

A case study on Pahang-Malaysia: A scrutinize of sociological impacts of superstition in the life manner of Malaysian people

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Abstract

This research paper is a study on sociological impact of superstition in public's lifestyle that has been carried out as a case study in Pahang-Malaysia. In view of the possibility of occurring unlikely events and fast advancement of sciences, it is believed that superstitious beliefs and faiths are disappeared. But, superstitious beliefs are not changed and disappeared as per the present conditions and affect the public life and their way of lives. Under such circumstances, the present investigation attempts to study the under discussion topic and issue with a significant perspective and five assumptions are regarded in view of the theories propounded by Malinowski, Max Weber, Samuel and Weber. As per the theoretical framework of the investigation, every society is based on its rituals, cultural basis, customs and dominant values of that society, selects particular reaction to satisfy the requirements of the individuals and institutionalizing them in the society that would consequently direct to the progression of special believes and influential behaviors crystallizing in the life style. So, the research assumptions are studied employing study survey procedure, interview and questionnaire. While the findings secured from Pearson correlation coefficient show, there is a correlation among independent variables including superstitious believes, morals and the function of superstition and relying variable of life style. In other word, as compared with the individuals who do not believe in superstitious notions, people who believe in superstition have more traditional life style; on the other hand, the persons that believe in superstition have more modern way of life. Consequently, as compared with the people who do not accept superstitious beliefs, people who accept the function of superstition in a society have very conventional way of life showing that the influence of social superstition is disappearing in the life style and does not undermine the people's life. In the second analytical level, multifunctional regression test applied to assess theoretical pattern indicates that there is a relation between superstitious believes, morals and also between social superstition with the function of superstition and way of life.

Keywords: superstition, life style, sociology

Introduction

During the history, wrong knowledge and perceptions about different phenomena such as superstition have always influenced human behaviors so that it can be said that a part of various societies includes superstitious notions and there have been conflicts and long fights due to these perceptions and notions in societies. A short look at human life indicates that the appearance of superstition is derived from human fears from material and mental conditions and these superstitious notions have been transmitted from one generation to another during the time.

In Malaysia, some beliefs are the results of daily, family, religious, and individual trials and memories of Indo-Malaysian race and even some belong to human primary periods (when Aryan family immigrated to Malaysia plateau) such as the legends pertain to moon, sun, dragon, and so forth and some other superstition can be considered as the result of neighbors' attack, e.g. Chaldea and Assyria which were the biggest source of superstition and magic.

Maybe superstition, as a human-made phenomenon, is only problem which survives in addition to the changes and developments of societies and has been increased among people and influences their behavior, speaking and thinking. Therefore, the present study attempts to present a theoretical design investigating the effect of superstition in people life style through both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Statement of the problem

Interest, understanding and discovering the world with the motivation of realizing and controlling it established the ideology of primary human. In fact, the questions about life raised for different ethnics were almost the same; also, the interest and motivation to understand the world was treated in a common way. But during the history, many different answers were provided for these questions and each of these answers were changed into beliefs and those unreasonable beliefs were called superstition.

Generally, superstition sometimes has religious aspect and sometimes has historical aspect and people imitate them without knowing its behavioral cause. However, believing in unreasonable and unjustifiable beliefs affects the way of thinking, emotions and recognitions of individuals and this effect determines their action way. In other words, when individuals' life style is regulated with superstition, for example, believing in astrology, good luck, bad luck, horseshoe, sneezing as a sign to wait, sore eye, and so forth, a nonscientific supposition is created and people's dynamic work, thinking and planning which are the requirements of each society's development are hindered. In such condition, scientific view is deactivated and any effort to find scientific and reasonable solution is removed leading to laziness and uselessness and ultimately a kind of passiveness is created in society.

With respect to the movement of communities towards development and modernity in which using rationale is the main factor or as Weber stated, rational action is its main base leading to advanced technology in different aspects of life, but why there is still superstition among people? Superstition may have been decreased compared with the past but they still exist.

Now, considering the superstitious beliefs existing in Malaysian communities, especially in small cities with traditional life styles, the present study tends to explore the changes of superstition in Pahang city, the social factors keeping them in society, their effect in people life style in the present and past time, and the helpful strategies to decrease superstition effect and make individuals' behaviors reasonable and rationale.

Significance of the study

In the present society of Malaysia, there are many social-political and economic crises and irregularities. Investigating the sociological effect of superstition in people's life style as an element in their country's development or underdevelopment contribute officials to clarify the status quo in order to promote individual and social life by making a balance between demands and facilities in society.

The subject studied in this paper is of importance due to its applied and theoretical aspects. It is both fundamental research causing to more understanding about sociological aspect (i.e. recognizing superstition and its effects in life) and applied so that its results can be used in planning and policy making through recognizing variables creating superstitious beliefs. In this regards, the significance of this study is so that no or little knowledge about this issue can expand baseless and wrong suppositions and cause people to be lazy, passive and determinism and finally, rational thinking is disappeared leading to underdevelopment in the country.

Research objectives

The main objective:

Investigating sociological effect of superstition in people's life style (a case study in Pahang city)

The secondary objectives:

- Investigating the status quo of superstitious beliefs existing in the society
- Investigating the affecting factors of superstition in life style

- Presenting practical strategies to decrease the tendency to superstition
- Recognizing barriers and problems

Literature review

Conducted a study on “Superstition in Malaysia”. In this study, he used documentary (library) method and the statistical population was whole Malaysia. As he concluded, there were more than 3000 superstitious beliefs in Malaysia. She selected 384 women (between 20 to 50 years) from region 22 of Tehran using multi-stages systematic random sampling. She also used survey method in her study. As she concluded, there was a significant relation between “social status, job, and education” and “cultural life style” but there was no significant relation between income and life style. She also reported that there was no significant relation between age and life style.

In America, Adorno, Brunswick, and Sanford (1950) investigated the relation of characteristic and family environment with superstitious beliefs. They used a sample including 2000 men and women (above 40 years) selected by random sampling and interview. They reported that highly biased people were had more superstitious beliefs and the environment in which these superstitious people lived caused to apply inflexible control over children and this is the factor encouraging superstitious beliefs.

Method

The present study used documentary (library) and survey methods.

Data gathering tools

To gather the required data of the study, questionnaire was used. The applied questionnaire included personal information questions and the questions pertained to the main research variables. These questions were designed based on the research hypotheses. The reliability of the applied questionnaire was also evaluated using Cronbach’s Alpha. The questionnaire was based on Likert scale and was completed through personal interview through field method.

Statistical population

Pahang (Malay pronunciation: is the third largest state in Malaysia, after Sarawak and Sabah, and the largest in Peninsular Malaysia. The state occupies the huge Pahang River basin. It is bordered to the north by Kelantan, to the west by Perak., (9612 men and 9741 women).

The findings obtained from interviewing Pahang’s citizens

Pahang city’s people were interviewed to get familiar with their beliefs. Using interview, superstitious beliefs were gathered and classified into s religious, social and moral superstition.

Religious beliefs

- If couples married in demise days of The Imams, they would have six-finger child.
- If a person died and people red one of Quarn Suras 40 times and tied a thread and put the thread in died person’s shroud, died person will have less grave pressure.
- If family of a died person put some soil of died person’s grave on their head, they would be more calm and patient.
- When a person went to visit God’s home (Makka), people cooked pottage and believed that the pottage would be eaten at home and would be taken out of the home because it is ominous and cause to passenger’s death.
- When a person died, survivors went over deceased’s grave and set fire in order that an animal cannot bring him/her out of the grave and in the morning, they poured water on the grave and said that wake up , your first grave night ended, stand up and pray.
- Combing hairs was not a good act at night since they believed that devils stay within hairs and it is sin.
- It should be said “in the name of God” before pouring boiled water on the earth to keep elf and fairies Childs away in order that they are not bothered and don’t die due to boiled water.
- When they see thin crescent moon (moon in the first Lunar month), they should look at a grass, agate ring, the right chest, or running water and pour it on their face as happiness sign.
- When one sneezes, they should stop doing things and send 70 blessings (Salavat).
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Social superstition

- In old Pahang, people believed that people should not marry during 13 days of Eid to be happy.
- If a girl married to a boy late, it was said that they took the dog, so, water was sprayed to them from behind without that they understood it.
- They believed that touching wood kept persons from sour eye away.
- A scissor and a loaf of bread were placed over the head of a woman gave a child birth to keep elf and fairy away from her.
- They believed that they would have gust if a shoe was placed over another pair.
- When losing something, it was believed that a corner of scarf would be tied indicating that fairy girl had been spelled and when the tie was opened, the lost thing would be found.
- They believed that when right ear ringed, someone was speaking about the person`s In good manner and if left ear ringed, someone was talking bad things about him/her.
- They believed closing and opening scissors continuously leads to quarrel.
- They also believed that a man with bidirectional bread will have two women.
- It was believed that if a crow sits in front of a home and plunks continuously, a letter or passenger should be expected.
- Further, if right hand of a person scratches, he/she will gain money and if left hand scratches, he/she will lose money.
- Moreover, if a woman covers back of her veil, she will be divorced.

Ethical superstition

- In Pahang, it was believed and it is still believed that Saturday night is not a good night to marry and couples won't be happy (Saturday night is not considered a good date to do important things).
- If a boy infant is put into bride`s arms in marriage night, her first child will be boy t is considered as an ominous sign if mirror is broken when bride is going to her home.
- Another belief is that if a person put four eggs in front of four wheels of his/her new car, the car will be protected from sour eye.
- If a guest take his/her nails in host`s home, it is implicated that he/she is an enemy and if guest comb his/her hairs, it is indicated that he/she is a friend.
- In Pahang, in shortage of rain, scissor is put under rainspout or a shovel is put backward in homes water canals or writ names of 7 or 40 bald persons and hang it on rainspout by a tread.
- It is believed that hugging knees is a sign of sadness and enemy.
- In Pahang, there is an old water spring boiling from mountain, namely Abbas Abad spring well. People believe that putting coin into this water causes happiness.
- If a cow gives birth to two children, the owner will have a good year.

Table 1- Determining measuring indices

Variable	Type		Index
	Dependent	Independent	
Superstition		*	Unreasonable beliefs – nonscientific beliefs
Religious superstition		*	Spell, infelicity, ...
Ethical superstition		*	Infelicity, sure eye, Tuesday, ...
Social superstition		*	Taking dog celebration, breaking egg
superstition function		*	Giving peace, making unity, ...
Life style	*		The way of spending free time, way of thinking, way of speaking, way of dressing

Questionnaire

In the present study, it was attempted to provide and specify statistical categories and required indicators based on the considered variables and determined indices. Then, the items of the questionnaire were achieved using them. The questionnaire included 62 questions involving the personal questions and the questions pertained to the main variables.

Sample and sampling method

Considering the features of statistical population, random sampling was used. To determine sample size, Cochran formula was used which is as follow:

$$n = \frac{\frac{t^2 pq}{d^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{N}(\frac{t^2 pq}{d^2} - 1)}$$

By substituting above numbers into the formula, the sample size was obtained 387 indicating the number of research population.

Findings

Religious superstition: according to the tables, the amount of believing in religious superstition is low in 14/7% of the sample, average in 56/7% of the sample and high in 28/6% of the sample.

Accordingly, it can be claimed that a large number of the sample believe in religious superstition.

Table 2- religious superstition

Row	Description	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Low	53	13.9	14.7	14.7
2	Average	204	53.4	59.7	71.4
3	High	103	27.0	28.6	100.0
4	Total	360	94.2	100.0	
5	No answer	22	5.8		
	Total	382	100.0		

Figure 1- diagram of religious superstition

Ethical superstition: as the Table 3 shows, the amount of ethical superstition is at low level in 30/7% of the sample, at average level in 43/8% of the sample and at high level in 25/5% of the sample.

So, it can be said that although believing in ethical superstition among the sample is common, it is less believed by the sample compared with religious superstition.

Table 3- ethical superstition

Row	Description	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Low	106	27.7	30.7	30.7
2	Average	151	39.5	43.8	74.5
3	High	88	23.0	25.5	100.0
4	Total	345	90.3	100.0	
5	No answer	37	9.7		
	Total	382	100.0		

Figure 2- diagram of ethical superstition

Social superstition: as shown in Table 4, the amount of belief in social superstition is low in 33/2% of the sample, average in 59/7% of the sample and high in 7/1% of the sample.

Accordingly, it can be stated that a large number of the sample believe the common social superstitions.

Table 4- ethical superstition

Row	Description	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Low	113	29.6	32.2	33.2
2	Average	203	53.1	59.7	92.9
3	High	24	6.3	7.1	100.0
4	Total	340	89.0	100.0	
5	No answer	42	11.0		
	Total	382	100.0		

Figure 3- diagram of social superstition

Superstition function: according to Table 5, the amount of superstition function is at low level in 33/4% of the sample, at average level in 46/5% of the sample and at high level in 20/1% of the sample.

Generally, as obtained data indicate, it can be said that a great number of the sample consider superstition is affective.

Table 5- ethical superstition

Row	Description	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Low	120	31.4	33.4	33.4
2	Average	167	43.7	46.5	79.9
3	High	72	18.8	20.1	100.0
4	Total	356	94.0	100.0	
5	No answer	23	6.0		
	Total	382	100.0		

Figure 4- diagram of superstition function

Life style: according to Table 6, 16/6% of the sample has a traditional life style and 8/9% of the sample has modern life style. But, a main part of the sample (74/5%) is placed at average level of this spectrum, that is, there is a combination of both modern and traditional style in their life.

Table 6- ethical superstition

Row	Description	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Traditional	56	14.7	16.6	16.6
2	Traditional-modern	251	65.7	74.5	91.1
3	Modern	30	7.9	8.9	100.0
4	Total	337	88.2	100.0	
5	No answer	45	11.8		
	Total	382	100.0		

Figure 5- diagram of life style

The relation between variables

To test analytical model of the research and investigate its analytical power, the relations between independent variable are studied (Table 7).

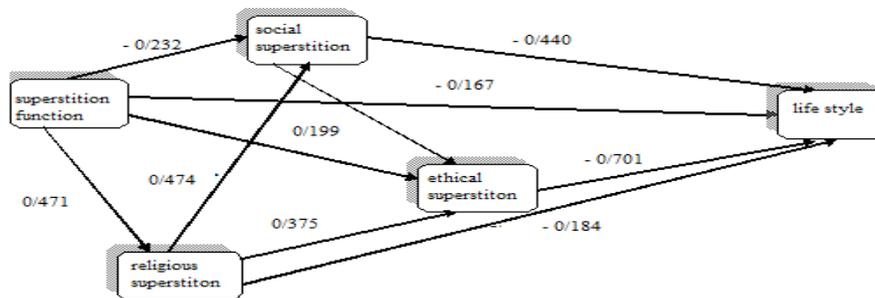
Table 7- the relations between independent variables

	Religious superstition	social superstition	Social superstition	Superstition function
Religious superstition	R= 1.0 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/704 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/580 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/499 Sig = 0/000
Religious superstition	R= 0/704 Sig = 0/000	R= 1.0 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/743 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/594 Sig = 0/000
Religious superstition	R= 0/580 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/743 Sig = 0/000	R= 1.0 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/548 Sig = 0/000
Religious superstition	R= 0/499 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/594 Sig = 0/000	R= 0/548 Sig = 0/000	R= 1.0 Sig = 0/000

The above table shows the correlation between independent variables. According to the shown data, there is correlation between four independent variables of “religious superstition”, “social superstition”, “ethical superstition”, and “superstition function”. All these correlations are positive and approximately strong.

According to obtained results, schematic of one way analysis path for determining life style variable is presented as follow:

Analysis path model



Conclusion

As the research findings revealed, there is a significant correlation between two variables of “religious superstition” and “life style”. In other words, individuals believing in religious superstition, compared with people who do not believe in such superstition, have a more traditional life style and vice versa. Considering Weber’s theory, some behaviors of individuals specify traditions and mostly, people do not ask any question about them and think that since these beliefs have been existed from past, they should be still exist. Now, when these traditions direct people’s behavior, especially in a society in which religious issues are of high importance, such beliefs and behaviors are more strength.

Moreover, there is a significant correlation between tow variables of “ethical superstition” and “life style”. Therefore, compared with people believing in this kind of superstition, people who believe in ethical superstition have a more modern life style. Considering the mentioned definition, it can be concluded that people’s beliefs forming in a small community affect their behavior and life style subsequently. There is superstition in every community and according to Merton, its form may have been changed in this period of time. That is, they have been used differently in communities with respect to some objectives so that leads to create superstitious beliefs.

Additionally, there is no significant correlation between “social superstition” and “life style”. social superstition and superstition known in a country gradually lose its effectively in people’s social life and other new beliefs which are derived from humans thoughts in this period of time are replaced with them, the beliefs which are related to individualism and self-orienting.

Finally, there is a significant correlation between “superstition function” and “life style”. In other words, people who believe in common superstition affectivity, in comparison with those who do not believe in such affectivity, have a more traditional life style. According to Mlinowski’s theory and functionalisms, human always thinks about things that can meet his/her needs and since human have various needs such as ideological and physical needs, thinking about things which can meet these needs is considered as human activities.

Suggested strategies

Briefly, the following strategies are suggested to achieve the objectives at macro-national level:

- By increasing the popularity of printed books in some of them it is only indicated that reading some prays decreases physical pains and other problems, these books should be modified by religious and social experts.
- In each city, religious missionaries are closely related with citizens (especially in small cities) and they are highly respected by people. So, people follow them as a behavioral pattern. Accordingly, religious missionaries should make sure of their statements to decrease the superstitious beliefs.
- As a useful strategy, training and increasing information level can be suggested. Promoting the culture of science-oriented believing, thinking and research in society through public education and high education in order to reinforce the place of knowledge in the country can be a way of achieving to a favorable status. Trainings also are needed to implement separately at communities for public. Additionally, booklets and brochures can be helpful to enhance knowledge of individuals at communities and schools level with a simple and understandable language.
- Mass media, especially broadcast, can build culture and transfer new views indirectly. So, it is better that the performance of media is in accordance with the reported results of the researches. In general, by providing programs and creating awareness in order to create tendency in people towards reasonable thinking leading to rational action, national media can play significant role to decrease peoples’ tendency towards superstition at least in social behaviors domain.
- Family is the most important and affective institutes in each society and in a family, children know parents at their primary life periods and most of beliefs are formed in family. So, parents and their avoidance from wrong beliefs cause children’s awareness and it is the same reason to prevent transmitting wrong beliefs to the next generations.

- Defining and approving or reconsidering rules in society and serious treatment with the promotion of wrong and superstitious beliefs (especially regarding religious issues) which may disturb society's peace and peoples' life and encourage individuals' laziness.

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