proverbs related to marriage and family by synthesizing approaches from cognitive linguistics and ethnocultural studies, and to determine their applicability to paremiological research;

– to examine the internal cognitive, cultural, and semantic organization of English and Chinese proverbs about marriage and family as an interconnected thematic system, and to determine the interaction between conceptual structures, cultural models, and semantic relations throughout the entire life cycle;

– to conduct a systematic comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs in order to reveal the underlying cognitive models and culturally conditioned value orientations reflected in their metaphorical and semantic patterns;

– to investigate the dynamic evolution and contemporary transformation of marriage and family proverbs under conditions of globalization, digital communication, and generational change, including the emergence of digital proverbs and anti-proverb forms;

– to clarify the social-cognitive functions of marriage and family proverbs as linguistic mechanisms for transmitting cultural norms, shaping collective memory, regulating social expectations, and mediating between traditional and contemporary social values.

Methods of the research. The research adopts a qualitative comparative approach combined with corpus-based verification. The analytical procedure follows the sequence of proverb screening, collection, classification, comparative analysis, and interpretation.

To ensure the authenticity and representativeness of the proverb data, proverbs that are highly dialect-specific or semantically ambiguous are excluded. Selection is guided by criteria of semantic clarity, cultural representativeness, and relevance to marriage and family themes. During the classification process, the principle of core semantic focus is applied. Proverbs centered on marital relationships are categorized as marriage proverbs, while those focusing on the family as a social unit and its functions are classified as family proverbs.

For analytical purposes, a framework based on "semantic theme → conceptual metaphor → cultural value orientation" is employed. Proverbs are first grouped into semantic fields such as the purpose of marriage, mate selection, family role division, and parent-child relations. Conceptual metaphor analysis is then used to identify cognitive models. Finally, ethnocultural analysis is applied to interpret the underlying cultural value systems reflected in these patterns.

Corpus-based searches were further employed to verify actual usage frequency, contextual distribution, and temporal vitality, thereby avoiding the limitations of relying exclusively on lexicographic sources.

In addition, the research includes a supplementary observation of how artificial intelligence systems and large language models interpret proverbial metaphors and culturally embedded meanings. This component serves to illustrate methodological

challenges in processing figurative and culture-dependent language.

Sources of the research. The empirical basis of this research consists of proverb data collected from authoritative dictionaries, language corpora, and contemporary digital platforms. English marriage and family proverbs were primarily drawn from *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs, The Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs, Cassell's Dictionary of Proverbs,* and *The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs,* supplemented by corpus-based retrieval from *the British National Corpus (BNC)* and *the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).* Chinese proverb data were collected from *中国谚语大辞典 (Zhongguo Yanyu Da Cidian), 中华谚语大词典 (Zhonghua Yanyu Da Cidian), 汉语谚语词典 (Hanyu Yanyu Cidian), and 谚海 (Yanhai),* with additional verification conducted through the *Peking University Chinese Corpus (CCL)* and the *Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus Center (BCC).*

To reflect both traditional usage and contemporary developments, the research corpus comprises over 600 English and Chinese proverbs related to marriage and family. Among them, approximately 500 proverb instances were obtained from dictionaries and reference corpora, while more than 100 digital proverbs collected from online platforms such as Weibo, Zhihu, Twitter, and Instagram. These digital proverbs include both newly emerging expressions and modified proverb forms, often referred to as anti-proverbs, which reflect ongoing processes of linguistic innovation under conditions of digital communication.

The theoretical and methodological framework of the research is grounded in foundational and contemporary works by international and Kazakhstani scholars in the fields of cognitive linguistics, ethnocultural studies, and paremiology. The cognitive linguistic approach is based on the works of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, G. Fauconnier and M. Turner, E. Rosch, A. Wierzbicka, C. J. Fillmore, L. W. Barsalou, and G. L. Murphy, as well as studies on cognition across cultures represented in the works of E. T. Hall, R. E. Nisbett, K. Peng, I. Choi, A. Norenzayan, L. Boroditsky, and G. Hofstede. The ethnocultural perspective of this study is based on the ideas of W. von Humboldt, E. Sapir, V. I. Karasik, V. A. Maslova, A. Qaydar, N. Ualy, Z. Q. Akhmetzhanova, R. Syzdyq, N. M. Zhanpeisova, A. Imanqul, and B. Smaqambet, who regard language as a reflection of the national worldview and as a carrier of cultural experience. This position is further supported by contemporary Kazakhstani paremiological studies, including the works of K. B. Duisenova, K. M. Zhampeiis, A. E. Sarbassova, E. V. Aleshinskaya, G. Omarbekova, F. Orazbayeva, E. Orazaliyeva, Z. Abdigapparova, G. Bekkozhanova, and R. Shakhanova. The paremiological framework draws on the works of A. Taylor, W. Mieder, R. P. Honeck, H. Hrisztova-Gotthardt, M. Varga, A. T. Litovkina, E. Davis, C. M. Danforth, and P. S. Dodds, in which proverbs are conceptualized as culturally marked units with important social functions and dynamic patterns of use in both traditional and contemporary contexts.

The theoretical and practical significance of the research. The research possesses both theoretical and practical significance. The theoretical significance. Firstly, by combining the dual perspectives of cognitive linguistics and ethnoculture, this research systematically reveals the cognitive models and cultural logics underlying English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs, thereby addressing the insufficient

comparative depth and theoretical integration in existing research.

Secondly, the research enriches and expands the theories and methodologies of cross-cultural proverb research, deepening the understanding of the complex interactions among language, cognition, and culture.

Finally, it provides empirical support and methodological references for the interdisciplinary integration of related fields (such as cognitive linguistics and cultural anthropology) in specific studies, while laying the theoretical groundwork for constructing a specialized corpus of marriage and family proverbs.

The practical significance. At the educational and practical level, it provides a systematic reference framework and deep cultural interpretation for language teaching, translation, and cross-cultural communication, thereby helping learners to understand conceptual differences, cultivate cultural sensitivity and critical thinking, and effectively enhance their cross-cultural competence.

At the socio-cultural level, the research findings help prevent misinterpretations and conflicts in cross-cultural communication, promote effective international cultural dissemination, and offer insights for examining the differences between traditional and modern values, as well as for advancing critical discourse on gender equality and family responsibilities.

At the academic and technological level, the research reveals the interactive relationship between cognition and cultural specificity in proverb formation. Its findings and relevant corpora can provide critical support for AI and LLMS in cross-cultural semantic understanding, while also serving as a typical case for further exploration of the interaction mechanisms between language and thought.

The scientific novelty of the research.

– the traditional approach, in which the concepts of “marriage” and “family” are examined separately, has been overcome, while the corresponding proverbs are presented as a unified and interconnected system of cultural and semantic relations covering the full life cycle of family relations. Previous studies have often examined marital relationships in isolation. The intrinsic logical connection between marriage and family is widely overlooked. Marriage can be regarded as the starting point of a family, and it also gives rise to subsequent multidimensional family relationships (such as parent-child relationships, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, etc.). Since both marriage and family proverbs are shaped by the same cultural background, this research treats themes such as mate selection, marriage relations, child-rearing, filial piety, and kinship in English and Chinese proverbs as an organic whole. The aim is to reveal the similarities and differences in cultural conceptions of family and marriage reflected in these proverbs, and to systematically examine how the two cultures use proverbs as a linguistic vehicle to conceptualize and interpret the complete life course, including the establishment of marriage, family construction, and intergenerational inheritance.

– the research is based on a dynamic approach that includes both traditional and modern forms of proverbs, as well as their functioning in digital communication, including social media, which makes it possible to reveal their evolutionary character. It systematically reveals the dynamic evolution of English and Chinese proverbs on marriage and family, thereby addressing the frequent disconnection between diachronic

and synchronic dimensions in previous research, as well as the insufficient attention paid to emerging discursive fields such as social media.

– from a methodological perspective, the study proposes a two-dimensional analytical model integrating cognitive linguistics and ethnocultural studies to identify metaphorical mechanisms, value orientations, and cultural norms reflected in English and Chinese proverbs. This methodological framework adopts a dual-dimensional approach to examining the conceptualization of marriage and family in English and Chinese proverbs and to revealing how these expressions reflect distinctive cultural features and social values. It systematically investigates the internal mechanisms and cultural divergences embedded in the proverb systems of the two languages. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the analysis focuses on linguistic expressions in proverbs, with particular attention to metaphorical mechanisms and cognitive salience, thereby addressing how marriage and family are conceptualized through cognition. From the perspective of ethnocultural studies, the analysis explores the values, social norms, and religious ethics underlying proverbs, thereby explaining why different cultures understand and express marriage and family in distinct ways. In other words, cognitive linguistics reveals how proverbs encode these concepts at the level of thought, whereas ethnocultural studies explain the sociocultural roots underlying such expressions. The integration of these two perspectives forms a practical and effective analytical approach.

– the results of the study have practical significance for the development of artificial intelligence systems and large language models, especially in the interpretation of metaphors, culturally conditioned expressions, and intercultural semantic processing. By examining the ethnocultural and cognitive structures of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs, this research provides insights relevant to the development of artificial intelligence and large language models. Proverbs are characterized by dense metaphorical content, strong cultural associations, and a high degree of context dependence, which makes them valuable material for evaluating the cultural-semantic capabilities of language models. The study identifies several limitations in current systems, including a tendency toward literal rendering, insufficient cultural grounding, difficulty in interpreting context-dependent meanings, challenges in handling polysemy, and uncertainty when processing new digital expressions. These findings demonstrate that the understanding of proverbs requires both cultural knowledge and cognitive modeling, and they provide guidance for improving cultural adaptability, metaphor interpretation, and cross-cultural communication in future language technologies.

The following key propositions are submitted for defense:

– the integrated linguo-cognitive and ethnocultural approach constitutes an effective theoretical and methodological foundation for the systematic study of English and Chinese proverbs related to the themes of marriage and family. By synthesizing cognitive linguistics and ethnocultural studies, the present research demonstrates that proverbs should be regarded not merely as fixed linguistic units, but as cognitive constructions deeply rooted in culture that encode collective experience, value systems, and socially shared models of conceptualization.

– English and Chinese proverbs about marriage and family form an interconnected

system of cognitive, cultural, and semantic relations, rather than two isolated thematic areas. Considering marriage and family proverbs as a continuous and interactive whole makes it possible to reveal how conceptual structures, cultural models, and semantic relations jointly shape meaning throughout the entire life cycle, including partner selection, marital relations, family formation, child-rearing, and the ethical norms of kinship relations.

– the similarities and differences between English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs represent systematic projections of underlying cognitive models and culturally conditioned value orientations rather than random linguistic variation. While certain metaphorical patterns reflect universal human cognitive experience, English proverbs tend to foreground individual choice, contractual relations, and personal responsibility, whereas Chinese proverbs emphasize collectivism, familial hierarchy, moral obligation, and intergenerational continuity, thereby reflecting broader contrasts in cognitive-cultural orientations.

– marriage and family proverbs are dynamically evolving linguistic and cultural units whose meanings, structures, and communicative functions continuously adapt to social transformation. Under the conditions of globalization, digital communication, and generational change, contemporary digital proverbs and modified forms (anti-proverbs) demonstrate that paremiological expressions remain active sites of cultural cognition, reinterpretation, and value negotiation, thus bridging the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of proverb research.

– marriage and family proverbs function as social-cognitive mechanisms that transmit cultural norms, shape collective memory, regulate social expectations, and mediate between traditional value systems and contemporary social concepts. Their continued use in both conventional and digital discourse confirms their role as dynamic linguistic instruments through which societies preserve, negotiate, and reconstruct cultural identities and social values.

Research approbation. The main provisions and results of the research have been published in 5 scientific articles, of which 3 articles were published in Scopus-indexed journals, and 2 articles were published in journals approved by the Committee for Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (CQASHE).

Articles published in Scopus-indexed journals:

1) Lan A., Shiguo S. Ethnocultural analysis of the concepts 'marriage' and 'family' in paremiology of Chinese language. Eurasian journal of applied linguistics. Hacettepe University Press,10(1), February, 2024.

2) An L. The persistent influence of “Zhong Yong” philosophy on Chinese thinking patterns: an analysis based on Chinese Chengyu and proverbs. Forum for Linguistic Studies. Academic Publishing, 26 February, 2025.

3) Lan A., Shiguo S., Bekkozhanova C., Shengelbayeva N. and Omarbekova G. Ethno-cultural aspects of marriage proverbs in Chinese and English. Global Chinese. De Gruyter Brills, 25 March, 2025.

Articles published in CQASHE-approved journals:

1） Lan A., and Shiguo S. An analysis of marriage and love concepts in English proverbs. Bulletin of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Philology

series, 147(2), 2024.

2）Lan A. Research on Confucianism reflected in Chinese marriage proverbs. Bulletin. Of Ablai Khan University: Philological sciences series .75(4),2024.

Volume and structure of the dissertation. The dissertation consists of a list of definitions, a list of abbreviations, an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, and a list of references.

1 COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AS THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND CHINESE PROVERBS

1.1 Conceptual research from the perspective of cognitive linguistics

The "Concept", as the basic unit of the human cognitive system, occupies a central place in cognitive linguistics and psychological research. It is defined as a mental representation of the world that underlies our understanding, categorization, and communication of experiences [1]. The cognitive linguistics perspective emphasize that concepts are formed based on body experience and social interaction [2].

In general semantic and psychological research, concepts are widely regarded as possessing the fundamental attributes of abstraction and generalization. They represent abstractions derived from concrete experiences and inductive summaries of common features shared by a class of entities.

Within the cognitive linguistics framework, researches further emphasize the embodiment, metaphoricity and metonymicity, prototypicality, categorization and hierarchy, fuzziness, cultural relativity, and dynamism of concepts. These characteristics transcend the traditional "classical categorization" model, offering a more flexible perspective for analyzing conceptualization processes in language.

From a cognitive linguistics viewpoint, these features of concepts can be understood as follows:

Embodiment refers to the fact that concepts are rooted in human bodily experience and sensorimotor patterns. The reason why we are able to understand abstract concepts is that they originate from the projection of bodily experience.

Metaphoricity and metonymicity mean that abstract concepts are often understood through concrete experiences, namely conceptual metaphors. In language, it is also common to find the metonymic mechanism of using a part to represent the whole.

Prototypicality means that the internal structure of concepts shows a center – periphery prototype effect. Human conceptual categories are not defined by strict necessary and sufficient conditions, but are organized around certain most typical and representative members (the prototypes).

Categorization refers to the cognitive activity by which human beings classify complex experiences, thereby simplifying the world and making thinking more economical. Hierarchy emphasizes that these categories do not exist in isolation, but are organized into superordinate, basic, and subordinate levels. Categorization reveals the classificatory process in the formation of concepts, whereas hierarchy reflects the internal organization of categories. The two are interconnected but distinct.

Fuzziness means that the boundaries of concepts are often unclear, and there may be overlap between different concepts. Context can influence their range of reference.

Cultural Relativity means that the content and structure of concepts may vary across cultures, and the same concept may have different connotations and evaluations in different cultural contexts.

Dynamism means that concepts are not fixed but change with the development of history, society, and culture.

Because of these characteristics, concepts perform multiple functions in cognition, including categorization, reasoning, communication, memory, prediction, and

decision-making. Categorization allows human beings to organize the complexity of experience into meaningful groups and to perceive order in social life. In the context of family relations, the English proverb "Like father, like son" and the Chinese *"龙生龙，凤生凤"* (Dragons beget dragons; phoenixes beget phoenixes) both illustrate how parent–child relations are classified and conceptualized through the idea of inherited qualities. Such categorization enables individuals to recognize social roles and interpret interpersonal relations with efficiency.

Reasoning provides the basis for logical judgment and problem-solving. Many proverbs concerning marriage operate as condensed causal reasoning. The Chinese proverb *"贫贱夫妻百事哀"* (For a couple in poverty, every matter brings sorrow) highlights the causal link between poverty and marital discord, while the English proverb "When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window" conveys the same inference in a more metaphorical form. Proverbs of this type help people to project potential outcomes from existing experience.

Communication demonstrates how concepts enable the concise transmission of complex social values. Proverbs such as the English "Blood is thicker than water" and the Chinese *"打虎还得亲兄弟"* (To fight a tiger, one needs one's brothers) both underline the priority of kinship ties, serving as shared cultural codes that facilitate understanding within a community. In cross-cultural settings, such proverbs also communicate the social importance attached to family solidarity.

Memory shows how concepts are reinforced through vivid imagery that preserves and recalls experience. The Chinese proverb *"慈母手中线，游子身上衣"* (A loving mother's thread makes the wanderer's clothes) employs the imagery of needle and thread to solidify the concept of maternal love in collective memory. Similarly, the English proverb "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" draws on the image of the cradle to emphasize the far-reaching influence of mothers, illustrating how concepts are anchored in cultural memory through metaphorical representation.

Prediction allows individuals to anticipate possible outcomes based on established conceptual patterns. Proverbs about child-rearing are especially illustrative. The English proverb "Spare the rod and spoil the child" warns that a lack of discipline will lead to spoiled children, while the Chinese *"棍棒底下出孝子"* (A filial son is raised under the rod) stresses that strict upbringing produces obedient and filial children. Both proverbs exemplify how concepts operate as predictive models, guiding expectations in family education.

Decision-making reveals how concepts provide frameworks for value judgments and practical choices. Proverbs concerning marriage often serve as normative guides. The Chinese proverb *"宁拆十座庙，不毁一桩婚"* (It is better to demolish ten temples than to break a single marriage) prioritizes the preservation of marriage as a social value, whereas the English proverb "Marry in haste, repent at leisure" warns individuals against impulsive decisions in choosing a spouse. Although they emphasize different aspects, both proverbs demonstrate how concepts frame human decision-making within specific cultural contexts.

Russian philosopher С. А. Аскольдов was the first to talk about concepts in the article "Концепт и слово" [3, p.29], which was published in 1928, and the article

attracted widespread attention from scholars in various fields, but due to historical limitations, the study of concepts did not get its due development at that time. In the middle and late 20th century, cognitive linguistics and cultural linguistics appeared and developed rapidly. Because of its prominent role in the study of thought, language, and culture, "Concept" is regarded as a basic research category by both schools.

Cognitive linguistics holds that the formation of concepts goes through several stages:

1. Abstraction: extracting common features from concrete experiences;
2. Categorization: grouping similar entities into the same class;
3. Conceptual integration: integrating information from different conceptual domains to form new concepts [4];
4. Social learning: acquiring concepts through linguistic and cultural transmission;
5. Experiential learning: forming concepts through direct experience and interaction.

Concepts play a great role in the study of proverbs. Cultural mapping, conceptual metaphors, cross-cultural comparisons, conceptual evolution, and categorization analyses embodied in proverbs are all related to concepts. Take "the uncertainty of marriage" as an example, and we can clearly see the process of concept formation. People first abstract common characteristics from specific marital experiences, recognizing that the outcomes of marriage are often unpredictable; this experience is further categorized into the cognitive pattern that "marriage is unpredictable," as reflected in the Chinese proverb *"夫妻本是同林鸟，大难临头各自飞"* (Husband and wife are like birds in the same woods; when disaster strikes, each flies away separately). Subsequently, different conceptual domains are integrated, such as linking "marriage" with 'gambling' or "lottery," forming the English proverb "Marriage is a lottery" as a metaphor. Meanwhile, this understanding is reinforced and transmitted through social learning, reflected in the advice of elders or cultural customs, such as the Chinese proverb "Marriage is a major matter; it should not be taken lightly" Finally, personal direct experience or observation of others' experiences further verify and internalize this concept. A classic example is the English proverb "Marry in haste, repent at leisure," which summarizes the costs of a hasty marriage through experiential learning. Thus, the concept of "the uncertainty of marriage" is gradually formed and solidified through the interactive process of abstraction, categorization, conceptual integration, social learning, and experiential learning.

Rosch's prototype theory proposed that concepts are organized around their most typical members (prototypes), which provides an important perspective for understanding conceptual structures across different cultures [5, p.193]. Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory reveals how abstract concepts could be understood through concrete conceptual domains, which is particularly important for analyzing metaphorical expressions in proverbs [2]. The conceptual integration theory developed by Fauconnier and Turner further explains the process of forming new concepts and emphasizes the dynamic nature of conceptual structures [4]. In cross-cultural studies, Wierzbicka pointed out the cultural relativity of concepts, offering a theoretical foundation for comparing conceptualizations across languages [6]. The

theory of embodied cognition stresses that concepts are rooted in bodily experience and sensorimotor patterns, which helps explain certain universal features of concepts across cultures [7, p.617]. In proverb studies, these theories can be applied to analyze how proverbs reflect the conceptual structures of specific cultures, how metaphors are employed to construct the concepts of "marriage" and "family," to compare similarities and differences in these concepts across cultures, and to trace their historical transformations.

In summary, in this subchapter we have conducted a detailed examination of the notion of "concept" as defined in cognitive linguistics and demonstrated its role as the fundamental unit through which humans perceive, categorize, and interpret the world. We discussed essential cognitive characteristics – including embodiment, metaphoricity and metonymicity, prototypicality, categorization and hierarchical structure, fuzziness, cultural relativity, and conceptual dynamism and illustrated these features through English and Chinese proverbs such as "Like father, like son," "When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window" and *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity). These examples allowed us to show how concepts function in classification, reasoning, communication, memory, prediction, and decision-making within culturally grounded contexts. We also reviewed key theoretical contributions from Askoldov, Rosch, Lakoff and Johnson, Fauconnier and Turner, and Wierzbicka, highlighting their relevance for understanding metaphorical mapping and cultural conceptualization.

By presenting the formation process of the concept of "marital uncertainty" through abstraction, categorization, conceptual integration, social learning, and experiential learning, we further demonstrated that conceptual structures are dynamic and culturally embedded. This subchapter thus provides the theoretical basis for our subsequent analysis of how English and Chinese proverbs construct and convey the concepts of marriage and family.

In traditional concepts, marriage is a social union or legal bond between persons who have acquired kinship ties. Usually, marriage is the foundation and basis for the formation of a family. Marriage is also seen as a social institution and an emotional bond between individuals. All human cultures have some forms of marriage. And family is a unit of common life formed on the basis of relationships such as marriage, blood, adoption, cohabitation and living together.

Within the framework of cognitive linguistics, the concepts of marriage and family transcend traditional sociological or legal boundaries and focus on how these concepts are constructed and understood in human cognition. Cognitive linguistics recognizes that language not only reflects the way we think, but also shapes the way we understand the world. Therefore, the definition of marriage and family as complex social concepts is deeply rooted in our cognitive processes and cultural experiences.

Frame semantics offers a fresh perspective for understanding the concepts of marriage and family [8, p.137]. This theory suggests that the meaning of words can only be fully understood within specific conceptual frames. This perspective is particularly crucial for analyzing proverbs about marriage and family, as these proverbs often embody rich cultural background knowledge. For instance, comprehending the

Chinese proverb *"一个巴掌拍不响"* (One hand alone cannot clap) requires activating the conceptual framework of harmony and complementarity within traditional Chinese marriage views. The frame semantics perspective emphasizes that marriage and family are complex cognitive frameworks encompassing various roles (such as spouse, parent, child), relationships, responsibilities, and expectations. These elements may be arranged and weighted differently across cultures, forming distinct cultural models.

Conceptual metaphor theory serves as the most crucial support for this study. This theory posits that Metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of mind, one that allows us to use what we know about our physical and social experience to provide understanding of countless other subjects [2, p.4]. By analyzing conceptual metaphors in proverbs about marriage and family, we can gain deeper insights into how different cultures perceive these social institutions. From the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory, we often understand marriage and family through experiences in other domains, such as "marriage is a journey" or "family is a safe haven" These metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions; they reflect people's deep cognitive understanding of these relationships.

Furthermore, prototype theory and categorization theory provide tools for understanding the fuzziness and cultural relativity of marriage and family concepts [5, p.233]. These theories help explain why certain forms of marriage or family are considered typical in one culture but may be regarded as marginal in another. Prototype theory suggests that while people may hold prototypical concepts of an "ideal" marriage or family, these concepts actually form a radial category centered around a prototype, encompassing diverse forms and interpretations. Categorization theory reminds us that as social categories, the boundaries of marriage and family are both fuzzy and continuously adjusted with social change.

Specifically, the concepts of marriage and family exhibit the following characteristics from a cognitive linguistics perspective:

Embodiment: Understanding of marriage and family derives from human bodily experience and social practice. Marriage is often metaphorically framed as a journey or contract. E.g., English proverb "Marry in haste, repent at leisure", while family is understood through "container" schemas. E.g., "Every man's home is his castle."

Metaphoricity and metonymicity: Metaphoricity refers to the concepts of marriage and family being understood through concrete experiences, that is, conceptual metaphor. For example, the family is metaphorically likened to a vessel. E g., "Every man's home is his castle", and parent-child relationships can be expressed through the imagery of blood ties. E.g., "Blood is thicker than water." There is also a smaller portion of marriage and family concepts understood through conceptual metonymy, where a part represents the whole. For example, "Keep the pot boiling" uses "pot" to symbolize sustaining the family livelihood; "Many mouths to feed" uses "mouths" to represent children needing nurturing.

Prototypicality: The prototype of marriage is monogamy, with marginal forms including common-law marriages or polygamy. The family in English-speaking cultures is prototypically the nuclear family, whereas in Chinese-speaking cultures it is typically the large extended family, e.g., *"四世同堂"* (Four generations under one

roof).

Categorization and Hierarchy: Both marriage and family possess hierarchical categorical structures. Categorization manifests as humans classifying different forms of marriage and family into subcategories within a shared cognitive framework, thereby simplifying and organizing complex social experiences. Hierarchy further reveals the internal structure among these categories, manifesting as multi-level divisions of superordinate-basic-subordinate.

For instance, marriage as a superordinate category can be subdivided into subordinate forms like arranged marriages, free marriages, and common-law marriages; the family as a superordinate category has the nuclear family as its basic level, with subordinate forms including single-parent families and blended families and so on. Proverbs as the linguistic embodiment of cultural experience vividly reflect this categorization and hierarchical structure.

Fuzziness: Both the conceptual boundaries of marriage and family are not fixed. Marriage can be defined as a legal contract, a religious ceremony, or a factual union; family can be defined as a blood-related community, an emotional belonging, or a shared residence.

Cultural Relativity: The content and structure of marriage and family concepts may vary across cultures. For instance, the Chinese proverb *"父母之命，媒妁之言"* (The rule for marriage was arrangement by parents and introduction by a matchmaker) emphasizes the familial and ethical background of marriage, while the English proverb "Happy wife, happy life" highlights harmony between spouses and individual happiness.

Dynamism: Concepts of marriage and family will change with social development. For instance, the English proverb "Children should be seen and not heard" is no longer a widely accepted value in contemporary times; similarly, the Chinese proverb *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog) often has a critical meaning in modern Chinese.

In cognitive linguistics, "marriage" and "family" are understood as conceptual outcomes of the human mind's processing of marriage and family experiences. This understanding emphasizes that neither is a fixed logical definition, but rather dynamic mental representations co-constructed by bodily experience, cultural patterns, and social interactions.

Marriage is not only a legal or religious institution but also an experiential cognition of human partnership; family is not only a collection of blood ties and cohabitation but an integrated understanding of kinship, responsibility, and belonging. Proverbs are the linguistic form of this conceptualization process, crystallizing experience in a highly condensed form that reflects universal cognitive patterns and cultural variations in human perceptions of marriage and family.

In summary, within cognitive linguistics, "marriage" and "family" are not fixed concepts but embodied, metaphorical and metonymic, prototypical, categorized and hierarchical, fuzzy, culturally embodied, and dynamically evolving cognitive constructs. Proverbs are a vivid embodiment of these characteristics as linguistic expressions of cultural experience.

1.2 The interaction of language, culture, and cognition

According to the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis [9], language plays a significant role in shaping human cognition and perception of the world. Early formulations of this hypothesis, particularly in its strong deterministic version, suggested that linguistic structures strictly determine patterns of thought. However, such a rigid interpretation has been largely rejected in contemporary linguistic and cognitive research. Modern scholars generally support a weaker version of linguistic relativity, which holds that language does not directly determine thought but influences habitual ways of attending to, categorizing, and interpreting experience.

From this weaker relativist perspective, language provides speakers with a set of habitual cognitive frameworks. These frameworks guide perception, memory, and interpretation, especially in domains that are culturally salient and frequently verbalized. Language thus functions as a cognitive filter rather than a cognitive prison. It channels attention toward certain distinctions while leaving others less marked, thereby shaping culturally preferred modes of conceptualization without eliminating alternative ways of thinking.

This view aligns closely with the core assumptions of cognitive linguistics, which regards language, culture, and cognition as mutually interacting components of a unified cognitive system. Cognitive linguistics emphasizes that linguistic meaning is grounded in embodied experience and shaped by recurrent patterns of interaction within a cultural environment. Linguistic structures are therefore not arbitrary but reflect culturally mediated conceptualizations that develop over time through social practice and collective experience.

Importantly, the interaction between language, culture, and cognition should not be understood as a one-directional or linear causal relationship. Instead, it constitutes a dynamic and reciprocal process. Cultural practices influence linguistic usage, linguistic patterns reinforce shared cognitive habits, and cognitive structures, in turn, shape how language is produced and interpreted. This dynamic interaction allows for both cross-cultural diversity and internal variation within languages, avoiding the limitations of deterministic explanations. To make the interaction among language, culture, and cognition analytically observable, this study treats it as a set of recurring linguistic patterns that can be systematically described and compared. In practice, the interaction is reflected in at least four concrete dimensions.

First, categorization: languages may divide the same social domain into different lexical categories, making some distinctions explicit and leaving others implicit. Second, salience: cultures highlight different aspects of the same experience, which becomes visible in frequent evaluative words, typical metaphors, and preferred narrative framing. Third, normativity: some linguistic units do not merely describe reality but implicitly prescribe “proper” behavior, especially in stable units such as kinship terms and proverbs. Fourth, conventionalization and stability: culturally important meanings tend to be stored in fixed expressions, which preserve collective experience over time and therefore provide reliable material for cross-cultural analysis.

Based on these dimensions, the research connects the general theory of interaction to concrete linguistic evidence. Proverbs are used as a broad entry point because they encode cultural evaluations, moral expectations, and shared cognitive models in a

condensed form. In this way, the interaction among language, culture, and cognition is examined not as an abstract claim, but as a testable pattern in actual linguistic data.

While the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis provides an important theoretical point of departure for understanding linguistic relativity, the philosophical foundations of this interactional view can be traced back to the linguistic thought of Wilhelm von Humboldt. Long before the emergence of modern linguistics, Humboldt proposed that language should not be regarded as a static product (ergon), but as an ongoing creative activity (energeia). In his view, language does not merely express pre-existing ideas; rather, it actively participates in the formation and development of human thought.

Humboldt argued that each language embodies a specific way of viewing and interpreting the world, which he described as Weltansicht (worldview) [10]. This worldview is not simply reflected in vocabulary, but is deeply embedded in the structural and semantic organization of language. As a result, speakers of different languages do not merely describe the same reality using different linguistic forms; instead, they conceptualize reality through culturally shaped linguistic frameworks that reflect distinct historical experiences, value systems, and modes of cognition.

Humboldt's theory highlights the inseparable connection between language and national culture. Language functions as a mediating force between individual cognition and collective cultural knowledge, shaping how experience is conceptualized and communicated. This idea provides a philosophical foundation for the cognitive linguistic claim that meaning arises from the interaction between linguistic form, conceptual structure, and cultural experience.

From this perspective, linguistic differences across languages correspond to differences in cognitive orientation and social perception. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a formative force that organizes experience and stabilizes culturally shared patterns of thought. Humboldt's dynamic conception of language thus anticipates key insights of modern cognitive linguistics and supports the view that language, culture, and cognition form an integrated and evolving system.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant for the study of culturally stable linguistic units, such as kinship terms and proverbs. These units tend to preserve long-term cultural experience and collectively shared cognitive models. As condensed expressions of social norms, moral evaluations, and value judgments, they provide valuable material for examining how culturally embedded cognitive patterns are encoded and transmitted through language.

Language is a carrier of culture, carrying the history, values and social norms of a nation, and at the same time reflecting and influencing the way human beings perceive. Culture and cognition profoundly shape language expressions. For example, in Chinese culture, which emphasizes hierarchical order and social harmony, the system of kinship titles is extremely complex, and the richness of kinship titles in the Chinese language reflect the importance Chinese culture attaches to family relationships. As a highly conventionalized lexical system, kinship terms encode socially salient distinctions related to family structure, hierarchy, and interpersonal relations. These terms are not merely referential labels, but reflect culturally specific cognitive models of social organization.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, kinship terms function as conceptual

categories that organize social experience. Their semantic structure is shaped by culturally dominant values, such as hierarchy, seniority, lineage, and social obligation. Because family relations constitute a fundamental social domain, the linguistic encoding of kinship provides particularly clear evidence of how language participates in the construction and transmission of culturally grounded patterns of thought.

Humboldt's notion of Weltansicht is especially relevant in this context. If each language embodies a distinct worldview, then differences in kinship terminology across languages can be understood as manifestations of different culturally conditioned ways of conceptualizing family relations. The comparison of kinship systems therefore allows us to observe how linguistic structures reflect deeper cognitive and cultural orientations within a speech community.

In this regard, English and Chinese offer a highly illustrative contrast. While both languages refer to similar social relations within the family, they differ significantly in how these relations are linguistically categorized and differentiated. The English kinship system tends to employ relatively broad and abstract terms, whereas the Chinese system displays a high degree of semantic specificity, encoding multiple social parameters within individual lexical items.

This contrast can be clearly observed in the case of the English term uncle and its multiple Chinese equivalents. The analysis of this term provides a concrete example of how culturally embedded cognitive models shape linguistic categorization. By examining how a single English kinship term corresponds to a complex network of differentiated Chinese kinship expressions, it becomes possible to demonstrate how language, culture, and cognition interact in the structuring of social knowledge.

In English, "uncle" is a relatively broad title, usually referring to a parent's brother or a sister's husband. The term does not distinguish between the brothers of one's father or mother; the relationship is typically inferred from context. Therefore, the use of "uncle" in English is more ambiguous than the distinctions made in Chinese.

In Chinese, "uncle" may correspond to a number of titles, such as *"伯"* (Father's older brother), *"叔"* (Father's younger brother), *"舅"* (Mother's brother), *"姑父"* (Father's sister's husband)，*"姨父"* (Mother's sister's husband). *"伯"* is further divided into *"大伯"* (Father's first elder brother), *"二伯"* (Father's second elder brother) ... ; *"叔"* is further divided into *"二叔"* (Father's younger brother, ranked 2nd in the family) *"三叔"* (Father's younger brother, ranked 3rd in the family) ...； *"舅"* is further divided into *"大舅"* (Mother's first brother), *"二舅"* (Mother's second brother) ...; *"姑父"* is further divided into *"大姑父"* (Father's first sister's husband), *"二姑父"* (Father's second sister's husband) ...; *"姨父"* is further divided into *"大姨夫"* (Mother's first sister's husband), *"二姨夫"* (Mother's second sister's husband) ... "Uncle" can also be translated as *"叔叔"* when referring to non-relatives of similar age to one's parents.

Each kinship term precisely reflects the complex factors of generation, age, and degree of closeness within family relations. Such linguistic distinctions not only demonstrate the importance attached to family ties in Chinese culture, but also reveal the cultural need to accurately define individual roles in social interaction. By contrast,

the relatively general kinship terms in English may reflect a more simplified cognitive conception of family in Western culture.

The comparison of the meanings corresponding to the term “uncle” in English and Chinese see Figure 1.

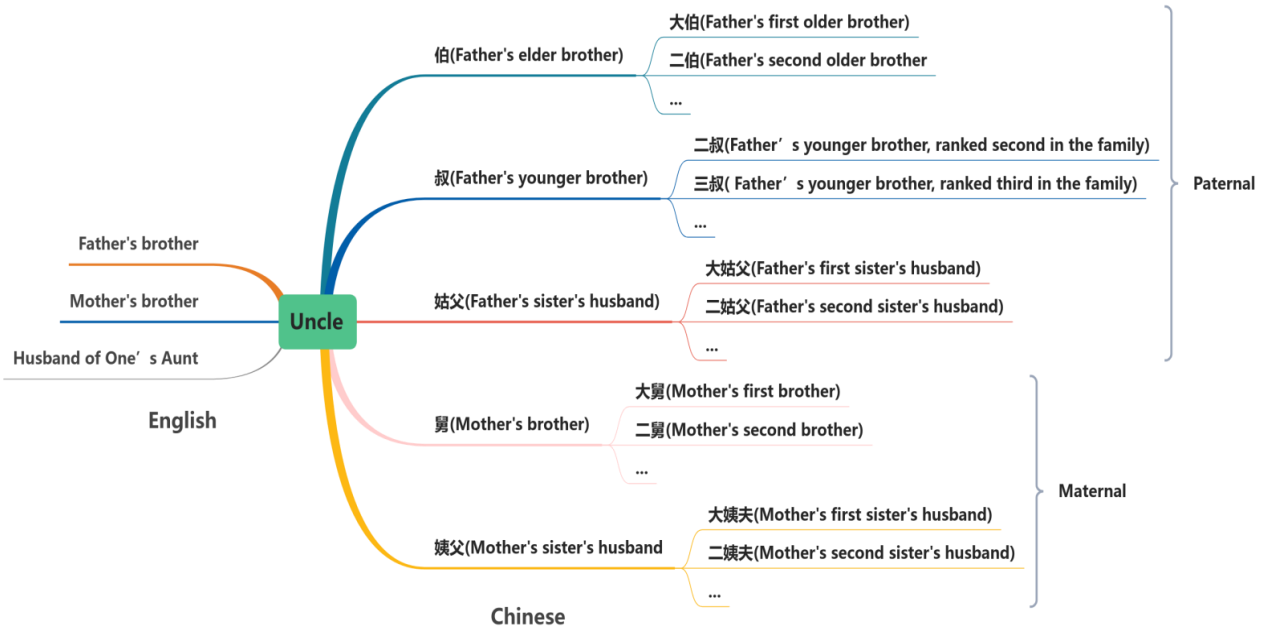


Figure 1. Semantic mapping of “uncle” in English and its multiple Chinese equivalents

As we see in Figure 1, the English word “uncle” covers a wide range of family relations. It refers to a father’s brother, a mother’s brother and the husbands of aunts. English does not mark differences between paternal and maternal lines, nor does it indicate age order or family ranking. The meaning is usually determined through context. This makes the English system simple and easy to use, but also less precise.

The right side of the figure shows a very different situation in Chinese. Chinese kinship terms divide the same group of relatives into many separate titles. They depend on whether the relative belongs to the father’s side or the mother’s side, whether he is older or younger, and whether the relationship is by blood or by marriage. For example, the father’s older brother is *“伯”*, while the younger brother is *“叔”*. Each of these can be further marked by birth order, such as *“大伯”*, *“二伯”*, *“三叔”* and so on. The same pattern appears on the mother’s side, where *“舅”*, *“姨父”* and their ranked forms reflect fine distinctions within the family structure.

The figure makes these differences clear. In English, one term is used in many situations. In Chinese, different terms point to specific positions in the family. The Chinese system shows the cultural value placed on hierarchy, seniority and clearly defined social roles. The English system reflects a more general way of naming relatives and relies on shared background knowledge to fill in details.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, the contrast between the English term uncle and its multiple Chinese equivalents reflects different strategies of conceptual

categorization rather than merely lexical variation.

Kinship terms function as conceptual labels that encode culturally salient distinctions, and the degree of semantic differentiation within a kinship system reveals what kinds of social information are considered cognitively relevant in a given culture.

In English, the term uncle represents a relatively abstract and inclusive category. It groups several family relations under a single lexical item without marking distinctions such as paternal versus maternal lineage, relative age, or generational hierarchy.

This pattern suggests that, within the English-speaking cultural model, such distinctions are not consistently foregrounded in everyday cognition and communication. Instead, they are treated as secondary information that can be inferred from context if necessary. From a cognitive point of view, this reflects a tendency toward higher-level abstraction and category generalization in the conceptualization of family relations.

By contrast, the Chinese kinship system exhibits a high degree of semantic granularity. Each kinship term encodes multiple parameters simultaneously, including generation, relative age, lineal affiliation, and the distinction between blood and marital relations. This linguistic specificity indicates that these parameters are cognitively salient within the Chinese cultural model of family. The fine-grained differentiation among terms such as *“伯”, “叔”, “舅”, “姑父”*, and *“姨父”* reflects a conceptual framework in which family relations are understood as a structured hierarchy rather than a loosely defined network.

From the perspective of cultural cognition, this difference can be explained by the role of family as a fundamental social institution in Chinese culture. Confucian ethics emphasize hierarchical order, role-based obligations, and clearly defined interpersonal positions within the family. Language, in this context, functions as a cognitive tool that reinforces these distinctions by making them linguistically explicit and routinely accessible. The repeated use of precise kinship terms contributes to the stabilization of culturally shared cognitive models of social relations.

In contrast, the relative generality of the English term uncle aligns with a cultural orientation that places less emphasis on rigid familial hierarchy and more emphasis on interpersonal equality and individual autonomy. The absence of obligatory lexical distinctions allows speakers to focus on relational closeness rather than structural position. Cognitively, this results in a more flexible categorization of family relations, where fine distinctions are not encoded unless pragmatically required.

These differences become particularly salient in cross-cultural interpretation. For Chinese speakers, the English term uncle may appear vague or underspecified, while for English speakers, the Chinese kinship system may seem overly complex. Such reactions illustrate how language shapes habitual patterns of attention and expectation, guiding speakers toward different ways of organizing social knowledge.

Importantly, kinship terminology does not merely describe family relations; it also performs a normative function. In Chinese, the appropriate use of kinship terms signals respect, acknowledges hierarchy, and affirms social identity within the family structure. In English, social meaning is more often conveyed through contextual cues rather than

through lexical differentiation. This contrast further demonstrates that linguistic categories reflect culturally grounded cognitive priorities rather than universal conceptual structures.

The comparison of kinship terminology demonstrates a general principle: when a social domain is culturally important, languages tend to encode it in ways that reflect culturally preferred models of relationship, hierarchy, and obligation. Proverbs extend this principle from naming relations to evaluating relations.

Unlike kinship terms, which mainly categorize social roles, proverbs often contain implicit judgments and cultural "common sense" about what is desirable, acceptable, or problematic in social life. Therefore, moving from kinship terms to proverbs allows the analysis to shift from cultural categorization to cultural evaluation, while still operating within the same interactional framework of language, culture, and cognition.

In the same way, proverbs also reflect cognition, such as the Chinese proverb *"枪打出头鸟"* (The gun hits the bird that pokes its head out) which emphasizes keeping a low profile to avoid risks, while the English proverb "The squeaky wheel gets the grease" encourages individuals to express themselves in order to gain attention and resources, reflecting the English culture's respect for individualism.

Cognitive patterns likewise play a key role in the formation and development of language. Some studies have shown that speakers of different languages may have different perceptions of colors [11, p.411].

In Chinese, the color red symbolizes good fortune and celebration, as seen in expressions like *"红运当头"* (Red luck be upon you) and *"红包"* (Red envelopes: gift money given during festive occasions).

Conversely, in English culture, "in the red" means operating at a loss, while "red flag" symbolizes danger and warning.

This illustrates how different cultures recognize metaphorical patterns associated with colors. It also demonstrates how culture influences language and cognition, providing languages with rich systems of meaning and contextual knowledge. Cultural categories and prototypes shape conceptual divisions and lexical organization within language. Cultural contexts also determine the way language is used, including pragmatic rules and communicative strategies.

Pan Ziwen believes that many animal-related terms in English and Chinese proverbs also carry rich cultural connotations. However, due to differing cultural environments and traditions, the cultural meanings of animal vocabulary in English and Chinese inevitably vary [12, p.62]. Therefore, the relationship between language, culture, and cognition is not a one-way determinism but a dynamic, mutually shaping process. Language not only carries and reflects culture but also influences human thought patterns through its grammatical structures, lexical systems, and metaphorical patterns.

Culture shapes the expressive framework of language, while language in turn reinforces people's cognitive patterns, giving individuals from different cultural backgrounds unique ways of thinking when viewing the world.

The interactive relationship between language, culture, and cognition from a cognitive linguistics perspective is shown in Figure 2.

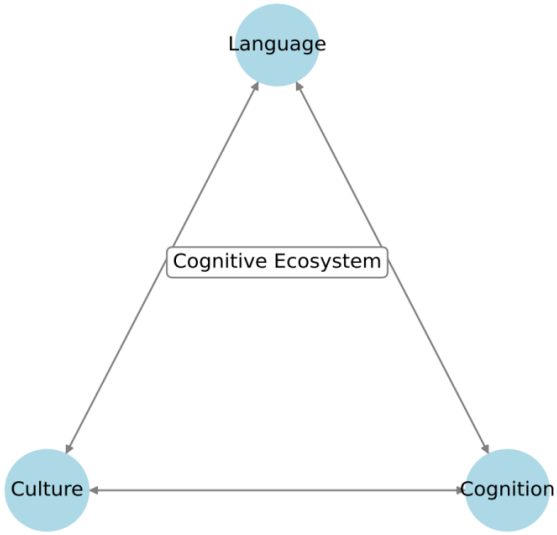


Figure 2. Interconnected Ecosystem of Language, Culture, and Cognition

As is illustrated in Figure 2, language, culture, and cognition function within a cognitive ecosystem in which each component interacts with and supports the others. Language encodes cultural knowledge and provides the structural and lexical resources through which individuals interpret experience. Culture offers the symbolic framework that shapes how linguistic meaning is produced, transmitted, and understood. Cognition serves as the mechanism through which speakers process linguistic input and apply culturally shared concepts in real-time understanding.

The triangular structure in the figure highlights the reciprocal and cyclical nature of these relationships. Changes in language can influence habitual ways of thinking, shifts in cultural practices can modify patterns of language use, and developments in cognitive habits can reshape how linguistic and cultural information is perceived. Meaning therefore emerges from the continuous coordination among these three dimensions rather than from any single factor in isolation.

In summary, in this subchapter we examined the reciprocal relationship among language, culture, and cognition, arguing that the three form an interconnected cognitive ecosystem rather than a one-directional causal chain. Drawing on the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis and key insights from cognitive linguistics, we showed that language both reflects and shapes culturally grounded patterns of thought, while cultural values and social structures guide the semantic, lexical, and pragmatic organization of language. Through examples such as the multiple Chinese equivalents of the English term uncle, the contrasting cultural metaphors associated with the color red, and proverb pairs like *“枪打出头鸟”* (The gun hits the bird that pokes its head out) and “The squeaky wheel gets the grease,” we demonstrated how linguistic distinctions and metaphorical patterns reveal the culturally specific ways in which different societies categorize experience and interpret social behavior. We also discussed how cognitive habits influence linguistic development, contributing to the emergence of prototype structures, metaphorical systems, and culturally salient semantic distinctions. The diagrams presented in this section further illustrated that

meaning is not produced by language alone but emerges from the dynamic interaction of cultural knowledge, linguistic resources, and cognitive processes. This understanding provides an essential theoretical basis for analyzing how English and Chinese proverbs encode distinct cultural schemas and cognitive patterns in their representations of marriage and family. While this section focuses on the general interaction of language, culture, and cognition, the following section will specifically address how these theoretical principles are operationalized in cognitive linguistic research on proverbs.

1.3 Cognitive linguistic theoretical foundations of research on English and Chinese proverbs

Cognitive linguistics is a field of study that explores the relationship between language and human cognitive abilities. It posits that language is not an independent system but is embedded within the human cognitive system, influenced by conceptualization, embodiment, and culture. Cognitive linguistics emerged in the 1980s as a challenge to traditional formalist linguistics (such as Chomsky's generative grammar). It argues that the structure of language arises from human thought patterns rather than being solely determined by grammatical rules.

Cognitive linguistics, as an important school of modern linguistics, provides strong theoretical support for this study. Its core proposition is that language research must be placed within the broad context of human cognition, emphasizing the close relationship between language, thought, and culture. Cognitive Linguistics initially begins by observing language and discovers the metaphorical nature of human thought. It then argues that metaphors in language reflect the metaphorical nature of the mind or thought. Then, through further study of language, it was found that the embodiment and imagination involved in conceptualization, categorization, and logical reasoning in thought led to the conclusion that the essence of the mind is embodied and imaginative.

The core stance of cognitive linguistics – the embodied nature of meaning and the metaphorical nature of thought directly inherits the ideas of embodied philosophy. "Embodied philosophy", also known as "Experientialism", provides cognitive linguistics with the philosophical premise that "human concepts are rooted in experience". Cognitive linguistics then operationalizes this into frameworks such as conceptual metaphor theory, image schema theory, categorization and prototype theory. Embodied philosophy asserts that: the mind is inherently embodied; thought is mostly unconscious; abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. It reminds us to focus on the foundations of bodily experience and social interaction, preventing cognitive studies of proverbs from remaining confined to the linguistic level.

This philosophy provides a theoretical basis for exploring the commonalities and differences in concepts of marriage and family across cultures. Our understanding of marriage and family is deeply rooted in bodily experience and social interaction. Fundamental human experiences such as intimate relationships, shared living, and raising children shape how we comprehend and express these concepts. For instance, the Chinese proverb *"贫贱夫妻百事哀"* (For a couple in poverty, every matter brings

sorrow) and the English proverb “When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window” are not merely linguistic phenomena, but reflections of shared human existential experiences.

The theories of CL provide profound perspectives for the study of English and Chinese proverbs, revealing the cognitive processes and cultural backgrounds behind the formation of proverbs. The main relevant theories include conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual metonymy theory, image schema theory, categorization and prototype theory, frame semantics, and cultural model theory. The CL theoretical foundations of English-Chinese proverb research are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Cognitive linguistic theories underpinning English and Chinese proverbs

Theory name	Core concepts	Relevance to proverbs
Conceptual metaphor theory	Abstract concepts are understood through concrete experiences	Proverbs frequently use metaphors to convey abstract ideas
Conceptual metonymy theory	Use of part for whole, cause for effect, etc.	Proverbs often use tangible elements to express abstract meanings
Image schema theory	Basic cognitive structures derived from bodily experience	Proverbs construct meaning through schemas such as path, container, balance
Categorization and prototype theory	Concepts are structured around prototypes; categories are fuzzy	Proverbs reflect prototypical social roles and behaviors
Frame semantics	Meaning is understood through background knowledge and cognitive frames	Proverbs activate knowledge of typical situations and experiences
Cultural model theory	Cultural patterns shape cognition and language use	Proverbs reflect culturally specific social beliefs and values

The most significant among these theories is conceptual metaphor theory. In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device but a cognitive mechanism. Metaphors help people understand abstract or complex concepts by relating them to familiar ones. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson introduced Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) in *Metaphors We Live By*, emphasizing the profound influence of metaphor on human thought and language [2].

Yao Yuqi believes that metaphors are extensively employed in both English and Chinese proverbs [13, p.119].

Metaphors have two fundamental characteristics: Metaphors are conceptual; Metaphors are based on “conceptual mapping”.

Conceptualization refers to the process by which humans organize, understand, and express experiences in the brain. In cognitive linguistics, conceptualization is a mental activity in which people transform information from the real world into concepts, and express these concepts through language. Metaphors exist not only in language but also in our ways of thinking and cognitive structures.

For example, "Time is money."

"That meeting was a waste of time."

"I'm investing my time in this project."

In these sentences, we can tell that this metaphor uses "money" (a quantifiable resource) to understand the abstract concept of "time" and uses economic vocabulary (such as "waste" and "invest") to discuss time.

Metaphor based on "Conceptual Mapping" refers to the core of metaphor is Conceptual Mapping, which means mapping from a "Source Domain" to a "Target Domain" The Source Domain refers to concrete, familiar concepts such as "journey" or "war". The target domain refers to abstract concepts that are difficult to grasp directly such as "life" or "love". For example, "Love is a journey."

"We are at a crossroads in our relationship."

"This relationship is going nowhere."

The metaphors embodied in these sentences employ "journey" (source domain) to help us understand "love" (target domain), metaphorically representing emotional changes as direction and progress along a journey.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson classified metaphors into three major categories: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor.

Structural metaphor refers to understanding one concept through the structure of another concrete concept. For example,"Time is money" → I spent a lot of time on this project.

"Argument is war" → He attacked my position in the debate.

Orientational Metaphor refers to understanding abstract concepts based on spatial relationships (up/down, front/back, large/small, etc.). For example,

"Good is up, bad is down" → "I am feeling up today!"/"His mood sank after hearing the news"

Ontological metaphor refers to treating abstract concepts as entities or containers to make them easier to understand. For example,

"Ideas are objects" → "I grasped the main idea"/ "He threw out a wild theory"

Metaphors not only reflect cognitive patterns but are also profoundly shaped by cultural factors. For instance, "Time is money" is a very common expression in Western culture, as Western capitalist societies emphasize the economic value of time. In contrast, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes time's fleeting nature, often expressed through the metaphor of flowing water. For example, *"逝者如斯夫，不舍昼夜"* (The passing of time is just like this stream, flowing on without pause, day and night). *论语 (The Analects)* This kind of cultural difference illustrates that conceptual metaphors in different cultures are influenced by history, society, religion, and values [14]. Kou Fuming believes that metaphorical thinking serves as the cognitive

foundation for the commonalities between Chinese and English proverbs, while cultural cognitive differences constitute the primary cause of their divergences [15, p.6].

The metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics has also influenced multiple linguistic research fields. For instance, in semantics, it is used to study how metaphors shape word meanings; in pragmatics, it is used to study how metaphors are understood in context; in sociolinguistics, it is used to study differences in metaphor usage among different social groups; and in intercultural studies, it is used to study metaphor differences in different languages.

Based on the research of Lakoff and Johnson, some cognitive linguists have further expanded the classification of metaphors and developed additional metaphor types, such as: Primary Metaphor, Image-Schema Metaphor, Multimodal Metaphor, Novel Metaphor, and Culture-specific Metaphors and so on. Although these subsequent metaphor classifications have enriched cognitive linguistics' understanding of metaphor, they exhibit a degree of overlap and intersection with conceptual metaphor theory. Some later metaphor theories evolved from those original classifications (e.g., primary metaphors have intersection with ontological metaphors, but primary metaphor research leans more toward psychology).

Different metaphor classifications emphasize different aspects. In this study, we adopt Lakoff and Johnson's foundational and widely applied three-category metaphor classification (structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor.) without subsequent expansions, to maintain theoretical coherence and analytical feasibility.

Conceptual metonymy theory holds that human cognition often relies on meaning associations within the same experiential domain, using a salient element in a situation or event to stand for a larger related concept. Unlike metaphor, which involves cross-domain mapping, metonymy operates within a single cognitive frame. Its mechanism is based on contiguity and salience, allowing speakers to access complex conceptual structures in an economical way. In natural language, this mechanism appears in patterns such as "tool for action," "body part for person," or "place for institution". Expressions like "the pen" referring to "the power of writing or ideas," or "hands" referring to "workers," illustrate this type of part–whole substitution within the same domain.

It should be noted that the proportion of metonymy in proverbs is much lower than that of metaphor. Proverbs generally rely on cross-domain analogy to condense experience, so metaphor plays the dominant role. However, a small number of proverbs do employ intra-domain substitution as their main mechanism, showing clear features of conceptual metonymy.

In English, the proverb "The pen is mightier than the sword" is widely cited as a typical case of metonymy. Here, "pen" does not refer to the physical writing instrument but stands for "the power of writing, thought, or argument," while "sword" refers to "violence or military force," reflecting a "tool → mode of action" mapping within the same domain. Another example is "Many hands make light work", in which "hands" does not mean the literal body part but stands for "workers", representing the classic "body part → person" substitution. In addition, "All roads lead to Rome" uses "Rome" not as a geographical city but as a metonymic reference to a centralized authority or

ultimate destination, functioning as a "place → institution/goal" mapping.

In Chinese, there are also a limited number of proverbs in which metonymy serves as the main mechanism. For example, in *"三个臭皮匠，赛过诸葛亮"* (Three cobblers with their wits combined equal Zhuge Liang), "cobblers" does not refer to actual craftsmen but uses the occupational label to stand for "ordinary people", showing a "profession → group ability" metonymy. These proverbs show that although metaphor dominates proverb structure, metonymy also plays a role in certain cases. Through substitution within the same cognitive domain, metonymy highlights key features to represent larger concepts, allowing proverbs to maintain clear cultural meanings in highly condensed forms.

Image schema theory holds that human understanding is grounded in recurrent sensorimotor structures that arise from bodily experience. These basic patterns – such as container, source-path-goal, balance, up-down, center-periphery and force – shape how individuals organize abstract concepts. Image schemas are pre-conceptual and bodily in origin, yet they function as fundamental cognitive structures that guide reasoning, categorization and meaning construction. For example, the source-path-goal schema reflects the embodied experience of movement from one location to another; it structures expressions such as "reach a conclusion" or "move forward with a plan," where action is conceptualized as motion along a path. The container schema, derived from bodily experience of interiority and boundary, underlies expressions such as "in trouble" or "out of danger".

Many conceptual metaphors are grounded in image schemas. Since image schemas originate from recurrent bodily experience, they provide the basic structural patterns upon which cross-domain metaphorical mappings are constructed. In this sense, image schemas function as the underlying cognitive foundation of numerous conceptual metaphors, supplying the spatial, dynamic and relational structures that metaphor later elaborates across conceptual domains.

Although image schemas are often associated with metaphor, they may also appear directly in proverbs, where bodily-based structural patterns give form to compressed social experience. In English, the proverb "Where there's a will, there's a way" reflects the source-path-goal schema: "way" is conceptualized as a path leading toward a desired goal, and the proverb frames problem-solving as movement through space. Similarly, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" is structured by the container schema, in which "basket" represents a bounded space that organizes the logic of risk distribution.

In Chinese proverbs, image schemas also appear in expressions that rely on embodied spatial and physical structures. The proverb *"千里之行，始于足下"* (A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step) reflects the source-path-goal schema by grounding the process of achieving a goal in the bodily experience of beginning a journey. *"宰相肚里能撑船"* (A statesman's belly can hold a ship) is structured by the container schema, conceptualizing a person's magnanimity or capacity as a vast vessel (the belly), whose interior space is large enough to accommodate a ship.

Compared with metaphor, proverbs that directly rely on image schemas are fewer

in number, yet they reveal how bodily-grounded cognitive patterns shape the formulation of traditional wisdom. These schemas provide a structural template that enables proverbs to present social experience in a concise, interpretable and experientially intuitive form.

Categorization and prototype theory include categorization theory and prototype theory. Categorization constitutes one of the most fundamental cognitive operations through which human beings organize, structure, and interpret the world. It refers to the mental process by which diverse objects, events, and experiences are grouped into meaningful classes based on perceived similarities, functional relations, or culturally shaped knowledge. Everyday cognition relies on such categorization: for example, people intuitively classify "sparrow," "robin," and "pigeon" as birds, even though some members (e.g., penguin, ostrich) occupy less typical positions. In natural language, the same mechanism explains why a sentence such as "He is reading Shakespeare" is readily understood as "reading works written by Shakespeare".

Within cognitive linguistics, categorization is therefore regarded as an embodied and experience-based activity grounded in perceptual salience, interactional patterns, and cultural conventions. Prototype Theory provides a model for describing the internal structure of categories formed through categorization, showing that categories display graded structures. Some members are more central – for instance, a "robin" is a more prototypical bird than a "penguin". Such prototype effects arise from repeated experiential exposure that makes certain exemplars more cognitively salient and thus more representative within the category.

The relationship between categorization and Prototype Theory is hierarchical rather than parallel. Categorization explains the general cognitive mechanism through which humans classify experience, whereas Prototype Theory specifies how these categories are internally organized. Categorization answers why categories are formed, and Prototype Theory explains how they exhibit center–periphery structures.

Within this theoretical framework, Categorization and Prototype Theory also provide the cognitive basis upon which Conceptual Metaphor Theory operates. Metaphorical mapping relies on projecting structured knowledge from a source category onto a target category, and the prototypical features of these categories strongly influence which elements are selected for projection. For example, in the conceptual metaphor "Marriage is a journey," the projected components – path, destination, obstacles, companion – reflect the prototype structure of the JOURNEY category. These core elements then structure the metaphorical interpretation of marriage.

The same cognitive mechanism is visible in English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs. English proverbs such as "Marriage is a lottery" or "Every family has its black sheep" select prototypical cultural knowledge related to chance, risk, or kinship. Chinese proverbs such as *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) relies on culturally salient prototypes – family-as-unity models. These examples demonstrate how categorical organization and prototypical structure shape which elements become available for metaphorical use.

Taken together, categorization determines how conceptual domains are formed,

Prototype Theory explains their internal structure, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory describes how knowledge from one domain is mapped onto another. The interaction of these theories explains the cognitive motivation, internal coherence, and cultural variability of metaphorical expressions found in English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs.

Frame semantics is a theoretical approach that explains how linguistic meaning is constructed through background structures of knowledge known as "frames" [8]. A frame is a structured cognitive schema that represents a particular situation, event, or culturally embedded experience, including its typical participants, roles, and relations. According to this theory, the meaning of a word or expression cannot be fully understood in isolation; rather, it presupposes and activates an entire background frame that gives the expression coherence.

For instance, the word "buy" presupposes a commercial transaction frame including a buyer, a seller, goods, payment, and an exchange process. Without such a frame, the meaning of the verb would be incomplete. Similarly, the interpretation of the sentence "He broke the contract" requires activation of a contract frame involving obligations, rights, agreements, and consequences, which are not explicitly stated in the sentence itself.

Frame semantics is therefore crucial for explaining how language users access encyclopedic knowledge during meaning construction. Because frames are culturally shaped, linguistic meaning is inherently tied to cultural expectations, values, and shared social knowledge.

In the domain of conceptual metaphor, frames provide the structured knowledge that metaphors draw upon. A metaphor such as "Marriage is a journey" not only relies on the source – path – goal schema but also activates the journey frame, which includes travelers, direction, obstacles, destinations, and shared commitment. The metaphor becomes meaningful only because these frame elements are culturally familiar and cognitively salient.

The explanatory power of Frame Semantics becomes particularly visible in marriage and family proverbs. English proverbs such as "Home is where the heart is" invoke a home frame that includes comfort, emotional security, identity, and belonging. The proverb "A good husband makes a good wife" draws upon a family role frame, highlighting expectations about reciprocal marital behavior. In Chinese, the proverb *"百善孝为先"* (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first) activates a Confucian family frame consisting of hierarchical kinship roles, moral obligations, and ritualized behavioral norms. Similarly, *"家丑不可外扬"* (Domestic shame should not be made public) presupposes a family-privacy frame that embeds values of collective honor and internal conflict management.

Such proverbs show that frames are not merely cognitive structures but culturally shaped models that influence how marriage, family roles, and interpersonal duties are conceptualized across societies. Frame Semantics therefore provides a crucial link between cognitive organization and cultural knowledge, revealing why similar marital or familial situations may be interpreted differently across English and Chinese proverbial traditions.

Cultural model theory posits that human conceptualization is profoundly shaped by culturally shared and socially transmitted mental structures known as cultural models. These models function as collective cognitive frameworks through which individuals perceive, organize, and interpret their experiences. A cultural model can be understood as an internally coherent system of assumptions, values, expectations, beliefs, and narrative patterns that members of a given cultural community draw upon when making sense of the world around them. Rather than existing as explicit or formalized rules, cultural models are embedded in everyday life and are gradually acquired through socialization, communication, education, and participation in cultural practices. In this sense, they serve as an essential bridge between individual cognition and collective cultural knowledge.

From this perspective, cultural models are not merely abstract theoretical constructs, but deeply rooted background structures that shape how people reason, evaluate, categorize, and express meanings linguistically. They influence not only what members of a culture consider important, normal, or desirable, but also how they structure social reality through language. Because these models are collectively shared, they contribute to the formation of common interpretive patterns within a speech community, allowing individuals to understand culturally meaningful concepts in relatively similar ways. Thus, cultural model theory highlights that language, cognition, and culture are inseparable, and that conceptual systems cannot be fully understood without taking into account the cultural frameworks within which they are formed and transmitted.

Cultural models often operate beneath the level of conscious awareness and provide default interpretive frameworks for understanding social roles, moral obligations, kinship relations, family structures, gender expectations, emotional norms, and patterns of behavior. Individuals typically do not reflect explicitly on these frameworks in daily life, because they are experienced as natural, self-evident, and socially legitimate. However, these implicit models strongly influence judgments about what is appropriate, respectable, admirable, shameful, or deviant in a given society. In this way, cultural models regulate not only cognitive interpretation but also social evaluation, shaping both personal attitudes and collective norms. They are especially visible in domains closely connected with value systems, such as marriage, family, education, work, and interpersonal relations.

For example, the concept of a “successful life” differs significantly across cultures because each society maintains culturally specific models concerning achievement, virtue, autonomy, responsibility, and social contribution. In some cultural contexts, success may be associated primarily with individual accomplishment, financial independence, and self-realization, whereas in others it may be more closely linked to family responsibility, moral character, and social harmony. Likewise, the notion of “a good parent” or “a respectable marriage” is never culturally neutral; rather, it is constructed within historically accumulated systems of moral values and social expectations. These culturally grounded models shape not only people’s beliefs and behaviors but also the linguistic expressions through which such concepts are represented.

Within linguistic meaning construction, cultural models serve as the background

knowledge that shapes how conceptual metaphors, frames, and image schemas are interpreted. They explain why certain metaphors are culturally naturalized while others are absent or ungrammatical. For instance, the metaphor "Time is money," though rooted in universal experience, is fully compatible with cultural models of individual autonomy, economic rationality, and productivity found in Anglo-American contexts, but less central in cultures that emphasize relational harmony or cyclical views of time.

The explanatory value of cultural models becomes especially visible in marriage and family proverbs, which encode culturally dominant expectations toward social roles, kinship relations, and moral duties. English proverbs such as "A man's home is his castle" reflect an individualist cultural model in which the home functions as a private domain associated with autonomy, protection, and personal control. Similarly, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" aligns with a moral upbringing model emphasizing discipline and personal responsibility.

In Chinese, cultural models grounded in Confucian ethics strongly influence proverbial expressions. The proverb *"夫唱妇随"* (When the husband sings, the wife follows) reflects a hierarchical family model based on differentiated gender roles. *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) corresponds to a collectivist family model emphasizing harmony, interdependence, and the moral priority of the household over individual interests. Proverbial expressions such as *"百善孝为先"* (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first) encode a kinship-centered moral model in which filial obligations are foundational to social order.

Cultural model theory therefore illuminates how linguistic expressions are not merely reflections of individual cognition, but manifestations of culturally inherited systems of meaning. By revealing how different societies conceptualize kinship, marriage, authority, and moral conduct, this theory provides a crucial interpretive framework for understanding the cross-cultural similarities and divergences between English and Chinese proverbs.

In summary, this subchapter has outlined the major cognitive linguistic frameworks that underpin the present study and demonstrated how they jointly provide the theoretical foundation for analyzing English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs. We have reviewed how Cognitive Linguistics emerged as a reaction to formalist approaches and how its core principles – embodiment, conceptualization, and the metaphorical nature of thought – shape the study of meaning. Building on the philosophy of embodied cognition, the discussion has further shown that these principles are operationalized through several interconnected theoretical models, including conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual metonymy theory, image schema theory, categorization and prototype theory, frame semantics, and cultural model theory.

Drawing on examples from both English and Chinese, we have illustrated how each framework reveals different dimensions of proverbial meaning, ranging from metaphorical and metonymic structuring to culturally grounded frames and conceptual models. Taken together, these theories demonstrate that proverbs encode socially shared experience through embodied cognition, prototype-based categorization, frame activation, and culturally patterned reasoning.

However, while the above discussion has established the theoretical basis for understanding proverbial meaning, it is equally necessary to consider how proverbs function in actual cognitive processing. Beyond their theoretical explanation, proverbs also operate as highly efficient units of semantic compression, memory retrieval, inferential reconstruction, and contextual activation. Therefore, the following section further examines the cognitive processing mechanisms through which English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs are interpreted, retained, and pragmatically activated in discourse.

While the previous section has established the principal theoretical foundations from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, it is equally important to consider how these theoretical frameworks operate in the actual processing of proverbs. Proverbs should not be viewed merely as fixed linguistic expressions or as isolated objects of theoretical description. Rather, they function as highly efficient cognitive units through which speakers organize, compress, retrieve, and interpret socially shared experience. This perspective is particularly significant in the case of marriage and family proverbs, since such expressions often condense deeply rooted cultural expectations concerning kinship, domestic order, intergenerational obligation, emotional conduct, and moral evaluation.

The cognitive processing of proverbs is first manifested in their high degree of semantic compression. In most cases, a proverb conveys substantially more meaning than its surface wording appears to contain. This characteristic may be understood through the theoretical frameworks of conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy discussed in the previous section. Conceptual metaphor enables abstract social experience to be expressed through concrete experiential domains, while metonymy allows part of a familiar frame to stand for a broader conceptual whole. In actual discourse, this mechanism significantly reduces processing effort and increases communicative efficiency.

For example, the English proverb “Marry in haste, repent at leisure” does not merely comment on the speed of decision-making. Rather, it compresses a broader cultural judgment concerning prudence, responsibility, and the long-term consequences of marital choice. Its meaning is cognitively structured through a metaphorical understanding of marriage as a long-term life path whose consequences unfold over time. Similarly, the Chinese proverb *“家和万事兴”* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) condenses an entire value system into a concise expression, in which family harmony functions as a metonymic representation of moral stability, social prosperity, and intergenerational order. In this sense, the semantic density of proverbs is not accidental, but is closely related to the metaphorical and metonymic mechanisms through which experience is cognitively organized.

A second important mechanism lies in memorability and cognitive retrievability. Proverbs are not only meaningful but also highly memorable, which partly explains their durability across generations. This characteristic can be more adequately understood when related to image schema theory and prototype-based structuring. The memorability of proverbs is often reinforced by schematic imageability, structural symmetry, and recurrent prototypical event patterns. These features make the

expression cognitively easier to store and retrieve.

Chinese proverbs often demonstrate this mechanism particularly clearly through compact and rhythmically balanced structures. Expressions such as *"种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆"* (zhòng guā dé guā, zhòng dòu dé dòu, /ʈʂʊŋ˥ kwa˥ tə˧ kwa˥ | ʈʂʊŋ˥ toʊ˥ tə˧ toʊ˥/, As you sow, so shall you reap) and *"百闻不如一见"* (bǎi wén bù rú yī jiàn, /paɪ˨˩˦ wən˧ pu˥ ʐu˧ i˥ tɕjɛn˥˧/, Seeing once is better than hearing a hundred times) are not merely concise; their formal organization, internal parallelism, and imageable experiential structure significantly reduce cognitive load and allow them to be readily accessed in discourse.

In marriage and family contexts, this retrievability becomes especially important, since such proverbs are frequently used in parental advice, moral instruction, intergenerational communication, and domestic evaluation.

Another major dimension of proverb processing lies in interpretation, which depends heavily on inferential reconstruction. Proverbs are rarely understood at the level of literal meaning alone. Their comprehension typically requires hearers to move beyond surface wording and reconstruct intended meaning through contextual inference, background knowledge activation, and culturally shared assumptions. This process is most effectively explained through frame semantics and cultural model theory.

When a speaker uses the English proverb "Blood is thicker than water" the hearer does not interpret it as a statement about physical substances. Rather, the expression activates a kinship frame in which family loyalty, inherited bonds, and social obligation are foregrounded. Similarly, the Chinese proverb *"清官难断家务事"* (Even an upright official finds it hard to settle family disputes) cannot be understood adequately at the literal level of legal judgment. Its meaning emerges only when the hearer activates a culturally shared model of family relations characterized by emotional complexity, internal hierarchy, and the limits of external intervention. Such examples demonstrate that proverb comprehension is fundamentally frame-based and culturally mediated. The hearer moves from literal wording to socially grounded meaning through inferential activation of stored cultural knowledge.

A further cognitive mechanism that contributes to the vitality of proverbs lies in their contextual flexibility. Proverbs are not rigid formulas whose meanings remain absolutely fixed. Instead, they typically possess a relatively stable conceptual core while remaining sufficiently flexible to be reinterpreted across different communicative situations. This dynamic feature can also be explained through the extension and reconfiguration of frames and cultural models.

For instance, the English proverb "Charity begins at home" may be used in family contexts to emphasize domestic responsibility, but it may also appear in broader social commentary to criticize selective morality or institutional inconsistency. Likewise, the Chinese proverb *"清官难断家务事"* (Even an upright official finds it hard to settle family disputes) may extend beyond domestic conflict and be used metaphorically in discussions of organizational management, interpersonal relations, or emotional disputes. This contextual adaptability demonstrates that proverbs are not static linguistic relics, but dynamic cognitive tools through which culturally significant

knowledge continues to be reorganized and reactivated.

Taken together, the cognitive processing mechanisms of proverbs are closely integrated with the theoretical frameworks established in the previous section. Semantic compression is largely realized through conceptual metaphor and metonymy; memorability is reinforced by image schemas and prototypical structures; interpretation relies on frame activation and cultural models; and contextual flexibility reflects the dynamic extension of cognitive frames across communicative environments.

From this perspective, proverbs should be understood not merely as inherited verbal formulas, but as dynamic cognitive structures through which communities preserve, organize, and reinterpret culturally significant knowledge. Beyond these processing mechanisms, it is equally important to consider the broader cognitive functions that proverbs perform in the stabilization and transmission of socially shared knowledge. Through repeated use in everyday discourse, proverbs gradually become cognitively entrenched as ready-made interpretive models, enabling speakers to categorize social situations, evaluate interpersonal relations, and formulate behavioral expectations in a highly economical way.

This function is particularly evident in the domain of marriage and family, where proverbs often contribute to the cognitive stabilization of concepts such as kinship loyalty, domestic harmony, marital responsibility, and intergenerational obligation. Once repeatedly activated in communication, these expressions begin to function as cognitive templates through which individuals interpret new experiences and integrate them into culturally shared conceptual structures. In this sense, proverbs do not merely reflect social reality, but actively participate in the formation and maintenance of collective memory and value-oriented ways of understanding social life.

Moreover, the repeated use of proverbs in family discourse, educational contexts, and interpersonal communication further strengthens their role in value internalization. Because of their concise form, high memorability, and cultural authority, proverbs are especially effective in shaping long-term cognitive habits and evaluative tendencies. In the field of marriage and family, they often function not only as descriptive statements but also as normative cognitive cues that guide judgment, regulate expectations, and reinforce culturally sanctioned models of behavior. Through this process, proverbs help transform individual experience into socially conventionalized conceptual knowledge and ensure the continuity of cultural models across generations.

Taken together, this theoretical–mechanistic integration provides the necessary cognitive foundation for the comparative analyses of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs developed in the following chapters.

1.4 Literature review on English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs

Marriage and family, as the most fundamental institutional forms in human society, have constituted essential elements of cultural narratives and linguistic expressions since ancient times. Proverbs, as the most condensed, stable, and ethnically distinctive linguistic units within oral traditions, serve as crucial entry points for studying shifts in marriage and family concepts, cultural differences, and the interaction between language and culture.

A comparative study of English and Chinese proverbs on marriage and family not only helps reveal similarities and differences between the two languages in cultural concepts, gender awareness, and social structures, but also provides rich corpus and theoretical support for translation studies, intercultural communication, and sociolinguistics. Zheng Changfa believes that proverbs cover a wide range of topics and are rich and varied, making them excellent material for language teaching. They can also serve as a means to understand social history, customs, and culture [16, p.5].

Research on Chinese proverbs about marriage and family has primarily focused on folklore and sociology. Scholars analyze traditional marriage and family concepts reflected in proverbs from a socio-historical perspective, such as the traditional marriage principles embodied in proverbs like *"男大当婚，女大当嫁"* (Men should marry when they grow up, women should marry when they grow up) and the traditional family concept expressed in *"家丑不可外扬"* (Domestic shame should not be made public).

In recent years, research perspectives have become increasingly diverse, encompassing gendered discourse, power dynamics, and the evolution of modern views on marriage, relationships, and parenting. Studies on English proverbs related to marriage and family are relatively well-established in Western academia, with a focus on exploring the cultural connotations of these proverbs from linguistic anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives.

Proverbs such as "Marriage is a lottery" and "Love is blind", which reflect individualistic views on marriage and relationships, have become key research emphases. The core research lies in the differences between marriage and family concepts. Chinese marriage proverbs emphasize family responsibilities and social ethics, such as in proverb like *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog) which reflect women's subordinate status. English proverbs, on the other hand, place greater emphasis on personal emotions and equal relationships, such as the partnership concept embodied in "Marriage is a partnership".

Gender role construction is also a significant topic. Research reveals that marriage proverbs in both languages contain gender biases, though manifested differently. Traditional Chinese proverbs deeply embed the concept of *"三从四德"* (Three obediences and four virtues). *"三从"* (The three obediences) means: *"未嫁从父"* (As an unmarried maiden, obey your father); *"既嫁从夫"* (As a married woman, obey your husband); *"夫死从子"* (As a widow, obey your son) *"四德"* (The four virtues) include: *"妇德"* (Virtue in morality: be chaste and adhere to moral conduct); *"妇言"* (Virtue in speech: speak in a refined and appropriate manner; avoid malicious gossip); *"妇容"* (Virtue in appearance: maintain a neat, modest, and orderly appearance); *"妇功"* (Virtue in work: be skilled in domestic duties such as weaving, sewing, cooking, and managing the household).

The *"三从四德"* were a set of moral principles for women in feudal Chinese Confucian society, designed to enforce their subordination to men. These concepts are now widely regarded as outdated and emblematic of historical gender inequality. As

for the shift in perspective from “A good wife makes a good husband” to “A good husband makes a good wife”，it reflects Western society’s transition from a traditional, gender-based patriarchy toward modern egalitarianism and individualism.

In recent years, proverb studies in Kazakhstan have developed in several interconnected directions, gradually moving beyond traditional descriptive paremiology toward linguocultural, cognitive, and discourse-oriented approaches. One of the most visible trends is the growing attention to family values, kinship relations, and marriage-related concepts in proverb discourse. For instance, Duisenova et al., in their comparative study of English and Kazakh proverbs, emphasize that Kazakh family-related proverbs place particular stress on kinship solidarity, moral duty, and continuity between generations [17].

A similar perspective can be found in the work of Mussa-Akhunov et al., who examine the macro concept of *family* in Kazakh–Dungan proverbs and show that family is conceptualized not merely as a domestic unit, but as a cultural structure closely linked to hierarchy, collective identity, and social responsibility [18]. This line of research is further supported by Kuzembayeva et al., whose ethnopsycholinguistic study focuses on family and relative values and confirms the central role of kinship in Kazakh cultural consciousness [19].

Another important direction concerns gender roles and social relations as reflected in proverb discourse. Igissinova, Raeva, and Kulamanova analyze gender stereotypes in Kazakh proverbs and sayings and demonstrate that traditional representations of male and female roles remain strongly influenced by patriarchal family structures and inherited social expectations [20]. Such studies are particularly relevant to the present dissertation, as they provide a valuable comparative basis for discussing the representation of marriage and family concepts across different cultural systems.

At the broader cultural level, several studies provide important background for understanding the symbolic and moral foundations of Kazakh proverbs. Altayev’s discussion of traditional Kazakh cultural values offers a useful framework for interpreting family ethics, domestic responsibility, and collective morality in proverb usage [21]. Likewise, Alshynbayeva, Orynbassar, and Baltabayeva examine the concept of the sacred in the Kazakh worldview and show how spiritual and religious values remain embedded in language [22]. This perspective is complemented by Batyrzhan’s study on the significance of the Hadith in the spiritual life of the Kazakh people, which explicitly connects religious tradition with proverbs, sayings, and moral expressions [23]. Taken together, these studies suggest that Kazakh proverbs should be understood not only as linguistic units but also as carriers of religious and ethical values.

A further development in recent scholarship is the shift toward cognitive and discourse-based research. Guven and Amalbekova discuss the contemporary use of proverbs in modern Kazakh society and demonstrate that traditional expressions continue to function actively within changing cultural practices [24]. Orazbayeva and Orazaliyeva approach Kazakh paremiology from the perspective of cultural cognition and communication, highlighting the role of proverbs in shaping collective understanding and social interaction [25]. In literary studies, Abdigapparova extends

this discussion by examining the cognitive activity of proverbs in fiction and their role in expressing national worldview and cultural memory [26].

Particularly noteworthy is the emergence of digital proverb research. Omarbekova's recent studies move proverb analysis into the sphere of digital discourse, focusing on the transformation of traditional wisdom in online communication and the changing functions of proverbs in the contemporary Kazakh cultural context [27 – 28]. These studies are especially important for the present dissertation, since they provide a methodological basis for discussing digital proverbs and anti-proverbs as evolving forms of cultural expression.

Finally, supplementary studies on symbolism and culturally marked expressions further enrich the field. Research on the symbolism of the number *seven* in Kazakh and English phraseological units and proverbs reveals the importance of symbolic cognition in cultural meaning-making [29]. Similarly, studies on culturally marked stable expressions in Kazakh proverbs highlight the strong link between proverb semantics and ethnocultural specificity [30].

Taken together, these studies show that contemporary Kazakh scholarship has developed from traditional folklore-oriented proverb studies into a more interdisciplinary field that combines linguocultural analysis, cognitive linguistics, religious studies, literary interpretation, and digital discourse research. This body of scholarship provides important regional and methodological support for the present dissertation.

In the West, proverb studies have long been systematically researched, originating in 19th-century folkloristics and comparative linguistics. In the early period, Taylor's *The Proverb* pioneered systematic research in this field [31].

Systematic research on proverbs in China emerged in the 1980s, initially focusing primarily on linguistic classification and the systematization of folk meanings. Studies on marriage and family proverbs have largely adopted a comprehensive linguistic-cultural approach, with many scholars viewing proverbs as sedimentations of national culture and emphasizing their function as a "cultural mirror".

In recent years, research in this area has predominantly focused on the following aspects: a social functional perspective, examining how proverbs reinforce social norms through repeated use; gender language studies, revealing how marital proverbs often reflect stereotypical biases against women; and a pragmatic and cognitive shift – recent scholarship increasingly employs cognitive linguistics to explore the cultural models and frame semantics underlying proverbs.

Mo Lianhua employed a contrastive linguistics framework to conduct a systematic analysis of Chinese and English marriage proverbs across multiple dimensions, including phonetics, vocabulary, semantics, and syntactic structure, arguing that studying marriage proverbs from different cultures and ethnic groups is a study of diverse marriage cultures and customs [32]. Lan A., Shiguo S. analyzed marriage and family-related proverbs in Chinese and English from an ethnocultural perspective [33, p.49].

The study systematically categorized proverbs on marriage and family in both languages and conducted an in-depth analysis of how differing cultural influences shape distinct perspectives on marriage and family within their respective linguistic

contexts. An Lan, Shan Shiguo, Gulnar Bekkozhanova conducted a comparative analysis of Chinese and English marriage-related proverbs from multiple perspectives, including lexical semantics, ethnic culture, linguistic culture, folklore studies, functional pragmatics, and contextual analysis [34, p.107]. The study explained in detail the differences and similarities in the portrayal of marital relationships within Chinese and English ethnic cultures.

As AI capabilities continue to advance, large language models have emerged as powerful tools in linguistic research. Some scholars have explored whether these models can achieve emotional experience and cultural empathy in linguistic experiments. Liu C., Koto F., Baldwin T., and Gurevych I. evaluated the comprehension and reasoning capabilities of multilingual large language models regarding cross-cultural proverbs [35]. They found that while large language models can memorize numerous proverbs, they struggle to comprehend their meanings within specific conversational contexts. Their reasoning performance is particularly weak for metaphorical proverbs. A significant "cultural gap" exists, with translated proverbs exhibiting reduced comprehension effectiveness in cross-lingual reasoning. There are still notable shortcomings in the dimension of cultural cognition. This represents a major area where AI cannot replace humans.

In recent years, some scholars have studied proverbs from a cognitive linguistics perspective. Belkhir S. examined proverbs within the cognitive linguistics framework, covering metaphorical mechanisms, pragmatic functions, and cross-cultural comparisons [36]. The study proposed that proverbs have complex metaphorical and metonymic frameworks; they exhibit cross-linguistic and cross-cultural commonalities while also reflecting local cognitive models; and they hold significant implications for education and second language acquisition.

Despite a substantial body of existing research, current studies on English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs still suffer from the following limitations: First, there is a lack of systematic corpora. Most scholars focus on case studies, resulting in insufficient and often outdated data. Sources are generally homogeneous, with a widespread absence of systematically constructed corpora. Furthermore, research perspectives tend to be narrow.

Many scholars examine marriage and family values in isolation, or conflate the two concepts without distinction, largely overlooking the logical connections between marriage and family. There is also insufficient integration of multidisciplinary approaches, particularly interdisciplinary research combining ethnology and cognitive linguistics. Finally, dynamic contextual analysis is lacking: research on the reception and evolution of proverbs in contemporary societal contexts remains underdeveloped.

Conclusions for chapter one

Cognitive linguistics emphasizes that concepts are mental representations formed through bodily experience and social interaction. Within this framework, "marriage" and "family" are understood as embodied, metaphorical and metonymic, fuzzy, categorical, prototypical, culturally relative, and dynamically evolving concepts. Cognitive linguistics posits that language, culture, and cognition do not exist independently but form an interactive cognitive framework. Language is not only a

product of culture; it also shapes human thought patterns and cognitive structures. Language users from different cultural backgrounds, their worldviews, values, and behavioral patterns are influenced by their language systems.

Cognitive linguistics theories offer profound perspectives for studying English and Chinese proverbs, revealing the cognitive processes and cultural contexts of their formation. The formation of proverbs is closely tied to human metaphorical thinking.

Metaphors not only shape our language but also profoundly influence our ways of thinking and cultural cognition. Conceptual metaphor theory emphasizes understanding abstract concepts through concrete experiential ones. Metonymy theory focuses on relationships between parts and wholes or cause and effect. Image-Schema Theory reveals how cognitive patterns rooted in bodily experience influence language comprehension.

Categorization and Prototype Theory demonstrate how society and culture classify human behavior through fuzzy categories and typicality prototypes. Frame Semantics illustrates the context-dependence of linguistic meaning, while Cultural Model Theory emphasizes the impact of culture-specific patterns on cognition and language use. These theories help us understand the deep cultural values and cognitive structures embedded in proverbs, demonstrating how language conveys specific cultural and social meanings through metaphors, metonymies, schemas, and categories. Through these theories, English and Chinese proverbs are not merely viewed as tools of linguistic expression but as carriers of cultural cognition, reflecting the ways of thinking, values, and social norms of people across different cultures. Conceptual metaphor is the most significant cognitive linguistic theory in the study. Metaphor is profoundly influenced by cultural, historical, and social factors. Metaphors across different cultural contexts reveal different ways of thinking. Metaphor also plays a crucial role in semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural studies.

2 THE FORMATION AND INTERPRETATION OF ENGLISH AND CHINESE PROVERBS FROM AN ETHNOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 The origin, development, and formation of English and Chinese proverbs

Proverbs originally stemmed from people's long-term life experiences and social practices. in ancient times, people constantly summarized universal principles and behavioral guidelines through agricultural production, family life, social interactions, and military cooperation. These experiences were not accumulated in isolation by individuals, but were formed through constant exchange and verification within social groups, relying on the collective wisdom of the community. *Introduction to Paremiology* is a comprehensive guide to paremiology [37, p.382]. Lu Lianwei believes that proverbs are an important component of national language and represent statements with relatively complete meanings [38, p.182]. Through the cognitive mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy, people transformed abstract truths into vivid and concrete expressions. In the process of continuous oral transmission, these experiences were gradually condensed, made rhythmic, and metaphorical, eventually developing into fixed expressions that were easy to memorize and to pass on. Only those forms of expression that aligned with a nation's cultural concepts, religious beliefs, and ethical norms could gain wide acceptance and be transmitted from generation to generation. Cao Xiang believes that Chinese and English proverbs embody the essence of wisdom from both nations, sharing commonalities while also exhibiting differences [39, p.146].

In this research, the English proverbs are mainly selected from *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* [40], *The Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs* [41], *Cassell's Dictionary of Proverbs* [42], and *The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs* [43], as well as the *British National Corpus (BNC)* [44] and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)* [45]. Chinese proverbs are mainly from the *中国谚语大辞典* (Zhongguo Yanyu Da Cidian) [46], *中华谚语大词典* (Zhonghua Yanyu Da Cidian) [47], *汉语谚语词典* (Hanyu Yanyu Cidian) [48], *谚海* (Yanhai) [49], along with the *Peking University Chinese Corpus (CCL)* [50] and the *Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus Center (BCC)* [51].

The formation of proverbs primarily involves seven key stages. The formation of proverbs primarily involves seven key stages.

The first stage is experience observation: Proverbs originate from people's daily life experiences and observations, which is the foundation for the formation of cognition.

The second stage is concept extraction and word combination: experiences are transformed into simple combinations of spoken words for linguistic expression, as an initial attempt to describe phenomena.

The third stage is conceptual categorization and induction based on similarity: similar experiences and concepts are classified and integrated, and commonalities are identified through induction.

The fourth stage is image-schema construction: concrete images or scenes that can be widely understood are formed, enhancing the vividness of expression.

The fifth stage is metaphorical and metonymic mapping: mappings between conceptual domains are established to connect abstract concepts with concrete experiences.

The sixth stage is cultural sedimentation and pragmatic optimization: through long-term usage and testing, linguistic expressions are gradually refined and simplified.

The seventh stage is social transmission and consensus formation: within specific cultural environments, these expressions undergo processes of selection, evaluation, simplification, and embellishment, and through wide dissemination gain social recognition, ultimately becoming shared linguistic wisdom that conforms to the cultural values of the community. The cognitive process of proverb formation is illustrated in Figure 3.

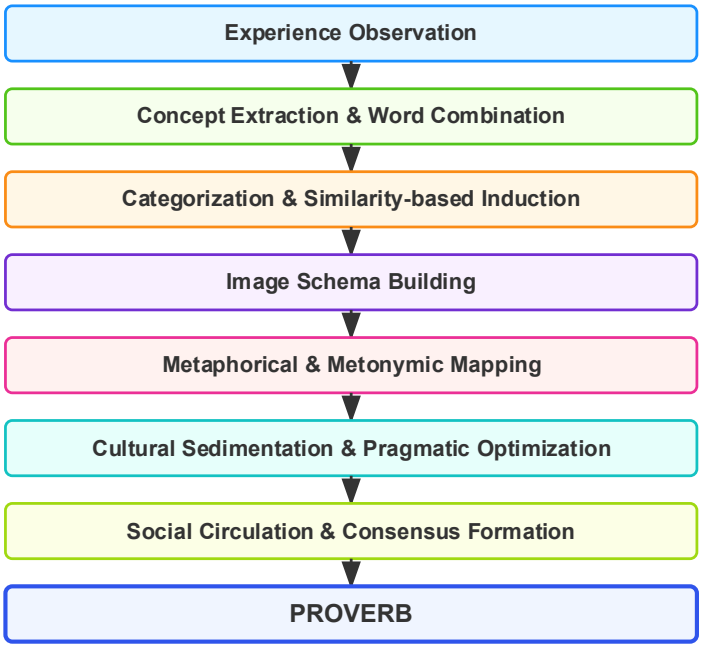


Figure 3. Pathway of proverb formation

As shown in Figure 3, the formation of proverbs can be understood as a gradual cognitive and cultural shaping process. It presents this development as a step-by-step progression from individual observation to collective linguistic crystallization. At the initial stages, personal experiences are noticed, extracted, and converted into simple linguistic units that reflect early attempts to express recurring patterns in life. These linguistic units are then categorized according to perceived similarities, allowing speakers to generalize from specific cases and form broad conceptual groupings.

As this process develops, image schemas begin to take shape as concrete mental patterns that help people understand experience. They also prepare the ground for later metaphorical and metonymic mappings, allowing abstract ideas such as moral values, emotions, and social relations to be understood through familiar embodied experience. With repeated use, these expressions undergo cultural sedimentation, during which communities refine their linguistic form for clarity, practicality, and communicative efficiency.

In the final stage, widespread social circulation leads to collective agreement. Through repetition, evaluation, and adaptation, some expressions gain stable cultural value and become recognized as proverbs. The figure thus demonstrates that proverbs are not spontaneous creations but cumulative products of cognition, culture, and social interaction, shaped across time until they achieve the concise, conventionalized form found in contemporary language.

Both Chinese and English possess a wealth of proverbs that continue to evolve alongside culture, language, and societal shifts. The formation of proverbs relies on cognitive, cultural, linguistic, and social factors, reflecting both universal aspects of human thought and distinct cultural characteristics.

Proverbs vividly embody the cultural identity of a people while also recording users' perceptions of their social context and historical development. The formation of proverbial meanings and their subsequent evolution can illuminate a nation's patterns of thinking and value systems. Hou Jiecheng argues that the differing concepts stemming from distinct Chinese and Western cultures are clearly reflected in English and Chinese proverbs [52, p.69].

In the primitive stage, that is, during the periods of Old English and Old Chinese, early proverbs in both languages were largely experiential summaries related to agricultural production and weather forecasting, transmitted orally.

The developmental stage of English proverbs was marked by the introduction of Christianity, through which religious thought was integrated into proverbial expressions, with the *Bible* becoming an important source.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, literary works such as those of Geoffrey Chaucer recorded and disseminated a large number of proverbs. For instance, in *Troilus and Criseyde* he wrote "It is nought good a slepyng hound to wake," which corresponds directly to the later well-known proverb "Let sleeping dogs lie" [53]. This shows how Chaucer preserved popular wisdom of his time and passed it on to subsequent generations.

In the Renaissance, William Shakespeare continued this process, embedding and even creating numerous proverbs in his plays. Expressions such as "All that glitters is not gold" from *The Merchant of Venice* [54] and "The better part of valour is discretion" from *Henry IV, Part 1* are now integral to the English proverbial stock [55]. Later, the colonial expansion of the British Empire facilitated cultural exchange, introducing new cultural elements and forms of expression into proverbs.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the development of printing technology and the media enabled the widespread dissemination of proverbs, while also giving rise to variations and newly created forms.

Chinese proverbs originated in the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties, mostly as "slang proverbs" "sayings" existed in the folklore, and later cited by the *史记 (Records of the Grand Historian)* [56], *汉书 (Book of Han)* [57] and other canonical books to enhance the persuasive power, such as the proverb *"百里不贩樵，千里不贩粜"*(A wise merchant does not sell firewood a hundred miles away, nor grain a thousand miles away) reflects the ancient commercial experience.

From the Wei and Jin dynasties to the Song and Yuan dynasties, proverbs became

increasingly rich in content, and the Song dynasty began to make a preliminary compilation of proverbs, with proverbs such as *"苏杭两浙，春寒秋热"* (Suzhou, Hangzhou, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, spring, cold, autumn and hot) appeared.

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the folklore of proverbs was fully affirmed, and specialized compilations such as *古谣谚 (Ancient Ballads and Proverbs)* appeared.

Since the modern era, proverbs have continued to be active in both spoken and written modern Chinese, guiding life and regulating behavior as a crystallization of wisdom [58]. At the same time, as society changes, some of the old proverbs die out, and some new proverbs reflecting new social phenomena are produced, such as *"不管白猫黑猫，捉到老鼠就是好猫"* (No matter what the cat is, if it catches a mouse, it is a good cat).

The formation of proverbs is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by multiple factors, among which geographical environment, social structure, and cultural traditions all play significant roles. English and Chinese proverbs each display highly distinctive characteristics.

As an island nation, Britain's maritime culture is reflected in proverbs such as "Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky in morning, sailors take warning" which embodies fishing wisdom. The agricultural background has also profoundly shaped English proverbs, such as "Make hay while the sun shines," which displays the productive wisdom of an agrarian society. Social structures and historical transformations also shaped the content of proverbs profoundly.

The spread of Christianity made the Bible an important source of proverbial expressions, while the ideas of the Reformation further reinforced the use of proverbs for moral instruction. In modern times, as economies and societies transformed, proverbs also reflected the shift in values from an agricultural to an industrial society. For example, Benjamin Franklin's 1748 maxim "Time is money" gained widespread use and became proverbial after the Industrial Revolution, highlighting the changing value placed on time.

Moreover, English proverbs reflect the fusion and absorption of diverse cultures. Anglo-Saxon, Norman, ancient Roman, and Christian civilizations have profoundly influenced both the content and expression of English proverbs, endowing them with a multi-sourced cultural background.

In terms of linguistic form, English proverbs gradually solidified and standardized during the transition from Middle English to Modern English, retaining their concise, direct, and logically coherent characteristics. Common rhetorical devices include rhyme and alliteration, such as "Birds of a feather flock together," and parallel structures such as "Like father, like son" These linguistic features not only enhance the proverbs' oral transmissibility but also ensure their enduring vitality within English-speaking cultures.

The formation of Chinese proverbs is also closely related to geographical environment, social structure, and cultural traditions. China has been an agricultural nation since ancient times, and its agrarian civilization profoundly shaped the core content of proverbs.

China has long been a large nation, making food security a paramount concern.

Within this agrarian context, a number of proverbs emerged concerning farming practices, seasons, and natural phenomena. For instance, *"春雨贵如油"* (Spring rain is as precious as oil) reflects the agricultural society's profound dependence on climate for a good harvest. At the same time, Confucianism has had a particularly profound influence on proverbs. Confucianism established a very strict family ethics system, and the family ethics and social order emphasized by Confucian culture are deeply reflected in proverbs. For example, the Chinese proverb *"百善孝为先"* (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first) highlights the central position of filial duty and family responsibility in Chinese culture.

Philosophical ideas permeate every aspect of people's lives. Concepts such as the Doctrine of the Mean and the balance of yin and yang provide a philosophical framework for the ideological foundation of proverbs, endowing them with both practical wisdom and philosophical insights.

At the linguistic level, Chinese proverbs are concise, often appearing as paired four- or five-character phrases that are easy to memorize and transmit orally. They frequently employ parallel structures, such as *"种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆"* (You get melon when you plant melon, you get beans when you plant beans). They borrow extensively from historical stories, conveying profound meanings in a subtle manner. They make abundant use of metaphors and symbols, emphasizing sound and rhythm: *"前人栽树，后人乘凉"* (Those who plant trees today provide shade for future generations). Chinese proverbs blend the practical wisdom of agrarian civilization with the cultural essence of Confucian philosophy, showing the unique character of the national language in both form and content.

The formation of both English and Chinese proverbs depends on the interplay of linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors, which mutually influence each other to ultimately shape this unique linguistic phenomenon. English proverbs and Chinese proverbs exhibit many differences.

The formative characteristics of English proverbs are as follows: during the empirical observation phase, they focus on individual experiences, emphasizing personal practice and religious activities; during the conceptual extraction phase, they pursue direct expression, with clear subject-predicate structures and logical precision; during the inductive classification phase, they adopt binary opposition classification, emphasizing causal relationships; during the schema construction phase, they build schemas of linear progress, competition, and personal achievement; during the mapping phase, they extensively use metaphors related to commerce, war, and sports; during the optimization phase, they incorporate Biblical culture and optimize rhyme and alliteration; during the dissemination phase, they spread within individualistic societies, emphasizing practical guidance.

These characteristics show that English proverbs are deeply rooted in the practical experiences and social life of English-speaking communities. They also demonstrate the close relationship between proverb formation and the cultural values of individualism, rationality, and functional expression.

After integrating cultural, linguistic, and cognitive analyses, we conclude that the formative path of English proverbs is illustrated in Figure 4.

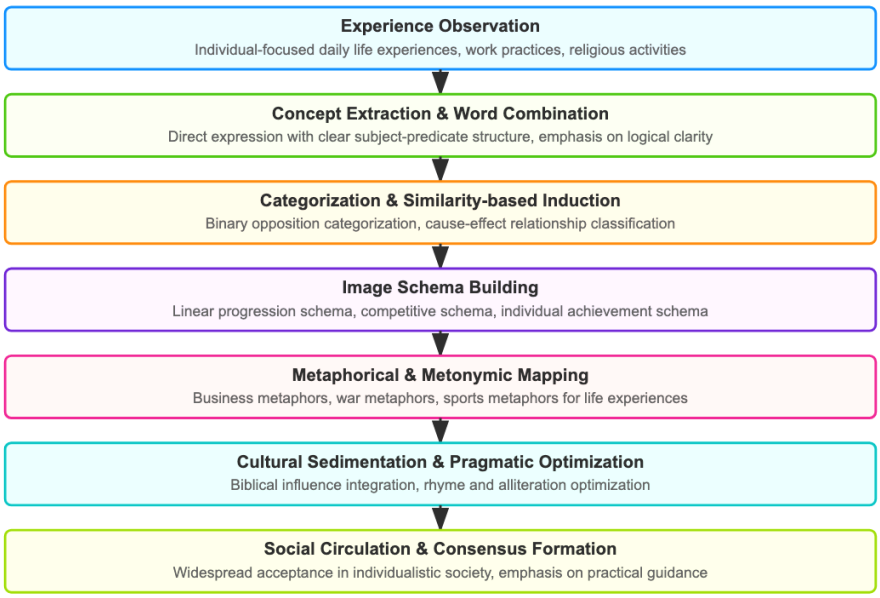


Figure 4. English proverb formation pathway

In Figure 4, we can see the English proverb formation pathway and the progressive shaping of proverb meaning across cognitive, linguistic, and cultural stages. It visualizes how individual experience is first noticed and verbally encoded, then gradually transformed through categorization, schema building, and metaphorical mapping. Each stage contributes a specific layer of structure and meaning. For instance, the focus on individual experience, direct linguistic expression, binary categorization, and goal-oriented schemas reflects the cognitive tendencies underlying many English proverbs. The presence of business, war, and sports metaphors further reveals the cultural domains that strongly influence English conceptualization.

The figure also demonstrates how cultural sedimentation refines the linguistic form of proverbs through elements such as Biblical references, rhyme, and alliteration, which enhance memorability and cultural acceptance. Finally, through broad social circulation, these expressions undergo selection and stabilization within an individualistic cultural context, eventually becoming widely shared maxims that guide everyday judgment and behavior. Thus, Figure 4 provides a clear representation of how English proverbs evolve from individual observations into culturally recognized linguistic formulas.

Chinese proverbs, on the other hand, demonstrate distinct formative characteristics: during the empirical observation phase, they emphasize collective experiences, with a focus on agricultural life and family relationships; during the conceptual extraction phase, they pursue implicit expression, often employing elliptical structures and prioritizing contextual understanding; during the inductive classification phase, they adopt dialectical opposition classification, emphasizing cyclical relationships; during the schema construction phase, they build schemas of cyclic transformation, harmonious balance, and collective virtues; during the mapping phase, they extensively use metaphors related to natural phenomena and family relationships; during the optimization phase, they incorporate Confucian and Taoist philosophies while refining rhythm and parallelism; during the dissemination phase, they spread

within collectivist societies, emphasizing moral cultivation. The formative path of Chinese proverbs is illustrated in Figure 5.

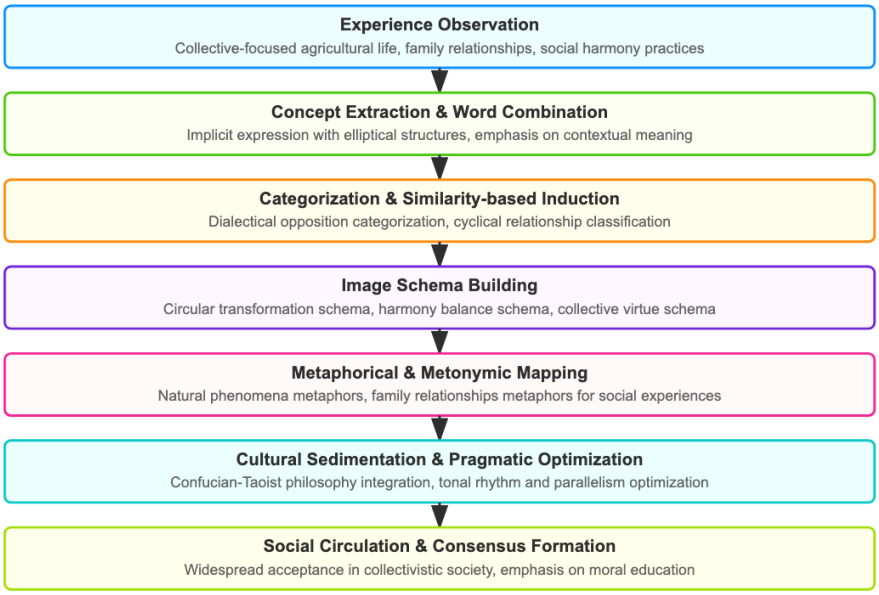


Figure 5. Chinese proverb formation pathway

In Figure 5, we can see the developmental pathway through which Chinese proverbs take shape, reflecting the interaction of collective experience, cultural philosophy, and cognitive patterning. The diagram shows how everyday observations rooted in agricultural production, family relations, and social harmony gradually evolve into condensed forms of cultural wisdom. As expressions emerge from these experiences, they tend to rely on implicit linguistic structures, inviting listeners to interpret meaning through context rather than through explicit grammatical marking.

The figure further illustrates how inductive classification in Chinese culture often follows a dialectical mode of reasoning. Instead of rigid binary contrasts, relationships are understood as dynamic, cyclical, and interdependent. This cognitive tendency leads to the construction of schemas based on cyclical change, balance, and collective moral values, which provide the conceptual foundation for many Chinese proverbs.

As the process advances, metaphorical and metonymic mappings draw heavily on natural phenomena and kinship relations, linking social experience to familiar images from the environment and family life. Cultural sedimentation gradually refines these expressions through the integration of Confucian and Taoist philosophies, as well as through the enhancement of rhythm, symmetry, and parallelism. In the final stage, social circulation occurs within a collectivist cultural framework, where proverbs gain authority and acceptance through moral instruction and communal consensus. Figure 5 thus demonstrates how Chinese proverbs become enduring cultural expressions shaped by shared experience, philosophical traditions, and collective cognitive habits.

These two paths clearly demonstrate the distinct cultural cognitive patterns reflected in the formation of English and Chinese proverbs, offering a significant linguistic perspective for understanding cultural differences between the East and the West. A comparison of the pathways for the formation of English and Chinese proverbs is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. A comparison of cognitive paths in the formation of English and Chinese proverbs

Cognitive phase	Ep path features	Cp path features
Experience observation	Focus on individual experience, emphasizing personal practice and religious activities	Focus on collective experience, emphasizing agricultural life and family relationships
Concept extraction and word combination	Pursue direct expression, clear subject-predicate structure, explicit logic	Pursue implicit expression, frequent use of elliptical structures, emphasis on context
Categorization and similarity-based induction	Adopt binary opposition classification, emphasizing causal relationships	Adopt dialectical opposition classification, emphasizing cyclical relationships
Image schema building	Construct linear progress, competition, and individual achievement schemas	Construct cyclical transformation, harmonious balance, and collective virtue schemas
Mapping	Extensive use of business, war, and sports metaphors	Extensive use of natural phenomena and family relationship metaphors
Cultural sedimentation and optimization	Integration of biblical culture, optimization of rhyme and alliteration	Integration of Confucian-Taoist philosophy, optimization of rhythm and parallelism
Dissemination	Spread in individualistic society, emphasizing practical guidance	Spread in collectivistic society, emphasizing moral education

In summary, in this subchapter we traced the origin, development, and formation of English and Chinese proverbs, and proposed a seven-stage cognitive and cultural pathway from individual experience to collective linguistic crystallization. We argued that proverbs arise from long-term social practice and are gradually shaped through experience observation, concept extraction, categorization, image-schema construction, metaphorical and metonymic mapping, cultural sedimentation, and social transmission. Drawing on major proverb dictionaries and corpora in both English and Chinese, we emphasized that proverbs are not random sayings but stabilized products of repeated use, cultural filtering, and pragmatic optimization.

English proverbs tend to foreground individual experience, linear progress, competition, and domains such as commerce, war, and sports, whereas Chinese

proverbs foreground collective agrarian life, family ethics, cyclical reasoning, and Confucian–Taoist philosophy.

Figures 3 – 5 and Table 2 visualized these distinct formative paths, demonstrating that English and Chinese proverbs reflect divergent yet comparable cultural-cognitive patterns. This provides an important background for understanding how marriage and family proverbs in both languages encode not only shared human experience but also culturally specific ways of thinking.

2.2 The influence of cultural, religious, philosophical, and social backgrounds on English and Chinese proverbs

Proverbs reflect national psychology and value systems. As a unique linguistic form, they not only mirror the values and thought patterns of specific cultures but may also profoundly influence users' cognitive processes. We conduct an in-depth analysis of the differences in content and form between English and Chinese proverbs from three primary perspectives – cultural, religious, and social – and examine how these differences shape the cognitive patterns of language users.

Mieder W. clarified the significant role of proverbs in literature, politics, popular songs, and everyday life [59].

Cultural background is one of the core factors shaping the content and usage of proverbs. English and Chinese represent two distinctly different cultural traditions– Western and Eastern, respectively. Differences in values, modes of expression, and ways of thinking are vividly reflected in Chinese and English proverbs. The influence of cultural background on English and Chinese proverbs are as follows.

a) Value systems: individualism vs. collectivism.

From a value perspective, English proverbs often reflect the individualistic values prevalent in Western culture, emphasizing personal independence and autonomy. For example, "The early bird catches the worm" "God helps those who help themselves". These proverbs emphasize the importance of personal effort and initiative in achieving success, potentially influencing users to develop a cognitive bias that values personal responsibility and self-actualization.

In contrast, Chinese proverbs more often reflect collectivist thinking. For example, the Chinese proverbs *"众人拾柴火焰高"* (Many hands make light work) and *"一个篱笆三个桩，一个好汉三个帮"* (It takes three stakes to make a fence, and three helpers to make a hero) emphasize the importance of collective cooperation. Such proverbs may influence users to prioritize group benefits and harmonious relationships.

Triandis indicates that such value differences may influence individuals' decision-making behaviors and social interaction patterns [60]. For instance, individuals from collectivist cultural backgrounds are more likely to consider family or group opinions when making decisions, whereas those from individualist cultural backgrounds tend to favor independent decision-making.

b) Expression methods: direct expression vs. indirect expression.

In terms of expression, English proverbs often reflect a preference for direct communication, such as "Call a spade a spade" and "Actions speak louder than words" This directness may foster more open, straightforward communication styles and

problem-solving strategies.

Chinese proverbs tend to employ more subtle and indirect expressions.

For example, *"话说到嘴边留三分"* (Hold back a third of what's on your mind)

"好言一句三冬暖，恶语伤人六月寒" (A kind word can warm one even in the dead of winter; a malicious remark can chill one even in the heat of summer.). Such phrasing may foster communication strategies that emphasize context and face-saving.

This difference can be explained by Hall's high-context/low-context cultural theory [61]. English-speaking cultures are low-context, favoring explicit verbal expression, whereas Chinese culture is high-context, relying more on implicit, nonverbal information. This difference may influence how language users process information and their interpersonal communication strategies.

c) Thinking style: analytical vs. holistic thinking.

From a thinking perspective, English proverbs often reflect more analytical thinking – emphasizing logical reasoning, individuality, and clear cause-and-effect relationships. This mindset tends to break problems down into independently analyzable parts. Examples like "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" and "Divide and conquer" may foster thinking patterns focused on risk diversification and problem decomposition.

Chinese proverbs more often reflect holistic thinking. Influenced by Confucian and Taoist philosophies, they emphasize relationships, context, harmony, and change. This mindset tends to view things as interconnected wholes, avoids hasty conclusions, and values "leaving room for interpretation"

For example, *"牵一发而动全身"* (Pull one hair and the whole body moves)；

"十年树木，百年树人" (It takes ten years to grow a tree, but a hundred to cultivate a person). It is emphasizing long-term planning. This mindset may foster systemic thinking and a holistic perspective.

Nisbett et al. found that individuals from Western cultural backgrounds tend to adopt analytical thinking, focusing on the specific attributes of an object, whereas those from Eastern cultural backgrounds tend to adopt holistic thinking, focusing on the relationship between an object and its environment [62, p.310].

This difference in thinking styles may influence problem-solving and decision-making processes. This distinction is particularly noticeable in classrooms with international students. Students from Western backgrounds are typically more active in responding to classroom questions.

Their analytical thinking leads them to speak while thinking – they may answer before fully formulating their thoughts or arriving at a conclusion, potentially arriving at the answer during the process of responding.

Students from Eastern backgrounds, however, tend to be more cautious in class. Under the influence of holistic thinking, they tend to be more cautious in expressing their views and are more likely to speak only when they are confident that their answer is correct. Moreover, their logic is summarized in their answers; they typically express their conclusions in class only after reaching a comprehensive understanding.

The comparative analysis of cultural background differences in Chinese and English proverbs is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. A comparative analysis of cultural differences in English and Chinese proverbs

Dimension	English proverbs	Chinese proverbs
Value systems	Individualism: Emphasize personal effort, autonomy, and independence. May foster a cognitive tendency toward personal responsibility and self-actualization. E.g., "god helps those who help themselves"	Collectivism: Emphasize cooperation, group benefits, and relational harmony. Encourage prioritizing group interests and collective decision-making. E.g., *"众人拾柴火焰高"* (many hands make light work)
Expression methods	Direct expression: Preference for explicit and straightforward communication. Fosters open communication and direct problem-solving. E.g., "call a spade a spade"	Indirect expression: Preference for subtle, context-dependent, and face-saving communication. Emphasize politeness, relational maintenance, and contextual cues. E.g., *"话说到嘴边留三分"* (hold back a third of what you want to say)
Thinking styles	Analytical thinking: Emphasize logic, causality, and problem decomposition. Promote independent analysis and risk-diversification strategies. E.g., "don't put all your eggs in one basket"	Holistic thinking: Emphasize relationships, contextual awareness, harmony, and long-term vision. Encourage systemic thinking and conclusions based on comprehensive understanding. E.g., *"牵一发而动全身"* (pull one hair and the whole body moves)

Overall, cultural background significantly shapes the content and functions of English and Chinese proverbs. English proverbs reflect the individualistic values of Western culture, emphasizing personal autonomy, self-reliance, and direct communication. Chinese proverbs, by contrast, embody collectivist orientations that highlight group cooperation, relational harmony, and indirect or context-dependent expression.

In terms of thinking styles, English proverbs reveal an analytic cognitive tendency focused on causality, problem decomposition, and risk management, whereas Chinese proverbs demonstrate a holistic perspective that stresses contextual awareness, interconnectedness, and long-term vision. Previous studies also show that such cultural differences influence individuals' decision-making, information processing, and even classroom participation. In sum, variations in value systems, communicative preferences, and cognitive styles jointly account for the contrasting characteristics of English and Chinese proverbs.

Religion profoundly influences the content and structure of proverbs, as well as

the cognitive patterns and value systems of language users [63, p.40]. English proverbs are primarily shaped by Western religions, chiefly Christianity (particularly Protestantism and Catholicism), while Chinese proverbs are chiefly influenced by Eastern philosophies, primarily Confucianism and Daoist thought. The influence of religious and philosophical backgrounds on English and Chinese proverbs are as follows.

a) The influence of religious background on English proverbs.

Christianity's influence on English proverbs has persisted for over 1,400 years. Since its introduction to England in the 6th century AD, it gradually became the core religion of the English-speaking world, profoundly shaping social values, moral ethics, and linguistic expression. The core doctrines of Christianity include belief in one almighty God, that humans are born sinful and require redemption through faith and good deeds, belief in heaven and hell after death, and an emphasis on loving God and one's neighbor, as well as forgiving others. These doctrines are widely reflected in English proverbs. The comparative influence of Catholicism and Protestantism on English proverbs is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The influence of Catholicism and Protestantism on English proverbs

Dimension	Catholicism	Protestantism
Core doctrine	Emphasizes church authority, confession, good deeds, and salvation	Emphasizes personal faith, work ethic, diligence, and self-discipline
God and humans	Communicate with God through the Church and sacraments	Individuals can communicate directly with God
View on salvation	Requires faith + good deeds (e.g., confession, charity)	Faith alone grants salvation (Justification by faith)
Ethical perspective	Emphasizes sacred order, following church teachings, focusing on patience and forgiveness	Emphasizes personal responsibility, highlighting self-reliance and effort
View on wealth	Traditionally sees wealth as potentially sinful, encourages charity and almsgiving	Views wealth as a blessing from God, emphasizing hard work and prosperity
View on fate	Stresses submission to God's will, believes in divine justice	Emphasizes individual effort alongside God's will

Early Europe was predominantly Catholic, and before the Middle Ages, Catholic

doctrine exerted a profound influence on social morality, law, and linguistic expression. Many proverbs related to sin, redemption, repentance, and good deeds originated from Catholic teachings. For example, the proverb "Confession is good for the soul" originates from the Catholic sacrament of confession and embodies Christian concepts of sin and redemption.

In modern times, it has transcended religious contexts and is widely applied to mental health, moral education, and social interactions. "To err is human，to forgive, divine" This proverb advocates for tolerance and understanding in interpersonal relationships. It blends human nature, morality, and religious values, emphasizing the inevitability of making mistakes and the importance of forgiveness. it is not only rooted in Christian faith but also represents a core tenet of Western ethical thought. In modern society, it is still relevant across various domains, including interpersonal relationships, mental health, and social reconciliation.

After the Reformation in the 16th century, England gradually shifted from Catholicism to Protestantism, with Puritans exerting a profound influence on English culture. Protestantism emphasized personal responsibility, diligence, frugality, and God's will, shaping numerous proverbs such as "God helps those who help themselves". This stresses individual effort and relates to the Protestant work ethic.

The proverb "Man proposes, God disposes" embodies a fatalistic philosophy, suggesting that while humans may make plans, the ultimate outcome rests in God's hands. It expresses a humble worldview that acknowledges human effort as important, yet ultimately attributes success or failure to a higher power (God). This proverb remains widely quoted to this day.

The Bible (*Old Testament* and *New Testament*) provides abundant inspiration for proverbs. Catholicism influenced early English proverbs, emphasizing confession and ecclesiastical authority. Protestantism shaped later proverbs, stressing personal striving and moral self-discipline. Even as contemporary Western societies trend toward secularization, many English proverbs retain the imprint of Christian doctrine, and Christianity continues to profoundly influence English culture and moral concepts.

English proverbs reflect core Christian values and worldviews, shaping and influencing users' moral judgments, behavioral standards, and understanding of life's meaning. For example, belief in "God's will" may affect how individuals attribute success and failure. While Christianity is the primary influence on English proverbs, traces of Germanic culture, Norse mythology and Viking culture, Greco-Roman influence, Celtic culture, and folk beliefs and superstitions also appear in certain proverbs. For example, the proverb "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts" originates from the Trojan Horse story in the Iliad, meaning to guard against apparent goodwill.

Catholicism and Protestantism (especially Puritanism) are also the religions that have most profoundly influenced English proverbs about marriage and family. Catholicism emphasizes the sanctity of marriage and traditional family structures, shaping numerous proverbs about fidelity, responsibility, and the role of motherhood. Protestantism emphasizes individual effort and the spirit of contract, shaping numerous proverbs about striving, cooperation, and discipline. Particularly since the Middle Ages, marriage has been viewed as a sacred religious contract (sacrament), with the family

serving as a significant place for practicing faith. English proverbs about marriage and family emphasize loyalty, sacrifice, complementarity, and responsibility. Many proverbs reflect biblical values on marriage. For example, “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder,” from the Gospel of Matthew, emphasizes the indissolubility of marriage.

Puritans, as a branch of Protestantism, profoundly influenced English culture – particularly American society’s views on marriage and family – promoting the spread of proverbs about diligence, frugality, and moral restraint. These proverbs embody the values that marriage is sacred, spouses should be faithful, the family structure is rigid, patriarchy is emphasized, mothers play a crucial role in raising children, and couples must work together to manage the household. For example, “Marriage is made in heaven” “A man’s home is his castle” “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world”

b) The influence of philosophical thinking backgrounds on Chinese proverbs.

Confucian thought has exerted a profound influence on China for over two thousand years. Since Confucius founded the Confucian school during the Spring and Autumn period (around the 6th century BCE), it has remained the core value system of Chinese society. Over two millennia ago, Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty advocated *“罢黜百家，独尊儒术”* (suppressing all schools of thought except Confucianism)，establishing Confucianism as the official ideology of feudal China. It permeated every level of society through the imperial examination system, the educational framework, and governmental structures.

Confucian principles such as the *“三纲五常”* (Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues) and the patriarchal clan system formed the fundamental framework of traditional Chinese social relations, regulating family structures and societal order. Through canonical texts like *“四书五经”* (The Four Books and Five Classics), Confucianism established a comprehensive knowledge system that became the core content of Chinese education. As the core of traditional Chinese culture, Confucian thought shaped the moral outlook and behavioral norms of the Chinese people, exerting a profound influence on the formation and development of Chinese proverbs.

“三纲五常” (The Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues) constitute the essential ethical framework of Confucian thought, forming the moral foundation of traditional Chinese society.

They profoundly influenced the political systems, familial relationships, and personal conduct standards of feudal society. *“三纲”* (The Three Cardinal Guides) refer to the three fundamental hierarchical relationships in feudal society: the ruler as the guide for his subjects, the father as the guide for his children, and the husband as the guide for his wife. Proposed by Dong Zhongshu of the Western Han Dynasty, they emphasized the hierarchical order and relationships of obedience between ruler and subjects, father and son, and husband and wife, serving as crucial ethical principles for maintaining stability in feudal society.

However, the *“三纲”* (Three Cardinal Guides) excessive emphasis on hierarchical relationships suppressed individual freedom, particularly the social status of women, and no longer aligns with modern values of liberty, democracy, and equality.

The meanings and requirements of *“三纲”* are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The meaning and moral requirements of three cardinal guides

三纲 (Three cardinal guides)	Meaning	Moral requirements
君为臣纲	The ruler guides the subject	Subjects must be loyal to the ruler and maintain the feudal hierarchy. E.g., *"君要臣死，臣不得不死"* (If the ruler demands the subject's death, the subject must die)
父为子纲	The father guides the son	Sons must be filial to their parents and uphold family ethics. E.g., *"百善孝为先"* (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first)
夫为妻纲	The husband guides the wife	Wives must obey their husbands and maintain family order. E.g., *"夫唱妇随"* (When the husband sings, the wife follows）

"五常" (The Five Constant Virtues) refer to five fundamental moral principles: *"仁"* (benevolence), *"义"* (righteousness), *"礼"* (propriety), *"智"* (wisdom), *"信"* (trustworthiness). First proposed by Confucius and later developed by Mencius, Dong Zhongshu, and others, *"五常"* (The Five Constant Virtues) became the core tenets of Confucian ethics. Emphasizing personal moral cultivation, they apply not only to relationships such as ruler-subject, father-son, and husband-wife, but also to the individual's self-cultivation, family management, and governance of the state. The definitions and requirements of the Five Constant Virtues are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6. The meaning and moral requirements of five constant virtues

五常(Five constant virtues)	Meaning	Moral requirements
仁 (Benevolence)	Love and compassion for others.	Show empathy and extend kindness to others.
义 (Righteousness)	Acting with justice and integrity.	Behave with honor and without selfishness.
礼 (Propriety)	Observing social norms and etiquette.	Maintain proper manners and respect social hierarchy.
智 (Wisdom)	Possessing insight and judgment.	Make rational decisions and distinguish right from wrong.
信 (Trustworthiness)	Being honest and keeping promises.	Be sincere and reliable in words and actions.

Many Chinese proverbs reflect Confucian ethical concepts, social values, and philosophies of life, covering multiple aspects such as moral cultivation, family relationships, social responsibility, and interpersonal interactions. For example, *"百善孝为先"* (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first). This is a very classic and well-known proverb that reinforces family responsibility and the concept of respect for elders and hierarchy, potentially influencing how family relationships are managed.

Confucian culture emphasizes filial piety as the foremost of all virtues. Filial duty held an extremely powerful moral influence in traditional Chinese society, but the blind, unconditional *"孝"* (filial piety) advocated by feudal society has faced strong questioning in modern times. Most young Chinese believe that filial piety remains important in contemporary society, but it should be balanced with personal independence and family responsibilities.

The proverb *"己所不欲，勿施于人"* (Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire) embodies one of the core principles of Confucian ethics *"仁"* (Benevolence), emphasizing empathy and respect for others. This proverb remains widely used today, offering advanced guidance and educational significance. The proverb *"过犹不及"* (Too much is as bad as too little) emphasizes moderation, embodying a mindset of balance and restraint that influences human decision-making and behavioral choices.

Confucianism advocates *"中庸之道"* (The doctrine of the Mean), which teaches that one should grasp the appropriate measure in all matters, avoiding excess or extremes. This philosophy profoundly shapes Chinese behavioral norms to this day, influencing interpersonal conduct, education, management, and social governance. Such proverbs reflect Confucian perspectives on personal ethics, social relations, and behavioral standards, potentially shaping users' value judgments and social behavior patterns.

Daoist thought emerged around the same time as Confucianism, with Laozi and Zhuangzi as its leading figures. Key tenets of Daoism include harmony with nature advocating for following nature's course without excessive intervention, maintaining yin-yang balance; and pursuing simplicity and authenticity. For example, *"顺其自然"* (Let nature take its course) teaches us to cultivate a mindset that adapts to environmental changes, reflecting respect for natural laws and an attitude of compliance with human behavior *"物极必反"* (Extremes give way to their opposites) embodies dialectical thinking, emphasizing that all things are in a state of constant change. When development reaches an extreme, it will shift in the opposite direction.

"大道至简" (The greatest truths are the simplest) advocates for minimalist thinking, emphasizing that the most profound principles are often the most straightforward. True wisdom lies in simplifying complexity and returning to simplicity. These examples reflect Daoist perspectives on nature, society, and life, potentially influencing the user's worldview and approach to living.

Research on Chinese proverbs concerning marriage and family reveals that Confucian thought exerts a far greater influence on views of marriage and family than Daoist thought. This is because Confucians place marriage and family at the core of

social order, whereas Daoists emphasize personal freedom, naturalness, and conformity to the Way of Nature, exerting less direct influence on family perspectives.

The Confucian influence reflected in Chinese marriage and family proverbs is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The influence of Confucianism reflected in CP on marriage and the family

Aspect	Examples and explanations
Purpose of marriage	*"有子万事足"* (With a son, everything is sufficient.) Family continuation, maintaining social order
Decision-making in marriage	*"父母之命，媒妁之言"* (The rule for marriage was arrangement by parents and introduction by a matchmaker.) Emphasizing family interests and parental authority
Husband-wife relationship	*"夫为妻纲"* (The husband guides, the wife follows.) Male supremacy and female subordination
Family roles	*"男主外，女主内"* (Men rule outside, women rule inside.) Clear gender division of labor
Child education	*"养不教,父之过"* (If the child is not taught, it is the father's fault) Parents have educational responsibility
Filial piety	*"百善孝为先"* (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first.) Children must support and obey parents
Social responsibility	*"男大当婚，女大当嫁"* (Men should marry when they grow up, women should marry when they grow up.) Family is the foundation of social stability; individuals must bear family responsibilities

In summary, Religion and philosophical traditions play a decisive role in shaping the content, structure, and value orientations of English and Chinese proverbs. English proverbs are primarily influenced by Christianity, including both Catholic and Protestant traditions. Many English proverbs also originate from the Bible, and despite modern secularization, Christian moral concepts continue to shape the worldview embedded in English proverbial expressions, especially those concerning marriage and family. By contrast, Chinese proverbs are chiefly shaped by Confucianism, which has dominated Chinese social and moral life for more than two millennia. Chinese proverbs about marriage and family mainly reflect Confucian norms concerning hierarchy, duty, and collective stability.

Social structures and historical experiences shape the content and usage of proverbs, thereby influencing linguistic cognition [64]. Geographical environments, modes of production, economic development, social transformations, political systems, and other factors profoundly impact the emergence and evolution of proverbs. English and Chinese proverbs reflect the distinctive characteristics and historical experiences of their respective societies. The influence of social background on English and Chinese proverbs are as follows.

a) Geographical environment and traditional modes of production.

The geographical environment in which people live is the primary source of their life experiences and directly influences their modes of production. Sometimes, traditional proverbs in a language can reveal the environment, landform, or even climate of its users. Differences in geographical settings and traditional production methods have led to obvious variations between English and Chinese proverbs.

Britain is an island nation whose civilization has been closely connected to the sea, navigation, and trade throughout its history. This geographical setting has shaped the distinctive character of English proverbs. A vast number of English proverbs originate from navigation experiences involving ships, fish, wind and waves, and weather forecasting at sea. For example, “Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky in morning, sailors take warning”, “A rising tide lifts all boats” and “Any port in a storm” are both classic navigation proverbs. Traditional British production methods also include agriculture and animal husbandry, reflected in proverbs such as “Don't count your chickens before they are hatched”, “You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs”, “Go for wool and come home shorn”.

Chinese civilization originated in the Yellow River and Yangtze River basins, forming a typical inland riverine agricultural civilization. The proverb *“靠山吃山，靠水吃水”* (Relying on the mountains for food if you live near them, relying on the water for food if you live near it) directly reflects this dependence on the surrounding geographical environment. China’s distinctive geographical features are deeply imprinted in its proverbs. China’s agriculture relies heavily on seasonal rainfall, making weather observations and agricultural timing the core themes of proverbs. As a result, weather proverbs and farming proverbs have flourished exceptionally. Many proverbs reflect the practice of predicting weather through sky observation to guide agriculture and transportation. For example, *“清明前后，种瓜点豆”* (Plant melons and beans around Qingming Festival), *“朝霞不出门，晚霞行千里”* (Morning glow means stay home; evening glow means journey far), *“瑞雪兆丰年”* (A timely snow promises a bumper harvest).

These differences in environment and production methods directly influenced views on marriage and family. Chinese proverbs like *“男耕女织，家道兴旺”* (Men till the fields, women weave cloth; the household thrives) highlight the importance of the family as a productive unit, where marriage is seen as the integration of labor and resources. English proverbs, however, emphasize maintaining the family through experience and practice, such as “A stitch in time saves nine,” which metaphorically suggests that preserving a marriage requires addressing issues promptly.

b) Patterns of economic development.

The British economic model has experienced a transformation from an agrarian society to commercial capitalism, then through the Industrial Revolution to a modern market economy. Particularly after the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, time, efficiency, and competition became core societal values. This shift has led to the widespread circulation of numerous proverbs. For example, “Time is money” directly reflects the values of a market economy. “The early bird catches the worm” emphasizes seizing opportunities, diligence, and time management awareness.

China's economy remained predominantly agricultural for centuries, emphasizing stability and self-sufficiency. Even as commerce flourished in the Song and Ming dynasties, the principle of *"重农抑商"* (valuing agriculture and restraining commerce) continued to influence values. Chinese proverbs often reflect the logic of cause and effect and the virtues of diligence and thrift in household management. For example, *"一寸光阴一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴"* (Time is money, but money can't buy time) emphasizes the importance of valuing time and working diligently. *"一分耕耘，一分收获"* (One moment of ploughing, one moment of gain) emphasizes that hard work and reward are directly proportional, reflecting the value of long-term commitment and patience. In modern times, with the development of industry, commerce, and the market economy, new proverbs have gradually emerged that highlight economic rationality and personal striving. Nevertheless, traditional values continue to exert a profound influence.

Chinese proverbs like *"种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆"* (You reap what you sow) embody agrarian causal thinking, while *"买卖不成仁义在"* (Even if the trade fails, friendship remains) ties economic activity to moral principles. Boroditsky argues that different cultural backgrounds may lead to variations in cognitive patterns regarding the concept of time and resource management [65]. For instance, an agricultural societal context may foster a cyclical conception of time, while an industrial societal context may promote a linear conception of time.

Economic patterns influenced marriage and family values directly. Chinese proverb *"家有余粮，心不慌"* (With grain surplus in the house, the heart is not flustered) links family stability to economic security. In English proverbs, economic rationality entered marriage decisions. For example, "Don't marry for money, but go where money is" reflects the practical importance of financial resources in marital decisions. Thus, while Chinese proverbs emphasize family security and household responsibility, English proverbs highlight individual economic capacity and rational choice in family life.

c) Social institutions and social structures.

In England, medieval society was mainly dominated by feudal hierarchies, but over time, commercial expansion, contractual relations, and the Industrial Revolution increased mobility, and personal responsibility became a cultural value. English proverbs often reflect greater social mobility, such as "Every man is the architect of his own fortune", "From rags to riches" and "Where there's a will, there's a way" These proverbs encourage risk-taking and innovation, emphasize personal effort and social mobility, and heighten sensitivity to opportunity. They may foster a positive, enterprising mindset and opportunistic thinking, influencing individuals' career planning and social aspirations.

Since the pre-Qin period, China has developed a patriarchal system, making family ethics the core of social operation. Chinese proverb *"龙生龙，凤生凤，老鼠的儿子会打洞"* (Dragons beget dragons, phoenixes beget phoenixes, and a rat's son will dig holes) stress lineage and inherited status*"不孝有三，无后为大"* (There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them all)

highlights the paramount importance of lineage continuity. Marriage was not merely a personal choice but a familial strategy; social hierarchies were rigidly structured with limited mobility. While the imperial examination system offered some possibilities for social mobility, it was still fundamentally based on family background and status. Compared to English proverbs, Chinese proverbs exhibit a more complex and multifaceted attitude toward social mobility.

Some Chinese proverbs reflect a positive attitude toward social mobility, while others emphasize the importance of social stability. The concept of social mobility reflected in proverbs suggests that social mobility is more closely tied to historical shifts and the unpredictability of fate than to the outcome of individual effort. For example, the proverb *"富不过三代"* (Wealth rarely lasts beyond three generations) reflects the fluidity of wealth while also implying the instability of social status. *"三十年河东，三十年河西"* (Fortune favors first one and then the other) suggests shifts in destiny and social status. These proverbs reflect an acknowledgment of social mobility, encouraging diligence and ambition while recognizing the potential for opportunity and change. However, some Chinese proverbs also emphasize the importance of social stability, such as the proverb *"守业不如创业"* (It's better to build a business than to maintain one). Although seemingly encouraging business creation, it also implies the difficulty of preserving the status.

Lu L. and Yang K. S. found that individuals from cultures with high social mobility may be more inclined to explore diverse career paths [66,175]. However, we should recognize that social mobility manifests complexly across cultures. Differences in social mobility may influence individuals' perceptions of social opportunities and career planning strategies, with specific effects requiring consideration of broader sociocultural contexts.

The influence of social systems and structures on marriage and family proverbs is evident in Chinese marriage proverbs that emphasize obedience and continuity. For example, *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog) reflects women's status and obedience under the patriarchal system. English family proverbs often reflect contractual obligations and rights awareness, for example, "A man's home is his castle," which emphasizes the autonomy of individuals and families. Overall, Chinese proverbs focus on ethical order and hierarchical stability, while English proverbs place greater emphasis on the spirit of contract and individual rights.

d) Political background and power culture.

The British political system evolved from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy and ultimately to modern democracy. The concept of divine right gradually gave way to the spirit of contract and parliamentary democracy, fostering a low power distance in its social culture. The early British proverb "The king can do no wrong" embodied the supremacy of royal authority, while the later proverb "What touches all should be approved by all" reflected the rise of democratic ideals. English proverbs often reveal a lower power distance and advocate for political equality, such as man, one vote"，"All men are created equal" These proverbs may foster a sense of equality and encourage a questioning attitude toward authority.

Throughout Chinese history, the nation long operated under a centralized and autocratic system, characterized by highly concentrated political power. This environment fostered a society with high power distance, where individuals typically maintained reverence and obedience toward political authority.

Proverbs such as *"伴君如伴虎"* (To serve the ruler is like living with a tiger) and *"天高皇帝远"* (The mountains are high and the emperor is far away) reflect caution and helplessness in the face of authority. *"只许州官放火，不许百姓点灯"* (The officials may set fires, but the common folk may not even light lamps) highlights the unfairness of hierarchical differences.

This proverb *"君要臣死，臣不得不死"* (When the emperor commands death, the subject must obey) emphasizes the absolute hierarchical order during the era of centralized feudal rule. Such proverbs reflect hierarchical concepts and respect for authority, shaping interpersonal interaction patterns, especially between individuals of differing social status. They also shape understandings of social roles and responsibilities, potentially influencing decision-making processes and innovative behaviors. The concept of power distance within Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory can explain this variation [67].

Cultures with high power distance (such as China) are more accepting of unequal power distribution, whereas cultures with low power distance (such as many Western nations) place greater emphasis on equality. This difference may influence organizational behavior and patterns of social interaction.

Political culture also permeated family and marriage discourse. In Chinese, patriarchal authority in the family often mirrored imperial power, as in *"父要子亡，子不得不亡"* (If a father orders his son to die, the son must obey), which reflects high power distance within the household.

In English, the democratization of political culture resonated with family values, producing expressions that stress equality and partnership, such as the proverb "Happy wife, happy life" highlights the importance of a wife in the family. Chinese proverbs thus perpetuated hierarchical family models aligned with state authority, while English proverbs gradually reflected egalitarian and contractual norms.

A specific comparative analysis of social and historical factors in Chinese and English proverbs is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Comparative analysis of social and historical factors in English and Chinese proverbs

Dimension	English proverbs	Chinese proverbs
Geographical environment and traditional modes of production	Island geography shaped a maritime and trade-oriented civilization; proverbs derive largely from seafaring, weather, and pastoral-agricultural experience.	Inland river-based agricultural civilization; proverbs center on geographical dependence, farming seasons, and climate.

Continuation of the Table 8

Dimension	English proverbs	Chinese proverbs
Patterns of economic development	Economic evolution from agriculture to commercial capitalism, then to industrialization and the market economy. Proverbs reflect values of efficiency, time, and competition	Long-term agrarian economy emphasizing stability, self-sufficiency, diligence, and thrift. Proverbs reflect agricultural causal logic
Social institutions and social structures	Higher social mobility; proverbs stress individual effort, opportunity, and upward mobility. Encourage risk-taking and career exploration.	Patriarchal and lineage-based system; proverbs stress inheritance, family ethics, and mixed attitudes toward mobility.
Political background and power culture	Transition from monarchy to democracy produced lower power distance; proverbs emphasize equality, rights, and questioning authority.	Long-standing centralized autocracy produced high power distance; proverbs emphasize hierarchy, obedience, and authority.

In summary, geographic conditions and traditional production modes lead English proverbs to reflect maritime life, trade, and practical reasoning, whereas Chinese proverbs center on agriculture, seasonal rhythms, and household-based labor. Economic development patterns make English proverbs emphasize efficiency, competition, and individual initiative, while Chinese proverbs foreground diligence, thrift, causal thinking, and family stability. Social structures foster English proverbs that promote personal effort and mobility, but Chinese proverbs reinforce lineage, hierarchy, and social order. Political traditions further deepen these contrasts: English proverbs reflect contractual relations and egalitarian values, whereas Chinese proverbs strengthen respect for authority, hierarchical order, and patriarchal family power. Overall, English proverbs lean toward individualism and social mobility, while Chinese proverbs highlight collective ethics, hierarchical stability, and family responsibility.

2.3 General social functions and practical applications of English and Chinese proverbs

As the concentrated carriers of linguistic culture, English and Chinese proverbs not only embody wisdom and experience but also serve multiple social functions. Proverbs can be passed down through generations due to their distinct social functions. English and Chinese proverbs differ in cultural values and application contexts, but both fulfill social needs through concise language. The social functions of English and Chinese proverbs can be divided into the following categories:

a) Behavioral standards and ethical guidance.

Proverbs were widely used in traditional societies to regulate individual behavior, serving as “oral rules” Chinese proverbs often embody Confucian moral concepts, for example, *“己所不欲，勿施于人”* (Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire),*“善有善报，恶有恶报”* (Good deeds beget good rewards; evil deeds beget evil consequences). English proverbs often embody Christian moral values, for example, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” and “Honesty is the best policy” Through highly condensed language, these proverbs have simplified widely accepted behavioral standards into easily memorable and transmissible expressions, effectively reinforcing social order and ethical norms.

b) Reflecting collective memory and life experiences.

Proverbs often reflect collective wisdom. Chinese proverbs embody the experiences of agrarian civilization and family systems, such as *“春种一粒粟，秋收万颗子”* (Sow a grain in spring, reap ten thousand in autumn) and *“家有一老，如有一宝”* (An elder in the family is like a treasure).English proverbs often reflect industrial civilization and commercial experience, such as “Time is money” and “Make hay while the sun shines” Proverbs also offer practical advice for solving life's problems. English proverbs like “A stitch in time saves nine” encourage prompt action, while Chinese proverbs such as *“清明前后，种瓜点豆”* (Plant melons and beans around Qingming Festival) guide agricultural practices.

c) Strengthen group cultural identity and social cohesion.

As a concentrate of a nation's cultural wisdom, proverbs have distinctive temporal and regional characteristics. They serve as “living linguistic fossils” of traditional culture and are the core carriers of cultural identity. Proverbs are important “cultural codes” for communication among language users. They enhance a sense of belonging and identity among group members. In major celebrations, weddings, funerals, educational admonitions, and other social contexts, proverbs are frequently used as shared cultural resources. As the Chinese proverb *“宁拆十座庙，不毁一桩婚”* (It’s better to tear down ten temples than to break up one marriage) and the English proverb “Marriages are made in heaven” both illustrate, marriage holds profound significance as a social institution.

d) Expressing emotions and interpersonal regulation.

Proverbs foster emotional resonance between communicators. Often employing metaphors and personification, they convey complex sentiments, serving as vital tools for emotional communication and conflict resolution. For example, the Chinese proverbs *“退一步海阔天空”* (Step back and the sky opens wide) and *“好言一句三冬暖”* (A kind word warms three winters) are used to encourage reconciliation and forgiveness. English proverbs like “Let sleeping dogs lie” and “Forgive and forget” similarly convey forgiveness and tolerance. This gentle mode of emotional expression is easily accepted and suitable for social interactions across various settings, helping maintain harmonious relationships. It also provides a shared linguistic foundation for people of different ages, fostering understanding and communication across generations.

e) Cognitive education and mindset shaping.

Proverbs are not merely linguistic forms; they also reflect a worldview and way of thinking. The intergenerational transmission of proverbs plays a significant role in family education, oral traditions, and literary expression. Chinese proverbs emphasize holistic thinking and the concept of harmony between heaven and humanity, such as *"天网恢恢，疏而不漏"* (The net of heaven is vast, yet nothing escapes it). English proverbs emphasize logical reasoning and individual rationality, such as "The early bird catches the worm". Through repeated use, proverbs become internalized as mental templates, shaping people's perceptions and judgments of the world. The Chinese proverb *"百善孝为先"* (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first.) teaches people that children should regard filial devotion to parents as the highest moral standard. The English proverb "Charity begins at home" teaches people to value family responsibilities.

The social functions of proverbs make their formation and dissemination closely linked. Proverbs emerge through subtle, gradual processes over complex and long periods. Only those that have a social function and value endure the test of time and are passed down.

The practical application of research on English and Chinese proverbs are as follows.

a) Applications in cross-cultural communication.

Language and culture, as fundamental elements of human communication, play a crucial role in cross-cultural communication. As the concentrated essence of a nation's cultural wisdom, proverbs serve as a crucial window for understanding cultural differences in cross-cultural communication. The differences in expressions of marriage and family proverbs between English and Chinese reveal the different value orientations and social concepts between the East and the West. We can take marriage and family proverbs as a starting point to analyze their unique value in cross-cultural understanding. For example, the Chinese proverb *"鱼找鱼，虾找虾"* (Fish seeks fish, shrimp seeks shrimp) emphasizes that marriage must adhere to matching family status and social hierarchy, reflecting traditional patriarchal societal views on marriage. In contrast, the English proverb "Marry in haste, repent at leisure" embodies the value orientation of personal choice and careful decision-making. Language is not merely a tool for conveying information but also a carrier of culture. Boroditsky argues that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis's core claim of language influencing thought remains widely debated. In cross-cultural communication, linguistic differences may cause misunderstandings while simultaneously offering windows into distinct cultural ways of thinking [65]. For example, the Chinese concept of *"家"* (jiā) is far more complex than the English terms "home" or "family," reflecting Chinese culture's particular emphasis on familial relationships.

As the sum of shared beliefs, values, and behavioral patterns within a society, culture profoundly shapes how people communicate. Language and culture are inextricably linked. On one hand, language is both a product and a vehicle of culture; on the other, culture is transmitted and developed through language. This interaction is particularly evident in cross-cultural communication. Cultural differences may lead to language barriers. For example, in high-context cultures like China, communication

often relies on context and nonverbal cues, whereas in low-context cultures such as the United States, people tend toward more direct and explicit expressions. Such differences often lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication, therefore requiring both communicators to possess cultural sensitivity and adaptability.

As a crystallization of language and culture, proverbs about marriage and family offer a unique perspective for studying cross-cultural communication. These proverbs not only reflect a specific culture's views on marriage and family but also embody its value orientations and thought patterns. For example, the Chinese proverb *"打虎亲兄弟"* (Fighting tigers requires blood brothers) emphasizes the importance of collectivism and family support, while the English proverb "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" highlights the mother's key role in the family, reflecting differing family values. Lan A. and Shiguo S. argue that English proverbs about love and marriage are not only a rich source of linguistic and cultural information but also a valuable resource for cross-cultural communication and education [68, p.25]. Similarly, An L. discusses the influence of Confucian thought on Chinese marriage proverbs and its role in shaping Chinese marriage concepts [69, p.27].

Holmes argues that the use and understanding of proverbs are profoundly influenced by social factors [70]. In cross-cultural communication, grasping the social-pragmatic functions of proverbs is crucial. For example, some marriage proverbs may be considered inappropriate in formal settings common in private family conversations. A lack of this pragmatic knowledge can lead to awkwardness or offense in cross-cultural communication. Yuan Qunying believes that for Chinese and Western cultures, which exhibit significant differences, studying proverbs can help grasp the patterns and characteristics of their cultural development as well as the disparities between Chinese and Western cultures [71, p.72].

In today's increasingly globalized world, cross-cultural communication has become an integral part of our daily lives. It is not only evident in international interactions but also permeates every aspect of our everyday existence. Recognizing the universality and importance of cross-cultural communication, cultivating relevant skills is an inevitable trend. In cross-cultural communication, understanding and correctly using proverbs can help break down communication barriers. Maintaining cultural sensitivity and an open attitude is crucial in cross-cultural communication. Respecting and embracing differences between cultures helps build trust and cooperative relationships. Cultural sensitivity not only includes awareness of cultural differences but also respect for and adaptation to these differences. Comparative studies can help cross-cultural communicators enhance their sensitivity to cultural differences, avoiding misunderstandings caused by applying their own cultural concepts. In international business, cross-cultural marriages, and diplomatic settings, understanding and appropriately using proverbs can enhance communication efficiency and interpersonal effectiveness.

The study of English and Chinese proverbs also plays a crucial role in language teaching. Language teaching is essentially a purposeful and organized cross-cultural communication activity. Proverbs are indispensable cultural and linguistic resources in language teaching. Sang-Oak Lees argues that Chinese proverbs and English proverbs

exhibit significant differences in their high-frequency keywords [72, p.81].

Due to their concise form, vivid expressions, and distinct cultural characteristics, English and Chinese proverbs help learners grasp cultural values underlying the language while mastering vocabulary and grammar. For example, in Chinese language teaching, the proverb *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) not only imparts vocabulary and syntactic knowledge but also conveys the importance of family harmony in Chinese culture. Similarly, in English language teaching, the proverb "Home is where the heart is" helps learners understand how family is closely linked to emotional belonging in English-speaking cultures. Proverbs are often essential material for the advanced stages of foreign language learning, particularly concerning the pragmatic level.

Berry's theory of cultural adaptation provides a framework for understanding how individuals adjust their behaviors and attitudes in cross-cultural settings [73, p.34]. In this process, learning and comprehending proverbs from the target culture can serve as a crucial adaptation strategy. For instance, foreigners studying Chinese marriage and family proverbs not only enhance their language proficiency but also gain deeper insights into Chinese family culture, thereby promoting cross-cultural adaptation. However, we must recognize that every culture is dynamic and multifaceted, and the use and interpretation of proverbs evolve over time. In modern societies, traditional proverbs may be reinterpreted or challenged, while some have already been discarded or criticized. In cross-cultural communication, it is important to maintain an open and critical mindset, avoiding overgeneralization or stereotyping.

b) Application in translation practice.

Li Hua believes that due to the unique cultural backgrounds of China and the West, cultural omissions inevitably occur in the translation of English and Chinese proverbs [74, p.127]. Proverb translation is one of the most challenging aspects of translation practice. Due to their heavy reliance on metaphor and cultural context, literal translations often fail to fully convey the original meaning. For example, the Chinese proverb *"不到黄河心不死"* means that a person won't abandon their resolve until they're backed into a corner with no way out. It describes an extremely stubborn state of mind. In Chinese culture, the Yellow River is not merely a geographical waterway. It is considered the mother river of the Chinese nation, yet it is also known for its violent floods and difficulty in control. Since ancient times, it has been viewed as an impassable natural barrier, symbolizing limits, endpoints, or ultimate predicaments. A literal translation like "One won't give up until they reach the Yellow River" is semantically accurate but lacks resonance in English culture, requiring cultural explanation or annotation. Similarly, if the English proverb "A man's home is his castle" were translated literally into Chinese, the target audience would struggle to grasp the symbolic meaning of "castle", thereby failing to understand the proverb's emphasis on the homeowner's autonomy and rights. Lu Meng points out that most current Chinese and foreign translation studies lack in-depth analysis and understanding of the cultural dimension at the level of values [75, p.184]. Li Hua and Li Yanlin argue that geographical factors, religious and cultural elements, as well as customs and traditions, all influence the translation of proverbs [76, p. 21].

Research on Chinese and English proverbs can provide translators with strategic guidance, such as when to adopt literal translation to preserve cultural characteristics, when to use free translation to find similar expressions in the target culture, and when to supplement cultural information through annotations when necessary. This not only enhances translation quality but also promotes cultural communication and understanding.

c) Applications in cognitive linguistics research.

Proverbs are typical expressions where language, culture, and cognition intertwine. From a cognitive linguistics perspective, the conceptual metaphors within proverbs offer crucial clues for understanding cultural cognitive patterns. Research on English and Chinese proverbs can reveal how people in different cultures conceptualize marriage and family. For instance, marriage is often metaphorically described as a journey, though the specific expressions and meanings may be different. The Chinese proverb *"百年修得同船渡，千年修得共枕眠"* (It takes a hundred years of spiritual cultivation to bring two people on the same boat, and a thousand to share the same pillow) suggests a fatalistic view of marriage, whereas the English proverb "Marriage is not a destination but a journey" emphasizes the dynamic nature of marital relationships and the necessity of ongoing effort. Through the theoretical perspectives of cognitive linguistics, such as conceptual metaphor, metonymy, and prototypical categorization, we can reveal how human experiences underlying proverbs are processed and expressed through language. This not only enriches the evidence supporting cognitive linguistics but also helps us understand how cultural differences influence human conceptual systems. Simultaneously, as cultural symbols, proverbs document historical transformations and the evolution of social values, providing crucial cultural samples for sociological and anthropological research.

d) Applications in Corpus construction.

In modern linguistic research, corpora are important tools for conducting systematic analysis. The collation and classification of English and Chinese proverbs provide a rich data source for building specialized corpora.

By annotating proverbs according to their themes (such as marriage, family, education, etc.), forms (such as parallelism, rhyme, etc.), cognitive features (metaphor, metonymy, archetypes, etc.), and cultural characteristics (patrilineal ethics, contractual spirit, etc.), a cross-linguistic proverb corpus can be constructed. Such a corpus supports comparative studies, statistical analysis, and cross-linguistic retrieval. For instance, researchers can utilize the corpus to compare the usage frequency, contextual distribution, and cultural meanings of *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) and "Home is where the heart is," thereby revealing linguistic differences more scientifically. Proverb corpora can also be applied to education, translation, and cultural dissemination, advancing proverb studies from traditional qualitative descriptions toward quantitative analysis and interdisciplinary applications.

e) Applications of LLMS and AI.

In the fields of natural language processing (NLP) and artificial intelligence, proverbs are regarded as ideal material for testing the semantic comprehension capabilities of language models due to their high metaphorical nature, cultural load,

and context dependency. By systematically incorporating English and Chinese proverbs into language model training, we can significantly enhance the model's performance in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication. Ultimately, if a large language model can accurately translate the metaphors within unfamiliar proverbs into culturally equivalent expressions rather than merely providing literal translations, it demonstrates the model's ability to handle cultural differences and metaphorical mapping. Simultaneously, the establishment of a proverb database can provide dialogue systems with expressions closer to human communication habits, enabling them to function more naturally and approachably in cross-cultural contexts.

However, current large language models still exhibit significant shortcomings when processing proverbs. First, they often tend toward literal translations, overlooking the metaphors and cultural connotations embedded within proverbs. This can result in semantically correct but culturally disconnected outputs. Second, these models perform poorly when handling context-dependent subtleties. LLMs perform well at memorizing language materials fed into the system, but when encountering unfamiliar proverbs, they struggle to accurately convey the underlying cultural elements. Many proverbs rely on specific contexts, and without cultural background knowledge, models often provide inappropriate or misleading interpretations. Third, large language models often struggle to make accurate choices when confronted with multiple meanings and ambiguities. For example, the word *"家"* can refer to family, residence, clan, or even nation, and models frequently fail to make the correct judgment based on context. Finally, the model tends to confuse and misjudge novel internet slang and modern proverbs, thereby undermining its reliability in cross-cultural communication. Consequently, proverb research not only provides valuable linguistic resources for artificial intelligence but also reveals the current limitations of large language models. Only by integrating corpus construction, cultural knowledge infusion, and cognitive mechanism modeling can we progressively enhance the accuracy and cultural adaptability of models when processing English-Chinese proverbs.

In summary, research on English and Chinese proverbs has important practical value across multiple fields. Proverbs provide insights into cultural differences in marriage and family concepts, support effective cross-cultural communication, and offer guidance for translation by revealing the cultural and metaphorical mechanisms behind fixed expressions. They also contribute empirical evidence to cognitive linguistics, serve as valuable data for building cross-linguistic corpora, and supply culturally enriched materials for improving large language models. At the same time, proverb studies highlight the current limitations of AI systems in handling metaphor, context, and culturally embedded meanings, underscoring the need for integrating cultural knowledge and cognitive modeling into future developments.

2.4 The contemporary development of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs

In the fields of linguistics, sociology, and folklore, "social function" refers to the role or social effect performed by a particular linguistic or cultural element within a specific social structure.

Marriage and family proverbs in both English and Chinese play multiple crucial roles in society. They are not only the crystallization of cultural wisdom but also serve as a lubricant and compass for social operations. Comparative analysis of the social functions of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs are as follows. These proverbs encompass six core social functions:

a) Normative function.

In English marriage and family proverbs, Christianity forms the core value-norm system, and marriage is viewed as a sacred and inviolable union. For example, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" shows that through religious ethics, marriage is given lifelong commitment, loyalty, and moral responsibility, which strengthens its normative force.

Family ethics are also reflected in proverbs such as "Charity begins at home," which emphasizes that moral practice starts within the family. In Chinese marriage and family proverbs, Confucian family ethics serve as the core value-norm system, treating marriage and family as moral duties that sustain patriarchal order and social stability. Proverbs such as *"父母之命，媒妁之言"* (The rule for marriage was arrangement by parents and introduction by a matchmaker) and *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog)highlight obedience, filial piety, and acceptance of assigned roles.

Under the influence of Confucian ethics, marriage and family are entrusted with maintaining harmony, continuing the family line, and fulfilling filial responsibility, which further reinforces a family-centered collectivist value orientation.

Overall, English proverbs are based on individualistic ethics and religious belief, making personal responsibility, loyalty, and moral self-discipline the key norms. Chinese proverbs, rooted in collectivism and Confucian principles, achieve their normative function by stressing filial piety, family duty, and role obligation.

b) Regulatory function.

Proverbs exert a subtle form of control and evaluation over marriage and family conduct through praise, criticism, admonition, and satire. They serve as a "soft constraint" in upholding traditional gender roles, family structures, and ethical order.

For example, traditional EMP "A woman's place is in the home" historically prescribed and restricted women's social roles. EFP "Blood is thicker than water" reinforces loyalty to kinfolk over other relationships. CMP *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog) emphasized a woman's duty of unquestioning compliance to her husband after marriage. CFP *"家丑不可外扬"* (Domestic shame should not be made public) regulates family members to practice endurance and secrecy to maintain the family's public reputation.

This function demonstrates that Chinese proverbs are often employed to maintain social order and traditional values, whereas English proverbs are frequently used for experiential warnings or behavioral feedback.

c) Experiential function.

Proverbs are rooted in collective experience, summarizing the conventional wisdom of marriage and family life. They help people avoid pitfalls and offer

actionable advice, serving as an "informal textbook" for transmitting wisdom about domestic life in oral cultures. For example, EMP "It takes two to make a quarrel" highlights shared responsibility in conflict. "Don't marry for money, you can borrow it cheaper" warns against marrying for financial gain alone, emphasizing practical reality. CMP *"男怕入错行，女怕嫁错郎"* (A man fears entering the wrong profession; a woman fears marrying the wrong man) stresses the critical, lifelong impact of key life choices. *"贫贱夫妻百事哀"* (For a couple in poverty, every matter brings sorrow). acknowledges the pervasive challenges that poverty imposes on a marriage.

This function demonstrates that while both English and Chinese proverbs are widely applied for practical guidance based on accumulated experience, Chinese proverbs often lean towards promoting harmony and collective well-being, whereas English proverbs tend to emphasize pragmatic rationality.

d) Cultural identity function.

Proverbs reflect a nation's family structure, social system and religious beliefs, serving as a linguistic expression of cultural identity. As cultural symbols, proverbs reinforce a community's views and value positions on marriage and family. They help shape a shared cultural consciousness on marital and familial matters and ensure its transmission across generations.

In English culture, marriage and family proverbs rely on religious community consciousness and the nuclear family structure as their foundation of identity. Expressions such as "A family that prays together stays together" and "Home is where the heart is" emphasize the family as a source of emotional belonging and spiritual connection, as well as the starting point of personal identity. The family is conceptualized as an "emotional harbor", centering on personal feelings, faith experience and familial bonds.

In Chinese culture, the cultural identity embedded in marriage and family proverbs is rooted in the patriarchal clan system and the consciousness of a kinship-based community. Proverbs such as *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) and *"君君臣臣，父父子子"* (Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister a minister, the father a father, and the son a son) construct a "family–clan–state" homology, making the family the starting point of both social identity and cultural belonging. In this framework, the family functions not only as an emotional community but also as a kinship, ethical and cultural community, whose identity mechanism emphasizes order, belonging and collective responsibility.

Proverbs such as *"养儿防老"* (Raise children to provide against old age) reflect the importance of family lineage, filial duty and multi-generational co-residence, illustrating a family-centered and group-oriented identity structure.

Overall, both English and Chinese proverbs construct a sense of community through the family, yet their identity logic differs. English proverbs build identity on personal emotional belonging and shape the self through the family, whereas Chinese proverbs build identity on kinship and reinforce group cohesion through the family. This contrast reveals different cultural understandings of the family and highlights the deeper discursive mechanisms through which marriage and family proverbs participate in cultural identity formation.

e) Affective function.

Proverbs can express emotional states within family and marriage, such as conflict, disappointment, humor, or self-deprecation. For example, EMP “Marriage is like a three-ring circus” uses metaphor to humorously describe chaos. EFP “Don't air your dirty laundry in public” advises keeping domestic conflicts private.

CMP *“婚姻是爱情的坟墓”* (Marriage is the grave of love) expresses disappointment in marriage and the inevitability of emotional breakdown. CFP *“家丑不可外扬”* (Domestic shame should not be made public) advocates for concealment and face-saving.

This function shows that English proverbs often employ irony and metaphor to process emotions, whereas Chinese proverbs lean towards expressive restraint and emotional suppression.

f) Intergenerational educational function.

This function refers to the transmission of marriage and family values through proverbs from older generations to younger ones. Elders make use of proverbs to instruct the young on marital responsibility, family obligations and social norms, forming an informal but long-lasting mode of education.

In EP, this function is closely linked to religious ethics, a sense of responsibility and moral self-discipline. Proverbs such as “Train up a child in the way he should go” and “Spare the rod, spoil the child” emphasize establishing behavioral boundaries, moral self-discipline, and responsibility within the family through “parental instruction combined with religious guidance”.

These proverbs serve as both oral textbooks for family education and vital linguistic tools for parents guiding their children in marriage, family roles, and moral judgment. Their educational focus lies in treating the family as the starting point for morality and individual development as the ultimate goal.

In CP, this function is more closely aligned with the Confucian patriarchal-clan system and the hierarchical order of elders and juniors. Proverbs such as *“子不教，父之过”* (If the child is not taught, it is the father’s fault) and *“棍棒底下出孝子”* (A filial son is raised under the rod) emphasize that children must obey their parents' guidance, fulfill family obligations, and comply with the will of elders in matters of marriage selection and household management.

These proverbs not only shape the power structure within the family but also ensure the continuity of ethical norms, marital responsibilities, and gender roles across generations. The core objective is to cultivate “members who submit to the family order”.

Marriage and family proverbs in both English and Chinese perform several shared social functions. They regulate behavior, transmit accumulated experience, reinforce social values, and guide younger generations. In both cultures, the family is viewed as a fundamental social unit, and proverbs serve as a cultural tool to maintain domestic stability, ethical order, and social continuity.

However, despite these shared functions, English and Chinese proverbs differ in their value orientation, emotional expression, and identity construction, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Comparison of social functions of marriage and family proverbs in English and Chinese

Social function	EMP and EFP	CMP and CFP
Normative function	Grounded in Christian ethics, proverbs emphasize personal responsibility, loyalty, and moral self-discipline in marriage and family life.	Rooted in Confucian ethics, proverbs stress filial piety, family duty, and role obligations as core moral norms.
Regulatory function	Used as warnings or behavioral guidelines, proverbs shape attitudes and choices in marital and family relationships.	Used to reinforce social order, restrain behavior, and maintain harmony and hierarchy within marriage and family.
Experiential function	Summarize practical wisdom, offering realistic advice for solving problems in marriage and family life.	Condense lived experience and highlight responsibility, harmony, and the long-term consequences of marriage and family decisions.
Cultural identity function	Construct cultural identity through the nuclear family, emotional belonging, and individual autonomy.	Construct cultural identity through kinship continuity, collective responsibility, and clan-based family structures.
Affective Function	Express and release emotions through irony, humor, or direct evaluation in marital and family proverbs.	Regulate emotions through restraint, endurance, and face-saving to preserve harmony and social image.
Intergenerational educational function	Emphasize moral self-discipline and personal growth, guiding younger generations through family teachings.	Emphasize obedience, filial piety, and ethical continuity, teaching younger generations to uphold family order and tradition.

Both traditions share the same functional framework, yet they rely on different cultural logics to fulfill these functions. Based on these social functions, marriage and family proverbs have been transmitted and developed across generations. Having undergone social transformations and era developments, proverbs have also experienced some changes.

Contemporary transformation lies in critique, inheritance, and innovation**.**

Proverbs are considered one of the most effective and powerful tools for transmitting cultural knowledge, social norms, principles, and ideas from one generation to the next [77]. With the acceleration of social modernization, the social context that traditional proverbs rely on has changed profoundly. The transformation of values regarding marriage and family has directly impacted the continuity and function of these proverbs. The adaptive transformation of marriage and family proverbs in both English and Chinese within contemporary society is a concentrated reflection of the interaction and development among language, cognition, and culture.

The popularization of the internet and digital communication has given proverbs new forms of expression and channels of dissemination in the contemporary context. A vast number of "digital proverbs" have emerged and gained popularity within virtual spaces. They provide concise, vivid, and humorous responses to contemporary concerns about marriage and family, such as the praise for freedom in love, the satire of traditional marital pressures, and the acceptance of diverse family structures. These "digital proverbs" represent both an inheritance and reinvention of traditional proverbs, as well as a dynamic extension of proverbs within the digital context. They highlight the vitality and adaptability of proverbs as cultural resources. The digital proverbs are mainly from digital platforms such as Weibo [78], Zhihu [79], Twitter [80], and Instagram [81].

The contemporary transformation of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs exhibits the following characteristics:

a) The emergence and innovative development of digital proverbs.

The widespread use of the Internet and the rise of digital culture have profoundly transformed the mechanisms of proverb creation and dissemination. A large number of new "digital proverbs" have emerged within virtual communities, spreading rapidly and undergoing constant modification, thereby demonstrating distinct features of the digital era and remarkable linguistic creativity. Deng Fei and Duan Hongmei point out that some proverbs have become outdated and no longer apply to contemporary life, gradually falling out of use; others continue to evolve, renewing themselves through reverse perspective-taking. By employing techniques such as shifting roles, substituting words, parodying, omitting elements, or creating antonyms, they reinterpret classic proverbs to construct entirely new ones [82, p.105]. Litovkina A. T., Hrisztova-Gotthardt H., Barta P., Vargha K. also point that traditional proverbs are not fixed or immutable: they are transformed through reduction, substitution, and recombination, becoming anti-proverbs and reflecting new cultural perspectives and contemporary social contexts [83].

These digital proverbs generally exhibit several notable characteristics. First, their content closely reflects contemporary social realities. For example, the EP "Love at first swipe" vividly illustrates the phenomenon of mobile dating culture, while the CP *"网恋有风险，见面需谨慎"* (Online romance is risky; meet with caution) (Weibo search results: https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=网恋有风险，见面需谨慎) concisely highlights the potential social risks of virtual relationships. Second, in terms of style and expression, such proverbs align with the cognitive and communicative habits of younger generations. They often employ irony, humor, or deconstruction of traditional

values to convey new social attitudes. For instance, the CMP *"有车有房，没爹没娘"* (With a car and a house, but without parents) retains the rhythmic balance of traditional proverbs but reflects a value shift from ethical orientation to material orientation. It reveals how economic conditions have replaced family ethics as a central criterion for social evaluation, while simultaneously expressing public criticism of materialized social values and a collective sense of cultural self-reflection.

Similarly, the EMP "Netflix and chill" (Twitter search results: https://twitter.com/search?q=Netflix%20and%20chill) has evolved into a semi-fixed expression with specific cultural connotations, symbolizing a form of intimacy based on leisure and entertainment. With contemporary developments, there is a noticeable trend toward variation of proverbs in news media and social networks; the forms and contextual uses of proverbs are gradually changing [84]. Omarbekova G. and Aasland E. also note that as the internet's influence expands, Kazakhs have moved beyond traditional Kazakh sentence structures. They are now reworking the content and form of proverbs to find vocabulary suited to contemporary issues [85].

The continuous emergence of such proverb-like expressions not only broadens the public discourse about marriage and family issues but also endows the entire proverbial system with greater adaptability, faster renewal, and stronger creative vitality than in traditional societies. This phenomenon clearly demonstrates that language, as a form of social practice, responds dynamically to technological environments and to the ongoing transformation of cultural concepts. Кротова А.Г. believes that some proverbs have entered the active vocabulary of native Russian speakers [86].

b) Globalization and cross-cultural integration.

The deepening of globalization and the increasing intensity of intercultural communication have infused new vitality into the contemporary transformation of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs. With the widespread acceptance of gender equality, individual freedom, and pluralistic values, proverbs are not merely as closed symbols of national culture. Instead, they are gradually evolving into expressive media for cross-cultural dialogue and shared human values.

First, globalization has promoted a growing convergence in the core values reflected by English and Chinese proverbs. Both the English proverb "Love conquers all" and the Chinese proverb *"有情人终成眷属"* (True lovers will eventually be joined in wedlock) emphasize the ideals of marriage freedom and love over material wealth or social status. This convergence demonstrates how proverbs, as collective linguistic wisdom, absorb and reinterpret universal values within the global semantic system. Хамроева Ж. Т. believes that some similar proverbs have emerged in Russian and Uzbek [87].

Second, cross-cultural integration manifests in the circulation and recontextualization of proverbs across linguistic and cultural boundaries. On the one hand, the Chinese proverb *"家和万事兴"* translated as "Harmony in the family leads to prosperity", has occasionally appeared in English-language publications and intercultural discourse, reflecting the growing global recognition of Confucian ideals such as family harmony and collective well-being. Although it has not become a common proverb in English, its selective citation demonstrates how traditional Chinese

values are interpreted and appreciated beyond their original cultural context. On the other hand, the English proverb "Happy wife, happy life" has gained popularity on Chinese social media, showing the adaptation of foreign proverbial wisdom within the Chinese linguistic environment. Люй Цзинвэй believes that Chinese proverbs used metaphorically in the context of Russian newspapers not only reflect Chinese culture but also describe Russian culture [88]. Akbembetova et al. point out that differences in culturally shaped ways of thinking between speech communities manifest themselves in language contact, especially in culturally fixed units such as proverbs and phraseological expressions. As carriers of collective experience, these units are particularly sensitive to transfer-related interference and therefore require analysis within the frameworks of general and comparative phraseology from an ethnocultural perspective [89]. Bekkozhanova et al. point out that in the context of language teaching and intercultural communication, English proverbs exhibit distinct cognitive and linguistic-cultural characteristics during their transfer into Kazakh. The transfer process is constrained by differences in cultural meanings and thought patterns [90].

Overall, the global spread of proverbs has transcended ethnic and linguistic boundaries, revealing a dynamic shift "from local wisdom to shared symbols". The intercultural convergence and mutual translation of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs not only reflect a growing alignment of cultural perspectives but also signify the transformation of proverbs from traditional moral norms into globally shared semantic resources. This evolution highlights the adaptive and innovative capacity of language as a living carrier of social and cultural values in the age of globalization.

c) The integration of new values and the transformation of proverbial style.

The incorporation of emerging social values has made contemporary marriage and family proverbs more flexible, rapidly evolving, and increasingly individualized. With the ongoing development of feminism, LGBTQ+ rights movements, and gender studies, marriage is no longer perceived solely as an institutional arrangement between a man and a woman. The legalization of same-sex marriage in several countries and the diversification of gender roles have rendered marriage-related proverbs more inclusive and reflective of contemporary social realities.

English marriage proverbs have undergone a significant transformation – from advocating obedience and virtue to expressing irony and social critique. These proverbs are not merely linguistic phenomena but cultural reflections of shifting gender relations. Through humor, satire, or even pessimism, they question traditional gender norms and signal the awakening of gender consciousness and the transformation of social attitudes.

For instance, the popular digital proverb "Love wins" (Instagram hashtag: https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/lovewins/) reflects the acceptance of diverse forms of love and the recognition of equality, while "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle" humorously conveys the idea of female independence, subverting the conventional notion that a woman's fulfillment depends on marriage.

In the system of Chinese proverbs, new expressions have likewise emerged in response to changes in social psychology. For example, *"智者不入爱河，建设美丽中国"* (Wise people don't fall in love – they build a beautiful China) (Zhihu search

results: https://www.zhihu.com/search?q=智者不入爱河，建设美丽中国) redefines the relationship between the individual, marriage, and society in a light-hearted tone. It transforms self-mockery about romantic anxiety and economic pressure into a positive expression of social responsibility, thereby giving the single lifestyle a sense of legitimacy and optimism through humor. This pragmatic strategy marks the shift of contemporary Chinese proverbs from moral prescription to psychological adjustment, serving as a cultural annotation to contemporary phenomena such as delayed marriage and voluntary singlehood among young people.

d) The fading of religious and ethical connotations.

Western proverbs are closely intertwined with religion. Шкурко Ю. С. believes that a significant number of Russian proverbs emphasize negative aspects within happiness, whereas American proverbs generally exhibit a positive outlook. This difference is linked to the disparity in religious values between Russian and American cultures [91].

From a religious and moral point of view, English marriage proverbs that once carried strong Christian meanings such as "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" have gradually lost their sacred tone in the process of contemporary secularization. Their interpretation has shifted from religious belief to ideas of legal contract and personal choice. In a similar way, Chinese proverbs based on Confucian family ethics such as *"父母之命，媒妁之言"* (The rule for marriage was arrangement by parents and introduction by a matchmaker) have also disappeared from daily use, remaining only as cultural symbols in literature, films, etc. The decline of religious authority and the weakening of moral control in both languages show that English and Chinese marriage proverbs have moved from being sacred and prescriptive to being more secular and individual-centered. Valery M. Mokienko argues that proverbs of Biblical origin have undergone structural and semantic transformations in modern Russian. Many of them have already detached from their original religious context and have become secularized or folklorized expressions [92].

e) The functional transformation of proverbs under generational conflict.

Generational conflict represents another crucial dimension in examining the contemporary transformation of proverbs. It directly promotes the "re-functionalization" of proverbs, meaning that their main role has shifted from guiding behavior to expressing cultural identity and values between generations.

In both English and Chinese contexts, differences in generational thinking strongly influence how proverbs are used and recreated. The older generation often refers to old proverbs to maintain family stability and moral order. For example, the English proverb "Marriage is for life" still reflects the belief of many elders in lifelong marriage, while the Chinese proverbs *"养儿防老"* (Raise sons to support one's old age and *"门当户对"* (A good match between families of equal status) show similar values about family duty and social order.

In contrast, the younger generation tends to be more rebellious and creative in expression. They create and spread new proverbs to show their pursuit of personal happiness and independence. For instance, the English proverb "Love is love" promotes equality and inclusion in relationships, and "Your happiness, your choice"

highlights the right to personal happiness. In Chinese online culture, expressions like *"退群保平安"* (Leave the WeChat group for peace of mind) (Weibo search results: https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=退群保平安) mock the communication gap between young people and their elders, while *"小病就治，大病就死"* (For the minor illness, get it treated; for a major one, prepare for the end) (Zhihu search results: https://www.zhihu.com/search?q=小病就治，大病就死) humorously rejects the pressure of marriage and childbirth, showing self-protection and irony toward traditional values.

These examples show that in contemporary society, proverbs have changed from tools for moral instruction to symbols of identity and attitude. By rejecting, rewriting, or parodying traditional proverbs, young people redefine their social identity and values. In this way, they both inherit and reinterpret existing culture while marking their difference from the older generation.

f) Critical inheritance and recontextualization.

Whether in English or Chinese, proverbs employ concise, vivid, and figurative language to encapsulate diverse life experiences and principles of existence. Бочкарева С. В. believes that traditional proverbs have shaped certain stereotypes about ethnic groups [93]. In contemporary society, the evolution of marriage and family proverbs reveals clear features of critical inheritance and recontextualization. This process is not a simple rejection or abandonment of tradition but a reinterpretation and reconstruction of traditional values within their original linguistic forms, in order to adapt to new social norms and ideological frameworks.

First, those authoritative proverbs that once maintained social hierarchy and gender order in traditional societies have gradually lost their original social function. For example, the CMP *"父母之命，媒妁之言"* (The rule for marriage was arrangement by parents and introduction by a matchmaker) and the EMP "The husband is the head of the family" now conflict with the modern ideals of personal autonomy and gender equality. They no longer serve as behavioral guidelines but rather appear as "cultural relics" in literature, film, and folk discourse. Кирсанова М. А. believes that studying proverbs from a gender perspective remains highly significant [94].

Second, many proverbs have achieved continuity and renewal through semantic recontextualization. The EMP "Happy wife, happy life" still carries traces of traditional gender roles, yet its modern meaning has shifted from emphasizing male authority to promoting mutual respect and emotional care between spouses. The CMP *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog) has gradually fallen out of use due to its implication of female submission, being replaced by *"夫妻同心，其利断金"* (When a couple works with one heart, they can break gold), which reflects a transformation from one-sided obedience to mutual cooperation.

At the same time, critical inheritance is not a linear process but a complex system in which old and new values coexist and compete. On the one hand, some traditional proverbs that embody universal wisdom remain highly resilient. For instance, the CFP *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) continues to be widely

used in family education and public discourse, as its focus on emotional harmony has been preserved while its patriarchal connotations have faded. On the other hand, modernization has not automatically eliminated all outdated beliefs. Certain gender biases have re-emerged in disguised linguistic forms. For example, the popular digital proverb in some Chinese regions, *"儿子是核武器，可以不用，不能没有"* (A son is like a nuclear weapon – you may not use it, but you cannot live without it) (Weibo search results: https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=儿子是核武器，可以不用，不能没有), appears contemporary in tone but in fact reproduces the traditional patriarchal mindset that values sons over daughters. Overall, the evolution of proverbs is not a process of linear replacement but a dynamic reconstruction of social and cultural meaning. The trajectory of their critical inheritance and recontextualization records the ongoing negotiation and conflict of social values while demonstrating the enduring vitality of language as it adapts to social change.

In summary, the transformation of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs in contemporary society demonstrates a multidimensional and dynamic character. First, from the perspective of social context, the function of proverbs has shifted from prescribing behavior to serving as a medium for cultural expression and social reflection. Their core values have undergone a profound reconstruction – from a family-centered to an individual-centered orientation, and from gender hierarchy to cooperative equality. Second, in terms of modes of transmission, the digital and networked media environment has greatly expanded the space for the creation and circulation of proverbs, generating a dynamic cycle of "rapid formation, instant dissemination, and semantic renewal". Third, from the perspective of cultural evolution, proverbs have increasingly transcended national and cultural boundaries under the influence of globalization and intercultural communication, forming a shared semantic field within the framework of universal values.

Тухватуллина И. А. believes that proverbs, as an essential part of national culture, always retain their relevance to contemporary society [95]. The contemporary transformation of proverbs does not represent a complete rejection of tradition but rather a process of critical inheritance. Some traditional proverbs have achieved semantic renewal and functional continuity through recontextualization, while others have gradually faded or been replaced as social values change. This coexistence of inheritance and innovation reflects the openness and adaptability of language as a form of social and cultural practice. It also reveals the living function of proverbs in shaping social cognition, mediating intergenerational communication, and negotiating cultural values. Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina believe that proverbs "never die," but continually change and are reshaped to adapt to different communities, media, and communicative situations [96, p.395]. Воловикова М. И., and Мустафина Л. Ш. believe that studying the usage of proverbs in contemporary society can still reflect social attitudes [97].

Therefore, the contemporary transformation of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs is not only a change in linguistic form but also a reflection of the reconstruction of social consciousness and cultural values. While preserving the memory of national traditions, these proverbs dynamically adapt to social change, demonstrating the vitality of the co-evolution between language and culture and

offering valuable insight into the social function of language and the mechanisms of cross-cultural communication. Чепурных О. А. believes that in any era, proverbs will remain a distinctive feature of a nation, deserving of attention and study [98].

Тухватуллина И. А. believes metaphorical proverbs represent the most understudied area in contemporary proverb studies [99]. However, numerous challenges remain in the study of proverbs. Orazakynqyzy F., Fidan Geray, and A. K. Anipina note that a unified classification system for proverbs has yet to be established, creating difficulties for both compilers and users. Proverbs should be systematically classified across multiple dimensions – alphabetical order, thematic-semantic categories, lexical-encyclopedic entries, monographic works, and ethnic origins – to more comprehensively reveal their linguistic and cultural characteristics [100].

Conclusions for chapter two

Proverbs originate from life, take shape through cognition, become fixed in language, and settle into culture. They represent humanity's collective crystallization of wisdom from experiences condensed into linguistic essence. Through oral transmission, literary works, religious texts, and educational systems, proverbs gradually become fixed units of expression within the linguistic system. English proverbs have been influenced by Christianity, while Chinese proverbs have been influenced by Confucian and Taoist thought. Cultural, religious, and social contexts exert complex and profound effects on proverbs. These influences manifest across multiple dimensions, including values, ways of thinking, modes of expression, and problem-solving strategies. However, it is important to note that such influences are dynamic and multi-layered and are influenced by individual differences and specific contexts. The formation and evolution of English and Chinese proverbs have been deeply shaped by social background. Natural environment and production grounded their experiential base; economic development shaped their values; social institutions structured family ethics and social order; political background provided the macro-framework of authority. In marriage and family proverbs, these influences are especially visible. Chinese proverbs emphasize lineage, hierarchy, and stability, while English proverbs highlight personal responsibility, contractual spirit, and equality. These contrasts reflect not only different historical trajectories but also distinct cultural strategies in addressing the universal challenges of marriage and family life.

From a cognitive perspective, the proverbs abstract specific experiences into universal truths through metaphor, metonymy, and categorization. E.g., the EP “Time is money” metaphorically treats time as a resource; the CP *“种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆”* (You reap what you sow) employs a causal metaphor. From a cultural perspective, proverbs reflect collective values. E.g., EP emphasizes individualism, as seen in “Every man for himself”. CP, on the other hand, prioritizes harmony and collectivism, as seen in *“家和万事兴”* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity). From a linguistic perspective, the proverb structure facilitates memorization. CP often employ parallelism with flexible structures, appearing as either simple or compound sentences with no fixed length; e.g., *“一寸光阴一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴”* (Time is money, but money can’t buy time). EP, however, tend toward rhyme, typically consisting of short,

compact sentences with limited length, e.g., “A penny saved is a penny earned.” From the perspective of social needs, proverbs fulfill the requirements of conveying morals, resolving conflicts, and offering advice: the EP “Actions speak louder than words” and the CP “Family troubles should not be aired in public”.

As the crystallization of national wisdom, the formation process of proverbs embodies profound cognitive pathways. A typical proverb formation process includes Experience Observation → Concept Extraction and Word Combination → Categorization and Similarity-based Induction → Image Schema Building → Metaphorical and Metonymic Mapping → Cultural Sedimentation and Pragmatic Optimization → Social Circulation and Consensus Formation → Proverb. This process embodies the core mechanisms of cognitive linguistics. Both English and Chinese proverbs follow this generative pathway. While both carry universal human wisdom, they exhibit significant differences across various stages of cognitive processing.

The widespread dissemination and intergenerational transmission of proverbs is due to their social functions. Proverbs serve as behavioral norms and moral guides for people. They embody cultural heritage, blending collective memory with life experience to direct practical living. Proverbs strengthen group identity and social cohesion, facilitate emotional expression, regulate interpersonal relationships, and serve as bridges for intergenerational communication. They also educate individuals in cognition and shape their thinking. Language and culture play complex and crucial roles in cross-cultural communication. As a microcosm of language and culture, proverbs about marriage and family offer a unique perspective for understanding and facilitating cross-cultural exchange. Cultural and national consciousness serve as foundational, decisive, and explanatory functions in the study of Chinese and English proverbs on marriage and family. Culture provides the context and logical framework for proverb formation, determining their value orientations and ways of expression, as well as shaping the forms of marriage and family institutions. National consciousness serves as a tool for cultural transmission, providing proverbs with emotional resonance and identity-affirming functions. It gives proverbs a sense of cultural boundaries and normative power. By analyzing proverbs, we can not only reveal cultural differences but also discover shared human values and emotions.

Барсукова Е. А. and Чжан Янь believe that Russian language textbooks frequently feature proverbs related to Russian culture. These fixed expressions enrich foreign students’ associations with Russia and its people, while also painting a broader and more vivid picture of Russian culture’s authentic character. This approach helps enhance students’ interest in learning Russian [101].

As highly condensed linguistic forms, proverbs embody rich cultural values and collective wisdom. Their study carries broad practical significance across multiple fields. First, in language teaching, proverbs serve as effective teaching materials because of their brevity, imagery, and cultural depth, helping learners acquire not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness. Second, in cross-cultural communication, they highlight cultural differences and commonalities, enhancing communicative sensitivity and reducing misunderstandings. Third, in translation practice, research provides strategies for rendering culturally loaded and metaphorical expressions, enabling translators to balance faithfulness and cultural resonance. Fourth,

in cognitive and cultural studies, proverbs offer insight into the interaction between language, thought, and culture, shedding light on shared and divergent conceptualizations of marriage, family, and social life. Fifth, in corpus construction, the systematic collection and classification of English and Chinese proverbs can create searchable and comparable datasets that support cross-linguistic research and digital humanities. Finally, in LLMS and AI, proverbs, with their strong metaphorical and context-dependent qualities, can be used to train and evaluate semantic understanding, thereby improving the cultural adaptability of computational models.

3 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND CHINESE PROVERBS ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

3.1 A comparative analysis of English and Chinese marriage proverbs from the perspective of cognitive linguistics

Proverbs, as vital carriers of national culture, embody profound cultural connotations and cognitive wisdom. Marriage and family constitute the fundamental units of human society. Related proverbs further reflect different cultural groups' deep-rooted perceptions of interpersonal relationships, social structures, and value systems.

Based on cognitive linguistics theory, we conduct a systematic comparative analysis of marriage and family proverbs in English and Chinese to reveal differences in conceptualization patterns and their underlying cognitive mechanisms across cultural contexts. Chen Xue and Li Xiang argue that the metaphorical structures in proverbs are influenced by cultural contexts, and the same theme may select different source domains for conceptual mapping across different languages [102, p.235].

Chen Na argues that the underlying mechanisms of metaphor in Chinese and English proverbs are identical; cultural patterns and context influence the selection and mapping of source and target domains during the metaphorical process [103, p.135].

Conceptual Metaphor Types in English Marriage Proverbs.

a) Marriage is a contract/business investment.

In English-speaking cultures, marriage is often conceptualized as a business investment activity. This metaphor reflects the Western emphasis on contractual relationships and pragmatic values, as shown in the following examples:

"Marriage is a lottery."

"Marry in haste, repent at leisure."

"A good wife is worth her weight in gold."

"Marriage is a contract made in heaven."

In metaphorical mapping, the structure of the source domain "business contract" is systematically mapped onto the target domain "marriage" Within this metaphor, entering into marriage equates to fulfilling contractual obligations, while divorce equates to terminating the contract.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Transaction parties → Married couple.

Investment costs → Marriage contributions.

Return on investment → Marital happiness.

Risk assessment → Mate selection criteria.

Uncertain outcome → Marriage result.

This metaphor emphasizes the utilitarian and calculable nature of marriage, reflecting the value of rational choice in Western culture.

b) Marriage is a journey.

This is another significant conceptual metaphor in English. This metaphor conceptualizes marriage as a dynamic process, emphasizing the shared experiences and growth of both spouses, as shown in the following examples:

"Marriage is a journey, not a destination."

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

“In marriage, as in life, the journey is more important than the destination.”

The source domain in these proverbs is travel, roads, and navigation, while the target domain is marriage.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Traveler → Married couple.

Starting point → Marriage.

Journey → Married life.

Destination → Marital goals.

Hardships along the way → Marital challenges.

This metaphor embodies the process-oriented values prevalent in Western culture, emphasizing the developmental and dynamic nature of marriage.

c) Marriage is a building.

This metaphor conceptualizes the marital relationship as a building structure, emphasizing the importance of stability and the construction process, as shown in the following examples:

“Marriage is built on trust.”

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

“Strong marriages require strong foundations.”

The source domain of these proverbs is building, housing, and infrastructure, while the target domain is marriage.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Architect → Husband and wife.

Foundation → The foundation of marriage (trust, love, etc.)

Building materials → The elements of marriage.

Construction process → The cultivation of marriage.

Structural integrity → The stability of marriage.

This metaphor emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining a marriage, while also reflecting that only through unity and cooperation between spouses can a marriage be strong and enduring.

d) Marriage is a prison.

The source domain of this metaphor is prison/cage, and the target domain is marriage. For example, “Marriage is not a word; it’s a sentence”. This is a pun, where “sentence” refers both to a written sentence and a prison sentence, carrying humorous irony.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Prisoners → Married couples.

Prison/Cage → Marriage.

Imprisonment/Being incarcerated → Marriage.

Serving a sentence → Married life.

In this metaphor, marriage signifies entering a constrained state of existence that limits individual freedom and action. Married life entails obligations, rules, and sacrifices.

e) Marriage is hierarchy → Marriage is an equal partnership.

The conceptual metaphor “Marriage is hierarchy” reflects the unequal gender structure found in many traditional English marriage proverbs. In this framework,

marriage is viewed as a system of power in which the husband takes the leading role and the wife is expected to obey. Li Jinge and Huang Fengling argue that proverbs in both English and Chinese reflect the notion that women are tools within the family, possessing no voice [104, p.48].

Proverbs such as "The husband is the head of the house" and "A man's home is his castle" show a cultural model that links authority and decision-making with men, and links obedience and domestic work with women. Their source domain is hierarchy, authority and control, and their target domain is marriage and family roles.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Authority → husband.

Obedience → wife.

Public decision-making → men.

Domestic duty → women.

This metaphor presents marriage as an extension of a social power system shaped by patriarchy and religious tradition.

With the growth of feminism and the spread of ideas about gender equality, this model has changed toward the metaphor "Marriage is an equal partnership". Modern English expressions focus on shared responsibility, mutual support, and emotional balance. For example, the proverb "A happy marriage is a partnership of two good forgivers" describes marriage as cooperation between two equal individuals. Their source domain is partnership, cooperation and teamwork, and their target domain is marriage relationship.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Equal partners → husband and wife.

Cooperation and trust → marital stability and happiness.

This shift shows a clear movement from a marriage model based on hierarchy to one based on equality. In modern English marriage proverbs, marriage is understood as a relationship built by two independent people who share responsibility and support each other.

Conceptual Metaphor Types in Chinese Marriage Proverbs.

Chinese marriage proverbs exhibit distinct conceptual metaphor patterns from English, primarily encompassing the following types:

a) Marriage is a matter of *"缘分"* (predestined affinity).

In traditional Chinese culture, marriages not chosen by the individuals themselves were often romanticized and conceptualized as the result of fate or divine will, reflecting the Chinese cultural notions of fatalism and the unity of heaven and humanity, as shown in the following examples:

"百年修得同船渡，千年修得共枕眠" (It takes a hundred years of spiritual cultivation to bring two people on the same boat, and a thousand to share the same pillow).

"有缘千里来相会，无缘对面不相识" (If destined, even a thousand miles will bring you together; if not, you will not know each other even when face to face).

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Past-life cultivation → Prerequisites for marriage in the present life.

Depth of predestined affinity → Likelihood of marital union.

Divine arrangement → Outcome of marriage.

Fulfilling karmic destiny → A blissful marital union.

This metaphor emphasizes the mysterious and uncontrollable nature of marriage, reflecting the reverence for and acceptance of fate in Chinese culture.

b) An ideal marriage is harmonious music.

This metaphor conceptualizes the marital relationship as musical harmony, reflecting the core value of harmony in Chinese culture, as shown in the following examples:

"夫唱妇随" (When the husband sings, the wife follows).

"夫妻相合好，琴瑟与笙簧" (For husband and wife to live in harmony, they must be as well-attuned as the Qin and Se, or the Sheng and Huang).

The "Qin and Se" refer to two of the most important ancient Chinese plucked string instruments, often mentioned together as a paired concept. The "Sheng and Huang" refers to the Sheng (a free-reed instrument) and its Huang (the reeds), collectively representing the Sheng. When "Qin and Se"" and "Sheng and Huang" appear together in literature or poetry, it is a rhetorical stacking technique intended to emphasize the perfection and completeness of harmony from different dimensions.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Musical instruments → Husband and wife.

Harmonious tones → A harmonious relationship.

Coordinated performance → Coordinated daily life.

Beautiful music → A happy marriage.

This metaphor emphasizes coordination and compatibility within the marital relationship, while also implicitly reinforcing the traditional perception of an ideal marriage as one where the male holds a dominant role and the female a subordinate position.

c) Marriage is a production team.

This metaphor reveals the most fundamental economic function of marriage. Both spouses provide labor to exchange and integrate resources for survival. Marriage reduces economic risk and provides financial security. Marriage is a complementary unit for co-producing wealth, achieving material creation and self-sufficiency through the integration of distinct labor resources contributed by men and women, as shown in the following examples:

"男女搭配，干活不累" (When men and women collaborate, the work feels effortless).

"男耕女织" (The man plows, the woman weaves).

"嫁汉嫁汉，穿衣吃饭" (Marrying a man is about clothing and food).

The source domain is agricultural production cooperation and the target domain is marriage.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Labor team → Husband and wife.

Gendered division of labor → Division of roles between spouses.

Production activities → Functioning of marriage.

Agricultural harvest → Accumulation of wealth through marriage.

Perfect collaboration → Ideal marriage.

This framework emphasizes the conceptualization of marriage as an economic partnership oriented toward practical outcomes and functional cohesion.

d) Marriage is a grave/besieged city.

Indeed, many Chinese proverbs express the idea that marriage life signifies the end of a carefree life, highlighting the stark contrast between idealized expectations and the reality of marriage, as shown in the following examples:

"婚姻是一座围城，城外的人想进去，城里的人想出来" (Marriage is like a besieged city: those outside want to get in, and those inside want to get out).

"婚姻是爱情的坟墓" (Marriage is the grave of love).

This conceptual metaphor stems from the human experience of spatially conceptualizing "freedom" versus "confinement". Within this metaphorical framework, marriage is constructed as a limited space, where individuals are placed and consequently lose a certain degree of autonomy or freedom. The Source Domain is the besieged city, the grave, or a restrictive space.

The Target Domain is marriage.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

A spatial container / power-control structure → Marriage.

Being trapped in a restrictive system → Entering marriage.

Loss of freedom → Life in marriage.

Through these metaphors, we can observe that marriage is perceived as the end of romance.

e) Marriage is hierarchy → Marriage is equal cooperation.

The conceptual metaphor "Marriage is hierarchy" reflects the gender inequality embedded in many traditional Chinese marriage proverbs. Marriage is viewed as a social structure based on power difference, spatial division, and role separation. Proverbs such as *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog), *"男主外，女主内"* (Men rule outside, women rule inside), and *"夫唱妇随"* (When the husband sings, the wife follows) show a cultural model in which men hold authority and women are expected to obey.

Their source domain is hierarchy, spatial division and domination, and their target domain is marriage roles.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Authority and leadership → men.

Obedience and dependence → women.

Public space → male domain.

Domestic space → female domain.

In this framework, marriage is understood as a hierarchical system, and gender roles are assigned through symbols of control and submission. The social power structure is projected onto the family structure, forming a stable but unequal model of marital relations.

With changing views on gender and growing awareness of women's rights, this metaphor has been questioned and gradually replaced by a more equal model of

marriage. Modern expressions show a shift toward cooperation and partnership. For example, the proverb *"夫妻同心，其利断金"* (When a couple works with one heart, they can break gold) represents the metaphor "Marriage is cooperation ", which emphasizes equality and shared effort. The source domain is cooperation and joint work, and the target domain is marriage relationship.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Equal individuals → marital partners.

Trust and cooperation → the foundation of a stable marriage.

This development indicates a movement from a hierarchical view of marriage to one based on equality, mutual support, and shared responsibility.

Comparative analysis of conceptual metaphors in English and Chinese marriage proverbs.

A comparative analysis of conceptual metaphors in English and Chinese marriage proverbs reveals the following significant differences. English and Chinese proverbs reveal starkly different conceptions of the essence of marriage.

English proverbs view marriage as a transaction, investment, or contract, while Chinese proverbs see it as destiny, responsibility, and ethics. This difference reflects the distinct tendencies in cognitive resource selection between English and Chinese cultures. English culture frequently borrows concepts from commerce and physical space to understand marriage, embodying pragmatic and individualistic values.

Chinese culture, conversely, tends to interpret marriage through natural, religious, agricultural production and aesthetic perspectives, reflecting cultural traditions of harmony between heaven and humanity and aesthetic harmony. In expression, English often employs sarcasm and humor to convey disappointment and criticism, while Chinese expressions tend to be more subtle and realistic.

Lin Yabin argues that gender discrimination against women is prevalent in both English and Chinese proverbs [105, p.165]. Although both English and Chinese marriage proverbs have shifted from hierarchical gender metaphors to partnership-based metaphors, the two traditions differ in their cultural origins and evolution paths.

English proverbs reflect a transition from religious patriarchal hierarchy to individual-based partnership, whereas Chinese proverbs embody a movement from clan-based patriarchal order to a cooperation-oriented conception that values family harmony. This indicates that, although English and Chinese marriage proverbs exhibit a similar value orientation, they still preserve the deep-seated cultural logic of their respective traditions. Nevertheless, both languages ultimately reconceptualize marriage as a reciprocal partnership, rather than a hierarchical social institution.

English culture emphasizes individual liberty, leading to stronger psychological reactions to perceived "losses" of freedom within marriage, often manifested through sarcastic or teasing language styles.

Chinese culture, where marriage historically functioned as part of the patriarchal system, prioritizes obligations and social roles. Consequently, while the "besieged city" metaphor exists, it is more frequently expressed through concepts like "submission" and "fate". A comparative analysis of metaphors in English and Chinese proverbs is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Metaphorical comparisons of English-Chinese marriage proverbs

Dimension	English marriage proverbs	Chinese marriage proverbs
Source domain	Commercial/economic domain: transactions, investments, contracts, etc. Physical spatial domain: journeys, architecture, containers, etc. Competitive games domain: lotteries, gambling, competitions, etc.	Natural/cosmic domain: heaven/earth, yin/yang, seasons. Philosophical domain: predestined affinity, destiny, etc. Artistic/aesthetic domain: music, calligraphy/painting, poetry, etc. Agricultural economic domain: production units, economic security, consolidation of resources, etc.
Mapping focus	Emphasis on selectivity and controllability of marriage. Focus on the procedural and developmental nature of marriage. Highlighting the utilitarian and practical aspects of marriage.	Emphasis on the predestined and sacred nature of marriage. Focus on the harmonious and stable nature of marriage. Highlighting the aesthetic and moral dimensions of marriage.
Value orientation	Individualism: emphasis on personal choice and happiness. Rationalism: focus on rational analysis and practical considerations. Gender relations: hierarchical → egalitarian	Collectivism: emphasis on family interests and social responsibility. Emotionalism: focus on emotional experience and spiritual compatibility. Hierarchism: emphasis on division and coordination of spousal roles. Gender relations: hierarchical → egalitarian

In summary, English marriage proverbs conceptualize marriage mainly as a transaction, contract, or controllable choice, while Chinese proverbs frame it as destiny, responsibility, and ethical duty. Although both traditions now move toward partnership-based views, English proverbs retain individualistic and practical logic, whereas Chinese proverbs preserve collectivist and moral orientations. Thus, despite similar modern values, each language reflects its own deep cultural logic and metaphorical patterns.

3.2 A comparative analysis of English and Chinese family proverbs from the perspective of cognitive linguistics

The section analyzed the conceptual metaphor types in English family proverbs. In both English and Chinese cultures, “family” is not merely a collective of residence and blood ties but is also endowed with profound emotional, social, and moral significance. People use metaphors to concretize the abstract concept of “family,”

making it perceptible and comprehensible. The metaphors commonly found in English and Chinese family proverbs are analyzed below.

a) Home is a safe haven.

In English culture, the family is often conceptualized as a safe haven or a sanctuary, emphasizing its protective function and emotional value, as shown in the following examples:

"Home is where the heart is."

"There's no place like home."

"Home is a man's castle."

"East or West, home is best."

These proverbs use the source domain of a harbor or castle to represent the target domain of the family. The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Harbor/Castle → Family.

Protective function → Family protection.

Ships/Residents → Family members.

Sense of security → Family warmth.

This metaphor reflects the importance of the family as a private space in Western culture, emphasizing its role in providing emotional support.

b) Family is a tree.

This metaphor conceptualizes family relationships as an organic structure of growth, emphasizing blood ties and intergenerational inheritance, as shown in the following examples:

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"A tree is known by its fruit."

They use the source domain of a tree and its roots to represent the target domain of family structure and bloodline inheritance. The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Tree roots → Family origins.

Trunk → Main lineage.

Branches → Family branches.

Fruit → Descendants.

c) Family is a team.

In modern English, the family is increasingly conceptualized as a team or a cooperative unit, reflecting the functional characteristics of contemporary family life, as shown in the following examples:

"United we stand, divided we fall."

"The family that prays together, stays together."

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."

They use the source domain of a team to represent the target domain of the family. The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Team members → Family members.

Common goal → Family vision.

Collaboration and division of labor → Family responsibilities.

Team success → Family well-being.

d) Family is a place of education.

Many English proverbs reflect the educational role of the family, emphasizing that words and actions themselves are the content of education, and highlighting the importance of parental example in teaching children, as shown in the following examples:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

"Charity begins at home."

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"Spare the rod, spoil the child."

These proverbs embody the image schema of a path, indicating that the family is the starting point of moral behavior and that compassion expands from within outward. In these proverbs, the source domain is an educational institution/school, and the target domain is the educational function of the family. The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Teachers → Parents.

Students → Children.

Family life → Teaching process.

Household rules and interactions → Curriculum.

Parental words and deeds → Role modeling.

Conceptual metaphor types in Chinese family proverbs are as follows.

a) Family is a tree/root.

In Chinese culture, the metaphor of the family as a tree carries profound cultural connotations, closely linked to ancestral worship and the concept of family. In traditional Chinese belief, it is considered essential for a person to be buried in their hometown after death, which is called *"落叶归根"* (Falling leaves return to the roots). Having children is referred to as *"开枝散叶"* (Spreading branches and scattering leaves). Many proverbs reflect this metaphor, as shown in the following examples:

"树高千丈，叶落归根" (However tall the tree grows, its fallen leaves will return to its roots.)

"树大分杈，人大分家" (As a tree branches out, so a family divides when children grow up.)

"靠着大树好乘凉" (Lean against a big tree and enjoy the shade.)

"根深叶茂，本固枝荣" (Deep roots and flourishing leaves; a strong trunk and prosperous branches.)

This metaphorical mapping reflects unique characteristics of Chinese culture. The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Roots → Ancestors/Hometown.

Trunk → Family Heritage.

Branches → Descendants and Progeny.

Falling Leaves Return to the Roots → Returning to One's Hometown in Old Age

This metaphor emphasizes the importance of ancestral reverence, familial continuity, and the deep connection to one's origins in Chinese cultural identity.

b) Family is a natural ecosystem.

This metaphor conceptualizes family relationships as a state of natural harmony,

reflecting the core value of harmony in Chinese culture., as shown in the following examples:

"家和万事兴" (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity.)

"阴阳和而后雨泽降，夫妇和而后家道成" (When yin and yang are in balance, rain falls; when husband and wife are in harmony, the household thrives.)

"大河有水小河满，大河没水小河干" (If the main river is full, the tributaries will be too; if the main river is dry, the tributaries will run empty.)

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Natural ecosystem → Family.

Natural harmony → Family harmony.

The vibrancy of nature → Family prosperity.

Seasonal balance → Family equilibrium.

The growth of all things → Career success.

c) Family's primary mission is to perpetuate the ancestral line.

This is a unique metaphor in Chinese culture that conceptualizes the function of the family as the continuation of ancestral worship and bloodline. Perpetuating the family line is regarded as the most critical function of the family, as shown in the following examples:

"人留后代草留根" (People leave descendants as grass leaves roots.)

"有子万事足" (With a son, everything is sufficient.)

"宁舍钱财，不舍人丁" (Better to relinquish wealth than to sacrifice descendants.)

In ancient China, offspring (particularly sons) were of utmost importance, and having a son was described as *"延续香火"* (Perpetuating the ancestral line.)

Within the cultural context of traditional Chinese patrilineal clan systems and ancestor worship, the term *"香火"* (Incense fire) serves as a core symbolic concept. Literally, it refers to the incense and eternal flames used in sacrificial rites, but metaphorically, it represents the perpetuation of the family bloodline and the continuity of ancestral veneration.

This concept integrates biological reproduction (producing heirs) with socio-religious obligations (worshipping ancestors), operationalized through the patrilineal system. Ensuring the *"香火不绝"* (Uninterrupted transmission of the ancestral line) was considered one of the highest expressions of Confucian filial piety.

For example, *"不孝有三，无后为大"* (There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them all.)

The absence of a son meant *"香火断绝"* (The extinction of the ancestral line), signifying the ultimate demise of a lineage, both biologically and culturally. Thus, *"断子绝孙"* (To die without descendants) was traditionally viewed as the most vicious curse in Chinese society. Many proverbs reflect this perception, as shown in the following examples:

"香火不外借" (The ancestral line must not be passed to outsiders.)

"不烧断头香" (Do not burn broken incense.)

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Incense fire → Family bloodline.

Perpetuation → Intergenerational continuity.

Prosperity of the incense fire → Proliferation of descendants.

Extinction of the incense fire → Decline of the family.

d) Family is a place of responsibility and obligation.

In Chinese proverbs about family, the family signifies duty and obligation, emphasizing the interconnectedness and mutual responsibility among its members. Ancient laws often institutionalized collective family responsibility, highlighting the close relationship between individual behavior and family reputation. For instance, *"诛九族"* (the extermination of the nine kinship groups) was one of the most severe punishments in ancient China for grave crimes such as rebellion or treason.

It targeted not only the offender but also their parents, children, siblings, spouses, and even in-laws. Its underlying logic was a mechanism for maintaining stability, using deterrence to uphold imperial authority and social order. Thus, the concept of collective family responsibility posits that an individual's actions reflect the education and ethos of their family.

As explicitly stated in *"大清律例"* (The Great Qing Legal Code):*"谋反大逆者，父母、子女、兄弟、妻妾，皆斩"* (Those who plot rebellion or commit great treachery shall be executed along with their parents, children, siblings, and wives). This demonstrates the perception that individual wrongdoing equates to the moral failure of the entire family.

Many proverbs also reflect the unique cultural emphasis on "filial piety" in Han Chinese culture, as shown in the following examples:

"养不教，父之过" (If a child is not taught, it is the father's fault.)

"百善孝为先。" (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first.)

"一荣俱荣，一损俱损" (When one is honored, all are honored; when one is disgraced, all are disgraced.)

"儿不嫌母丑，狗不嫌家贫" (A son does not dislike his mother's homeliness; a dog does not despise its owner's poverty.)

"养儿防老" (Raise children to provide against old age.)

"打断骨头连着筋" (Even if the bone is broken, the tendons remain connected.)

In these proverbs, the source domain is a social contract/legal obligation, and the target domain is familial relationships and emotional bonds. The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Interest community → Family members.

Old-age security mechanism → Family responsibility.

Unconditional loyalty contract → Family relationships.

Connecting bond → Inseparable blood ties.

Investment behavior → Parents raising children.

Moral obligation → Children supporting parents.

Binding force → Duty and constraint.

This metaphor reflects the indissoluble, predestined, and ethical nature of blood relations, emphasizing the paramount importance of family responsibility.

e) Family is a hierarchical system with clearly defined superior and inferior roles.

Chinese traditional proverbs reflect the idea that the family is a microcosm of the state, emphasizing its internal hierarchical structure and ritual norms. The family is perceived as a "miniature society" or a "legal unit" with explicit rules and institutions. The father holds absolute authority within the household. If the father passes away, the eldest son assumes leadership. Many proverbs reflect that, as shown in the following examples:

"天下无不是的父母" (No parents are in the wrong.)

"父是天，母是地" (The father is heaven, the mother is earth.)

"长兄如父" (The eldest brother is like a father.)

"君要臣死，臣不得不死；父要子亡，子不得不亡" (If the ruler demands the subject's death, the subject must die; if the father demands the son's death, the son must perish.)

"长幼有序，尊卑有别" (There is an order between senior and junior, and a distinction between superior and inferior.) illustrate this structure.

Additionally, Numerous proverbs also reflect that women held no voice within the family, typically remaining passive and dependent on men.

For example, *"未嫁从父，既嫁从夫，夫死从子"* (Before marriage, obey your father; after marriage, obey your husband; after the husband's death, obey your son).

In these metaphors, the source domain comprises legal systems, social norms, and order structures (such as state laws, military discipline, and rites), while the target domain is the behavioral norms, hierarchical relationships, and ethical constraints within the family. The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Legislator and executor → The father.

Subordinate status → Children.

Subordination to superiors → Attitude of children toward parents.

Legal norms → Family rules.

Social hierarchical structure → Seniority and superiority distinctions.

These proverbs and metaphors reflect an emphasis on paternal responsibility and education under patriarchy, wherein the father, as the sole decision-maker, holds absolute authority and is responsible for maintaining internal order and morality within the family. The family operates under a clear behavioral constraint mechanism, requiring each member to know and keep their place.

f) Family is a sanctuary/private space.

In traditional Chinese culture, "family" encompasses not only the physical space of home, but also serves as a sanctuary for individuals to seek refuge, rest, and restore themselves. Many proverbs reflect that.

For example, *"金窝银窝不如自家狗窝"* (A golden nest or a silver nest is not as good as one's own dog kennel.)

"家丑不可外扬" (Domestic shame should not be made public.)

"清官难断家务事" (Even an upright official finds it hard to settle family disputes.)

The family is likened to a private, enclosed space where outsiders should not interfere easily, emphasizing the concept of "internal autonomy" within the household.

In this metaphor, the source domain is a sanctuary or safe space, and the target domain is the family unit.

The metaphorical mappings are as follows:

Sanctuary/Private space → Family.

Provision of safety and emotional belonging → Physical structure of a home.

Guardian → Head of the household.

Personal matters difficult to resolve publicly → Family conflicts.

The image schema is that of a container, conceptualizing the family as a closed entity. The enclosed space metaphor safeguards internal affairs, emphasizing privacy and honor while avoiding external intervention. This reflects the collectivist concern for familial reputation.

Comparative analysis of conceptual metaphors in English and Chinese family proverbs are as follows.

There are significant differences between English and Chinese family proverbs in terms of metaphorical source domains, mapping emphasis, and value orientations. Regarding the conceptualization of family, English and Chinese proverbs reveal distinct perspectives.

English proverbs regard the primary function of the family as providing emotional sustenance, whereas Chinese proverbs consider its most important function and duty to be the continuation of the family line. English culture predominantly draws concepts from psychological-emotional domains, natural domains, social organizational domains, and educational domains to understand the family, reflecting an individualistic value orientation.

In contrast, Chinese culture tends to understand the family through natural domains, ethical-moral domains, and political-structural domains, embodying a collectivist value orientation.

A comparative analysis of metaphors in English and Chinese family proverbs is shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Metaphorical comparisons of English-Chinese family proverbs

Dimension	English family proverbs	Chinese family proverbs
Source domain	Psychological-emotional domain: safe harbor, lighthouse, etc. Natural domain: tree, roots, etc. Social organizational Domain: system, company Educational domain: school, educational organization，etc.	Natural-cosmic domain: heaven and earth, rivers, tree/roots, etc. Ethical-moral domain: continuation of ancestral lineage, blood ties, ethical norms, filial piety, etc. Political-structural domain: national model. Educational domain: family instructions, family rules, etc.

Continuation of the Table 11

Dimension	English family proverbs	Chinese family proverbs
Mapping focus	Family is a space of support and freedom; family influences personality development; emphasis on member collaboration and individual development	Family is a sphere of duty and ethics; emphasis on family lineage and social hierarchical order; values norms and moral responsibilities
Value orientation	Individualism: the family centers on the marital relationship, valuing individual development and free will	Collectivism: prioritizes the overall interests of the family and obedience; hierarchism: follows age-based order and role norms; women typically hold subordinate roles in the family

English family proverbs distinctly reflect a cognitive schema of individualism, which emphasizes personal rights, individual choice, and personal responsibility. This schema highlights the family as a domain of personal sovereignty and privacy, as seen in proverbs like “A man’s home is his castle”.

The family is also portrayed as a product of personal choice and emotional bonds, exemplified by proverbs such as “Home is where the heart is” and “There’s no place like home” Additionally, the notion that individuals bear primary responsibility for their family’s well-being aligns with the self-accountability principle in individualistic cultures, as reflected in the proverb “Every man is the architect of his own fortune”.

In contrast, Chinese family proverbs exhibit a clear cognitive schema of collectivism, emphasizing group interests, social responsibility, and collective harmony.

Many proverbs prioritize the collective and the family, e.g., *“舍小家为大家”* (Sacrifice one’s own family for the benefit of the collective). *“大河有水小河满，大河无水小河干”* (If the main river is full, the tributaries will be too; if the main river is dry, the tributaries will run empty) and *“吃苦在前，享乐在后”* (Be the first to bear hardships, and the last to enjoy comforts). These proverbs inextricably link personal happiness to the interests of the collective and the family, underscoring the expectation that individuals should make sacrifices for the greater good.

Furthermore, numerous proverbs emphasize social responsibility, e.g., *“不孝有三，无后为大”* (There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them all). “养儿防老” (Raise children to provide against old age). *“男大当婚，女大当嫁”* (Men should marry when they grow up, women should marry when they grow up). These expressions highlight the inescapable duties individuals owe to their family and society, embodying the concept of social obligation inherent in collectivist cultures.

In terms of emotional expression, English proverbs tend to be more direct, often infused with irony and humor, while Chinese proverbs are more implicit, permeated with didacticism and an emphasis on obedience.

3.3 Ethnocultural analysis and comparison of English and Chinese proverbs on marriage and family

Cultural model theory proposes that cultural models are the shared patterns of thinking and cognitive structures constructed within a cultural community [106].

Proverbs, as highly condensed linguistic forms, often embody deep conceptual systems regarding marriage, family, and social relations specific to a given cultural group, Cultural Dimension Theory maintains that different cultures exhibit systematic differences in their value orientations.

English and Chinese proverbs show stable and interpretable cultural distinctions in their conceptualizations of marriage, gender roles, and family responsibilities [67]. Lu Xiaoyi believes that proverbs reflect the relationship between culture and language [107, p.87].

Tian Wenge believes that as a unique cultural phenomenon, proverbs represent the accumulated wisdom of humanity, passed down through generations [108, p.181].

Language is not only a means of communication, but also a symbolic carrier of a community's cultural identity and value system [109, p.69]. English-Chinese marriage and family proverbs not only carry rich linguistic expressions and cognitive metaphorical structures but also deeply reflect the differences and similarities between Chinese and English cultures in terms of values, social structures, religious beliefs, and life philosophies. Wang Yeqi believes that proverbs possess profound cultural significance, with some also embodying distinctive ethnic characteristics [110, p.17].

Regarding views on marriage and family, traditional Chinese marriage institutions, family structures, and familial ethics were almost entirely constructed according to Confucian principles, influenced by the *"宗法制"* (Patriarchal clan system). This system, based on blood ties and centered on the family, served as a social organization and hierarchy in traditional Chinese society.

It was not only a familial institution but also a political and social one, exerting a profound impact on the social structure, ethical concepts, and even political systems of ancient China.

In contrast, English marriage and family proverbs are rooted in the Christian cultural tradition while also being shaped by industrial civilization, literary works, and individualistic value systems.

Since marriage is a part of family life, there is some overlap between English-Chinese marriage and family proverbs regarding gender roles and status in marital relationships. In this study, these overlapping aspects are categorized under marriage proverbs for analysis and are not reiterated in the section on family proverbs.

Thus, the topic of marital relationships is not included in the analysis of family proverbs. Marriage can be understood as the beginning of a new family. Since marriage and family concepts within the same linguistic environment are influenced by shared cultural backgrounds, we will analyze marriage proverbs and family proverbs together

in this chapter.

This section provided an ethnocultural analysis of English proverbs concerning marriage and family. In total, we selects approximately 600 English and Chinese proverbs related to marriage and family, including about 500 traditional and modern proverbs and around 100 digital proverbs. The analysis in this section focuses on the approximately 500 traditional and modern proverbs. The numbers of English and Chinese proverbs are roughly comparable, each accounting for close to half of the dataset. Similarly, marriage-related and family-related proverbs are distributed in nearly equal proportions.

After systematically organizing the proverbs and classifying the themes, it becomes clear that English marriage and family proverbs show a relatively stable pattern of thematic distribution. English marriage proverbs are mainly concentrated in seven core themes, while family proverbs primarily cover four core themes.

This classification reflects the different emphases placed on marriage and family relations in English-speaking cultures and shows the structured features of these proverbs in terms of emotional expression, social norms, and value orientation. Based on this, the research constructs a thematic framework for English marriage and family proverbs, as shown in the Figure 6.

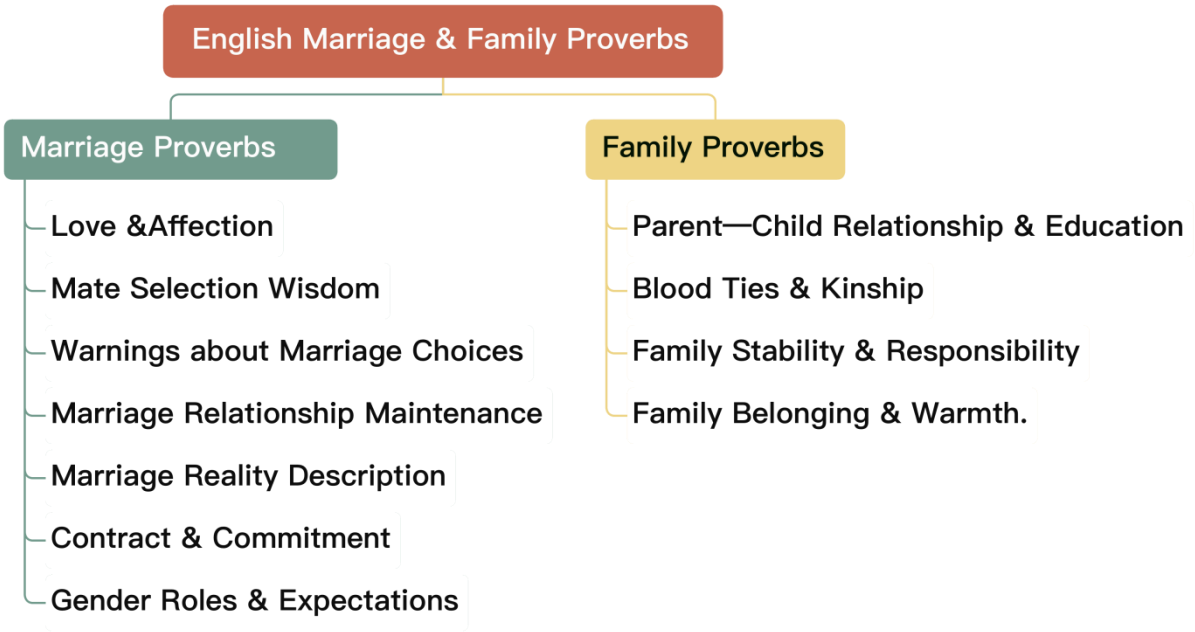


Figure 6. English marriage and family proverbs

In Figure 6, we can see the themes of English and Chinese marriage proverbs can be primarily categorized into the following types: Love and Affection, Mate Selection Wisdom, Marriage Decision Warnings, Marriage Relationship Maintenance, Marriage Reality Description, Contract and Commitment, and Gender Roles and Expectations. The main categories of English family proverbs include: Parent-Child Relationship and Education, Blood Ties and Kinship, Family Stability and Responsibility, and Family Belonging and Warmth. On the basis of this thematic framework, the following sections will examine English marriage proverbs and family proverbs in detail according to these thematic categories.

English marriage proverbs can be divided into the following categories.

a) Love and affection.

English marriage proverbs are deeply influenced by Christianity. Christian tradition emphasizes fidelity, sacrifice, and "spiritual compatibility", viewing love as a sacred emotion. The Romantic movement of the 18th-19th centuries idealized "love" as a force transcending rationality, profoundly influencing literature and perspectives on marriage. Love-themed English proverbs often highlight the romantic experience of individual emotions and emotional fluctuations. They promote individualism and freedom in love, asserting that marriage should be founded on "love", as shown in the following examples:

"Love conquers all."

"Love makes the world go round."

"Love is blind."

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

"Love me little, love me long."

"You don't marry someone you can live with-you marry the one you can't live without."

These proverbs reflect the Western cultural notion of love as an expression of personal choice and free will, underscoring the belief in the supremacy of true love.

b) Mate selection wisdom.

The criteria for mate selection reflected in English marriage proverbs typically include compatibility in character and values, while also considering economic conditions, family background, and social status. There is also a tendency to discourage placing excessive importance on physical appearance and attraction as key factors in choosing a spouse.

Many proverbs emphasize the importance of alignment in personality, interests, and values, suggesting that positive qualities and behaviors in one partner can positively influence the other, as shown in the following examples:

"Birds of a feather flock together."

"A good match is a great fortune."

"A good Jack makes a good Jill."

These proverbs emphasize the significance of harmonious character and shared aspirations.

Economic stability is also a crucial criterion in mate selection. English-speaking cultures have long emphasized personal effort and practical considerations, advocating that marriage choices should balance emotion and material needs. During the 18th and 19th centuries, urbanization spurred by the Industrial Revolution made economic security a vital foundation for marital stability. This perspective is reflected in proverbs, as shown in the following examples:

"First thrive, then wive."

"Before you marry, be sure of a house wherein to tarry."

"Love doesn't pay the bills."

"When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window."

These proverbs highlight how financial hardship can strain relationships, emphasizing the importance of material foundations in sustaining marriage.

Similarity in family background is another important criterion for mate selection, as shown in the following examples:

"Like blood, like good, and like age make the happiest marriage."

"Like marries like."

"Marry in your own rank."

These proverbs reflect the value placed on shared social and familial contexts. These proverbs illustrate the realistic approach to marriage prevalent in Anglo-American culture, which stresses the importance of matching social and economic status.

Some proverbs also acknowledge the significance of economic conditions while cautioning against the risks of mercenary marriages, as shown in the following examples:

"Marry money and you marry trouble."

"He that marries for wealth sells his liberty."

Proverbs addressing physical appearance often carry a critical or sarcastic tone, as shown in the following examples:

"Beauty is but skin deep."

"Handsome is as handsome does."

"Don't judge a book by its cover."

These proverbs reflect a wariness toward prioritizing physical attraction and emphasize the greater importance of inner qualities.

c) Warnings about marriage choices.

English proverbs regarding marriage choices universally emphasize rational thinking, prudent decision-making, personal responsibility, and seizing the right moment. Marriage is considered a major life decision. Many proverbs stress the importance of being cautious and rational when choosing a spouse, advising against rash or impulsive decisions. They encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own lives while also being prepared to seize the right opportunity, as shown in the following examples:

"Better be alone than in bad company."

"Look before you leap."

"Choose your wife as you choose your knife – sharp and well-tempered."

"Marry in haste, repent at leisure."

"There's a right time for everything."

"Early wed, early dead."

These proverbs reflect the marriage decision-making logic in English-speaking cultural contexts, which is built upon "rationality + responsibility", emphasizing long-term planning and self-accountability. Overall, Western marriages emphasize free love, with individualism prevailing. When choosing a spouse, emphasis is placed on personality and compatibility, valuing economic conditions, but decisions should be made rationally, advocating for long-term judgment in marriage choices.

d) Marriage relationship maintenance.

Many English proverbs reveal wisdom for marriage and offer valuable insights on maintaining a strong marriage. A crucial point is to regard the wife as the heart of the household, as shown in the following examples:

“Happy wife, happy life.”

“A good husband makes a good wife.”

“The wife is the key to the house.”

“A good wife and health is a man's best wealth.”

These proverbs emphasize the wife’s vital role in the household, suggesting that family happiness is closely tied to the wife’s well-being. Attending to the wife’s needs is crucial for a fulfilling marriage. Furthermore, a woman’s behavior and character are influenced by how her husband treats her, emphasizing that both partners are essential for a successful union.

English proverbs also emphasize that spouses should be equal and complementary, mutually supportive, and grow together, as shown in the following examples:

“Marriage is a partnership.”

“Marriage is give and take.”

“The couple who plays together, stays together.”

“The husband is the head, but the wife is the neck that turns the head.”

Mutual tolerance between spouses and actively resolving conflicts are also good marriage secrets, as shown in the following examples:

“Don’t go to bed angry.”

“A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple.”

e) Marriage reality description.

Many English proverbs reveal the difficulties and challenges in real marriages, often with a tone of irony and realism. After the Industrial Revolution, economic realities became a critical variable in the sustainability of marriages. At the same time, realist writers like Dickens extensively exposed the conflicts and disappointments within marriage, influencing societal perceptions. In the mid-19th century, the realist literary movement emerged in Europe, emphasizing the objective and truthful depiction of everyday life and social realities, as opposed to the romanticized exaggeration of ideals and emotions characteristic of Romanticism. In portraying marriage, realist writers moved away from idealization, instead highlighting social pressures, gender inequality, economic motivations, conflicts between love and reality, and the disillusionment and repression that can follow marriage. Some English proverbs reflect this critical, even cynical, view of marriage reality, such as “Love is blind, but marriage restores its sight” and “Marriage is a lottery” Such proverbs linguistically embody the contradictions, conflicts, and shattered illusions within marriage, revealing the tension between ideal and reality.

In *Hard Times* [111], Louisa is forced by her father to marry Bounderby, an older wealthy banker, and suffers immensely in her marriage, illustrating how unions are often driven not by love but by social contracts.

Little Dorrit [112] further reveals the tight interplay between marriage and money, status, and the constraints poverty imposes on marriage freedom. Although Dickens retains some idealism regarding morality and family values, he unflinchingly exposes the institutional constraints, gender inequalities, and darker aspects of marriage. In these literary works, marriage often becomes a social institution that suppresses individuals, particularly women, and confines their autonomy. This literary expression also influenced the trajectory of marriage proverbs in oral culture, infusing them with

a more critically realistic perspective.

In *Great Expectations* [113], Dickens portrays Miss Havisham, who is abandoned by her fiancé and spends the rest of her life in her wedding dress, harboring resentment toward men and raising Estella as a tool for revenge. It reveals the psychological trauma caused by betrayal in marriage while also criticizing the excessive reliance on money and social class within marriage.

Under the influence of these negative perceptions, many English proverbs bluntly described the unsatisfactory realities of marriage, leading to a shift in attitudes toward marriage, as shown in the following examples:

"Marriage has teeth, and it bites hard."

"Marriage is not a bed of roses."

"Marriage is hard work."

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

"When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window."

"Marriage is neither heaven nor hell – it is simply purgatory."

These proverbs point out that the reality of marriage is not as rosy as imagined, emphasizing that marriage is not just about ideals and romance but also filled with challenges and uncertainties. Financial difficulties after marriage can even destroy the relationship.

f) Marriage contract and commitment.

The Christian tradition has profoundly influenced Western perspectives on marriage, which is regarded as a sacrament established by God – a union "between one man and one woman, for a lifetime" Particularly in the *New Testament*, marriage is not merely a contract but a "holy covenant" between God and humanity, transcending emotional and legal dimensions, and is not to be lightly dissolved. Many English proverbs emphasizing the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage are derived directly from the *Bible*, underscoring its sacred and inseparable nature [114].

"What God has joined together, let no man put asunder," originating from the *Gospel of Matthew*, is the most frequently cited biblical phrase in Christian marriage ceremonies. Such proverbs reflect the theological view of Christianity that regards marriage as a sacrament, emphasizing that marriage is a sacred union not to be broken by worldly forces [114].

Moreover, common expressions like "Marriages are made in heaven", though tinged with fatalism, also reflect the Christian belief in the divine arrangement of marital destinies.

This religious context makes marriage not merely a private act but a covenant with God, imbued with profound ethical and ritual significance, as shown in the following examples:

"Till death do us part."

"If two people are meant to be together, they will find their way back."

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the lord."

The Anglo-American culture emphasizes contractualism, and marriage in the modern era has gradually become "legalized" and "institutionalized". Marriage is regarded as a "civil contract" requiring mutual consent and legal enforcement, where breaching it equates to breaking the law. Many proverbs interpret marital

responsibilities from the perspective of a legal contract, as shown in the following examples:

"A promise made is a debt unpaid."

"A man is only as good as his word."

These proverbs emphasize that commitments in marriage carry both moral and legal binding force. The expression "Tying the knot" originates from the "handfasting" ritual in early Northern England and Scotland, where the hands of the bride and groom were bound together with a ribbon during the wedding ceremony to symbolize the formation of the marital contract. The evolution of such ritualistic language reflects the contractual and public nature of marriage in traditional Anglo-American society.

Gillis J. R. proposed that in Victorian-era Britain (particularly during the 19th century), "fidelity" and "family responsibility" were core values within the middle-class moral framework [115]. Marriage symbolized the moral order, and divorce was regarded as a disgrace. Proverbs were widely circulated in family teachings, textbooks, and marriage manuals, reinforcing these norms.

Within this context, the institution of marriage was established under dual religious and legal frameworks, emphasizing its inviolability and the gravity of its commitments. The expression of proverbs has naturally been influenced by these concepts.

g) Gender roles and expectations.

In English marriage proverbs, expressions of gender roles not only reflect traditional and modern societal expectations for marital behavior between men and women but have also long regulated and solidified gender relations. Gender role stereotypes are prevalent in English marriage proverbs and have evolved over time.

In British society from the 17th to the early 19th century, the family was a male-dominated power structure where women were expected to assume roles centered on child-rearing, household management, and obedience to their husbands, while men were regarded as the economic pillars and moral authorities of the household. Typical marriage proverbs of this period, as shown in the following examples:

"The man is the head of the house."

"A woman's place is in the home."

These proverbs implicitly served to normalize gendered divisions of labor, acting as significant vehicles for transmitting socially constructed "gender orders". They reinforced a family structure in which men made decisions and women obeyed, while also establishing ideal models of female "virtue", "diligence" and "gentleness". British society during this era was deeply influenced by Christian teachings, with the *Ephesians* emphasizing that "wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord" [114]. Simultaneously, under coverture laws, women automatically came under their husbands' guardianship upon marriage, possessing almost no independent property rights, educational opportunities, or legal identity. These proverbs emphasized a gender ideology that promoted "female submission" and "male leadership". Rather than reflecting an egalitarian marital relationship, they served to legitimize and rationalize gendered divisions of labor.

Since the 19th century, with the rise of the middle class during the Victorian era (1837–1901), marriage in this period was imbued with greater significance concerning

social order and moral responsibility. The family was regarded as a microcosm of the nation and the foundation of a moral society, with marriage becoming synonymous with social "stability", while women were elevated as "Angels in the House" Proverbs of the time increasingly moralized and emphasized the sacrificial role of women, as shown in the following examples:

"Behind every great man, there's a great woman."

"The wife is the heart of the home."

These proverbs ostensibly praised women's domestic roles but in reality reinforced a moral framework that confined women to the home and idealized selfless devotion.

Some proverbs exemplify the emphasis on prudence and moral guidance in marriage, as shown in the following examples:

"Marry in haste, repent at leisure."

"A good wife makes a good husband."

Such proverbs often carried a prescriptive tone, functioning not merely as advice or summaries of wisdom but as moral injunctions aimed at preserving the social function of marriage through language. The moral culture of this era stressed sexual restraint, domestic order, and female chastity. Within marriage, women were assigned the role of "guardians of the domestic sphere", while those outside matrimony, such as widows or unmarried women, often faced social marginalization. Numerous marriage manuals and household guides (e.g., Isabella Beeton's *The Book of Household Management*) instructed women on how to become "perfect wives", further cementing these gendered expectations [116].

Entering the 20th century, particularly during World War I and World War II, women entered the labor market in large numbers and began to fight for rights in education, employment, and politics. The movement for professional equality gradually developed, and marriage relations also showed a trend toward desacralization and de-hierarchization. Beginning in the 1930s, British women gained more property rights and the right to divorce. Society began to rethink issues of gender equality within marriage. For example, "The husband is the head, the wife is the neck" declares the husband's dominant position while simultaneously reflecting the wife's practical, indirect influence in the family.

Although proverbs still retain conservative elements, they increasingly feature irony and challenges to traditional gender roles. For example, "A man is incomplete until he is married. Then he is finished."

This humorously framed expressions of "male victimhood" serve as a linguistic parody of traditional marital pressures, which gained popularity in post-war American society amid growing economic strains, reflecting broader challenges to the traditional institution of marriage. For example, "Marriage is give and take – the husband gives and the wife takes" reflects post-war reflections on the "housewife dependency structure", offering a subtle satire of economically unequal marital arrangements while also foreshadowing women's re-evaluation of their domestic and economic status.

These proverbs reflect public criticism of power imbalances and role expectations within marriage, carrying tones of satire, humor, and even cynicism. Meanwhile, emerging newspaper columns and radio programs (such as those by Groucho Marx and

George Burns) frequently employed “marriage jokes”, fostering a critical public attitude. The proverbs of this period reflect the shift in marriage concepts and institutions from the “sacred family” to “secular marriage”， reinforcing the notion of marriage as an integral part of everyday life.

In contemporary Anglo-American culture, marriage proverbs have become increasingly diverse and varied. People continue to use traditional proverbs while also creating new ones that either advocate for equality or humorously reflect on marriage, as shown in the following examples:

“Happy wife, happy life.”

“Love is love.”

“It takes two to tango.”

“Marriage is a partnership of equals.”

These proverbs reflect how modern marriages place greater emphasis on values such as equality, communication, and mutual adjustment, illustrating evolving gender perceptions and intergenerational values in society.

English family proverbs can be primarily categorized into themes including Parent-Child Relationship and Education, Blood Ties and Kinship, Family Stability and Responsibility, Family Belonging and Warmth, Marriage Relationships and Gender Roles. Given that marriage relationships and gender roles have already been extensively analyzed in the discussion on marriage proverbs, this section will not elaborate on them further.

a) Parent-Child relationship and education.

This category of proverbs emphasizes parental influence on children, family education, and character inheritance, positing a genetic continuity in the psychological traits between individuals and their families. Western thought emphasizes “familial personality characteristics,” focusing not solely on patriarchal hierarchy but on inheritance and identity cognition. Many proverbs highlight similarities in personality or behavior between parents and children, as shown in the following examples:

“Like father, like son.”

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

Some proverbs reflect the Christian ethic that “discipline is an expression of love,” emphasizing the family as the primary moral classroom. These proverbs also reflect traditional societal expectations of children as both labor resources and heirs to the family legacy, as shown in the following examples:

“Spare the rod and spoil the child.”

“Children are a poor man’s riches.”

“Children should be seen and not heard.”

“Charity begins at home.”

“One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.”

“What the child says, he has heard at home.”

Influenced by Christian teachings and Victorian moral values, many proverbs emphasize the importance of family education. However, modern parenting trends increasingly reject violence, stressing the power of example over preaching, as shown in the following examples:

“Example is better than precept.”

“Connect before you correct.”

“Practice makes progress.”

“Values are caught, not taught.”

The popularity of these modern family education proverbs reflects a societal shift from authoritarian parenting to a coach-like or partnership-based approach, centering on respect for the child as an independent individual with inherent dignity.

b) Blood ties and kinship.

This category of proverbs emphasizes the innate bonds and mutual responsibilities among family members, highlighting the dual constraints of blood ties and emotional bonds. They stress that family responsibilities take precedence over social obligations, embodying a strong sense of kinship loyalty. This is particularly prominent in American rural culture, as shown in the following examples:

“Blood is thicker than water.”

“A brother is a friend given by nature.”

“You can’t choose your family.”

c) Family stability and responsibility.

This category of proverbs emphasizes loyalty, responsibility, and enduring relationships among family members. Their origins lie in the Christian emphasis on the sanctity of family, reflecting the moral expectations of familial loyalty in Western society, as shown in the following examples:

“United we stand, divided we fall.”

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

“A family that prays together stays together.”

These proverbs reflect the traditional agricultural society where the family served as the fundamental unit of production, emphasizing the need for unity, continuity, and stability.

d) Family belonging and warmth.

This category of proverbs emphasizes that the family serves as an emotional haven, a source of belonging and security for individuals. This stems from Western traditions of romanticism and individualism, highlighting the family as a symbol of emotional belonging, as shown in the following examples:

“Home is where the heart is.”

“Every bird likes its own nest.”

“East or west, home is best.”

“Home sweet home.”

“There’s no place like home.”

The section provides an ethnocultural analysis of Chinese proverbs on marriage and family.

After systematically organizing the proverbs and categorizing the themes, it can be observed that Chinese marriage and family proverbs also show a relatively stable pattern of thematic distribution. Chinese marriage proverbs are mainly concentrated in nine core themes, while family proverbs encompass four core themes.

These themes reflect the distinctive cultural emphases placed on marriage and family relations in Chinese-speaking societies and highlights the structured

characteristics of these proverbs in terms of emotional expression, moral expectations, social norms, and value orientation. This section continues to focus primarily on traditional and modern proverbs as the main research material. The thematic framework of Chinese marriage and family proverbs is shown in Figure 7.

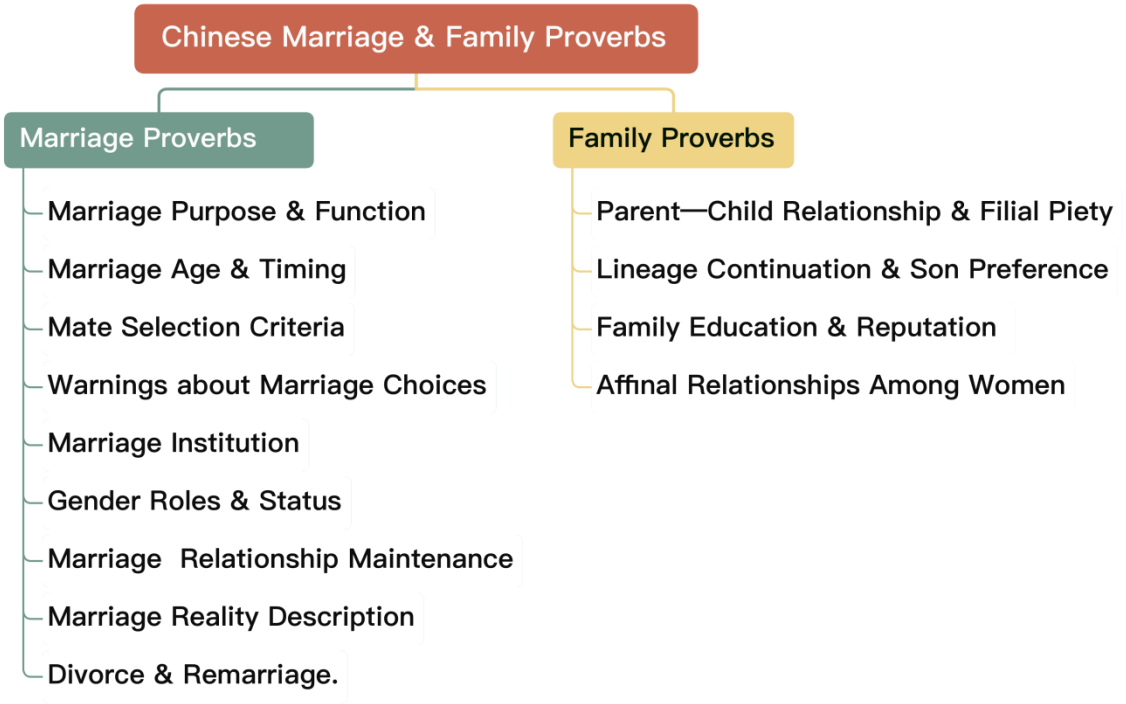


Figure 7. Chinese marriage and family proverbs

In Figure 7, we can see that the main categories of Chinese marriage-related proverbs include: marriage purpose and function; marriage age and timing; mate selection criteria; warnings about marriage choices; marriage institution; gender roles and status; marriage relationship maintenance; marriage reality description; divorce and remarriage.

a) Marriage purpose and function.

Marriage is not only a family responsibility but also a social one. After ancient China transitioned into a class society dominated by an agricultural natural economy, the patriarchal family system gradually strengthened. Society regarded procreation as a primary goal of marriage, making it not only a necessary means to expand production and increase wealth but also the primary method for inheriting property and power. Chen Guyuan noted in *The History of Chinese Marriage* that "continuing the family line" was the main purpose of traditional Han Chinese marriages, while receiving economic support from the spouse's family was a secondary purpose [117].

Many proverbs reflect that the primary purpose of marriage was to ensure the continuation of the family line. For ancient and traditional Chinese people, "having no son" was a grave matter, as it meant "leaving no descendants". This implied not only a lack of support in old age and a proper end to life but also that there would be no one to offer incense and sacrifices after death, no one to inherit the family estate, and the eventual disappearance of the family name. Thus, *"断子绝孙"* (may you die without sons) became the most vicious curse in traditional Chinese belief. Numerous proverbs

emphasize the importance of having sons, as shown in the following examples:

"不孝有三，无后为大" (There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them all.)

"有子万事足" (With a son, everything is sufficient.)

"不怕野种，就怕绝种" (Better a wild offspring than none at all.)

Economic assistance and livelihood security were another important purpose of marriage. For example, the proverb *"嫁汉嫁汉，穿衣吃饭"* (A woman marries a man for clothing and food) suggests that women relied on men for livelihood through marriage, reflecting the subordinate status of women in traditional society.

In feudal society, men handled external affairs while women managed domestic ones, making marriage the primary means for women to integrate into society. With low economic independence, marriage became a means of survival for women. In modern times, with the rise of gender equality, this concept has gradually faded, though remnants can still be observed in some regions.

Modern marriage values emphasize the emotional significance of the individual, believing that marriage should be a union based on love, as the proverb goes: *"有情人终成眷属"* (True lovers will eventually be joined in wedlock.)

b) Marriage age and timing.

Chinese proverbs emphasize the importance of marrying at an appropriate age to promote family continuity and personal responsibility. The traditional notion of men's specific social responsibilities, *"成家立业"* (starting a family and building a career), is directly tied to age, reflecting two crucial aspects of an individual's social life: establishing a household and developing a career.

In traditional thinking, the sooner a man accomplishes these two tasks, the more societal approval he gains. This concept symbolizes a person's transition from youth to maturity, from dependence to independence, and from individuality to family and social integration. Specifically, *"成家"* (starting a family) means taking on familial responsibilities and obligations, while also enjoying the warmth and happiness of family life. *"立业"* (Establishing a career) refers to finding one's place in society, achieving self-worth through hard work, providing for family life, and contributing to society.

The concept of marriage age for men and women is underpinned by strong anxieties about fertility windows and gendered logic. The time constraints surrounding women's "depreciation" are far more stringent than those for men, reflecting the patriarchal society's objectification of women's marital value. Many proverbs emphasize the importance of marrying early, as shown in the following examples:

"男大当婚，女大当嫁" (Men should marry when they grow up, women should marry when they grow up.)

"女大不中留" (A grown daughter is not to be kept at home.)

Some proverbs suggest that marrying and having children early brings happiness. For example, *"早栽秧，早打谷；早生娃儿，早享福"* (Plant seedlings early, harvest grain early; have children early, enjoy blessings early.)

Some proverbs also link women's marriageable age to their appearance and

fertility, as shown in the following examples:

"男大十岁不为大，女大十岁做妈妈" (A man ten years older is not too old; a woman ten years older is like a mother.)

"娶妻要小，嫁汉要老" (Choose a young wife, marry an older man.)

"男人四十一朵花，女人四十豆腐渣" (A man at forty is a flower; a woman at forty is like bean dregs.)

Additionally, late marriage for women is seen as squandering their youth. These proverbs reflect traditional society's expectations for marriage at the appropriate age, particularly emphasizing early marriage for women to meet standards of fertility and aesthetic. For example,*"过了这个村，就没这个店"* (If you miss this inn, you won't find another) is often used to describe the regret of missing the optimal marriage age, illustrating the traditional belief that the window for marriage is fleeting.

In traditional views, marrying late or remaining unmarried was often seen as socially deviant, as it could lead to loneliness or lack of descendants. Proverbs reflect that people construct an ideal "marriageable age", creating time pressure for young people, especially women. It reflects the expectations of "early marriage and high fertility" for women in traditional society, as well as the genuine anxiety surrounding the fear of lacking heirs.

In the late 1970s to the 1980s, China established the family planning policy as a fundamental national policy to control population growth, advocating for *"晚婚、晚育、少生、优生"* (later marriage, later childbirth, fewer but healthier births). The government educated the general public, especially in rural areas, on the benefits of later marriage. As a result, during this specific historical period, many promotional slogans related to the family planning policy emerged, as shown in the following examples:

"若要身体好，娶妻莫过早" (If you want good health, don't marry too early.)

"早婚是个害，年轻身体坏" (Early marriage is harmful – it ruins young bodies.)

These slogans were used to disseminate the concept of later marriage, and they were once regarded as emblematic expressions promoting a scientific view of marriage and childbirth.

Although China no longer implements the family planning policy today, the birth rate continues to decline year by year. Young people's views on marriage and childbirth have significantly diverged from traditional perspectives. With the changes of the times, later marriage has become the norm for urban youth, and the age of marriage has shown a notable trend toward being older.

The age of marriage is no longer a matter of anxiety for people, as the proverb goes: *"好饭不怕晚"* (Good things are worth waiting for). Additionally, many individuals who identify as "marriage-free" have emerged, referring to themselves as *"单身贵族"* (The Single Aristocrat). Young people place greater emphasis on personal quality of life and no longer view marriage as a life mission. However, some traditional regions still hold to the belief that "early marriage is ideal". In modern society, there are still those who derogatorily label women unwilling to marry early as *"大龄剩女"* (Older leftover women).

c) Mate selection criteria.

Proverbs related to mate selection criteria reflect the expectations and standards for an ideal spouse in traditional Chinese society, embodying a profound awareness of social hierarchy and value judgments. They primarily emphasize the importance placed on a spouse's moral character, economic capability, and family upbringing in traditional marital choices, along with specific expectations regarding age differences. The most critical criterion in selecting a spouse was *"门当户对"* (matching family status), which emphasized alignment and compatibility in economic conditions, social standing, and family background.

In ancient China's agrarian society, which emphasized economic stability, the concept of *"门当户对"* (matching family status) emerged as the most representative proverb on spouse selection. Originating from the system of powerful clans and land ownership, it focused on class compatibility, emphasizing the alignment of social status, economic conditions, and cultural background between marriage partners. This reflected the traditional Chinese society's rational consideration for marital stability, as shown in the following examples:

"竹门对竹门，木门对木门" (Bamboo doors pair with bamboo doors, wooden doors with wooden doors.)

"郎才女貌" (A talented man matches a beautiful woman.)

"好马配好鞍，好女配好男" (A good horse deserves a good saddle, a good woman deserves a good man.)

"鱼找鱼，虾找虾，青蛙找那癞蛤蟆" (Fish seeks fish, shrimp seeks shrimp, a frog seeks a toad.)

Even today, this concept continues to influence many people's views on choosing a spouse.

Proverbs that advocate prioritizing character over appearance in choosing a spouse. The traditional Han Chinese cultural belief that a good wife plays a crucial role as a capable helpmate, as shown in the following examples:

"娶妻娶德不娶色" (When taking a wife, seek virtue, not beauty.)

"节省油盐米面布，是个巧媳妇" (A thrifty wife skilled in managing oil, salt, rice, flour, and cloth.)

"妻贤夫祸少" (A virtuous wife spares her husband from troubles.)

"好女不在貌，美德值千金" (A good woman's worth lies not in her looks but in her virtue, which is priceless.)

"丑妻家中宝" (An ugly wife is a treasure at home.)

Similarly, when selecting a husband, greater emphasis was placed on moral character. For example, *"世上谁见男儿丑?"* (In this world, who has ever judged a man by his looks?) These proverbs emphasize the Confucian cultural emphasis on moral cultivation and reflects the traditional societal value of placing character above physical appearance.

Many proverbs reflect the importance placed on economic conditions when choosing a spouse, as shown in the following examples:

"嫁汉嫁汉，穿衣吃饭" (A woman marries a man for clothing and food.)

“娶妻不娶穷家女” (Do not marry a girl from a poor family.)

“彩礼厚，门庭高” (A rich bride price raises the family’s status.)

“聘礼不够，亲事难成” (Insufficient bride price makes a marriage difficult.)

“彩礼高，亲家笑” (A high bride price makes the in-laws smile.)

Within the traditional Chinese marital custom system, wedding rituals were not only ceremonies uniting two individuals but also social contracts between two families. Among these practices, *“彩礼”* (bride price, also known as betrothal gifts) and *“嫁妆”* (dowry) constituted the essential material foundation of marital exchange.

Bride price refers to the monetary or material gifts presented by the groom's family to the bride’s family before marriage as a token of forming marital ties. Dowry, on the other hand, consists of the property or daily necessities provided by the bride's family to accompany her into the marriage, serving both as security for her future life and a symbol of the family’s honor and social status.

According to records in *礼记・昏义(The Book of Rites· Meaning of Marriage),* as early as the Zhou Dynasty, the *“六礼”* (Six Rites) system already existed, within which *“纳采”* (initial proposal gift) and *“纳币”* (gift of betrothal) were precursors to the bride price custom [118]. These reflected the social status and commitment of both families. These customs of bride price and dowry were not merely material exchanges but were embedded with deeper cultural logics such as social identity, kinship obligations, and gender structures, embodying the institutional nature of ancient Chinese marriage.

While the form of bride price has evolved from traditional items like grain, cloth, and money to modern assets such as apartments, cars, and cash savings, its economic essence remains unchanged. In contemporary society, bride price is also perceived as compensation to the bride’s family for raising their daughter. However, in recent years, skyrocketing bride prices in some regions (ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions of RMB) have sparked social controversy. China enacted legislation in 2024 prohibiting exorbitant bride prices, aiming to dismantle the overly materialistic view of marriage where “money talks” and restore the essence of the bride price and dowry as blessings for the union. However, in most parts of China, bride prices and dowries remain integral components of marriage customs. In modern mate selection criteria, economic factors remain a primary consideration, as the proverb goes: *“钱不是万能的，没有钱是万万不能的”* (Money can’t buy everything, but without it, you can’t buy anything.)

Numerous proverbs reflect the importance of evaluating family upbringing when choosing a spouse, as shown in the following examples:

“虎父无犬子” (A tiger father won’t have a dog son.)

“老子英雄儿好汉” (A heroic father raises a brave son.)

“龙生龙，凤生凤，老鼠的儿子会打洞” (Dragons beget dragons, phoenixes beget phoenixes, and the son of a rat knows how to dig holes.)

“娘勤女不懒，爹懒儿好闲” (A hardworking mother raises an industrious daughter; a lazy father breeds an idle son.)

“上梁不正下梁歪” (If the upper beam is crooked, the lower ones will be askew.)

Placing importance on family upbringing was a fundamental consideration in traditional Chinese society. Evaluating a potential spouse's family involved assessing their moral values, ethical standards, and cultural traditions, etc. This practice reflected a deep concern for marital stability and the continuation of family heritage. Traditional belief held that a wholesome family environment positively influenced every member, particularly young children, who would be imperceptibly shaped by their surroundings. Through constant exposure to virtuous examples, they would gradually develop strong moral character and noble ethical sentiments. It was commonly thought that children of morally upright parents would inevitably embody similar qualities. In ancient China's agrarian society, which relied heavily on family cooperation, Confucian philosophy regarded family upbringing as the foundation of social order. When selecting a spouse, a family's moral and ethical traditions reflected its integrity and economic stability, making *"门当户对"* (matching family status) and *"书香门第"* (scholarly families) the ideal standards. These values continue to exert influence in modern times.

Chinese marriage proverbs reflect the importance of considering age differences in spouse selection. Traditional Chinese beliefs hold that the appropriate age gap between spouses should be the husband being older than the wife, as shown in the following examples:

"要得相配，妻小三岁" (To be well-matched, the wife should be three years younger.)

"男大女小,团圆到老" (An older husband and a younger wife lead to a harmonious life together.)

"男大一,好夫妻,男大二,过一块,男大三,抱金砖" (A husband one year older makes a good couple; two years older, they live in harmony; three years older, he brings prosperity.)

*"女大五，赛老母" (*A wife five years older is like an old mother.)

However, an excessively large age gap where the husband is significantly older than the wife could also lead to marital instability, as cautioned by the proverb:"老牛吃嫩草" (An old cow eating tender grass.) This is a derogatory proverb, full of sarcasm and mockery, criticizing older men who leverage their advantages such as wealth and status to marry much younger women. The proverb also warns of the potential instability in marriages with significant age disparities. Such marriages were seen as fraught with hidden risks and unlikely to last, reflecting the rational judgment of traditional wisdom and experience in assessing extreme circumstances.

In ancient Chinese traditional society, there existed a unique marital custom known as *"养媳婚"* (child bride marriage). This practice typically involved giving away or selling an underage girl to another family, where she would be raised and later formally married to a son of that family upon reaching adulthood. Such girls were referred to as *"童养媳"* (child brides).In ancient Hakka families, there was another form of this system where a girl was adopted before a son was even born. These girls were called *"等郎妹"* (wait-for-a-son brides). People believed this would help them have a son sooner, as his future wife was already waiting for him. Such customs

persisted primarily because when families lacked sons or their sons were too young to work, they would adopt a child bride to compensate for the shortage of labor. In both scenarios, the wife was often significantly older than the husband, resulting in marriages that were inevitably distorted and dysfunctional. Many proverbs reflected this phenomenon, as shown in the following examples:

"二十岁大姐十岁郎，夜夜困觉抱上床" (A twenty-year-old wife was tasked with the duty of putting her ten-year-old child husband to bed every night.)

"六月麦子正扬花，丈夫还是奶娃娃" (When the wife was already fully ripe like the wheat blooming in June, her husband was still an infant in swaddling clothes.)

The child bride system originated during the Northern Song Dynasty, peaked during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and was more prevalent in impoverished areas. For the groom's parents, a child bride could provide additional labor, demonstrate filial piety toward her in-laws, serve her husband, and manage household chores. Thus, the proverb *"女大三，抱金砖"* (A woman three years older is like holding a gold brick) later emerged. However, this practice completely trampled on human rights and personal dignity, offering no freedom in marriage. Many women suffered under this system yet had no recourse, as expressed in proverbs like: *"宁嫁穷汉子，莫嫁孩蛋子"* (Better to marry a poor man than a child husband.) In 1950, the enactment of China's Marriage Law explicitly prohibited the practice of raising child brides.

d) Warnings about marriage choices.

Chinese marriage proverbs contain a wealth of warnings regarding marriage choices, reflecting the profound understanding our ancestors had of the risks associated with marriage. Many of these proverbs emphasize the importance of choosing a spouse cautiously. This was particularly crucial for women, as the consequences of choosing the wrong partner in traditional society were often lifelong, as shown in the following examples:

"男怕入错行，女怕嫁错郎" (A man fears entering the wrong profession; a woman fears marrying the wrong man.)

"娶妻不贤，遗祸百年" (Marrying an unvirtuous wife brings calamity for a hundred years.)

"快纺无好纱，快嫁无好家" (Hasty spinning yields no good yarn; a hasty marriage leads to no good family.)

Some proverbs stress the need for long-term perspective in selecting a spouse, considering future generations, and caution against being blinded by material wealth or physical beauty. These proverbs strongly discourage short-sighted behavior in marital choices, as shown in the following examples:

"娶妻先看娘，嫁夫先看爹" (When taking a wife, first look at her mother; when marrying a husband, first look at his father.)

"一辈子没好妻，十辈子没好子" (A lifetime with a bad wife means ten generations without good descendants.)

"江山易改，本性难移" (It is easy to change rivers and mountains but hard to change a person's nature.)

"有其父必有其子，有其母必有其女" (Like father, like son; like mother, like

daughter.)

Other proverbs point out that forced unions rarely lead to happiness, as shown in the following examples:

"强扭的瓜不甜" (A melon forced from the vine is not sweet.)

"强迫不成买卖，捆绑不成夫妻" (Coercion makes no successful trade; binding does not make a couple.)

"牛不吃水强按头" (You can lead a cow to water, but you can't make it drink.)

These proverbs demonstrate traditional society's clear-eyed recognition of the risks of marriage and its educational concern for future generations. They emphasize the importance of spouse selection, reflecting traditional society's focus on family continuity. They warn against being deceived by appearances and advocate for rational choice in marriage partners, highlighting the cultural emphasis on family harmony as the foundation of all success.

e) Marriage institution.

The marriage institution reflected in the Chinese language is a result of the influence of Confucian thought. Within the agrarian economic structure of the ancient Han people, the family, as the most fundamental unit of production, maintained its central role over a long period, becoming a key element in both the social structure and the state system. Consequently, the primary bonds connecting individuals were blood ties and marriage.

In such a clan-centered group that placed supreme importance on blood relations, *"孝"* (Filial piety) served as the fundamental principle for maintaining hierarchical distinctions between elders and juniors within the family, as well as embodying an individual's subordination to the family unit.

"孝" (Filial piety) is the core virtue of Confucian ethics, and its most basic tenet is that *"父为子纲"* (The father guides the son) , meaning children must obey their father's commands and give up their own choices. Such principles directly influenced the marriage institution in ancient China.

In the traditional beliefs of the ancient Han people, the authority to choose a marriage partner lay in the hands of parents, with individuals having no say in the matter. This form of marriage is known as *"包办婚姻"* (Arranged marriage). It reflects the decision-making mechanism within the traditional marriage institution, where personal will held a secondary role in institutional arrangements.

At the same time, it emphasizes the indispensable role of matchmakers in the traditional marriage institution and procedure, highlighting marriage as a social institution rather than a purely personal act, as shown in the following examples:

"无媒不成亲" (No matchmaker, no marriage.)

"父母之命，媒妁之言" (The rule for marriage was arrangement by parents and introduction by a matchmaker.)

In the feudal traditional marriage institution of China, there once existed a marital structure known as *"一夫一妻多妾制"* (One husband with one principal wife and multiple concubines), particularly prevalent among the nobility and scholar-gentry classes.

The status difference between the wife and concubines was extreme. The primary wife held an irreplaceable legal status, presiding over household affairs and managing the concubines, while concubines occupied a subordinate position. In ancient times, with its strict hierarchical system, typically only the *"嫡长子"* (The eldest son born to the principal wife) could inherit his father's official title and nobility, hence the proverb, *"子以母贵，母以子贵"* (A son gains status through his mother, and a mother gains status through her son.) This proverb reveals the mutually dependent relationship between mothers and sons in feudal society.

Under the primogeniture system of the son of the principal wife, children gained inheritance priority due to their mother's status as the principal wife, while mothers elevated their own standing through their sons' prominence and inheritance rights.

Whether wife or concubine, bearing a son could enhance her own status. That era created tragedies for women as a whole, and many proverbs reflect women's perspective of rejection and opposition to this institution, as shown in the following examples:

"宁做庶人妻，不做官家姬" (Better be the wife of a commoner than the concubine of an official.)

"宁愿挑柴卖草，不给人家做小" (Better to carry firewood and sell grass than to be someone's concubine.)

The agrarian society relied on labor, and having many children was considered a blessing. With poor medical conditions and high infant mortality rates, taking concubines was seen as a means to ensure *"多子多福"* (More children, more blessings). Wealthy families used this way to increase offspring and economic support.

The Confucian emphasis on *"传宗接代"* (Continuing the family line) encouraged men to have many children, and the duty of filial piety required producing heirs; thus, this institution was viewed as a tool for familial prosperity.

Under the feudal system, wealth and status determined the number of concubines a man could possess. The upper classes (such as landlords and officials) flaunted their power through multiple concubines. Patriarchy legitimized male ownership of multiple concubines, while women faced restricted status, with the concubinage system reinforcing male dominance.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Marriage Law was promulgated in 1950, officially abolishing the concubinage system and establishing a marital system based on monogamy, freedom of marriage, and gender equality. Modern marriage values emphasize fidelity to one's spouse and avoiding betrayal, as the proverb *"色字头上一把刀"* (In the character for 'lust', there hangs a knife). It indicates that infidelity and betraying one's family will lead to severe consequences.

f) Gender roles and status.

Chinese marriage proverbs abundantly reflect traditional gender divisions of labor and status disparities. These proverbs not only mirror the marriage values and family structures of historical periods but also profoundly reveal the patriarchy, and the concept of male superiority over female, inherent in traditional Chinese society, demonstrating the influence of Confucian thought.

The Confucian tenets of the *"三从四德"* (Three obediences and four virtues) and *"男尊女卑"* (Men being superior to women) served as a crucial cultural foundation for the formation of such proverbs. The mode of production in an agrarian society determined the functional division of labor between men and women within the family, while the clan system and the patrilineal bloodline inheritance reinforced the male-dominated social power structure.

Traditional gender roles emphasized that men should be the economic pillars and uphold the family's external honor, while women were expected to manage household chores, support their husbands, and raise children. The hierarchical structure of gender status was characterized by husband's dominance and wife's submission, reflecting a strong ideology of male superiority and female inferiority, as shown in the following examples:

"男主外，女主内" (Men rule outside, women rule inside.)

"夫唱妇随" (When the husband sings, the wife follows.)

"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗" (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog.)

"娶到的媳妇，买来的马，由人骑来由人打" (A wife once married is like a horse that's been bought; she can be ridden or beaten as her husband pleases.)

These proverbs clarify the power relations within marital relationships, reflecting a patriarchal structure of marriage.

While traditional marriage proverbs reflecting gendered divisions of labor and hierarchical status persist as linguistic remnants, the concept of gender equality has become the dominant trend across legal systems, social structures, and individual consciousness. Particularly, marital legislative reforms beginning in 1950 and profound social transformations since the 21st century have gradually displaced the model of *"男尊女卑"* (Male superiority and female inferiority) with a new ethos centered on "equality, respect, and cooperation". For example, *"妇女能顶半边天"* (Women hold up half the sky.)

In contemporary China, women have achieved significantly higher educational attainment and greater economic independence. Their influence in family decision-making, social participation, and career development has grown substantially. Many proverbs with discriminatory undertones are no longer widely used in modern discourse or are now employed ironically or critically.

Furthermore, initiatives in media and education have progressively reshaped gender role perceptions among the Chinese public. By promoting gender equality in films, television, textbooks, and public campaigns while challenging traditional stereotypes, these efforts have facilitated a fundamental redefinition of gender roles.

g) Marriage relationship maintenance.

Chinese proverbs regarding marriage interaction and relationship maintenance are remarkably rich, reflecting the profound understanding and practical wisdom of marriage and family in traditional Chinese culture. These proverbs not only convey accumulated experience for preserving marital affection but also embody societal values concerning marital ethics, gender roles, and family harmony.

Traditional Chinese culture places a high value on *"和"* (Harmony), viewing marriage as the cornerstone of a harmonious family. Such proverbs emphasize the practical aspects of managing married life and spousal interaction, focusing on *"和睦"* (Harmony) and *"忍让"* (Mutual forbearance). They represent distilled wisdom from long-term marital experience, reflecting the core Confucian ideal of harmony, as shown in the following examples:

"床头吵架床尾和" (Quarrels begin at the head of the bed but end at its foot.)

"夫妻一条心，黄土变成金" (Husband and wife of one mind can turn yellow soil into gold.)

"一日夫妻百日恩" (A single day as husband and wife brings a hundred days' bond between the life.)

"好狗不咬鸡，好汉不打妻" (A good dog does not bite chickens; a good man does not beat his wife.)

"秤钩不离秤砣，老公不离老婆" (The steelyard hook never leaves its weight; a husband never leaves his wife.)

This category of proverbs collectively illustrates traditional society's understanding and expectations of the marriage relationship. While containing simple, practical wisdom, they also reflect the deep influence of feudal ethics, advising people to cherish their marriages.

h) Marriage reality description.

Chinese marriage proverbs extensively reflect the realistic portrayals of marriage life, such as financial pressures and emotional cooling, revealing the contradictions, compromises, responsibilities, and the fickleness of human relationships within marriage. These proverbs often originate from genuine folk experiences, carrying critical, ironic, or cautionary connotations, demonstrating traditional Chinese society's profound observation of marriage realities. Many proverbs acknowledge the universality of conflicts in practical marital life, as shown in the following examples:

"家家有本难念的经" (Every family has its own hard-to-recitate scripture.)

"清官难断家务事" (Even an honest official can't judge domestic disputes.)

In traditional society, marriage was often closely tied to economic conditions. Poverty could breed conflict, strain affections, and even lead to broken relationships, showing that marital bonds were not as stable as imagined, as shown in the following examples:

"贫贱夫妻百事哀" (For a couple in poverty, every matter brings sorrow.)

"成家容易养家难" (It's easy to marry but hard to provide for a family.)

"夫妻本是同林鸟，大难临头各自飞" (Husband and wife are like birds in the same woods; when disaster strikes, each flies away separately.)

There are also proverbs suggesting that real married life is mundane and tedious, with most of the time spent dealing with these specific daily chores. Emotions may gradually fade away in the routine of ordinary days, yet only through the test of time does one discover that companionship is the most vital value and meaning of marriage, as shown in the following examples:

"婚姻是爱情的坟墓" (Marriage is the tomb of love.)

"开门七件事，柴米油盐酱醋茶" (As the day begins, remember these seven: fuel, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar, and tea.)

"少夫少妻，老来是伴" (Young couples wed, old companions end.)

In long-term marriages, passion may fade, but deep affection and tacit understanding gradually form. These realistic descriptions emphasize the value of loyalty and perseverance within marriage.

i) Divorce and remarriage.

In traditional Chinese society, marriage was not merely a union between a man and a woman, but also an integral part of family, clan, and ethical order, carrying profound moral and social significance. Consequently, "divorce" was viewed as disgraceful in traditional culture, while "remarriage," especially for women, often carried a stigma. Confucian culture emphasizes the *"三纲五常"* (Three cardinal guides and five constant virtues) requiring women to comply with the *"三从四德"* (Three obediences and four virtues) Among these, the notion of "remaining faithful to one husband until death" has had a profound influence. Consequently, related proverbs often carry a tone of admonition and disapproval, as shown in the following examples:

"宁拆十座庙，不毁一桩婚" (Better to tear down ten temples than to break one marriage.)

"嫁出去的女儿，泼出去的水" (A married daughter is like water splashed on the ground – gone forever.)

"夫妻没有隔夜仇" (Husband and wife hold no grudges overnight.)

"好女不嫁二夫" (A good woman never marries twice.)

This type of proverb vividly reflects traditional society's emphasis on marital stability and its complex attitude toward remarriage. Traditional society demanded absolute fidelity from women in marriage, stressing that once married, a woman should unconditionally submit and adapt. The moral condemnation of remarriage for women exemplifies the stringent demands of traditional chastity concepts.

As the proverb *"一女不嫁二夫，一臣不事二主"* (A woman does not marry two husbands, nor does a subject serve two masters) equates marital fidelity with political loyalty, revealing traditional society's value of unifying family and state ethics.

However, there are also proverbs in folk culture that express relative tolerance toward divorce and remarriage, as shown in the following examples: *"天要下雨，娘要嫁人"* (If Heaven wills it to rain, or a widow to remarry, no one can stop it, against nature's will.) The proverb reflects an understanding of natural laws and human relationships.

"寡妇门前是非多" (Where there's a widow, there's gossip.) The proverb reveals society's complex attitude toward single women.)

"破镜难重圆" (A broken mirror cannot be mended.)

While expressing regret over divorce, it also implies its inevitability. These proverbs demonstrate the profound recognition of marriage's complexity within folk wisdom, reflecting traditional society's tension and adaptation between moral ideals and lived reality.

In modern China, divorce rates have risen annually; divorce is no longer a taboo

subject but a freely chosen path. For example, *"天涯何处无芳草"* (The world is full of fair flowers). This proverb offers solace to those who have experienced heartbreak or divorce, suggesting that the world is vast and there are many suitable partners out there. It encourages them to believe in the possibility of finding love again in the future, reflecting an optimistic attitude toward the freedom to remarry.

The proverb *"旧的不去，新的不来"* (If the old doesn't go, the new won't come) also applies to marriage, encouraging people not to cling to broken relationships but to bravely bid farewell to the past in order to welcome new life and partners. It directly supports divorce and remarriage as pathways to a fresh start.

The main categories of Chinese family-related proverbs include: Parent-Child relationship and filial piety; lineage continuation and son preference; family education and reputation; affinal relationships among women (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships; sisters-in-law relationships).

a) Parent-Child relationship and filial piety.

These proverbs fully reflect the deep influence of Confucian thought on traditional Chinese values. Confucianism emphasizes *"孝"* (Filial piety) as the core of family and social order, highlighting the debt of gratitude for upbringing and intergenerational responsibilities, and regards the family as the cradle of morality.

The proverb *"父为天，母为地"* (The father is heaven, the mother is earth.) embodies the absolute authority of parents. Children are seen as the support for parents in their old age, reflecting the family's role in elderly care and promoting the idea that filial piety should be practiced early, with a heart of gratitude toward parents, as shown in the following examples:

"百善孝为先" (Among all virtues, filial piety is the first.)

"养儿防老，积谷防饥" (Raise children to provide against old age, just as you store grain against famine.)

"树欲静而风不止，子欲养而亲不待" (The tree desires to stand still, but the wind does not stop; the son desires to support his parents, but they are no longer there.)

"儿不嫌母丑，狗不嫌家贫" (Children don't mind their mother's ugliness, dogs don't mind their family's poverty.)

"家有一老，如有一宝" (An elder in the family is like a treasure.)

In traditional Chinese families, the father is typically strict, while the mother is often affectionate. A family with a mother is warm. Although traditional families often center around hierarchy and order, there are also many Chinese proverbs that emphasize familial warmth, as shown in the following examples:

"儿行千里母担忧" (When a son travels a thousand miles, his mother worries.)

"父母在，不远游" (While parents are alive, do not travel far.)

"金窝银窝，不如自己的狗窝" (A golden nest or a silver nest, none is better than one's own humble nest.)

Modern proverbs increasingly reflect parental love and sacrifice within family bonds, emphasizing the warmth of familial affection while downplaying the traditional concept of children's responsibilities. For example, *"可怜天下父母心"* (Parents' hearts are the most compassionate in the world) and *"养儿一百岁，长忧九十九"*

(Raising a child for a hundred years brings ninety-nine years of worry.)

b) Lineage continuation and son-preference.

Traditional patriarchal beliefs hold that the core purpose of the family is procreation, particularly the bearing of sons. Ancient Chinese culture emphasizes ancestor worship. People believe that after death, the souls of ancestors continued to exist and would continue to bless their descendants. It is required to make offerings to the ancestral tablets. If the line of descendants is cut off, the lineage of offerings is severed. An endless line of descendants means the perpetuation of the bloodline. Many proverbs reflect the importance of having descendants as both a family duty and a social responsibility, as shown in the following examples:

"亲有三代，族有万年" (Relatives last for three generations, but the clan lasts for ten thousand years.)

"宝玉白银与黄金，不若堂前有子孙" (No treasure of jade, silver, or gold can ever compare to the continuation of the family line.)

"人留子孙草留根" (People must leave behind descendants, just as grass must leave behind roots.)

"不孝有三，无后为大" (There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them all.)

Under the Confucian patriarchal system, whether in state governance or family life, men were naturally regarded as the honored superiors, holding absolute authority. Both political power and family property were passed down through an exclusively patrilineal system, with male lineage serving as the marker of familial bloodline. Sons were seen as the carriers of the family line, while daughters had no inheritance rights. Upon marriage, a woman would leave her natal home to live with her husband's family, becoming a member of his household and bearing children to continue his lineage. As a result, daughters were often considered dispensable within their own families. Many proverbs reflect this preference for sons over daughters, as shown in the following examples:

"嫁出去的女儿泼出去的水" (A married daughter is like water splashed on the ground – gone forever.)

"养儿满堂红，养女满堂空" (Sons fill the house with prosperity; daughters leave it empty.)

"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 whole family rejoices; when a girl is born, they sigh in dismay.)

"有子万事足" (With a son, everything is sufficient.)

Traditional Chinese proverbs reflect the strong patriarchal values and male supremacy prevalent in ancient times. The pursuit of numerous offspring not only ensured the continuity of inheritance rights but also served as a means to protect the patriarchal family and political power through strength in numbers. Even today, some people remain influenced by such notions.

Therefore, to protect the rights and interests of women and girls and promote gender equality, China has enacted a series of laws. Among them, a crucial measure addresses preventing sex-selective abortions to curb the "son preference" phenomenon,

effectively alleviating the imbalance in the sex ratio at birth.

To safeguard the rights and interests of women and girls and promote gender equality, China has introduced a series of laws. One crucial legislation aims to prevent sex-selective abortions in order to curb the phenomenon of son preference, effectively alleviating the imbalance in the sex ratio at birth. Before this law was enacted, numerous cases occurred where expectant mothers and their families requested abortions after the sex of the fetus was determined to be female during prenatal examinations. Consequently, China enacted relevant legislation in 1994, prohibiting hospitals and medical workers from performing non-medically necessary fetal sex determination or gender-selective abortions.

Modern concepts increasingly favor gender equality, as reflected in the proverb: *"时代不同了，男女都一样"* (Times have changed; men and women are the same.) However, some regions still show a preference for boys.

c) Family education and reputation.

Traditional Chinese families placed great importance on family reputation, and this is also deeply influenced by Confucianism. In ancient Chinese culture, family reputation encompassed the social evaluation, moral standing, and historical legacy of a family or clan. Many Chinese proverbs reflect this *"面子文化"* (Culture of face) and the concept of collective honor, e.g., *"家丑不可外扬"* (Domestic shame should not be made public.)

This concept prioritized the family's reputation over individual interests, viewing family actions as "representative" and "hereditary". The shame or glory of any family member was collectively borne by all, e.g., *"一荣俱荣，一损俱损"* (When one is honored, all are honored; when one is disgraced, all are disgraced.)

Under the influence of this belief, educational views in ancient China were exceptionally strict. It was commonly thought that children's behavior and habits were learned or inherited from their parents. Therefore, parents were often judged by their children's behavior. To prevent children from bringing shame upon the family, fathers were expected to discipline them strictly; otherwise, the father would be held primarily responsible, as shown in the following examples:

"严父出孝子，慈母多败儿" (A strict father raises a filial son; an indulgent mother spoils the child.)

"棍棒底下出孝子" (A filial son is raised under the rod.)

"上梁不正下梁歪" (If the upper beam is crooked, the lower beam will be crooked too.)

"养不教，父之过" (If the child is not taught, it is the father's fault.)

"虎父无犬子" (A tiger father will not have a dog son.)

These proverbs also reflect how ancient Chinese families established a strict hierarchical moral order within the household, e.g., elders and juniors, superiors and inferiors, rules and regulations). The strictly hierarchical family structure further reinforced social stability.

Modern concepts emphasize greater individual independence, with parents gradually recognizing their diminishing control over their children. While still caring

for their offspring, they increasingly accept that children have their own lives and choices, and the "collective responsibility" for personal actions affecting the family's overall reputation is weakening. The bonds of family ties have loosened. As the proverb goes, *"儿孙自有儿孙福"* (Children have their own blessings). Family reputation is also seen as less crucial, as reflected in the proverb *"谁人背后无人说?"* (Who hasn't been gossiped about behind their back?)

d) Affinal relationships among women.

Chinese proverbs about women linked by marriage most often focus on three key relationships: that of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, sisters-in-law, and the wives of brothers. The traditional extended family lifestyle led to constant conflicts among them. These proverbs reflect the social reality of traditional Chinese multi-generational households and their complex kinship structures. They not only reveal the subtle dynamics of female relationships but also reflect the gender hierarchies and family ethics within the Confucian patriarchal system.

In ancient times, after a woman married, she would leave her parental home to live with her husband's family, becoming a member of his household. Not only was she expected to reside there permanently, but she also had to serve her parents-in-law on behalf of her husband. This gave rise to the unique and complex family relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

In traditional ancient Chinese families, which were often patrilineal and multi-generational, the mother-in-law held dominion over the "internal affairs" of the household, while the daughter-in-law was perceived as an "outsider". This dynamic inherently created tension between them regarding authority and status within the kinship hierarchy. The daughter-in-law was seen as a "laborer" serving her husband's family, without equal standing. Ancient moral standards for women were exceptionally high, demanding that a daughter-in-law be virtuous, obedient, and forbearing. Consequently, her position in the husband's family was difficult, as shown in the proverb: *"起早了得罪丈夫，起晚了得罪婆婆"* (Get up too early, and you offend your husband; get up too late, and you offend your mother-in-law.)

Simultaneously, the mother-in-law was often viewed as a "potential oppressor". There was also an emotional rivalry between them; some mothers felt that their son, their primary emotional anchor, was "taken away" by his new wife after marriage, leading to resentment. Many proverbs reflect the mother-in-law's complaints, as shown in the following examples:

"娶了媳妇忘了娘" (A son forgets his mother after taking a wife.)

"辫子三寸长，娘老娘；辫子三尺长，只有娘子没有娘" (With a three-inch queue, he's his mother's boy; with a three-foot queue, only his wife exists, and his mother is forgotten.) This proverb using the queue hairstyle to signify a son growing up and shifting allegiance to his wife.

As the primary managers of household chores, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law often held differing views on domestic expenses, division of labor, grandchildren's education, and lifestyle, making conflict likely to occur, as shown in the following examples:

"公公当不了生身夫，婆婆当不了自己娘" (A father-in-law can never be one's

birth father, nor a mother-in-law one's own mother.)

"一山不容二虎，一家容不得两妇" (One mountain cannot accommodate two tigers, nor one household two mistresses.)

Furthermore, the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship contained a cyclical logic of oppression. Once a daughter-in-law eventually transitioned into the role of mother-in-law herself, she would often impose the same demands on the new bride that her own mother-in-law had once placed on her. In that historical context, conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law persisted and continued. As the proverb goes, *"多年媳妇熬成婆"* (After years of endurance, the daughter-in-law finally becomes the mother-in-law and now holds all her power and authority).

Beyond the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the relationships between sisters-in-law (specifically between a woman and her husband's sister) and among wives of brothers were the most complex among peers in traditional Chinese families. Within the old family system, the most contentious relationship was undoubtedly that between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, followed closely by those between sisters-in-law and among wives of brothers. The traditional family model is *"男主外，女主内"* (Men rule outside, women rule inside.) Therefore, women often compete for limited resources within the family, such as status, their mother-in-law's favor, and division of labor.

Proverbs often portray women as vicious and rivalrous, reflecting ancient society's double standards towards female roles. The conflicts between wives of brothers and between sisters-in-law were rooted in the traditional patriarchal family structure. Multiple generations living under one roof, with dense interpersonal roles and unclear responsibilities, led to frequent disputes. In ancient times, women's spheres of activity were limited; they spent their entire lives confined within the home. Before marriage, they belonged to their natal family; after marriage, they belonged to their husband's family. This was not merely a personal issue, but a problem shaped by the times and prevailing attitudes.

Conflict in large ancient households was inevitable. The relationship between the husband's unmarried sister and the husband's wife was particularly delicate. Women, themselves victims of patriarchal oppression and trapped within the household under unequal treatment, often formed inherent adversarial relationships. Typically, the husband's sister would ally with her mother, viewing the wife as an enemy. Meanwhile, the male beneficiaries of this family system remained perfectly invisible in these dynamics, leaving the women to struggle against each other, often resulting in mutual damage and a bad reputation. Many proverbs reflect the tensions between sisters-in-law, as shown in the following examples:

"拔了萝卜地头宽，嫁了姑娘嫂喜欢" (Pulling out the radish makes the field spacious; marrying off the husband's sister makes his wife happy.)

"小姑赛阎罗" (A husband's sister is like the King of Hell.)

"姑嫂不和，家中难过" (When sisters-in-law are at odds, the household suffers.)

"一屋两女，难得和气" (Two women under one roof rarely live in harmony.)

The relationship among wives of brothers was one of direct competition for

resources and status within the family, as seen in the proverb: *"妯娌如冤家，低头不见抬头见"* (Wives of brothers are like enemies; they can't avoid seeing each other). In this context, the mother-in-law's role was crucial, as the proverb goes: *"婆婆公正，妯娌不争"* (With a fair and impartial mother-in-law, the wives of brothers won't fight.)

With the prevalence of the modern nuclear family model (often parents and one child) and the rise of women's independence, the tensions inherent in these relationships have lessened compared to ancient times. However, the related proverbs persist in the cultural memory, reflecting both the continuity and the evolution of Chinese family concepts.

Юсупова З. А. believes that studying proverbs can reveal the distinctive character traits of different ethnic groups [119]. English and Chinese proverbs about marriage and family reveal many differences. English proverbs, influenced by Christianity and industrial society, reflect individualistic values, emphasizing personal emotional needs and spiritual pursuits. Chinese proverbs, shaped by Confucianism, the patriarchal system, and agrarian society, embody collectivist values, stressing an individual's responsibilities to the family and society. This disparity highlights the fundamental differences in the relationship between the individual and the collective within different cultural systems. A comparison of marriage and family concepts reflected in English and Chinese proverbs are as follows.

a) A comparison of marriage concepts reflected in English and Chinese proverbs.

Regarding the purpose of marriage, English proverbs primarily reflect two themes: contract and commitment, and love and affection. The former is more common in traditional proverbs, e.g., "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" The latter, however, dominates modern proverbs, which view love and affection as the foundation of marriage, emphasizing emotional fulfillment and personal happiness. The proverb "Love makes the world go round" places love at the core of marriage, reflecting the supremacy of personal emotional experience in Western culture. The proverb "Marriage is the union of two souls" emphasizes the spiritual compatibility function of marriage, portraying it as a deep fusion of two independent individuals at a spiritual level. This perspective transcends material considerations.

In contrast, Chinese proverbs view the purpose of marriage as continuing the family line and securing livelihood, emphasizing its role in ensuring familial continuity. The proverb *"不孝有三，无后为大"* (There are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants) directly reflects that the primary purpose of marriage is to produce offspring and perpetuate the family bloodline. This notion stems from Confucian filial piety, which closely links personal marriage choices to familial responsibilities. The proverb *"嫁汉嫁汉，穿衣吃饭"* (A woman marries a man for clothing and food) reflects the economic and livelihood security provided by marriage, while also revealing the subordinate status of women under a patriarchal system. Modern marriage concepts reflect the purpose of marriage as a union based on love, as shown in the proverb: *"有情人终成眷属"* (True lovers will eventually be joined in wedlock.)

Regarding the appropriate age for marriage, English proverbs emphasize that marriage should not be constrained by age, focusing more on personal readiness and

timing. The proverb “There’s a right time for everything” reflects respect for individual rhythms, highlighting that everyone has their own timeline for development. The proverb “Better late than never”, in the context of marriage, conveys a tolerant attitude toward later marriages, suggesting that finding the right partner is more important than marrying on schedule. This notion reflects the respect for individual autonomy within an individualistic culture. The proverb “Age is just a number” reflects modern Western society’s breaking away from traditional age restrictions, emphasizing that psychological maturity and emotional preparedness matter more than biological age. English marriage proverbs reflect an individual-centered concept of time, emphasizing the importance of personal rhythm and internal readiness.

In contrast, Chinese marriage proverbs embody a society-centered concept of time, emphasizing that individuals should complete life’s major milestones according to society’s expected timeline. This contrast highlights how individual choices in collective cultures are often shaped by social constraints.

Chinese marriage proverbs often promote the idea of marrying early and not missing the optimal opportunity. For example, *“男大当婚，女大当嫁”* (Men should marry when they grow up, women should marry when they grow up) emphasizes the importance placed on both reproductive cycles and social responsibilities. Traditional beliefs held that early marriage was ideal, and delaying marriage was considered shameful. The proverb *“男怕三十，女怕十八”* (Men fear thirty without success, women fear eighteen without marriage) reveals anxiety about missing the ideal window for marriage and childbearing, reflecting how personal life planning was closely intertwined with societal expectations.

The proverb *“过了这个村，没有这个店”* (If you miss this inn, you won’t find another) is often used to emphasize the importance of seizing the right moment in marriage, reflecting a traditional awareness of limited opportunities for individual choice. marriage is no longer a problem that causes people anxiety, as the proverb goes: *“好饭不怕晚”* (Good things are worth waiting for).

Regarding mate selection criteria, both English and Chinese proverbs express certain economic expectations, yet significant differences remain. English proverbs on this subject emphasize that while economic status, family background, and social standing are considered, the most crucial factors are the compatibility of character, inner qualities, and values. The proverb Beauty is only skin deep” highlights the superficiality of physical appearance and guides people to focus on inner virtues. The proverb “Opposites attract” acknowledges the value of complementary personalities, suggesting that differences can create attraction and balance. Conversely, the proverb “Birds of a feather flock together” emphasizes the principle of similarity, positing that shared backgrounds and traits form the foundation for marital harmony. The proverb “Handsome is as handsome does” emphasizes conduct and character, linking external appeal to moral behavior.

Chinese proverbs traditionally consider *“门当户对”* (Matching family status) as the most important criterion, viewing marriages between mismatched partners unfavorably. Ancient beliefs held that family conditions, appearance, and age should align between men and women. The vivid proverb *“鱼找鱼，虾找虾，青蛙找那癞蛤*

蟆" (Fish seeks fish, shrimp seeks shrimp, a frog seeks a toad) illustrates this expectation for matches based on similar standing. The proverb *"郎才女貌"* (A talented man matches a beautiful woman) reflects traditional gender role expectations: men are valued for ability, women for beauty. Beyond status and appearance, significant weight was placed on moral character, economic capability, family reputation, and age difference, with a preference for the man being older. The proverb *"娶妻娶德不娶色"* (When taking a wife, seek virtue, not beauty) emphasizes the importance of a woman's moral character.

Similarly, *"家有贤妻，男人不遭横事"* (With a virtuous wife at home, a man avoids calamity) links female virtue to family harmony and the husband's success, highlighting the traditionally perceived supportive role of women. The proverb *"男怕入错行，女怕嫁错郎"* (A man fears entering the wrong profession; a woman fears marrying the wrong man) emphasizes the decisive impact of mate selection, equating it with career choice in its importance for one's life path.

Regarding marriage warnings, English and Chinese proverbs offer distinct perspectives. English proverbs caution people to think rationally, choose prudently, seize the right timing, and shoulder individual responsibility in marriage. For example, the proverb "Marriage is a lottery" reflects an awareness of marital uncertainty. By comparing marriage to a gamble, it emphasizes the unpredictability of the outcome, revealing individuals' anxiety about marriage risks in modern society.

Chinese proverbs warn against short-sightedness in mate selection, advocating for a long-term perspective that considers future generations. They emphasize the importance of character and moral integrity, cautioning against being misled by material wealth or physical beauty. The proverb *"丑妻家中宝"* (A plain wife is a treasure at home) advises people not to overvalue appearance when choosing a wife, asserting that inner qualities are crucial.

Regarding marriage institutions, English proverbs reflect concepts of monogamy and free-choice marriage, where marriage is seen as the result of personal free will and individual choice, with the decision resting in one's own hands. For example, "You don't marry someone you can live with – you marry the one you can't live without". Furthermore, marriage is not merely a contract but a "holy covenant" between God and individuals, transcending a simple emotional or legal relationship and not to be easily dissolved. The proverb "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" emphasizes this sacredness and indissolubility. The proverb "Marriage is a partnership" directly reflects the fundamental principle of equal cooperation in modern Western marriage institutions.

Chinese proverbs, conversely, Chinese proverbs reflect the ancient system of the system of one husband with one principal wife and multiple concubines and arranged marriages, as well as the modern monogamous system. In ancient times, parents held absolute authority over their children's marriages. The system of one husband, one wife, and multiple concubines was a historical phenomenon in ancient Chinese society, reflecting gender inequality within a patriarchal structure.

Both principal wives and concubines were victims of this marital system, hence numerous proverbs emerged expressing women's resistance to the system while

powerless to change it. The proverb *"宁愿粗食布衣为人妻，不愿锦衣玉食为人妾"* (Better to be a wife clothed in rough fabric and eating simple meals than to be a concubine living in luxury) powerfully conveys this attitude. Chinese proverbs about marriage institutions also highlight the traditional society's hierarchical view of marriage. The principle *"夫为妻纲"* (The husband is the guiding principle for the wife) reflects the power structure within traditional marriage. In traditional Chinese marriages, one's spouse was often not self-determined but chosen by parents, with young people having virtually no right to freely choose partners based on love.

The proverb *"父母之命，媒妁之言"* (The rule for marriage was arrangement by parents and introduction by a matchmaker) reflects the parental authority and intermediary mechanism central to the traditional marriage institution, reflecting the passive role of individuals in marriage choice and the prioritization of family interests. Modern marriage is monogamous, emphasizing fidelity to the union, e.g., *"糟糠之妻不下堂"* (Do not cast away the wife who shared your humble days.)

Regarding the division of gender roles and status, both English and Chinese traditional proverbs reflect a husband-dominated and wife-submissive relationship. However, Chinese proverbs demonstrate an extremely strong concept of male superiority and female inferiority, with women's status being very low.

In modern times, proverbs in both languages have begun to reflect the concept of gender equality. English proverbs reflect an evolution from traditional gender roles towards an equal partnership, gradually acknowledging women's independent value and equal status. This difference highlights the significant disparity in the degree of gender liberation across cultural contexts. For instance, proverbs like "The man is the head, but the woman is the neck" and "Behind every great man, there's a great woman" reflect women's supportive and subordinate role.

The proverb "A woman's work is never done" recognizes the intensity of female labor, reflecting the reality of women bearing excessive domestic burdens within traditional gender roles. The proverb "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" glorifies the mother's role, linking women's child-rearing function to societal influence.

The modern English proverb "Happy wife, happy life" emphasizes the importance of female satisfaction, indicating a shift in the power balance within gender relations.

Traditional Chinese proverbs concerning gender roles and status reflect a hierarchical gender relationship, emphasizing male dominance and female subordination, vividly characterizing the patriarchal nature of ancient traditional society. The proverb *"男主外，女主内"* (Men rule outside, women rule inside) clearly demarcates the boundaries of gender roles, positioning men as the primary economic providers and participants in public life, while women are confined to domestic management and childcare.

The proverb *"夫唱妇随"* (When the husband sings, the wife follows) depicts the power imbalance in the marital relationship, stressing the wife's obedience and compliance, and reflecting women's subordinate status in traditional society. The proverb *"女子无才便是德"* (For a woman, lack of talent is a virtue) reflects the cultural expectation limiting female intellectual development, revealing traditional

society's restrictive attitude towards women's social participation.

The concept of *"三从四德"* (The three obediences and four virtues) systematically prescribed women's subordinate relationships at different life stages, representing the institutionalized arrangement of women's status within Confucian culture. In contrast, the modern Chinese proverb *"妇女能顶半边天"* (Women hold up half the sky) redefines women's capabilities and status.

Regarding the maintenance of marriage, English proverbs place greater emphasis on individual independence and mutual respect within an equal partnership, stressing that spouses should be tolerant, equality, mutual support, and grow together. For instance, the proverb "Marriage is give and take" embodies the principle of reciprocity in modern marriage relationships, highlighting the equal contribution and benefit expected from both partners and reflecting the concept of fair exchange within a contractual view of marriage.

The proverb "Happy wife, happy life" demonstrates a particular focus on female satisfaction, implying the decisive impact of a woman's emotional state on family harmony, which reflects the improved status and increased voice of women in modern Western society. The proverb "Don't go to bed angry" emphasizes the importance of timely communication, embodying the application of modern psychological principles in marital relationships.

It also reflects Western culture's proactive approach to emotional expression and problem-solving. The proverb "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" highlights the value placed on personal space, suggesting that moderate separation can strengthen bonds and indicating the protection of individuality and autonomy within an individualistic culture. Finally, the proverb "The couple who plays together, stays together" emphasizes the role of shared interests and leisure activities in sustaining a marriage, reflecting the importance modern Western society attaches to quality of life and shared emotional experiences.

Chinese proverbs advocate forbearance as the optimal way to maintain a marriage, reflecting the core Confucian principles of harmony and mutual accommodation. For example, the proverb *"夫妻同心，其利断金"* (When a couple works with one heart, they can break gold) emphasizes the paramount importance of unity and cooperation in the marriage relationship. It highlights the value placed on familial solidarity within a collectivist culture, framing the husband-wife bond as a powerful partnership.

Proverbs like *"床头打架床尾和"* (A quarrel at the head of the bed ends in harmony at its foot) and *"夫妻没有隔夜仇"* (Husband and wife should let no grievance linger overnight) embody a wise perspective on resolving marriage conflicts. They stress the temporary nature of arguments and the underlying resilience of the relationship, demonstrating traditional culture's confidence in durability and reparative capacity of marriage. This perspective emphasizes that conflict within a marital relationship is quite normal, both inevitable and manageable.

The proverb *"忍一时风平浪静，退一步海阔天空"* (Endure for a moment, and the wind calms and the waves subside; take a step back, and the sea is vast and the sky wide) advocates for the solution of "forbearance". Furthermore, the proverb *"家和万*

事兴" (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) elevates marriage harmony to a strategic level crucial for the family's overall prosperity. This reflects the foundational role that domestic harmony plays in achieving social functionality within traditional thought, emphasizing the decisive influence of the marriage relationship on the entire clan's development.

Regarding the marriage reality description, both English and Chinese proverbs acknowledge the hardships and dissatisfactions of married life, sharing a consensus that economic conditions directly impact marriage and that poverty can lead to emotional breakdown. The English proverb "When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window" and the Chinese proverb *"贫贱夫妻百事哀"* (For a couple in poverty, every matter brings sorrow) are strikingly similar, reflecting a cross-cultural recognition of the destructive impact of financial pressure on relationships.

Beyond this, English proverbs and Chinese proverbs differ in their emphasis when describing the realities of marriage. English proverbs describe real marriage as falling short of the idealized romantic life, filled with challenges and complexities. As the proverb "Marriage is no bed of roses" directly refutes the illusion of a perfect marriage, emphasizing the objective existence of difficulties and challenges in married life.

The proverb "The course of true love never did run smooth" reflects the instability and challenges inherent in love and marriage, suggesting that even sincere affection may encounter trials and obstacles.

The proverb "Love is blind, but marriage restores its sight" embodies a profound insight into the transition from romantic idealism to marital pragmatism, reflecting a rational analysis of the stages of emotional development within Western culture.

The proverb "Marriage is hard work" likens marriage to a labor process, emphasizing that sustaining a marital relationship requires continuous effort and investment. This reflects modern psychology's rational understanding of marriage management.

The proverb "You can't live with them, you can't live without them" humorously captures the contradictory nature of marital relationships, reflecting Western culture's lighthearted attitude toward the complexities of human connections.

EMP focus more on the influence of internal factors (such as personal effort and psychological adjustment) on marriage, reflecting the cultural characteristics of individualism. In contrast, CMP place greater emphasis on the constraints of external conditions (such as economic status and social environment), demonstrating a cultural tendency towards contextual determinism or an external orientation.

Chinese proverbs reflect a profound understanding of the importance of a marriage's economic foundation and the practical difficulties involved, suggesting that marital relationships are often unstable and overly mundane.

The proverb *"贫贱夫妻百事哀"* (For a couple in poverty, every matter brings sorrow) explicitly identifies economic factors as decisive for marital quality, revealing a traditional, realistic understanding of the interaction between material conditions and emotional ties, and reflecting the acceptance of a pragmatic view of marriage in Chinese culture.

The proverb *"嫁汉嫁汉，穿衣吃饭"* (A woman marries a man for clothing and

food) more bluntly expresses the survival function of marriage, directly linking a woman's marriage choice to basic livelihood security and highlighting the dependence on economic safety within traditional society.

Although the proverb *"开门七件事，柴米油盐酱醋茶"* (As the day begins, remember these seven: fuel, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar, and tea) literally refers to daily necessities, it symbolizes the grind and routine of married life in a marital context, hinting at the gradual dissolution of romantic love within everyday realities.

The proverb *"夫妻本是同林鸟，大难临头各自飞"* (Husband and wife are like birds in the same woods; when disaster strikes, each flies away separately) suggests that the marital relationship is fundamentally fragile and unable to withstand major shocks or adversities.

On the issues of divorce and remarriage, although English-speaking societies historically held notions opposing divorce, emphasizing the sacredness of marriage that should not be treated lightly, English proverbs more frequently reflect a belief in an individual's right to free choice.

Proverbs concerning divorce and remarriage in English demonstrate a relatively open and pragmatic attitude. For instance, the proverb "Better alone than in bad company" expresses approval of singlehood, suggesting that living alone is preferable to maintaining a harmful relationship.

The proverb "Time heals all wounds" indicates confidence in emotional recovery, believing that time can help people heal from marriage trauma. The proverb "There are plenty of fish in the sea" reflects an optimistic view of having new choices, believing that many other opportunities remain after the end of one relationship.

In contrast, traditional Chinese proverbs reflect a strong desire for marital stability and a conservative attitude toward remarriage, opposing and condemning divorce and remarriage among women.

The proverb *"嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗"* (Follow the rooster if you marry a rooster; follow the dog if you marry a dog) emphasizes the irreversibility of a woman's marital choice, reflecting traditional society's strict demands on female chastity.

The proverb *"好女不嫁二夫"* (A good woman never marries twice) highlights the traditional emphasis on female honor and reputation, implying that preserving reputation is more important than remaining in an unhappy marriage.

Overall, Chinese proverbs related to divorce and remarriage exhibit a culturally distinct characteristic that is stability-oriented and socially constrained. Modern attitudes toward divorce and remarriage are open-minded, and individuals have the freedom to choose whether to divorce or remarry. As the proverb goes, *"女人越离越胆大，男人越离越害怕"* (Women become bolder with each divorce, while men grow more wary).

The comparison of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs also reflects the differences between Christian and Confucian ideologies as well as the patriarchal clan system, alongside the distinctions between industrial and agrarian societies, and between individualism and collectivism.

A comparison of the marriage concepts reflected in English and Chinese proverbs is shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Comparison of marriage views reflected in English and Chinese proverbs

Dimensions	English marriage proverbs	Chinese marriage proverbs
Marriage purpose	Contract and commitment → Love and affection	Procreation, economic support, and life security → Love-based marriage
Marriage age and timing	Marriage has no strict age limit	Early marriage, seize timing → Age is not a decisive factor
Mate selection criteria	Compatibility of character and values; economic condition; family background; social status	Matching families in economy, social status, and family background; Emphasis on virtue and family tradition; preferred age gap with older men and younger women
Marriage decision warnings	Rational consideration, cautious choice, proper timing, individual responsibility	Long-term vision for descendants; emphasis on character and morality; avoidance of being misled by wealth or beauty
Marriage institution	Monogamy; holy covenant under religion; individual choice, free will	Polygyny (one principal wife with multiple concubines); arranged marriage → Monogamy and marriage freedom
Gender division and status	Male dominance and female subordination → Partnership, equality, and respect for women	Male superiority and female absolute obedience → Spousal cooperation and shared responsibility
Marriage relationship maintenance	The wife's happiness as the foundation of family well-being; mutual tolerance, equality, support, and joint growth	Emphasis on harmony and forbearance
Marriage reality description	Marriage is full of conflicts and disappointments; poverty may destroy affection; it is not only romantic but also challenging and uncertain	Marriage is full of conflicts; poverty may break affection; it is often plain, fragile, and lacking excitement

Continuation of the Table 12

Dimensions	English marriage proverbs	Chinese marriage proverbs
Divorce and remarriage	Marriage is free but a sacred covenant, not to be terminated lightly	Strong opposition to divorce and remarriage; women must be absolutely loyal; remarriage condemned → Freedom of divorce and remarriage

According to the table, English and Chinese marriage proverbs reveal both differences and transformations across nine dimensions. In terms of marriage purpose, English proverbs shifted from contract and commitment to love and affection, while Chinese proverbs moved from procreation and economic security to marrying for love.

Regarding marriage age and timing, English proverbs suggest no strict age limit, whereas Chinese proverbs traditionally emphasized marrying early but now increasingly treat age as secondary.

In mate selection, English proverbs stress compatibility of character and values along with economic and social background, while Chinese proverbs emphasize matching families, virtue, family tradition, and prefer older men with younger women.

For marriage decision warnings, English proverbs highlight rationality, prudence, and individual responsibility, whereas Chinese proverbs stress long-term vision, morality, and caution against being misled by wealth or beauty.

In terms of marriage institution, English proverbs highlight monogamy as a holy covenant and an act of free will, while Chinese proverbs moved from polygyny and arranged marriage to monogamy and freedom of marriage.

In gender division and status, both traditions originally emphasized male dominance and female obedience, but modern proverbs stress partnership and equality. In relationship maintenance, English proverbs emphasize the wife's happiness and mutual tolerance, support, and growth, while Chinese proverbs focus on harmony and forbearance.

In marriage reality, both sets of proverbs describe conflicts, economic hardship, and the ordinariness of daily life.

Finally, regarding divorce and remarriage, English proverbs regard marriage as free but a sacred covenant not to be dissolved lightly, while Chinese proverbs shifted from strong opposition and demands for women's absolute loyalty to the acceptance of divorce and remarriage as personal freedom.

Overall, English and Chinese marriage proverbs, while preserving traditional values, both reflect an evolution of marital concepts toward love-centeredness, freedom of choice, and gender equality.

b) A comparison of family concepts reflected in English and Chinese proverbs.

English and Chinese proverbs reveal differing family concepts in terms of family structure, parent-child relationships, family education, family responsibilities, the value and function of the family, internal hierarchical order and gender perceptions, as well as family conflicts and their resolution, but they also reflect a dynamic trend of

development and change.

Regarding family structure, English culture primarily reflects the nuclear family model. As the proverb "My son is my son till he gets him a wife" vividly illustrates, a son's priorities shift from his family of origin to his new nuclear family after marriage. Chinese proverbs, on the other hand, embody the traditional structure of multi-generational households, reflecting clan-oriented values. For example, *"家有一老，如有一宝"* (An elder in the house is a living treasure) emphasizes the cherished role of the elderly within the extended family. Modern Chinese proverbs, however, increasingly reflect the nuclear family structure. The proverb *"老婆孩子热炕头"* (a warm hearth with a wife and children) reflects the idealized, self-sufficient happiness nuclear family mode.

Regarding parent-child relationships, traditional English proverbs often emphasize respect for parents and the greatness of maternal love, reflecting a relational model that combines authority with emotional attachment. For example, "Honor thy father and thy mother" emphasizes children's duty and obedience toward their parents, highlighting their responsibility and deference. Modern English proverbs, on the other hand, advocate for an egalitarian parent-child relationship, emphasizing the importance of children as the emotional core of the family. A harmonious parent-child relationship is regarded as a tremendous wealth, e.g., "Children are poor men's riches", which illustrates how children serve as comfort and hope in life.

The proverb "The child is father of the man" emphasizes respect for children's independence and the value of their growth. Contemporary views on parent-child relationships further highlight parents' love and companionship for their children, emphasizing the family as an emotional community. For example, "A mother's love is never spent" emphasizes the enduring and unconditional emotional support between parents and children. The proverb "Train up a child in the way he should go" reflects a relationship that respects children's individual development, where parents should accompany and grow together with them.

In Chinese proverbs, parent-child relationships reflect the hierarchical concepts arising from patriarchal and clan-based systems, emphasizing filial piety and obedience, as well as the nurturing grace of parents and intergenerational responsibilities. The proverb *"天下无不是的父母"* (No parents are in the wrong) reflects the absolute authority of parents. Modern proverbs about parent-child relationships primarily highlight parents' love and devotion to their children, e.g., *"可怜天下父母心"* (So moved one is by the selfless devotion of parents everywhere.)

Regarding views on family education, traditional English proverbs often emphasized strict discipline, such as the Victorian-era proverb "Children should be seen and not heard", which highlighted the expectation for children to be quiet and obedient. In contrast, modern English views on family education prioritize parent-child interaction, communication, and emotional support. The proverb "The child is the father of the man" reflects the belief that childhood shapes the future and that children, in turn, influence their parents' growth.

The modern perspective also emphasizes the power of example, e.g., "Actions speak louder than words". Early education and environmental influences are

particularly crucial for children, e.g., “What is learned in the cradle is carried to the grave”.

Furthermore, modern values encourage independence and individual development. “Train up a child in the way he should go” embodies a relationship that respects the child’s individual path, while “It takes a whole village to raise a child” emphasizes that educating a child is a shared societal responsibility.

Traditional Chinese educational views, as seen in proverbs, emphasized strict discipline and the paramount importance of protecting the family’s reputation. The traditional Chinese family placed great value on family honor, which often superseded individual interests. The proverb *“一荣俱荣，一损俱损”* (When one is honored, all are honored; when one is disgraced, all are disgraced.) conveys that individual actions represent the family, and shame or glory is collectively borne. This focus on family reputation resulted in a stricter approach to education, as it was commonly believed that children’s habits and behaviors were learned from their parents. Consequently, parents were often judged by their children’s conduct.

To prevent children from bringing shame upon the family, fathers were expected to enforce strict discipline; otherwise, they were seen as primarily responsible. This is reflected by the proverb *“严父出孝子，慈母多败儿”* (A strict father raises a filial son; an indulgent mother spoils the child). Chinese proverbs also reflect a deep emphasis on early education. The proverb *“三岁看大，七岁看老”* (From the child’s behavior at three, we can predict his future; from his behavior at seven, we can foresee his whole life) stresses the utmost importance of cultivating character and habits in early childhood. The proverb *“小时偷针，大时偷金”* (He who steals a needle as a child will steal gold as an adult) warns that a lack of early discipline can lead to serious problems in adulthood.

Modern educational perspectives express hopes for children to achieve excellence and avoid mediocrity, as seen in the proverb *“望子成龙，望女成凤”* (To hope one’s son becomes a Loong, one’s daughter a phoenix). The proverb *“再穷不能穷教育，再苦不能苦孩子”* (However poor, we must not skimp on education; however hard, we must not let our children suffer) reflects modern society’s emphasis on the holistic development of children. The proverb *“身教重于言传”* (Example is better than precept) emphasizes the power of family role models.

Regarding the family responsibilities that individuals should undertake, English and Chinese proverbs reveal significant differences. The English view of “family responsibility” aligns more closely with an individual’s duty to safeguard both themselves and the boundaries of the family unit, highlighting personal autonomy and rights within the household. For instance, “A man’s home is his castle” emphasizes the home as a domain that protects individual independence and freedom.

The proverb “Charity begins at home” highlights the concept of family first, emphasizing that individuals should fulfill their responsibilities to their family before extending them to the wider society. English proverbs also stress that family members should maintain stability, unity, and mutual support, as seen in “A house divided against itself cannot stand”. Overall, English proverbs reflect self-reliance and family

coexistence within individualism.

In contrast, Chinese emphasizes family as the priority within collectivism. The Chinese view of family responsibility focuses on an individual's obligations and sacrifices to the family. Chinese proverbs embody the notion of family supremacy, holding that individuals should serve the family. Chinese proverbs emphasize that parents bear the responsibility of educating their children, while children should fulfill their filial duty by caring for their parents and being grateful to them. The proverb *"养不教，父之过"* (If the child is not taught, it is the father's fault) illustrates the father's educational role, while *"养儿防老"* (Raise children to provide against old age) reflects the children's duty to provide for their parents. Children are also expected to fulfill the responsibility of continuing the family line, as highlighted in the proverb *"不孝有三，无后为大"* (There are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants.)

In modern views, however, the emphasis on purely familial obligations has diminished, shifting toward viewing elder care as a societal responsibility, reflected in the proverb *"老吾老以及人之老"* (Respect the elders in one's own family and extend this respect to the elders of others). The proverb *"父母在，不远游，游必有方"* (While parents are alive, one should not travel far; if travel is necessary, one must have a definite direction) has gained a modern interpretation, calling for emotional companionship toward parents within families while emphasizing that personal development should not be constrained by parents, thereby significantly weakening the family's hold over the individual.

Regarding the value and functions of the family, English proverbs emphasize the sense of belonging associated with home, e.g., "Home is where the heart is", which reflects that home serves as an emotional sanctuary. Traditional Chinese proverbs, on the other hand, regard the primary function of the family as continuing the family line, ancestral worship, and providing care for the elderly. For instance, the proverb *"不孝有三，无后为大"* (There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them all) reflects the traditional emphasis on the obligation and urgency of carrying on the family lineage.

In modern perspectives, the family primarily serves an emotional function, emphasizing warmth and shelter, e.g., *"养儿一百岁，长忧九十九"* (Even if your child lives to be a hundred, you will worry for ninety-nine years.)

Regarding internal family hierarchy and gender perceptions, English family proverbs reflect a shift from patriarchal discrimination against women to advocating for gender equality. For instance, the proverb "A mother's place is in the home" reflects the traditional patriarchal society's definition of the mother's role, with a clear gender division of labor. Modern perspectives, however, emphasize gender equality and respect for women. The proverb "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" highlights the capability and importance of mothers.

Traditional Chinese proverbs, on the other hand, embody the patriarchal clan system, advocating for hierarchical order and reinforcing the notion of male supremacy over women. For example, *"嫁出去的女儿泼出去的水"* (A married daughter is like

water splashed on the ground – gone forever), which reflects the traditional devaluation of daughters in Chinese families. It implies that daughters will eventually marry into another family and contribute nothing to their own. The proverb *"父要子亡，子不得不亡"* (If the father wants the son to die, the son has no choice but to die) reflects the absolute authority of the patriarch under a strict patriarchal clan system. Modern views tend toward gender equality, e.g., *"时代不同了，男女都一样"* (Times have changed, men and women are now equal.)

Regarding family conflicts and their resolution, English proverbs primarily focus on marital disputes, with relatively few descriptions of conflicts among other family members. This is closely related to the nuclear family structure and the cultural value placed on familial independence. English proverbs emphasize the universality of conflicts, e.g., "Every family has a skeleton in the cupboard".

Family issues are generally considered private matters that should not be aired in public, e.g., "Don't air your dirty laundry in public". English proverbs advocate addressing conflicts through open communication and active resolution, e.g., "Don't let the sun go down on your anger". Resolving family conflicts requires calmness and rationality. e.g., "A soft answer turns away wrath". They also emphasize the importance of family unity, warning that a divided household is inherently vulnerable, e.g., "A house divided against itself cannot stand".

Chinese proverbs reflect the inevitability of family conflicts, acknowledging that every household faces its own unique challenges and disputes, e.g., *"家家有本难念的经"* (Every family has its own hard-to-read scripture). Beyond marital conflicts, the most common family disputes reflected in Chinese proverbs are mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflicts, sister-in-law conflicts, and conflicts between wives of brothers, reflecting the social reality of multi-generational cohabitation and intricate kinship networks in traditional Chinese family structures.

Proverbs reveal the delicate dynamics among women in extended families. For example, *"娶了媳妇忘了娘"* (A son forgets his mother after taking a wife) appears to be a mother-in-law complaining about her son, but in reality, it expresses resentment toward the daughter-in-law. Proverbs like *"姑嫂不和，家中难过"* (When sisters-in-law are at odds, the household suffers) and *"一屋两女，难得和气"* (Two women under one roof rarely live in harmony) reflect the recurring tensions between sisters-in-law and wives of brothers. The Kazakh proverb "Balañ jaman bolsa da, keliniñ jaqsı bolsın" also highlights the daughter-in-law's role in family harmony [120].

Chinese family proverbs reflect that the solution to family conflicts and disputes is forbearance. The proverb *"家丑不可外扬"* (Domestic shame should not be made public) emphasizes that internal conflicts within a family should be resolved privately. Consequently, the proverb *"睁一只眼，闭一只眼"* (Turn a blind eye to) is regarded as an effective way to quell conflicts. The proverb *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) serves both as admonition and aspiration, emphasizing that familial harmony is the foundation of overall well-being.

A comparison of family concepts reflected in English and Chinese proverbs is shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Comparison of family views reflected in English and Chinese proverbs

Dimensions	English family proverbs	Chinese family proverbs
Family structure	Nuclear family	Multi-generational household → Nuclear family
Parent-child relationship	Respect for parents → Egalitarian parent–child relations, emphasizing love and companionship	Parental authority, children's obedience, filial piety → Parental love and devotion
Family education	Authoritarian discipline → Early education, role models, and self-development	Early education, strict discipline, family reputation → High expectations for children's success and holistic development
Family responsibility	Family first, with protection of individual independence and freedom; family members should maintain stability, unity, cooperation, and mutual support	Family above all, individual subordinated; parents responsible for education, children for filial piety and elder care → Weakened compulsory obligations, greater focus on individual development and shared social responsibility
Family value and function	Family as emotional belonging and shelter	Lineage continuation, ancestor worship, elder care, funeral duties, family as the foundation of the individual →Emotional function, warmth, and protection
Internal hierarchy and gender concepts	Patriarchy, female discrimination → Gender equality and respect for women	Patriarchal clan system, Parental authority, seniority order, preference for sons → Gender equality
Family conflicts and resolution	Open communication, calm reasoning, active resolution, emphasis on unity and stability	Conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, between sisters-in-law, and between wives of brothers were common; emphasis on tolerance and harmony, avoidance of exposing family disputes

The table shows that both English and Chinese family proverbs reflect changing views of family across multiple dimensions. EFP mainly emphasize the nuclear family, respect for parents, and a gradual shift toward egalitarian and affectionate parent-child relations. They also show a move in educational ideas from authoritarian discipline to

role modeling and individuality, while stressing "family first," balancing family stability with individual independence, and increasingly supporting gender equality and open communication in conflict resolution.

By contrast, CFP originate in a multi-generational family context and strongly emphasize filial piety, parental authority, and family obligations linked to lineage continuation and ancestor worship.

Over time, however, they also show a shift toward nuclear family structures, greater attention to parental devotion and children's development, softened family obligations, the redefinition of family functions as emotional support, greater gender equality, and a stronger preference for harmony in resolving domestic conflicts.

Overall, both traditions reveal a shared movement from hierarchy, authority, and collectivist obligation toward equality, emotional connection, and individual development.

The comparison of similarities and differences between traditional and modern values of marriage and family, as reflected in English proverbs and Chinese proverbs, is presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Similarities and differences in marriage and family values: EP vs. CP

Dimension	Similarities	Differences	
Traditional marriage values	Marriage centered on responsibility and stability, maintaining social and family order; male dominance, female subordination.	EMP：Religious covenant stressing fidelity and responsibility; mate selection based on character, values, and status; flexible marriage age.	CMP：Aimed at procreation and economic security; emphasis on family compatibility; prevalence of arranged marriage and polygyny(one principal wife and concubines); preference for early marriage.
Modern marriage values	Marriage based on love and free choice; spousal equality and cooperation; freer divorce/remarriage; emphasis on communication and emotional support.	EMP：Stronger focus on individual independence and freedom; marriage seen as both contract and personal will.	CMP：Shift from family-centered to individual-centered; weakening of early-marriage notion, with "age is not a decisive factor"

Continuation of the Table 14

Dimension	Similarities	Differences	
Traditional family values	Family centered on authority and responsibility; parents hold educational and disciplinary power.	EFP：Mainly nuclear family, education emphasizes discipline; family as emotional shelter.	CFP：Extended households; strong parental authority and filial piety; strict education tied to family reputation; functions of elder care, ancestor worship, lineage continuation; preference for sons.
Modern family values	Family focused on emotional support and cooperation; education values individuality and independence; family relations stress equality and unity.	EFP：Family prioritized while safeguarding personal freedom; parent–child relations emphasize companionship and communication; education stresses independence and autonomy; gender equality established.	CFP：Nuclear family replacing extended; parent-child relations stress love and companionship; education emphasizes success and holistic development; Family responsibility shouldn't be a barrier to individual development.; son preference weakening.

Proverbs are linguistic carriers of cultural codes and cannot be adequately interpreted apart from their cultural contexts [121-125]. In summary, marriage and family relations are not static structures [126]; both English and Chinese traditions have shifted from hierarchical marriage-family models toward modern ideals of equality, but their cultural roots diverge sharply. EP conceptualize marriage as a religious-contractual and individual-choice union, whereas CP view it as family-oriented, duty-bound, and lineage-centered. In family values, English culture emphasizes nuclear families and personal autonomy, while Chinese culture historically stressed extended households, parental authority, and filial obligations, though modern views in both cultures now highlight emotion, cooperation, and child independence.

Conclusions for chapter three

Proverbs serve as a mirror that reflects the family ethics, marital values, and cultural worldviews of different nations. The concepts of marriage and family not only have semantic content, but also carry cultural and value dimensions [127-129]. Both English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs demonstrate dynamic development. Although both traditions attach great importance to the role of marriage and family in life, their source domains, cultural expectations, and social functions reveal distinct national characteristics. A comparative analysis from cognitive linguistics and cultural

perspectives shows clear differences between the two proverb systems.

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, EMP are primarily grounded in source domains related to business and economy, physical space, and competitive games, while CMP are largely derived from nature and the cosmos, religious–philosophical thought, and aesthetic imagery. EMP are rooted in individualism and rationalism, while CMP embody collectivism and emotional–ethical thinking. Both languages, however, demonstrate a shift in gender metaphors from hierarchical models to egalitarian ones, indicating a conceptual transition from authority-based discourse to empathy-based discourse.

Although English and Chinese family proverbs share metaphorical themes such as the family as a harbor, a tree, or an educational space, they diverge significantly in cultural orientation. English emphasizes individual autonomy, emotional support, and personal growth, whereas Chinese highlights family lineage, ethical hierarchy, and role obligations, reflecting the Confucian idea of "family–state isomorphism". These differences shape not only linguistic expression but also the deeper cognitive structures behind the two cultures.

Thematically, EMP focus on love and affection, mate selection wisdom, marriage decision warnings, marriage relationship maintenance, marriage reality description, contract and commitment, and gender roles and expectations. EFP focus on parent-child relationship and Education, blood ties and kinship, family stability and responsibility, and family belonging and warmth. In contrast, CMP emphasize marriage purpose and function; marriage age and timing; mate selection criteria; warnings about marriage choices; marriage institution; gender roles and status; marriage relationship maintenance; marriage reality description; divorce and remarriage. CFP highlight parent—child relationship and filial piety; lineage continuation and son preference; family education and reputation; affinal relationships among women (mother-in-law and daughter-in-Law Relationships; sisters-in-law relationships).

EP, shaped by Christianity and industrial social structures, reflect an individualistic worldview that values personal experience and emotional expression. In contrast, CP, influenced by Confucian ethics, the patriarchal clan system, and the agrarian way of life, embody a collectivist orientation. At the level of traditional marriage and family concepts, both EP and CP emphasize responsibility, obedience, and stability, viewing marriage as an institution that maintains social order and the family as a core unit of authority and obligation. They also reflect gender hierarchy, a gender-based division of roles, and strong parental authority. However, cultural emphases diverge between the EP and CP: EP place greater stress on the religious and contractual nature of marriage and on individual responsibility, with the nuclear family as the basic structure and child-rearing grounded in authority and discipline. CP, on the other hand, highlight family lineage, with marriage serving the purposes of procreation and economic security; the family is typically organized as an extended, multi-generational unit, and values such as filial piety, family reputation, and a preference for sons are strongly reinforced.

In the modern context, both EP and CP reveal a clear transformation in marital values, shifting from a duty-oriented model to one centered on love, and from

authoritative control to cooperative equality. Marriage is increasingly associated with emotional fulfillment and free choice, and the spousal relationship is characterized by mutual respect, balanced roles, and collaborative partnership. Divorce and remarriage have become more socially acceptable. At the family level, the primary function has moved toward emotional support and cooperative interaction among members. Parent–child relationships emphasize companionship and open communication, and family education places greater value on individual development and personal independence.

EP and CP concerning marriage and family embody six major social functions: normative function, regulative function, experiential function, cultural identity function, expressive function and pedagogic function. In EMP and EFP, Christian ethics form the core normative framework, whereas in CP this role is assumed by Confucian family ethics. EP reflect an individual-oriented perspective, while CP embody a family-oriented worldview. EP tend to function as experiential warnings or behavioral feedback, whereas Chinese proverbs serve to reinforce social order and traditional values.

In terms of cultural identity, EP construct belonging through personal emotions and family bonds, whereas CP strengthen collective identity through Confucian lineage consciousness and the ancestral clan system. Although both English and Chinese proverbs apply accumulated experience widely to practical guidance, CP emphasize social harmony and group cohesion, while EP favor pragmatic reasoning. In emotional expression, EP often employ irony and metaphor, whereas CP incline toward restraint and implicitness. Furthermore, EP emphasize family education as a means of guiding individual growth, whereas CP stress family education as a way of maintaining ethical order.

With the acceleration of social modernization, the transformation of marriage and family values has directly challenged the continuity and functions of traditional proverbs. The adaptive changes observed in EP and CP on marriage and family reflect the dynamic interaction between language and culture in contemporary society. Their contemporary evolution is marked by several tendencies: the constant emergence and innovation of digital proverbs; the influence of globalization and cross-cultural integration; the infusion of new values accompanied by stylistic shifts; the fading of religious and ethical overtones; the intensification of intergenerational conflict, which weakens the normative role of proverbs while strengthening their cultural symbolic function; and the prominence of critical inheritance and re-contextualization. These tendencies reveal that proverbs have acquired new vitality in the contemporary era.

CONCLUSION

From language to culture, proverbs serve as a mirror reflecting the distinct family ethics, marital values, and cultural worldviews of the English and Chinese peoples. The development and evolution of English and Chinese proverbs both exhibit dynamic characteristics. While both cultures emphasize the central role of family and marriage in life, the construction of cognitive metaphor source domains, cultural expectations, and social practices reveal distinct national cultural traits. Through a comparative analysis of English and Chinese proverbs from cognitive linguistic and ethnocultural perspectives, we uncover numerous differences between them.

This dissertation has provided a systematic comparative analysis of English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs through an integrated framework of cognitive linguistics and ethnocultural studies. Based on an examination of 500 proverbs from authoritative dictionaries and corpora, along with 100 highly disseminated digital proverbs, this research reveals the distinct cognitive models and cultural roots embedded within these proverbs. The findings affirm that proverbs serve as a vital interface where language, cognition, and culture converge, offering profound insights into a society's fundamental values and worldview.

Existing comparative studies are mostly conducted from a single cultural or linguistic perspective and lack an integrated approach combining cognitive linguistics with ethnocultural analysis. Most current research does not offer a systematic cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison, nor does it provide a unified examination of marriage and family proverbs. Marriage proverbs and family proverbs should neither be conflated nor treated in complete isolation. In addition, previous studies have paid insufficient attention to the contemporary development of proverbs, particularly the new trends emerging under digitalization and globalization. For these reasons, the research analyzes English and Chinese marriage and family proverbs from the intersection of cognitive linguistics and ethnocultural studies. The cognitive linguistic perspective focuses on the linguistic patterns of proverbs, revealing their metaphorical mechanisms and points of cognitive salience, and addressing the question of how people conceptualize marriage and family. For example, the English proverb "Marriage is a partnership" conceptualizes marriage as a form of "cooperation", whereas the Chinese proverb *"千年修得共枕眠"* (It takes a thousand to share the same pillow) interprets marriage through the metaphor of predestined affinity.

The ethnocultural perspective explores the underlying value systems, social norms, and religious ethics embedded in proverbs, answering the question of why different cultures understand and express marriage and family in particular ways. For instance, the English proverb "A man's home is his castle" reflects individualism and legal consciousness in Western society, while the Chinese proverb *"家和万事兴"* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity) embodies the central Confucian value of harmony.

The findings of this research are primarily manifested across three core dimensions: First, at the cognitive level, there exists a fundamental difference and dynamic evolution in metaphorical framing. English proverbs tend to draw their source

domains from areas such as commerce, physical space, and games (e.g., “Marriage is a partnership”), constructing marriage as a contractual partnership that emphasizes rational choice and shared commitment. In contrast, Chinese proverbs are primarily rooted in the realms of natural cosmology and religious philosophy, e.g., *“百年修得同船渡，千年修得共枕眠”* (It takes a hundred years of spiritual cultivation to share a boat, and a thousand to share a pillow), employing metaphors of predestined affinity and ethical order that highlight the roles of fate and social duty. Regarding family, while both share some common metaphors (e.g., “family as a haven”), their cultural mappings are different. English proverbs emphasize the family as an emotional sanctuary for the individual, whereas Chinese proverbs emphasize it as the foundational node in a web of kinship and ethical responsibilities. At the level of gender cognition, both proverb systems have undergone a profound transformation from traditional hierarchical order to modern egalitarian relationships.

Second, at the cultural level, traditional English proverbs embody the individualistic spirit, shaped by Christianity and industrial civilization, which emphasizes personal sovereignty and private space, as seen in proverbs like “A man’s home is his castle” Traditional Chinese proverbs, however, carry a collectivist orientation influenced by Confucian thought, patriarchal clan system and agrarian traditions, placing paramount importance on familial harmony, filial piety, and the continuity of the lineage, a concept distilled in expressions such as *“家和万事兴”* (Harmony in the family leads to prosperity). While retaining their fundamental orientations, these core value systems are undergoing a process of modern-era evolution and reinterpretation in both connotation and expression. For instance, the spirit of individualism reflected in English proverbs has expanded beyond an emphasis on personal sovereignty to encompass emotional communication, egalitarian negotiation, and self-realization within relationships. Similarly, the collectivist orientation embodied in Chinese proverbs is shifting its focus from a family-centric model demanding absolute sacrifice and obedience toward a form of “neo-collectivism” that balances individual emotional needs with overall family harmony.

Third, at the socio-functional level, both proverb systems are undergoing a significant contemporary transformation. Traditionally, they served to prescribe norms for marital and family life, although with different emphases (individual guidance vs. social order). However, in the context of globalization and digitalization, a profound shift is occurring. There is a clear transition from a duty-oriented model towards an affection-oriented one, moving from authoritative constraints to egalitarian cooperation. This is evident in the evolution of gender metaphors and the emergence of digital proverbs. The primary function of proverbs is shifting from social regulation towards personal attitude expression and cultural symbolism, marking a dynamic path of “critique, inheritance, and innovation”.

This research carries both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it offers a dual-perspective framework that effectively bridges cognitive and ethnocultural analyses, thereby addressing a significant gap in cross-linguistic proverb studies. Practically, the findings provide a nuanced interpretive model for application in language education, cross-cultural communication, and translation studies, helping

learners to move beyond literal comprehension toward deeper cultural sensitivity and critical thinking. The research also provides reference for building specialized corpora and advancing digital humanities research.

This research still has certain limitations. Although the selected proverbs are representative, the study does not systematically include dialect-specific proverbs and regionally restricted, low-frequency expressions with limited circulation. In addition, the rapid and ongoing evolution of digital proverbs requires continuous observation and updating, which goes beyond the scope of the present research.

Future research may expand the range of proverb sources and adopt a broader methodological perspective. In particular, further studies could combine linguistic analysis with ethnographic methods, corpus expansion, and big data ‑ based approaches in order to trace the dynamic development of marriage and family concepts more comprehensively.

From a long-term perspective, this research lays the groundwork for the creation of a multilingual proverb corpus, including Kazakh, Russian, English, Chinese, and potentially other languages. Such a project would contribute to the development of ethnocultural and cognitive linguistic studies in Kazakhstan, support cross-cultural research, and provide valuable resources for translation studies, intercultural communication, and future interdisciplinary projects.

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