

Musical Practices as an Instrument for Spiritual Ascension, Praying and Practicing Faith

The First Conference in Kyoto:

**Between Praying and Playing: Exploring the Potentials of Musical
Performance in Religious Traditions**

Date: 24-26 February, 2025

Venue (25-26 February): Meeting Room (AA447), 4th Floor, Research Building
No. 2, Kyoto University

[Prospectus]

Conventionally, the mystical philosophy by intellectual elites and the practices of mystical orders among people have been studied separately in the research of Sufism (Islamic mysticism). The former has been studied in Islamic studies, and the latter in anthropology, and the two kinds of approaches have never been linked. In order to overcome the division, this project focuses on poetry, music, and rituals including dances, all of which express mystical experiences, side by side with metaphysics. Mystical poetry, written by intellectual poets, is widely known among people. It has often been chanted with musical instruments and has fascinated people. In addition, dances are performed with the music as a part of rituals in some mystical orders.

Music, side by side with literature, is an essential component of ritual practices and plays a central role in many religions, both historically and in contemporary contexts. The relationship between music (and related artificial expressions) and religion is shaped by a variety of often contradictory transcendent artistic concepts, normative functional claims, and theological expectations introduced by scholars, believers, religious and spiritual leaders, and musicians over time. This dialectical nature of music reflects the culture and musical perceptions of its respective era in diverse ways.

The goal of this inaugural workshop is to form a working group dedicated to exploring intersections between two rich spiritual traditions: Sufi Islam/Tasawwuf and Japanese culture (Buddhism, Shintoism, Hidden Christianity and so on). By examining music, literature, and ritual within these traditions, the workshop aims to highlight both unique and shared elements across metaphysical concepts, religious practice, and artistic expression. Through a collaborative approach, we seek to uncover new synergies between these

disciplines, fostering a deeper understanding of the roles that music and ritual play in shaping spiritual experience.

Just before the conference at Kyoto University, the study tour for Japanese Culture of Religion and Art will be conducted. We believe this study tour will give the participants a chance of the direct experience of Japanese culture on religions and art, side by side with the informations presented in the conference.

[Program]

24 February, 2025 (Study Tour for Japanese Culture of Religion and Art)

9:00 Start from Kyoto University

10:00-16:00 Experience of Shinto culture at Fushimi Inari Shrine, Experience of Buddhism culture at Mampukuji Temple and Byodoin Temple, and discussion about the comparison of religions and art between Japan and Islamic world.

17:00 Arrival at Kyoto University

25 February, 2025 (Day One of the Conference: Meeting of East and West)

10:15-10:45 Opening Session (Opening remarks: Tonaga Yasushi & Tuba Işık, congratulatory speeches: Cemalnur Sargut, Chair: Suzuki Manami)

10:45-12:15 Session 1 (Chair: TONAGA Yasushi)

Tuba Işık: Singing as a Sufi Performance and its Impact on Character Cultivation

Michael Conway: Shinran's Japanese Language Hymns in Contemporary Shin Buddhist Ritual

Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya: Sufi Literature, Ritual, and Music/The Dynamics of Spiritual Awareness: Exploring Buddhist and Sufi Pathways through Text, Practice, and Sound

12:15-13:45 Lunch

13:45-15:15 Session 2 (Chair: Hatice Dilek Güldütuna)

KOIZUMI Yurina: Reception of Christianity in Japan and its Influence on Various Arts

Vasfi Emre Ömürlü: Flow of a Least Known Zikir Example of Istanbul Tekke: Rifâî Kelîme-i Tevhîd Zikir

FUJITA Takanori: Sound patterns for invocation to the supernatural in kagura, the Shinto ritual and Noh drama of Japan

15:15-15:45 Tea Break

15:45-17:45 Performance Workshop

Vasfi Emre Ömürlü: : Experiencing the Least Known Sûfî Practice of *Rifâi Kıyam Kelîme-i Tevhîd Zikir*

FUJITA Takanori: *Yuri* (“to Sway”) , the Sound Symbol Used to Revive the Solar Deity in Noh Drama

18:30- Dinner

26 Febuary, 2025 (Day Two of the Conference: Artificial Expressions in between Practice and Meaning)

09:30-10:30 Sesssion 3 (Chair: AKAHORI Masayuki)

SUZUKI Manami: Melody and Lyrics in Cem Rituals of Alevi-Bektaşî: Music as a Form of Islam that Accompanies People

Birhan Gencer, M.A.: Rifai Qiyâm Dhikr in the Tradition of Ümmü Kenan Lodge

10:30-10:45 Tea Break

10:45-11:45 Session 4 (Chair: İlknur Bahadır)

YAMAGUCHI Takumi: Corporeality of Otherness: A Typology of Bodily Reactions at Sufi Ritual of Spirit Possession in Morocco

Hatice Dilek Güldütuna: *Mânâ* of *Sema Mukâbele* and *Mevlevî Âyin* Example Through Various Composed Pieces

11:45-12:15 General Discussion (Chair: Akahori Masayuki)

12:15-12:30 Closing Session (Closing greetings: Elif Erhan, Chair: Suzuki Manami)

[Speakers' abstracts and short bios]

(Session 1)

Tuba Işık: Singing as a Sufi Performance and its Impact on Character Cultivation

(abstract)

In this talk, I will explore how singing religious songs in Sufism serves as both an artistic and a deeply transformative practice for personal and spiritual development. Drawing upon the Sufi concept of *tazkiyya an-nafs* (the purification of the soul) and *sayr-u-suluk* (the spiritual journey), singing is more than just vocal expression. It becomes a form of worship and self-reflection, shaping the individual's inner character while connecting them to the divine.

Prof. Dr. Tuba Işık

Tuba Işık is a Professor of Islamic Education and Practical Theology at the Berlin Institute of Islamic Theology at Humboldt University in Berlin. She holds a master's degree in international public law and pedagogy from the Georg-August University of Göttingen and earned her Ph.D. from the University of Paderborn, where she also completed her habilitation with a focus on the cultivation of the self. She studied Catholic theology in Paderborn and at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome and further specialized in Islamic education at the University of Osnabrück and the İlahiyat Faculties of Bursa and Ankara in Turkey.

Michael Conway: Shinran's Japanese Language Hymns in Contemporary Shin Buddhist Ritual

(abstract)

This presentation introduces Shinran's Japanese language hymns and describes how they are used in contemporary ritual settings in Shin Buddhist temples. After showing one example of how the hymns are creative presentations of Shinran's unique doctrinal perspectives, I will introduce the role that they play in a variety of Shin Buddhist rituals.

Prof. Michael Conway (Associate Professor, Department of Shin Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Letters, Otani University)

Dr. Michael Conway is an associate professor in the Shin Buddhist Studies Department at Otani University. He studied in the graduate school at the same university from 2003 and received his PhD in 2011 for a dissertation on the one of the Chinese exegetes whose thought heavily influenced Shinran in his unique formulation of Pure Land Buddhist soteriology. His research interests include not only the roots of Shinran's thought in China but also the way that it has been received and represented by later

generations, particularly in the modern period, both in Japan and in the West.

Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya: Contours of Living Presence: Comparative Approaches to Spiritual Awareness in Buddhist and Sufi Artistic Traditions

This presentation, explores the intersections of spiritual awareness through the lens of Buddhist and Sufi traditions, focusing on their respective artistic expressions. The concepts of mindfulness (*sati*) in Buddhism and vigilance (*yakaza*) in Sufism serve as the foundation for this comparative analysis, where both traditions employ various forms of art, ritual, and music to cultivate spiritual awareness. The study explores the roles these artistic and musical practices play as conduits for harmonizing inner awareness with the sacred principles inherent in their ritualistic frameworks. In Zen Buddhism, the meditative tones of the shakuhachi flute and the minimalist elegance of calligraphy encapsulate ideals of presence, balance, and harmony, reflecting the broader Buddhist aspiration for awakening and transcendence. Similarly, in Sufi practice, the ney, a central instrument deeply embedded in the musical expressions of Ottoman Turkish dervish lodges, emerges as a profound vehicle for spiritual refinement. Rooted in the sacred atmospheres of Mevlevi lodges, Sufi music embodies a transformative power, enabling practitioners to attune their hearts to divine rhythms and sustain an elevated state of spiritual awareness. Rather than drawing reductive parallels, this inquiry explores how the historical trajectories and distinct spiritual frameworks of these traditions have shaped their unique artistic legacies. Featuring musical performances and engaging with literary and artistic examples, the presentation seeks to demonstrate the ways in which these practices inform contemporary understandings of living presence, offering nuanced insights into the intersection of tradition, art, and awareness.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya (Associate Professor, The Institute for Sufi Studies, Üsküdar University)

Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya is a faculty member at the Institute for Sufi Studies at Üsküdar University. Her research explores Sufism's intersections with modernity and secularism, focusing on late Ottoman-era Sufi movements. Yalçınkaya completed her MA thesis on the *Mathnawī* discourses of Ken'ān Rifāī (d. 1950) and then undertook three years of graduate courses in religion at Harvard Extension School. Her PhD thesis, examining the life, works, and Sufi thought of Ken'ān Rifāī, was published as a monograph (2020). Currently, she is a visiting researcher at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, conducting postdoctoral research on the "Bridging Role of the Sufi Intellectuals Between the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Republican Turkey." Her recent work on 19th-

century Sufi soundscapes has led to events on Sufi music and poetry at Harvard Divinity School, the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

(Session 2)

KOIZUMI Yurina: Reception of Christianity in Japan and its Influence on Various Arts

(abstract)

Christianity was first introduced to Japan in 1549, when the Jesuit Francis Xavier arrived in

the country. Following his arrival, Jesuit missionaries began proselytizing in Japan under

the patronage of warlords, the so-called “Christian daimyo”.

In particular, those referred as “Christian daimyo” were baptized and engaged in religious

activities with great zeal. However, there were others, such as Oda Nobunaga, who were

not baptized, but became backers of Christianity and offered generous protection.

In this lecture, I will focus on the musical aspect of the Christian culture that entered Japan,

and will discuss the following four points:

- (1) Church schools as training institutions for musicians
- (2) The exchange of music between Japan and the West
- (3) The preservation of musical culture thanks to its intangible nature
- (4) Contemporary Kakure Kirishitan beliefs and the “Uta-Orasho”

Dr. KOIZUMI Yurina (Associate Professor, Nagasaki International University)

Dr. Yurina KOIZUMI is an associate professor of Nagasaki International University.

She obtained Ph.D. (History and Folklore studies) at Graduate School of Kanagawa University in 2017. Also she studied at University of Ca' Foscari University of Venice (2015-2016).

Her dissertation presented the hidden Christian beliefs in contemporary Japanese society.

She specializes in intangible cultural heritage in Japan, including traditional performing arts, folk arts, and traditional craft techniques.

Vasfi Emre Ömürlü: Flow of a Least Known Zikir Example of Istanbul Tekke: Rifâî Kelîme-i Tevhîd Zikir

(abstract)

In this presentation, mapping of Rifâî Kelîme-i Tevhîd zikir which is a lost tradition from Ottoman times, is aimed. Procedure, steps inside the ceremony,

content of the zikir, musical compositions and structures will be presented. Live performance for the each step will be shared and performed with the audience.

Prof. Dr. Vasfi Emre Ömürlü

Vasfi Emre Ömürlü is a full professor in Yildiz Technical University, Mechatronic Engineering Department. He received his Ph.D. from The Ohio State University Mechanical Engineering Department in the area of medical robotics in 2002. Since his family is a professional musician family, his relations with Turkish Classical and Sufi Music has started from childhood. He attended concert practices and regular music theory courses in Kubbealtı Culture and Art Group Chorus, attended ney (reed flute) classes of Ömer Erdoğan and began to provide ney lessons in Kubbealtı Art and Culture Group. He was in numerous concerts and the most importantly, in radio programs in TRT (Turkish Radio and Television). One of his grandmasters is Hafız Kazım Büyükkaksoy, who was one of the greatest authorities in Turkish Classical Music. He has become a professional in the improvisational side of Islamic and Sufi music in different forms. He attended radio programs with Alaaddin Yavaşca in Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) Classical Turkish Music Chorus and with Doğan Ergin in TRT Sufi Music Chorus. Cinuçen Tanrıkorur, who is a composer, conductor, singer, and an oud player, is also another of his grandmaster, whose name was known internationally. CD recordings of Vasfi Emre Ömürlü is two CDs as “Suite in Makam Şeddisaba & Sufi Hymns” and “Aziz Mahmud Hüdâî in the Sufi Music of Cinuçen Tanrıkorur” and “İlahiyat-ı Ken’an” as 4 CD collection with his talented elderly sister as a soloist. Vasfi Emre Ömürlü is currently towards his second Ph.D. in Uskudar University Institute for Sufi Studies. He is the conductor of Lâ Edrî Sûfi Music chorus and they have been delivering concerts nationally and internationally in Germany, India, and Tanzania. Vasfi Emre Ömürlü is married and has twins as a boy and a girl.

FUJITA Takanori: Sound Patterns for Invocation to the Supernatural in Kagura, the Shinto Ritual and Noh Drama of Japan

(abstract)

One focus of a Japanese Kagura ritual is on the introduction of supernatural beings to the host community of the ritual. In order to invoke the such beings, usage of particular sound instruments and emitting specific sound patterns are indispensable. In this presentation, I will touch on kagura traditions transmitted both in the rural area and the imperial court and will compare them with the kagura parts that appear in Noh drama, the medieval drama transmitted in Japan from the 15th century. It is natural to think that Noh drama imitated the rural traditions and elaborated them into artistic style.

Prof. FUJITA Takanori (Professor, the Institute for Japanese Traditional Music, Kyoto City University of Arts)

Prof. FUJITA Takanori is a professor, the Institute for Japanese Traditional Music, Kyoto City University of Arts.

Since his graduation from the Musicology Department, Faculty of Letters, Osaka University in 1984, he has been involved in the music research on Noh drama and related local ritualistic performances of the Japanese medieval origin. Based mainly on field research, he watches local musical

forms in relation to social values maintained among communities. His doctoral thesis (Noh Choruses and Choral Singers. 2000, in Japanese) describes the historical change of the choral part of Noh chanting and its effect on dramatic production and narrativity. His recent work includes the youtube site Hagoromo with Full Notation and the co-authored internet pages Noh as intermedia (noh.stanford.edu).

(Performance Workshop)

Vasfi Emre Ömürlü: Experiencing the Least Known Sûfî Practice of *Rifâî Kiyam Kelîme-i Tevhîd Zikir*

(abstract)

Goals

1. To comprehend the structure of Rifâî Kiyam Kelîme-i Tevhîd Zikir
2. To practice together by participating for the lâfîz part
3. To understand the makams (musical structures) employed

Collective Singing: Experiencing Resonance (30-40 minutes)

1. Practicing the lâfîz: Practicing Kelîme-i Tevhîd “Lâ ilâhe illâllah — لا إله إلا الله” performed at different parts of the zikir.
 - a) Solo: Emre Hoca and Birhan Gençer begin to sing while the rest of the group listens silently.
 - b) Together: We sing together under the guidance of Emre Hoca.
2. Performing part of the usûl with audience:
 - a) Zâkirân and Dervîşân performance: Emre Hoca (Zâkirân) and Birhan Gençer/audience (Dervîşân) begins altogether to experience the perde kaldırma (pitch ascension) and perde indirme (pitch descension) parts while Dervîşân repeating the lâfîz, Kelîme-i Tevhîd “Lâ ilâhe illâllah — لا إله إلا الله” altogether.
 - b) Directions will be provided visually by the Zâkirân during the zikir.
3. Reflection Part: "How did I experience the practice?"

FUJITA Takanori: *Yuri* (“to Sway”) , the Sound Symbol Used to Revive the Solar Deity in Noh Drama

(abstract)

In my presentation and workshop, I will explain and demonstrate the fixed sound materials and musical patterns, which is used for calling "gods" (or somethings divine) in local traditions named kagura as well as noh drama. Specializing in music of Noh, I will lead the participants to utter the syllabic notations of the sound and melody of both the drum and the flute. I will bring some musical instruments. Participants may touch on the instruments and play if they like to.

(Session 3)

**SUZUKI Manami: Melody and Lyrics in Cem Rituals of Alevi-Bektaşî:
Music as a Form of Islam that Accompanies People**

(abstract)

This presentation focuses on the musical elements performed in the rituals of the Sufi-inspired religious group Alevi-Bektaşî, especially their sacred songs (deyiş/nefes) and circling movements (semah), as an Islamic ritualistic activity that strongly expresses musical elements of Anatolian folklore. These show an example of Islamic form that has been integrated into people's daily life.

**Dr. SUZUKI Manami (Specially Assigned Assistant Professor,
Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto
University)**

Dr. Manami SUZUKI is a Research fellow of Kenan Rifai Center for Sufi Studies at Kyoto University and specially assigned assistant professor of the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University. She obtained Ph.D. (Musicology) at the Graduate School of Kunitachi College of Music in 2020. Also she studied at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (2016-2017).

Her research interest is music and body movement performed in Islamic rituals, especially by Alevi and Sufis in Turkey, Balkan, and Austria. Her dissertation was focused on Alevi's ritualistic musical practice and inheritance to next generation in the migrant situation Balkan, and Austria. Her dissertation was focused on Alevi's ritualistic musical practice and inheritance to next generation in the migrant situation of Austria.

Birhan Gencer: Rifai qiyâm dhikr in the tradition of Ümmü Kenan Lodge
Dhikr (invocation) is being together with Allah to be able to recognize His manifestation in the human and the universe. It is to never be without Him, hence why there is much encouragement to do dhikr in the Qur'an. Ibn Arabi defines dhikr as "Knocking on God's door and waiting and hoping for that to open." From this perspective dhikr is in the center of tasavvuf's practical and doctrinal aspects. All mystical traditions interpret dhikr per their own disposition and perform dhikr ceremonies with different methods and composition. Some of these different rituals have been sustained till today, but some of them unfortunately have been lost. One that has reached our time is "Qauma Dhikr in İstanbul Rifâî Tradition." This dhikr with its method of reciting evrad, depth of music, composition and body movements has a special place among these ceremonies. This presentation focuses on the body movements of the people performing the dhikr and the words they recite during the dhikr.

Birhan Gencer, M.A.

Birhan Gencer is educated in Bilkent University, department of Economics between 1989-1992 and New Hampshire College, department of Business Administration between 1992- 1994. After graduation he worked in the field of aluminum industry for 23 years as a director and general manager which mainly focused on foreign relations and export markets.

In the year of 2016, he started master program in the Institute for Sufi Studies, Üsküdar University in İstanbul which he had some research and completed his thesis on “Qauma Dhikr in İstanbul Rifâî Tradition”. Since 2020, he’s studied PhD at the program of Islamic Civilization, Thought, History and Literature in the Institute for Sufi Studies and continue to the subject about Qauma Dhikr and other dhikr rituals.

(Session 4)

YAMAGUCHI Takumi: Corporeality of Otherness: A Typology of Bodily Reactions at Sufi Ritual of Spirit Possession in Morocco

(abstract)

This presentation explores a type of Moroccan *ḥadra* ritual that induces trance among the possessed. Taking the case of the Ḥamadsha Order, I will examine how diverse bodily reactions of the audience reflect the changing social context in which the ritual takes place.

Mr. YAMAGUCHI Takumi. M.A. (Research Assistant, Asian Cultures Research Institute (ACRI), Toyo University)

Mr. Takumi Yamaguchi is a research assistant at Asian Cultures Research Institute (ACRI), Toyo University and a PhD candidate in cultural anthropology at the University of Tokyo.

After acquiring M.A. degree at the University of Tokyo in 2014, he conducted fieldwork in Morocco from 2015 to 2017 and served as a specialized researcher for the Japanese embassy in the country from 2020 to 2022.

His research interest includes public religion, particularly Sufi movements in contemporary Morocco, as well as visual representation of the MENA region in popular culture.

Hatice Dilek Güldütuna: *Mânâ* of Sema Mukâbele and Mevlevî Âyin Example Through Various Composed Pieces

(abstract)

Meaning of sema mukabele will be shared and discussion will take place. Various musical compositions of mevlevî âyin will be presented and differences between them will be talked about. Importance of Mevlevî mukabele in Turkish Classical Music is going to be discussed.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hatice Dilek Güldütuna

Güldütuna graduated from Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa Faculty of Medicine. She completed her residency in Anesthesiology at the Koşuyolu Research Hospital. She spent three years at Professor Fuat Sezgin's Arab-Islamic History of Science Institute in Frankfurt to complete her Arabic education. Between 2005 and 2011, she first received her master's degree at the Department of Islamic and Religious Sciences in Johann Wolfgang Goethe University with her thesis titled "Buchstabensymbolik bei Ibn Arabi" (Letter Symbolism in Ibn Arabi) and then her PhD at the Department of Islamic Studies on "Konstruktionen des weiblichen bei Ken'ân Rifâi: Das weibliche als Spiegel der göttlichen Wirklichkeit" (Women as a Mirror of Truth in Ken'ân Rifâi). She is currently giving lectures on Sufism at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt. Her main areas of interest include symbolism, the letter symbology in Ibn Arabi, the role of women in Islamic Sufism and femininity and masculinity as symbols, and the role of Islamic culture in the history of thought and science and its effect in the West.

[Co-organizers]

Tonaga Yasushi (Kyoto University), Tuba Işık (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and Institute for Sufi Studies at Üsküdar University

[Steering Committee]

Tonaga Yasushi (Kyoto University), Akahori Masayuki (Sophia University), Suzuki Manami (Kyoto University: Secretary-in-Chief)

[Secretariat]

Suzuki Manami (Head: Kyoto University), Hara Rikuo (Deputy Head: Kyoto University), Sueno Takanori (JSPS PD; Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), Fujii Chiaki (Kyoto University), Fujimoto Azusa (Kyoto University), Ikegami Uno (Kyoto University), Sakaguchi Ryosuke (Kyoto University)

[Organizing Institutions]

Kenan Rifai Center for Sufi Studies at Kyoto University
Berlin Institute of Islamic Theology at Humboldt University

[Co-organizing Institution]

Institute for Sufi Studies at Üsküdar University

[Supporting research Projects]

Research on Moderate Islam in the Non-Arab World: From the Cases of Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey (Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A), JSPS)
Comprehensive Study of Sufism: Through Metaphysics, Literature, Music and Rituals (Fund for the Promotion of Joint International Research(B) (International Collaborative Research) JSPS)