

SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS OF FILIPINOS

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Like any other racial group in the world, present-day Filipinos have their own set of superstitious beliefs they have inherited from their ancestors. Such superstitions cover all departments of life like building a house, birth, romance, marriage, how to attract good luck and shoo away bad luck, promotion of sound health and avoiding sickness, and superstitions on death itself. Some of these superstitious are distinctly Filipino while others have been derived from other cultures. Some are amusing others appear downright ridiculous if not exasperating. While most of these beliefs are national in scope, some are confined to a particular ethnic or regional group. Below are examples of these superstitious beliefs.

House Building Superstitions

Palm fronds consecrated by a priest are placed in the different corners of the house to prevent the entry of evil spirits.

In the Tagalog region, house plans in the shape of a cross are supposed to be a jinx.

The owner of a new house that has been superimposed on an old house will have a short life.

A sunken living room brings bad luck and sickness to the house.

Doors that face west will bring quarrels, diseases and death in the family.

A mirror placed on the wall facing the main door of a house will deflect good luck that enters the house.

The foundation of a post should be bathed with the blood of a pig or white chicken to appease the spirits presiding on the land on which the house was erected. This is based on an ancient Filipino pagan tradition.

To make a house typhoon-resistant, the posts should be turned clockwise before being permanently cemented and secured.

Allowing the shadow of a post to fall on you while erecting it is a bad omen. Shadows falling in the holes dug for securing the posts also bring bad luck.

Using posts with cracks will attract bad luck.

The ridge of the roof should face neither east nor west.

To bring good luck to a child, its first extracted milk tooth is hidden under the roof.

It is bad luck to sweep the floor at night. Aside from sweeping away the wealth in the house, it will also cause centipedes crawling on the ceiling to fall down.

Erecting a house in front of a dead-end street will bring bad luck to its occupants, whether it is the original owners or tenants. Although this superstition is locally attributed to the Pampangos of Central Luzon, it probably originated from the Chinese who believe that a house with such a location is bad *feng sui* and will bring financial misfortune or a death in the family.

Another popular house-building superstition is the cornerstone laying ritual of burying coins under the posts of a house being erected to attract prosperity and good luck. This practice originated from the Ilocanos of Northern Luzon.

Among the Tagalogs of Southern Luzon, the number of the stair-steps is crucial and must be counted in a series of threes called *oro*, *plata* and *mata* or gold, silver and death, respectively. The counting should start from the bottom rung and end on the topmost rung. If the topmost rung coincides with *oro* or *plata*, it will attract good. If, however, the aforementioned rung coincides with *mata*, it will bring bad luck.

For those living in concrete houses, an old coin must be imprinted on the cemented doorstep to ensure a steady flow of money.

It is imperative that a house faces east where the sun rises to guarantee prosperity. In contrast, a house that faces west where the sun sets is a jinx and will bring bad luck. This superstition was borrowed from the Ancient Chinese.

Doors should always be on the right side of the house and the stairs should always turn to the right to keep a married couple loyal to each other for life. Doors erected on the left side of the house and stairs that turn to the left will encourage infidelity.

Doors should not be built facing each other for it portends that money will come in easily but will also rush out quickly. As a stopgap measure, doors can be built parallel to walls so that money entering the house will stay in the house and be saved.

Septic tanks must not be constructed higher than the ground for it would demand a sacrifice in human life. Neither should septic tanks and toilets be built near the kitchen because it would contaminate the food in a psychic sense and will bring sickness to the family.

The owner must transfer to the new house not later than six in the morning during the new moon to attract good luck and prosperity, and the first things that must be brought inside the house are salt, rice and coins.

No part of the house should cover or hang over the stump of a newly cut tree. Neither should a new house overlap any portion of an old house.

A two-story building that is remodeled into a single story will shorten the lives of its occupants.

A snake that enters the house brings good luck as long as it doesn't bite any of the occupants. This is probably based on the practice of Filipinos during the Spanish colonial times to keep pythons in the partition between the roof and the ceiling to reduce the rodent population the house.

While number 7 and 11 bring good luck, number 13 is never used as an address number or the number of a story in a building.

An injury to a construction worker while a house or building is being erected is an omen of bad luck that can be neutralized by killing a pig or a white chicken and sacrificing its blood to the spirits.

A *balete* tree is considered to be haunted and must not be cut down when building a house or else the spirits will attack the construction workers as well as the owner of a house.

Conception, Pregnancy and Birth

A conceiving woman should only be shown photographs of beautiful women and handsome men in order to give birth to a beautiful baby. If she sees photos of ugly people, she might give birth to an ugly babe. Likewise, a woman's favorite food during conception will affect the physical characteristics of her child. Say if a woman likes to eat pork a lot, she might give birth to a baby that looks like a pig or has a hairy birthmark just like the skin of a pig.

If the pregnant woman hops over her husband, her morning sickness will transfer to her husband.

Anyone who shares the food being eaten by a pregnant woman will suffer from spells of drowsiness, dizziness and vomiting.

Plants will wither and trees will bear sour fruits if touched by a pregnant woman.

If a pregnant woman eats eggplants her baby will have violet discolorations on its skin, while eating twin bananas will cause her to give birth to twins.

If a woman looks pretty during pregnancy she will give birth to a girl, whereas if she looks ugly she will give birth to a boy. In the same vein, if the woman's stomach is rounded, it will be a girl; but if the stomach is pointed, the baby will be a boy.

A pregnant woman must not attend funerals, have her picture taken, or stand under doorways for it will lead to a difficult delivery or even death of the baby.

A woman who accidentally falls down hard will deliver a hare-lipped baby.

Pregnant women are prone to aswang (vampire) attacks. Garlic should be hung near the windows and the husband must always keep a stingray tail in the bedroom to discourage vampires from entering it and eating the foetus.

Pregnant women should bathe in the afternoon to prevent hypertension.

A pregnant woman who watches a lunar eclipse is in danger of having a miscarriage. She must not leave the house at sundown or twilight without wearing a shawl on her head to prevent giving birth to a bald child.

The birth of a child signals good luck in the family.

To make a baby fortunate wrap it in old or borrowed clothes.

It is unlucky to show a baby's clothes before it is born.

When breast-feeding a woman's milk will curdle if she eats watermelon, mangoes or any sour fruit for that matter.

Breast-feeding mothers should drink a lot of milk to produce a good supply of milk.

A baby's umbilical cord must be immediately buried upon the birth of a child to attract good luck. A baby with its umbilical cord wrapped around its neck like a noose will mean good luck.

A baby born with its head covered with a hood of thin skin will not die by drowning and will become famous when it grows up.

Money-related Superstitions

Paying a debt at night brings bad luck.

Never let money pass through a window because money will run away from you.

Avoid borrowing money on the first hour of the day, the first day of the week, the first week of the month, and the first month of the year. You will never become rich and will always be haunted by creditors.

Black ants inside the house are an omen of good fortune.

Placing money bills or coins on top of the dining table attracts bad luck for it means that all your income will go to food expenses and nothing will be left for other things.

Showering the rooms of a new house with coins before moving in will bring prosperity.

Ornamental plants with round leaves inside the house are signs of good luck, while keeping vines that grow downward are bad luck.

Bills should be arranged neatly inside the wallet or purse from the largest to the smallest denomination in such a way that when you open your wallet the first to be seen will be the largest bill.

Do not shun or avoid keeping creased or dirty money. You should not regard money as something filthy.

Don't put your bag or wallet on the ground because it is debasing the worth of money.

Do not hoard money. Let it circulate by putting it in a bank or buying something with it.

Use your right hand when paying money and the left hand when receiving money.

Use green-colored objects to attract money.

If you keep money in a pouch roll the bills into circles because circles represent infinity.

New Year Superstitions

Wear a polka-dot shirt or dress to prosperity on New Year's Eve to attract prosperity the whole year round.

Exploding firecrackers and ringing bells at the stroke of midnight on New Year will bring good luck.

If the first sound one hears at the stroke of midnight is a dog barking or a cock crowing, the coming year will be gloomy for such is an omen of financial difficulties ahead, sickness, typhoons and other calamities. But if the first sound is that of a goat, a cow or a carabao (water buffalo), the year ahead will be prosperous.

On New Year one must refrain from buying a lot of things, instead one must save money to increase one's savings the whole year.

Merchants should sell their wares at a low price during New Year to attract more business.

Raining on New Year means prosperity and a bountiful harvest for the year.

Everyone must rise early and keep busy on New Year.

Whatever one does on New Year, whether constructive or counter-productive, will determine how he will fare for the rest of the year.

Superstitions about Death

A black butterfly flitting inside the house will bring death in the household.

A dog barking or howling continuously signifies the impending death of its master.

A man without shadow will soon die.

Candles must be burned for the dead to protect them from evil spirits.

A picture falling from the wall on its own is an omen of the death of the person in the picture.

Sleeping in front of a mirror can cause the death of that person whose soul might get trapped in the mirror.

Trampling on a man's shadow can cause his death.

Dreaming of an extracted tooth means death of a close relative.

Among the Ilocanos dreaming of the loss of a hat, broken earrings and clothes swept away by a river current will mean the death of a relative or close friend. Dreaming of a jar of money means impending death of a family member among Bicolanos. To Aklanons a boat ride is an omen of death in the family.

In Central Luzon it is believed that if it rains when a person dies is a sign that such a person was a good man since even the heavens weep for him.

Smelling the fragrance of flowers for the dead means someone will die.

The spirit of a person who dies a violent day will become earthbound.

A dead person who is buried with his shoes on will haunt his relatives and, during his arrival, his loud footsteps will be heard.

Before a dead person is buried his shoes or slippers must be removed and placed beside his legs so that St. Peter will welcome him at Heaven's gate. For a relative to assist in carrying the coffin to the grave will mean another death in the family.

The Ilocanos break a plate as an offering to the dead.

No kin should look back or attempt to go back to the house after the funeral procession has started.

Leytenos bring out the coffin from the house through the window to make it easier for the newly departed to rest in peace.

If a rosary is placed in the hand of the dead prior to burial, its string should be snapped because continuity in the beads will mean another death in the family.

A person who sneezes in front of a corpse will also die.

Many Filipinos bury precious items with the dead for use in the afterlife.

Right before the coffin is lowered in the grave, the children of the dead person are made to step across the coffin while adults throw flowers into the open grave so the spirit of the departed kin will not haunt them.

Sundry Superstitions

Meeting a funeral entourage, riding a vehicle with 13 passengers, or traveling on a Good Friday invites bad luck and accidents.

Among the Maranaws of Mindanao, hearing the sound of a house lizard is an omen that one should not travel on that day.

Walking under a ladder is bad luck.

Cavitenos believe that a son or daughter who is devoted to his or her parents will receive a lot of blessings after the death of the parents.

A baby greeted and kissed by a stranger will get sick.

A person whose face does not reflect in the mirror is either a vampire or a witch.

If a person cannot look another in the eye, he is surely possessed by an evil spirit.

Opening an umbrella indoors brings bad luck.

A maiden who sings in front of a stove will marry a widower.

A spoon that accidentally drops on the floor means that an unexpected female visitor will arrive. If it is a fork that drops means that the surprise visitor will be a man.

It is unlucky to cut one's hair or fingernails after sundown.

If one accidentally bites his tongue people are talking about him.

It is bad luck to comb one's hair after dark.

If one sleeps while his hair is still wet, he will develop bad eyesight.

If a bad spirit tries to confuse and mislead a traveller, reversing his shirt will enable him to reach his destination safely.

If one catches a two-tailed lizard, he will be lucky in gambling.

Throwing a handful of salt into the fire will bring instant relief to a depressed person.

The Meaning of Moles

A mole on the back of a man augurs conflict and misfortune, while on a woman it foretells hardship in life and difficulty in giving birth.

A mole on the back of the neck means that the person is a liar and is an unfaithful lover.

A mole on the left shoulder means that the person will carry a heavy burden in life.

A mole on the temple is a sign of wisdom and courage.

A mole in between the eyebrows means that a person easily attracts the opposite sex and has magnetic appeal.

A mole on the eyebrow in a man means that he is a flirt and is inconstant in affairs of the heart. In the case of a woman it means loyalty when it comes to love.

For both men and women, a mole on the corner of the eye where the tears flow means the person will always survive his or her mate and marry many times.

A person who has a mole on the center of his forehead means that he possesses an acute intellect and will be successful in business.

A mole on the nose means that a person is oversexed.

A mole on the left chin is a sign of prosperity and many children.

A mole on the right chin means that the person has a good heart and knows how to manage his financial resources.

A mole on the upper lip means good luck in marriage.

A mole on the neck means lung problems but also a big inheritance.

A mole on the center of the chest means that the person will always be happy, loyal, and brave and is protective of his name and honor.

A mole on a man's heart means that he is a flirt while on a woman means that she is loyal when it comes to love.

A person who has a mole on the right side of his chest just above the ribs is a sign of cowardice and a low intelligence.

A mole on the stomach indicates that the person is a glutton, is selfish, and is untidy in the way he grooms himself.

In a woman a mole near the navel means she will bear a lot of children, while in a man it means that he will always be energetic.

A mole on the hips signifies that the person will have many children, has a sound health, is industrious and has forbearance.

A mole on the right thigh means prosperity and happiness in marriage.

A mole on the left thigh means a life of hardship and lack of friendship.

A mole on the right knee means that a person will have a happy marriage but will lack friends.

A mole on the leg is a sign of a lazy and irresponsible person.

In a man a mole on the heel indicates that he is fond of grooming himself and wearing stylish clothes. In a woman it means that she is stubborn but industrious.

Blooming Omens

As an old English poem contends:

The language of flowers

Is not all sweetness.

They have dark powers,

Many bear witness.

Roses are red,

Violets are blue-

Oh, shrink in dread

From the charms they brew!

The *kalachuchi*, a Philippine ornamental plant, is believed to be a harbinger of death.

A family living in a house surrounded by flowers called *bandera espanola* will always run into debt, no matter how large its income.

The barrio folks of Negros Occidental believe that the fragrance of the *dama de noche* attracts witches.

The Cebuanos believe that the *azucena* flower brings misfortune and even death. In contrast young swains in Northern Mindanao consider the same flower as a lucky love charm.

In Cebu the century plant, a hardy ornamental vine, is also considered as a plant that attracts death in the family.

In the mountain barrio of Igboras, Iloilo, the tree of the fragrant ilang-ilang is regarded as bad luck because evil spirits always haunts it.

The fishermen of Semirara Island in Antique believe that the everlasting flower is lucky because it brings a big catch to fishermen and staves off danger at sea.

Many folks subscribe to the superstition that the wood rose can ward off lightning and brings long life.

Ref.: <http://felixfojas.wordpress.com/2012/03/06/superstitious-beliefs-of-filipinos-4/>

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