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The Vitality of Sufism: A Contextual Analysis

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Abstract

Corresponding to the increasing studies on Sufism in South Korea, this paper analyzes the modern discourse on Sufism to present that Sufism needs to be examined contextually in changing modalities. By employing a method of contextual analysis in the line of Clifford Geertz and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, this paper specifically demonstrates that 1) many of modern studies theorized and predicted disappearing Sufism toward its extinction in the face of modernity, 2) contrary to this prediction, Sufism is still vibrantly alive in most parts of Muslim majority countries today and spreading over the world along the line of the globalization, 3) the theory of disappearing Sufism failed to grasp this reality of vitality of Sufism due to its assumption of homogeneous Sufism, and 4) contrary to homogenous Sufism, the vitality

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of Sufism is owed to changing modalities in Sufism. By demonstrating these four points contextually, this paper draws out contextual and considerable reasons why the studies failed to grasp the vitality of Sufism and why Sufism remains alive even vibrantly. With this analysis, this paper hopes to add a considerable piece to the studies in Sufism in South Korea.

• Keywords

Sufism, Islam, Contextuality, Mysticism, Reductionism, Orientalism, Anti-Sufism

1. Introduction

South Korea today observes a growing interest in Sufism, both in the public and academia. A good number of works have been published in Korean during the past three decades.

To list some landmarking studies, one of the earliest works is Park's translation of Idries Shah's Sufi thought in 1988.[1] In 1989 a collection of Sufi stories was translated by Wu,[2] and there followed more translations, including Lee's translation of Moshref Al-Saadi Al-Shirazi (d. 1291) in 2008,[3] Na's translation of the works of Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) in 2014,[4] Shin's compilation of Rumi's poetry in 2016,[5] and more recently, Jeung's complied translation of Rumi's *Masnavi* in 2019.[6]

In addition to these translations that are directly addressed to public readers, there are scholarly research articles on Sufism. Representatively, Kim's article entitled "A Study on the Religious Pluralism in S*ufism"[7] provid*es a timely examination of the Sufi approach to religious diversity and pluralism in a way appealing to today's South Korean context that people of diverse religions, including Islam, coexist.[8]

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1 Idries Shah, *Teachings of Sufis*, trans. Sang Jun Park (Seoul: Koreaone Media, 1988).

2 American Association of Sufism, ed., *Little Saint,* trans. Gye Suk Woo (Seoul: Inner World Publishing, 1989).

3 Moshref Al-Saadi Al-Shirazi, *Saadi's Fable Garden*, trans. Hyun Joo Lee (Seoul: Morning Dew Publishing, 2008).

4 Jihan Okuyucu, Rumi: *Forever Teacher of Sufism*, trans. Jeong Won Na (Seoul: M.AD Publishing, 2014).

5 Eun Hee Shin, *Sufism: Temptation of God* (Seoul: Kyunghee University Press, 2016).

6 Jalal al-Din Rumi, *A Collection of Rumi's Poetry*, trans. Jae Hee Jeoung (Seoul: Sigongsa, 2019).

7 Jeoung Myoung Kim, "A study on Religious Pluralism in Sufism," *The Journal of Humanities* 37.2 (2016), 133-162.

8 While these studies, be they translations or scholarly articles, are exclusive on Sufism, there is also a growing number of studies on Sufism compared to other religions. For instance, Lee's

Having thoroughly reviewed all of these and other studies, I acknowledged them as an opening chapter of studies on Sufism in South Korea. Nevertheless, I also noted the following points that call for further research.

The studies on Sufism in South Korea, be they translations or scholarly articles, are still in an introductory stage mainly due to its short history. Thus, it is far from enough, especially, to meet the growing public interest in Sufism, and thereby necessitates many more studies. In this globalized world of today, a contact among diverse cultures in a society becomes predominant. South Korean and Muslim societies are not exceptional. Along the line of globalization, a contact between Koreans and Muslims takes place in many areas. While Korean culture widely diffuses in Muslim majority countries through K-pop, K-drama, and K-beauty, Muslim culture becomes more and more noticeable in South Korea via the influx of Muslim workers and the expansion of economic exchange. If there is any difference in this mutual contact, while the diffusion of Korean culture in Muslim countries mainly relies upon Muslims' public interest as represented by Hanryu (한류), South Koreans' growing contact with Muslim culture goes after the governmental effort to understand Islam for its international policy and economic purpose. For instance, to export Korean foods to the Muslim world, it is an essential first step to understand *shariah* (Islamic sacred law) that regulates Islamic dietary life. Likewise, for the rapidly growing contact between South Koreans and Muslims, it is necessary to understand each other. Though little known in South Korea, it is

comparative study on Christianity and Islam includes a notable piece of Sufi literature like from Rumi and al-Hallaj's poetry; see, Myung Kwon Lee, Muhammad, Jesus and Islam (Seoul: Conatus, 2008).

well researched in the western academia that Sufism has served for a thousand years in providing a religious and cultural identity to Muslims. In this sense, the existing Korean studies on Sufism should be highly regarded. Yet, as aforementioned, these studies remain introductory, and much more academically rigorous works are needed to understand the Muslim world better and to meet with growing interest in Sufism.

As the western academia well reveals, people of the world become more and more interested in Sufism. Against the backdrop of capitalist neo-liberalism that continues to frame people's lives and experiences by a material-centric worldview, more people seek an alternative, and many find it in spirituality. Although there is a trend to see religion and spirituality separately, religion is still considered as an, if not 'the,' undeniable source of spirituality, and this suggests why religion still remain active in this exceptionally materialistic world of today. Sufism remains vivid by having provided Islamic spirituality. Thereby, as it did throughout Islamic history, Sufism significantly contributes to make Islam to be the second largest religion of today's material-centric world and the fastest growing religion in the USA, the heart of neo-liberalism. Islam in South Korea is no exception to this phenomenon. Unlike the government-led boost of Islamic studies primarily for economic purpose, an increasing number of the general public in South Korean become interested in Sufism, reasonably because they seek a sort of new and different spirituality against materialism that South Korea has been directed to with its compressed growth. Within a trend of the revival of humanities against the material-centered backdrop of current South Korea, it is not surprising to note the growing public interest in Sufism, which calls for more Korean studies on Sufism.

This contextual reading of the existing Korean studies on Sufism directed this present article, which hopes to provide a significant piece to the studies on Sufism in a way attracting more scholarly attention and stimulating more studies to come.

II. Method: Contextuality

With this hope, this paper examines the prominent studies on Sufism in the West. For this examination, a contextual analysis is employed. By a contextual analysis, I follow the concept of contextuality, which was set forth in the studies of Clifford Geertz and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, both of whom left a significant mark in contemporary Islamic studies.

In his book, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz considered contextuality as "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."[9] Following this consideration, he necessitated a contextual approach in his *Study of Culture* by articulating that:

> A great deal of recent social scientific theorizing has turned upon an attempt to distinguish and specify two major analytical concepts: culture and social structure. The impetus for this effort has sprung from a desire to take account of ideational factors in social processes without succumbing to either the Hegelian or the Marxist forms of reductionism. In order to avoid having

9 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books 1973), 5.

> to regard ideas, concepts, values, and expressive forms either as shadows cast by the organization of society upon the hard surfaces of history or as the soul of history whose progress is but a working out of their internal dialectic, it has proved necessary to regard them as independent but not self-sufficient forces-as acting and having their impact only within specific social contexts to which they adapt, by which they are stimulated, but upon which they have, to a greater or lesser degree, a determining influence.[10]

This contextual approach is well reserved in *Islam Observed*, another influential work of Geertz.[11] In this seminal work, he compared Islamic developments in Morocco and Indonesia to demonstrate how culturally different contexts shape different religious development.

Geertz's contextual approach to religious cultures provided a useful method to many Islamic studies. However, in my reading, his evaluation of Sufism is problematic. As the later part of this paper argues, Geertz's exclusively anthropological focus did not count Sufism 'as it is believed and practiced' by Sufis themselves. Rather, it showed a reductionist trend to understand Sufism-related phenomena by reducing them into an anthropological framework. From this consideration, while employing a contextual approach indebted to Geertz, this paper does not attempt to understand Sufism from any framework of other disciplines like sociology, psychology, anthropology, or politics. This open stance prevents this paper from falling into a risk of confining

10 Ibid., 361.

11 Clifford Geertz, Islam *Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Havan & London: Yale University Press, 1968).

Sufism to a specific view or definition. Instead it allows the reader to see diverse manifestations of Sufism 'as they are.' In this sense, this paper is more indebted to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's studies on Sufism.

Nasr's *Three Muslim Sages* drew a paralleling comparison among three great Muslim thinkers, Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Ibn al-Arabi. Unlike Geertz, Nasr did not compare these thinkers by any means of other disciplinary framework. Instead, he gave spaces to introduce each thinker's thought 'as it is.' This stance made appealing of his comparative analysis between Islamic philosophy as represented by Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi, and Sufism as illustrated by Ibn al-Arabi. With this open stance, Nasr looked at Sufism in light of Sufism itself, and thereby, he considered Sufism as Islamic spirituality.[12] As Islamic spirituality, Nasr asserted, "one cannot properly speak of a history of Sufism because in its essence Sufism has no history." Nevertheless, echoing Geertz's contextuality, Nasr wrote:

> However, since at each epoch it has presented its principles in a language confirming to the general mental and psychological conditions of that age, and since there have developed over the centuries various schools of interpretation, again depending on the "needs" of different types of men, it is possible to speak of the distinct features of the Sufi tradition in each period.[13]

As clear as it is, Nasr acknowledged the necessity of a contextual approach to understanding how Sufism as Islamic spiritualty mani-

12 See, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

13 Seyyd Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1976), 85.

fests itself in history especially with its distinct features. For this paper, I employ a contextual approach as suggested by both Nasr and Geertz to figure out, especially as Nasr suggested, the distinctive features of Sufism that interact with given contexts.

III. Disappearing Sufism: Theory

Not surprisingly, many studies in the modern discourse declared the disappearance of Sufism. This declaration came out in the line of the modernization and secularization theories that were a dominant paradigm in social sciences in the mid-twentieth century. Within the purview of Durkheimian functionalism and Weberian rationalism, prominent sociologists like Byran Wilson and Peter Berger argued that in the face of emerging modern industrial society, religion would gradually lose its importance in society and eventually disappear.[14]

Like all other religions that were claimed to gradually die out as people became more rationalized and secularized, Islam would be exposed under the impact of modernity to go through similar paths. Particularly Sufism became a representative target to be considered among the first ones to disappear. Sufism with its irrational practice and outdated social organizations was allegedly considered incompatible with the rational mind of modern people, and thereby destined to be fade out. This view of incompatibility between mystical religious experience and rationalism of modernity was widely held and spread in the mid-twentieth century among scholars in Islamic studies, and

14 See, Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966); and Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

severely impacted in the later study of Sufism, leading many scholars to theorize and foresee the inevitable extinction of Sufism in modern societies.

Louis Massignon was one of the scholars who initiated this theory of disappearing Sufism. He extensively studied al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), who was executed in Baghdad in the tenth century because his claim of "I am the Truth" (Ana 'l-Ḥaqq) was considered blasphemy. Massignon's study was published in 1922 entitled *La Passion de Husayn ibn Mansur Hallaj: martyr mystique de l'is/am,*[15] which "became a landmark book that was almost singlehandedly responsible for arousing scholarly interest in the west in Sufism and Islamic mysticism."[16] His works on Sufism played a significant role in leading the western scholarship of Sufism. In the colonial context, Massignon's study showed his sympathetic understanding of Sufism as illustrated in his introduction of al-Hallaj as a mystic and martyr of Islam. Regardless of how sympathetically he wrote on al-Hallaj, Massignon later concluded:

> In Turkey the government has often persecuted the orders on account of their Shi'a associations: and after a brief truce during which the pan-Islam of Abd al-Hamid endeavoured to make use of them, they were dissolved in 1925 for reactionary conspiracy. In the other Muslim countries in spite of some attempts at reform interesting from the moral (India) or intellectual (Al-

15 This book was later published in English; see, Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, 4 volumes, ed. and trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

16 Sidney Griffith, "Thomas Merton, Louis Massignon, and the Challenge of Islam," *Merton Annual* 3 (1990), 155.

geria) point of view they are in a state of complete decline. The acrobatics and juggling practiced by certain adepts of the lower classes, and the moral corruption of too many of their leaders has aroused against almost all of them the hostility and contempt of the elite of the modern Muslim world.[17]

Massignon's observation of Sufism "in a state of complete decline" was based on his sharp distinction of Sufism as a lower class' religiosity as opposed to the educated elite of modernity, and this idea provided an authoritative overview of the subject in the western scholarship.

Arthur Arberry strengthened this basis of disappearing Sufism. In his case study of Sufism in Egypt, he noted that "the history of the decline varies from country to country according to circumstance, but the general pattern, though admitting differences of detail, is fairly consistent throughout."[18] Arberry's reasoning for this decline was similar to that of Massignon. He stated that "Though the Sufi orders continued — and in many countries continue — to hold the interest and allegiance of the ignorant masses, no man of education would care to speak in their favour."[19] Arberry highlighted this decline of Sufism in the elaborated word of "The Decay of Sufism."

Many scholars were handed this baton to make concrete the theory of the decline and decay of Sufism. Among them, the studies of Clifford Geertz and Spencer Trimingham are remarkable.

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17 Louis Massignon, "Tarika," in *E.J Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam: 1913-1936, Volume VIII*, eds. M. Th. Houtsma et al. (Leiden, New York; E.J Brill, 1993), 667-668.

18 Arthur Arberry, Sufism: *An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), 119.

19 Ibid., 122.

Geertz' seminal work of *The Religion of Java*[20] in 1960, which is still considered the most influential account of the subject, added another case to the theories on disappearing Sufism. In his observation, the Javanese mystical tradition that he termed "maraboutism" was on the way to be replaced by a scripturalist form of Islam. Later, Geertz found a similar path in Sufism in Morocco, and published *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* in 1968. In comparing Sufism in Indonesia and Morocco, he distinguished the non-scriptural styles of rural miracle-working saints from the scripturalist styles of urban Islamic reformists, and observed a transition from the former to the latter. In this transition, Geertz concluded, Sufism would gradually fade out.

Spencer Trimingham's *The Sufi Orders in Islam* in 1971 was the first extensive research on Sufi orders in the modern West, which turned scholarly attention from personal mystical dimensions to social institutions of Sufism. In this study, Trimingham examined various Sufi orders in the contemporary Islamic world to argue that not only Sufism-related traditions but also Sufi orders as social institutions of Sufism were in decline. In his words,

> Opposed by the ulama, by the salafi-type of fundamentalist reformers, and by the secularized new men, and primarily undermined by changes taking place in the whole social and religious climate, it is hardly to be wondered that the orders are in decline everywhere. This has come about, less by defection, than because the young have not been joining. Taifas [Sufi orders] disappear when sheikhs die since there is no one to suc-

20 Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960).

ceed; their sons, in their intellectual outlook and dominant interests, no longer belong to their fathers' world.[21]

In this observation, Trimingham specifically counted Sufi orders out of date, incapable of catching up with social and religious changes, and thereby destined for extinction. Sufi orders were not particularly for the new young generation equipped with secular ideas, which, again in Trimingham's words, "are affecting every section of society." This social change toward modernization, secularization and rationalization also shifted religious climate, in which "many functions of the taifas have been taken over by secular organizations; new educational facilities, clubs, and societies."[22]

These representative studies theorized disappearing Sufism to lead many later studies to predict the eventual end of Sufism.

IV. Vitality of Sufism: Reality

A theory and a reality do not always coincide, and it is the case of Sufism today. As opposed to the theory of disappearing Sufism to its eventual end, it is evident that Sufism with its thoughts, practices and social orders remain an important basis of Muslim religiosity and culture. Just as it played a determinant role in spreading Islam in the middle age, Sufism is "at the forefront of the expansion of Islam, not only in traditional rural areas but also in modern societies in the West and among the modernized intellectual elites within the Muslim

21 Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 250.

22 Ibid.

world."[23]

The vitality of Sufism is a reality that has been observed everywhere in the Muslim majority countries. Martin van Bruinessen, a specialist in contemporary Sufism, well summed up the vitality of Sufism today as:

> From Morocco and Turkey to Indonesia, Sufi orders have become more visibly present and politically significant; in West and East Africa, where their decline had never been considered imminent, they show renewed vigour. Sufi orders have, moreover, found fertile soil in the West, among both Muslim immigrant populations and Western converts (or even unconverted Westerners).[24]

Just as the visible and vigorous presence of Sufism is ubiquitous, numerous examples can be made. Due to the limited space of this paper, let it suffice to note the followings.

Sufism in Indonesia and Morocco, contrary to Geertz's theory of disappearing Sufism as aforementioned, is observed vividly. Among several studies on Indonesian Sufism, Julia Day Howell's one deserves to be mentioned. Directly responding to Geertz's decline theory, Howell found that "devotional and mystical intensifications of core Islamic practice - in short Sufism - have survived." Sufism is active in both rural and urban areas, in her close observation, having been "enthusiastically pursued" by the elderly village people on the one hand and

23 John Voll "Sufi Orders," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World in the Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, https://bridgingcultures-muslimjourneys.org/items/show/196.

24 Martin van Bruinessen, "Sufism, 'Popular' Islam and the Encounter with Modernity," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 135.

having "captured the interest of people who are well educated in the general education system-even members of the national elite" on the other hand.[25] This finding presents Sufism quite contrary to the aforementioned decline theorists' sharp distinction between rural Sufism and urban elite religiosity. A case study of Moroccan Sufism by Patrick Haenni and Raphael Voix not only repudiates this distinction but also speculates about the secularization paradigm that was, as noted earlier, believed to put the end of Sufism. According to the study, Sufism was able to appeal to the contemporary Moroccan bourgeoisie, who "largely secularized, assimilated to French culture, and open onto the world through business networks and travel."[26] This New Age bourgeoisie "is re-structuring itself around two tendencies; one close to contemporary individualism and relativism and claiming the right to multiple spiritual commitments, and the other affirming the absolute superiority of Sufism compared to other possible paths."[27]

Sufism in Egypt, which Arberry once disdained as religiosity of ignorant masses, also remains active. While Valerie Hoffman's study in late 90s noted that the increasing numbers of the membership include "young, well-educated and modernist-minded individuals who especially appreciated a *shar ī* 'a -oriented approach in Sufism,"[28] John Voll estimated the current membership in Sufi orders in Egypt to be

25 Julia Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *Journal of Asian Studies* 60.3 (2001), 702.

26 Patrick Haenni and Raphael Voix, "God by All Means...Eclectic Faith and Sufi Resurgence among the Moroccan Bourgeoisie," in *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, eds. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 243.

27 Ibid., 246.

28 Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

in the millions.[29]

Turkey also observes the vitality of Sufism today. The Kemalist Republic, which was established under the flag of secularism and nationalism in 1923, de-Islamized the public space of modern Turkey, and Sufism was the primary target for de-Islamization. The Kemalist laicism declared that "from this day forth, there are not *tarikats*, or *dervishes*, and *murids* belonging to them, within the boundaries of the Turkish Republic,"[30] and thereby outlawed all Sufi orders, gatherings and practices in 1925, while replacing Sufism-associated organizations with secular institutions.[31] As politically and legally banned, Sufism-related activities were quite shrunk for a while. However, over the course of time Sufism has resurged in the modernized and secularized Turkish contexts, as a good number of studies revealed, to gain its full vitality today even in political spaces that once showed anti-Sufism.[32]

Interestingly to note, the vitality of Sufism is also observed in Saudi Arabia where the Wahhabist anti-Sufi policy has for a century been active. The Wahhabism, an official religious ideology in Saudi Arabia since the 1920s, gained fame by its rigid scripturalist interpretation of Islam and application of it exclusively throughout the nation where Islamic sacred places, Mecca and Medina, are located. In general, Wahhabism did not allow other interpretations of Islam, and particularly

29 Voll, "Sufi Orders."

30 Hamid Algar, "The Naqshbandi Order in Republican Turkey," *Islam World Report: Turkey: The Pendulum Swings Back* 1.3 (1994), 55.

31 Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003), 54 and 285-286.

32 See, for instance, Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Modernity in Turkey: From the Authenticity of Experience to the Practice of Discipline," in *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, eds. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 39-60; and, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*.

considered Sufism as heresy. Even in such a harsh soil of the Wahhabist anti-Sufism, Sufism is yet resurged today. Faiza Saleh Ambah remarked in her *Washington Post* report to the western readers that:

> [A] mainstay of the more spiritual and often mystic Sufi Islam, was until recently viewed as heretical and banned by Saudi Arabia's official religious establishment, the ultraconservative Wahhabis. But a new atmosphere of increased religious tolerance has spurred a resurgence of Sufism and brought the once-underground Sufis and their rituals out in the open.[33]

Ambah specifically noted how the aftermath of 9/11 contextualized the resurgence of Sufism, as:

> Analysts and some Sufis partly credit reaction to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States for the atmosphere that has made the changes possible. When it was discovered that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi, the kingdom's strict Wahhabi doctrine—which had banned all other sects and schools of thought—came under intense scrutiny from inside and outside the country. The newfound tolerance Sufis have come to enjoy is perhaps one of the most concrete outcomes of that shift.[34]

The rest of the Muslim world is not off from the vitality of Sufism. For instance, Sufism in modern Iran shows its continuance of the

33 Faiza Saleh Ambah, "In Saudi Arabia, a Resurgence of Sufism: Mystical Sect of Islam Finds Its Voice in More Tolerant Post-9/11 Era," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2006.

34 Ibid.

strong Sufi tradition, in a way illuminating the development of Sufism under Shiite Islam. Having analyzed the modern period of Sufism in Iran, Leonard Lewisohn's study amply demonstrated how Sufi spirituality continues to serve as a vibrant living tradition in the development of Persian society and culture.[35] Meanwhile, Alexander Knysh's research adds contemporary Sufism in Yemen to the discourse on the vitality of Sufism. Unlike the western scholarship that considered Yemenis affiliation with Sufism to be tenuous, Knysh observed that Yemenis affinity with the Sufi tradition is obvious as the manifestations of living Sufism in various local contexts.[36] The Central Asian countries also observe the continuing vitality of Sufism, which were actively involved in keeping a national Muslim identity against the Soviet Union and after gaining a nation's independence from the Soviet Union.[37]

As analyzed so far, Sufism is alive vibrantly in most, if not all, parts of the Muslim world today. It is also not surprising to observe the diffusion of Sufism in the West that demonstrates the compatibility of Sufism in today's highly modernized, secularized and globalized contexts. A most recent cutting-edge collaborative research by the specialists in the field remarked a vibrant presence of Sufism in the West, as:

> Sufism, the major trend of Islamic mysticism, has become in-

35 Leonard Lewisohn, "An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 62.1 (1999), 36-59.

36 Alexander Knysh, "The Tariqa on a Landcruiser: The Resurgence of Sufism in Yemen," *Middle East Journal* 55.3 (2001), 399-414.

37 For the most recent discussion on Sufism in Central Asia, see, Devin DeWeese and Jo-Ann Gross, eds. *Sufism in Central Asia: New Perspectives on Sufi Traditions, 15th-21st Centuries* (Boston: Brill, 2018).

> creasingly visible in Western Muslim minority contexts during the last two and half centuries. Sufi texts from the East were translated into European languages, Sufi orders and their branches expanded into Euro-American spaces, and significant religious, political and social movements have been inspired by Sufi principles.[38]

Based upon this observation, the research brought specialists together to discuss this phenomenon of the vibrant presence of Sufism in the West and to present Sufism as a vehicle that bridges the East and the West. In fact, due to its vibrant presence, Sufism in the West has been well observed and continues to be discussed in western scholarship.

In my analysis of the relevant studies so far, the phenomenon that Sufism became vibrant in the West occurs broadly in two ways, among immigrant Muslims and westerners.

The influx of Muslims into the Western Muslim minority countries occurred from the mid-1970s onwards. Many of these immigrant Muslims imported with themselves Sufi thoughts, traditions and practices, which they eventually found helpful in retaining their religious identity and cultural heritage in the highly modernized and materially secularized western contexts – an alien and unfriendly environment to themselves.[39] Interestingly, their descendants, the second generation immigrants, who were born in the West and so identified to be Mus-

38 Jamal Malik and Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh, eds. *Sufism East and West: Mystical Islam and Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Modern World* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 1.

39 See, Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, eds. *Sufism in the West* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

lim-westerners in their own wills or not, found it difficult to be a Muslim and simultaneously a westerner. Here Sufism worked for them to compromise their identity conflict between Muslim-ness and western-ness. As a notable example, unlike their parents who already embodied religious obligations, including the five pillars of Islam like five times daily prayers, it was not easy for them to stick to the obligations in their daily lives. To carry out the obligations, they needed reasonable motivation and found it in Sufism. Sufism served for them as a sort of spirituality that provides inner reasons for the outer obligations, as it did for many Muslims in history. Through both Sufi ideas like Ibn Arabi or Rumi and Sufi practices like dhikr (remembrance of God), they embodied Islamic obligations to live as a Muslim westerner.[40] In addition, as a westerner they tended to feel repulsion to Muslim fundamentalists' understanding and application of Islam against the West where they lived. The reports about Islam and Muslims, which the western media highlighted, were about Muslim fundamentalists and their jihadist and terrorist acts that endangers the West. This was especially the case post 9/11, which created an image problem of Islam in the public mind as a religion of terrorism. In this context of post 9/11, "Islamophobia and racism have become rampant in the West, particularly in the United States of America and Europe. Muslims, whether they are immigrants or not, practitioners or not, are frequently prejudiced and discriminated against."[41] Against this backdrop, the new generation of Muslim westerners found an alternative

40 As a case study on Sufism in Muslim generations in the West, see, Roger Ballard, *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain* (London: South Asia Books, 1996).

41 Rachid Acim, *The Reception of Sufism in the West: The Mystical Experiences of American and European Converts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

in Sufism, which, as opposed to the exclusivist tendency of Muslim fundamentalists, ideologically and historically preserved and encouraged a pluralistic, inclusive and tolerant approach to other thoughts, cultures and religions, especially in the post-modern pluralistic contexts of the western countries.[42]

Along with immigrant Muslims and their descendants, non-Muslims westerners' keen interest in Sufism has also played a role in diffusing Sufism in the West. On the one hand, they are interested in Sufism as another spirituality that is not completely alien but close to their own monotheistic Abrahamic tradition. Sufism meets with the westerners especially who seek spirituality in the rise of materialism and neoliberalist world order and post-modernism on the one hand, and on the other peace in the rise of religious fundamentalism and globalization.

V. On Problems of the Theory: Homogenous Sufism

The reality of the vitality of Sufism both in the Muslim world and the West that I have analytically presented in the above part repudiates the theory of disappearing Sufism in the face of modernity and secularization. Apparently, the theory failed to grasp the reality, as Sufism does not only continue its vitality in the modernized and secularized contexts but has also spread over the world along the line of globalization today. Even in South Korea, as noted earlier, there is a growing interest in Sufism, which evinces the vitality of Sufism in non-Western Muslim minority societies. This reality opens an inevitable question.

42 see, Malik and Hinnells, eds. Sufism in the West, 175.

Why did the theory of disappearing Sufism fail to grasp the reality of the vitality of Sufism? This part is my contextual analysis from the textual readings of the relevant studies to provide considerable answers. The finding answers will help put forward the distinctive features of Sufism, which will further explain why Sufism is still alive even vibrantly in today's context.

First of all, a close look at the theory of disappearing Sufism discloses a reductionist approach to Sufism as a main reason of the failure of the theory to grasp the vitality of Sufism. Reductionism is a trend among scientists to understand complex issues and phenomena by using a simplified theory or idea. Here a simplified theory or idea works as *a priori*, through which complex issues and phenomena are reduced down to be understood.[43] The theory of disappearing Sufism is typically reductionist in the sense that they have already *a priori* from other disciplines, like sociology, anthropology, psychology, and politics. In the reductionist theory, Sufism-related phenomena are reduced or simplified to already assumed *a priori*. As representative examples from the above discussion, Geertz, an influential anthropologist, asserted disappearing Sufism by seeing Sufism as an *anthropolitically* reduced religiosity of rural miracle-working saints, while a sociologist Trimingham theorized disappearing Sufism by exclusively focusing on social dimensions of Sufism (Sufi orders). Neither Geertz nor Trimingham in their reductionist understanding considered other dimensions of Sufism. While Geertz's theory ignored Sufi dimensions that address and appeal directly to educated elite in urban areas, Triming-

43 For a critical reassessment of a reductionist trend in Islamic studies, see, Heon Choul Kim, "A Phenomenological Approach to the Modem Trends of Islamic Studies," *The Journal of the Institute of the Middle East Studies* 23.1 (2004), 249-288.

ham's one excluded ideological and spiritual aspects of Sufism that have given birth to and continue to organize Sufi orders.

More essentially, no matter how diverse *a priori* the scholars of disappearing Sufism took from different disciplines, all of the theories of disappearing Sufism showed one common *a priori* from the modernization and secularization paradigm. Exclusively following this dominant paradigm in the mid-twentieth, the theories attempted to understand and explain all Sufism-related phenomena within the purview of the modernized and secularized contexts, and there conclusively predicted the decay, decline and eventual death of Sufism in the face of modernity and secularization with which Sufism is intrinsically incompatible. Put simply, by giving priority onto their own presumed *a priori*, the theories did not see Sufism 'as it is' believed and practiced, and thereby failed to discern the vitality of Sufism.

Arguably, the theory of disappearing Sufism seemed to be correct in a sense. As a matter of fact, some forms of Sufism were in decline in the process of modernization and secularization at least by the mid-twentieth century when the secularization thesis was at its peak, As Trimingham noted, when the western secularist ideas penetrated into the Muslim world, Muslim societies underwent changes, which gradually disregarded otherworldly forms of Sufism.[44] As Arberry also observed, Sufism, which was featured as a fatalistic, superstitious and ecstatic tradition, caused its decay in the face of modernity.[45] This observation seems reasonable, but a closer look reveals that by putting priority on the secularization paradigm as *a priori*, it overlooked the inner dynamics of Islamic local contexts, specifically domestic power

44 Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 249-250.

45 See, Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, Chapter 11, "The Decay of Sufism."

politics of anti-Sufism. This is to say that disappearing Sufism occurred not mainly because of the intrinsic factor of the proclaimed incompatibility of Sufism with modernity and secularization, but more essentially due to the external factors of anti-Sufism.

Anti-Sufism within the Muslim world has a long history of hundreds of years. Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah, a 14th century's Sunni thinker, is the most well-known early critic against Sufism. His severe critique of Sufi pantheism and saint veneration had provided a theological basis of anti-Sufism to many later Muslim theologians, particularly, to Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab in the late 18th century. Al-Wahhab brought Ibn Taymiyyah's critique further to condemn Sufism as a heresy. To him, the Sufi practices of saint veneration and idolatrous worship of masters was *shirk*, the unbearable sin in Islam that associates another with God and denies the foundational theology of *tawhid*, the Oneness of *God.*[46] *This v*iew became the foundation of an anti-Sufi stance of the Wahhabism, which initiated and continues political oppression against Sufism in Saudi Arabia today. Perhaps less seriously than Saudi Arabia, other Muslim countries also observed, albeit in different degrees, certain anti-Sufi trends. Influential modern Islamists and Muslim secularists played a significant role in spreading anti-Sufism throughout the Muslim world. Islamists and secularists showed quite opposite approaches to modernity. While Islamists preached to maximize Islamic tenets in reaction to western colonialism, rationalization and modernization, secularists advocated minimal use of Islamic theology to accept the western secularization for modernization. Regardless of these opposite approaches to the changing

46 See, Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and anti-Sufis: the Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 1-26.

contexts, both were common in anti-Sufism. Prominent Islamists such as Jamal ad-Din al-Afgani (d. 1897), Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) gave a verdict on Sufism as *bid'a*, innovation, and *khurafa*, superstition, which were considered nothing to do with the Qur'an.[47] This Islamist verdict was powerful enough to include anti-Sufism in their pursued ideal of *al-hakimiyyah*, Islamic State that is ruled by Shariah. On the other side, Muslim secularists considered Sufi tradition as a primary reason of state backwardness compared to the western developed countries, and a political obstacle to a secular state.[48] A foremost showcase is the Kemalist laicist Republic of modern Turkey, which, as noted earlier, banned all Sufism-related traditions and practices in 1925 and replaced Sufism-associated organizations with secular institutions.

In this context of anti-Sufism within the Muslim world, Sufism-related activities declined in some parts of the Muslim world. Surely, as implicated in the theory of disappearing Sufism, the context of modernity and secularization served to trigger anti-Sufism to cause Sufism's decline. Nonetheless, the contextual consideration of the existing anti-Sufism as a primary reason for the decline of Sufism does not concur with the theory's' reductionist use of the secularization paradigm as *a priori* that only reached to the conclusion of incompatibility of Sufism with modernity as the direct cause of disappearing Sufism.

Still, what is obvious, as noted in the previous part, is the vibrant presence and vitality of Sufism in most parts of the Muslim world today, be they Islamic states or secular nations. This reality disap-

47 For the Islamist anti-Sufi thought, see, ibid., 65-167.

48 For the Muslim secularist view against Sufism, see, Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 247-250.

proves the theorized incompatibility of Sufism with modernity and secularization. Instead, it shows not only compatibility of Sufism with modernity but even the vitality of Sufism in the post-modern globalized world of today. This phenomenological fact points out another pivotal flaw that lies in the theory of disappearing Sufism.

Along with its common reductionist approach, another major pitfall that penetrates the theory was to take out one aspect of Sufism and consider it as 'real' Sufism, which I coin 'homogenous Sufism.' The 'real' Sufism in the theory was homogenously an ecstatic, rural, illiterate and popular religiosity. With this aspect alone, the theory is again reductionist and so defective, as it disregarded other aspects of Sufism, including urban Sufism that has always been in the history of Sufism. Thus, it is necessary to revisit the definition issues of Sufism.

Actually, the theory's definition of homogenous Sufism as an ecstatic, rural, illiterate and popular religiosity is closely linked to the orientalist approach to Sufism, which highly focused on a non-Islamic variation of drunken or intoxicated aspect of Sufism.

In retrospect, the studies of Sufism in the West began with the orientalist scholarship. In the colonial context (roughly 1750-1950) that swept over the pre-modern world, then western scholars came across popular religious practices among the Muslim public through European traveler's notes of oriental lands. Mainly out of exotic curiosity, the travelers had remarked "fakirs' (the Arabic word for 'poor man') and 'darvishes' (the Persian word for 'standing by the door'), whose ascetic and spiritual life style resembled Catholic monks' solitary way of life. These travelers' accounts led some European scholars, representatively William Jones (d. 1794), John Malcolm (d. 1833) and Friedrich Tholuck (d. 1877) to initiate a study on a mystical form of re-

ligion as shown in fakirs and darvishes. While studying, they were persuaded by the poetry of Hafiz of Shiraz (d.1389) and Jalal al-Din Rumi, which exalted ecstatic and mystical experience in divine love with metaphorical words of wine-drinking, music and dance. In the scholars' knowledge, this religiosity seemed little to do with Islam, but more in common with Christian faith, Greek thought, and Indian Vedanta tradition. Though seemingly non-Islamic, the practitioners of this religiosity were found among the Muslim public. The scholars called them " Sooffees," and invented the term "Sufism" to denote their religiosity in the 18th century. Throughout the colonial era, *this* Sufism became widely circulated, as it was more appealing to the European colonials than Ottoman Turkish Islam, which had once endangered the European Christendom.

Along with this scholarly definition of Sufism, yet in a quite different way, the European colonial officers produced and provided a primary source of Sufism. While the scholars perceived Sufism as a non-Islamic, personal and mystical form of religiosity, the colonial administrators were attentive exclusively in social organizations of Sufism. In the 19th century when the colonial rule over Muslim countries became in full swing, the colonial administrators faced resistance of brotherhoods organized by charismatic Sufi leaders, and thereby had a pressing concern to study on them for effective colonial rule. In their colonial viewpoint, Sufism was a rebellious ideology that formed brotherhoods against the European conquest. Eventually, Sufism was filed as a dangerous cult by the end of the 19th century. Along with the anti-Sufi trend within the Muslim world, as noted earlier, this negative perception of Sufism created image problem contributing to the decline of Sufism in some parts of the Muslim world.

Put together, the studies on Sufism in the colonial context had then a double, somewhat paradoxical, attitude oscillating between sympathy and antipathy. While its personal mystical expressions were adored, its organizational forms were regarded as dangerous. Interestingly, this paradoxical attitude is also noticeable in South Korea today. While a growing number of Koreans becomes interested in personal mystical expressions of Sufism, any organizational form like Sufi orders is not visible. This may be because of the negative attitude toward Sufism that the Korean Muslim Federation, an official governing body of Muslims in South Korea, showed. Since its establishment during the oil crisis in the late 1970s and with the political and economic support from then President Park's government,[49] the Federation has been supported largely by the Saudi Arabian government, and its Wahabi doctrine of anti-Sufism flew in too.

The perception of Sufism that the European scholars and colonial officers provided in the colonial context is typically considered today to be orientalist. By 'orientalist' – directly drawn from Edward Said's seminal thesis of Orientalism –[50] the current scholarship points out the problematic nature of the perception, which mainly refers to a false description of Sufism produced by and for colonialism. As this term of 'orientalist' is widely circulated in the contemporary study of Sufism, any repetition is not needed here. Yet, directly related to this paper, and to figure out why the theory of disappearing Sufism failed to grasp the vitality of Sufism, I reexamined the popular term of 'orientalist,' and in my own contextual analysis, I found the following

49 For a brief note on the history of Islam in South Korea, see, Hee S. Lee, "Islam in Korea: History, Present Situation and Future Prospect," *Korea Journal of Islamic Culture* 1.1 (1997).

50 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

two points.

First, in Said's thesis, orientalism denoted knowledge that was constructed and manipulated in the power relationship between the Occident and the Orient in the western dominating context of colonialism. The knowledge of Sufism in the colonial context was also *produced*, in Said's terminology. Obviously, the colonial administers' perception of Sufism as a dangerous cult had an aim for effective colonialization. Though less noticeable, the very term of Sufism can be also deconstructed from Said's Orientalism. As noted above, Sufism was an outsider's naming invented by the European scholars in the 18th century in the colonial context. Sufism is a combination of Sufi and ism, which implicates a collective thought, practice and tradition of "Sooffes," a group of people as represented by fakirs, dervishes, Hafiz and Rumi. In other words, Sufism is a religiosity of Sooffes, which is, to the western scholars, little to do with Islam. Having been invented in this non-Islamic sense, the term of Sufism continues to be popularly used today. From this deconstruction, Sufism, this terminology itself, actually denotes the orientalist perception of Sufism, which discloses the discrepancy between outsider's arbitrary understanding of insider's religiosity and insider's religiosity itself. Due to this problematic nature that the term Sufism intrinsically has, the academic discourse ever since the term Sufism was invented continues to use the term Sufism quite ambiguously, somewhere between the orientalist definition of Sufism and Sufism as defined by Sufis themselves.

Second, Orientalism had, as Said put it, a tendency to consider the Orient as a cohesive whole. By assuming a single Orient as a cohesive whole, the orientalist knowledge did not acknowledge and allow diversity across the Orient. Instead, the Orient was simply perceived as

a whole as opposed to the Occident. Orientalist scholarship produced a prototypical image of the Orient, as opposed to the Occident, as an inferior other to be educated or civilized through colonialization by the superior civilized West. On this basis, Said stressed that Orientalism created a false image of Arabs and Muslims with such essential qualities as backwardness, weakness and unchanging. These qualities were seen in uniformly negative terms to describe Islam and Muslims. In this line of Orientalism, Sufism was depicted in orientalist scholarship as a cohesive whole, which has essential qualities of wine-drinking, music and dance, and is thus non-Islamic. In this regard, I propose to call 'homogenous Sufism.'

The orientalist definition of homogenous Sufism was not limited to its period of colonialism. Although the colonial period ended, its idea of Sufism continually affected the postcolonial discourse on Sufism. Ironically, the perception of homogenous Sufism has been reinforced by the interaction with modern Islamists' and Muslim secularists' anti-Sufism, which, as noted earlier, has long considered Sufism as a distortion of Islam. While the European orientalists' idea may be identified as a non-Muslim external effort to bind Sufism to other religious traditions, the Muslim critique of Sufism represents an internal desire to exclude it from Islam. Despite this difference, the orientalist definition of homogenous Sufism in the context of colonialism worked well with the Islamist and secularist anti-Sufism within the Muslim world to lead later theorists to consider Sufism homogeneously as a non-Islamic, ecstatic, rural, illiterate and popular religiosity, to argue incompatibility of Sufism with modernity, and to predict the inevitable extinction of Sufism.

In my contextual analysis of the existing studies on disappearing

Sufism, this definition and perception of homogenous Sufism provides a considerable reason why the theorists failed to grasp the vitality of Sufism.

VI. On Impetus for the Vitality of Sufism

The definition of homogenous Sufism that the theorists relied on for their prediction of disappearing Sufism has never been approved by Sufis themselves. Contrary to homogenous Sufism, what Sufis have shown in history is not a uniformed but dynamic and evolving religiosity corresponding to given and changing contexts.

As a matter of fact, *tasawwuf*, the original Arabic word that Sufi themselves call their religiosity,[51] was used in the historical records and Sufi literature as a broad, inclusive and blanket term, which encompasses every dimension of Islamic inner spiritual life, thought, experience and practice. As widely held in contemporary scholarship, *tasawwuf* literally originates from the Arabic word for *suf*, wool, to denote religiosity of Sufis who wore clothes made by *suf*. In early Muslim history, people with *suf* clothes (Sufis) abandoned material wealth and life to live ascetic spiritual life for experience in *tawhid*. Sufis in this sense became later linked to fakirs ("poor man") and darvishes ('standing by the door').

Despite this linguistic origin and meaning, the term *tasawwuf* is intrinsically too broad to be confined to a single definition, not to say of

51 For a brief note on the term of *tasawwuf*, see, Siraj ed-Din, "The Nature and Origin of Sufism," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 223-238.

its obstinate refusal of any reductionist confinement of homogenous Sufism. In fact, almost all scholars find difficulties in defining and describing *tasawwuf*. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a leading scholar in Sufism in the West, concluded his extensive life-long works on Sufism by presenting *tasawwuf* descriptively as Islamic spirituality. Nevertheless, just as the term religion itself is too elusive to be defined by a clear-cut definition, the term spirituality is elusive because it is a subjective term that carries a variety of descriptions and connotations, depending on who defines it, which religion defines it, and in what context it is defined. So is *tasawwuf*.

A more popular descriptive definition of *tasawwuf* in English is Islamic mysticism, though many scholars like Nasr and the majority of Sufis disagree. Yet, Islamic mysticism is also elusive, or more ambiguous. To note how ambiguous it is, Ibn al-Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* deserves to brought up. Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240) is regarded as one of the greatest Sufi masters along with Jalal al-Din Rumi in the Muslim world, and his masterpiece *Fusus al-Hikam* is considered one of the landmarks in Sufi literature.[52] *The Bezels of Wisdom*, the English translation of *Fusus al-Hikam*, is widely referred to in the western scholarship as a representative text of Sufism, Islamic mysticism.[53] In this reference, mysticism is described as a religiosity that cannot be fully captured in any literal language.[54] Mysticism is an umbrella term to

52 Regardless of the prime importance of Ibn al-Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* in the Muslim world, it is little known in South Korea, nor is translated in Korean. Due to its importance and with hope to add in Korean scholarship in Islamic studies, I am currently translating this book. Actually, I have used an English translation of this book as a primary reading of my Islam courses and Asian Philosophy course.

53 For instance, see, Joel J. Kupperman, *Classic Asian Philosophy: A Guide to the Essential Texts* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 60.

include any experience that cannot be expressed in written form and thus remains in the *mystical* arena. For instance, the Buddhist notion of the indescribability of nirvana is mysticism, as 'nirvana is not something to be understood by reason (it is beyond our reason), but something to be experienced.' In this indescribability lies mysticism as mysticism. Another example, an experience of "atman is Brahman" (moksha), the core premise of Hinduism, remains beyond languages. Since it is beyond languages, it is called mysticism. *Tasawwuf* as Sufism in English is considered mysticism in this sense, and *the Bezels of Wisdom* is foremost for Islamic mysticism.

As another common feature, mysticism seeks for experience in union or 'being united.' This feature is clear in the oneness of "atman is Brahman." Albeit still difficult to understand in languages because of its indescribability, nirvana refers to a state of union with, or 'being absorbed into,' the world of anatman. From this perspective, scholars call mysticism to denote human mystical experience in 'being united.' In this sense, the scholarship in comparative religions often compares mystical philosophies of Sufism and Hinduism (as a case study, *the Bezels of Wisdom* and *the Upanishads*). In a comparative view, Sufism is similar to Hinduism in the sense that both seek after mystical union with a divine reality. In *the Upanishads* this reality is Brahman. In *the Bezels of Wisdom* it is Allah. In Hinduism, the way to reach to the mystical union with Brahman is called *moksha*. In Sufism, it is called *tawhid* (Unity or Oneness of God). Sufism seeks mystical experience in *tawhid* beyond languages, and thus just as mysticism is actually indiscernible, so is *tasawwuf*.

This indescribable nature of *tasawwuf* makes it far-fetched to call,

54 Ibid., 61.

even imagine, 'homogenous Sufism.' Instead, it is right to consider *tasawwuf* as an umbrella term that encompasses every dimension of Islamic inner spiritual life, thought, experience and practice.

Tasawwuf is inclusive in its diverse manifestations, and its diverse manifestations include a drunken aspect. As noted earlier, the theory of disappearing Sufism took homogenous Sufism for granted as *a priori* to present Sufism uniformly as a non-Islamic variation of ecstatic, rural, illiterate and popular religiosity to disappear in face of modernity and secularization. Particularly, in the orientalist scholarship, Sufism was a cohesive whole of ecstatic intoxication of mysticism, which was exemplified by Sufi poetry of wine-drinking, music and dance, and thus, remained remotely from both Islam and rationalized modern society. However, as evinced above, Sufism is still alive even vibrantly in modernized urban societies beyond rural areas of the Muslim world, and is spreading to Muslim minority western countries. This vibrant Sufism is owing to the diverse manifestations of *tasawwuf*.

In history, *tasawwuf* has manifested itself not only as popular rural religiosity of the lay people but also as sober urban religiosity of intelligent elites. While the former provided a basis for the orientalist idea of homogenous Sufism that presented intoxicated Sufism as real Sufism, such famous Sufi masters as Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), Abu al-Qasim Junayd (d. 910), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), and Ibn Arabi gave a priority on sobriety of *tasawwuf* over drunken intoxication. Well represented by al-Hallaj who proclaimed "I am the Truth," the drunken expression puts forth a mystical experience in the state of *tawhid*. Here, the drunken expression of wine-drinking should not be misunderstood as physical drinking, but needs to be understood, as

Sufi themselves understood, as metaphor for their mystical experience in the state of union. Instead of being in an intoxicated state, sobriety of tasawwuf seeks for rationalization of tawhid toward experience in *tawhid*.[55] Both were well recorded in Sufi literature to exemplify diverse manifestations of *tasawwuf*. Indeed, many Sufi literature, like Rumi's poetry (some of which were translated in Korean), oscillates between sobriety and intoxication of *tasawwuf*.

Notably, while the intoxicated manifestation of tasawwuf was regarded as 'real' homogenous Sufism in all of the orientalists, the Islamists and the Muslim secularists, sobriety of *tasawwuf* made Sufism vibrantly in modernized and rationalized societies. As showcases, Gilsenan's research noted the expansion of the Shadhiliyya Sufi order with its sobriety to interact with modernization and rationalization process of modern Egypt.[56] Howell's study on Indonesian Sufism[57] and Mardin's work on the Nurcu movement in Turkey[58] depicted successful transformation of Sufi orders to new institutional forms to serve for necessary modernized institutions like education and hospitality in civil societies.

As these studies disclosed, *tasawwuf* with its sobriety made itself compatible with modernization and rationalization to remain vibrantly alive. Specifically, while standing for diverse manifestations of *tasawwuf*, sobriety of *tasawwuf* implicates changing modalities of *ta-*

55 William Chittick, "Sufism, Sufi Thought and Practice," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), 106–107.

56 Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*.

57 Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival."

58 Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Changes in Modern Turkey* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

sawwuf in given conditions and changing contexts.

Changing modalities of *tasawwuf* may be best exemplified with the newly proposed term of neo-Sufism in contemporary academia. During the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, significant changes in Sufism and Sufi movements occurred against the changing contexts of the European colonialization, Islamist/secularist anti-Sufism, the corrupted leadership within the Muslim world, and eventually in the face of modernity. The new term of neo-Sufism[59] was proposed to characterize these significant changes, which included strict adherence to shariah, rejection of ecstatic practices and saint veneration, emphasis on *tariqa Muhammadiyya* (Muhammadan way), and active engagement in this-worldly affairs in defense of Islam. Having noted these changed characteristics of Sufism, some scholars argued that neo-Sufi movements departed themselves from the traditional Sufi orders, and underlined the *new* form of Sufism. Yet, this prefix of 'new' and 'neo' was questioned.[60] According to the critics, the term neo-Sufism puts forth as an innovative and initiative departure from pre-existent Sufi traditions,[61] disregarding notable continuity and sustainability of the pre-existent Sufism. Just as a reductionist understanding of Sufism, the term neo-Sufism may lead one to understand diverse and complex manifestations of *tasawwuf* by reducing them into the stereotype of

59 Fazlur Rahman is claimed an initiator of the term neo-Sufism; see, Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). 206.

60 For the critical approach to the term neo-Sufism, see, Rex O'Fahey. *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 1-9; and, Rex O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," *Der Islam* 70 (1993), 52-87.

61 See, O'Fahey and Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," 73 & 87; and, Valerie Hoffman, "Annihilation in the Messenger of God: the development of a Sufi practice," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999), 351-369.

neo-Sufism.

To engage in this debate is yet less important here than it is to note that the term neo-Sufism illustrates changing modalities of *tasawwuf* corresponding to changing contexts to consider these changing modalities to be impetus for the vitality of Sufism.

VII. Conclusion

South Korea today observes the growing public interest in Sufism and the increasing studies on this subject. Nevertheless, as noted in this paper, the studies on Sufism in South Korea still remain in an introductory passage with its short history of three decades compared to nearly three centuries history of the study on Sufism in the West. In this context, this paper presented a major trend in the western scholarship to add a considerable piece to the studies on Sufism in South Korea.

By employing a method of contextual analysis in the line of Clifford Geertz and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the prominent scholars in the western scholarship of Sufism, this paper showed that many modern studies theorized and predicted disappearing Sufism toward its eventual extinction in the face of modernity. Contrary to this theorized prediction, as this paper proceeded in demonstrating, Sufism is still vibrantly alive in most parts of Muslim majority countries today and is spreading over the world along the line of the globalization. The discrepancy between the theory of disappearing Sufism and the reality of the vitality of Sufism followed to be contextually analyzed. According to the analysis, the theory failed to grasp the reality because of its reduc-

tionist view on homogenous Sufism based upon the orientalist, Islamist and Muslim secularist' knowledge. Contrary to the presumed homogenous Sufism, as closely analyzed, Sufism showed in history and today a dynamic and evolving nature to correspond to given and changing contexts. This further led this paper to draw out changing modalities of Sufism, and to consider changing modalities of Sufism as impetus for the vitality of Sufism.

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