

## Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry

**Charles Ikechukwu Okoro**

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities  
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
+2349092314974  
([chylistar@yahoo.com](mailto:chylistar@yahoo.com))

**Christian C. Emedolu, Ph.D**

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities,  
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
+2348035517505  
([dongaphilsemd@yahoo.com](mailto:dongaphilsemd@yahoo.com))

**Edward U. Ezedike**

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities,  
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
+23408032684202  
[uzomaezedike@gmail.com](mailto:uzomaezedike@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*The concept of Chi in Igbo ontology is one aspect of Igbo metaphysics that demands full philosophical exploration. Philosophers have at one time or the other reflected on the concept of chi. Reflections such as these can scarcely exhaust the meaning of chi in the various aspects of the life of the people. The meaning of chi is often associated with the Christian guardian Angel. The problem with this identification is that the chi concept does not lend itself to translation into other philosophical traditions. This has given rise to the use of various appellations to designate the same concept. This paper, therefore, examines these various designations of the meaning of the concept of chi and offers some critique with a view to highlighting their philosophic strength or otherwise, as well as the relevance of chi to Igbo people. The method of literary documentary evidence is employed in this philosophical inquiry.*

**Keywords:** *Chi, Igbo Ontology, Philosophical Inquiry, Traditions*

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### **Introduction**

It is time to delve into the philosophical meaning of the term of *chi* in Igbo cosmology. The term of *chi* is almost on the lips of every Igbo. It is the principle of individualism in Igbo cosmology. The common notion is that every person has his or her own *chi*. *Chi* can either be praised or blamed for the fortunes or ill luck that befalls the individual. Fundamentally, what is at the back of the mind of every Igbo is that *chi* is the initiator and controller of a person's destiny. This is a matter of religious belief. But the extent of this claim remains a matter of scholarly dispute. The truth, however, is that *chi* pervades every strata of human existence. This derives from its meaning as god or spirit. Actually, the term of *chi* is not translatable. Attempts have been made to render it understandable by associating it with the Christian guardian angel. This association, though, inadequate has helped to bring some bit of enlightenment on the concept. The relevance of *chi* is felt in the whole life of the individual. It is as important as life itself. *Chi* forms a duality with the Supreme Being, *Chukwu*. It is also at the center of human destiny as already noted. It is even part and parcel of the names that people take up at birth. Its influence cuts across the spheres of the living and the dead. *Chi* belongs to the sphere of the spiritual. When applied to the human person it makes him assume partly an immortal nature. Indeed the individual becomes partly

human and partly divine. By this association, an element of mystery thus enters the sphere of human existence. Indeed, *chi* influences a lot about how a given people should be defined in terms of their origin, nature and destiny. It is hoped that our search will broaden our horizon of understanding to see that, though, the human person, is at the center of the whole created order, he is nevertheless not its creator, that though, he has in comparison to animal, a higher life, he is nevertheless not the source of this life, and because this life is given for a purpose, he is only a mere steward.

### **Duality in Igbo thought**

The phenomenon of duality in Igbo traditional thought is clearly demonstrated in the testimony of Major A. C. Leonard as quoted by Chinua Achebe in *African Philosophy An Anthology* thus:

We Igbo look forward to the next world as being much the same as this . . . we picture life there to be exactly as it is in this world. The ground there is just the same as it is here; the earth is similar. There are forests and hills and valleys with rivers flowing and roads leading from one town to another . . . People in spiritland have their ordinary occupations, the farmer his farm. (1998: 68).

That the spirit land bears the semblance of this worldly in all its ordinariness means that the two worlds are in fact one and not two. It is a duality that precludes total separation of the two spheres of existence. While distinguishing between duality and dualism in his book, *Africa: The Question of Identity*, I. M. Onyeocha notes that the two concepts refer to things or reality in their two-ness. The contrast for him is that whereas duality connotes harmony, continuity and complementarity, dualism sets reality in opposition to itself or to something else, and thus, results to discontinuity. He designates male and female, right hand and left hand, the beginning of an activity and its end as instances of complementarity duality. On the contrary, dualism typifies darkness and light, good and evil, love and hate, and are in stiff opposition to one another. He attributes these two ways of looking at reality to sociological factors. As far as reality is concerned for the African, the subject is implicated in the object and vice versa. For the Western philosophy the subject is distinguished from, and opposed to the object. Differences in the modes of thought exist between Africa and the West. The African mode of thought is broad, elastic and personalized. And the Western mode is strict, narrow, and impersonal. The consequences of dualism, he continued, are the contradictory theories of rationalism and naturalism that respectively emphasize the primacy of reason over nature and of nature over reason. He noted that what constitutes an embarrassment is that these theories have received the endorsement of the academics of Western extraction as authentic means of acquiring knowledge. Hence knowledge must either be objective or subjective. It is objective if it satisfies the conditions of 'emotion-less' and 'presupposition-less.' Behind dualism are the conceptions of one and many, mind and matter, freedom and necessity, realism and idealism. It is inconceivable for the African to do entirely without bringing emotion and preconceptions into play, and she disabuses any doubt that this would in any way affect the truth about reality. The theories of rationalism and naturalism, he said, have engendered the alienation of human being from nature or have subordinated man to nature processes. The thought about duality involves a two-ness, a duo. In dualism two levels of existence or realms exist, namely, mental and physical. The distinction between duality and dualism as given by Onyeocha assigns 'complementary' to duality and total separation and opposition to dualism. The two-world order existing in African worldview, the visible and the invisible are said to be in one physical world. Life experience and activity in the physical world is much the same as in the invisible world. Thus there is mutual interaction and communication. Placide Tempels' Bantu presents a hierarchical ordering of beings or forces belonging to different realms of existence that have fulsome relation and interaction with one another. Omi and Anyawu (1984: 14) have a beautiful way of describing the relationship of the individual to the community in view of the forces that constitute beings in African ontology. In this ontology, "it (reality) stands in a

particular relationship with all there is, both visible and invisible.” Continuing, they maintained that the human being remains a formidable force uniting the visible created order and the invisible world through interactions and intercommunications between them. (1984: 211). The African world is densely religious. There is endless communication between humans and gods. The gods are believed to be the emissaries of the Supreme Being. It is believed that maintaining a good rapport with the gods will bring much favor upon humanity. Therefore African duality is one that recognizes two spheres of existence that are not independent of each other. It is a duality that acknowledges the existence of beings of different natures, but which, nevertheless interact and communicate with each other. In the words of C. Anyawu (1984: 264), the African acknowledges there is a duality, but sees it not as separate from, and antagonistic to each other in view of unity of existence in one inseparable continuum of a hierarchical order. I. Asouzu has written to dismiss all forms of exclusive immanent reasoning and all forms of the world immanent pre-deterministic causal concomitant reasoning as a fallacy of an inherent duality about the transcendent idea of being; this informs his idea that anything that exists forms a missing link of reality. He believes that a richer insight would be gained by way of conceptualization that fully takes cognizance of the future referential dimension of our being. (2004: 287, 438). But how does the African achieve this unitary form of life? That he sees reality at a glance and not in fragmentary form? Asouzu’s response is found in his complementary reflection by which reality is pictured as one in relation to all others and not in their otherness. He expresses this thought in his book, *Method and Principles*:

In complementary reflection, therefore, the mind intuitively perceives opposites not in their otherness but in relation to all other missing links of reality as positive moments of historicity. Through this intuitive perception of the necessity of their being, and what they stand for, the mind seeks to reconcile contraries in a manner that ensures that the harmony of being is upheld. In this way, even the negative idea of non-being serves the missing link of communicating being in the most transparent manner, but not in **the sense of substituting what it is not**. Likewise, contradictory actions have relevance not because of themselves, but because of what they help us achieve. (2004: 305-306).

He explains that contraries are resolvable by converting the exclusiveness into the unity of consciousness. He equally believes that human consciousness is something unified, and with the human person being something greater than the sum of its parts. He further opines that the human being is fundamentally and naturally good. Consequently personal failure is blamed on the abuse of one’s freedom. This means that the individual corrupts himself by cooperating with the forces productive of evil. Which is to say that in the absence of such influence, the ‘sacred body’ would always do the good. In order to commit evil, witches and wizards even assume false identities by disguising themselves in the form of lower animals. It is by falling prey to the elemental forces of nature in this way that the human person can be tossed between good and evil. This interplay of opposing forces reached its peak in the idea of Supreme Being (Chukwu) as the originator of all good things and the Devil (ekwensu) as the source of all evils. To resolve the duality, the idea of total exclusion of being from non-being to which *Chukwu* and *Ekwensu* respectively belong is invoked; with the result that total annihilation of evil and its agents is conceivable. (Asouzu, 2004: 165-166). The theory of duality in Igbo thought equally finds expression in the body-soul unity in man. Duality applies as already noted to the two orders of the world, namely, the visible and the invisible. According to E. M. P.Edeh (1985: 77), it is a duality that says that “for all beings in the material universe, existence is a dual and interrelated phenomenon.” In this duality, the visible and the invisible worlds constitute two aspects of one reality or world. Which means that it has a ‘dual existence,’ and that the “reality of its existence is a phenomenon in the visible world and also in that of the invisible world. Whatever obtains in the phenomenal world has its replica in the world of the invisible.” This way of looking at duality is not only peculiar to human beings but also to material things. A thing’s visible and invisible aspects are taken as real with the result that material objects in daily use are accorded respect and reverence. The metaphysical

reality of the visible and the invisible natures, though, distinct from each other remain indisputably embodied in the expression: *ife na ife ya na ya yi* (that is, a thing and that with which it is). According to him, the expression *ife ya na ya yi* (that by which something is) in the Aristotelian sense not only captures this duality but also portrays the invisible as implicated in the visible. Or as he puts it:

the invisible element is distinct from and yet part of the visible, and in fact it is “that by which the visible is.” This second interpretation of the Igbo expression “ife ya na ya yi” helps us to understand what the Igbos seem to esteem the unseen element much more than the visible. It also helps us to comprehend why, in the case of the broken yam, the farmer could address the unseen through the visible: the visible, sensible element, exists only in combination with the unseen; and whereas the two are distinct from each other, the latter is that by which the former is. From this we can see that the Igbos maintain a sharp duality, and conceive of the unseen element as being that by which the visible element is. Thus it seems that the duality is moderated. (1985: 79).

Much as the author would want to stress that there is a sharp contrast between the visible and the invisible, the truth of the matter is that both spheres are two aspects of one reality in the light of complementary ontology. Contrary to the position of the author, the two spheres of existence are not different in the strict sense. There is in essence no dualism when there is the implication of one in the other or where one is the reason for the being of the other. It is one reality but seen in two complementary aspects. Here, the influence of Aristotle on Edeh may be strongly felt. No wonder he enmeshed his presentation of Igbo metaphysics of duality in dualism. However we can excuse him, seeing that he wanted to make his Whiteman Supervisor understand Igbo duality by connecting to Aristotle that he is familiar with. The application of Aristotelian dualistic category cannot adequately explain Igbo duality without corrupting the latter. In his “Chi” in Igbo Cosmology” in *African Philosophy An Anthology*, Achebe takes up the Igbo expression: *ife kwulu, ife akwudobe ya* (Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it). This is a further deliberation on Edeh’s reflection above, but actually means the same, except the involvement of the Aristotelian sense or category. For Achebe, a “person’s *chi* is his other identity in spiritland – his spirit being complementing his terrestrial human being”- since every thing has its double. (1998: 67-68). The fundamental feature of this duality lies in its complementary character.

### **The concept of *Chi* explained**

The *chi* concept is a religious belief firmly enshrined in Igbo worldview. And it is called the principle of individualism. However it is an individualism that is defined by communality. Achebe has already intimated us that a person’s *chi* complements his terrestrial human being. Let us reason with him like this. There is *chi* on the one hand. And there is the terrestrial human being on the other hand that the *chi* complements. This terrestrial human being is already composed of body and soul or spirit. Our question then is, ‘what distinguishes this personal *chi* component called a spirit-double, that complements the terrestrial human being from the spirit of an embodied human being?’ Are they the same or different? Our immediate preceding reasoning may suggest that one to one identification may not apply. Again, how can we describe the relationship *chi* has with the terrestrial human being? Is it one of causal dependence on *chi* vis-à-vis the human being or what? Perhaps the ensuing reflections offered by different philosophers regarding the concept of *chi* will help to enlighten us on some of these questions. Indeed, many are the appellations proffered by Philosophers to designate the concept of *chi* in Igbo cosmology. C. Achebe (1998: 159-160) has already noted that the concept of *chi* is not translatable. He goes on to designate *chi* using many appellations such as god, guardian angel, personal spirits, soul and spirit double. R. O. Madu (1996: 178-9) follows the same pattern of designation. For him *chi* is personal and thus singular; *chi* is a personal god; It is the author and controller of human destiny; *chi* is the individual spirit-counterpart of a man; *chi* respects human

gender such that a man has a male chi and a woman has a female chi. *Chi* could be either good or bad. The writer of this paper would want to include here that *chi* is also a respecter of human freedom. It does not come in conflict with the freedom of the individual, even as it exercises its role as the initiator and controller of human destiny. Also, *chi* is equally the very source of human freedom itself. For E. M. P. Edeh, the Igbo postulate *chi* in order to capture the origin of the soul. Thus, *chi* designates life in the sense of coming from God or indicative of the presence of God. He fears that this might be mistaken for pantheism or that God is partitioned among his creatures. He equally sees a problem of translating life of God and life from God, expressions that mean the same thing as in *ndu nke Chukwu*. He allows the use of *chi* for the soul on the ground that it directs and protects the body. In his book *Philosophical Perspective on Chinua Achebe*, C. S. Nwodo (2004: 16-17) says that the idea of *chi* as a guardian angel is influenced by the idea of Christian guardian angel whose work is not only to accompany the individual everywhere but also to protect him from evil, and inspire him to the performance of every good work. This, he offers as a reason that informs the use of such names as *Chimuanya* since the *chi* must be responsibly awake to avert danger. In his "The Depiction of Masculinity in Classic Nigerian Literature" in *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*, New edition, F. Salamone (2010: 143) designates *chi* as an essential link between a human and God, a personal destiny, an integral part of human personality. He adds that *chi* is not God but remains active in the choice of the packages God placed before it. In his entry on "The idea of art in African thought" in the book *Contemporary Philosophy, A new Survey*, K. C. Anyanwu (1987: 253) designates *chi* as a "dynamic self-regulating and self-directing force, and the principle of selfhood and individuation, and as that that makes a person unique." In his 1997 Odenigbo Lecture (1996-2000: 132), T. Okere designates *chi* as personal god and a connecting link between man and God. And that *chi* dwells within man. It was N. K. Dzobo (1992: 131) who labeled *chi* a creative principle that shares divine nature with *Chukwu*. The most appealing designation of the concept of *chi* from the foregoing is that it is a god or spirit double. All other designations of the concept are considered as helpful guides to its further understanding.

### **Chi, Chukwu and Chineke**

The Igbo refer to the name of *chi* as a god. And *Chi-ukwu* literally means the great God or Supreme Being. Both *chi* and *Chukwu* are related by their shared common nature, *chi*. Characteristically *chi* is by nature spiritual and immortal. *Chi* is believed to be at the service of the Supreme Being, God. Much controversy surrounds the role of *chi* in creation. Whereas some hold that *Chi-ukwu* assigned the role of creation to *chi*, others hold that that creative responsibility is reserved solely to *Chi-ukwu*. If the latter supposition were correct, it means that *Chineke* (God creates) must be another name for *Chi-ukwu*. But is it? Achebe approaches this issue by throwing light on the composition of "Chi na eke." According to him, when the stress is put on 'na,' the expression gives *chi* the creative function. Again, when 'na' serves as an auxiliary verb, it means that *chi* plays no role in creation. But when 'na' functions as a conjunction, *Chi na eke* becomes *chineke*, and this, for Achebe means that both constitute a dual deity. Achebe finds this elucidation more attractive, and even argues that its meaning and sense is in line with the other double-headed phrases in Igbo language such as *ikwu na ibe* (entire community of kinsmen and women), *ogbo na uke* (militant and aggressive band of spirit adversaries), *okwu na uka* (endless wrangling), and *nta na imo* (odds and ends). He thus concludes that such phrases express a totality, a duality and that *Chukwu* and *Chineke* share the same attribute of divinity. The Igbo hold to the idea of a Supreme Being called *Chukwu*. And all other lesser gods are subservient to Him. Achebe's comparison of *Chi-na-eke* with the double-headed phrases in Igbo language is anything but convincing. One major reason is that they do not all belong to the same category or level of being to warrant such comparison. Till date among the Igbo the common understanding about *Chukwu* and *Chineke* is that each could substitute for the other. Consequently, they do not refer to two different Gods but one. What is more? At a higher level of existence, *chi* forms a duality with *Chukwu*, and at a lower level of existence where it functions as a spirit-double; it

forms another duality with the terrestrial human being. This is our submission. The seemingly confusing names of God as *Chukwu* and *Chineke* as though referring to two different Gods can be resolved by acknowledging in fact that *Chineke* is an outburst of a pious nature gazer, who is filled with wonder at God's power made visible in his creation. Otherwise *Chukwu* is *Chineke* and *Chineke* is *Chukwu*.

### Chi and Igbo names

In his "The Self" being a paper delivered at the World Conference of Philosophy in Beijing China, 2018, T. Okere identified name with "identity and power" deriving, as it were, from its designation as noumenal. He gives other senses of name to include: *Namen*, *Nomen*, *nombre*, *Numen* used to designate a god. For him name embodies the power of a god both in Indo-European languages as in Igbo. Further he added that "Name is godly. And that it is part of personality and self... name is numen, character, destiny." It is no exaggeration to say that more than two thirds of Igbo names have almost equal number of prefixes and suffixes of *chi* attached to them. Some Igbo names by which *chi* forms a prefix are: *Chi-ka* (Chi is supreme), *Chi-buzo* (Chi is in front), *Chi-nwendu* (Chi owns life), *Chi-kadibia* (Chi heals more than both traditional and medical doctors). We have also some Igbo names with *chi* suffixes: *Ike-chukwu* (the power of Chukwu), *Nebe-chi* (look to Chi), *Anayo-chukwu* (prayer to Chukwu), and *Ebere-chi* (the mercy of Chi). These names show the general primacy of *chi* over mankind. God is the beginning as well as the end of all.

### Chi and Personal Identity

In his entry on "The Idea of art in African thought" K. C. Anyanwu (1987: 253), writing precisely on 'The Notion of Chi' in the book *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey* describes chi as:

dynamic self-regulating and self-directing force . . . the principle of selfhood and individuation because it is that which makes every person unique.

The choice of expression used by the author to describe *chi* is carefully made. The expressions of self-regulating and self-directing force are languages of freedom and autonomy. What else can we say? It shows clearly enough that *chi* is the source and origin of human freedom and autonomy. Moreover the author refers to this force as the principle of selfhood and individuation. No wonder it is applied to a human being with intellect and will. This gives *chi* the essence of selfhood, that creative force that now directs a person's will, and thus, generates wishes, goals and desires in a person according to the author. It is in realizing these wishes, goals and desires that *chi* can rightly be called a creative principle, whose activity is geared toward transforming the world. Similarly, the author identifies *chi* as the source that gives African aesthetic experience its uniqueness. It is this uniqueness, he says, that must traverse the paths of freedom and determinism. It must be stated that *chi* exercises an overall influence over the individual, and not just over his aesthetic experience alone. It is in its role as a creative principle that one can say rightly that chi is indeed a guardian since it propels the individual to greatness. The Igbo employ the word *Ikenga*, an art symbol to denote the driving force of Igbo personality. *Ikenga* is broken down to *Ike* meaning power, force, and *nga* meaning motif. The combination of the two gives the driving force. *Ikenga* is a visible concretization of *chi* in a wooden symbol. But the question is: 'To which direction does *chi* as a self-regulating and self-directing force lead one?' The answer lies in the knowledge of what constitutes Igbo personality. To this end, C. I. Okoro (2020) explains that the full meaning of Igbo personality is tied to *Onwe* and *chi*. *Onwe* is the Igbo word for the self. Whereas the *onwe* supplies the will, the *chi*'s presence, which illuminates and guards the individual, supplies the vision. Because *chi* assumes a spiritual nature, this makes the vision it opens up for *onwe* to be something spiritual. He thus identifies this spiritual end with righteousness, which evidently shines forth in the self's pursuit of truth and justice as foundational ideals for society.

### Chi and the ancestral cult

It is God who assigns each person his or her own chi right at conception. In his entry on “The Depiction of Masculinity in Classic Nigerian Literature” in *Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretation*, New Edition, F. Salamone (2010:143) noted that *chi* constitutes

. . . an essential link between a human being and God, called “chi.” Chi is a personal destiny, part of a person from conception. Chi is an integral part of a person’s personality. Chi is not a passive thing. It actively chooses from among the packages God places before it. Each package contains an individual’s destiny.

In his 1997 *Odenigbo* Lecture on the topic “God is Life: Worship of God among the Igbo,” T. Okere (2015:132) identifies *chi* as a bridge that unites God and man. Further he identifies *chi* as a spirit that dwells within the individual. He enumerates the benefits of the union to include: savoring the knowledge of God, His counsel and direction, the assurance of God’s protection and safety. Finally, the author likens the unity between the man and God to: “Man walking with God in himself.” The Igbo revere their ancestors because they were men of proven integrity. They walked with God in themselves during their earthly sojourn by upholding truth and justice. This is concretized in the great *Ofo na Ogu* symbolism. When it is said that *chi* is the basis of immortality for an ancestor beyond the confines of this earthly life, part of the understanding is that the ancestor in question must have lived in close co-operation and harmony with his *chi* in uprightness of truth and justice, deemed as a *conditio sine qua non* for the enjoyment of immortal existence. The ancestors form the bulk of support for the living members of their families in times of crises. This is sustained through constant communication between the living and the dead. The feeling runs high that the living members of the community may not enjoy meaningful life if their life’s values are at odds with those of their communal gods and/or with the noble legacy of their ancestral members. Without this good rapport according to D. I. Ilega (2000: 37), the individual is stripped of the “basis and pledge of immortality and reincarnation, together with his avenue of communion with his ancestors and posterity.”

### Chi and Human Destiny

The preceding passage from Frank Salamone clearly indicates that chi chooses on behalf of the individual from among the packages God placed before it. The influence of *chi* over the destiny of an individual seems to be decisive. But does it lead to fatalism? If the answer is in the positive, where is then the place for individual responsibility? What seem to be fatalistic are the ups and downs, joys and sorrows of life. One observes here the sense of duality enshrined in human experience in the variations of ups and downs, joys and sorrows. I submit that the responsibility falls on the individual to chart the course of his own success or failure, fortune or misfortune, the influence of his *chi* notwithstanding. Much insight will be gained when we deeply reflect on the expression, *Onyekwe chi ya ekwe*. The expression simply means, if a man says yes, his *chi* also says yes. But what happens when we reverse this expression to read, *Chi ya kwe onyekwe*? But this is another way of respectively asking, ‘what are the things to which man should say yes?’ And ‘what are the things to which *chi* or god should say yes? First, let us respond to the second question that says, *Chi ya kwe onyekwe*. To me, the things to which *chi* or god should say yes are the very contents of the destiny package, which the individual’s *chi* received from the Supreme Being on his behalf at conception. One understands that the package refers to a set of living standards a person is obliged to follow in order to lead a meaningful life and actualize his full potentials in the world. So, the role of individual’s *chi* as a pathfinder is to keep reminding the individual of the need to faithfully actualize the destiny package agreement, which represents meaningful existence for him and others. Conversely, the first question derived from *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe* can only refer to things to which a man should say yes, that would possibly please his *chi* also. The individual can only say yes to his *chi* and to what his *chi* demands of him. So, what is expected of the individual may be his response to the demands of his *chi*. Contextually, the language of response, of compliance is the language of moral demand and action. Because

an individual can neither decree for his *chi* nor wrestle with him, it behooves the individual to comply and obey, to observe and follow, and to translate in concrete terms the dictates of his destiny package. However the individual is at liberty to respond, to say, either yes or no to the demands of his destiny package. What is required then for the destiny package to be realized is the perfect marriage between the individual's ethical life vis à vis the dictates of his own *chi*. He or she must embrace truth, equity, justice, and fairness in relation to his dealings with his fellows and the whole created order. Achebe uses two expressions for this: *aniebonam* (may land not accuse me) and *chiebonam* (may *chi* not accuse me) to denote that these two spheres of existence give sanctions or rather exercise control over the moral life of the individual. The stress is not necessarily on the sanctions they give, but rather on the type of offence for which sanction is given. Sanctions are meted out to offenders at the instances of the serious acts of desecration against the entire created order as represented by *ani* and *chi* in *aniebonam* and *chiebonam*. Let us consider yet another Igbo expression: *Uwa bu ahia*, meaning that the world is a market place. The bargaining method is central to Igbo means of transacting businesses. When applied to destiny, it means that there is the possibility available to one of renegotiating one's destiny. Which says in a word that nothing is absolute. Invariably one understands that life is a struggle. It is by remaining put amidst the vicissitudes of life that success is finally achieved. No wonder the Igbo spirit is so strong that it stops at nothing until success is won. Thus destiny in the sense of being fixed or fatalism might even serve as a mechanism to pass the buck in times of life's crises. Ultimately, it might even be the consequence of not abiding by the standards of a person's *chi*, considered as a violation of the destiny package.

#### **Critique of the concept of Chi in Igbo cosmology**

In the light of the duality principle explicated above, *chi* forms a duality with the Supreme Being, *Chukwu* in Igbo ontology. Achebe holds that *Chukwu* and *Chineke* form a dual deity. However contrary to Achebe's position, our finding reveals that the name of *Chukwu* is the same as *Chineke*. What admits of no dispute is our previous observation that *chi* forms a duality with *Chukwu*, and that *chi* forms a duality with the terrestrial human being it complements. At least this will satisfy the appellation given to *chi* as the spirit double. The association of *chi* with Christian guardian angel has helped us to make some serious observation. It does not seem agreeable to reason that *chi* which should perform the role of a guardian should inflict pain or rather abandon the individual at a time its protection is needed the most. This is part of the reason why it may be difficult to accept that *chi* could be either good or bad. It is unthinkable to imagine an association of *chi* (having the attributes of good and evil) with *Chukwu*, who is all goodness, when *Chukwu* himself could not form such an alliance with *Ekwensu* or devil. Even the Christian guardian angel against which *chi* is compared bears no trace of evil, not to talk of inflicting pain. Among the philosophers that reflected on the names of *chi*, there is only one dissenting voice that said *chi* is not a personal god. Otherwise all the other philosophers are unanimous in equating *chi* with a god. *Chi* as a personal god, therefore, forms a common denominator in all the appellations ascribed to *chi*. Thus, we hold this designation (god) for the true nature and character of *chi*. However all other efforts made to explain the concept of *chi* are quite insightful and commendable. Achebe variously calls *chi* god, guardian angel, personal spirits, soul and spirit double. What unites these concepts lies in their immaterial or immortal nature. Still, we have an objection. The Igbo conceptual world trades with four categories of the soul. According to P. Amaury Talbot, the Igbo identify four different kinds of soul, namely the ethereal soul, the soul proper, the spiritual ego and the Over-soul or Chi. Except for the Over-soul or Chi, Talbot did not expatiate on the others. However, I. M. Onyeocha (2007: 171) offers their elaboration thus: the ethereal soul or *mmuo* is the double or inner frame of the physical form, the soul proper or *mkpuruobi* is the principle of life and consciousness, the spiritual or minor ego, *unamuna* is associated with instincts and emotions, and Chi or Over soul stays always with God. In the above designation of the names of Chi, Achebe did not specify which of the soul type he meant. He simply states the soul without qualification. For this reason, the soul may be rejected, as it seems



ambiguous or at odds with the rest in Achebe's name-dropping group in his designation of the name of *chi*. The Igbo hold to the composite nature of body and soul for man. To identify the soul with *chi* remains questionable. Apart from this, the Igbo do not regard the soul as *chi* or god. That would amount to conflating the two concepts into one. *Chi* is most fittingly called a god. And if a god then, it must be different from the human soul or spirit of man. The human soul is not named a god. It is rather named the breath of God. It is simply that which makes a man a living being. The assignment of *chi* to every individual must have been God's arrangement revealed to the traditional Igbo people after the creation of man. Our assumption here is that God assigned a personal god to a human being that is already composed of body and soul. We have this to buttress our point: Since the Christian guardian angel does not lose its identity by reason of its association with the Christian believer, so *chi* does not lose itself to the soul of man by its association with the human person in Igbo cosmology. In other words, *chi* is not the soul and vice versa. To insist that the human soul is the same as *chi* is not without its consequence. It would mean that the human person has no soul or spirit of his own, but God's. Based on the influence of Kant, we know that moral obligations partly flow from man's rational part: soul or spirit. And this makes a man morally responsible. Otherwise it will mean that God would be held responsible (praised or blamed) for man's moral lapses, and not man per se. How can anyone attempt at reconciling this? Moreover, this will not allay Edeh's fears bordering on a mistaken pantheism or God being construed as partitioned among his creatures. It was T. Okere who observed that *chi* is immanent in man. But he did not conflate the idea of *chi* with that of the soul. The Christian guardian angel against which *chi* is compared with does not substitute for any part of the human person that it is assigned to guard. Thus, we may conclude as follows: that God entrusted man under the protection of his *chi*, and that this *chi* is different from the soul, forms a spiritual edifice in man to the extent that it becomes part of the substantiality of human personality without losing its identity, and that *chi* is saddled with the role of assisting man attain his temporal and ultimate goals in life. It is by hearing the voice of this *chi* and following the dictates of one's conscience that *chi*'s full benevolence blossoms in the life of the individual. Also, R. O. Madu's (1996:178-9) view on *chi* could be summarized as follows: *Chi* is personal and thus singular; *chi* is a personal god; It is the author and controller of human destiny; *chi* is the individual spirit-counterpart of a man; *chi* respects human gender such that a man has a male *chi* and a woman has a female *chi*. *Chi* could be either good or bad. Certain questions may be called forth here. We may resurrect similar criticism as above. It is said that *chi* shares the same nature with the Supreme Being, and that it controls individual destinies. The question is: How can *chi* embark on its role as the controller of human destiny indiscriminately, even to the extent that it can be both instruments of fortune and misfortune at the same time? *Chi* stands for God's deputy or emissary. Can an evil *chi* or god deputize for a God who is all goodness? As a guardian angel, *chi* or god must be responsibly awake to avert danger and protect the one entrusted to its care. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe reports about the brutal killing of the people of Abame village. He said that those who were alive after the deadly incident were lucky because their gods were awake to save them. Conversely, one surmises then that those who died may have received the displeasure of their own *chi*. Pertinent to ask here is, 'does it mean that those who died did not keep to the standard set by their *chi*?' Or that their *chi* could not powerfully save them?' If it were the former it becomes difficult to know what a person should do to merit such a favor or to know when he or she is following the set rules. If the latter, it means that the various gods assigned to individuals do not share or command the same power. If the above suppositions are correct, the partiality of a Supremely Good God becomes evident in the assignment of the god or *chi* to individuals. We are thus constrained to say that the appellations of *chi* as God's deputy or emissary or controller of human destiny may be unsatisfying and inadequate.

## Conclusion

The philosophical exploration of the concept of *chi* in Igbo cosmology has been insightful and inspiring. Such an exploration helps to deepen the depth of mystery in human life. By way of recapitulation, *chi* is a personal god assigned for the good of the individual, a creative principle, a dynamic self-regulating, self-directing force, part of individual personality and selfhood, and, the principle of union of man and God. Indeed it was T. Okere that gave the huge benefits of man's identification with *chi*. He says that through one's *chi*, one: enjoys a special relationship with the divinity, is enabled to acquire God's wisdom and knowledge, benefits from God's direction and counsel, feels secure in God's hand, and attends to life's complexities through communion with God. In the explication of the concept of *chi*, the study made some excavations regarding what should be agreeable to the concept of *chi* and what should not. We made a case especially with the designation of *chi* as a guardian of the individual or God's deputy or emissary, or controller of human destiny by pointing to their inherent shortcoming. The shortcoming helped us to claim that *chi*, insofar as it is identified with either God or angel cannot be anything bad or evil. The same reason is adduced in the ascription to *chi* as the controller of human destiny that is associated with contributing to a person's misfortune. Instead of destiny in terms fatalism, we advocate more for the placement of human actions under moral scrutiny. By that we mean that a human being in possession of will and intellect, considered as a free moral agent, should take responsibility for whatever it does, and refrain from passing the buck either to its fellow or god or *chi*. We reiterate also our earlier position that *chi* is the origin as well as a respecter of human freedom. Life is a mixed bag of the good, the bad and the ugly. No one has attained success in life without a tinge or experience of problems, setbacks and troubles. The ups and downs of life may underline a duality even in human experience. And if they are conceived as such it means that they are like the two faces of a coin. It is when the going gets tough that the touch keeps going. If one fails in life, it could either be that one sets a goal too high beyond one's reach or that one's skills could not match up to the set goal. It could even be the result of one's failure to strictly adhere to the terms of the destiny package agreed to on coming into the world. Whatever may be the case, the individual must be content with whatever life offers him. He must lend an attentive ear to the voice of his *chi* residing within him, translate the spirit of the letter of agreement on the destiny package, and equally embody in his life and conduct the ideals desired by his *chi* or God. The shortcomings discoverable in associating *chi* with evil, Christian guardian angel, God's deputy or emissary may be blamed on the poverty of human knowledge to adequately account for the *chi* concept. Thus, we hold *chi* to be a god devoid of evil. To some extent, *chi* qualifies as a near equivalent concept to the Christian guardian angel, God's deputy or emissary in Igbo cosmology. To sum up, the association of *chi* with evil may reflect a pagan cultural background of the Igbo people. The Igbo may have scapegoated *chi* to bear the responsibility for the moral lapses of the people in times of crises. There is a common saying among Igbo people: *madu mesia asi n'obu arusi*. (Literally meaning; the moral lapses of men are usually blamed on the gods). We, therefore, conclude that *chi* is a personal god as distinguished from the human soul, perceived as the source of human freedom. *Chi* is assigned to every individual to play the role of a guardian and inspirator, and where the individual is a free, responsible moral agent. It is by following the leading role of *chi* and pursuing its visionary proposed enduring values thereof that humanity would attain its ultimate goal of happiness.

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