

Gender Parity, Growing Economies: Refiguring Female Power in Japanese and Yoruba Proverbs

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Abstract— Cultural affirmations and their extensions have been relatively unyielding in their representations of female power and essence. Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the majorly ethnically homogenous population of Japan, oral traditions, particularly proverbs, have always provided a contestable site for investigating gender relations as part of an overall template for social structures. Proverbs are critical lenses for the apprehension of cultural epistemes and their knowledge productions. The Yoruba and Japanese are remarked for their strong cultural belief systems which foreground communal acceptability, conformity, ideology and power relations. Japanese proverbs, as well as their Yoruba parallels, are forms of veiled speeches in oral traditions and folklore which communicate society's foundations, formations, religious, cultural and societal idiosyncrasies. This paper, while drawing inspiration from a feminist literary theory and through an analysis of selected Yoruba and Japanese proverbs, contends that within such belief systems are maxims which negate the female essence and shrinks her relevance. While some of the proverbs analysed celebrate women in few instances, they equally unveil the burden of marginalization placed on women. The essay reveals that gender parity as a given for economic growth in a new world order is only achievable when these cultural strictures against women are dismantled.

Keywords— Gender parity, female power, Japan, Yoruba, proverbs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Yoruba proverbs (òwé) serve as repositories of cultural wisdom, reflecting the collective consciousness of the Yoruba people. These proverbs, often succinct and metaphorical, embody communal values, social norms, and moral lessons passed down through generations. The communal role of Yoruba proverbs lies in their ability to sustain cultural identity by emphasizing shared beliefs, respect for hierarchy, and the importance of unity (Oyetimi, "Oral Narrative" 12). For example, the proverb "Àgbájó ọwọ́ lá fi ńsọyà, ọwọ́ kan ò gbérù d'órùn" (Unity is strength; one hand cannot lift a load to the head) underscores the significance of collaboration and collective effort in Yoruba society. This communal ethos ensures that individuals prioritize societal welfare over personal ambitions, creating a strong sense of belonging and interdependence (Akporobaro, 1994). Through the promotion of values such as teamwork and communal responsibility, proverbs reinforce the interconnectedness that defines Yoruba social life.

In addition to fostering community spirit, Yoruba proverbs serve didactic purposes by acting as tools for moral instruction and character formation. Elders use proverbs to guide behavior, caution against moral lapses, and reinforce societal expectations. For instance, "Omọ tó bá ẹ́rẹ̀ pẹ̀lú kẹ́rín ẹ̀yẹ, yóó fò pẹ̀lú rẹ̀" (A child who plays with a bird will fly with it) warns against bad company, emphasizing the importance of choosing companions wisely. Similarly, gendered proverbs like "Obinrin lo bi ni, ki a to ni Baba" (A woman gives birth to a child before a father exists) highlight the primacy of women in childbirth, acknowledging their essential role in family and societal continuity. However, this proverb also confines women's significance to reproductive functions, subtly reinforcing patriarchal norms that limit their agency. Such proverbs, while instructive, often perpetuate gendered stereotypes that reflect societal biases rather than challenge them (Odeunmi, 2008).

Moreover, Yoruba proverbs act as instruments of social control, reflecting and perpetuating hierarchical structures, particularly in gender relations. The proverb "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) encapsulates the patriarchal ideology that subordinates women's agency to male authority. This reinforces the belief that a woman's value and strength are derived from her association with men, thereby limiting her potential for independent identity and leadership. By reiterating such narratives, Yoruba proverbs sustain traditional power dynamics that prioritize male dominance while offering limited recognition of female capabilities (Adeleke, 2019). Conversely, proverbs like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) celebrate women's foundational role in societal development. While this acknowledgment seems empowering, it often frames women's contributions within nurturing and reproductive capacities, sidelining other dimensions of their agency.

In contemporary discourse, these dual roles of Yoruba proverbs—communal and didactic—highlight their importance as both cultural assets and instruments of critique. While proverbs preserve Yoruba identity and offer moral guidance, their patriarchal undertones necessitate critical engagement (Oyetimi, "Oral Distillates" 330). Feminist scholars argue for a reinterpretation of these proverbs to challenge gender biases and promote egalitarian values. For instance, re-framing "Obinrin lo bi ni, ki a to ni Baba" to emphasize the indispensability of both men and women in familial and societal structures could foster gender parity. By critically engaging with Yoruba proverbs, scholars and activists can transform these cultural expressions into tools for advocacy and social reform, ensuring that they evolve to reflect progressive values while retaining their communal and didactic significance (Oyewumi, 1997).

Japanese proverbs (kotowaza) are deeply embedded in the nation's cultural fabric, serving as tools for social cohesion and the reinforcement of traditional norms. These concise sayings often encapsulate values that promote societal conformity, urging individuals to align their behaviors with established norms. Proverbs serve as both mirrors and molds of societal hierarchies, ensuring the transmission of cultural expectations across generations (Hendry, 1995). For example, the proverb "Deru kugi wa utareru" (The nail that sticks out gets hammered down) reflects the cultural emphasis on collective harmony and discourages individuality that disrupts societal equilibrium. This conformity extends to gender roles, where proverbs outline and reinforce distinct expectations for men and women. In a patriarchal society like Japan, such sayings perpetuate male authority and female subservience, embedding these roles in everyday discourse.

Within the domain of gender roles, Japanese proverbs often prescribe an idealized image of femininity that confines women to nurturing and submissive roles. For instance, "Onna no naka no onna" (A woman among women) suggests an archetypal ideal of womanhood, characterized by virtues such as modesty, gentleness, and domesticity. While this phrase may appear to celebrate women, it implicitly enforces traditional expectations, limiting their roles to caregivers and homemakers. Similarly, the saying "Ryōsai kenbo" (Good wife, wise mother) encapsulates the Meiji-era ideology that continues to influence gender norms in Japan. This proverb glorifies women's roles within the family while marginalizing their contributions in public or professional spheres. By idealizing such roles, these proverbs discourage deviation from traditional expectations, reinforcing societal pressures that prioritize conformity over personal aspirations (Sugimoto, 2020).

Japanese proverbs also highlight the hierarchical structure of gender relations, emphasizing male authority and female subservience. Through repeated usage, such proverbs naturalize gender hierarchies, making them appear as immutable cultural truths (Nakane, 1970). A common saying, "Danson jōhi" (Respect men, despise women), reflects the deeply ingrained patriarchal values that historically dominated Japanese society. Although contemporary Japan has made strides toward gender equality, this proverb exemplifies the residual biases that still pervade cultural attitudes. Another proverb, "Otoko wa sokai, onna wa sankai" (Men should go out into the world; women should stay in the home), reinforces the dichotomy between male public dominance and female domesticity. These sayings not only legitimize male privilege but also sustain a cultural framework where women's worth is measured by their adherence to prescribed roles.

Despite their prescriptive nature, Japanese proverbs can also be reinterpreted as tools for critical reflection on societal values. Feminist scholars have argued for a deconstruction of these sayings to challenge their restrictive implications and advocate for more egalitarian interpretations. For example, "Onna wa sansai, ko wa sankai" (A woman blooms three times; a child blossoms three times) could be reframed to highlight the multifaceted contributions of women beyond traditional roles. Similarly, promoting alternative proverbs that celebrate female agency, such as "Onna no chikara wa sanzensekai o ugokasu" (A woman's power moves the three worlds), can help reshape societal attitudes toward gender equity. By critically engaging with these cultural artifacts, scholars and activists can transform Japanese proverbs into vehicles for progressive change, fostering an environment where traditional wisdom coexists with modern values (Inoue, 2006).

II. GENDER AND POWER DYNAMICS IN PROVERBS

2.1 Negative Depictions of Female Essence

In Yoruba culture, proverbs often articulate societal attitudes toward gender, with many portraying women as subordinate or dependent (Oyetimi, "Cultural Ecological Knowledge" 105). The saying "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) encapsulates the patriarchal belief that a woman's power and relevance are derived from her association with a man. This proverb diminishes women's individual agency, framing their significance within the context of marriage. Such a portrayal reinforces the societal expectation that a woman's value is tied to her ability to support and amplify her husband's stature, rather than her own accomplishments.

Another Yoruba proverb, "Ile ni a ti n ko eso r'ode" (Charity begins at home), when applied to women, is often interpreted to mean that a woman's primary domain is the home, where her contributions are confined to caregiving and domestic management. This saying, while emphasizing the importance of familial stability, sidelines women's potential contributions to public life or leadership (Oyetimi, "Masculinity and Heroism" 4). Proverbs like these not only reflect but also perpetuate the patriarchal norms that prioritize male authority and confine women to supportive or secondary roles in society.

Similarly, Japanese proverbs codify patriarchal norms, often portraying women as subordinate or dependent on men. The proverb "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines: her father's house, her husband's house, and her son's house) underscores the traditional Japanese expectation that women's lives are defined by their relationships with male family members. This saying not only restricts women's mobility and independence but also reinforces the notion that women's primary role is to serve men across different stages of life.

Another example, "Otoko wa sokai, onna wa sankai" (Men should go out into the world; women should stay in the home), reflects the dichotomy between male public dominance and female domesticity. This proverb suggests that the public sphere—associated with work, leadership, and influence—is exclusively male, while women are relegated to the private sphere. Such proverbs sustain the patriarchal ideology that limits women's opportunities for education, professional growth, and leadership, reinforcing the belief that their worth is tied to their domestic roles.

Both Yoruba and Japanese proverbs reveal striking similarities in their reinforcement of patriarchal norms. They emphasize male authority and female subordination while legitimizing societal structures that restrict women's autonomy. For instance, "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" and "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" both portray women's strength and worth as being contingent on their relationships with men. These proverbs naturalize the gender hierarchy, making it appear as an immutable cultural truth rather than a social construct.

However, there are subtle differences in the cultural contexts they reflect. Yoruba proverbs often center around the family as the nucleus of societal organization, emphasizing women's roles as wives and mothers. In contrast, Japanese proverbs extend this dependency across a woman's life stages, emphasizing her subordination within her natal, marital, and post-marital homes. These variations highlight the specific ways in which patriarchal norms are articulated and maintained in different cultural settings.

Proverbs like these, while reflecting historical realities, pose significant challenges for contemporary efforts toward gender equality. Their continued use perpetuates stereotypes that limit women's potential and reinforce discriminatory practices. However, critical engagement with these sayings offers opportunities for reinterpretation and reform. For instance, feminist scholars and cultural practitioners can reframe such proverbs to highlight the indispensable roles women play in societal development beyond traditional expectations. By deconstructing these cultural artifacts, societies can foster more inclusive narratives that challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equity.

2.2 Veiled Speeches of Resistance

While many proverbs reflect and perpetuate patriarchal norms, others subtly affirm women's power and agency despite restrictive cultural frameworks. These sayings offer glimpses of recognition for women's foundational roles in society, their influence in collective success, and their indispensable contributions to societal well-being. In Yoruba culture, the proverb "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) foregrounds the indispensability of women in the origin and continuity of human existence. This saying affirms that women are central to life itself, challenging the notion that their significance is confined to their reproductive roles. It subtly recognizes women's creative power and their irreplaceable contributions to societal foundation and progress. While patriarchal interpretations might limit this acknowledgment to

biological functions, the underlying message points to a deeper reverence for women's existence as vital to the community's survival and continuity.

Another Yoruba proverb, "Ti obinrin ba so ile di ile, ile naa a tu di oko" (If a woman makes a home, the home will become prosperous), emphasizes the transformative potential of women in familial and communal spaces. This saying highlights women's agency in fostering stability, growth, and harmony within the household. Although it operates within the framework of domestic roles, it affirms women's unique ability to influence and elevate the family's well-being, subtly challenging the notion of male dominance in decision-making processes. Such proverbs illustrate the Yoruba worldview that, even in restrictive settings, women wield significant power in shaping societal outcomes.

Japanese proverbs also reflect moments where women's power is acknowledged, particularly in the context of collective achievements. The saying "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) underscores the importance of women's support and partnership in achieving great feats. This proverb, while still framing women's influence as relational, highlights their strategic and emotional contributions to success. By recognizing women as essential allies, it subtly challenges the idea that male achievement exists independently of female agency.

Similarly, "Onna wa taiyō de aru" (A woman is the sun) suggests a powerful metaphor for women's indispensable role in providing warmth, life, and energy to the world. This saying conveys a deeper acknowledgment of women's centrality to society's well-being and progress. While it may not directly address gender equity, it poetically affirms the profound impact of women's presence and contributions, offering an alternative narrative to the restrictive roles often prescribed in patriarchal cultures.

Both Yoruba and Japanese proverbs reveal that even within restrictive cultural paradigms, women's power and agency are sometimes affirmed, albeit in subtle ways. Yoruba proverbs often emphasize women's foundational and transformative roles in communal and familial settings, as seen in sayings like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" and "Ti obinrin ba so ile di ile, ile naa a tu di oko." These proverbs challenge simplistic portrayals of women as merely subordinate, instead highlighting their essential contributions to societal growth and harmony.

Japanese proverbs, on the other hand, frequently frame women's power in relational or symbolic terms, as seen in "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" and "Onna wa taiyō de aru." While these sayings acknowledge women's influence, they do so within a context that often links their significance to their support of others. Nevertheless, they provide opportunities for reimagining women's roles as integral to success and societal well-being.

These affirmations of women's agency within proverbs offer a starting point for rethinking restrictive cultural norms. By foregrounding women's indispensability and influence, such sayings challenge dominant narratives that marginalize female contributions. For contemporary societies striving for gender parity, these proverbs can serve as cultural touchstones for advocating greater recognition of women's roles beyond traditional constraints. Critical reinterpretation of these sayings can reveal their potential as tools for empowerment, emphasizing their capacity to inspire a more equitable understanding of gender roles in both Yoruba and Japanese contexts.

III. FEMINIST REINTERPRETATION OF PROVERBS

Feminist theory provides a critical lens to analyze and reinterpret cultural proverbs, often seen as vehicles for societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality. By deconstructing the patriarchal underpinnings in these expressions, feminist reinterpretation challenges biases and reclaims proverbs to affirm women's agency, strength, and significance. This process not only critiques cultural narratives but also proposes new meanings that align with gender equity.

Proverbs often encapsulate societal attitudes that prioritize male dominance and depict women as secondary or dependent. For example, the Yoruba saying "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) enforces the notion that women's power is contingent upon their relationships with men. Similarly, the Japanese proverb "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines: her father's house, her husband's house, and her son's house) reduces women to passive participants confined to male-defined spaces.

Feminist theory critiques such sayings as instruments of patriarchy that normalize the subordination of women (Beauvoir, 1949). These proverbs function as cultural artifacts that perpetuate structural inequality, framing women's roles as inherently supportive rather than independent or influential. Feminist scholars like Judith Butler argue that such narratives produce gendered performativity, restricting women to predefined roles that reinforce male dominance (Hooks, 1984).

Through feminist reinterpretation, proverbs can be reframed to emphasize women's inherent value and contributions. For instance, the Yoruba proverb "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) can be reimagined to highlight the foundational role of women not just in childbirth but in societal, intellectual, and economic spheres. This shift moves beyond the biological lens, affirming women as creators, innovators, and leaders.

Similarly, the Japanese saying "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) subtly acknowledges the influence of women in collective success. A feminist reinterpretation can amplify this acknowledgment by framing women as equal partners whose contributions are critical to achieving societal progress, rather than as ancillary supporters.

Proverbs reflect the cultural values and ideologies of their societies, and their reinterpretation offers an opportunity to transform these narratives. In Yoruba culture, "Ti obinrin ba so ile di ile, ile naa a tu di oko" (If a woman makes a home, the home will become prosperous) traditionally emphasizes women's domestic roles. However, a feminist reinterpretation can extend this idea to celebrate women's broader societal leadership, positioning them as pivotal in community-building and governance.

In Japanese culture, the proverb "Onna wa taiyō de aru" (A woman is the sun) symbolizes women's centrality in life. Reinterpreted through a feminist lens, this proverb can affirm women's power to illuminate and influence all aspects of existence, including political, intellectual, and economic domains, thereby challenging traditional limitations on their roles.

Feminist reinterpretation of proverbs is a powerful tool for cultural transformation. It critiques and dismantles the biases embedded in these sayings while reconstructing them to align with gender equity. This process not only empowers women by affirming their agency but also educates society about the importance of inclusive narratives that reflect the realities of both genders.

Reinterpreted proverbs can underscore the complementary roles of men and women in societal development. For instance, the Yoruba saying "Ti obinrin o ba si, ile o le dabi ile" (Without a woman, a house cannot become a home) can be expanded to emphasize the indispensability of women in creating balanced and productive societies. Similarly, the Japanese proverb "Onna wa taiyō de aru" (A woman is the sun) can be reinterpreted to reflect women's pivotal contributions beyond the domestic sphere, acknowledging their role in economic, political, and social advancement. These reinterpretations shift the narrative from women's dependence to their integral roles in driving progress, aligning with studies that show societies with greater gender parity experience higher economic growth (World Economic Forum, 2021).

In Yoruba culture, "Igi kan o le da'gba" (One tree does not make a forest) highlights the importance of cooperation. When applied to gender relations, this proverb can emphasize the necessity of partnership between men and women in achieving communal and economic goals. Reframing this saying to explicitly include gender dynamics could challenge patriarchal norms that isolate decision-making to men, fostering a collaborative environment where women's perspectives are equally valued.

The Japanese proverb "Ryōshu wa futari de tsukuru" (Good sake is made by two brewers) traditionally symbolizes teamwork. Reinterpreted, it can highlight the shared responsibility of men and women in societal development. By applying this principle to gender relations, the proverb underscores the idea that mutual respect and collaboration are essential for creating a harmonious and prosperous society.

Both Yoruba and Japanese cultures contain proverbs that, when reinterpreted, reveal a latent potential for advocating gender parity. The Yoruba proverb "Eyin ni i mo pe Ikan s'ere ara re" (The back only knows when the stomach is full) can be paralleled with the Japanese saying "Aun no kokyū" (Harmony achieved by breathing in unison). Both sayings can symbolize the interconnectedness and mutual dependency of men and women, emphasizing that societal harmony and progress depend on balanced and inclusive contributions from all genders.

Progressive proverbs that explicitly or implicitly advocate for gender parity can also serve as powerful advocacy tools. The Yoruba saying "A jeji owo kan ko gberu dori" (One hand cannot lift a load to the head) aligns with the Japanese "Hito wa hitori ja ikite ikenai" (No one can live alone). Both sayings can be reframed to highlight the interdependence of men and women in achieving common goals, reinforcing the need for shared power and responsibilities.

Reimagined proverbs have the potential to shift cultural narratives, replacing outdated gender norms with progressive values that promote equality. When proverbs like "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) and "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) are highlighted in public discourse, they can inspire policies and practices that prioritize women's empowerment and inclusion. Societies that embrace such progressive

ideologies are better positioned to leverage the full potential of their populations, enhancing innovation, productivity, and economic resilience.

IV. LINKING GENDER PARITY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

Feminist economic theories, which interrogate the intersections of gender, labor, and economic structures, provide a compelling framework for understanding the societal benefits of dismantling cultural restrictions on women's power. These theories emphasize the importance of equitable participation of women in all spheres of life—social, economic, and political—as a pathway to achieving sustainable development and societal transformation. When applied to the reinterpretation of cultural norms embedded in proverbs, feminist economic theories reveal how rethinking gendered narratives can catalyze progress at both micro and macro levels.

Central to feminist economic thought is the assertion that gender parity is not just a social justice issue but an economic necessity. Scholars like Diane Elson and Naila Kabeer argue that gender inequalities restrict economic growth by limiting women's participation in labor markets, decision-making, and innovation (Elson, 1999; Kabeer, 1994). Restrictive proverbs, such as the Yoruba "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) and the Japanese "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines: her father's house, her husband's house, and her son's house), reinforce systemic limitations on women's agency, effectively curbing their contributions to society. Dismantling these cultural strictures enables women to take on leadership roles and participate more fully in economic and social activities, creating a multiplier effect on productivity and growth.

Feminist economic theories also critique traditional definitions of work that undervalue women's contributions, especially in caregiving and community-building roles (Folbre, 1994). Proverbs like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) and "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) can be reframed to highlight the foundational role of women in both domestic and public spheres. By shifting the focus from women's traditional roles to their broader capacities for leadership, innovation, and collaboration, these reinterpretations challenge patriarchal hierarchies and affirm women's essential contributions to societal well-being.

Feminist economic theories also draw on intersectionality to examine how race, class, and culture compound gender inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991). In the Yoruba and Japanese contexts, proverbs often reflect the intersection of gender with communal values and hierarchical structures. Reinterpreted sayings that emphasize collaboration and mutual respect—such as "Ti obinrin o ba si, ile o le dabi ile" (Without a woman, a house cannot become a home) or "Ryōshu wa futari de tsukuru" (Good sake is made by two brewers)—can disrupt these intersecting oppressions. This rethinking aligns with feminist arguments that inclusive policies and practices, driven by cultural shifts, are necessary to achieve equitable development outcomes.

The societal benefits of dismantling cultural restrictions on women's power are well-documented in feminist economic research. Societies with higher levels of gender equality experience improved child welfare, reduced poverty rates, and increased educational attainment, all of which are critical for long-term development (World Economic Forum, 2021). Reinterpreting proverbs to promote gender parity serves as a cultural strategy for advancing these goals. For example, Yoruba and Japanese proverbs that celebrate women's influence, such as "A jeji owo kan ko gberu dori" (One hand cannot lift a load to the head) and "Aun no kokyū" (Harmony achieved by breathing in unison), can inspire narratives that position women as equal partners in societal progress, thus reinforcing feminist economic principles.

Both Yoruba and Japanese cultures face the challenge of addressing gender disparities within broader systems of communal values and hierarchical structures. In Yoruba culture, the communal emphasis often prioritizes collective harmony over individual autonomy, which can obscure women's contributions. Similarly, in Japanese society, the cultural ideal of *wa* (harmony) often results in women's subordination to maintain societal cohesion. However, these communal values also provide a foundation for promoting gender parity by reframing proverbs to highlight women as integral to societal harmony and success.

For instance, the Yoruba proverb "Ti obinrin o ba si, ile o le dabi ile" (Without a woman, a house cannot become a home) and the Japanese saying "Ryōshu wa futari de tsukuru" (Good sake is made by two brewers) both underscore the necessity of collaboration. Reinterpreted through a feminist lens, these proverbs can advocate for mutual respect and equality in partnerships, positioning women as indispensable contributors to collective prosperity.

Analyzing these proverbs through a comparative lens underscores the shared potential of Yoruba and Japanese societies to redefine cultural narratives in ways that support gender parity. By challenging restrictive proverbs and amplifying those that

affirm women's agency, both cultures can create more inclusive frameworks that not only empower women but also benefit society as a whole.

Feminist scholars like Naila Kabeer argue that gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a catalyst for economic and social progress (Kabeer, 1994). Drawing on this perspective, Yoruba and Japanese proverbs can serve as tools for cultural reformation, promoting values of equity, collaboration, and respect. In doing so, these societies can align traditional wisdom with contemporary ideals, paving the way for sustainable development driven by shared contributions from all genders.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Yoruba and Japanese proverbs reveals that these cultural aphorisms often perpetuate patriarchal narratives, portraying women as inferior or dependent while restricting their roles to domestic and reproductive functions. Examples like the Yoruba proverb "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) and the Japanese saying "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines) illustrate how these cultural expressions reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

However, the research also uncovers proverbs that subtly affirm women's foundational roles and potential for influence. Sayings like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) and "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) demonstrate that cultural narratives can also highlight women's indispensability in societal growth and collaboration.

Dismantling patriarchal narratives embedded in Yoruba and Japanese proverbs is a cultural imperative for achieving gender parity and economic growth. By reinterpreting these cultural artifacts to affirm women's agency and value, societies can align traditional wisdom with contemporary ideals of equity and inclusion. Through education, cultural advocacy, media integration, and policy development, feminist reinterpretations of proverbs can inspire a more equitable future, ensuring that cultural heritage becomes a foundation for progress rather than a barrier to it

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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