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## **Discourses about Superstitious Beliefs: A Case-study of Yorùbá and Chinese Societies**

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### **Abstract**

Right from ancient times, certain beliefs and practices are formed based on either irrational, supernatural influences or unscientific ideologies in different human societies globally. Many of such convictions and practices have not only survived but prevailed even in modern societies with their attendant collateral impact on behaviour and actions of people. Traditional societies have indigenous ideas and practices often formed as a result of magical practices, religion, ignorance, fear, luck, and prophecy. The fact is many of such ideas have shaped modern thoughts and actions of humans in the 21st century. A number of studies have examined the notion of superstition but none has conducted a cross-cultural study of the Yorùbá culture in contrast to the Chinese culture despite the plethora of cultural convictions strongly upheld and somehow shared by these two different cultures. This paper investigates the varied ideologies employed in the crafting of superstitions in Yoruba and Chinese societies. It examines factors such as religion, ignorance, fear, luck, supernatural forces, and traditions to ascertain the sources and cultural drivers involved in the carving of superstitions in the two cultures.

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## *2 Discourses about Superstitious Beliefs ...*

The paper adopts socio-psychological theory with data obtained through purposive sampling technique and content analysis. It argues that traditional practices and religions in Yorùbá and Chinese cultures have huge influences on the conceptualisation of human actions, morals, fate, luck, and prophecies in the two societies. It concludes that traditional societies cannot completely do away with superstitious beliefs and practices because they hold them as excessive credulous intuitions of morals and fate.

**Keywords:** belief, behaviour, practices, religion, good and bad luck

### **Introduction**

Superstition is a universal phenomenon which has become part of human life since ancient times. It evolved as a method employed by the ancients to explain mysterious events or situations within their scope of knowledge, culture, and values. Over the years, scholars have seen that such explanations were based on irrational beliefs or actions borne out of ignorance, fear, traditions, limited knowledge, and unexplainable events. Superstitions are therefore regarded as social phenomena and as such products of social contexts, conditions, and realities of societies.

Some societies form superstitions from spiritual and divine situations, or as precautionary measures, nevertheless they are widely formed opinions. These thoughts could be formed as a result of people being constantly faced with certain phenomena of reality especially when there is a repeated sequence of events and then the human mind develops a certain regularity of the occurrence of this particular chain of events. Scholars have argued and debated that the presence of religion in any society facilitates superstition, they become deeply engraved in peoples mind and in some instances these superstitions endangers the lives of the people and the society

(Keinan 1994). MacDonald (1995) explains that religiosity has been found to correlate with the occurrence of superstitions and paranormal suspicion in many studies. He found out that people high in religiosity that might have encountered an emotional negative experience in the past year, thus they decreased in their degree of supernatural postulation and as such there is a correlation between religiosity and superstitious belief when combined with life experiences. Consequently, people are inclined to believe that life events are due to luck, fate, or external forces.

Irwin (1994) claims that individual's attribute life's personal events to external factors or other people (external) or to their own disposition (internal). Invariably, the society creates irrational or false deductions that are related to the control of good or bad luck. For instance, we have two luck mindsets associated with superstitions, fleeting luck and stable luck. Individuals who believe in fleeting luck see it as an external and uncontrollable force in action. They formed a superstitious notion on it and around the objects, action or images (Heider 1958). Stable luck on the other hand considers luck as relatively constant and internal to the individual rather than being a product of situational stance (Weiner 1998). Instead of being temporal and unreliable, stable luck is thought to produce favourable outcomes more dependably than fleeting luck does (Kaplan 1975). The fact is that superstition is motivated by different factors in different societies. Malinowski (1948) sees uncertainty and fears as the primary motivator of superstition. To him, it acts as a buffer to reduce the tension associated with uncertainty and it fills the void of the unknown. Keinan (1994) asserts that societies develop superstition to adopt it as a means of understanding their environment and thereby controlling it. Potter (1993) explains the notion of relativity in superstition as the thing that is believed by one person but not by the other

people, not believed by a person in one time but believed in another time. This study, therefore, attempts to fill the gap in literature by showing that superstition as a concept that is peculiar to different traditional societies such as the Yorùbá and the Chinese. Hence, this study finds a meeting point in the concept of socio-cultural psychology. The aim of this study is to identify the superstitious beliefs that have shaped the behavioural attitudes of the Yorùbá and the Chinese and to discuss the different irrational hypothesis which might have emanated from tradition, fear, illiteracy, mythical powers and ignorance. In this vein, this study examines the types of superstitions in these societies, its connotations and explicit perception by members of the Yorùbá and Chinese societies.

#### **Literature review**

The concept of superstition has led to a super fluidity of literature in the field of humanities because scholars tend to define it based on the logical connections they intend to create between the observed and predicted events. Popov (2010) reflects on the notion of superstition in ancient societies and he claims that the basis of all superstition is a priori idea of the presence of supernatural forces and the power of such forces. To him, superstition perhaps is a relic of the religion that existed before the civilization of modern societies. Popov also posits that superstition is only for those who do not exist in the system of knowledge and values in which the belief was formulated and was considered true. Dahl (2005) defines superstition as the erroneous, empty, false judgment in anything; it could be a notion in divination, fortune telling, supernatural, and miraculous or cause and effect actions. To him, there is no causal link that can be observed as a logical phenomenon. Sedghi-Nejad (1994) perceives superstitions as formed opinions that have been passed on from generation to generation, it has

changed in the passage of time and place, and has been modified as necessary. To him, these opinions are changeable and they vary from total dependency to lack of understanding. Some people regard them firmly while others doubt its authenticity. Jahovda (1992) posits that superstitions grow in the context of ignorance; thus, its authenticity is unverifiable. To him, superstition is a product of an illiterate society that is progressively backward who lack the ability of reasoning and imagination to the truth. Bajah (1981) observes that superstition is the irrational way of explaining usual or unusual events. Science does not believe in any irrational way of explaining events. Science aims to know the cause and effect of each phenomenon based on scientific principles that can be verified with experiments and are proven based on well-established scientific rules known as laws.

Foster, Weigand and Baines (2006) all conceive superstition as a behaviour which does not have a clear technical function in the execution of a skill, yet it is believed to control luck or other external factors. Corsini (2002) sees superstition as a belief or practice based on the operation of supernatural or magical forces, such as charms, omens or exorcism or any unscientific theorem accepted without question or unfounded notion. Tsang (2004) supports the earlier definition by asserting that superstition is an irrational presumption or practice resulting from a supernatural or false conception of causation. To him, superstitious behaviour is generally socially unacceptable in modern industrialized countries. Tobacyk and Milford (1983) see superstitions as a distinctive form of bizarre assent or eccentric suspicion; it involves the notion in extraordinary life forms, psychic abilities and a lot of supernatural concepts. Jajoda (1969) classifies bizarre beliefs embedded in superstition into two clusters, new age philosophy which includes psi (philosophical assumptions about man and the universe),

spiritualism and precognition and traditional bizarre assents which include the devil, hell and witchcraft. Dudley (1998) sees superstition as the thwarting of bad luck or its omen through avoiding certain acts such as walking under the ladder, not opening an umbrella indoors and many others. He claims they are irrational or unexplainable ideas within the realm of science yet governs and directs the affairs of the society. Inglehart (2002) believes superstitions are phenomenon that have no experimental evidence for them; they estimate a mystery by another mystery. Believing that the world is directed by chance, offering the thoughts, desires and intentions with reference to their original nature. Bjurstrom (2009) posits that superstition is an age-old and inherited cultural tradition which might be from our ancestors. Some of them are created while others might be formed due to personal reasons. Superstition is the expectation in the mystical; it involves miracle, magic and divination. According to him, superstition is based on obliviousness and its infrastructure and origin are false hopes. Kagan (2012) views superstition as an intuition or practice that is not based on facts or events that can be proven, they were discourses found in early man's effort to explain nature and his own existence, to propitiate fate and invite fortune, to avoid evils he could not understand and to pry into the future. For example, in western societies, some people believe in the superstition that if a black cat crosses your path, you will have bad luck. The reason this is called a superstition is because no one can prove that any bad luck encountered arose from having a black cat cross one's path and what it would mean to have bad luck is also something that cannot be defined (Encyclopedia Britannica 2009).

Superstitions can also be seen to primarily represent the underlying inherent fear of mankind caused by the uncertainties of this world. In a way, it is a sign of acceptance of our ignorance and limitations of our power. In another way, it is a

sign of accepting the grandness of this universe and its scheme of operation, which is still largely beyond our comprehension and understanding (Kumar 2009). Superstitious practices are therefore due to the fabricated interpretation of the natural events which might be due to the different postulations that result from ignorance and anxiety of the unknown (Valeed 2012). Omoḡólá (2013) perceives superstition as representing the basis of human fear that is caused by indefinite things in the world. To him, it's the sign of acceptance toward irresponsible and limitation of human ability. He further says, it's a sign of universe acceptance when the process scheme is still beyond human understanding. Superstition can also be the notion or influence that cannot be suited with rational thought. Superstition is illogical credence where object, action or purpose is linked with the events that influence the caused result. Apart from these general connotations about superstitions, scholars have observed that superstitions are very prevalent in societies that posed hazards or high risks to people's life such as hunters, miners and fishermen (Renard 1987). Psychologists posit that superstition helped people to cope with uncertainty and reduce threat or uncertainty-induced anxiety. Threats and uncertainties are everywhere in our society and death induces emotional anxiety to an individual. Superstition aids people in reducing the anxiety induced from threats and uncertainties initially by giving a sense of relieved emotion, people develop tolerance with the practice of superstitions (Tsang 2004).

Superstitions were also aimed at educating the people; Agboḡlá and Mabawonkú (1996) claimed that it served traditional and informal education in Yorùbá societies. Ìdòwú (1962) emphasizes the importance of superstitions as elements of traditional education because it facilitates the renewal, development and growth of the society. Chen (1993) also states that in Chinese societies, superstitions serve as a form of

knowledge about the supernatural; it aids the people from incurring the wrath of supernatural elements and beings. Yeh (2000) asserts that superstitions are embedded in knowledge-based elements about evil spirits, death, disasters and negative phenomenon.

In conclusion, these literatures have exposed the diverse conception of superstition by scholars; they have universally agreed that superstition can be based on ignorance or lack of knowledge. Likewise, it can connote a strong trust in the supernatural, an irrational thought that cannot be scientifically proven but has strong effects on the human luck and fortune, yet they remain handed down from generations to generations. It also depicts that superstition represents a form of education in many societies and it acts as a guide to regulate, inform and direct the thoughts and mind of the people.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research work adopts socio-cultural theory because the theory explains how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional and historical context. Hence, the focus of the socio-cultural perspective is revealed in the role that participation plays in social interactions and culturally organized activities which invariably influence psychological development. The framework for socio-cultural theory was put forward by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky considers social interactions as the essence of cognitive development which may differ across cultures. Learning and behaviour are affected by individual, social and contextual issues. It is assumed that by nature, humans are social and reflexive; therefore, their thoughts and behaviour are sensitive to the complexities of the social world around them. Thus, the developmental pattern in an eastern society might be different from a pattern in a western culture (Vygotsky 1978).



Essentially, there are three main principles that summarize Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The first principle underlying this theory is that learning is a social process rather than a cognitive or biological process. Secondly, human process is a mediated process; it is organized by cultural artifacts, activities and concepts. These activities and concepts are simple tools for the mediated learning process that the learning environment provides. The implication is that socio-cultural theory emphasizes the importance of different immediate settings in which the learners find the chance to receive the support of their environment during the learning process, be it family, friends, school or settings of social activities. To him, learning is not only a cognitive issue but also a social process. This theory also asserts that the instructional setting that provides the learner with social and material environments during the learning process bear importance (Engestrom 1998). The instructional contexts used in this social process should then provide learners with the tools that they can use to solve their problems step by step or sometimes with tools that may shape their thinking (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden 2013). The third principle underlying the socio-cultural theory is that to understand human learning pattern, researchers must scrutinize the human learning process more holistically rather than examining what is taking place in the human mind, or what is observable in human behaviour separately (Vygotsky 1978).

This theory is applicable to this work because it explains how people's mental functioning is related to the cultural faith of the society. Superstitions are cultural beliefs that have been institutionalized over the ages that overwhelmingly influence social interaction. This theory also explains that human process of thinking and reasoning are largely influenced by social interactions. Since this theory argues and propounds that human are sensitive to the intricacies of the world around them such as

the widely held knowledge around the supernatural or unexplainable scientific concepts the guides and regulates human action and conduct.

### **Methodology**

Data for this research work were sourced from two major sources: the Yorùbá and the Chinese database as depicted in the notion of superstitions. The internet proved to be a reliable source of information gathering because relevant information on the subject matter were selected through purposive random sampling method. The notion of superstition, types and perception were downloaded from the internet, specifically on how they shape and affect the behaviour and attitudes of people both positively or negatively in these societies. The data used for this work was therefore analyzed through content analysis with the vital aim of dissecting the different kinds of superstition that exists in these two traditional societies.

### **Yorùbá Discourses on Superstitious Beliefs**

In Yorùbá society, superstition is a widely held phenomena and concept. It includes certain claims that have been designed by humans in the past. These forms of beliefs permeate all aspects of thought and culture. They are deeply engraved in family life, trading, politics and social life (Clarke 1982).

Superstitions in traditional Yorùbá communities play significant positive roles because they provide a set of rules to serve as a moral guidance or law in the community to ensure that peace and security existed in the community. Osei (2006) reiterates that every moral system requires the existence of guiding principles, sources of motivation and some grounds for objectivity. Superstitions in Yorùbá communities therefore serve as the guardian of moral values because they are indirectly taught what is acceptable and unacceptable. Likewise, they

enforce societal accepted values and traditions among certain institutions such as marriages. Furthermore, they are a means of social control in the society; they prevent chaos through the religious sanctions that is dispelled by divinities and their ancestral spirits. These invariably led to a harmonious relationship between the visible and the invisible world and as such they guided, directed and regulated the affairs of individuals in their respective societies (Osei 1995).

This paper groups superstitions into two categories: physical and spiritual. Physical superstitions are those traditional intuitions that humans have on a daily basis and what they have to be cautious about to avoid the wrath of their divinities or to maintain order and morals in the society. Spiritual superstitions are those that are widely associated with the rituals associated with their divinities, spirits and ancestral spirits. Some broadly reinforced superstitious judgment about the physical realm among the Yorùbá ethnic group are as follows: one must not touch or play with a green snake (python). It is believed to be a sacred creature and anyone that plays with it will die. If one disobeys this, he has to appease the divinity through some ritual practices. Likewise, a female child must be circumcised before marriage. It is believed that circumcision makes a girl not to have feelings or urge for sexual intercourse, therefore making her to stick to only one partner. In addition, the divinity of small pox (Sànpònná) must not be called by his name or else there will be an outbreak of the disease. If one violates this rule, he would face the wrath of the divinities by different misfortunes. Furthermore, women who have children that always fall sick or die are believed to be possessed by a spiritual demon or evil spirit which perhaps runs in the family lineage. Such children can be healed through special rituals or sacrifices.

Additionally, a woman who gives birth to an albino is believed to be a good woman, she is hardly associated with evils

like witch craft or demons (Bajah 1981). Others include one must not look at a mirror at night, doing this might allow one to see the reflection of a ghost and not oneself. They also hold strong faith that a male child should not be beaten with a broom, doing this can render the child impotent. One must not drink coconut water; if one does the person will become retarded or unintelligent. People are not allowed to whistle at night, when one does he is simply calling on reptiles such as snakes to his house. They also have strong faith in the concept that a piece of thread can magically stop hiccups, traditionally it is a custom held that when infants are experiencing hiccups, one should just place a piece of thread on the child's head to stop the hiccups. Certain people in Yorùbá culture also believe that duck eggs must not be stolen; otherwise he will be bequeathed with a lot of calamities such as being struck by thunderstorm, shaking hands and bad omen casted upon the person (Ògúntúnjí 2014).

On the other hand, spiritual superstitions in Yorùbá cosmology has to do with certain presuppositions, practices, rituals, and traditions that must be upheld towards their traditional spiritual beings. It is generally believed that proper sacrifice must be offered to deities to avert calamities and to also propitiate the gods for their offences and mistakes that may incur the wrath of the deities upon them. It is assumed that Ògún (god of iron) likes dogs, snails, tortoises and rams; Òsun (a goddess of the river) accepts goats and fowls; Èsù (the Yorùbá trickster deity) is fond of black fowl; Şàngó (god of thunder) likes rams; Òrúnmilà (god of wisdom, knowledge and prophesy) is fond of rats and mud-fish; Ọbàtálá (the Supreme God) likes snails; Ọsanyìn (the god of herbal medicine) is fond of tortoises; Egúngún (Masquerade) loves ram (Ajíbádé 2006). This culture also holds a religious animism about water which they perceive as a symbol or totem of spiritual and divine essence in life and nature.

Parrinder (1969) asserts that all great rivers of Yorùbá culture have their presiding spirits. We have Ọya, goddess of the river Niger, wife of Şàngó the thunder god; two other wives of his were the river Ọsun east of Ibadan and Ovia at Benin. We also have Yemoja, who is the mother of all deities and has shrines in many parts of the country but especially rules over Ọgùn at Abẹ̀òkúta. Olókun is the owner of the sea in Yorùbá land and Ọlósà is the lagoon goddess worshipped by those who live along the coast. All these spirits are presumed to be female and a core catalyst agent in the creation of the world myths. They are water goddesses that oversee reproduction, care, peaceful and harmonious interaction with water related entities, inclusive of plants which emphasizes the symbol of water's potency, vitality and fertility which are essential for human recreation (Bòròkìní and Lawal 2014).

The literature above has revealed that superstition in Yorùbá culture has inherent connotations in them. They serve different purposes such as the guidance of cultural beliefs, values, customs and traditions. Secondly, they act as guides to regulate human behaviour and actions. Thirdly, they bridge the gap or perhaps connect the natural world with the spiritual world. Fourthly, superstitious beliefs in this culture seem to be embedded in moral values such as honesty, virtuousness, modesty and good behaviour.

### **Chinese Discourses on Superstitious Beliefs**

The Chinese have thousands of years of history and civilization and they may be considered the most superstitious people in the world. This is because they have a variety of superstitious beliefs.

Chinese physical superstitions can be inferred from a popular credence in China, i.e. the notion of Feng Shui (Chinese Geomancy) which means wind and water respectively. They

perceive that the harmony of the people and the environment has an effect on the people's health, wealth, and career. Feng Shui presumption is also seen in the location of a building, its surrounding and positioning of furniture inside a house which can influence people's fate. Furthermore, it influences business people in their decision-making process as it sometimes provides managers with additional source of information and reduces any uncertainty-induced anxiety. They also believe in palmistry, which is the reading of lines and shapes of hands which is largely similar to physiognomy, which means the reading of faces to tell fates (Tsang 2004). Certain fates such as wealth and death are embedded in their superstitions using numbers; the word four, si 四 has a similar pronunciation for the word death while eight ba 八 or fa 发 is phonetically similar for prosperity or wealth in Chinese. Likewise, ten thousand represents abundance as connoted in the notion of "The Great Wall" which in Chinese is called "Wànlichángchéng 万里长城" which represents ten thousand mile long wall and inferring abundance (Ulu 2012).

The Chinese also attach certain fate to colours and as such some are considered auspicious and others inauspicious. These traditional colours (五眼) correspond with the theory of the five elements and as such we have wood (green 绿色 meaning health, prosperity and harmony), fire (red 红色 symbolizing fortune and joy), earth (yellow 黄色 connoting prestige and beauty), metal (white 白色 representing brightness, purity and fulfilment) and water (black 黑色 meaning neutrality). They use these colour symbols to understand and categorize the world around them while inferring these notions attributed to the colours (William 2007).

The Chinese also have some certain presumptions with marriage and childbearing. For instance, when a bride leaves with the groom, she is assumed to be blessed with healthy children, surviving parents, and a happy marriage. The groom is expected to hold a red umbrella over the brides' head which shields her off from evil. Likewise, a pregnant woman must eat whatever she craves, even harmful food to avoid the child from having slobbery mouth. She must avoid eating very hot or cold food which causes miscarriages. Her diets are based on Ying-Yang theory which supports the balance of opposite powers. The duration of pregnancy is considered a hot period so she must eat cold food; and after pregnancy is considered a cold period so she should eat hot food (Brathwaite 2004). Furthermore, they pay a lot of attention to the zodiac calendar which comprises of a 12-year cycle named after an animal. Animals hold a symbolic presumption in Chinese culture. For instance the dragon year is considered to be particularly auspicious and is associated with surges of new births among the Chinese. Dragons have many animal-like forms like turtles and fishes but it is commonly seen as a snake with four legs. It symbolizes power, strength, and good luck among the Chinese people. Turtles are revered for their longevity and can also be a symbol of bad luck while phoenixes signify women that are auspicious (Ulu 2012).

On the other hand, Chinese supernatural superstitions have to do with the spiritual realm such as death notions or religious beliefs. The Chinese believe that life and death are like day and night as inferred in the Chinese saying "Death and life have the same roots, like twins". For the same reason humans have life, death exists. The concept of Ying-Yang is a central part of Chinese postulations; Yang is the spirit when a person is alive; when the person dies, his spirit changes to Ying. Ying is the soul and can leave the body when the person dies but the

Yang energy can be preserved. So in Chinese concepts, death is nothing but a state of energy, it does not exist in a fixed form; when the soul dies and leaves the body, it will no longer have a fixed shape. Ying energy cannot be seen as we see a person. Some people in China also believe that the ghost world is made up of 18 hells and reincarnation. Invariably, they think when humans die; they can either ascend to heaven to continue with life, go to hell, or become a hungry ghost (Fu 2006).

Other Chinese superstitious views opine that bad luck arises from visiting people's home during early bereavement. Similarly, discussing death in front of dying people would speed up their deaths. These notions are highly observed by the Chinese who fear the negative consequences of violating traditional and cultural norms (Gallagher and Lewis 2001). Deaths for family members among the Chinese are very strong convictions. The general perception is, if someone dies, a great funeral must be arranged for the person so that he would not return to disturb the family. People therefore play musical instruments such as trumpets and bell in front of the descendants' home to expel bad spirits (Ulu 2012). If the person dies at home, his coffin must be brought home and if he dies outside the house, his coffin must be brought to the compound of the house. Certain items are placed near the coffin such as his favourite food and flowers while fake money, paper made house and furniture are burnt with the hope that he would need them in his after-life (Emily and Emily 1973).

The literature revealed that superstition in Chinese culture revolves around the physical and the spiritual realm. Superstitions are used to guide the people on the natural elements of the society such as wind and water. Likewise, they have strong convictions on using superstitions to guide and protect its people from evil; they are used to attract positive or good luck. They have been crafted around traditional and



cultural norms of the Chinese society and as such it acts as a panacea to modulate human actions and conduct.

### **Findings**

The fact that emanates from the socio-cultural theory is that there are interactions between the society, environment, and the people that live in it. It also suggests that human learning is a continuous process. Vygotsky (1978) posits that information is assessed when people interact with each other; to him culture provides the society with tools of intellectual adaptation as they become their habits and eventually their lifestyle. Habits are a learning process which is directly related to our cognitive control and goals. It is also observed that these societies have their own unique superstition but certain traits are found in both cultures which are of similar nature. Traits such as morals, symbols, rituals, nature, luck and fortune were found in the superstition of these societies

Certain notions found in Yorùbá and Chinese superstitions have a lot in common: first, it is observed that the Yorùbá through their superstitions promote certain morals such as fidelity as seen when circumcision guides against promiscuousness; while the context of Chinese superstition is embedded with the promotion of luck, fate and prophecy as seen in the use of a red umbrella by the groom over the bride. Second, both cultural superstitions adopt the use of animal symbols. Scholars have posited that symbols are important in cultures because they facilitate communication and identification of ideas and other concepts based on what they represent (Fu 2006). In Yorùbá culture, the python amongst others is seen as a sacred creature while in Chinese culture the dragon is seen as a sacred and mythical animal. Third, superstitions from the two cultures are ritualistic in nature. The rituals are strictly followed and repeated to avoid calamities or

catastrophes. So, rituals associated with gods, deities, and ancestors are widely revered by both cultures. Fourth, superstitions from both cultures are nature inclined. The gods associated with natural elements in Yorùbá culture are highly revered, worship, and respected; similarly Chinese culture pay a lot of cognizance to the five elements in nature and the concept of Ying-Yang is of paramount importance in the belief system. Fifth, both societies have a lot of irrational or paranormal beliefs that are related to the supernatural. This is the Yorùbá perception of the worship of Ògún with dogs, snails, tortoise, and rams or Ọsun with goats and fowls.

It is observed that superstitions in both cultures are not supported by any evidence as relevant examples suffice from both cultures. One example from the Chinese end is the one that mandates the groom to use an umbrella over the bride as a symbol that she is being shielded off from evil. Likewise, there is no evidence that when one whistles at night he or she is calling on reptiles to come to his place of abode. There is no scientific evidence to support these beliefs.

Also, superstitions from both societies also radiate some abnormal behaviour. In Chinese society, they burn paper money, houses, furniture, and cars for their ancestors in anticipation that they will use such in their afterlife. The Yorùbá have a unique practice as seen in using a piece of thread to stop the hiccups of an infant child.

Lastly, it was observed that superstitions in both societies have a lot of false conceptions. The Yorùbá have a strong conviction that a woman can be perceived as good by just giving birth to an albino or a male child can become impotent by being beaten with a broom. The Chinese also have a false conception in assuming numbers can represent wealth or death as seen in the notion of the digits four and eight: four (si) is an unlucky number in Chinese because its sound is similar to the

notion of death (si) just as eight (ba) is a lucky number simply because it sounds similar to the concept of fortune (fa).

### **Conclusion**

This study has identified that superstitions serve a lot of functions in traditional societies but their contents are different from one to the other. Invariably, one can assert that Yorùbá superstitions are totally different from Chinese superstitions. The Yorùbá have morally inclined physical and supernatural superstitions while the Chinese have numerical, physical, and spiritual superstitions. Nevertheless, we can argue that they reinforce cultural traditions, norms and values among the people which are transferred from generation to generation. They instil morals about what is right or what is wrong in the society, they set standards and principles to which humans adhere while conducting certain practices as their norms.

The study also discovered that superstition keeps a balance between the physical and the spiritual world. The physical world has obligations to carry out for the spiritual realm to fulfil certain duties as it is required. Likewise, Chinese superstition is seen as a harmony with nature position in which one can observe that there is no real separation between human activities, nature and the supernatural. Such linkages are created through rituals and ancestral worship as seen in Chinese societies. Yorùbá societies revere their gods and strongly share the conviction that once they are properly worshipped, they are acting in accordance with the rituals of the divinities. Superstition is also found to be related to people's fate, most especially in having good or bad luck as most of the Chinese superstitions investigated are directly related to luck. As such, people cannot forget to practice or emphasize the practices on daily basis. Lastly, one can say that superstitions have shaped

and influenced the behaviour, attitudes, values, and morals of the people in Yoruba and Chinese societies.

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