

# A Philosophical Examination of the Unique Characteristics and Cultural Identity of the Igbo People

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**Abstract.** *This article explores the intrinsic characteristics of the Igbo people from a philosophical perspective. Drawing on Igbo cosmology and metaphysics, the paper argues that the Igbo possess certain distinctive traits such as communalism, practical intelligence, and a deep sense of spirituality. These traits are embedded in the Igbo worldview and shape their cultural practices and social structures. The article further suggests that an understanding of the Igbo's intrinsic characteristics can deepen intercultural understanding and promote a more equitable and inclusive global society. The writer, therefore employed the hermeneutics methodological approach. This approach involves a critical examination of the beliefs, values, and practices of the Igbo people, and how they relate to their worldview and metaphysics. It also considers the ways in which these intrinsic characteristics shape the social structures and cultural practices of the Igbo people, and how they can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive global society.*

**Keywords:** *Intrinsic Characteristics, The Igbo, Philosophical, Entrepreneurial Culture, Communalistic System*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, with a rich cultural heritage that has been shaped by their philosophical worldview. This study aims to explore the intrinsic characteristics of the Igbo people, as viewed through the lens of philosophy, and to understand how these characteristics shape Igbo culture and society. According to Osuagwu (2021) The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and are renowned for their rich cultural heritage, unique worldview, and philosophical traditions. Their customs, beliefs, and practices are deeply rooted in their cultural identity, which has been shaped by various historical and social factors.

According to Aniakor (2018) the Igbo people have a distinct worldview that is founded on their understanding of the world as a dynamic and interconnected system of beings. They believe that everything in the world, whether animate or inanimate, is imbued with a life force, or chi, that gives it a unique identity and purpose. This worldview has profound implications for their philosophy, as it shapes their understanding of human nature, morality, and the purpose of existence (Ugwu & Abah, 2021). According to Ejizu (2018) The oral tradition is a distinct aspect of Igbo culture, whereby tales, fables, and myths are transmitted from one generation to the next using verbal narratives, songs, and dance. This custom has been crucial in shaping the cultural identity of the Igbo community, enabling them to establish a link with their past, principles, and convictions.

Another essential element of Igbo culture is their artistic expressions. The Igbo people are known for their elaborate masquerade performances, which are an essential part of their religious and cultural practices (Asogwa, 2022). These performances are a form of communication with the spirit world, and they reflect the values, beliefs, and customs of the Igbo people. Other forms of Igbo art include pottery, carving, and weaving, which are characterized by their intricate designs and patterns. According to Nwankwo (2017) The empirical research on Igbo characteristics highlights the importance of communalism, resilience, adaptability, and a strong work ethic. These qualities are often attributed to Igbo individuals and communities, and have been linked to their success in various fields, including business, education, and politics (Ikeanyibe, 2018).

The Igbo people also have a unique system of governance and social organization. They have a decentralized political system, with each community being governed by a council of elders (Korieh & Keke, 2023). This system has allowed for the preservation of their cultural traditions and values, as well as the promotion of communal living and shared responsibility (Osugwu, 2017). The Igbo concept of "Ubuntu" emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of community, which is reflected in the emphasis on communalism and collectivism in Igbo culture (Nwankwo, 2017). The philosophical concept of "dualism" is also explored as a way to understand the balance of complementary qualities, such as strength and adaptability, that are valued in Igbo culture (Osugwu, 2017).

According to Aniakor (2018) In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the philosophical traditions of the Igbo people. Scholars have examined the Igbo worldview and its implications for various philosophical concepts, such as ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. They have also explored the role of Igbo philosophy in addressing contemporary issues such as globalization, social justice, and human rights. One of the significant challenges in studying Igbo philosophy is the lack of written texts. Unlike Western philosophy, which has a rich tradition of written works, Igbo philosophy is predominantly oral (Onwuatuegwu, 2023). This has made it challenging to access and document their philosophical ideas and concepts. However, scholars have used various methods, such as ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and archival research, to document and analyze Igbo philosophy.

One of the key areas of Igbo philosophy that has attracted scholarly attention is the concept of personhood. In Igbo philosophy, personhood is not solely defined by individual attributes, but it is a relational concept that is shaped by one's interactions with others and the world around them. This perspective has significant implications for how the Igbo people understand human nature, morality, and the purpose of existence (Metuh, 2019). Another area of Igbo philosophy that has been explored is their understanding of knowledge. In Igbo culture, knowledge is not solely the result of individual intellectual inquiry but is also rooted in community and collective memory. This perspective challenges the Western understanding of knowledge as an individualistic and objective pursuit (Ejizu, 2018).

The Igbo community is a group with a rich and varied culture, possessing distinct worldviews and philosophical customs (Ayika, 2020). Various historical and societal influences, such as their oral history, artistic creations, governing structure, and social system, have molded their cultural identity. Investigating Igbo philosophy has profound implications for comprehending human nature, ethics, and the meaning of life, and it offers a valuable standpoint for tackling current issues.

According to John (2009) The Igbo ethnic group is indigenous to the southeastern region of Nigeria and is among the most populous ethnic groups in the country. They have a rich cultural heritage, including a variety of art forms, music, and religious traditions (Chika, 2012). The Igbo are known for their strong sense of community, and their traditional social structure is based on a system of clans and lineages (Nwando, 2013). In recent years, the Igbo have been at the forefront of political and economic developments in Nigeria, with many prominent politicians and business leaders coming from the Igbo community (Umezurike, 2019). The Igbo are a group of

people who originate from southeastern Nigeria and are recognized as one of the country's most populous ethnic groups, with a population exceeding 30 million. Their cultural heritage is diverse and extensive, and they have a tight-knit sense of community. Key traits of the Igbo include their strong familial and communal relationships, emphasis on education and individual success, and commitment to their traditional religious customs and beliefs (Umezurike, 2019).

According to BBC (2021) With a populace of around 40 million individuals, the Igbo community is among the most populous ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are known for their unique culture, rich history, and strong sense of identity. The Igbo people have a number of intrinsic characteristics that set them apart from other ethnic groups in Nigeria and around the world (Iloanya & Nwanegbo-Ben, 2021). In this essay, we will explore some of these characteristics in detail. According to Oyelami (2020) Firstly, the Igbo people are known for their entrepreneurial spirit. They are considered one of the most enterprising ethnic groups in Africa. This is evident in the fact that they have a high rate of self-employment and entrepreneurship. The Igbo people are known to be involved in a wide range of businesses, including trading, manufacturing, and agriculture. They are also known for their ability to adapt to new environments and opportunities, which has enabled them to thrive in different parts of the world.

According to Oyelami (2020) One of the key factors that has contributed to the Igbo people's entrepreneurial success is their strong family and community values. The Igbo people place a high value on family and community, and this has enabled them to build strong networks that support their businesses. They are known to have a strong sense of communalism, where the success of one individual is seen as the success of the entire community. This sense of communalism has helped the Igbo people to build a strong economic foundation, which has enabled them to survive and thrive in the face of economic challenges. According to Commander & Mbiti (2015) The Igbo are one of the largest and most economically successful ethnic groups in Nigeria. They have a well-established reputation for their business acumen and entrepreneurial spirit. They are known for their rich cultural traditions and their strong business acumen. Many Igbo people are successful entrepreneurs and business owners, particularly in the fields of trade and commerce (Falola, 2007). Some of the businesses commonly owned by Igbo people include grocery stores, clothing shops, and restaurants. Additionally, many Igbo people are involved in the import and export of goods, and are known for their ability to adapt to new business opportunities and thrive in a competitive market (Falola & Childs, 2018).

According to Okoro (2018) Secondly, the Igbo people are known for their strong sense of identity. They have a unique culture that is characterized by a rich history, customs, and traditions. The Igbo people are proud of their heritage, and they are known for their strong commitment to preserving their culture. This is evident in the fact that they have a rich oral tradition, which has enabled them to pass on their history, customs, and traditions from one generation to another. One of the most significant aspects of the Igbo people's culture is their language. The Igbo language is a tonal language, which means that the pitch of a word can change its meaning. It is a complex language that requires a lot of skill to learn. The Igbo people take great pride in their language, and they see it as an important part of their identity (Okoro, 2019). They are known to be passionate about their language, and they make a conscious effort to preserve and promote it (Chukwu, 2018).

The Igbo people's strong sense of identity is also evident in their traditional attire. They have a unique way of dressing, which is characterized by bright colors, intricate patterns, and elaborate designs. The Igbo people's traditional attire is a reflection of their rich cultural heritage, and they take great pride in it. They see their traditional attire as a way of expressing their identity and showcasing their cultural heritage. According to Chukwu (2018) Thirdly, the Igbo people are known for their strong work ethic. They are a hardworking people who place a high value on education and personal development. The Igbo people believe that hard work is the key to success, and they are known to work long hours to achieve their goals. They are also known for their resilience and determination, which has enabled them to overcome many challenges in their history.

According to Onwuegbuchulam (2019) The Igbo people's strong work ethic is evident in their approach to education. They place a high value on education, and they see it as a way of achieving personal development and success. Education is critical to empowering individuals and promoting social and economic development in the Igbo society. The Igbo people are known for their high literacy rates, and they are well represented in many professions, including medicine, law, and engineering. The Igbo people's commitment to education has enabled them to become one of the most educated ethnic groups in Nigeria and Africa (Uche et al., 2020). According to Nwauche (2017) In the Igbo culture, hard work and determination are highly regarded, and people are encouraged to strive for success in their personal and professional lives. They place a high premium on success, hard work, and determination, which is why they are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen. This drive for achievement is often seen as a key aspect of the Igbo identity, and it is something that is deeply ingrained in the culture.

Hence, for the Igbo, the pursuit of success and achievement is a way of life. They believe that success is earned through hard work and determination, and it is something to be proud of (Okere, 2019). According to Okoye (2018) Hence, there is a relationship between entrepreneurship and traditional economic practices in the Igbo culture. The concept of entrepreneurship in the Igbo culture, as well as traditional economic practices such as the use of community-based lending, apprenticeship systems, and market days are undeniably conspicuous. The understanding of these traditional practices is important for promoting entrepreneurship and economic development in Igbo communities.

According to Anugwom (2020) Fourthly, the Igbo people are known for their egalitarianism. They have a social structure that is based on a system of checks and balances. The power and authority of any individual or group is limited by the need to seek the consensus of the wider community, and decisions are made through a process of consensus-building and consultation. This has contributed to a strong sense of community and mutual support among the Igbo people. Igbo people believe in the equality of all individuals and the importance of collective decision-making. This is reflected in their traditional democratic system, which allows for a wide range of opinions to be heard before making important decisions.

According to Echeruo (1995) Furthermore, the Igbo are a diverse and culturally rich people who are known for their strong sense of community and their love for their culture and traditions. As a predominantly rural and agrarian society, the Igbo place a strong emphasis on the importance of community and family. This is reflected in their traditional systems of governance, which are often based on a communal decision-making process known as the "town meeting." This system allows every member of the community to participate in the decision-making process and promotes collaboration among them for the benefit of all (Nwabueze, 1981). This emphasis on community and cooperation is also reflected in many aspects of Igbo culture, including their music, art, and religious practices.

Obviously, the Igbo have a strong sense of community and place great emphasis on the well-being of their extended families and communities. They also place a high value on hard work and entrepreneurship, which has led to their success in business and commerce. This is reflected in their strong sense of community, their strong family ties, and their commitment to self-reliance (Okoye, 2015). Igbo people, therefore have a long tradition of entrepreneurial activity, stemming from their emphasis on trade and commerce, and their belief in hard work, innovation, and community support (Okpewho, 1992). They are known for their strong sense of community and their emphasis on the importance of family and kinship. The Igbo value the collective good of the community over the individual and they have a deep respect for the traditions and customs of their ancestors (Uzodinma, 2019). This love for community is reflected in many aspects of Igbo life, including their religious beliefs, political organization, and social customs. The social organization of the Igbo population is established on the principles of fairness, communal agreement-making, and a robust feeling of togetherness. These principles have significantly influenced the development of Igbo customs and have aided in their achievements as a society.

## The Role of these Characteristics in Shaping Igbo Culture and Society

The Igbo people of Nigeria are one of the largest ethnic groups in the country, and they have a rich cultural heritage that is shaped by a number of intrinsic characteristics. In this response, we shall explore some of the key intrinsic characteristics of the Igbo people and explain how they have influenced their culture and society. Entrepreneurial spirit: One of the most notable characteristics of the Igbo people is their entrepreneurial spirit. Igbo people are known for their industriousness, creativity, and willingness to take risks in pursuit of economic success (Uche, 2020). This trait has had a significant impact on Igbo culture, with many Igbo people being involved in businesses and trade, both locally and internationally. In fact, the Igbo people are often referred to as the "Jews of Africa" because of their reputation for being successful merchants and traders.

Strong sense of community: The Igbo people also have a strong sense of community, and this is reflected in their social structures and customs (Oduah, 2019). Igbo communities are usually organized around extended families, with each family having a designated leader or elder. These leaders are responsible for maintaining the social order and resolving disputes within the community. In addition, Igbo people are known for their egalitarianism and respect for individual autonomy, which are also key aspects of their sense of community. Emphasis on education: Another intrinsic characteristic of the Igbo people is their emphasis on education. Igbo people place a high value on formal education, and this is reflected in the large number of Igbo people who hold advanced degrees and occupy prominent positions in various fields (Temitope, 2021). Education is seen as a means of upward social mobility and is often a top priority for Igbo families.

Religion and spirituality: Religion and spirituality are also important aspects of Igbo culture. The Igbo people are traditionally animists, and they believe in the existence of a vast pantheon of deities and spirits. This belief system has had a significant impact on Igbo culture, with many customs and traditions being associated with religious observance (Okpewho, 1992). Furthermore, a significant number of Igbo individuals have embraced either Christianity or Islam, which has had a significant impact on the religious makeup of Igbo culture. Love for art and music: The Igbo culture also boasts a rich heritage in the realms of music and art. Igbo art is known for its intricate designs and patterns, which are often inspired by nature or religious symbolism (Oduah, 2019). Igbo music is also very diverse, with a range of styles and instruments being used in traditional and contemporary settings. Igbo art and music are seen as important cultural expressions that reflect the creativity and vibrancy of Igbo culture.

Undeniably, the intrinsic characteristics of the Igbo people have had a significant impact on their culture and society. The Igbo people's entrepreneurial spirit, strong sense of community, emphasis on education, religion and spirituality, and love for art and music are all key aspects of their cultural identity. These traits have contributed to the success and resilience of the Igbo people, both in Nigeria and around the world.

## CONCLUSION

The intrinsic characteristics of the Igbo people are shaped by their philosophical worldview, which emphasizes the importance of the individual will, communalism, and the interconnectedness of all things in the universe. These characteristics have contributed to the development of Igbo culture and society, including their entrepreneurial spirit, sense of self-reliance, and social and political structures based on consensus-building. Understanding these intrinsic characteristics is essential for anyone seeking to engage with Igbo culture and society.

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