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Religion as an organic entity: The emergence of *fundamental-liberalism* in Islam in Indonesia and Japanese Shinran Buddhism

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...Mysticism intends a state of "possession," not action, and the individual is not a tool but a "vessel" of the divine. Action in the world must thus appear as endangering the absolutely irrational and other-worldly religious state.¹

Introduction

Millions of Japanese people visit Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples on the first day of January every year, wishing to receive from gods or Buddha such worldly benefits as prosperity, longevity, or financial security, which are collectively known as *gensei riki* in Japanese.

It is also a common practice for Indonesian Muslims to go on a pilgrimage to the burial site of a saint or *wali* to ask for protection from unfavourable occurrences and the realization of their worldly wishes. In authentic Islamic tradition, however, the practice of supplication, known as *tawassul*, is only allowed by appealing to Allah and not any other entity. Nonetheless, the practice of incorrect *tawassul* is popular among Indonesian Muslims, who expect to be granted some fortune (*kabul*) from their patron *wali*.

In Jakarta, a popular sanctuary for *kabul*-seeking pilgrims is the five-hectare complex of the grave of Mbah Priok², a descendant of Nabi Muhammad. This complex is situated in Koja of Tanjung Priok, the bustling port area of north Jakarta, and has been maintained by the family of self-proclaimed descendants of Mbah Priok, Habib Ali and Habib Abdullah.

The name of Mbah Priok has become even more prominent nationally ever since the clashes on 14th April 2010 between young pious Muslims living in the complex and local residents of Koja and Jakarta police forces on the other. The land on which Mbah Priok's grave is built is legally owned by a state-owned enterprise, P.T. Pelabuhan Indonesia II, or Pelindo II.³ With the intention of launching a development project in the area including the complex

¹ M. Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions", in H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology*, London, 1991, p. 270.

² Al Imam Al 'Arif Billah Al Quthub Syech Sayyidina Al Habib Hasan bin Muhammad Al Haddad R.A

³ The company obtained official land ownership in 1987 according to HPL No, 1, 1987, *Kasusu "Mbah Priok": Studi Bayani-Wa-Tahaqiqqa Terhadap Masalah Makam Eks TPU Dobo*, p. 27.

of Mbah Priok, this company has requested that Habib Ali and his family vacate the site. The family, however, refuses to leave the site, insisting that the ownership of the land had been illegitimately approved by the Dutch colonial government.⁴ This conflict regarding the ownership of the land has caused the clash between the two parties.⁵

Since this incident, the site of Mbah Priok has become even more popular with visitors. Religious gatherings held both inside and outside the complex attract a huge number of followers.⁶ Pilgrims from all over the country visit the site every day. The incident on April 14, 2010 did not produce any concrete solution to this land dispute, with the situation remaining much the same as it has been since the colonial era.

Rather than focusing on the issue of the land dispute *per se*, this paper is an attempt to account for the popularity of the religious group based in Koja where Mbah Priok is thought to be buried. In other words, it is our interest to explain how religion and civilization interact in a given society.

Religion has two distinct domains: theological and sociological. The former is more closely related to the understanding of what constitutes authentic doctrines to adherents, while the latter is concerned with their socio-religious behaviors. From the sociological perspective, doctrines are flexible, given that they may be influenced by the condition of society, the course of civilization, and probably the psychology of the people. It is our assumption that the social aspect of religion would be a determining factor in the behaviors of both Japanese visitors to the temples on New Year's Day and the followers of Mbah Priok. Hypothetically speaking, religion as a social construct would somehow function to enable people to adapt to changes in a given society.

The content of Habib Ali's teachings and that of a 12th century Japanese Buddhist group led by Shinran show impressive similarities. They both deal with the worldly interests of the people and offer tolerance and forgiveness for any human beings, including evil-doers. It is our supposition that a comparative analysis of these two groups would demonstrate how religion exists as an organic entity in society.

Mythology and history of Mbah Priok

According to a book published by Habib Ali, Mbah Priok was born in 1727 at Palembang, a town in the south of Sumatra island. When he was 29 in 1756, he was an enthusiastic apprentice of Islam and set off with two other colleagues to Java to promulgate the teachings of Islam.⁷

⁴ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, 30th December, 2011.

⁵ *Jakarta Post*, 14th April, 2010.

⁶ For example, when Habib Ali presided over the session in the evening of 29th December, 2011, at least one thousand enthusiastic followers attended despite the downpour on the day.

⁷ *Maqom Keramat Wali Allah Situs Sejarah Tanjug Priuk/Pondok Dayung*, p.4.

Mbah Priok, however, never reached Java. Stormy weather capsized his boat, and he died.⁸ His body was found at a beach in north Batavia (i.e. Jakarta) by local residents, who found a wooden paddle and *priok* or rice pot near his body. After performing burial rites at a site called Pondok Dayung, they used the paddle as his tomb and placed the *priok* beside it.⁹ It is said that the paddle turned into a tropical tree, that is, *Mimusops elengi*, known to local residents as *tanjung*. Local residents also believe that the *priok* near the tomb moved into the sea, and that this rice container, which was amplified to the size of a house, can be seen from ashore every three to four years.¹⁰ Habib Ali explains that by being sufficiently large to shelter people, the enormous *priok* signifies the amicability of Mbah Priok.¹¹ This myth accounts for the naming of the coastal area in the northern part of Jakarta as Tanjung Priok.

Two decades after the burial of Mbah Priok at Pondok Dayung, an attempt by the Dutch colonial government to develop this site into a trading port was hindered by mysterious deaths, injuries and diseases of workers. According to folklore, a knowledgeable Muslim communicated with Mbah Priok and learned that Mbah Priok himself wished to have the grave relocated to the present site in Koja, which is also in the vicinity of Tanjung Priok.¹² As a whole, these elements of the myth affirm the sanctity of the present location of the remains of Mbah Priok.

A research team consisting of scholars and members of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) has cast much doubt on the stories presented by the family of Ali Habib. They point out that the birth year of Mbah Priok is not in accordance with genealogy. In particular, the great grandfather of Mbah Priok, Habib Hamid, was born in 1750 and died in 1820 in Palembang.¹³ In addition, research has also found that the name of the area, Tanjung Priok, appears in documents recording the history of Islamization of Jakarta dated as early as the sixteenth century.¹⁴ Needless to say, Habib Ali and his family ardently reject the results of this research.¹⁵

Moreover, the actual remains of Mbah Priok were relocated to a public graveyard in another part of north Jakarta, Semper, on August 21, 1997.¹⁶ Habib Ali never acknowledges this

⁸ Ibid., pp.4-6.

⁹ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.6-7.

¹¹ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, 25th December, 2011.

¹² Maqom, op.cit., pp.7-8.

¹³ *Kasusu "Mbah Priok": Studi Bayani-Wa-Tahaqiqa Terhadap Masalah Makam Eks TPU Dobo*, p.12.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵ Habib Ali stated that all results presented by the research team from MUI were false at a public gathering held in the complex of Mbah Priok and urged his followers not to believe it. The gathering took place on 29th December, 2011.

¹⁶ Guntoro Shirli, an undertaker who has been working at the graveyard since the time of relocation, confirms the burial of Mbah Priok. He still has in possession of photos of the

relocation.¹⁷ Local residents, including riders of tricycles (*becak*), also firmly believe that the Mbah Priok has been buried at the site in Koja and not at Semper. Knowledge of the grave in Semper is not widespread and few local residents are able to pinpoint its location.

Sanctification of the site and mythology

The mythology of Mbah Priok has obviously contributed to the sanctification of his tomb at Koja and of his descendants. Pilgrims who recognize and affirm this sanctity believe they will receive miraculous benefits from their *wali*. The book published by Habib Ali is replete with this sort of sanctification of Mbah Priok in its description of history and of clashes that took place on April 14, 2010.

The descendants of Mbah Priok insist that the Tanjung Priok area has been blessed by Allah because of the existence of the tomb of Mbah Priok. They warn that people disregarding this blessing given by Allah will suffer adversity. The attempt by the authorities to remove the grave in 1997, for example, contributed to the fall of the Suharto government in the following year.¹⁸ Moreover, the detention of a family member of Habib Ali by the authorities was supposedly associated with unprecedented natural disasters in Indonesia, i.e., the earthquake and *tsunami* that hit the northern part of Sumatra in December 2004.¹⁹

Fantastic accounts on the extraordinariness and sanctity of Mbah Priok reached their climax in the chapter that describes the clashes between the police and a group of Mbah Priok followers on April 14, 2010. They claimed that the machinery for the operation suddenly ceased to operate, and rocks thrown by the officers miraculously reversed their course and never reached their targets.²⁰

Moreover, two giants thirty-five meters high appeared during the operation, along with hundreds of birds clawing rocks. There were, as well, white-robed holy soldiers riding horses, who chased away all intruders from the complex. With great fear, the intruders absconded from the scene and plunged into the sea.²¹

Regardless of the mythical nature of these stories, it is obvious that the mission to close down the complex ended in failure and the family of Habib Ali and his followers still occupy the land to the present day.²² The book also clearly proclaims that anyone who

tombs of Mbah Priok and his family members. However, the grave site is a flat square patch at present as the tombstones were stolen and have not been replaced ever since.

¹⁷ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, 30th December 2011.

¹⁸ *Maqom Keramat Wali Allah Situs Sejarah Tanjug Priuk/Pondok Dayung*, pp.18-20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

²² Around thirty young Muslims, who are mostly in their late teens, reside in the complex. They truly believe the magical power of Mbah Priok. Many of them state that they never feared during the April 2010 clashes with the police as they thought Mbah Priok protected

attempts to destroy the tomb of Mbah Priok is destined to contract incurable diseases and receive absolute miseries and misfortunes in both this world and the next.²³

Theologically speaking, the stories described in the history book of Mbah Priok are regarded as *khurafat* (mythology and superstition), which Muslims are forbidden to believe.²⁴ Nonetheless, Habib Ali seems to have no hesitation in emphasising *khurafat* in his congregation, referring to a girl told to have her leg amputated by a medical doctor who recovered from her illness without doing so after offering a prayer at the tomb of Mbah Priok.²⁵ Evidently, the group of Mbah Priok led by Habib Ali and his brother is inauthentic in theological terms. However, they are still extremely Islamic in social terms in that they stress their linkage with Allah through the genealogy of Nabi Muhammad. They remain, therefore, fundamentally Islamic, holding firmly to their linkage with the roots of Islam. These tendencies are even clearer in the teachings and the attitude of Habib Ali.

Dispositions of the Mbah Priok group

The nature of the Mbah Priok group is three-fold. First, they are emphatic on the practical issues in life. That secular predilection is evident. At the congregative gatherings, Habib Ali vehemently stresses the importance of worshipping Allah through Mbah Priok if the followers wish to have a long life, good health, a good job, and wealth.²⁶ One of the pilgrims, a middle-aged woman, who visits the site every week, asked Mbah Priok to eradicate her debt. Mbah Priok has “listened” to her, she explains, and she is now free from her financial difficulties.

Another pilgrim, a male in his early twenties, visits the tomb to offer his prayer in order to improve his poor health.²⁷ Followers of Mbah Priok strongly believe that the magical power of Mbah Priok is so mighty that he is able to bring about miracles.

Again, it should be remembered that the worshipping of any being other than Allah is regarded as *kemusyrikan* or a deviation from Islamic teachings. *Karomah* can only be actualised by *wali* while they are still alive. No dead *wali* is supposed to possess such a power.

them. Interview conducted by the author, in Koja on 24th, 25th, 29th, 30th, 31st December, 2011.

²³ *Maqom Keramat*, op.cit., pp.28-31.

²⁴ The belief that is not in accordance with reason can be regarded as *khurafat*. It is also not based on *syariat* Islam (Islamic law). Man-made stories are, thus, falsehood and forbidden. This notion is based on al-Quran, “When they are told: ‘Follow what God has revealed,’ they reply: ‘We will follow what our fathers practised,’ even though their fathers were senseless men lacking in guidance (al-Baqarah: 2:170).

²⁵ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, 30th December, 2011.

²⁶ This was observed at a weekly gathering on 29th December, 2011 and at the New Year’s Eve gathering on 31st December, 2011.

²⁷ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, 25th December, 2011.

A second feature of the Mbah Priok group is the stress on the mystical as well as religious attributes of Mbah Priok. Although their tenets do not always correspond to orthodox teachings of Islam, they never admit the evident inauthenticity but accentuate their genuine and decent connection with the religion Islam itself.

Habib Ali explains that the posting stickers that contain drawings of the *tanjung* tree, *priok* and wooden paddle, are needed to exert their magical protective powers.²⁸ This sticker is obviously *jimat* or a talisman, which again is strictly forbidden in Islam. The followers of Habib Ali put bottled water in front of him as he preaches in order to have it purified. Similarly, this is regarded as magic or *syhir* that is not allowed in Islam either.

Habib Ali constantly reminds his followers of the religious significance of Mbah Priok and his family as heirs of Nabi Muhammad. This obviously strengthens the credibility of their religious status and promotes more trust among his followers. *Akhirat*, which is one of the six major beliefs in Islam,²⁹ is also emphasised by Habib Ali. The better life after this world is promised if people pay respect to Mbah Priok. This religious notion assures the credulous of Habib Ali's authenticity in Islam and also encourages the followers to maintain their faith in Islam through Mbah Priok.

Liberalism and tolerance towards all humans and other faiths occupy an essential part in the teachings of Habib Ali. It is a well-known fact that gambling and drinking are prohibited in Islam. Nevertheless, Habib Ali is bold enough to state that all kinds of people, regardless of their nationality, race, religion, sex, or social behaviour, including gambling and drinking, are accepted by Mbah Priok.³⁰ He explains his religious stance in the following way:

Warna-warni (miscellany/all kinds of colors) should be appreciated. All cultures should be appreciated. All people are welcomed and accepted by Mbah Priok. Mbah Priok can understand all languages. Animals can go to heaven, Buddhists can go to heaven, criminals can go to heaven, and gamblers can also go to heaven, if they believe in Mbah Priok, who is a mediator between Allah and us, humans.³¹

Habib Ali's ideas on controversial issues in Islam, such as the implementation of Islamic law or *syariat* and execution of *jihad* or holy war, are similar to those of so-called liberal Muslims.³² Habib Ali believes that *syariat* Islam should not be employed as a state law in Indonesia, and physical *jihad*, which would result in taking someone's life, should not be practised by Muslims.³³ He publicly criticises executors of bombings in Indonesia, saying

²⁸ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, on 25th December, 2011.

²⁹ The six pillars of Islamic doctrines are: *Allah*; *khitab* (al-Quran and other holy books); Nabi Muhammad; Angel; *qadar* (fatalism); and *akhirat* (life after death).

³⁰ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, on 25th December, 2011.

³¹ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, on 30th December, 2011.

³² On this matter, see Kato (ed), *The Clash of Ijtihad*, New Delhi, 2011.

³³ Interview conducted by the author in Koja, on 30th December, 2011.

that they are far from Allah, a pronouncement which received a huge round of applause from his audience.³⁴

Religion and civilization

Many of the dispositions of the Mbah Priok group led by Habib Ali are noticeably inauthentic from the theological point of view. Yet the group's popularity is beyond dispute. One of their most attractive creeds is that Mbah Priok is able to offer *kabul* when people believe in him. Islamic orthodoxy is assigned a lower priority when people visit the tomb with the purpose of obtaining practical *kabul*. Secular yearnings are often influenced by the orientation of society, which has much resonance with the course of a given civilization. Modern civilization, which is predominant at present, values material wealth most highly. It is a common belief that "the more possessions you have, the better life becomes." In this sense, Mbah Priok functions perfectly to sustain and help develop modern materialistic civilization.

It seems that religion itself can be divided into two distinctive domains, that is, theological religion (one could simply call this religion) and social religion (one could call this religiosity). The former appreciates authenticity more than practical benefits, while the latter attaches greater importance to benefits than to theological correctness. The Mbah Priok group clearly exemplifies this second domain of religion. It is, then, natural that the group itself can be materialistically-oriented.

Tolerance towards all human kind presented by the Mbah Priok group is a distinctive feature of its religiosity. As there is less of an emphasis on theological correctness, this religious group is able to welcome more openly a wider circle of people, including criminals. While this tendency may appear to sow the seeds of anarchy, it could potentially create a society where mutual forgiveness is valued. In turn, such prospects could be a powerful incentive for people to repent from harmful deeds. In this sense, religion as represented by the Mbah Priok group could contribute to the creation of a more civilized society that extends compassion to all of humankind.

Emergence of the Japanese Buddhist Shinran school and its background

It is usually understood that Islam and Buddhism are quite unrelated in terms of theology. For example, it is believed that any human has potential to attain Buddhahood in Buddhism while Islam never acknowledges a potential divine nature in any individual humans. However, interestingly, in the sphere of religiosity, which is related to the socio-religious behaviors of the followers, the two religions can be quite in harmony.

A Japanese Buddhist school called Jodo Shinshu shows striking similarities with the Mbah Priok group of Islam. Jodo Shinshu was founded by a notable monk named Shinran in the

³⁴ This public gathering took place in Koja on 29th December, 2011. There was a series of bombings in Indonesia, such as the bombing a restaurant in Bali in 2001 and the bombing the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in 2004.

12th century and is one of the streams of *Mahayana* Buddhism.³⁵ The school of *Mahayana* Buddhism developed about 200 years after the death of Gautama Siddhartha and is distinguishable by its emphasis on the salvation of lay people through a reliance on *bodhisattva*.³⁶

Buddhism had before that required, on the basis of Hinayana doctrine, several austere practices on the part of believers for them to attain Buddhahood. Shinran, in contrast, maximized the inclusive orientation of *Mahayana* Buddhism by stressing that salvation is available for all, regardless of one's religious status as either a lay person or a cleric.

It seems that prevailing social conditions encouraged the emergence of Shinran's Jodo Shinshu in the 12th century, when a feudal system was first introduced in Japan. Feudalism was a harsh system for the peasants and non-warrior classes as they were required to pay an annual tribute to the warrior (*samurai*) class. At the time, metaphysical Zen Buddhism was popular among the *samurai* class. The non-*samurai* classes were left in the religious predicament of being excluded by the intellectual demands of comprehending such complex Buddhist creeds as Zen.

In addition to this social reality, Japanese people were in the midst of psychological stress in the 12th century. It was said that they had already entered the age of ruination (*mappo*), based on a traditional Buddhist belief that society goes through a cycle every 500 or 1,000 years after the death of Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha.³⁷ In Japan, it was said that the age of *mappo* started in 1052.³⁸ We can easily imagine that people in Japan at the time desperately hoped to be saved, especially those who were not able to comprehend complex teachings of Buddhism and were not able to practice the required disciplines.

Under these social conditions, several new Buddhist movements which were inclusive of commoners emerged in Japan in the Kamakura period, beginning in 1192. Among these movements was Jodo Shinshu, which has attracted a huge number of followers until the present day.³⁹

³⁵ A Sanskrit word, *Mahayana* literally means 'greater vehicle'. It is contrasted with another major school of Buddhism, i.e., Hinayana or 'smaller vehicle'. Mahayana "opens the way of liberation to a greater number of people", see *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*, Boston, 1986, p. 215.

³⁶ "A *bodhisattva* is a being who seeks Buddhahood through the systematic practice the perfect virtues but renounces complete entry into nirvana until all being are saved". Ibid., p.39.

³⁷ M. Saegusa, op.cit., p.39.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The registered member of a major group of Jodo Shinshu, Higashihonganjiha, amounts 6,941,005 in 2009. The figure is available at the website of Agency of Cultural Affairs, Japan. <http://www.bunka.go.jp/shukyouhoujin/nenkan/pdf/h21nenkan.pdf>

Similarity with Japanese Buddhist Shinran school

Shinran was a disciple of Honen, who founded another Buddhist school called Jodo Shu. Both Jodo Shu and Jodo Shinshu teach that if people believe in Amida Buddha or Amitabha Buddha, they are allowed to enter *jodo* which means pure land or Buddhist paradise. The only practice required of the followers of Jodo is to chant a single verse known as *nembutsu*, that is, *namu-amida-butsu* whose literal meaning is “Amida Buddha, I believe in you. Have compassion on me.”

Both Honen and Shinran declared that people would be saved by only chanting *nembutsu*. What distinguished Shinran from Honen is that Shinran promulgated that a single chant of *nembutsu* is sufficient to reach *jodo*, while Honen thought the followers should chant it as many times as possible. Shinran also mentioned the realization of worldly desires such as longevity:

He that hath unending pity, the Buddha of Infinite Life, hath given unto us in the Sutra of Golden Light a teaching concerning long life, that the way of long life and the welfare of the people might be made known onto them.⁴⁰

Shinran also talked about the greatness of Amida Buddha and practical benefit that people can obtain:

When we say “*Namu-amida-butsu*,” the benefits we gain in the present are boundless; The karmic evil of our transmigration in birth-and-death disappears, And determinate karma and untimely death are eliminated. ... When we say “*Namu-amida-butsu*,” the four great deva-kings together protect us constantly, day and night -- and let no evil spirits come near.⁴¹

The absolute reliance on and trust in Amida Buddha is an essential element in Shinran’s Buddhism as it is in the case of Mbah Priok of Habib Ali’s Islam. Presumably, the interests of ordinary Japanese people were oriented towards security in that they wished to have a materially richer and healthier life as they struggled with duties imposed on them by the feudal system. The situation has remained much the same in modern times in that people are eager to possess material goods and have an interest in attaining their secular wishes. Millions of Japanese still visit shrines and temples on New Year’s Eve, and many Muslims in Indonesia visit the site of Mbah Priok.

It was obviously an effortless choice for peasants and other non-*samurai* classes in the feudal era as well as ordinary people today to only chant *nembutsu* once. Simpler and less laborious religious practice is another point of resemblance between Jodo Shinshu’s

⁴⁰ S. Yamabe and L. A. Beck, *Buddhist Psalms of Shinran Shonin*, London, 2009, p.24.

⁴¹ A. Bloom, *The Essential Shinran*, 2007, Indiana, p.162. The translation of Shinran’s *Kyogo Shinsho* is available in this book.

Buddhism and Mbah Priok's Islam. Sitting in front of the tomb of Mbah Priok for half an hour is apparently tantamount to practising Islam for the duration of 75 years.⁴² This metamorphosis of authentic creeds of religion takes place when specific social conditions are present. Prevailing civilization and religion are, therefore, in close proximity. Religion in this sense functions to enable people to adjust in a society that is influenced by a given civilization.

Another conspicuous teaching of Shinran is his treatment of so-called bad people. Despite the authentic Buddhist precepts, that is, not taking life, not stealing, not engaging in carnal relations, not lying, and no intoxication,⁴³ Shinran insisted that any humans, including evil-doers, should be saved if they believe in Amida Buddha by chanting *nembutsu*. In his famous writing, *Tanninsho* elaborated on this point as follows:

Even the good person attains birth in the Pure Land, how much more so the evil person. ... The Primal Vow was established out of deep compassion for us who cannot become freed from the bondage of birth-and-death through any religious practice, due to the abundance of blind passion.⁴⁴

This theory is known as *akuninshoki*⁴⁵ which means that the evil person is the one who is able to attain salvation. This innovative Buddhist teaching is also resonant with the teaching of Habib Ali of the Mbah Priok group, which assures the acceptance of evil-doers in heaven.⁴⁶ Therefore, both Habib Ali's group and Shinran's Jodo Shinshu can be described as open and liberal in terms of their socio-religious attitudes towards people.

Theoretically, *akuninshoki* and Habib Ali's tolerance towards evil-doers would contribute to the increase of crimes in society. However, the role of religion, unlike that of secular legal institutions, would offer an opportunity for repentance. What comes to mind is a famous Japanese story entitled *Rashomon*, which is concerned with the hardship of ordinary people in the time of famine in the end of 12th century.

In *Rashomon*, a lowly servant, who had a strong sense of morality, saw an old woman pulling hair from dead people in order to survive in the time of famine. That woman's act was obviously against ethics, and the lowly servant initially resented her. However, he realised that her conduct was inevitable for her survival and concluded that he also had to engage in such an unethical act for his own survival.⁴⁷ Could humans fully maintain their ethical integrity throughout life? If not, how could humans be saved? Shinran and Habib Ali

⁴² Interview conducted by the author with Habib Abdullah, in Koja on 25 December, 2011.

⁴³ E. Bechert and R. Gombrich (eds), *The World of Buddhism*, 1984, London, p.54.

⁴⁴ Shinran (translated by T. Unno), *Tanninsho*, Michigan, 1996, p.6.

⁴⁵ Some also point out that *akuninshoki* was also uttered by Shinran's master, Honen. See H. Kurata, *Honen to Shinran no Shinko (the Faith of Honen and Shinran)*, Tokyo, 1994.

⁴⁶ Interview conducted by the author in Koja on 30th December, 2011.

⁴⁷ See, R. Akutagawa, *Rashomon*, London, 2006.

have already offered salvation to all humans, including people who inevitably engage in unethical acts.

Conclusion

With the exception of determined atheists, humans have a tendency to seek a sort of supernatural occurrence to transport them from a negative situation to an improved one as a way of realizing their worldly interests in life. The belief in supernatural powers, needless to say, springs from religious conviction. Organised religious institutions play an important role in making people believe the factuality of supernatural phenomena or miracles. Some sites that are connected with religious mythology have thereby become sanctuaries for believers. Individual leaders of religious communities are also revered by followers for their connection with holiness. These are only possible when the religious significance of the place (sanctuary) and the person (leader) is affirmed by both religious leaders and their followers.

Religion and civilization have existed inseparably throughout history. To borrow F. Braudel's words, "religion is the strongest feature of civilizations, at the heart of both their present and their past."⁴⁸ It should be heeded that religion consists of both the creed and the practice (religion and religiosity), and that the former deals with scriptural authority (and this is the main interest of fundamentalists who are strictly literalists) while the latter is connected with any occurrence of religious sentiment.⁴⁹ Any religious behavior that includes the attitude of seeking *gensei rieki* and *kabul* is under the strong influence of religiosity. Noticeably these religious behaviours are not necessarily ratified by orthodox religion.

It is this second feature of religion that has been interacting with civilization. Because these deviant religious practices modify social behavior in the name of religion, depending on the conditions of a given society, the authenticity of orthodoxy is placed in a great quandary. V.S. Naipaul might therefore be right to state that:

Religious or cultural purity is a fundamentalist fantasy. Perhaps only shut-away tribal communities can have strong and simple ideas of who they are. The rest of us are for the most part culturally mixed, in varying degrees, and everyone lives in his own way with his complexity.⁵⁰

The "complexity" here is tantamount to the social situation influenced by a prevalent civilization. Orthodoxy can be challenged by the complexity of a society itself. The religious group in Koja led by Habib Ali in north Jakarta serves as a vivid example of this

⁴⁸ F. Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, 1993, New York, p.22.

⁴⁹ H. Kato, "Social Demand and the "Clash of Ijtihad": A Constructionist Approach to Current Islamic Movements in Indonesia", in *The Clash of Ijtihad* (H. Kato ed.), 2011, New Delhi, p. xviii.

⁵⁰ V.S. Naipaul, *Beyond Belief*, 1999, New York, p.59.

phenomenon. It is true that both Habib Ali and Shinran unconventionally interpret original teachings of their religions with great emphasis on their own personal authenticity as well as openness and tolerance. Yet, their stance on faith differs from that of conventional fundamentalists who uncompromisingly adhere to the original scriptures and refuse to deviate from doctrines. Therefore, Habib Ali and Shinran to some extent can be *fundamental-liberalist* in the sense they accentuate their truthfulness of their religion and yet show unorthodox interpretation of their respective scriptures. This type of *fundamental-liberalism* may well be “the strongest feature” of civilization.

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Glossary

Terms related to Japanese or Buddhism

Explanation

akuninshoki: The notion that an evil person is able to attain salvation

bodhisattva: A being seeking Buddhahood but who delays entry into nirvana in order to help others attain salvation

gensei reiki: Worldly benefits

Hinayana: A school of Buddhism

Jodo: Literally 'pure land', the name of Buddhist paradise

Mahayana: Literally, 'greater vehicle', a school of Buddhism

namu-amida-butsu: Literally, 'Amida Buddha, I believe in you. Have compassion on me.'

Nembutsu: A verse containing the words '*namu-amida-butsu*'

Rashomon: A well-known Japanese story

samurai: The warrior class in pre-modern Japanese society

mappo: A recurring age of ruination

Terms related to Indonesia and Islam

Explanation

akhirat: The afterlife

becak: The name of a tricycle that takes passengers

Jihad: Holy war

jimat: A talisman

kabul: Granted/answered

karomah: Miracles

kemusyrikan: Deviation from Islamic teachings

khurafat: Mythology or superstition

priok: Rice pot

syariat: Islamic law

syhir: Magic

tanjung: A name for the tree *Mimusops elengi*

tawassul: Supplication

wali: Saint

warna-warni: Miscellany