THE ROLE OF *CHI* IN SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN TRADITIONAL IGBO COSMOLOGY

Marcel I. S. Onyibor*

Abstract
The need for a critical examination of the role of *chi,* the guardian/ personal god in *Igbo* traditional religion believed to be responsible for the success or failure of a person in life is very important. This is because central to this belief is the question of choice of one's destiny, which is a subject of debate among Igbo scholars as there emerge different but interrelated interpretations of this phenomenon. While some scholars argue that the choice of destiny was made by the individual in co conjunction with his/her chi before birth, after which the child suffers total amnesia after birth with regard to destiny package earlier chosen. Others are of the opinion that chi whom Chinaeke/Chukwu the Igbo Supreme Being created with the individual was assigned the role of dispenser and guardian of destiny already allotted by the Creator. Hence, the *chi* the person's guardian spirit takes over to direct and guard the individual to live and act in accordance with his/her chosen destiny; which if altered could have severe consequences. The above belief generates some questions when critically viewed from the *Igbo* cosmological and ontological background namely: If the individual's life lot is totally dependent on his/her *chi* and the destiny package earlier chosen, does it mean that the individual has no role to play in the accomplishment of this destiny? What is the implication of this belief in the individual's journey in life especially in relation to self-actualization, bearing in mind that the same culture encourages hard work and set no limit to individual achievement in life. This paper will thematically, through conceptual analysis, evaluate the *Igbo* conceptual understanding and meaning embedded in *chi* and related function of being the guardian and dispenser of destiny package, as well as how it influences identity construction and self-actualization in Igbo world.
Keywords: *Chi*, Role, individual, Self-actualization, Identity, Igbo, Destiny, Cosmology.

Introduction

The Igbo concept of *chi* is not an ordinary abstract concept but a living reality in everyday life and experience of the individual in the community. It is an operative principle that has far reaching effect on individual psyche and self-actualization. Hence, the need for a critical examination of the role of *chi,* the guardian/ personal god in *Igbo* traditional religion believed to be responsible for the success or failure of a person in life is very important. This is because central to this belief is the question of choice of one's destiny, which is a subject of debate among Igbo scholars as they argue on different aspects, but closely interrelated interpretations of this phenomenon. For the purpose of our present endeavour we shall discuss the role of chi in self-actualization along the following sub heading: Igbo world and its traditional cosmology, chi and identity construction in Igbo world, chi and individual accomplishment/self-actualization in Igbo world, after which we give our personal evaluation and conclusion.

Igbo World and Cosmology

Geographically, Hatch (1967) in Kanu (2014:2) summarized the Igbo tribe and location:

> as a single people even though fragmented and scattered, inhabiting a geographical area stretching from Benin to Igala and Cross River to Niger Delta. They speak the same language which gradually developed into various dialects but understood among all the groups. Their cultural patterns are closely related, based on similar cults and social institutions; they believe in a common Supreme Being known as Chukwu or Chineke.

Despite the above assertion, Uzozie (1991:4) observed with regard to Igbo geographical location that "To date, there is no agreement among ethnographers, missionaries, anthropologists, historians, geographers and politicians on the definition of and geographical limits of territory." Earlier, Uchendu (1965:7) stated that "in its status as an ethnic group, the Igbo share common boundaries with other ethnic groups: eastward, the Yakos and Ibibios; westwards, with Binis and the Isokos, warri; northward, with the Igalas, Idomas, and the Tivs, and southward, the Ijaws and Ogonis." Perhaps, Njoku (1990: 2) was more specific when he posits that "Igbo land is located in the Southeastern region of what is known as Nigeria. It is situated within the parallels of 6 and 8 east longitudes and 5 and 7 north latitudes. As a culture area, it is made up of Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi and parts of the Delta, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Rivers states of Nigeria."

On the meaning and origin of the word *Igbo* or *Ndi Igbo*, there are different interpretations of the meaning of the word as well as the origin of the people. Historically, it is recorded that O. Equiano (an lgbo ex-slave) referred to it as *Eboe* (Ibos or *Igbo* as in present usage) in 1789. Similarly, W.B. Baikie used the word *Igbo* to "refer to villages East and West of the Niger, because of their perceived common language" (Okafor 1992:13). Later, it was used pejoratively to refer to "slaves" from West African sub region by European slave merchants. However, the expression *Ndi lgbo* was derogatorily used by some sections of the *lgbo* community namely Onitsha and *Nri* people to refer to others outside their community, which some scholars including the present writer attributed to the theory of "their outside origin." For instance, Basden (1965:35) reported that "[...] Onitsha people refer to all living East of them as lgbo, the Nri people refer to others including Onitsha as *lgbo* ..." Similarly, Onwuejeogwu,(1972:40) an *Igbo* anthropologist who has done some extensive research on Igbo culture especially in *Nri* subculture interpreted the word *Igbo* to mean "the community of people"

Presently, neither the debate on the actual meaning of the word Igbo nor its origin is settled, because, the word itself is too dynamic to be confined to mere accident of origin or meaning. In fact, the dynamism in it lies in the unity of its identity application in language and culture, geographical locations notwithstanding. Thus, from what has been said so far, this paper aligns itself with Ekei (2001:21) suggestion that it is necessary to see it more from what it stands for than other minor considerations. The *lgbo* person is not determined by common political exigencies or on the common ancestral origin. It is rather predicated on their vision of life, common language and common destiny, in spite of paired dialects. The use of this concept refers more to "Igbo personality", "Igbo consciousness" which gives rise to "Pan-Igbo nation". This concept presently embodies not just the people within a given map, but also those in Diaspora or other places.

On socio-political organization, *Ndi Igbo* distinguished themselves as having evolved a complicated and monolithic centralized system of governance often classified by political scientists as republican, made up of clans, comprising towns, villages, kindred and family units in descending order. Thus, their concept of power and authority is structured around the above levels and membership of various title associations. Economically, they were traditionally sedentary agriculturalists. Hence, the traditional Igbo culture and life, in this paper, refers to what is generally obtainable in Igbo village setting before distortion by experiences of slavery, colonialism, Christian missionary evangelism, neo colonialism and western development in science, technology and commercialized globalization.

However, despite these influences, the typical *Igbo* village setting remains the reservoir of their culture which still exhibits much of their original ideas, beliefs, customs, world views/cosmology and value systems. Presently, the physical features of these villages are changing fast in the face of modern infrastructures, but in the realm of belief and ideas, the changes are not very rapid. Thus, *Ndi Igbo* as used in this work refers to Igbo community not as derogatory term, but an expression of the Igbo people as a nation with distinct culture and cosmology. Cosmology is derived from two Greek words namely *Kosmos* (world) and *logos* (discourse), when combined can imply the study of the origins, structure and development of the world or universe in its totality. Uduefi (2012:118) loosely defined it as that branch of metaphysics after ontology (which is the study of the meaning and nature of being), which treats of the universe as an ordered system. Nwala (1985:7) was more precise when he defines it as:

> ...that framework of concepts and relations which man erects in satisfaction of some emotional or intellectual drive, for the purpose of bringing descriptive order into the world as a whole, including himself as one of its elements. The resulting cosmology will accordingly reflect the sociological, philosophical or scientific predilections of the individual and his group.

In this paper cosmology is used to imply a philosophical theory which studies the world with regard to its origin, structure and ultimate end. There are various cosmological theories according to the numerous cultural and religious background of a given society. This is necessitated by the fact that a given people's ideas about the world, whether at physical or supernatural level, have some substantial influence on their attitude to and outlook on life. Hence, Okafor, F. U. (1992:13) opines:

> ...Our actions are precipitated by our mental attitude. So do our cosmological and metaphysical ideas determine the basic notions underlying our cultural, religious and social activity. In fact, these notions necessarily, though sometimes covertly shape our behaviour and thus guide our actions.

Thus, what one could deduce from the above passage is that the *Igbo* perceptions, attitudes and orientations towards life and even death are functions of cosmological perceptions of their world. Hence, their life styles, and attitudinal orientations are explainable within their cosmology. It, therefore, forms the foundation on which certain theories or principles of understanding reality in *Igbo* world is anchored. It embraces both the visible and invisible, the living, the dead and the yet unborn. It is not scientific in the modern usage of the term, rather like all traditional worldviews, is based on naive interpretation of nature and natural occurrences in human life. Central to the above cosmological understanding of reality is the concept of *chi* (the traditional Igbo guardian spirit/dispenser of destiny) and individual choice of destiny in identity construction and accomplishment in *Igbo* world.

The Concept of *Chi*

The concept of *chi* in *Igbo* traditional religion occupies a central role in relation to interpretation of individual attitudes and accomplishments in life. Life and its meaning cannot be understood without recourse to *chi* as a reference point. However, scholars on Igbo religion and culture have divergent views on the real meaning of *chi*. Chukwukere, I. (1983:523) observes that:

> [...] in the immense but widely scattered literature on chi, confusion still lingers over the exact meaning and full religious and social significance of the term. The main reason behind this can be traced back to the apparently strong legacy left by early Christian missionary scholars and ethnographers e.g. (Basden 1921, Talbot, 1926 and Thomas 1913), from which modern students of Igbo religion and epistemology ought to break away.

The above divergent views account for different interpretations of this concept especially from the semantic angle which gave rise to two major definitions of it either as a personal divine guardian spirit being or as an abbreviation for Igbo Supreme Being Chukwu*/Chiukwu.* as evident in some Igbo names like *Chukwubuike/Chibuike, Chukwuemeka/Chiemeka* etc. Metuh, I. E (1981:46) highlights the above categorizations when he opines that "Chi in my view is one of

those archaic root words which are found in some languages and which defy all etymology." Hence, he suggests that its interpretation should be sought among the traditional Igbo "who have live their religion, whose language, culture and modes of thought and expression are all permeated by it. These can best explain the terminology and the meaning it implies." The complexity associated with the interpretation of this concept becomes more compelling on the ontological level because a critical analysis of this phenomenon reveals that the concept of *chi* in Igbo cosmo-ontological belief system is susceptible to three interrelated interpretations; *Chi* as in *Chineke* the Supreme Being who creates, *chi* as in *chi abola* or *chi efola* (day break or as a form of greeting in the morning hours) , *chi* as a personal guardian spirit/ custodian of destiny or fortune. Only the context determines which of the three is uppermost in the *Igbo* man's mind when he uses the word *chi*.

Thus, Chi as in *Chineke* the Supreme Being who creates, usually spelt with capital letter "C", there are several hermeneutical exegesis of this phenomenon in Igbo religion by scholars. However, this writer agrees with Chinua Achebe's (1998:71) interpretation because of its being in line with Igbo cosmology, when he avers that:

> *Chineke* consists of three words: *chi na eke.* In assigning meaning to it the crucial word is *na*; which itself has three possible meanings…. a) said with a high tone, *na* means who or which. *Chineke* will then mean *chi which creates*. b) Said with a low tone, *na* can mean the auxiliary verb *does*, in which case *Chineke* will mean *chi does create*, and finally, Said with a low tone, *na* can mean the conjunctive and. Here, something fundamental changes because *eke* is no longer a verb but a noun. *Chineke* then becomes *chi* and *eke*. is the correct version.

Chineke which is being interpreted as *chi who creates* is nothing of the sort, but rather is an Igbo traditional religious dual deity, *chi* and *eke*. Achebe notes that "the early missionaries by putting the wrong tone on that little word *na* escorted a two-headed, pagan god into the holy of holies!" (Achebe 1998:71). He further substantiated this claim by saying that eke (or *aka* as sometimes realized in some *Igbo* dialect) as having the same attribute as *chi.* For instance, the name *chinweuba* (*chi* has increase) has another version *Ekejiuba* (*eke* holds increase). Similarly, *Nebechi* (look to *chi*) and *Leweke* (*Lemeke*) look to *eke*, both appear to have exactly the same meaning except that eke occurs instead of *chi*. He further explains that:

> …*chi* and/ *eke* are closely related deities, perhaps the same god in a twofold manifestation, such as male and female; or the duality may have come into being for the purpose of bringing two dialectical tributaries of *Igbo* into liturgical union.

The above assertion is plausibly based on Igbo cosmological principle of pairing as a way of explaining reality. For instance Achebe further used the expression, *ikwu na ibe* that translates as the entire community of kinsmen and women; *Ogbo na uke* for

militant and aggressive band of spiritual adversaries; *okwu na uka* for endless wrangling; *nta na imo* for odds and ends to bring home his point. He therefore maintains that "if *chi na eke* should turn out to belong to this group of phrases, the idea of using it to curse a man absolutely would then make a lot of sense! …. Thus, he asserts that: "if you want to curse a man in the most thorough fashion, you curse his *chi* and his *eke* (or *aka)*. That really takes care of him!" (Achebe, 1998:72) Arising from the above assertion Achebe suggests that the attraction of early Christian missionaries in *Igbo* land to translate *chi na eke* as one word *chineke* "must have been its seeming lack of ambiguity on the all-important question of creation. They needed a "God who creates" and *Chineke* stood ready at hand. Meanwhile, the Igbo traditional thought in its own way and style did recognize *Chineke/ Chukwu* as the Supreme Creator, speculating only on the modalities, on how He accomplished the work and through what agencies and intermediaries. (Achebe, 1998:72)

As earlier discussed, *Chineke* appears to work through *chi* to create man and even consults or work with man either in making the world or enhancing its habitability. The Igbo traditional cosmology has it that the work of creation is not one fiat accomplice, but an ongoing process where *Chineke* and man dialogue on critical issues and moments, sometimes agreeing and sometimes not. Achebe (1998:73) further attests that:

> […] at crucial cosmological moments *Chukwu* will discuss His universe with man. The moments of man's first awareness of the implications of death were such a time….For as we have seen a man may talk and bargain even with his chi at the moment of his creation. And what was more, *Chukwu* Himself in all His power and glory did not make the world by fiat. He held conversation with mankind; he talked with those archetypal men of *Nri* and *Adama* and even enlisted their good offices to make the earth firm and productive.

As a personal god, *chi* is believed to be responsible for the success or failure of a person in life. Madu (1995:33) describes it as a "personal god-divine afflatus-the spirit that animates human beings." Okere (1971:142) adds that "*chi* is really a personal god. It is the Supreme God shared by each individual but more specifically in his aspect as giver and author of destiny." Ekennia (2003:27) was more specific in his description of *chi* as "a unique life force, which each person possesses. No two persons have the same *chi*, it is regarded as the Igbo principle of individualization…. Each person is unique and irreplaceable." Ojike (1955:183) similarly acknowledges that "No one's *chi* is like another because no two persons are identical. A rich man's *chi* is rich and a poor man's *chi* is poor. A man's *chi* is masculine and a woman's chi is feminine. A man's *chi* is equal to that man." Achebe (1986:16) further stresses that "*Chiukwu* created humans in groups or sets but imbued each with his spark *Chi*. This is intended to continue the creative process until the individual dies when his chi is recalled to *Chiukwu*." Thus, for her creation in Igbo world is a continuous process unlike the western perspective. Some scholars have even associated *chi* with the Christian guardian angel. Hence, one is inclined to agree with Chukwukere's (524)

observation that "*Chi* [...] represents the central unified theme that incorporates the different facets of *Igbo* social thought and usages, especially those aspects concerning man's relationship with the inscrutable realm of the supernatural." Hence, Achebe, C (1975: 94-95) avers that:

> *Chi* is an individual personal god which accounts for the fortune or the misfortune that one experiences in life. Hence, the meaning of a person's life is only realized as a collaborative venture *mu na chi m so* between the person and his *Chi*. People often make statements like I am in agreement with my personal god or *chi* as a reference to the collaborative dimension in the individual */chi* relationship. However, there are situations in a person's life when it is believed that one's *Chi* may work against him.

Arinze F. (1978:88-89) collaborates the above assertion when he states that:

> [...] Most *Ibos* believe that each individual has a spirit, a genius or spiritual double, his *chi*, which is given to him at conception by *Chukwu* and which accompanies this individual from the cradle to the grave. *Chi* is strictly personal [...] The ordinary *Ibo* man regards his chi as his guardian on whose competence depends his personal prosperity.

For Ilogu, E (1974:146) "*Chi* is the divine particle in man by which he shares in the Supreme Being and the basis of which rests in man's immortality and communion with the ancestors." Metuh, I. E (1981:68) also sees it "as the immanent presence of God in man or man's guardian angel in life." Isichei, E (1976:25) avers that "*Chi* is a personalised providence which comes from *Chukwu* and reverts to him at a man's death. Each man has his own *Chi*, who may be well or ill disposed." Chinwe Achebe (1986:17) seems to be more interested in its divine origin when she adds that:

> [...] at creation, God entrusted each human being with a *chi*, a creative force, this creative force...is God's representative and emissary on earth, which helps or works in very delicate collaboration with each individual to fulfil those life's possibilities and attributes which the individual personally chooses.

A critical aspect of *chi* revealed by the above scholars, despite the overwhelming influence drawn from their Christian perspective especially as averred in Arinze, Ilogu, Metuh, Isichei and Chinwe Achebe is the fact that they all affirm that there is a necessary relationship between the individual, his/her chi and the choice of destiny/self actualisation in the journey of life. Secondly, they affirm the belief that *chi* is actively involved in the choice of destiny as well as active dispenser of this destiny package. However, what is in contention in this belief is the question of who made the choice of destiny package upon which the individual self actualization depends? Thus, a closer look at Chinua Achebe's description of *chi* as a man's "other identity in the spirit land, his spirit being complementing his terrestrial human being"

as being in line with Igbo cosmological theory of complimentary dualism or what Okafor, C (2004:87) called the "phenomenology of pairing," which is captured in Igbo expression that "nothing exists by itself, since wherever something exists, something else exists beside it: *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya*. Hence, Ndi Igbo do not conceive of any unpaired manifestation of force or being in their world. Thus, the existence of *chi* as a counterpart of the individual in the spirit world is in line with Igbo cosmology.

Also central to this belief is the choice of destiny, which some scholars interpreted to mean that the individual did in collaboration with his/her *chi* before birth. Uke (2007:224) is of this view when he states that "CHI creates an individual and assigns him a personal spirit or *chi*. This *chi* helps the individual in choosing the contents of his destiny package…." In addition, as a personal god in Igbo religion, some Igbo scholars believe that *Chi* connotes *Eke*, which though are different concepts are essentially connected to each other as in *Chi-na-eke* as earlier explained above by Chinua Achebe. Thus Metuh (1999:50) succinctly adds that it is the "creative emanation of God [....] although *Eke* is intimately connected with the creative action, he does not create. Igbo belief has it that when *Chukwu* creates, *Chi* chooses the destiny of the creature, and *Eke* (or *Okike*) lets him out into the world." (Metuh 1999:50). In an earlier work, he argues that:

> Eke … maintains the unbroken ontological bond between a person, his family, lineage, clan and tribe. A son's life is the prolongation of the life of his father, his grandfather, his ancestors and the life of whole lineage. As its numerical strength increases, so does its life force become stronger. Hence, the greatest tragedy that can befall a man and his lineage is for him to die childless. (Metuh 1991:114)

Other scholars like Ezekwugo C.U.M (1987:101) opine that "no doubt, *Chi* and *Eke* are universal notions as far as Igbo land is concerned." He explains that *Chi* with the big letter "C" *Chiukwu* or *Chukwu* is the Supreme God in traditional Igbo religion, while the *chi* starting with small letter represents the personal guardian spirit being." He argues that both are the same and different things simultaneously, and cites some *Igbo* sayings and expressions in which they are portrayed as different entities, suggesting that *chi* is a person's life-spirit received from *Chi* (Supreme Being), while Eke is his patron-spirit (which can be either one of the ancestors or even a deity). Ukeh C. O (2007:224) further explains the sequence thus:

> CHI creates an individual and assigns him a personal spirit or chi .This chi helps the individual in choosing the contents of his destiny package and it is the Eke who finally lets him into the world. During his life on earth, chi and eke accompany, guard and guide him. At death, Chi brings him back to Chi. The main point is that chi is the Chi personalised for the sake of cultic convenience, and Eke is an attempt to maintain the ancestral connection and origins of the life of the individual. Eke is thus the patron, or something like a foster father,

> who, inter alia, maintains the essential ancestral link between its ward and forebears.

Another aspect of *chi* as personal guardian spirit which will help to understand its import in an individual's life has to do with it institutionalization in an adult home. Every adult married man and woman is expected to install a shrine for his or her chi as soon as he builds a house of his own for a man and as soon as she get married and have her own home for the woman. Their shrines are usually sited in front of the house. The husband and wife may have shrines adjacent to each other's. (Okafor 1992:21) The above point can be further buttress by the processes and items involved in its installation for married woman in her husband's house. This usually involves going to fetch the *oku chi* earthen dish from her own mother's established *chi* cult called inyi, *irota, irolu or ikute Chi* (depending on the dialect) containing *chi*- bundle which symbolize the readiness of the person to feed the chi with necessary sacrifices. (Ezekwugo, 1987:213)

The above items are placed or buried within the tripod of planted ogirisi, *ora*, and *ogbu* trees to implant and instutionalize the *chi* cult in a married woman's household from where the *alom -chi* worship and annual sacrifice is offered. Ezekwugo (214) further explains that:

> Alom-chi is a feast in honour of chi [….] Gratitude and appreciation for received favours disposes the giver to continue his act of benefaction [….] The Igbo realizes that the giver of life and all good things should be given thanks and that this disposes him to do yet more. For this purpose a day is set apart in the year for a common worship of chi.

Thus, Ukeh (2007:224) opines that: "it is the *chi*, who brings a person all his good from the Supreme Being, *CHI*. He is the patron who wards off all evils from his god - child, guides and protects him at all moments of the day." In summary, scholars on the *chi* phenomenon agree on its existence and relation with each individual in the Igbo world. Consequently each person sees his/her chi as a personal being, with which he/she could and should maintain an inter-personal relationship. What is our contention here is the extent to which this phenomenon can influence individual identity and self actualisation in the Igbo world.

Chi and Individual Identity Construction in Igbo World

Identity can be literally defined as a character or personality trait of an individual that distinguishes him/her as a distinct person in the society. Rapport (1972:308) defines it as the "awareness of the self as distinct from the other [...]." In other words, it refers to the individual's continuous struggle to define himself, to discover himself and to know himself. He/she tries to grapple with such questions as: Who am I? What am I? How do people see me? How do I see myself? What do I want to become? How can I connect myself to and explore opportunities as well as meet the demands of the

society? (Onyemelukwe, .2004:36) How do the concept and belief in *chi* and personal destiny affect individual struggle among the *Igbo*? How do these help him to define himself, discover himself and to know himself in order to resolve such questions as who am I? What am I? How does my community see me? How do I see myself in relation to community demands? What do I want to become within my community? And how do I connect myself to the opportunities available in the community in order to accomplish my personal aspirations? All the above questions revolve around the role of *chi* in shaping identity and self actualisation of the individual in *Igbo* society, bearing in mind that the role of culture in the formation of identity is very critical and the most discussed version of identity construction. This is in line with Masolo's (2002:88) assertion that the "identities of persons are determined biologically and socially by some assumed homogeneous characteristics which they share with other members of the group which they belong."

However, like other elements of *Igbo* thought, belief in *chi* especially in relation to identity construction and self-actualization in the *Igbo* world holds some elements of absolute as well as counter to this absolute. Odimegwu (2016:56) calls it "a form of absolute-relative dialogics," in which if a man says 'yes' his *chi* also says 'yes.' But there is also counter absolute, "If a man says yes and his *chi* does not concur, let his kinsmen should not hold him to ransom." The first saying presents a relation of necessary concurrence, while the second introduces the possibility of discord in the same relation. It is possible that one's *chi* may say no even when the person has said a very strong yes. This brings to the fore the role of the individual in the acceptance or concurrence of *chi* with the designs of the individual's destiny. Hence, the saying: *Onye kwe chie ekwe* (if one says yes, his *chi* affirms too), implying that chi expresses itself differently in different individual, which further points to the individualistic nature of *chi* in both nature and operation. That is to say that one's chi according to Igbo belief is always at the side of him/her if he/she is fully determined to succeed. Connected with this notion is the nagging question of personal responsibility in the midst of overwhelming influence of *chi* in the share of blame or reward in human action (Nwodo 2004:16). There is also a proposition in *Igbo* myth of creation that one had made a previous choice and had bargained with destiny so that whatever happened to him/her later in life was seen as a consequence of that primordial choice. Thus, destiny manifests here as a philosophical belief of the traditional *Igbo* that "every life is unique in a significant way and is subject to series of enforceable hazards and unexpected rewards all mapped out by *chi*." (Madu 1995:34)

Achebe (1986:18-19) aptly narrated the above Igbo myth of creation which will be cited in detail because of it strategic importance to our discussion. According to her, Igbo myth has it that:

> When *CHI UKWU* created the universe, he imbued man with an attribute of his spiritual nature, intended to continue the creative process and to be the guiding force that gives meaning and direction to his existence. This spark known as chi is unique to each individual. The role that *chi*' is meant to play in the life of each individual is so

> important that an equally significant 'handing over' ceremony as it were, had to be instituted for each and every individual separately.

This ceremony according to her:

> … took place at the *Akpu Ojodogo*. For some, *Akpu Ojodogo'*is a huge rock situated in the middle of the river and for others, it is a unique *Akpu* tree where *CHI UKWU* handed over to each person his *chi.* Whatever the nature of *Akpu Ojodog*', it is here that *CHI UKWU* not only divests part of his divine characteristics but invests man with it. *CHI UKWU* is thus perceived as simultaneously removed but present with man. He is seemingly away or removed from men because he delegates the creative process to *chi.* Indeed, he cannot be completely removed from man since *chi* is his ambassador and representative through whom constant contact with man is kept...., Man, on his part, is allowed tremendous freedom and power of initiative to choose whatever attributes, talents or characteristics he wishes to possess as well as how he will like to use these qualities. The individual and his *chi* at the *Akpu Ojodogo* enter into a long dialogue culminating in a contractual agreement satisfactory to both. The individual's *chi* does not choose what he cannot cope with. When the individual has finished choosing and specifying the details of his life, his *chi* agrees to support him in the achievement of his desires. A pact is then made between the individual and his *chi* to the effect that the individual will not deviate from the terms of the contract without consulting *chi* in return for the support of his *chi*. This signed pact is known as *Iyi-Uwa*, the oath of life, which is sworn to by both at the *Akpu Ojodogo* and witnessed to by *CHI UKWU*, Once this is done, *CHI UKWU* withdraws and leaves the individual to continue the journey to earth with his *chi.*

However, once the choice has been made and the child is born, this chosen destiny is guarded by his *chi* all through his life and cannot be changed. The question that may arise at this juncture is: why is it that the child who participated in choosing this destiny package does not remember anything about it after birth? Some Igbo scholars like Okafor (2004:87) have this to say: “at birth, the child suffers total amnesia with respect to his chosen destiny." But this amnesia does not deter the person from striving to achieve the best possible in life, since only his *chi* knows what destiny he has chosen. Regardless of what one's conscious desires may be, the prior choice made functions as the subconscious drive that predisposes the individual to act in such a way that aligns with his or her chosen destiny. This belief does not make the *Igbo* fatalistic, because no one remembers what manner of life he or she has chosen after birth. Nwodo (2004:16) explains that “the concept of *chi* despite having an added notion of fate is at the same time not fatalistic. In a way, with the *Igbo* things are never quite fatalistic; there is always room for renegotiation" through divination, ritual and appropriate sacrifice.

Secondly, the traditional *Igbo* also firmly believe that human agencies like the family and community is critical to the construction of individual identity and eventual actualization of one's destiny, because through these agencies, hard work that results in a better life is inculcated into the child early enough to enable him or her believe that there is no limit to what he or she can achieve in life. It is only after a person has suffered several misfortunes despite his or her best effort that he begins to suspect that he may not be destined for accomplishment of great things in life after all. However, the final judgment is suspended until after his or her death, when the living will properly assess his or her life journey. This is captured in an *Igbo* proverb which says: *Chi ejilu adi akalu ubosi* (One must not condemn the day until it is over.) Again, the import and authenticity of the earlier cited myth cannot be easily faulted because it does not only expose a lot of facts concerning *chi*, it as well provided an insight into the close relation between the individual and his *chi,* and the consequent devotion accorded it. Moreover, the flexibility of the dialogue between the individual and his *chi* at the famous *akpu Ojodogo* the scene of destiny bargain is in line with *Igbo* cosmology of the 'world as a marketplace and subject to bargain.' Another aspect of *chi* that the above passage brought out is the fact that even though *chi* is divine and supernatural, a speck or parts of the Great CHI or CHUKWU the Supreme Being, it is never regarded as infinite or omnipotent. Nwodo alludes to this when he states that "… not only is it "made", it is "made" with certain limitations." Hence, Chinua Achebe posits in Chapter Fourteen of *Things Fall Apart* that the *chi* of Okonkwo the hero of the novel was not made perhaps for great things. "Clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*." Thus even *chi*, has limitations and "its own destiny." *Nwodo* (2004:17) asserts.

Chi and Individual Accomplishment/Self-Actualization

To allow for a full comprehension of the relationship between *chi* and individual accomplishment in *Igbo* society, there is need to discuss this in the context of other self-actualization indicators in the *Igbo* world especially within the family *ezi na ulo* and the community. The life of the individual in Igbo society is tied to the family, kindred, village and the entire community of the living, the dead and the yet unborn. The individual's journey through life is a progression of different accomplishments of self-realization from the family and kindred levels to the village and community levels. Iroegbu, P (2000:111) captures this in his description of the human person as community structured, when he opines that "a person is a person because he shares, because he communes with others." Mbiti, J. S. (1969:108-9) is more direct when he describes the individual identity in African community as a being that exists in the midst of others. This is captured in his famous statement: "I am because we are; and since we are; therefore I am." However, Iroegbu's later description of the human person as "the communally and self -embodied being that is in search of full transcendence" is more akin to the line of thought in our study especially if one look at his description of human person as a community being that is in journey of self-transcendence. There is therefore, a tacit agreement among some scholars of *Igbo* culture and thought that there is an implicit influence of the community in the life, thought and self-conception of the individual. The individual identity and self-

actualization is formed through the multiple and intersecting dialogues of the individual with his communal thought and belief system of discourse in which *chi* is an integral aspect. Odimegwu Ike (2016:60) explains the above complex dialogue when he observes that:

> Even when the individual is holding a private dialogue with himself in the secrecy of his reflections or when he examines himself in his introspection regarding the things he has done and /or not done, and the things that have happened to him, this private talk of the self with the self is inevitably a conversation with the community. For he is either ruminating within the accepted norms of the community or he is questioning the communal status quo. Either way, the person is engaged with the community.

Thus, the Igbo concept of *chi* is not an abstract concept but a living reality in everyday life and experience of the individual in the community. It is an operative principle that has far reaching effect on individual psyche. For instance, Achebe affirms in *Things Fall Apart* that while the lazy ones like Okonkwo's father, Unoka, blame their lack of success in life on their *chi* chosen destiny, those that imbibed the Igbo ontological principles of daring and renegotiation of destiny, gather courage and keep on moving against all odds, encouraging themselves with the *Igbo* wise saying that: *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe* meaning: If a man says yes his *chi* also affirms. He/she sees challenges and obstacles in life as only temporal setback and that victory is close and requires a little more hard work, perseverance and patience. In fact the traditional Igbo person has it in his/her subconscious that there is always room for a re-negotiation with one's *chi*. Hence, Nwodo (2004) notes that:

> The word impossible has to be considerably qualified if not redefined, in order to accommodate the Igbo conception of reality. The Igbo are bound to think and feel that a whole lot depends on the individual. This affects considerably their attitude to life, instilling in them a sense of self-confidence and spirit of defiance of any form of determinism except of course their own self-determination.

Every traditional Igbo person is imbued by the above principle, lives by it and their existence as well as that of their community has meaning only within this framework, because of the close relationship between this belief and their behavioral attitudes to life generally. To deviate from this will place one on a collision course with his/her family and the community of the living, the dead and the yet unborn. No sane Igbo person will like to dare the community, because of the underlying belief that no one wins a case against the community.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Despite the ambiguous and contradictory nature of some aspect of Igbo belief in *chi* and the current condemnation of the belief in this phenomenon by Christian religion, its influence is still prevalent. For instance, many '*Igbo* Christians' have implicit

belief in the efficacy of *chi* in their journey through life and often resort to its consultation when they encounter challenges in self actualisation. In fact, a critical analysis of some of the scholars earlier cited on the interpretation of chi especially Chinwe Achebe (1986), Arinze (1978), Ilogu (1974), Metuh (1999) and Isichei (1976) suggests a theological reflection of its likeness to the biblical account of creation of man in the image and likeness of God. Thus, there arises according to Okafor (1992:21) from:

> … the Igbo concept of *chi* this one theological fact-that everybody possesses some godhead, some divinity. This is a simple syllogism resulting from the premises that the *chi* is the divine force, the active manifestation of God in his creature and that every human being has his own chi and not only human beings but all creatures at large.

This suggests that no matter how primitive a culture may seem, God has a way of revealing himself to human beings in every culture. Thus implying that *chi* represents the 'imago Dei' in man as conceived by traditional Igbo.

At the philosophical level, a critical evaluation of the Igbo concept of *chi* despite being a religious issue is neck deep in question of individual freedom and responsibility, which has ontological implication in their philosophy of existence especially when it is used to denote destiny, which may either imply destiny or dispenser of destiny. Thus, evoking a kind of fatalism when viewed from the perspective that one's fate in life is entirely determined by *chi*, which may warrant some people to resign to accepting events in their life blindly leading to fatalism. They nevertheless do not allow this to degenerate or relapse into quietism. (Okafor 1992:21) For them, as earlier noted in this write up, manipulation, negotiation and even renegotiation are normal way of navigating the journey of life to placate negative forces militating against the fortunes of the individual, family or the community. This is because he understands life as market where bargaining is the order of transaction. Hence, the apparent conflicting views on *chi* when critically analyze will yield different responses or approaches to the same or similar thought-provoking events at different moments and situations in Igbo world. Thus, some of the ambiguities and paradoxes evident in the signification of *chi* are conflicting yet complementary life experiences, each of which is true in its own right. Thus, Okoro (2008:61-62) rightly advice that:

> *Chi* is a good example of a symbol with accumulative intention, a traditional sapiential and religious symbol which has taken on so many contradictory values that tend to neutralize one another. The *chi* symbol also demonstrates the potentiality of some symbols to acquire oppositional values and function that make polysemy one of the prime problems of semantics.

He further states and I agree with him that "what is important is not the raising of particular philosophical problems; but the spotting of the general philosophical orientation of the *chi*/personal destiny issue in Igbo culture."(Okoro 63). Like in most African cultures and religions, Igbo culture is a participatory one in which God,

Chiukwu/Chineke the Supreme creator is believed not only to have created human beings, but is involved in the daily living of the individual through the agency of *chi* and other spirit beings.

In conclusion, despite the above Igbo belief in the ambivalent nature of *chi*, as a guardian personal god /possessor and dispenser of the chosen destiny of the individual, there is an underlying belief that the *chi* does not have absolute power over the individual. Because chi though created for the individual is not the same with the individual. This is buttress by fact that there is always room for negotiation of one's destiny in the relationship between the two as earlier observed. Even though there is an Igbo expression which says: *chi onye adighi n'izu ihe anaghi eme ya*. (No matter how many divinities sit together to plot a man's ruin, it will come to nothing unless his *chi* is there among them). There is also a contrary belief that sets limit to *chi's* exercise of power over man, *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe*, (If a man agrees, his *chi* agrees.), at the root of this lies the Igbo ontological belief in the centrality of human being in the cosmic order as well as his intrinsic worth and right to speak and be consulted on issues that concern him even at the spiritual realm. This is because, in his interaction with other forces in nature he recognizes his freedom and the sacredness of his being and as a result of this belief, *Ndi Igbo* does not accept any form of absolutism (except the one they set by themselves) which tends to endanger their independence as suggested in the earlier expression *chi onye adighi n'izu ihe anaghi eme ya*. For they believe that man is not subservient to the gods, he only appeals to the gods when he "needs them and may choose to denounce them when they fail" (Kunene, 1980:199) Hence, this study aligns with Achebe's (1975:72) assertion that "it is not surprising that the Igbo held discussion and consensus as the highest ideals of the political process. This made them "argumentative" and difficult to rule. But how could they suspend, for the convenience of a ruler, limitations which they impose even on their gods?" From what has been discussed so far, it would be reasonable to conclude this paper on the strong note that the concept and meaning of *chi* is so central in Igbo thought that it appears in almost every contextual experience of their daily existence. Hence, the full conceptualization and understanding of its role in self-actualization in *Igbo* world can only be comprehended within the individual's existential daily living in his/her family/ community framework. This is because it is only within this system of communal living that the individual discovers his origin, identity, meaning, purpose, significance and his/her destiny.

***Marcel I. S. Onyibor, PhD**
Department of General Studies,
School of Sciences,
Federal University of Technology, Akure,
Ondo State, Nigeria
Email: mionyibor@futa.edu.ng , marsjoe2014@gmail.com

References

Achebe, C. (1975) "Chi in Igbo Cosmology". In Eze, E.C. (ed) *Afric an Philosophy An Anthology*. Malden, Massachusetts USA, Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Achebe, Chinwe (Mrs), (1986). *The World of the Ogbanje*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

Arinze, F.A., (1978) *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Basden, G.T. (1938) The Niger Ibos. London: Seely Associates.

Chukwukere, I. (1983) "Chi in Igbo Religion and Thought: The God in Every Man" *Anthropos : An International Review of Ethnology and Linguistics*, 78,1988 519-534.

Ekei, J. C. (2001) Justice in Communalism. A Foundation of Ethics in African Philosophy. Lagos: Realm Communication LTD.

Ekennia, J. (2003) *Bio-Medical Ethics*, Owerri: Barloz publishers Inc

Ezekwugo, C.M.U. (1987) *Chi: The True God In Igbo Religion*, (Pontifical Institute of Philosophy & Theology, Alwaye, Kerala India) Muvattupuzha, India.

Ilogu, E., (1974) *Christianity and Igbo Culture. A Study of the Interaction of Christianity and Igbo Culture.* New York: Nok Publishers.

Iroegbu, P., (2000) *Kpim of Personality: Treatise on the Human Person.* Owerri: Eustel Publishers.

Isichei, E. (1976) A History of the Igbo People. London: Macmillan.

Kalu, I.A. (2014) "Igbo Proverbs as Embodiments of Igbo-African Philosophy." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. Vol.4, No.1. pp.164-168.

Kunene, M. (1980), "The Relevance of the African Cosmological Systems to African Literature Today" in *Africa Literature Today*, Vol. 11.

Madu, R. O. (1995) "Problem of Meaning in Philosophy and Theology: The Hermeneutic Solution", Academic Paper Presented at the 1995 Graduation Ceremony of Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu.

Mbonu, O. (1955) *My Africa*. London.

Mbiti, J.S. (1969) *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann

Metuh, I. E. (1999) *God & Man in African Religion. (A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria)* Enugu

Njoku, E. E. (1990) *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes and Survival.* New York: Edwin Mellen.

Nwala , T.U. (1985), *Igbo Philosophy*, Lagos: Lantern Books.

Nwodo, C.S. (2004) *Philosophical Perspective on Chinua Achebe.* Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.

Odimegwu, I.. (2016) "Okonkwo: Construction of an African Identity in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart" In Alam , E.J.(ed) *Honoring Chinua Achebe. A Lebanese- Nigerian Celebration in Company of Nobel Prize Winner Wole Soyinka.* Lebanon: NDU Press.

Okafor , F. U. (1992) *Igbo Philosophy of Law.* Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

Okafor, C. (2004) "Igbo Cosmology and the Parameters of Individual Accomplishments in Things Fall Apart" In Emenyonu E.N. (ed) *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe. Vol.1. OMENKA: The Master Artist.* Trenton, NJ, African World Press, Inc.

Okere, T. (1971) Can There Be An African Philosophy? PhD Dissertation, Louvain Belgium.

Okoro, E. (2008) "Chi Symbolism in Achebe's Things Fall Apart: A Hermeneutical Understanding". https://www.ajd.info.2008. 15/04/2018.

Onyemelukwe, I. (2004) "Search for lost Identity in Achebe's Things Fall Apart" In Emenyonu E.N. (ed) *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe. Vol.1. OMENKA: The Master Artist.* Trenton, NJ, African World Press, Inc.

Onwuejeogwu, M.A. (1987) "Evolutionary Trends in the History of the Development of the Igbo Civilisation in the Culture Theatre of Igbo land in Southern Nigeria." A Paper Presented during the Ahiajioku Lecture Owerri.

Rapport, L. (1972) *Personality Development: The Chronology of Experience.* Glenveiw, Illinois: Scott Foresman & Co.

Uchendu, V.C. (1965) *The Igbos of South East Nigeria*. London: Rinehart and Winston.

Uduefi , A. (2012) "Philosophy, Mythology and an African Cosmological System" *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studie*s, Nos. 21 & 22 (2011-2012)

Ukeh, C.O. (2007) *Spirit-Between Man and God. An Igbo-African Christian Appreciation.* Frankfurt, Iko-Verlag.

Uzozie, C.L. (1991) "Geographical Background of Igbo land". In Afigbo, A.E. (ed) *Ground Works of Igbo History*. Lagos: Vista.