

# Superstitions in the Philippines and Hans-George Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons

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**Abstract**—This research paper explores the phenomenon of superstitions in the Philippines through Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of "Fusion of Horizons." By applying Gadamer's hermeneutic framework, this study aims to understand how superstitions function as a cultural system in the Philippines and how they contribute to the fusion of horizons between different cultural perspectives. This study clarifies the role of superstitions in Filipino society, their cultural relevance, and their influence on both individual and community worldviews through a thorough literature investigation and analysis of anecdotal evidence. The results emphasize the importance of respecting and acknowledging various cultural belief systems when having cross-cultural conversations and understanding.

**Keywords**— Cultural beliefs, fusion of horizons, Philippine superstitions.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Superstitions play a crucial role in shaping the beliefs and practices of individuals and communities worldwide, and the Philippines is no exception. As a Southeast Asian country renowned for its vibrant cultural heritage, the Philippines boasts a rich tapestry of superstitions deeply intertwined with the daily lives of its people (Gardner, 1906). This study aims to delve into the phenomenon of superstitions in the Philippines through the lens of Hans-George Gadamer's concept of Fusion of Horizons, providing a theoretical framework to comprehend how cultural traditions and personal experiences intersect (Findling, 2007).

This study aims to investigate the phenomenon of superstitions in the Philippines and examine their intersection with Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the Fusion of Horizons. By exploring the nature, manifestations, and sociocultural implications of superstitions in Filipino society, the study aims to deepen our understanding of these beliefs' cultural dynamics and social significance (Knotts, 2014). Additionally, the study seeks to apply Gadamer's theoretical framework to gain insights into how individuals navigate the coexistence of traditional superstitions and modern realities, thereby contributing to the broader field of intercultural communication and cultural studies (Eroukhmanoff & Teles Fazendeiro, 2018). Ultimately, the purpose is to shed light on the complex interplay between cultural traditions, personal experiences, and the formation of beliefs and values in the context of superstitions in the Philippines (Vessey, 2009).

The goal of this study is to achieve several objectives. Firstly, it seeks to thoroughly examine the various superstitions common in Filipino society, illuminating their genesis, cultural importance, and various expressions in all spheres of life. Secondly, it seeks to apply Gadamer's concept of Fusion of Horizons to unravel how individuals navigate the coexistence of traditional superstitions and the demands of modernity and how this intricate interplay shapes their beliefs, values, and decision-making processes. Lastly, this study aspires to contribute to a broader understanding of cultural dynamics and intercultural communication in the Philippines by exploring the intersection between superstitions and the fusion of horizons. This specifically seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the origins, cultural significance, and manifestations of superstitions in Filipino society across different domains?
2. How do individuals in the Philippines navigate the coexistence of traditional superstitions and the demands of modernity, and how does this intricate interplay shape their beliefs, values, and decision-making processes?
3. How can the application of Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of Fusion of Horizons contribute to our understanding of how individuals reconcile traditional superstitions with contemporary influences in the Philippines.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Hans-George Gadamer's Fusion of Horizon

This study is anchored on Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of Fusion of Horizons. It is pivotal in hermeneutics, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between the reader's understanding and the text's interpretation. It involves the fusion of the reader's preexisting horizons, shaped by their cultural background, experiences, and beliefs, with the horizons presented within the text (Gadamer, 2004). This fusion creates a new and expanded horizon of understanding, enabling a deeper engagement with the text and facilitating the interpretation process (Gadamer, 2013).

According to Dockhorn and Brown (1980), Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons highlights the dialogical nature of interpretation, emphasizing that the meaning of a text is not fixed but emerges through an ongoing conversation between the reader and the text. The fusion occurs as the reader brings their perspectives, biases, and assumptions into dialogue with

the text, leading to a mutual transformation of the reader's understanding and the text's meaning. The study of Campbell (1978) on hermeneutics suggests that Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons also recognizes the historical situatedness of interpretation, acknowledging that the reader is located within a particular historical context that influences their understanding of the text. This understanding underscores the importance of contextual knowledge, including cultural, social, and historical aspects, in grasping the intended meaning of a text (Campbell, 1978). Furthermore, Gadamer (2004) argues that Fusion of Horizons encourages an open and receptive stance towards the text, rejecting the notion of a singular, objective interpretation. Instead, it recognizes the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations that emerge from different readers' engagements with the exact text. The fusion process involves a willingness to engage in a hermeneutical dialogue, embracing the diversity of interpretations while seeking common ground and deeper insights. Hence, Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons offers a framework for understanding the interpretive process as a dynamic dialogue between the reader and the text, resulting in a fusion of their horizons and the emergence of new meaning. It highlights the role of the reader's preexisting understanding, the historical context, and the openness to multiple interpretations in shaping the interpretive experience. By engaging with diverse perspectives and embracing the dialogical nature of interpretation, the Fusion of Horizons enriches our understanding and opens up new avenues of interpretation (Snodgrass, 1992).

Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of Fusion of Horizons offers valuable insights into understanding the role of superstitions or beliefs within cultural contexts. According to Gadamer (2013), the Fusion of Horizons refers to the process through which individuals engage in a dialogue between their own preexisting beliefs and the beliefs of others, leading to the emergence of a shared understanding or interpretation. This concept emphasizes the dynamic nature of cultural phenomena and recognizes that beliefs are not fixed entities but somewhat shaped and transformed through ongoing interactions (Gadamer, 2004). In the context of superstitions or beliefs, the Fusion of Horizons highlights the interplay between individual interpretations and collective cultural frameworks. Superstitions, rooted in cultural traditions, serve as a lens through which individuals make sense of the world and interpret their experiences (Villaraza, 2017). Through the Fusion of Horizons, individuals engage in dialogues with others, expanding their horizons by integrating diverse perspectives and insights (Ramsbotham, 2019). This ongoing dialogue helps individuals navigate the tensions between personal beliefs and societal norms, leading to the continuous reinterpretation and evolution of superstitions within a cultural context. Research by Clark (2008) explores the significance of Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons in understanding the dynamic nature of superstitions. The study emphasizes that the Fusion of Horizons enables individuals to negotiate their beliefs with broader cultural narratives, allowing for the coexistence and transformation of superstitions. Furthermore, Wheatley (2018) discusses the relevance of Gadamer's concept in analyzing

how superstitions function as shared symbolic systems within communities, fostering a sense of cultural identity and providing a framework for meaning-making.

In reconciling traditional superstitions with modern influences, Gadamer's concept provides valuable insights into the fluid nature of belief systems. A study conducted by Enriquez (1992) explores how the Fusion of Horizons allows individuals to navigate the tensions arising from traditional superstitions and the impact of modernization. Additionally, Scott (1994) emphasizes the relevance of Gadamer's concept in understanding how individuals negotiate cultural continuity and change. The Fusion of Horizons enables individuals to reinterpret traditional superstitions in light of new cultural influences, facilitating a process of adaptation and transformation. Through ongoing dialogues and interpretations, individuals can forge meaningful connections between traditional beliefs and contemporary influences, resulting in a synthesis that authentically reflects the complexities of their lived experiences (Gadamer, 2004).

## 2.2 Superstitions in the Philippines

Superstitions in the Philippines hold deep cultural significance and continue to shape the lives of its people (Villaraza, 2017). They are rooted in centuries-old traditions and belief systems passed down through generations (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005). These superstitions encompass various aspects of daily life, including birth, marriage, death, and even everyday activities. For instance, the belief in "pagpag" after attending a wake, where individuals must stop at a different location to prevent spirits from following them, illustrates the profound impact of superstitions on Filipino customs (Santos, 2019). Superstitions also guide decision-making, as seen in the practice of "pamahiin" which influences choices related to business, travel, and personal relationships (Arganosa & Bandian, 1979).

Moreover, they shape interpersonal interactions, such as avoiding whistling at night to prevent misfortune (Almonte, 2016). These superstitions reflect a blend of indigenous beliefs, animism, folklore, and Catholicism, highlighting the syncretic nature of Filipino culture (Macdonald, 2004). Understanding the cultural significance of superstitions in the Philippines requires an exploration of these rich traditions and their impact on the lives of the Filipino people (Lopez, 2006).

### 2.2.1 Origin

Superstitions in the Philippines have a rich and fascinating origin deeply rooted in the country's cultural and historical tapestry, and according to Scott (1994), the pre-colonial period of the Philippines played a significant role in shaping the foundation of Filipino superstitions. By examining various aspects, Juntilla et al (2023) uncover the rich pre-colonial Visayan culture by exploring the data through Symbolic Interaction Theory, Structural Anthropology, and Archetypal Literary Theory, utilizing a discourse analysis approach that presents non-numerical information and provides a detailed narrative of historical and cultural contexts showing that Visayan folklore has also played a pivotal role in shaping Filipino superstitions, highlighting the significance of Visayan cultural heritage, showcasing a rich tapestry of beliefs and

practices (Juntilla et al., 2023). These folklore traditions often revolve around mythical creatures, enchanted objects, and supernatural beings. The oral tradition has been a primary means of transmitting these superstitions across generations, preserving their essence and cultural significance (Stanyukovich, 2003).

Additionally, the influences of lower mythology and ancient belief systems are evident in the origin of Filipino superstitions. Sugue and Reyes (2022) explore the lower mythological aspects of Philippine folklore, uncovering the significance of deities and divine entities in shaping popular beliefs (Gaverza, 2014). The interplay between indigenous beliefs and the introduction of foreign religious traditions during the Spanish colonial era has further enriched the superstitions present in Filipino society (Rafael, 1993).

### 2.2.2 Cultural Significance

Superstitions in the Philippines hold immense cultural significance and continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the Filipino people's beliefs, traditions, and everyday practices. These deeply ingrained superstitions reflect the fusion of indigenous animistic beliefs, pre-colonial influences, and the integration of Catholicism brought by Spanish colonization (Scott, 1994; Macdonald, 2004; Rafael, 1993). The cultural significance of superstitions lies in their ability to provide individuals with a sense of security, guidance, and a connection to their cultural heritage (Scott, 1994; Stanyukovich, 2003). These beliefs serve as a shared cultural language, fostering a sense of unity and belonging among Filipinos.

One significant aspect of superstitions in the Philippines is their role in major life events and rituals. From birth to death, superstitious beliefs are intertwined with various rites of passage and ceremonies. For instance, the presence of "pagpag" or visiting a different location after attending a wake is rooted in the belief in warding off evil spirits (Santos, 2019). Superstitions related to weddings, such as the groom not seeing the bride in her wedding gown before the ceremony, highlight the importance of maintaining tradition and ensuring a harmonious union (Dichoso, 1967). These rituals and beliefs provide a sense of cultural continuity and reinforce the collective identity of the Filipino people.

Superstitions also permeate daily life in the Philippines, influencing behaviors, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. They act as a moral compass, assisting people in making decisions consistent with social standards and cultural values. Superstitious beliefs regarding luck, such as avoiding the number 13 or not sweeping at night, shape people's actions and routines (Darke & Freedman, 1997; Gardner, 1906; Almonte, 2016). These practices are deeply rooted in the Filipino psyche and contribute to a sense of order, control, and the preservation of cultural customs.

Furthermore, superstitions play a role in fostering social cohesion and community bonds. Shared beliefs and rituals create a sense of solidarity among Filipinos, strengthening social connections and fostering a collective identity. Superstitious practices often involve communal participation, such as the belief in "bayanihan" or collective effort in overcoming obstacles (Su, 2023). These shared experiences

strengthen communities' sense of support and belonging, strengthening the social fabric of Filipino society.

In essence, superstitions in the Philippines have significant cultural importance as they reflect a blend of indigenous, historical, and religious influences. They shape major life events, guide daily behaviors, and foster social cohesion. By understanding the cultural significance of superstitions, we gain insights into the complex interplay between beliefs, traditions, and the social fabric of Filipino society. These beliefs continue to be cherished and practiced, embodying the rich cultural heritage of the Filipino people.

### 2.2.3 Manifestations

Superstitions in the Philippines manifest in various intriguing ways, permeating different aspects of daily life and cultural practices. One prominent manifestation is the belief in "anting-anting" or amulets, as Francia (1997) highlighted. These objects, often worn as accessories or kept in homes, are believed to possess protective powers and ward off evil spirits. The anting-anting reflects the deep-rooted belief in supernatural forces and the desire for personal protection (Domingo, 2009; Lopez, 2006).

Another manifestation of superstitions in the Philippines is the practice of "pamahiin" or folk beliefs, encompassing various customs and rituals. According to Amat (2020), pamahiin influences various life events, such as birth, marriage, and daily routines. For instance, pregnant women may follow customs like avoiding sharp objects or refraining from attending funerals to ensure a safe delivery (Fatala, 2021; Corbita & Saministrado, 2019; Portillo, 2022; Lopez, 2006). These pamahiins serve as cultural guidelines that provide guidance and protection within the community.

Filipino superstitions also extend to the realm of nature and natural phenomena. Nadeau (2011) explores the belief in supernatural creatures like the "aswang" or mythical shape-shifting beings. These creatures are believed to prey on unsuspecting individuals and are often associated with specific areas or occurrences, such as moonlit nights or remote provinces. The fear and caution surrounding these supernatural creatures reflect the deeply ingrained belief in the unseen and the mysterious forces of nature (Ramos, 1969; Nadeau, 2011; Azuma, 2012; Lopez, 2006; Ramos, 1971).

Furthermore, the practice of "pagtatawas," or folk divination, is a notable manifestation of superstitions in the Philippines. As Martinez (2019) discussed, pagtatawas involve using candles, eggs, or other objects to interpret signs and symbols believed to reveal personal fortunes or misfortunes. This practice reflects the Filipinos' desire for guidance and a deeper understanding of their lives, relationships, and future paths (Molina et al., 2020; Samaniego et al., 2009; Real et al., 2022; Real et al., 2023; Martinez, 2019; Jocano, 1969). These various manifestations of superstitions in the Philippines demonstrate the deep intertwining of cultural beliefs, folklore, and daily practices (Santa Romana-Cruz, 1996). They reflect the Filipino people's reliance on supernatural elements, the quest for protection, and the desire for control in the face of uncertainties.

### III. METHODS

This study involved conducting a thorough literature review and analyzing anecdotal evidence to gain a deeper understanding of the role of superstitions in Filipino society, as well as their cultural significance and influence on individual and collective worldviews (Snodgrass, 1992; Ataman, 2008). By examining existing scholarly works and gathering firsthand accounts, this research aims to shed light on the intricate interplay between superstitions and various aspects of Filipino culture.

To explore the research question in more detail, an extensive review of relevant academic articles was undertaken. Besa et al. (2021) delve into the beliefs and practices surrounding superstitions in Filipino culture, providing valuable insights into their manifestations and prevalence. Scott (1994) examines the cultural significance of superstitions in the Philippines, offering a nuanced analysis of their impact on societal values and traditions (Lopez, 2006). Abinales (2005) contributes to the field by investigating the relationship between superstitions and collective worldviews within Filipino society, highlighting the intricate connections between these two aspects (Rafael, 1993).

In addition to the literature review, anecdotal evidence was gathered from various sources. Personal communications with ten (10) individuals, using purposive sampling, who shared their experiences and perspectives in a one to three-hour in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interview on superstitions in Filipino society were considered. Of the 10 interviewees, 5 were female, and 5 were male. The ages ranged from 21-31 years old (n=3), 32-42 years old (n=3), 43-53 years old (n=2) 54-64 years old (n=2).

The literature review and anecdotal evidence analysis allow for a holistic examination of the topic, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of superstitions in Filipino society and their impact on individual and collective worldviews.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Superstitious beliefs are deeply ingrained in Filipino culture and have been passed down from generation to generation. These beliefs are rooted in the country's pre-colonial Animist past, with likely Hindu-Buddhist influences, followed by a significant conversion to Christianity (Escalona, 2023). Different researchers in the Philippines have conducted several studies on superstitious beliefs. The first-person narratives of 10 participants described their experiences and insights on superstitions in the Philippines. These interviewees' narratives were selected as anecdotal evidence because they offered the most incredible detail about superstitions in the Philippines.

The views of Filipino millennials on superstitious beliefs and their impact on behavior and decision-making were the main topic of the ASEAN Journal of Science and Engineering Education (2021). The study revealed that millennials still believe in the power of superstitions based on the traditions of their ancestors (Besa et al., 2021).

*"Yes, I believe in the power of superstitions since I saw it with my own eyes what my grandmother did with me and my cousins when I was in elementary. Even until now. One time, my cousin has high fever for the more than a week already and the fever never went down not until my grandmother put something in the food, in the forehead, in all the ligaments in the body" (P4, 25 years old).*

Filipino folklore is rich with various elementals, from giants smoking tobacco to small, grumpy older men living in anthills. Stories of these creatures have been passed down through generations and are still believed by many Filipinos today (Escalona, 2023).

*"Even until today, I still believe in kapre (giants smoking tobacco) because I saw one at the back of our old house back in the day." (P1, 55 years old).*

*"Me too, I also saw green-colored dwende (small grumpy, old men living in anthills). My grandfather told us, his grandchildren that dwende's are categorized in four colors – white, red, black, and green" (P3, 47 years old).*

Common manifestations of superstitions in Filipino society include using amulets and talismans for protection, divination for healing, and the belief in the power of quacks and faith healers to cure specific ailments that physicians could not (Hays, 2015).

*"I remember a story told to me by my classmate in grade school that her uncle had anting-anting (amulet) that would give the power of strength. I asked my grandfather if he believed in it, and he said yes. He even has one. I saw it with my very own eyes" (P2, 60 years old).*

*"In our province, we believe in quacks and faith healers. We believe that there are specific persons who are handed on a task of healing. They can heal ailments that physicians could not diagnose" (P7, 50 years old).*

Superstitious beliefs are also prevalent in everyday life, such as the belief that planting trees near your home brings good luck or that serving pancit (noodles) at celebrations represents long life (Fanoga, 2023).

*"There are foods in a specific celebration that will represent something. For Example, during birthdays, my parents would cook pancit (noodles) because they believe that it will give you a long life" (P6, 27 years old).*

Additionally, the Philippines' long history of colonization and diverse mix of beliefs, rooted in its pre-colonial Animist past with likely Hindu-Buddhist influences, followed by a significant conversion into Christianity, has contributed to the coexistence of traditional superstitions and the demands of modernity in Filipino society (Escalona, 2023). The intricate interplay between traditional superstitions and modern demands shapes individuals' beliefs, values, and decision-making processes in the Philippines, influencing their perspectives and behaviors (Besa et al., 2021).

By highlighting the dynamic and developing character of understanding, Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" can help us comprehend how people in the Philippines balance traditional beliefs with modern influences. According to Gadamer, the horizon of understanding is not static but constantly influenced by history and encounters with others. When individuals encounter different perspectives, they engage in the process of negotiation and mutual understanding, where their horizons are expanded, and elements of the "alien" or "foreign" horizon are integrated into

their own, allowing them to reconcile traditional beliefs with contemporary influences (Gadamer, 2022). This concept highlights the ongoing and transformative nature of cultural exchange, providing a framework for understanding how individuals navigate and integrate diverse belief systems in a changing world.

These findings underscore the continued significance of superstitious beliefs in Filipino society and their impact on individuals' lives, especially in navigating the coexistence of tradition and modernity.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The extensive exploration of superstitious beliefs in Filipino culture, deeply rooted in its pre-colonial Animist past and the subsequent introduction of Christianity sheds light on the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. The application of Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" provides valuable insights into how individuals navigate and integrate diverse belief systems in the face of cultural exchange, emphasizing these processes' ongoing and transformative nature. Recognizing the significance of superstitious beliefs in Filipino society is crucial for preserving cultural heritage and fostering a deeper understanding of how individuals reconcile tradition with contemporary influences, contributing to a more comprehensive perspective on cultural diversity and its impact on people's lives. This is essential for promoting cross-cultural understanding and enriching the Filipino tradition and modernity dialogue.

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