



## Cats in Malay Proverbs

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The writer's cat *Konnichiwa*  
"Konni"

Our forefathers and foremothers were great observers of nature and its inhabitants. This was especially so when they had lived in an environment filled with animals, whether wild or domesticated. Human observations of these animals' characteristics were reflected in the language used. One of the animals that has numerous accounts of reference is the cat. Cats play an important role in the Malay community, not only as pets

but also as the source of expressions and proverbs related to the animal. The understanding of the Malay expressions related to cats helps to understand the characteristics of this feline.

Cats are frequently compared or made reference to other animals such as dogs, mice, pigs and fish. ***Seperti anjing dan kucing*** (like dogs and cats) makes a comparison between two old time foes who cannot meet eye to eye and will fight when facing each other. ***Kalau kucing tidak bermisai, takkan ditakuti tikus lagi*** (if a cat does not have whiskers, the mouse would not be afraid of it anymore) refers to a person with a position who loses the respect of his subordinates. ***Awak tikus, hendak menampar kepala kucing*** (you mouse, want to hit the cat's head) refers to a person wanting to do something yet is helpless. ***Kucing lalu, tikus tiada berdecit*** (when the cat pass, mice don't squeak) happens when the arrival of a feared person silences the noisy ones. ***Kucing pergi tikus menari*** (when the cat's away, the mouse dances) describes during the absence of superiors, subordinate employees would not work properly. ***Duduk seperti kucing, melompat seperti harimau*** (Sit like a cat, jump like a tiger) represents someone who is quiet but quick and agile when at task. ***Mengadu kucing dengan babi*** (complaining about cats to pigs) refers to a person trying to improve his fortune by gambling. ***Ikan gantung, kucing tunggu*** (hanging fish, waiting cat) alludes to people who feel annoyed to see things they want but are unable to have it. ***Anak kucing menjadi harimau*** (when a kitten becomes a tiger) is when the poor become rich.

Men-women relationship is also depicted via cat related proverbs. ***Bagai kucing takut dengan balur*** (like a cat that is afraid of crystal stone) indicates men who are afraid of women, while ***berburu kucing di dapur*** (cat hunting in

the kitchen) alludes to a young man and a girl who live in the same house having illicit relationship. ***Seperti kucing biang*** (like a sexually aroused cat) implies a person screaming shamelessly and even annoys others especially at night. ***Biarpun kucing naik haji, pulangnya mengeong juga*** (the cat still meows even after it has returned from its pilgrimage) suggests a person's disposition or habits that cannot be changed despite his 'piety'. ***Bagai kucing dengan panggang*** (like a cat with a roast) is when something bad can happen when two things are brought closer; for instance when a man has sexual intentions towards a woman.

Cats are also portrayed to be meek, restless, mischievous and hopeless. ***Bagai kucing bawakan lidi*** (if cats are shown off the broom) refers to a guilty person's fear of punishment. ***Bagai kucing kehilangan anak*** (like a cat who lost her kittens) purports a person who has gone out of his or her mind. ***Terkejar-kejar bagai kucing jatuh anak*** (like a cat who lost its kittens) signifies a person who is in a hurry. ***Seperti kucing berakkan rambut*** (like a cat defecating hair) happens when one complains of pain. ***Bagai kucing lepas senja*** (like a cat after dusk) indicates a person having the habit of wandering off and disappearing altogether at night. ***Menantikan kucing bertanduk*** (waiting for the horned cat) means someone expecting the impossible. ***Bagai mengail kucing hanyut*** (like hooking a drifting cat) connotes a futile deed. ***Membeli kucing dalam karung*** (buying a cat in a sack) occurs when buying something without checking. ***Kucing di atas tampuk*** (cat on the reins) is when one has multiple tasks and does not know which one to pay attention to.

Cats are also displayed having a few positive traits in proverbs. ***Bagai kucing tidur di bantal*** (like a cat sleeping on a pillow) shows those living a luxurious life. ***Bagai kucing main daun*** (like a cat playing with the leaves) connotes the greatness of one's appearance.

Despite being relatively painted unfavourably in proverbs, cats will always be much loved family members. Remember not to ***pukul kucing di dapur*** (hitting the cat in the kitchen) because it is likened to ill treating relatives or people close to us.

N.B.: All Malay proverbs are sourced from Kamus Dewan online dictionary (<https://prpm.dbp.gov.my/Cari1?keyword=kucing>)