RETHINKING TRADITION IN MODERN LIFE

Krisprantono [1]

Abstract: In a general sense, tradition is associated with the past, that remains integral to us all, while on the other hand modernity look towards the future. Historically, traditions derived from local conditions such as social system, climate, our natural environment and our beliefs about religion and philosophy. However, modernity is more related to our social economic factors, technology and global information. These influence the changes of our attitude towards our heritage and what we should do about it. In the long existence of humanity a new generation appears roughly every twenty five years. In modern time, we question how can tradition survive in the dynamic advancement of modernization? In the West and even in the Eastern culture together with the influence of modernity, traditions and different customs have gradually declined, and in son.e cases have disappeared. Does this consequently mean that tradition and all it stands for have been left behind and disappeared?

Key words: tradition, modernity, culture and philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Over these generations, what caused people to group together were the basic survival needs, but what bound them culturally and emotionally was the emergence of tradition. Referring to this situation Heidegger states in David Gross's *The Past in Ruins* that "Everything essential and of great magnitude has arisen only out of the fact that man ..... was rooted in a tradition". Gross argues that "Tradition is a vital source of social cohesion and continuity and that the erosion of past values and practices is a disaster, the root cause of contemporary spiritual and social decay" (1992:4).

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[1]. **Dr. Ir. Krisprantono,** is a lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang.

phenomenon and elements of a largely urban society, with this different styles and notion that modernization is the product of industrialization. Significantly, in a general sense, modernity has reshaped the notion of society. But understanding the nature and reasons for the ideology of modernity demands some brief examination of the historical process which has helped to shape it.

The ideological basis of modernity has formulated its own 'new world' and is based on 'rationality', 'individualism', 'materialism' and 'developmentalism'. Modernity has transferred the norms of rational ways of life (Lash and Friedman 1992). Some say that development of modernity in the West derived from the same historical process that gave us the Enlightenment and industrial periods. Originally, the 'Enlightenment' was the title of a painting by the German artist, Deniel Chedowski in the 18th century. The picture depicts the early morning sunlight on the village with a building like a kind a manor house, surrounded by people on their way towards the building. This ideology is directed towards the "birth of industrial Revolution" (Im Hof 1994:3). In the painting of Enlightenment, the light of the sun refers to contemporary reform movements.

In Britain, the English employed the term Enlightenment to emphasis that the 18th century society was "Enlightenment beyond the hopes and imaginations of former times" (Im Hof 1994:4). In France, at the same time, Enlightenment denoted the beginning of freedom from fetters and absolutism, and these ideologies lead to the Frech Revolution " ......*les seules 'lumieres' de la raison naturelle sont capable de conduire les hommes a la perfection de la science et de la sagesse humaine*". Lumiere was the French word for 'light' and represented understanding and Knowledge (Im Hof 1994:4). In the 1780s, the German term 'Aufklarung' was applied to that historical era: das Zeitalter der Aufklarung – the Age of Enlightenment conveyed "The idea of light in number of parallel combinations" (Im Hof 1994:5).

Generally, Enlightenment spreading out 'reason and science' transmitted in some ways trough many areas of discipline. Im Hof writes,

> The light enters into hearts and minds to remove veils
> and screens that covered our sight, and led to a freedom
> of thought (1994:5).

Approximately in the 18th century the Enlightenment implies creation opportunities that affect the transition from theory to practice, from criticism to action, from design to improvement and the reform of the education system (Im Hof 1994:6). The nature Enlightenment concerned primarily looking forward, rather than backward, with the expectation that men would be directed by their own reason and be free from orthodoxy, to search for opportunities of new stability following the crises of the 17th century.

The basic ideology of Enlightenment a program of action was meant to train not only new men but better men. It was "........ to liberate human beings from their chains by de-socialization of knowledge and instead reliance on scientific knowledge". Every individual had " ....a freedom was his own conscience and had to observe ethical principles". For this function of a goal, it absorbed the idea of the doctrine of the four cardinal virtues, derived from Greek and Roman ethical system, justitia, prudentia, temperantia and fortitude-justice wisdom, moderation and courage (Im Hof 1994:213). Derived from the Enlightenment, classical knowledge was seen in terms of its practical application in the way of methodical thinking. But by the late 18th century, this opinion had become widespread.

In Europe, the Romantic movements in literature and the arts began in the closing decade of the 18th century, led by England in the 1780s Germany in the 1790s and France in the 1800s. the term Romanticism in its pluralistic and varied manifestations became ".... The timbre of national historical movements with differing connotations outside its historical boundaries" (Frust 1979:14). *The Webster's Dictionary* (1995: 836) describes 'Romanticism' as " ... an exaltation of individual values and aspirations".

The *French Encyclopedia, Larousse du xxe Siecle* designates 'romantic' as those " ...at the beginning of the 19th century, emancipated themselves from the classical rules of composition and style". The end of Romanticism in the 19th century, was the dawn of 'modernism' as Syre and Lowy express in *Figures Romantic Anti-capitalism* in Frust *Romanticism* that "One cannot therefore avoid facing the hypothesis that Romanticism is an essential component of modern culture" (Frust, quoted in Frust 1979:105).

At the end of the 20th century we are said to be in the middle of a modernizing period but the evidence for this is complicated. The most powerful legacy of the present age is the belief that as modern societies develop tradition has less and less of a role to play in the lives of individuals. Eisenstadt explains

> Traditional society is conceived as bound by the cultural horizons and modern society is considered culturally dynamic and oriented to change innovation (Eisenstadt 1973:10).

In Indonesia's big cities, many groups of citizens tend to live a modern lifestyle, though their institutions often depend on and express the traditional overtones of a pre-modern society. Perhaps unexpectedly, a large number of modern organizations depend on the continuation of traditional forms. In Indonesia, religious life is well maintained, and the rituals and ceremonies connected with religion have been performed from distant times up to the present. For example, *Waisak* for the Hindus, Christmas for Christians and even Islamic *Idulfitri* are celebrated by most Indonesians. These rituals and ceremonies have helped to retain Indonesian traditional society in modern times.

THE EVOLUTION OF TRADITION IN MODERNITY

One of the most important potential changes with modernization is the dimension of human life and cultural communities. It is interesting to discuss whether traditions still have value in modern society, although it might be difficult to discover whether or not they exist. In the Third World countries, such as in Southeast Asia which are encountering the effects of modernity from developed countries, the main resistant factor is that the country's economic development is not advanced enough to utterly displace tradition particularly in big cities. In less developed rural areas, modernity does not have much influence, thus older customs and ways of life are still alive in many areas.

Notions such as the failure of tradition, and defects in modernity, or the decline of customs are seen to be due to modernity. It is claimed that the power of modernity destroys the future of tradition and thus causes the decline of tradition. On the one hand, tradition are essentially there to: "…regulate cultural and social lives, basically appearing from the villages, rules by religious or secular authority and in rule of natural order and belief" (Center 1992:1) In the binary opposition between tradition and modernity arguments presented above, the word tradition commonly refers to the composite beliefs and practice that are authoritative and natural and of the particular society's past. Thus, 'traditional' societies are " …usually those

that are portrayed as organically maintaining social order, they are stable, unchanging, and governed by authoritative rules which creation and legitimization of reflexive subject" (Center 1992: 2).

Modernity is now, however, our reality. Each of these developments is taken to be a loss, and the main underlying cause of them is the decline of tradition. Gross, addressing this anomaly, claims that at present "Tradition still survive, only they do so beside, behind, between or beneath the practice and structure of modernity" (1992:42). It is claimed that the power of modernity causes the decline of tradition.

Anthony Giddens supports the idea in the "Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Traditions and Aesthetics in Modern Social Order" writing that

> Traditions have not disappeared altogether from the modern world, but rather their status has changed. They are less secure and have become relics", which he calls "The past with no effective connection with the present (1994:100).

Luke also argues in "The Past in Ruin, Tradition and Critique of Modernity" that " ... tradition may still persist in the social constitution ... beside, behind, between and beneath the practice and structure of modernity" (quoted in Heelas 1996:112).

CONCLUSION

The relevance of the past history of society can be carefully recorded and learned precisely by the historian. By understanding the historical consciousness of the society continuously one can become knowledgeable about the framework of traditions, but this does not guarantee that restoring tradition and past practices can have any part in addressing present problems. Here, the historian is entrusted with the fact not only of collecting factual details of customs before they disappear, but of preserving some sense of their feel, ethos and texture for future generations. In their purest form these recent traditions attempt to set the lock back in order to bring the past to life. As an ideology, traditionalism opposes the present in its entirety and looks to past values for an alternate way of living. Yet for tradition to become re-operative, modernity would have to be eradicated so that the normatively of antedated traditions can be restored.

In order for tradition to refunction, it must be revised, made over, touched up, enhanced, or glamorized in some manner in order to become more attractive for whatever purpose the state or market may intend. In connection with commodities, some forms of tradition have been preserved that otherwise would have been forgotten. For example, in Indonesia, the stories of shadow puppets based on the old Hindu tale, the Mahabarata, when Islam came to Indonesia in the 15th and 16th centuries, were represented in an Islamic version to entice the Javanese to adopt the Moslem faith. This tradition has been perpetuated, not only for the sake of tourism, but because the stories are meaningful and interesting for the Javanese.

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