

# Superstitions

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Max Hunter, Mia Kobs, Kira Koehler, Ama Kyerewaa, Derek Lue, Marlee  
Montella, Casey Ross, Sanjena Venkatesh, Kipling Weisel

Russian 13

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# Overview

Social Groups:	People:
Greek	Madeline Donahue, Kira Koehler
Chinese	Seby Carter, Mia Kobs, Casey Ross
Indian	Derek Lue, Marlee Montella, Sanjena Venkatesh
Mexican	Ama Kyerewaa
Korean	Clay Han, Will Graber, Kipling Weisel
American	Oliver Campbell, Max Hunter

# What are Superstitions?

**Superstitions** = traditional sayings that describe conditions (either signs or causes) and their results

Area of Folklore: Verbal, Customary, Material

Types of Superstitions:

1. Sign Superstitions: if A, then B
2. Magic Superstitions: if you do A, then B
3. Conversion Superstitions: If A, then B, unless C

# Greek Superstitions

- Δεισιδαιμονία = “fear of demons”
- distinct languages, customs, and traditions across the region
- Superstitions passed down from generation to generation
  - Older generations follow superstitions more seriously
  - Greeks value culture
- Many superstitions practiced to bring good luck and prevent bad luck



Total: 6 Informants; 10 Superstitions; 2 Subgenres (Good & Bad Luck)

# Greek Folklore: Evil Eye

Contextual Data: In 100 AD, Plutarch claimed that eyes are the primary source of deadly spells and evil occurrences

Item: An individual's stare, comments, or praises of another is said to cause harm, misfortune, and bad luck

- Subgenre: Bad Luck
- Sign Superstition - If someone is glared at with evil intentions, he will be condemned with bad luck and misfortune.
- Oldest and most popular superstition
- Explanation for bad things that occur
- Recognized by the church



# Informant: Evangelia Constantine

“How do you receive the Evil Eye?”

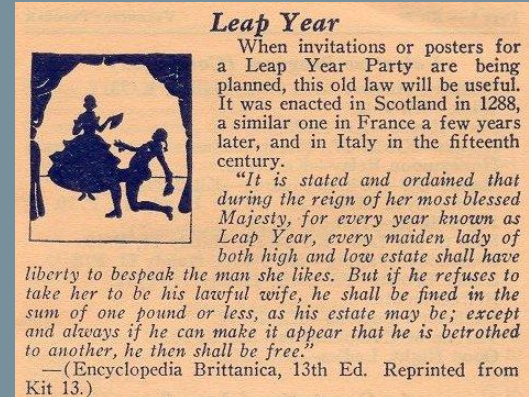


# Greek Folklore: Leap Year Weddings

Contextual Data: Since Pope George XIII finalized the modern calendar in 1582, Greeks have held superstitions related to the introduction of a new event, practice, or contract during a leap year.

Item: Leap year engagements and marriages will bring bad luck to the couple; misfortune comes in two possibilities: divorce or death of a spouse.

- Subgenre: Bad Luck
- Magic Superstition - If a couple gets married during a leap year, they will have bad luck, and their marriage is doomed.
- Many cultures have leap year traditions



# Greek Folklore: Dragées

Cultural Context: Dragées originated during the Golden Age of ancient Greece. They are a sweet treat made up of sugar coated almonds. During the Renaissance they were passed around the dinner table and noble men would offer Dragées to welcome their guests a symbol of hospitality.

Item: They have been said to hold marital powers that if a single person sleeps with a Dragée under his/her pillow they will dream of the person they are to marry.





# Greek Folklore: Pomegranates



Cultural Context: Hades and Persephone in Ancient Greek mythology.

Social Context: Symbol of fertility, prosperity and regeneration. Prominent during Christmas time and New Years

Item: Smashing a pomegranate on the doorway of a home to determine the luck for that family for the rest of the year. Also, said to promote fertility.

# Chinese Superstitions

- There are a few especially prevalent topics found in Chinese superstitions
  - Cleanliness
  - Death and its avoidance
  - Colors
  - Chinese New Year's
- Philosophy and Religion often affect superstitions
  - Taoism
  - Confucianism
- Eight informants, fourteen superstitions



# Chinese Superstition: The Color Black

- Many superstitions involving colors
- The color black (黑色) is considered unlucky
  - Informant: Dartmouth College Senior
  - Black should not be worn
  - Black should not be used as a color for decorating
- Not wearing red (紅色) on Chinese New Year's is unlucky
  - Informant: 22 year old college student



# Chinese Superstition



## Confucianism

- Family values
  - Father is the head of the family
- Strict rituals

## Taoism

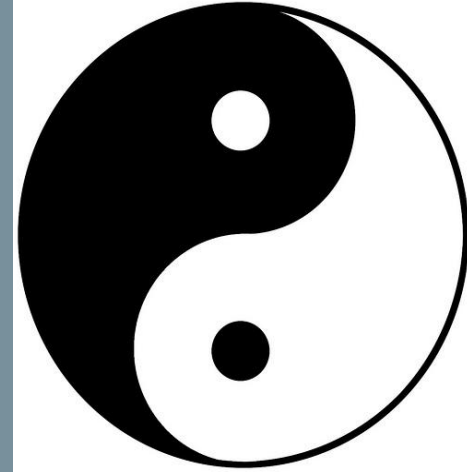
- Balance
- Yin and Yang

**Yin**

**Yang**

-Negative  
-Dark

-Positive  
-Light



- Western Sun and River
- (Interviews)
- River west of a house is bad luck

- Significance of Certain Trees
- Scholartree used as grave markers
- Scholartree and Willow Tree represent Yin



# Indian Superstitions

India is a country of diverse culture and tradition, as well as of a lot of superstitions.

Superstitions are linked to religion in India. Since religious beliefs change across India, so do the superstitions.

Some of these beliefs and practices are centuries old and are considered part of the tradition and religion, as a result introduction of new prohibitory laws often face opposition.

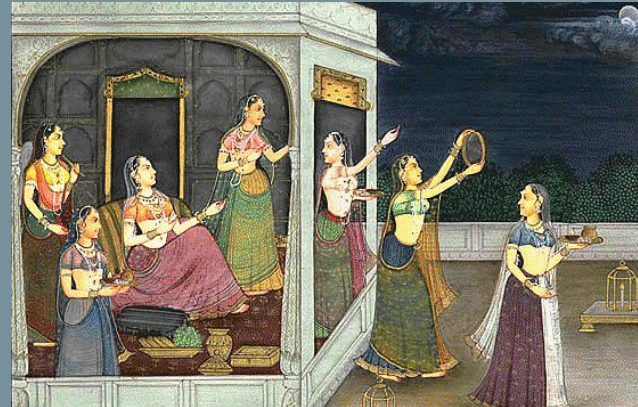
In our collection project, we observed bad-luck superstitions from 7 informants from southern, northern, and central India.



# Indian Superstition: Fasting on Karva Chauth

On Karva Chauth, a one-day Hindu festival that occurs four days after purnima in the month of Kartika, Women fast all day until the moon is fully visible.

According to the superstition, if a married woman eats during the fasting period, bad luck would be brought upon her husband/the marriage.





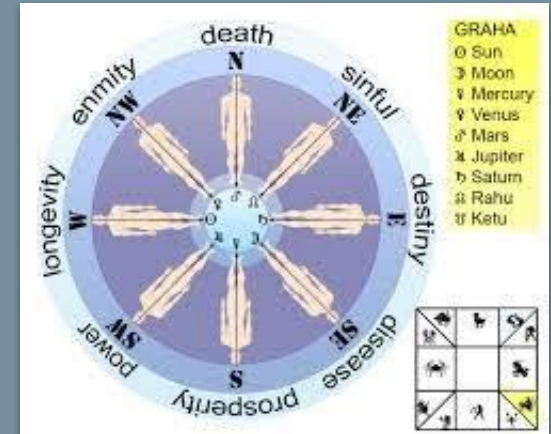
# Indian Superstition: Evil Eye

- Evil Eye: A look/glance rooted in jealousy, associated with malevolent spirits, and bring bad luck
- Numerous Indian superstitions aim to counteract the effects of the evil eye
  - If infected by the evil eye, an elder must take salt, dried red chilis, and camphor in his/her right palm and circle it around the affected individuals head (3, 5, or 7 times depending on the severity of the misfortune)
  - Penciling a black dot on the body with kajol helps to prevent the evil eye
  - While building a new house, hanging a white pumpkin in the front helps to prevent the evil eye



# Indian Superstition: Sleeping Direction

- Sleeping with your head pointing north is dangerous
    - Parvathi created a boy from turmeric to guard her while she was taking a bath. Lord Shiva returned to find this stranger denying him access, so he struck off his head in rage. Parvathi broke down in grief, so Shiva sent people out to fetch the head of any sleeping being whose head was facing north. They found a sleeping elephant and brought back its severed head, which was then attached to the boy.
    - South is the direction of Yama, the God of death, so dead bodies are placed with their feet pointing south
- Hindus believe sleeping with your head in the north direction will bring death





# Mexican Superstitions

- Background: Like many cultures around the world, the Mexican culture is deeply rooted in superstitions. Due to its geographical location between north and south America, Mexican superstitions are relatively similar to its neighbouring countries.
- Cultural and Social Context: Many of these superstitions are passed on in the home setting. They are told with the purpose of encouraging a certain kind of behavior over the other.

3 Interviewees 8 Superstitions



# Mexican Superstition: Opening an Umbrella

- Item : Umbrella
- Translation: You are not supposed to open an umbrella inside the house because doing so brings you bad luck.
- Social Context:
  - If the umbrella is wet from rain, it may spread droplets of water on different items in the room.
  - Protect the safety of people and property indoors.



# Mexican Superstition: Passing Salt

- Item : Passing Salt
- Translation: When passing the salt at the dinner table, you are are to pass it without lifting it from the table. It is bad luck to lift it.

## Variation:

- Translation: When you pass salt to someone, you have to grab a little and throw it behind you or else there will be future problems with the person you are passing the salt to.



Variant

# Mexican Superstition: Sweeping at Night

- Item: Sweeping at Night
- Translation: You should not sweep at night or else you will be sweeping away your money
- Cultural Context:
  - Luxury of electricity not as prevalent
  - Dark hinders ability to see
  - Sweep away valuable items due to not seeing properly



# American Superstitions

Significant aspects of American Superstitions:

- America is a melting pot of different cultures
- Pop culture influences superstitions (Friday the 13th movie)

Many American superstitions are shared in social settings such as school, as well as passed down from siblings and other family members.



# American Superstitions: Walking Under a Ladder

Magic superstition: If you do A then B

Informant: Bennett Mccaskill (Dartmouth '21)

Contextual data: This superstition has been passed from generation to generation in Bennett's family. His uncle painted houses in San Diego, and the one time he fell from a ladder was the same day he walked under one. His co-workers shared with him the superstition that it is bad luck to walk under a ladder. He passed this superstition to Bennett's older brothers, and his older brothers shared this superstition with Bennett at a young age.

Item: If you walk under a ladder, something bad will happen to you

Subgenre: bad luck superstitions

Historical Origin: Ancient Egypt, 5000 years ago: Ladder leaning against a wall forms triangle, and Egyptians regarded this shape as sacred (as shown by pyramids)

<https://www.livescience.com/33507-origins-of-superstitions.html>

# American Superstitions: Knock On Wood

Conversion Superstition: If A then B unless C

Informant: Katie Slinkosky (University of Florida Student)

Contextual data: <https://youtu.be/dIQMYVQwYII>

Item: If someone makes a positive prediction/statement that you want to come true, it won't happen unless you knock on wood.

Subgenre: Bad luck superstitions

Origin: Largely unknown. One explanation is that the ancient pagan cultures thought spirits resided in trees, so knocking on the wood of the tree bought them protection from bad luck. Another says knocking on wood chases away evil spirits so they cannot hear one talking about their luck.

<https://www.history.com/news/why-do-people-knock-on-wood-for-luck>

# Korean Superstitions

- Like many Asian cultures, Korean superstitions tend to be passed down from older relatives to young children
- Korean culture deeply rooted in spiritual beliefs
  - Especially cautious with superstitions surrounding luck
- Superstitions teach children to be obedient
  - Follow rules or face consequences
  - Respect for words of elders
- Many Asian cultures share the same or similar superstitions
  - Influences from China and Japan
- 4 interviewees, 8 Superstitions





# Korean Superstitions - The Number 4

- The number 4 is associated with death and bad luck
- Chinese pronunciation of 4
  - “Sì” pronounced “Suh”
  - The Chinese word for “death” also pronounced “Suh”
- Doing things such as knocking on a door 4 times is considered bad luck
- Number 4 is often left out in elevators
  - Also replaced with the letter “F”
- In general, even numbers are considered incomplete
  - Odd numbers are considered complete and good luck



# Korean Superstitions - Names in Red Ink

- A name written in **red** ink is bad luck for that person
- **Red** ink associated with death
- Origin
  - Death sentences written in red
  - Names of the deceased written in red
- Presence in Korean Culture
  - Taught at a young age
  - Still believed and practiced by many
- Example of Homeopathic Magic



# Korean Superstitions - Cutting Fingernails at Night

- Cutting fingernails at night is bad luck
  - Rats will come and eat them
  - Soul possessed / transformation
- Origin:
  - Before electricity it was hard to see at night
  - Unable to pick all toenail clippings = mice
  - Japanese - evil spirits at night, cut a gap for spirits to enter
- Presence in Korean Culture
  - Primarily parents teach kids at a young age
  - Mainly only children that believe in it
- Example of Contagious Magic



# Cross-Cultural Comparison

- Evil Eye (Greek and Indian)
- The Korean superstition surrounding the number 4, also apparent in Chinese and Japanese society
  - Comparable to the number 13 in American culture
- Cutting finger nails at night present in Japanese and Korean cultures
- Polygenesis: independent invention of similar folklore
  - Common psychological basis (psychoanalysis - Jung, Freud)
  - Similar basic conditions (natural, social)

Many cultures share aspects of various superstitions!