

Female Stereotyping and Gender Socialization through Proverbs and Idioms: A Comparative Study of Malaysia and Korea^{*}

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Abstract

Despite rapid economic growth and social development, women in both Malaysian and Korean societies are still left behind in terms of their social, economic, and political positions compared to women in other countries of equivalent economic standing. In order to better understand the prevalence of gender inequality in both countries, this study, in recognizing the commonly accepted link between gender inequality and religious and socio-cultural context, emphasizes the significance of proverbs as a socializing agent that reflects and reproduces traditional norms and values that perpetuate female stereotypes. In both Malay and Korean societies, proverbs play an important role in upholding important social and cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes through which children learn gender-appropriate behaviors, accept gender assumptions and perspectives, and acquire gender-specific characteristics deeply rooted in the traditions of the society. By examining the depiction of the universal theme of the social role and behavior of women in proverbs, this study compares similarities and differences in the illustrations of women in both Malay and Korean proverbs. In doing so, it aims to analyze how gender stereotypes are created and reinforced through the process of socialization as it takes place within everyday language. Findings will extend our understanding of the relationship between female stereotypes and gender gaps in society and offer greater insight into the interrelationship between

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language, culture, and gender.

Key words

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Introduction

Malaysia and South Korea (Korea, hereafter), as leading Asian countries in economic and political development, have strived to enhance the competitiveness of the female workforce, which has consequently contributed to the economic development of those nations (Abdullah, Noraini, & Wok, 2008; Cardoso-Khoo & Khoo Khay, 1989; Jackson & Pearson, 2000; Kim, 1992; Kim, 1996; Ong, 1987; Park, 1993; Pearson, 1998). Both governments have undertaken a number of policy and law enforcement initiatives to enhance the contribution of women to the economy and promote greater inclusiveness in the workforce. Despite these efforts, however, in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report, Malaysia and Korea were ranked 104 and 118, respectively, out of 144 countries surveyed, indicating that women in both countries still fall behind in terms of their social, political, and economic status compared to other countries of equivalent economic standing (World Economic Forum, 2017). The report indicates that, while both Malaysia and Korea recorded minor, yet steady, progress in political empowerment, women's labor force participation remains low in both countries—52.8% in Malaysia and 55.9% in Korea—alongside the prevalent gender wage gap. In both countries, women are also highly under-represented in politics; in 2016, the proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament was only 17% in Korea and 10% in Malaysia (World Bank, 2018). In both societies, women remain secondary groups in terms of social, economic, and political status or power compared to men.

As widely evidenced in previous studies, the status of women and the state of gender inequality in Malaysia and Korea are likely to be linked to the religious and socio-cultural context of each country (Chodorow, 1974; Hofstede, 1980; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015; Miles, 1996; Šikić-Mićanović, 1997). This implies that an explanation of persistent gender inequality in both countries necessitates an understanding of the religious and socio-cultural context of each country.

Reflective of socio-cultural norms and values, literature has been recognized as a fundamental socializing agent that directly influences readers' attitudes and

behaviors. Through literature, children learn gender-appropriate behaviors, accept gender assumptions and perspectives, and acquire characteristics associated with a specific gender deeply rooted in cultural values and practices (Clark, 2002; Davies, 1991; Giddens & Griffiths, 2006; Nkosi, 2013; Pincet, 1997; Vassiloudi, 2016). As a simplified form of folk literature passed from one generation to another, proverbs, in most traditional countries, are highly valued as a collection of wisdom, knowledge, advice, and guidance, and as tools to teach cultural values and norms to members of society (Asmah, 1992; Titleman, 1996). While the origins of many proverbs are obscure, they typically express a commonplace thought in a succinct and often metaphorical way. While the same thought can be expressed in different proverbs, two distinct proverbs may also contradict each other. Proverbs also provide important information on culture-related gender role expectations and ideologies and play a pivotal role in infusing children with norms and values relating to gender identity and gender roles. They can consequently be argued as having “impersonal power” in teaching a child social behaviors or in supporting the validity of arguments (Arewa & Dundes, 1964).

In Malay and Korean literature, various forms of proverbs portray the values, norms, customs, and wisdoms of their respective societies (Daillie, 1988; Hamid, 1994). In Malaysia, for example, *pantun* (a form of classical Malay poetry), *peribahasa*, and *simpulan babasa* are popular forms of proverbs and idioms that people memorize and repeat. They are regarded as a microcosm of typical social communication and as an authentic representation of Malay mentality (Asmah, 1992; Hamid, 1994; Lim, 2017; Tajuddin, 2017). In Korea, proverbs deliver messages that convey emotion, attitudes, values, advice, guidance, and even sarcasm—elements related to the lives of individuals and the society. Regarded as the wisdom of generations, they provide an important moral guideline for members of the society to live by and strive toward the greater good (Cho, 1988; Cho, 1999). In both countries, proverbs are a cultural heritage that preserves important and useful data for understanding social values, thoughts, worldview, norms, and traditions of the society.

One of the themes found universally in the proverbs of the two countries is women. Previous research has suggested that women’s representation in proverbs serves an important social guide or norm to control and restrain women from deviating from their socially-determined roles and thus function as an obstacle to women’s rights and equality (Buja, 2018; Kiyimba, 2005; Mubarok, 2017; Schipper, 2004; Storm, 1992; United Nations, 2014). How differently or similarly women are described and perceived in the proverbs of Malaysia and Korea, however, remains

under-researched in English language literature, with even less research on how these proverbs function as a mechanism of creating and reinforcing gender stereotypes and reinforcing gender socialization within society.

It must be noted that there have been a number of studies on the proverbs of other Asian countries. In these proverbs, women are often presented with negative characteristics: as being foolish, submissive, and loud in Chinese proverbs (Lee, 2015); silly, foolish, uncivilized, and incapable of engaging in conversations and debates with other people in Indian proverbs (Mir, 2018); suspicious, weak, or lacking power and energy in Pakistani proverbs (Khan, Sultana, & Naz, 2015); and fragile, unintelligent, talkative, troublesome, and untrustworthy in Urdu proverbs (Rasul, 2015). Generally, women are associated with beauty and valued for their appearance (Lee, 2015). In both Pakistani (Khan et al., 2015) and Chinese proverbs (Lee, 2015), women's roles are described as secondary, supportive and nurturing in society. Some of these studies have argued that proverbs legitimize female stereotypes, consequently sustaining male domination over women and reinforcing the patriarchal social structure (Belfatmi, 2013; Khan et al., 2015).

On the basis of this knowledge, this study examines whether proverbs have been used as a means of influencing and promoting patriarchal attitudes and sexist ideology in both Malaysia and Korea. To achieve this, the study has a number of specific objectives: to examine how women are represented in both Malay and Korean proverbs; to identify and interpret female stereotypes and biases presented in the proverbs; and to examine how they are inculcated in and imposed on women in both countries through the socialization process. Although studies on female representation in proverbs have been conducted in many countries, this study is different in that it examines and compares proverbs reflecting the values of two traditional, but culturally and religiously different societies: Malaysia and Korea. Given that the two countries have the worst gender gaps in Asia, our findings will demonstrate how gender inequalities in these two countries stem from socio-cultural and religious constraints. Finally, the study will extend our understanding of the relationship between female stereotypes and gender gaps in society and offer greater insight into the inter-relationship between language, culture, and gender.

Understanding Socio-Cultural Contexts in Malaysia and Korea

In Korea, where no single religion is predominant, Confucianism is one of the fundamental ideologies learned by individuals within the society. Introduced dur-

ing the *Koguryo* kingdom (37 BC–668), it was adopted as a state ideology during the *Chosun* dynasty (1392–1910) and had become almost completely assimilated into Korean culture and embedded in Korean society as a civil code by the fifteenth century. This development has significantly contributed to the formation of the modern South Korean society (Koh, 2003; Śleziak, 2013). Following Confucius' view of women as “irrational creatures” and their social status as being as low as “servants” (Lowney, 2014), Confucianism determined the principles of women's morality as the pursuit of “*Samjong Jido* (the rule of three obediences),” which denoted their subordination to men throughout life: first to their father before marriage, second to their husband after marriage, and third to their son after the death of their husband (Cho, 1988; Kim, 2006). This patriarchal culture informed by Confucianism has been preserved and maintained to the present day, greatly affecting the role and status of Korean women (Palley, 1994). In the Korean family, responsibilities and obligations are distributed in accordance with age and gender. The father holds absolute power over all members of his household while he owes them the obligation of economic support and protection. This tradition, inconsistent with the rapidly changing roles and expectations of women in the modern age, has given rise to acute contradictions and conflicts in the domestic lives of many Korean women across classes and age groups (Cho, 2002; Chong, 2006).

In comparison, the customs and culture of Malays has been shaped by Islam since its arrival in the thirteenth century AD (Al-Attas, 1990). Essentially, Islam articulates equality between men and women. The creation of Adam and Hawa (Eve) in Islam delivers a clear message to Malay society that men and women are mutually complementary and dependent on each other (Hamdan & Md. Radzi, 2014a). In a simplified viewpoint of women, when she (the woman) is a daughter, she opens a door of Jannah (Heaven) for her father¹; when she becomes a mother, Jannah (Heaven) lies under her feet². The men are required to treat women (wives) with honor and respect in all circumstances. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “The best of you is the one who is best to his wife.”³

In Islam, women have been granted the rights of inheritance and the power to maintain their identity since the early seventh century. On the basis of its ideal gen-

¹ Sunan Ibn Majah Vol. 5, Book of Etiquette, Hadith 3670.

² Sunan an-Nasaa'i Vol. 4, Book of Jihad, Hadith 3106.

³ Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 3, Book 9, Hadith 1977 & Jami'at-Tirmidhi Vol. 6, Book of Al-Manaqib (Virtues), Hadith 3895.

der-equitable principles, Islamic teachings have promoted women's rights, including a marriage settlement requiring men to give money to their wives; acknowledgement of marriages as an agreement between consenting adults; and a woman's right to divorce (Shaheed, 1986). Acknowledging gender differences in physical characteristics and performance, Islam differentiates the role of men and women in society. It is believed that certain qualities are possessed only by women (or by men). In Muslim society, while the men's primary role is to engage in productive activities in the public domain, women are usually assigned a complementary role confined to the domestic space—that is, raising the children and being a good wife. Women are allowed to step out of the domestic domain only if they possess specific skills that are needed by members of the community—for example, the job of a midwife and healer (Hamdan & Md. Radzi, 2014a; Karim, 1992).

The state of gender inequality in Muslim society is often interpreted as the product of pre-existing patriarchal behavioral codes that are used to control social behavior, rather than a consequence of Islamic teachings (DeLong-Bas, 2018; Shaheed, 1986). The patriarchal view of women is persistent in modern Malaysia. In a study conducted on Malay women in 2008, besides religious knowledge, the three most important indicators of success perceived by the women were: i) having successful children, ii) academic achievement, and iii) income. In the same study, many women identified husbands and in-laws as major barriers that hindered progress in their lives (Abdullah et al., 2008).

Evidently, culture has a significant impact on gender stereotypes while cultural dimensions reflect differences in gender roles (Cuddy, Crotty, Chong, & Norton, 2010; Neculaesei, 2015). Through socialization, children become familiar with their culture and learn how to live within it, and boys and girls develop fundamentally different characteristics. Gender expectations and ideologies are then reinforced through various socializing agents (Giddens & Griffiths, 2006). Proverbs also reflect and reinforce the socio-cultural norms and values as will be discussed further in the paper.

Research Method

This study investigates the images of women represented in Malay and Korean proverbs using a qualitative analysis of proverbs from archived and published materials in Malaysia and Korea. Malay proverbs on women were collected from the following four sources: *Peribahasa Melayu: Penelitian Nilai dan Makna* (Hamzah & Hassan, 2011a); *Kamus Istimewa Peribahasa Melayu Edisi Kedua* (Hussain, 2006);

Kamus Peribahasa Kontemporari Edisi Ketiga (Mohd & Hassan, 2008); and *Kamus Peribahasa Melayu* (Said, 2013). Korean proverbs on women were derived from the following three collections: *The Jungsun Interpretation Dictionary of Proverbs* (Korean Classic and Modern Book Publisher, 1992), *The Proverb Dictionary of Women* (Song, 1998), and *The World Proverb Dictionary of Women* (Schipper, 2010). These materials also contain idioms that are commonly used in both countries.

For the selection of sample proverbs, topic modeling techniques were utilized (Barde & Bainwad, 2017). All the proverbs and idioms from the above books were reviewed to detect approximately 16,000 proverbs that explicitly mentioned woman/women or their derivatives or synonyms. Based on a literature review, 12 woman-related keywords were selected and used: woman, women, girl, wife, mistress, mother, daughter, grandmother, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, flower, and cat (Diabah & Amfo, 2015; Hamdan & Md. Radzi, 2014a, 2014b; Kerschen, 2000). Each of the 16,000 proverbs and idioms was reviewed and screened to extract 365 proverbs conveying female stereotypes such as women's roles, status, and characteristics. Proverbs and idioms that had women as the subject, but were not directly relevant to women's roles, status, or characteristics, were eliminated to avoid a deluge of data: for example, those emphasizing sexuality, various aspects of married life, relationships, children, pregnancy, reproduction, feelings, emotions, and so forth. After duplicates were removed, detailed readings of the texts of 365 proverbs enabled the researchers to categorize them into four dominant themes: (i) beauty as the main value of women, (ii) politeness as a virtue of women, (iii) talkativeness as the main characteristic of women, and (iv) proactiveness as a flaw in women. Finally, a total of 32 sample proverbs, including three to five of the most representative of each of the four main themes, were selected to be presented in this paper.

Findings

The analysis of Malay and Korean proverbs reveals more similarities than differences in gender norms, values, and customs between the two countries, and confirms that gender roles depicted in proverbs clearly reflect the social values, norms, and traditions of each society. From the data analysis, several dominant themes have been identified concerning female roles in both countries, which usually focus on stereotypical female characteristics such as beauty, politeness, talkativeness, passivity, and weakness. These proverbs represent widely accepted prejudice or biases about women in those societies, which contribute to the creation and re-

inforcement of the patriarchal and submissive stereotypes of women in both countries.

Beauty as the Main Value of Women in Proverbs

One of the most common female characteristics emphasized in both Malay and Korean proverbs concerns women's physical appearance. Both Malay and Korean proverbs value beauty in women and emphasize the importance of physical attractiveness. For this reason, flowers symbolize women in the proverbs of both countries (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1
Beauty of Women in Malay Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
<i>Umpama bunga di gunung batu, taruk kaca tangkainya embun.</i>	Like a flower in a rocky mountain, its stem is covered by shiny dew.
<i>Bunga tengah kembang di taman, baunya merebek kemana-mana.</i>	A blooming flower in the garden, its scent spreads everywhere.
<i>Bagai bulan dipagar bintang.</i>	Like the moon surrounded (fenced) by the stars.
<i>Bagai bulan penuh purnama.</i>	Like the full moon.
<i>Kerling bagai pelita kan padam.</i>	Like a glimpse of the lights going off.

Table 2
Beauty of Women in Korean Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
<i>꽃이 좋아야 나비가 모인다.</i>	When a flower is good, butterflies will flock.
<i>여자와 집은 가꾸기 나름.</i>	Women and houses depend on the decoration.
<i>여자는 첫째가 외모 둘째 심덕이다.</i>	For women, their personality is secondary to beauty.
<i>여자는 얼굴이 밑천이다.</i>	Beauty is a woman's property.

Many of the Malay proverbs describe the characteristics of an ideal woman who is appreciated and considered beautiful. In addition to physical appearance, behavior, manners, values, thoughts, views, and religious faith are also prioritized. In comparison, in Korean proverbs, the emphasis for women is on beauty rather than

personality, based on the belief that it would elevate women's value. In the past, women's future was determined according to the status and ability of their husband. With most women unable to achieve material advancements in education and economic activities, marriage served as the sole path through which they could change their social status (Cho, 1999; Lee, 2008). Physical attractiveness thus became an advantage or strength to be exploited by women to attract men with a higher social status and position. Recognizing the low social and economic position of women, Korean proverbs emphasize that women need to work hard to maintain their beauty and good looks.

Politeness as the Main Virtue Expected of Women

Another female characteristic highlighted in Malay and Korean proverbs reflects the social perception of women that they should be polite, gentle, and soft in their actions and attitudes, as well as speech (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3
Women and Politeness in Malay Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
<i>Cik puan melangkah ular tak lepas.</i>	A young woman's movement is so gentle, a crossing snake cannot escape her step.
<i>Lenggang patah sembilan.</i>	A woman can swing her arms so smoothly as if her arms are broken into nine pieces.
<i>Jika bunga bendak dipersunting, boleh dibuat paksi kain.</i>	If the flower is plucked, it can still be used as an ornament for cloth.

Although good manners in one's speech is considered critical to ensure good relations between members of Malay society and to safeguard its harmony and prosperity (Hamzah & Hassan, 2011b), women in particular are obliged to display softness and gentleness in their speech, movement, and behaviors. They are supposed to be very particular about choosing appropriate words in their conversation, while men are allowed to yell or scream in public (Hamdan & Md. Radzi, 2014b). Hamdan and Md. Radzi (2014a) claim that this difference forms "the basis of gender relations in the Malay community" (p. 223). This message is conveyed through proverbs, which serve as a reminder to Malay women to always be graceful in their actions and behaviors while maintaining verbal politeness (Table 3).

Table 4
Women and Politeness in Korean Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
두부 딱딱한 것과 여자 딱딱한 것은 쓸모가 없다.	Hardened tofu and a hardened woman are of no use.
정렬한 것은 부인의 덕이요 부지런하고 검소한 것도 부인의 복이다.	Softness and honesty are virtues of the wife, and diligence and frugality are blessings to the wife.
그릇과 여자는 내들리면 깨진다.	Bowls and women break when taken out.
달걀과 여자는 구르면 깨진다.	Eggs and women break when rolled.

Korean proverbs also appreciate politeness as well as diligence, being economical, patience, and staying at home as important characteristics of women. This is closely related to the teachings of Confucianism that instruct women to have the virtues of being gentle, polite, and obedient. Korean proverbs also provide warnings on the consequences of disobedience or non-compliance with these behavioral guidelines; for example, they say, as seen in Table 4 (e.g., “Bowls and women break when taken out” and “Eggs and women break when rolled”), if a woman is proactive or working outside the home, it is implied that misfortune will be wrought on family affairs, daily activities, and the preservation of social customs. This can be understood as a mechanism of gender socialization as it limits the scope, territory, and activities of women in order to coerce them to accept their role as domesticated people who are confined to housework and subordinate to men.

Talkativeness as the Main Characteristic of Women

In the Malay proverbs, women are often labeled *murai* [magpie] or *kucing biang* [cat] for being talkative (Table 5). In the olden days, the *murai* was seen as a naturally noisy bird that often creates a lively atmosphere. Women are generally considered to be more talkative than men, which is perceived as disrupting the peace and quiet of the community.

Table 5
Description of Women Who Talk a Lot in Malay Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
<i>Bagai murai dicabut ekor.</i>	Like a magpie pulled by the tail.
<i>Terjerit-jerit seperti kucing biang.</i>	Screaming like a cat.
<i>Seperti kuang memekik di puncak gunung.</i>	Like a peasant screaming on the top of the mountain.

In contrast, Korean proverbs articulate in negative terms the consequences of being talkative (Table 6). In Korean traditions, being talkative is regarded as a flaw of women as it is believed to always attract negative consequences. This implies the pivotal role of proverbs as a tool of social control that works to minimize disorder and conflict.

Table 6
Description of Talkative Women and its Impact in Korean Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
<i>여자가 말 많으면 과부 된다.</i>	A talkative woman will become a widow/would kill the husband.
<i>여자가 말 많으면 장맛이 쓴다.</i>	If a woman talks a lot, soy sauce will become bitter.
<i>여자 셋이 모이면 그릇이 깨진다.</i>	Three women getting together can break a dish.

Proactiveness as a Flaw in Women

In both Malay and Korean proverbs, women with aggressive or proactive personalities are commonly described as being detrimental to themselves and others. In Malaysia, women are often seen as a passive group and are not encouraged to assert themselves. Many proverbs ensure that women remain passive in the society. Using different literal symbols, they condemn women who actively seek for men/husbands as being “against the rule of nature” (Table 7): “*perigi mencari timba* (a well looking for a bucket)”, for example, means that it is impossible and unacceptable for a well to go searching for a bucket as, naturally, it should be the other way around. Men, in contrast, are symbolized in proverbs as a bucket and a pestle that should be proactive and aggressive in finding their partners, depicted as a well and a mortar.

Table 7
Aggressive Women in Malay Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
<i>Perigi mencari timba.</i>	A well looking for a bucket.
<i>Bagai harimau beranak muda.</i>	Like a tiger giving birth to a cub at young age.
<i>Bomoh mencari orang sakit.</i>	A shaman looking for sick people.
<i>Lesung mencari antan.</i>	A mortar looking for a pestle.
<i>Ulam mencari sambal.</i>	Vegetables looking for chili sauce (A woman searching for a man)

Compared to Malay proverbs, Korean proverbs tend to emphasize the adverse consequences of women who are proactive and aggressive in nature (Table 8). They seem to serve as a tool to deter and control women from pursuing aspirations in education, social affairs, and leadership. Proverbs like “the woman is the earth, and the man is the sky,” for example, affirm that women are always inferior to men and instruct women to respect the higher position of men and not to challenge their rights.

Table 8
Aggressive Women in Korean Proverbs/Idioms

Proverbs	Interpretation
<i>여자가 날뛰면 집안이 망한다.</i>	A family will break when women rant and rave.
<i>여자가 고집이 세면 팔자가 세다.</i>	A stubborn woman will live a difficult life.
<i>암탉이 울면 집안 망한다.</i>	When a hen crows, the family will be ruined.
<i>여자가 너무 알아도 팔자가 세다.</i>	An educated woman will live a difficult life.
<i>여자는 땅이고 남자는 하늘이다.</i>	The woman is the earth, and the man is the sky.

By stressing the detrimental effects of being proactive, not only for themselves but for their family and society, the proverbs work to limit the activities and personalities of women. Through these proverbs, educated or proactive women are warned that they would live a hard life as a result of disobedience. This represents the “labeling” process in which women are categorized according to how much they adhere to conventional discriminatory gender norms.

Conclusion

The above analysis of both Malay and Korean proverbs reveals how, and the extent to which, principles of patriarchy have been maintained and reinforced through proverbs in both societies. It also shows how these proverbs function as mechanisms that (i) enforce the ideal image and behavior of women, (ii) reproduce stereotypical views of the society on the nature and role of women, and (iii) deter behaviors that are deemed unacceptable by society.

Malay and Korean proverbs are largely similar in their portrayal of female characteristics. In both Malay and Korean proverbs, women are characterized and encouraged to be beautiful, polite, talkative, and passive as an inferior and less capable group than men. Articulated in negative rather than positive terms toward women, these proverbs have formed important sources of socio-cultural values in both countries. They provide a set of criteria for women's positions, roles, and responsibilities to guide women to behave accordingly to maintain the state of affairs in the society. Malay and Korean proverbs are also similar in their role as a mechanism to control and label women in regard to their dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors and make them adhere to the standards laid down by their respective societies. Distinctively, however, Korean proverbs can be seen as a stronger social control mechanism as they are more explicit about the damaging effects of women's wrongdoings or deviations from the status quo. They contain advice, guidance, reproaches, and even threats to ensure women do not speak out, do not demand additional rights, or do not seek to work outside the house.

Despite these similarities, Malay and Korean proverbs exhibit slight differences in their description of gender norms, values, and customs. With a stronger Confucian influence within its society, Korean proverbs are much clearer in illustrating the different roles of women and men in society and how they are accepted and perceived by that society. Women in Korean proverbs are more restricted in terms of their role, activities, and positions compared to the image of women in Malay proverbs. In contrast, the Malay proverbs tend to focus less on the differences between the roles of women and men. Although the Malay community as an Islamic community is perceived by outsiders as a society that discriminates against women, Malay proverbs do not necessarily emphasize this discrimination. This may reflect Islamic principles which, in fact, hold women in the highest regard in every phase of their life. These differences confirm that the stereotypes of women portrayed in Malay and Korean proverbs are directly related to a cultural heritage of patriarchal values and biases rather than merely religious beliefs.

This study has sought to unravel cultural norms and values that reinforce female stereotypes and gender inequality in Malaysia and Korea by exploring how a negative depiction of women is socialized through proverbs. The continuing relevance of Malay and Korean proverbs confirms that, as claimed by Smuts (1995), language has the ability to sustain patriarchal ideologies over time. The study has shown that Malay and Korean proverbs about women proffer and rationalize traditional perceptions and expectations of what is an ideal woman and what is not. They contain many negative views on women, mainly founded on patriarchal perspectives, and these stereotypes have been utilized as a tool that further acts to accentuate and preserve patriarchal norms. Proverbs are thus a key to understanding gender inequality in Malaysia and Korea.

As this is only a preliminary study aiming to examine how negative stereotypes of women have become deeply rooted in the proverbs of Malaysia and Korea, further study of the current usage of these proverbs among speakers in Korea and Malaysia is warranted. It is hoped that such further study can examine the relevance of female stereotypes portrayed in the proverbs and their impact on the younger generation and modern society in both countries.

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