

Islamization and Sufism in Indonesia

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Preface

Islam is not state religion in the Republic of Indonesia, but 90percent of its population are Muslims, so the history of Indonesia can not be discussed without referring to Islam.

According to the established theory, Islam spread gradually and unequally in every place, blending with the local culture such as the holy spirit worship, ancestor worship, and customes (adat).

At first, Islam was accepted by rulers and merchants in port towns, and then by farmers. Seeing that Islam was brought through the trade route, Muslim merchants surely played an important role in Islamization in Indonesia. And, Islamization of this country was also greatly due to the Sufis, or Islamic mysticists, as well as in India. When we come to think of it, the activities of the Sufis can not be disregarded.

As the way of the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, six types¹⁾ have been pointed out: (1)the type by Muslim merchants, (2)the type by specific religious sects, (3)the type by marriage, (4)the type by Hajj, (5)the type by royal famillies and aristocracy, (6)the type by emancipation of slaves.

Indonesia was Islamized gradually and peacefully by means of all types except (6). Especially tariqa, or Sufi mysticism order, which belonged to the second type, played a great role in propagation of Islam as Muslim merchants.

In this article, the Cultural types of Indonesian Islam will be treated, with Islamization, and activities of Sufis in Java and Sumatra.

1. The infiltration of Islam

Islam was first brought into Aceh in North-west Sumatra, and after 12th century Islam began to spread in Indonesia. According to Drs. J. M. Yunus, Sultan Abdul Aziz (1161~186) established Islamic country Perlak Sultanate in Aceh in the middle of 12th century²⁾. And the royal line was succeeded to Samudra Pasai Sultanate³⁾, because a princess of Perlak Sultanate was married into this kingdom. Similarly, the royal line of Samudra Pasai was succeeded to Aceh Darsallam Kingdom.

Islam was brought into port towns in Java and other islands through the trade route from these Sultanate and port towns under their control. This is the way most of port towns in islands has become Islamized before 17th century. And moreover, Islam went on infiltrating into interior of islands, and some regions were not Islamized until 20th century. It can be said that Islam were infiltrating very gradually and for a very long time. And, Islam spread without so much trouble or conflict, because Muslim merchants and Sufis were mainly engaged in missionary work⁴⁾.

Thus Islam spread in various ways in Indonesia, so that religious form differs according to individuals and localities. For example, in East Java and Central Java, Islam and Adat are closely connected. The proverb, "Agama come from the sea, and Adat come from the mountain (Agama datang dari laut, Adat datang dari gunung)", shows the Javanese religious form characterized by syncretism. In Aceh and Minangkabau in Sumatra, however, Islam and Adat are truly connected, but the purity of Islam is emphasized. In Minangkabau, since the late of 18th century, the proverb has come down, "Adat is based on the religion, and the religion is based on the Koran (Adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah⁵⁾)". It means that Islam should be rated above Adat, and that its fundamental should be in the Koran. And it made Adat more universal, and Islamic precept firm in the Minangkabau lives.

When East Java and Central Java are compared with Minangkabau, the former region come to be Islamized in 15th century and the latter is in the late of 16th century. Thus the way of acceptance of Islam varied in different localities, and that is also seen in these above proverbs. Moreover there is a prverb, “Aceh is a veranda of Mecca (Aceh serambi Makka⁶⁾”, it means that Aceh was the first region that was Islamized not only in Indonesia but also in Southeast Asia, and that Islam in Aceh is the most orthodox.

Adding to these regional differences, there are individual differences in the way of religion life. Dr. C. Geertz, American Cultural Sociologist, presented a very suggestive view about Javanese Muslims⁷⁾. He classified them into three cultural types: (1)Santri, (2)Prijaji, (3)Abangan⁸⁾. His view is a clue to the study of various Indonesian Muslims. Whether it should be taken or not, the classification of Javanese Muslims is a very excellent study.

In the process of Islamization, in fact, there were political motives and religious cause between both sides, non-Muslim and Muslim ; Islam was brought to port towns in every island through the trade route: first, through the route starting from Aceh, and then through the route starting from Malacca.

The port towns were bases for propagating Islam, and these towns which had been prosperouse from old times were the center of Muslim merchant’ s activities. By and by, they came to be Islamized one after another. As Dr. C. Geertz mentions ; the merchants living in these towns were also the first to accept Islam and to become pious Muslims, and Satri originated with them.

2. The role of Sufism

It is difficult to know exactly what kind of role Sufism played in Islamization in Indonesia, because of lack of historical records. Therefore, to discuss the relation between Islamization and Sufism is not more than a tentative assumption. It is certain, however, that in the process of Islamization there were some agreement between Muslims and those who

had observed ancient tradition. And, it was Sufis that played a great role in joining them. According to 'The Suma Oriental' by Tome Pires, in Java, there were mystical ascetics called *tapa*, who had a great deal to do with the Javanese religious lives. So the Javanese people did not regard Sufis as heretics⁹⁾. It is also said that Sufism was accepted without so much trouble, because the Javanese Buddhism was monotheistically interpreted, and because Sufism was accompanied with the same practice as shamanism was, in point of aiming at pantheistic speculation and emancipation from the soul¹⁰⁾.

By the early of 20th century, some Sufism orders had been established in Sumatra and Sulawesi: Kadiriyya, Nakshbandiyyah, Shadiliyya, Summaniyya, Rifaiyya, Shattariyya, Tidjaniyya, Qusyasiyya, Kalwatiyya, and so on¹¹⁾.

In Java, nine saints, Wali Sanga or Wali Songo, were engaged in propagation of Islam¹²⁾. Besides these saints, of course, there were many saints called Sunan, and their graves are still in every place. And there was a particular case that the name of Sunan Giri, one of Wali Sanga, was succeeded by his successors for a long time¹³⁾. Incidentally the word of Sanga is that of Sanskrit origin, which means "an organization", so Wali Sanga may be taken for the organization of Sufism saints.

Generally speaking, however, Wali Sanga consists of these nine saints: Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Sunan Gresik), Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bounang, Sunan Giri, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Gunung Jati, Sunan Kudus, and Sunan Muria. They hold proper positions in the lineage (*silsilah*) that can be traced back to Muhammad.

Among them, Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Muria belonged to the lineage of Abbas, an uncle of Muhammad. Other seven saints are said to have been blood relatives, that is, descendants of Husein, a son of Fatima, a daughter of Muhammad¹⁴⁾. According to the genealogical table of Wali Sanga, *Silsilah Walisongo & Syeh Abd Qadir Jaelany*, which this writer possesses, Syeh Abd Qadir Jaelany, founder of the Kadiriyya order, belong to the lineage of Hasan who is an elder brother of Husein. Therefore, it may be said that the *tariqa* or

the Sufism order that Wali Sanga belonged to, was the Kadiriyya order. However, I have not been convinced of it yet, though I discussed this problem with Islamic scholars in Indonesia.

As well known, in the process of development, the Sufi order devided into many branches, some of which become independent of the headquarters under the name of new tariqa. So we may consider that the saints of Wali Sanga got independent of the Kadiriyya order. The Kadiriyya was the first tariqa that was estalished by Abd Qadir Jaelany in the Islamic world, and after 15th century it developed into a big order that extended to every place in the Islamic world. But the control of the headquarter in Bagdad was not so strong, and the branch orders were rather independent. And, they were rarely opposed to the political authorities and Sunni Islam, because their religious standpoint was moderate and peaceful.

Sunan Ampel, one of Wali Sanga, was appointed to a local governor of Ampel Denta, Surabaya by the Majapahit dynasty, and Sunan Gunung Jati, also one of them, was the founder of Banten Sultanate, who Islamized West Java. The former kept in harmony with the Hindu-Java authorities in Java, and latter played a great role in establisement of Islamic government¹⁵⁾. Therefore it can be said that Wali Sanga originated in Kadiriyya, though they did not say that they belonged to this order.

On the other hand, it is confirmed that there existed many tariqas in Sumatra, and the order mainly engaged in Islamization of Aceh and Minangkabau was the Shattariyya¹⁶⁾. To this order belonged Syekh Abdurrauf, Islamic mystic in Aceh, and his disciple Syekh Burhanuddin, who had a strong influence on Islamization in Minangkabau¹⁷⁾.

Syekh Abdurrauf studied an Islamic doctrine in Mecca and Medina for twenty years under Ahmad Qushasi, who belonged to the Shattariyya order. This order emphasized the uniqueness of God, or Tauhid. And by performing dhikr, the saints of this order reached the state of 'fana', the state of being one with God, advocating, "I am God¹⁸⁾". After mastering the secrets of the

Shattariyya, Syekh Abdurrauf came back to Aceh in 1661 to be engaged in propaganda. He, widely called by the name of 'Master of Estuary (Teunku di Kuala)', or Syiak Kuala, was engaged in propagation as 'Mufti' or Islamic judge, under the protect of Sultanah Taj al- 'Alam Safiat al-Din Syah (1641~75), and gained many believers in the lower classes¹⁹⁾.

Syekh Burhanuddin, born in Nagari Sintuk, studied under Syekh Abdurrauf, came back to Minangkabau from Aceh in the end of 17th century, and began to propagate in Ulakan in the south of Pariaman or the western coast of Sumatra. He taught the Islamic law, Iman, Tauhid, Taqlid and Tasawwuf to many disciples from darek, or inland hights, as well as from rantau, or the coast region²⁰⁾. After his death his disciples were positively engaged in propagation in Minangkabau of the matrilineal community.

The Sufi order built Khanqa, or training schools, where special sufis or nonspecial sufis gathered to try to be one with God, Allah. As what was equivalent to Khanqa, Pesantrens were built in Java on the model of early Islamic school called Mandara²¹⁾. Pesantren means the school of Santri. Santri, originated from the Sanskrit 'shastra', means the student²²⁾. Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Kalijaga built Pesantrens and educated disciples, engaging in propagation. Pesantrens still exist in every place of Indonesia and are engaged in Islamic education. At least before 1936, Kyai, or teachers, and Santris practised dhikr after dawn worship at Pesantrens²³⁾. Judging from this fact, Pesantren must have been Khanqa for training and propagation.

Syekh Burhanuddin built Surau Pondok in Ulakan of Minangkabau. Surau means a house for youths in Minangkabau, and Pondok means a dormitory in the Malay world. Pondok were always attached to Pesantrens and Santris live there together²⁴⁾. Syekh Burhanuddin built such a school or house for youths, and lectured on the Islamic doctrine to his disciples living together there. Therefore Surau Pondok can be surely equivalent to Pesantren²⁵⁾.

This is how Sufi saints educated their disciples and engaged in the Islamic propaganda at these schools: Pesantren, Pondok, Surau and so on. Though these schools were not given the name of Khanqa, they were equal to Khanqa. It is said that there still exist more than twenty thousand Pesantrens with Pondok in Indonesia²⁶). And all the villages in Minangkabau have Suraus, and young people in spend nights there learning Islamic doctrine from Ulamas.

Sufism was generally tolerant of the local culture and native traditions, and heathen holy graves and relics were treated in the Islamic style. Sufi saints were thought to have the superhuman ability (baraka) to work miracles, and their biographies were embellished with various miracle stories. As people thought that baraka still remained in the graves and relics after saint's death, they visited holy graves praying for the worldly profit.

The graves of Wali Sanga in Java, that of Syekh Abdurrauf in Aceh, and that of Syekh Burhanuddin in Minangkabau are still worshiped. The graves of Wali Sanga, of course, are visited by the number of people, which shows the vestige of Javanese syncretism. The grave of Syekh Burhanuddin is also visited by many people. The graves of the famous founders of pesantrens are worshiped in Java, and the grave of the hero of Aceh War Teunku di Tiro (Syekh Saman) is worshiped in Aceh²⁷).

The people visiting holy graves offered flowers and food to them, and burn incense, chanting the 36th chapter of Koran 'Sura Yasin' or other, and meditating. This is called "berhajat". In meditating, one has the beads of a rosary, a charm (jimat), and a stone brought from a holy as they are considered to have baraka.

Judging from the above mention, it is evident that Sufism played a great role in Islamization of Indonesia.

3. The theory of Sufi-Guild

As above mentioned, gradual and unequal Islamization of Indonesia had

much to do with the activities of Muslim merchants, and port towns were the bases for propagating Islam. Paying attention to the close relation between Muslim merchants and Sufis, an Australian scholar Dr. A. H. Jones proposed the theory of Sufi-Guild²⁸⁾.

Though it has not been made so clear what role Sufis played in Islamization, Dr. A. H. Jones says that Sufis were engaged in propagation, joining the merchant guild and the craftman guild. As they were able to adapt themselves to the spirit worship and the ancestor worship, they effectively propagated Islam in the Indonesian society where animism and Hindu mysticism blended. And, they faced on an equal footing the mystics who believed in Siva Buddha and advocated the superiority of Islam²⁹⁾.

It is very difficult to prove by historical records that Sufis joined the merchant guild and the craftman guild. But it is certain that one of Wali Sanga Maulana Malik Ibrahim ran a trading store in Romo³⁰⁾, and Sunan Giri was either a head porter or a head financial commissioner (shabandar) in Gresik. A Muslim lady Niai Gede Pinate, who brought him up, was also a Shabandar in Gresik. It has not been made clear whether all the Sufis with an honorific title of Sunan or Syekh were really connected with trade or handcraft, but some chronicles record that most of them devoted themselves to propagation.

Therefore we must not conclude that all the Sufis belonged to the merchant guild or the craftman guild. But it is undoubted that they acted with Muslim merchants, and settled down in every place of Indonesia, and were engaged in propagation, building Pesantren, Pondok, Surau, Masjid, Langgar, Mushalla, and so on.

The Masjid built by Sunan Kalijaga was Tiban Masjid, that is, a Mosque serving as a hospital. And there Sufis gave medium to patients and treated them by, so to speak, psychotherapy using freely psychopathological knowledge³¹⁾. It was also the practice of Sufi's miracles. People showed their respect to Sufis and were converted to Islam.

Around the 15th century, the Javanese traditional art Wayan was changed from a picture scroll called Wayan Beber into a shadow picture play Wayan Kulit. Its change began at about the same time as the acceptance of Islam, and it is considered to have something to do with the introduction of Islam. Sunan Kalijaga made use of Wayan in propagating Islam and adopted a scene of Gara Gara, or the chaotic state of cataclysm, in a Wayan play made on the model of the Hindu epic poetry. At that scene the God of Wisdom, Semar, comes on the stage and the cataclysm becomes calm. The God of wisdom means a Sufi saint. A Sufi saint holds position equal to God, Allah. And, that the appearance of the God makes the world clam. The God of Wisdom means a Sufi saint. A Sufi saint holds a position equal to God, Allah. And, that the appearance of the God makes the world clam is the evidence of the greatness of God³².

A peculiarity of Sufism consists in the way, Sufis made use of the native traditions in propagation Islam³³.

To approve the theory of Sufi-Guild, more practical studies will be needed. However, the problem must be solved to make clear of the process of Islamization and to understand the proper role that Sufism played.

4. The cultural types of Indonesian Muslim

As mentioned above, Indonesian Islam came to be tinged with the feature of multi-layer religion. Therefore it called syncretism Islam. Though different from place to place, Islam was obliged to keep in harmony with the adat that ruled the lives of Indonesian people.

Based on this form of multi-layer religion, Dr. C. Geertz found a clue to classify the religious form into three ; that is, (1)Santri, (2)Prijaji, (3)Abangan. The first are pious Muslims connected with commercial world ; the second are educated Muslim with Hindu culture and courtesy, who are on the aristocratic lineage continuing from New Mataram dynasty ; the third are Muslims who make much of the cult of spirit and ancestor, and adat. Of

course, Santri live in villages, too. Because this classification coincides with the social class, it is not so persuasive. But it is a very effective way to analyze the existence form of Indonesian Muslim, especially Javanese Muslim³⁴⁾.

Through these studies, we can see the way of life of Indonesian Muslims: they make an offering to the holy spirit, hold ceremonies in conformity with adat, and use magic in treatment of the sick. Even Abangans, since they are Muslims, must chant "Gusti Allah (the Lord Allah)" and call Muhammad 'kanjung Nabi (the suprem prophet³⁵⁾'. And they pray five times a day, attend the Friday service, and observe a fast in Ramadan, September of Hijra calendar. On many occasion they perform a ceremony of eating food together, called *Selamatan* or *Kenduri*. Though the Islamic law rules marriage, they very often hold marriage in conformity with traditional rite, praying to the holy spirit for happiness³⁶⁾.

When Islam was introduced into Indonesia, the tension occurred between Islam and the local culture. In other words, it was friction between the Islamic law and the adat. Then, however, through the activities of Sufis, a compromise was reached between the traditional religion and the Islamic law. As adat was recognized to be orthodox, it accepted Islam. And as the Islamic doctrine was observed, Islam approved the local culture, such as adat, in the Muslim's daily lives³⁷⁾.

The process of change from tense relation into peaceful coexistence must be grasped not only in the aspect of Islam but in the aspect of the traditional value system of Indonesia. And it is desirable that we should study the existence form of Indonesian Muslims, who have multi-layer religion or syncretism, in the aspect of both Islam and the traditional value system.

Conclusions

Islam, combined with adat, gradually spread in Indonesia for a long time. In Minangkabau a Muslim group called Adat sect was formed, and it was

conservative Islam. Against this group a new movement called 'Kaum Muda', or Young Generation, began at the end of the 19th century, influenced by the Wahhab movement in Arabia. Its purpose was to come back to sternness and plainness of the primitive Islam, and then the reform movement began. Thus reform movement developed in parallel with the development of Indonesian nationalism³⁸). But in the aspect of Islam, we may consider this movement to be the movement to reform and purify conservative Islam.

Among these movements by younger generation, the most powerful was the Muhammadiyah³⁹) (now, Partai Amanat Nasional), started by K. H. Ahmad Dahran in 1912, and it is still carry out the reform movement. Some scholars regards this movement as Re-Islamization⁴⁰).

These movements stimulated conservative Muslims to start new movement. In 1926, Nahdatul Ulama (now, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa) was organized by the leaders of Pesantren in East Java. Though this group came to be engaged in politics later, it is still systematically playing an active part.

This is how Indonesian Islam is now developing into a new phase. And at present, what is necessary is to study anew the history of Indonesian Muslim based on the practical research in terms of Islam today.

Notes

1) Encyclopedia of Islam (in Japanese), Heibonsha, Tokyo, pp.133-134.

2) Seiji Imanaga, Islam in Southeast Asia, pp.67-94.

Dr. A. H. Hasjmi put forward a new theory on the basis of "Silsila Raja Raja Peureulak (The lineage of Perlak Sultanate)", that Perlak Sultanate was established in the 9th century. See A. H. Hasjimy, *Kebudayaan Aceh dalam Sejarah*, pp.45-46.

3) Michiko Nakahara, Islamization of Southeast Asian Islands (in Japanese), *The History of Cultural Exchange in the World*, pp.120-133.

4) John, D. Legge, *Indonesia* (trans. Mitsuo Nakamura in Japanese), pp.88-93.

5) Seiji Imanaga, *op.cit.*, pp.127-168.

6) "Aceh serambi Makka" was duly approved in 1980 by the Academic Council of Islam

- in Aceh (Majelis Ulama Propinsi Daerah Aceh), See Seiji Imanaga, *op.cit.*, p.67.
- 7) Akira Nagazumi and Sakae Maotani, *A Value System of Southeast Asia [Indonesia]* (in Japanese), pp.32-33.
 - 8) C. Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, pp.121-352.
 - 9) Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental* (trans.Shigeru Ikuta in Japanese), *The Age of Great Voyage Collection V*, p. 305.
 - 10) Hiroshi Iwamoto, *Islamization of Java* (in Japanese), *The Culture of Asia*, Vol.12, No.3, p.58.
 - 11) *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New ed., Vol.3, p.1228.
 - 12) Solicin Salam, *Wali Sanga*, p.25.
 - 13) As to Sunan Giri, see Shinjiro Nagaoka, *The End of Islamic Cities in Java* (in Japanese), *The Society and the Culture of Southeast Asia and India*, II, pp.214-233.
 - 14) Seiji Imanaga, *Sufism in Java* (in Japanese), *A Society for the Study of Middle East*, No.4, p.305.
 - 15) S. T. Raffles, *The History of Java*, Vol.2, pp.118-119.
 - 16) Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, Vol.2, pp.13-17.
 - 17) Tsuyoshi Katoh, *The Relation between Islam and the Matrilineal System in Minangkabau Community* (in Japanese), *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.18, No.2, p.236.
 - 18) *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp.533-534.
 - 19) Snouck Hurgronje, *op.cit.*, Vol.2, p.20.
 - 20) Amiruddin Tuanku Bagindo, *Syeik Burhanuddin*, p.16.
 - 21) Raphael Israele ed., *The Crescent in the East, Islam in Asia Major*, p.183.
 - 22) Though Dr. C. Geertz regards Santri as a pious Muslim, strictly speaking, Santri is a student of Pesantren.
 - 23) *Encyclopedia of Islam*, old ed., Vol. 13, pp.1028-1029.
 - 24) Pesantren exists in Malaysia, but there Pesantren is often called Pondok.
 - 25) As to Surau, see Muhammad Rajab, *Semasa Kecil di Kampung 1913-28, Autobiografi Seorang anak Minangkabau [Memories of a village of Sumatra]* (trans.Tsuyoshi Katoh in Japanese), pp.57-72.
 - 26) *The Indonesian Council of Mosques*, ed., *Islam in Indonesia Today*, p.63.
 - 27) H. Mohmmad Said, *Aceh*, pp.754-800.
 - 28) A. H. Johns, *Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History*, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol.2, No.2, p.13.
 - 29) John, D. Legge, *op.cit.*, pp.94-96.
 - 30) *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 2, p.130. In this book, Maulana Malik Ibrahim is

- explained as a Persian merchant. But one of his biographies describes him as a Muslim from Cambodia, whose descent can be traced back to Fatima. See *Riwayat Singkat Perjuangan Maulana Malik Ibrahim*, pp.5-6.
- 31) Ki. M. A. Machfoeld, *Sunan Kalijaga*, p.25.
 - 32) Ki. M. A. Machfoeld, *ibid*, pp.21-23.
 - 33) as to the way of Islamic propagation, see Seiji Imanaga, *Sufism in Java* (in Japanese), *A Society for the Study of Middle East*, No.4, pp.116-126.
 - 34) Islamic scholars set up two-type classification, *Islam and Statistic Islam*. See M. Rasjidi, *Mengapa aku tetap memeluk Agama Islam*, pp.10-11.
 - 35) Seiji Imanaga, *op.cit.*, pp.95-125.
 - 36) Koentjaraningrat, ed., *Manusia dan Kebudayaan di Indonesia* [People and Culture of Indonesia] (trans.Tsuyoshi Katoh, Kenji Tsuchiya, and Takashi Shiraishi in Japanese), p.413.
 - 37) Arifin Bey, *Modernization and Islam*, p.108.
 - 38) See, Akira Nagazumi, *The Formation of Indonesian Nationalism* (in Japanese), pp.99-271.
 - 39) A. Jainuri, *Muhammadiyah, Gerakan Reformasi Islam di Jawa Awal Abad Kedua Puluh*, pp.1-99.
 - 40) Mituo Nakamura, *The Crescent arises over the Banyan Tree*, pp.180-183.

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