

## **Ghosts in Chinese and Igbo Religions**

BY

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### **Abstract:**

This is a comparative study on Chinese and Igbo beliefs about ghosts and life after death. One understands that with the interaction between the Western and Chinese cultures on one side, Igbo and Western cultures on the other, the modern Chinese and Igbo peoples tend to misunderstand their ancestors' understanding of life after death hence, the disrespect for the dead in recent times from the duo cultures. This paper frowns at this development and therefore intends to find out what ghost is, how the Chinese see ghosts, what ghosts stand for in Igbo world view, how both cultures relate with the ghosts and know the different types of ghosts especially during ghosts and or ancestors' feast. In effort to make this paper good, the study consulted some books on related topics, had face to face interview sessions with some interviewees where possible from both cultures and through phone conversations. Responses from the interviews and extracts from books read, formed the data of this study. The study observed that both cultures recognise the presence of ghosts. It also found that both cultures recognise and respect ancestors believing that they have symbiotic relationship with their various ancestors. However, this paper acknowledged that none of the cultures equates her ancestors status with that of the ghosts. This paper understands that whatever exists in people's culture is part of that culture and as such helps the growth of such culture. It therefore encourages the promotion of those arts within any culture that promotes the moral attitudes of the people

### **Introduction:**

There are many ghosts in both Igbo and Chinese cultures. They have been worshipped by the Chinese for a few thousand years. Even Confucius said, "Respect ghosts and gods, but keep away from them." However, among the Igbo, ghosts are not worshipped, rather, they are wished away. While many people believe in ghosts, there are others who don't. The Chinese people often say, "If you believe it, there will be, but if you don't, there will not." The ghost is a classical image in Chinese culture, i.e., the young woman whose face is covered by long black hair, who dies due to misfortune, then comes back for revenge. Among the Igbo, it is the spirit of one who passed away in bad manner. Such death comes as a result of accident, suicide, untimely or due to evil disease. Some are the spirits of those whose death did not receive normal burial rites. "Among the Igbo, people love to live life of emulation, life of righteousness, life that attracts love and respect to the beholder even after here on earth. Such people when they die and befitting burial accorded them are remembered as ancestors" (Anedo, 2008:1). Normal burial rites stand as a passport to meeting

one's creator and as such, it eludes such unfortunate ones. An example of such ghost according to Robert P Weller, is "...Qu Yuan, a loyal Warring States period scholar and poet whose emperor suspected him of treachery, and who thus drowned himself. The emperor later repented and ordered food thrown into the river to feed Qu Yuan's ghost." The food thrown into the water also was meant to scare the fish from eating Qu Yuan's body by eating the food. Another example of ghost is what Chinese call short-term ancestors. According to them, "Sometimes ghosts are at first worshipped as ancestors, but then eventually come to be treated as ghosts." An instance of this can be seen in the treatment of what are called in Chinese language anthropological literature "outsider ancestral tablets" (I – hsing kung-ma p'ai), that is, a tablet which represents the dead spirit of another family's descent line. Generally, such outsider tablets enter by way of marriage, be it virilocal or uxorilocal. Though, all outside tablets are grouped under the common I-hsing kung-ma p'ai rubric, there are, in fact, important differences between them. For example, the classification of outsider tablet as tending more toward a ghost or toward an ancestor spirit can be determined by where it is kept. Outsider tablets may be found anywhere other than the main hall, such as in a side room, rear room, kitchen, or pig pen, under the eaves, etc. There are even ways to mark a different status when they are placed in the main hall to indicate their inferiority to the real ancestors.

The word "ghost" for many Chinese conjures up similar images and in some cases differs from how the Igbo see it. Often the ghost is a beautiful young woman. The sudden switch from a beautiful girl to a frightening ghost is striking. The seemingly fragile, helpless and beautiful women turning into fearless killers are a favorite theme among African and Asian movie directors and storywriters. One has to understand that it is not only dead females turn to ghost. It is certain that even ancestors uncared for among the Chinese or maltreated before death and forgotten after death among the Igbo, also turn to be ghosts. It then means that when an ancestor is neglected and become hungry, he or she becomes violent in that hungry person they say, is an angry one. Anedo (2008) acknowledges that "... because of neglect of ancestors and subsequent violation of moral codes of the land by the livings, the ancestors allow certain unpleasant events to affect human beings." However, "In studying the reciprocity that is at the heart of ancestor worship, we shall find that the livings are expected to care for the dead in payment of the debts they owe them. Beyond this, in the act of meeting this obligation, the living hopes to inspire a further reciprocal response from the ancestors, to obtain through them the good life as they perceive it: wealth, rich harvests, and offspring who will ensure undying memory and sustenance in the afterlife"(Emily M. Ahern, 1973: 91).

## **Methodology**

To carry out this type of research is not an easy task. This is because the two cultures in question are far from each other. It is an International study. However, because the I am an Igbo personality who specialised in African Culture and Civilization and at the same time lived in China and studied Chinese Culture and Anthropology, it was difficult to obtain information through my contacts. While I was in China, I visited Buddhist, Taoist and Chinese Folk religions' temples. During the times, I had interview sessions with some Monks. I visited and participated in tomb sweeping ceremony during the Chinese Ancestors' festival.

Being an Igbo person, I observed some festivals in honour of ancestors. Such festivals are *ituaka*, *ini ozu*, *alommuo*, and *igbu ogbala*. I also observed *ini iyiwu* for *ogbanje* (changling). Where what was happening was not clear to me, I asked questions. I even had full interview sessions with some elderly and younger persons. All the responses from interview sessions and

understandings from my observations during ceremonies formed the data for this study. These were collected and analysed.

### **Chinese thoughts towards life after death**

Young women in traditional societies are rarely endowed with much power, and malignant powers are only summoned with keen hatred and a desire for revenge. The more badly one is wronged, the more powerful he or she becomes after death. Such beliefs are closely related to the Chinese attitude towards life after death -- a combination of superstition and religion.

Buddhist doctrines about the life cycle led to many vivid descriptions in Chinese legends about karma. For example, Buddhism forbids murder; in folklore, people believe that butchers return in the next life in the form of the animals they killed. People who treat others badly or do cruel things become pathetic beings, suffering for the rest of the next life.

Besides retribution in lives to come, vivid and complicated descriptions of heaven and hell also exist in Chinese legends. People have imaginatively transfigured their real life experiences into visions of the unknown world. The Chinese legendary hell, for example, is governed by a king in a completely bureaucratic system. The king of the underground takes charge of people's lives, keeping a book that spells out the exact time of everybody's death.

In the classic novel, *Pilgrimage to the West*, the Monkey King Wu Kong goes to visit the king of hell and reads the book of death. He looks for his own name and erases it, ensuring himself everlasting life. There are many references to **ghosts in Chinese culture**. Even Confucius said, "Respect ghosts and gods, but keep away from them."

The ghosts take many forms depending on the way in which the person died, and are often harmful. Many of the Chinese ghost beliefs have been accepted by neighboring cultures, notably Japan and south-east Asia. Ghost beliefs are closely associated with the traditional Chinese religion based on ancestor worship, many of which were incorporated in Taoism. Later beliefs were influenced by Buddhism, and in turn influenced and created uniquely Chinese Buddhist beliefs.

Many Chinese today consider that it is possible to contact the spirits of their ancestors through a medium, and that the ancestor can help their descendants if properly respected and rewarded. The annual ghost festival is celebrated by Chinese around the world. On this day ghosts and spirits, including those of the deceased ancestors, come out from the lower realm. Ghosts are described in classical Chinese texts, and continue to be depicted in modern literature and movies.

### ***Chinese Ghost Culture:***

The Chinese believe that the dead become ghosts between heaven and earth. Spirits without descendants to care for them are summoned during the Ghost Festival so that they may also enjoy the warmth of life among the living. This custom -- an extension of the traditional Chinese ethic of "universal love" -- has been woven together with the didactic legend, "Moginlin Saving His Mother from Hades." It lends the Ghost Festival a positive spin as a time for remembering the importance of filial piety. People now have inherited releasing river light as an important activity. It is said that river light can comfort and warm homeless ghosts. "In the rural areas along the southwestern edge of the Taipei basin, conservative families burn three sticks of incense every morning and every evening. One of these is placed in a niche outside the back door for the

wandering ghost; one is dedicated to the stove God whose image resides above the large brick structure on which all meals are prepared; and the third is placed in a burner before the tablets of the family's immediate ancestors"(Wolf, 1974). In consonance with Arthur's statement, Janet Lee Scott (in his book, *For Gods, Ghost and Ancestors*) says, "The first feature to understand is that paper offerings' are burnt to ashes so they may go beyond the confines of the living world – to the gods, the ghosts, and the ancestors."

### ***Burial of the dead:***

In the past, the burial of the dead (cremation is traditionally uncommon) was a matter taken very seriously in Chinese society. Improper funeral arrangements could wreak ill fortune and disaster upon the family of the deceased. To a certain degree, Chinese funeral rites and burial customs were determined by the age of the deceased, the manner of his/her death, his/her status and position in society and his/her marital status. According to Chinese custom, an older person should not show respect to someone younger. Thus, if the deceased was a young bachelor his body could not be brought home but was left at the funeral parlor and the parents could not offer prayers for their son. Since the deceased was unmarried he had no children to perform the rites, which was why the body did not enter the family home. If a baby or child died no funeral rites were performed since respect could not be shown to a younger person. The child was, therefore, buried in silence.

Death is the event which marks the passage of an individual from the world of man to the world of spirit. According to Francis (1971), "All rites in West Town funerals aim at one of four things: (1). Expecting the spirit's safe entry into that world; (2) its comfort in that world; (3) expressing sorrowful feelings of the living and their reluctance to let the dead go; and (4) making sure that the dead has not created conditions for future disaster through circumstances which are beyond his or her control." Chinese funeral rites for an elderly person must follow the prescribed form and convey the relevant rites that befit the person. Such prescribed form may be in gifts thus:

According to traditional Chinese beliefs, it is up to the living to make sure that their departed relatives are looked after financially and materially, as the dead cannot take anything with them to the next life. The act of burning the paper products 'sends' it to the underworld. If the departed live well on the other side, it is believed they will bestow blessings on the living. (Anthony, 2009).

### **Igbo Thought Towards Life and Death**

Human beings do have a double status which is unique among creatures of this world. On the one hand men are animals formed out of long slow evolutionary process. Men have emerged out of the lower forms of and they constitute part of the continuous realm of nature. The belief that those who depart from this earth continue in existence elsewhere and are actively in touch with those who are still here on earth is seen in certain cults. As animals, men are mortal, made out of the dust of earth and destined to return to that dust. Men have a normal life span today. In our seventies or in our eighties or at most our nineties we shall die, and this living body, then lifeless and cold, will begin to disintegrate and return to the dust of the earth. This on one hand is true. Even Anedo (2007:147) supported it by saying that "For the Igbo people, what survives after death, are the spirits. They regard this as the real person himself, or a mirror of shadow "Onyinyo" and this "Onyinyo" is liable to God alone."

But on the other hand while we are part of nature, in a quite precise sense we transcend nature. For we, are possessed of reason which is the power to contemplate and understand, including our

own nature, from an intellectual vantage point outside it. The journey to the spirit land in some cases is believed to be long and arduous. At death the spirit leaves the body. "The disseminated spirit looks like the shadow cast by the person on a sunny day during his time" (Metuh, 1981:118). On leaving the body, the spirit hangs around the home stead for a few days, visiting for the last time, the place he used to be frequently while he was alive. Soon after burial, he sets out for the ancestral spirit land.

### **Human soul**

The Igbo thinker was forced by nature to search for the existence of human soul, which he called 'muo'. For him the soul is an infinite substance that proves the existence of man. The Igbo thinker believes that the soul is immortal and that the body can't perform or exist without the soul, which means that he, is trying to say that the body is the property of the soul.

For him one cannot see or physically perceive the soul but through one's intuitive knowledge one can perceive it. He believes that it is through one's soul that one can reach and communicate in the spiritual realm. For him whatever action a man carries out must be permitted by the soul. The Igbo thinker believes that the relationship between the body and soul is a finite relationship. That is to say that their relationship will always come to a point of separation, which is the death of the body.

He believes that the soul never dies; it only separates itself from body. The Igbo thinker believes that each soul has a particular time made eternally for it to separate from the body, when the body and the soul separate accidentally, he called it an untimely or premature separation, which is called 'onwu ike' in Igbo language, and that keeps the soul restless when it leaves the body or when the body dies. He thinks that the body and the soul should separate peacefully when time for it to take place is.

The Igbo does not believe that man should die prematurely. They therefore, attribute all cases of premature death, to external manipulations not destined by Chukwu, the Creator. It is these spirits emanating from premature or bad death that the Igbo call ghosts. These souls called ghosts they believe, wander about terrorizing the living. This is because of the way by which their death came; they are restless because they neither belong to the world of the dead nor the world of the living. Reasons for their terrorism are of two. In one aspect, these angry souls want a revenge assuming someone caused their untimely death or that there are jealous of their mates still living and would not allow them to have peace. Some of them died at a place far from home and were not brought home either for full burial rites. They therefore disturb their living relations in order to be satisfied. This paper is to discuss these types of souls which are otherwise the types of ghosts in Igbo Culture.

**Ogbanje** is an ancient Igbo metaphysical philosophy. Ogbanje is the process whereby the soul is internally influenced by the evil spirit or to have a covenant with the spirit.

### **List of supernatural beings in Chinese folklore**

Yan Wang also called Yanluo is the god of death and the sovereign of the underworld. He is also the judge of the underworld, and decides whether the dead will have good or miserable future lives.

Guǐ is the general Chinese term for ghost, used in combination with other symbols to give related meanings such as gweilo, literally "ghost man", used to refer to white people, and mogwai meaning "devil". Derived symbols such as (chui) meaning "nightmare" also carry related meanings. There are many types of Guǐ:

- Diào Sǐ Guǐ: The ghost of someone who has been hanged, either in execution or suicide
- Yóu Hún Yě Guǐ:
  1. The wandering ghost who has died far away from his/her hometown or family, especially when his/her body and spirit haven't been sent back to home.
  2. The wandering ghost of the dead, including vengeful spirits who take their revenge, hungry ghosts and playful spirits who may cause trouble during the Hungry Ghost Festival.
- Guǐ Pó: A ghost that takes the form of a kind and friendly old woman. They may be the spirits of servants who used to work for rich families, and who have returned to help around the house.
- Nǚ Guǐ: The ghost of a woman who has committed suicide due to some injustice such as being wronged or sexually abused. She returns to take her revenge.
- Yuān Guǐ: The ghost of someone who have died a wrongful death. They roam the world of the living, depressed and restless, seeking to have their grievances redressed.
- Shuǐ Guǐ: The spirit of someone who drowned and continues living in the water. They attack unsuspecting victims by dragging them underwater and drowning them to take possession of the victim's body.
- Wú Tóu Guǐ: A headless ghost who roams about aimlessly.
- È Guǐ: A hungry ghost which usually appears during the Hungry Ghost Festival. The spirit of a person who has committed sins of greed while he/she was alive and condemned to suffer in hunger after death. Variants of this concept are common to Buddhist and Hindu beliefs.

**Zhong Kui** is the vanquisher of ghosts and evil beings. Portraits of him were hung in Chinese houses at the end of the Chinese lunar year to scare away evil spirits and demons. He is depicted as fierce man with a black face and a comic beard brandishing a magic sword. Zhong Kui is said to be himself the ghost of a man who failed to pass the civil service examinations and committed suicide. He then became a ghost hunter. There is a story that the once dreamed that a small ghost stole the purse of imperial consort. A larger ghost - Zhong Kui - captured the smaller one and returned the purse.

### **Supernatural Beings in Igbo World**

Igbo belief in supernatural beings is not in doubt. There are many supernatural entities which the Igbo believe, exist in the spirit world with Chukwu, the Supreme Being as the head. These in their hierarchical order are Chukwu, Primordial beings, Ancestors, Chi (Personal guardian angel), Divinities (deities), and ghosts.

### **Chukwu**

Chukwu is the creator of all things both on earth and in heaven. Without Him to the Igbo, nothing was made. They strongly believe in his existence. He assigns ministries to other spirits with certain responsibilities but it is not the responsibility of this paper to discuss them due to time and space. However, it will take a look on the types of ghosts prevalent in Igbo culture. But it is not

to say that Chukwu assigned any work to the ghosts. This is because apart from their disturbing factors, they are not relevant in Igbo affairs. Before going into discussion of these ghosts, it is wise to say something about Chi even though it is not a ghost.

## **Chi**

In odinaani, the Igbo People believe that each person has their own personal spiritual assistant or guardian called Chi, appointed to them before and at the time of their birth and remains with them for the rest of their life on Earth. A person's Chi is the personification of that individual's fate, which is credited for an individual's life's successes, misfortunes and failures. The Igbo believe that their success in life is determined by their Chi, and that no man can rise past the greatness of his/her own Chi.

## **Ghosts in Igbo Society**

### **Ogbanje (Changeling)**

*Ogbanje* is believed to be an evil spirit that would deliberately plague a family with misfortune. It is believed that upon being born by the mother, under a certain amount of time (usually not passed puberty), the Ogbanje would deliberately die and then come back and repeat the cycle, causing the family grief. Sometimes, they are in bond on when to come to life, which family to be born in, and when to die or how many times to come on earth. Some of these spirits are fish, snake, animals like cat, dog, pig, et cetera. Their purpose is to punish whatever couple they may visit to be borne by them. Female circumcision was sometimes thought to get rid of the evil spirit, whereas finding the evil spirits *Iyi-uwa*, which they have dug somewhere secret, would ensure that ogbanje would never plague the family again. Iyiuwa is ogbanje's way of coming back into the world through a family of her choice.

### **Ogbonauke**

As earlier stated that Igbo believe that no one is created to die young, sometime some people die prematurely due to certain circumstances. Apart from accident, or suicide some women die during child birth or as a result of man's inhumanity to man. However, when a young person dies untimely, the soul continues to wander about, terrorizing his age mates. This is what the Igbo call Ogbonauke meaning age grade disturbance. The ghosts terrorize their age mates in that they want to see that they do not die alone. However, instead of worshipping them, native witchdoctors are invited whose work it is to spell out these spirits from their disturbing forces.

## **History**

There has been extensive interaction between traditional Chinese beliefs and the more recent Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Ancestor worship is the original basic Chinese religion. The core belief is that there is a continued existence after death. It is thought that the soul of a deceased person is made up of yin and yang components. The yin component, po, is associated with the grave, and the yang component, hun, is associated with ancestral tablets. At death the components split into three different souls; the po stays with the body to the grave, another goes to judgment, and the hun resides in an ancestral tablet. The po and hun are not immortal and need to be nourished by offerings made by descendants. Eventually both the po and hun go to the underworld, although the hun goes to heaven first. Unlike in western usages of the term, underworld has no negative connotation.

## **Practices and beliefs**

### **Mediums**

The use of mediums to communicate with spirits is much more important in traditional Chinese culture than in Western societies, and is closely linked to ancestor worship. The medium (mum mai poh) or "ask rice woman" helps to ask the ancestor what they require on the other side, and these needs can be provided through the burning of paper effigies. In return, the spirit can be of great help in matters such as winning the lottery or being admitted to low-cost government housing. The person visiting the medium will take a cup of rice from their kitchen to identify the family. Through these communications the dead help the living while the living helps the dead. The name involves a pun, since with a change in intonation "ask rice" becomes "spirit medium".

### **Ghost festival**

Here, I have to relate a story told by a Buddhist Monk at Dong Shan Island Temple while responding to our question on our visit in 2011. Just as the West features Halloween for ghosts and ghouls, the Chinese have a holiday to honor the departed spirits of the underworld -- the Chinese Ghost Festival. It is said that ghosts roam the world every year for one lunar month. In some areas of China, visitors can see small roadside fires, where believers burn paper money and other offerings to appease the restless spirits that have temporarily been released from Hades.

The Chinese Ghost Festival is also called "Half July" (Lunar). It is a popular occasion celebrated throughout China on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month. Historically, families offer sacrifices of the newly harvested grain to departed ancestors on this day, which also coincides with the Buddhist Ullambana (Deliverance) Festival and the Taoist Chinese Ghost Festival. Since each of these traditions in some way honours the spirits of the departed, the seventh lunar month has come to be known as "Ghost Month" and is a time when the "Good Brethren" (ghosts from the underworld) come back to earth to feast on the victuals offered by the living. The offer of the first grain harvest to ancestors could have arisen from the belief that ancestors contribute to good harvest hence the offer as a thanksgiving to the benevolent ancestors. Over time the Ullambana Festival and Ghost Festival have melded together to become the present-day Chung Yuan Putu or "Mid-origin Passage to Universal Salvation."

The Ghost Festival is a traditional Chinese festival celebrated by Chinese in many countries. The fifteenth day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar is called Ghost Day and the seventh month in general is regarded as the 'Ghost Month, in which ghosts and spirits, including those of the deceased ancestors, come out from the lower realm. Distinct from both the Qingming Festival (in spring) and Chung Yeung Festival (in autumn) in which living descendants pay homage to their deceased ancestors, on Ghost Day, the deceased are believed to visit the living. The festival has a long history. The Buddhists associate the Chung Yuan festival with the legend of Moginlin saving his mother from the underworld. In this story, the hero learns that his mother is starving in the underworld. He travels there, overcoming many difficulties, and offers her food. However, the food bursts into flames before she can eat. In despair, he asks Sakyamuni for advice. The Buddha tells him to find ten monks who will fast and pray together with him on the 15th day of the seventh moon. Moginlin follows this advice and finally manages to release his mother from her torments.

On the fifteenth day the realms of Heaven and Hell and the realm of the living are open and both Taoists and Buddhists would perform rituals to transmute and absolve the sufferings of the



deceased. Intrinsic to the Ghost Month is ancestor worship, where traditionally the filial piety of descendants extends to their ancestors even after their deaths. Activities during the month would include preparing ritualistic food offerings, burning incense, and burning joss paper, a papier-mache form of material items such as clothes, gold and other fine goods for the visiting spirits of the ancestors. Elaborate meals would be served with empty seats for each of the deceased in the family treating the deceased as if they are still living. Ancestor worship is what distinguishes Qingming Festival from Ghost Festival because the latter includes paying respects to all deceased, including the same and younger generations, while the former only includes older generations. Other festivities may include, buying and releasing miniature paper boats and lanterns on water, which signifies giving directions to the lost ghosts and spirits of the ancestors and other deities.

The modern festival of Chung Yuan Putu or "Mid-origin Passage to Universal Salvation" owes its origins to both the Buddhist Ullambana (Deliverance) Festival and the Taoist Chinese Ghost Festival, both of which honor the spirits of the departed, and which have now been combined. Historically, families offer sacrifices of the newly harvested grain to departed ancestors on this day. In some parts of China, believers make small roadside fires where they burn paper money and other offerings to appease the restless spirits that have temporarily been released from the underworld.

During the ghost festival, people try to avoid outdoor activities, getting married or moving to a new house-especially at night. It is thought that if a ghost finds someone in the street and follows them home, they and their family will have bad luck for the next year. People should also avoid bodies of water on Ghost day, since they may be caught and drowned by a Shui Guǐ, a ghost who had died through drowning and wants to return to life. The Ghost Festival shares some similarities with the predominantly Mexican observance of El Día de los Muertos. Due to theme of ghosts and spirits, the festival is sometimes also known as the "Chinese Halloween".

### ***Hungry ghosts:***

Hungry Ghosts are a Buddhist concept that differs from ghosts in Chinese tradition. Traditional belief is that people become ghosts when they die. It was originally thought that ghosts did not have eternal life, but would slowly weaken and eventually die a second time. Hungry ghosts in traditional thought would only be an issue in exceptional cases such a whole family was killed or when a family no longer appreciated their ancestors. With the rise of popularity in Buddhism the idea that souls would live in space until reincarnation became popular. In the Taoist tradition it is believed hungry ghosts can arise from people whose deaths have been violent or unhappy. Both Buddhism and Taoism share the idea that hungry ghosts can emerge from neglect or desertion of ancestors.

According to the Hua-yen Sutra evil deeds will cause a soul to be born in different realms. There are six possible realms of existence for souls. The highest degree of evil deed will cause a soul to be born into a realm as a denizen of hell, the lower degree of that would cause a soul to be born as an animal, and the lowest degree would cause a soul to be born as a hungry ghost. Evil deeds that lead to becoming a hungry ghost would be killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Desire, greed, anger and ignorance all have factors in causing a soul to be reborn as a hungry ghost because they are motives for people to perform evil deeds. The least serious of these will cause one to be having the destiny of becoming a hungry ghost.

### **Miscellany**

When someone dies, it is important to perform the correct rites to ensure that the departed ancestor does not become a wandering ghost. Since the corpse, or at least the bones, continues to have powers that could affect the fate of living relatives, an expert in feng-shui is needed to determine an auspicious time, place, and orientation of the burial.

In Chinese tradition, a ghost marriage (also known as a Minghun or spirit marriage) is a marriage in which one or both parties are deceased. A ghost marriage was usually set up by the family of the deceased and performed for a number of reasons, including the marriage of a couple previously engaged before one member's death, to integrate an unmarried daughter into a patrilineage, to ensure the family line is continued, or to maintain that no younger brother is married before an elder brother.

### **Ancestors among the Igbo**

The history of ancestral belief among the Igbo is as old as how death came into the world. Among the Igbo people of West Africa, the belief that life extends beyond death is a serious issue. The Igbo believe that when one dies the soul separates itself from the physical body, leaving it to decay and as such goes and settles in a place prepared for it depending on the soul's status. So it happens that when soul and physical self cease to relate, one is said to have died. And so Craig (1998:41) says, "In as much as it has certain relation to a body, the soul is a form to that body, which is the perfection of that body. It is a form because a natural body is composed of matter and form."

The belief, that the soul lives beyond this present life after separation from the matter is unquestionable among the Igbo. The Igbo therefore honour some of these souls believed to have lived exemplary life while on earth. In explaining this point, Anizoba (2002:79) says, "To live a good life means that one must not be a murderer, a sorcerer and a liar. One must abstain from any unclean thing and uphold all the social norms and taboos of one's community."

These souls are called ancestors. The Igbo people know it as *ndiichie*. However, there are three types of *ndiichie* in Igbo belief system. These are *ndiichie di ndu* (the living ancestors). They are the oldest set of people in a community. Ajamma (2005; 13) grouped them at the age bracket 71 and above. He says, "They are the apex of the hierarchy of the age grades. They hold in trust the tradition and culture of the people and ensure their sanctity always." The oldest among them is the head or *obi* of the village.

The living ancestors are believed to be closer to the dead ancestors and therefore serve as intermediaries between the younger ones and the dead ancestors. They understand and speak the language of the dead. As a result of their position in the families and the communities, they are respected. It is the belief of the Igbo people that whoever they curse or bless is ratified by the living dead. Therefore no one loves to disobey or challenge their words. An example was what happened in The New American Bible (1995; Gen, 27:33) thus: "Who was it then who killed an animal and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came. I gave him my final blessing and so it is forever." Apart from this, respect for elders has been with the Igbo from time of creation and that is why the elders snub the younger ones whenever they pass them without showing respect.

The second type of *ndiichie* is the *ndiichie no n'obi* (the ancestral cult symbols.). Anedo (2007:197) says, "It was found that as in every other cultures and religions of the world, symbols and symbolisms were prominent in Igbo culture." One cannot talk of religious aspect of Igbo culture without mention of ancestral worship. And so since ancestral worship is part of Igbo Traditional Religion, symbols play important role in the veneration of the ancestors.

*Ndiichie no n'obi* (ancestral cult symbols) are the consecrated carved representations of the dead ancestors through which the living ancestors commune with the dead ancestors. These symbols are always positioned inside the ancestral house (Obi) where both the dead and the living members of the family converge for deliberations on matters concerning them. The symbols in Igbo are referred to as *okposi*. Jacobs (1977:264) agrees with this saying "There are also family stools called *okposi*." Some other parts of Igbo land also represent these with *mpekele eju* (broken clay pot's neck) usually for women and rock (Okwute).

The third type of *ndiichie* is the one in vogue. They are the ones being represented with the ancestral cult symbols. They lived fulfilled life here on earth before their exit into eternal bliss from where they oversee the overall administration of their various families on earth.

### **Qualities of Ancestors**

Life is full of struggles. People therefore strive in one way or the other to make ends meet. In pursuit of that, some people are very careful not to injure others while others do not care to know whoever they step on their toes as far as success is their answer. The Igbo believe that the status of a soul is pre-determined by the person's performance before death. It is the outcome of one's observance of the taboos of the land. This was why Anedo (2004:7) says that:

What occupied the mind of every African of Pre-Christian time, was how to keep the taboos of his community or how to appease the land in case of violation and by so doing, helped entire community enjoyed a peaceful environment.

To achieve this, the Igbo man had to know the taboos, mended his life, and ensured that he did not violate any of the community's taboos. In keeping of these taboos, one must not have destroyed life in any way. This is on the belief that life belongs to God and Him alone has right to take it. Of course, one might argue that in the past, the Igbo sacrificed human beings to their deities. That to their understanding was in honour of those deities as it was believed to be the highest sacrifice due to a deity.

Other qualities of ancestors are that one should not die untimely. It is the belief of the Igbo that death is not for the young ones. Therefore one has to reach a ripe old age. One must not die a bad death and in-fact one must die with someone beside one. Having one beside a dying person helps the Igbo know full well who the person actually is for sometimes a dying person before his or her final breath confesses of his or her wrong doings. Wealth is also necessary here to show that such person is not an idle one. He therefore must take title.

Marriage is also a condition so as to show responsibility. In fact one must live a good life. To live a good life means that one must not be a murderer, a sorcerer and a liar. One must abstain from unclean things and uphold all the social norms and values of one's community.

### **Relationship between the Ancestors and their People on Earth**

Among the Igbo, the belief that the living and the dead commune is real hence all the rites performed by the living for the dead some of which start immediately breath ceases. They believe that life goes on even after here on earth. The Igbo therefore wash the corpses of their dead relations especially the elderly ones, beautify it, cloth it and go on to bury him or her with some property. All these are in preparation of his or her journey unto eternity. On the other hand, if any of these rites due for the dead lacks, the livings receive aggression from the dead. It is because of this that Basden (1983:117) says that Igbo man being "... deeply conscious of relationship to the unseen world, every precaution must be observed in order to keep the spirit of the dead in a state

of peaceful contentment.”In-fact the symbiotic relationship that exists between the living and the dead is inevitable for peaceful progressive society.

### **The Roles of Ancestors**

The roles of ancestors made the Igbo feel their absence in the governance of the families and or towns. “The ancestor constitutes a very important instrument of faith and belief in African traditional Religion because of their roles in the lives of the living” (Anizoba, 2002:84). Anizoba further said that among the Igbo, the ancestral influence and capabilities in ensuring spiritual, economic and social well-being of the living members of the Igbo families is very real, clear and beyond doubt.

Among the numerous beings worshipped by the Igbo, ancestors are the closest to mankind and most loved. Reasons were that they were with the living and knew their problems. In-fact they care for the living more than any other worshipped being in the spirit world. Their spirits are always around to solve the problems of the living.

The Igbo people know that ancestors do not fail in their ability to care for the living. They serve as eye of the living in the spirit world. They therefore do not sit down and watch evil spirits torment the members of their families on earth. Even when the members of their families erred against spirit beings, the ancestors act as solicitors of the living. “They do this because they are capable of understanding both human and spirit languages” (Anizoba, 2002:84-85).

Ensuring that the livings also observe all the moral standards of the communities is the work of the ancestors. Violation of any of these is disobedience to the ancestors therefore one has to appease them as well as the land-*kuo ala, kuo ndiichie*. Failure to do this amounts to catastrophe in the violator’s life. In support of this, Parrinder (1949:124) says, “Under the presidency of Ala- the earth spirit- the ancestors are the guardians of morality.” However, observance of these laws gives one a long life as the ancestors have it as a duty to protect the person spiritually and otherwise. Some times when one seems to have died, on one’s way to the spirit land, the ancestor on seeing the person, send the persons back to earth.

### **Feast of Ancestors**

Among nations of West Africa, there are beliefs in ancestors and they have feasts and periods of feasts for the ancestors. So, ancestral worship is not peculiar to the Igbo alone. Jacobs (1977:261) says that “The mende people of Sierra Leone worship two distinct groups of ancestor spirits. These are *Kekeri*, ancestors whose names are known and *ndibia*, ancestors who died in the distant past.” The later according to Jacobs are prayed to through the former. The *kono* of Sierra Leone refer to the invisible abode of the dead as *faa* and the residents of *faa* are spoken of as *fanu*- fathers, or *Mbinbanu*- the great ancestral fore fathers.

Among the *Fon* of Abomey, the cult of the ancestors is established by special priests and initiators. The annual ancestral ceremonies come up in May and June. The ceremonies last days and consist of sacrifices, prayers and dances by cult groups. Jacobs made us to know that in some areas in West Africa, important rites are held at the beginning of the yam season. No one must eat the new yam until the ancestors have taken their share of the new harvest. And after the rites, no old yam must be eaten. The Fon sacrifice goats and fowls at the shrines and slice of new yams are placed there. The flesh of the victims is eaten after a portion has been put on the irons of the ancestors.

The Yoruba ancestral cults have their own special characteristics. There are public rites as well as private rites. As among other peoples, offerings are made by individuals, to the ancestors called **Babanla** - the great fathers.

Among the Igbo, there is also an annual feast in honour of the ancestors. This feast is referred to as **Alommuo**. According to Arinze (1970: 20) "Although the ancestors are daily invoked and worshipped, there is a special yearly feast about August time in honour of all the ancestors. This feast is variously called **Alom mmuo**, or **otute**, or by other names". Elaborate preparations are made; village paths are cleaned by children, sons and daughters abroad return. To the Igbo, this is the time for thanksgiving to the ancestors for their protection, economic boost in the families, insurance of peace and all other favours. This time also is when members of different families that did not get on well economically, socially, politically and otherwise, use to pledge the ancestral assistance in future endeavours. So it is a conference time for both the living and dead members of various families of Igbo nation. This time, there are libations and sacrifices to the ancestors. As the Igbo people observe this feast of ancestors, "The ancestral spirits also believed to be incarnate in man links him with his family, clan and other human societies" (Metuh, 1981:85).

The Benin people also devote much of their time to the ancestral cults. Jacobs (1977:265) confirms that "After the death of a father, his eldest son establishes the cult of the dead in the house." Understandably this symbol of the dead is placed there and there is also a special ceremony for it called **Ebo**.

### **Chinese Ghost Marriage**

#### **A Chinese spirit marriage is a complex part of traditional culture**

A Chinese ghost marriage (also called a "spirit marriage") is a fascinating tradition in which the husband, the wife, or both are no longer living.

#### **History of Chinese Ghost Marriage**

The origin of ghost marriages is shrouded in mystery. Cultures ranging across the world (including surprising locations like France) have and sometimes still do practice ghost marriages, but China's ghost marriages (referred to as *guihun* in Chinese) are perhaps the most famous. Yu Kuang-hong (1983: 41) explains that "The most popular example of a ghost becoming a benefactor is posthumous marriage (also called ghost marriage)." There are several descriptions of posthumous marriage (Jordan 1972; Wolf 1974b; Yuan 1972). For the bride's family, the posthumous marriage of a deceased daughter helps resolve the problem of worshipping a tablet which property does not belong to the family's descent line. For the groom and his family, it transforms a potential malefactor into a potential benefactor. Taiwan Hokkien is convinced that once a man is "loved" by a dead maiden, the sooner he marries her, the better. Should he dare refuse, or even postpone "taking the tablet," his family members (himself included) will quite possibly be afflicted by the spirit of the bride-to-be. There are other types of ghost marriages which abound not only in China but because of space and time; it could not be described here.

#### **Why are there Ghost Marriages for Women?**

The question of why Chinese ghost marriages exist is a complex one with many reasons. One reason for the existence of Chinese ghost marriages exist is to fulfill a previously agreed to marriage contract. If a bride's fiancé dies before the marriage, the option exists to carry out a ghost marriage in place of a real one. In this situation, the bride has all the normal obligations of

marriage: she moves into her husband's home, participates in a funeral ritual and mourning period for her deceased husband, and vows to remain loyal to him (that is to say, celibate).

Another reason why Chinese ghost marriages exist is because of the enormous social pressure for a Chinese woman to get married. Ghost marriage is often the answer when a woman passes away before marrying. This is to ensure that she can join a male line of descent (by joining her husband's family).

Living women are often participants in Chinese ghost marriages as well, since an unmarried daughter is traditionally thought of as an embarrassing burden on her family.

### **Why are there Ghost Marriages for Men?**

Men that die before they are married are often given ghost marriages as well, either to living or deceased brides. This is to allow the man to have a socially accepted heir and legitimately carry on his family name. A male offspring of a male family member is often adopted as the deceased man's son, thus ensuring the family line continues.

Additionally, ghost marriages are often held for deceased older brothers. Because tradition dictates that an older brother should marry before a younger one, a ghost marriage for an unmarried older brother frees the younger brother to marry without breaking tradition.

### **Ghost Marriages for two Dead Spouses**

In many ghost marriages, both of the spouses are already deceased and the marriage ceremony is carried out in absence of their physical selves. In some cases, family members claim to be alerted to the desires of deceased unmarried relatives, either through a spirit medium or some other supernatural means. According to this tradition, lonely, unmarried spirits make their marriage intentions known and ask their living relatives to carry out their wishes. In addition, ghost marriages can be used as a means of creating a social bond between two families, much the same way a typical marriage might.

### **Ghost Marriage Ceremony**

A ghost marriage ceremony is variable, but often follows the same lines of a typical marriage. Since one or both of the participants are deceased, an effigy is often made in their stead.

The dowry, traditional in Chinese marriages, can range anywhere from a simple red packet of money to houses, furniture and expensive jewelry. In any event, the ceremony is often conducted in the same manner as if both parties were present.

### **Ghost Marriage among the Igbo**

The Igbo people are respecters of their culture. Institutions like family, economy, religion, et cetera are greatly upheld by them. They have respect for marriage and family. They deem it right and necessary for any grown up man or woman to have his or her family. They believe that marriage is not a short term issue but, a long term unless where the couple concerned found it too difficult to continue.

The Igbo have great love for children. Any marriage without child or children is considered fruitless, therefore useless and meaningless. This is why Ogbalu (1981) says that when a woman marries, what is expected of her is to get pregnant and bear a child. That is why when a baby is born, there is joy in the family and a day fixed for the naming ceremony. However, for fear of terminating their lineage, the Igbo have different types of marriage. These are monogamy, polygamy, marriage of two women (not gay), deity marriage, ghost marriage, child marriage. Here, the paper has to discuss only ghost marriage, which is its concern.

There are many ways and reasons for ghost marriage among the Igbo. The Igbo people believe that whoever kills fellow human being goes to the grave with his victim. Nevertheless, if the killing is found to be accidental, the killer has to perform some rituals including replacing the dead person with any girl of his or her blood relation. He does this by giving the girl in marriage to the dead family's relations. This time, the family has nothing to pay for the said marriage. They do this so as to give birth to them another human being.

In some other cases, assuming in a family, there is only a son and eventually he dies without taking a wife and the mother has reached menopause, the family will not relax and allow the lineage to end that way. They have to get a wife for their dead son. However, it their duty to find another man whose responsibility it is to ensure that she gets pregnant and bears a son. She may also find one that she likes with the consent of the family and make love with him for the purpose of procreating.

Another interesting type of ghost marriage experienced among the Igbo of old was marriage of a girl with a deity. This happens when the priest of the deity has no money to marry. The deity may then request through a diviner that she needs a wife. The worshippers of course, have to find a wife for her otherwise she will inflict them with illness, disaster or disintegration. The wife to be married for her will never know that she is being married to a deity because the priest is there to perform the assignment of procreation. The ugly part of it, is that her children belongs to the ohu (slave) caste system.

### **The Chinese Ghost Month**

At the climax of August, the most inauspicious time of the year, the Chinese hold the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts the seventh month in the Chinese calendar is the "Month of the Hungry Ghosts". Buddhists, Taoists and believers of Chinese folk religions believe that, during the "Ghost Month", the spirits of the dead wander the earth. During this dangerous time they suspend all important activities and decisions. At its climax, they celebrate the **Festival of the:**

#### ***Hungry Ghosts:***

This goes back to the Buddhist *Ullambana Sutra*, which tells of Maudgalyayana, who as a young boy left home to become a disciple of Brahma, and later of Buddha. When he attained enlightenment, he remembered his parents and looked for them. He found his father in heaven, but his mother had been reborn into the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts, a realm of hell. She hadn't respected his wish that she welcome any Buddhist monk, and had instead been greedy with money and kindness.

The description of her ghost is terrifying. Her skin was "like that of a golden pheasant when its feathers have been plucked, her bones were like round stones placed one beside the other. Her head was big as a ball, her neck thin as a thread, and her stomach like a great sea swelling out." Because her throat was too narrow to eat or drink, but her belly so distended, she went terribly hungry. But the rice and water that Maudgalyayana gave her caught fire in her belly. So he pled

with the Buddha, who instructed him to gather the Buddhist monks and sacrifice food and drink, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. Maudgalyayana did so, and his mother was liberated.

Both aspects of the story - the terrifying, and the happy occasion of being reunited upon fulfilling one's filial duty - are mixed in the present-day Buddhist festival of *Ullambana* and the Taoist and Chinese folk festival of *Zhongyuan Jie*, collectively known as the "**Festival of the Hungry Ghosts**", held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. In 2006, that day was August 8.

On that day families solemnly pay homage to their ancestors and pay Buddhist monks (as charity) to pray for their souls. But they are also horrified by the ghosts, and to appease them they put food outside their homes, float paper boats and lanterns on water to give them directions, and burn "hell money". **Superstition** takes over entirely in their belief that Ghost Month is the most inauspicious time of the year, during which traveling, weddings, moving to a new house, and even swimming are suspended.

### **Conclusion**

Existences of ghosts in both Chinese and Igbo have been examined carefully. Actually, what is found in rat's house is also found in the house of her relation. There is no fact denying that what is in China, is also in Igbo. The two cultures believe in ghosts and take various actions to address this point in their different ways. However, it has to be understood that even though the two have ghosts, there are slight differences on how they see ghosts.

The Chinese see ghost as object of worship. They therefore make serious preparations for them, pray to them for blessings. They also see ancestors as taking the position of ghosts especially when they think that the said ancestors do not have living descendants. On the part of the Igbo, ghosts are evil that one should not dare near or relate with them. They therefore try all ways to discharge and expel them from their contact. The Igbo of course never and do not intend to group their ancestors with the ghosts. They believe that doing so, is a disservice to their ancestors which do not augur well with them. From the analysis so far, this paper understand that whatever exists in people's culture is part of that culture and as such helps the growth of such culture. It therefore encourages the promotion of those arts within any culture that promotes the moral attitudes of the people.

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