

International Conference

**“Sunnis” and “Shi‘is” across History:
Confessional Identities, Mutual Perceptions,
and Academic (Mis)Conceptions**



September 19–20, 2026

Kyoto

 **東洋文化研究所**
Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia



京都大學人文科學研究所
Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University



JAPAN SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF SCIENCE
日本学術振興会

 **CISMOR**
Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Minorities' Religions

Prospectus

Our knowledge of the institutions and intellectual traditions cultivated by the two major Islamic confessional groups—Sunnis and Shi‘is—and of the processes through which these traditions developed has grown substantially thanks to scholarship to date. Yet the character and substance of the “Sunnis” and “Shi‘is” that appear in historical research often cannot be adequately grasped simply by reference to this existing body of knowledge. This is because groups or individuals marked by a wide range of variation have come to possess a self-consciousness as “Sunni” or “Shi‘i,” or have been so perceived by others. To arrive at a fuller understanding of the various “Sunnis” and “Shi‘is” encountered across history, it is therefore necessary to examine individual cases in diverse settings in depth, while at the same time keeping in view the need to move beyond such cases toward a broader synthesis of what has been regarded as “Sunni” or “Shi‘i” in different periods and regions.

In the meantime, Islamic history offers examples of societies, groups, and individuals whose beliefs and practices make it unclear—at least from the researcher’s perspective—whether they should be regarded as “Sunni” or “Shi‘i,” or as occupying a position “in between.” Groups or individuals who may well have identified themselves as belonging to one of these two categories can be characterized by those around them as affiliated with the other. In still other cases, such actors appear to have shifted—apparently without clear rupture, at least to observers today—their confessional self-consciousness over time. Asking how “Sunni” and “Shi‘i” were understood in emic terms is therefore essential for making sense of such apparently ambiguous situations, as it allows us to take into account the criteria by which historical actors themselves construed these categories.

Needless to say, research pursued along this line of inquiry requires scholars to continuously interrogate themselves regarding the validity of the very binary categories “Sunni” and “Shi‘i.” The imposition of such labels on historical subjects for whom they had little, if any, relevance, or who employed other categorical systems to situate themselves—when carried out without conscious awareness—results in a distorted picture of historical realities on the ground. At the same time, the validity and appropriate theoretical scope of alternative analytical concepts coined to move beyond this binary framework and to account more adequately for particular situations must also be critically examined.

The international conference “‘Sunnis’ and ‘Shi’is’ across History: Confessional Identities, Mutual Perceptions, and Academic (Mis)Conceptions” will tackle this set of concerns squarely. The conference will feature presentations both by members of the joint-research project (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Kakenhi Grant-in-Aid 23K25371 “‘Sunnis’ and ‘Shi’is’: Historical Inquiries into Confessional Identities and Mutual Perceptions”) within the framework of which it is being organized and by invited non-members.

The following thematic axes are currently conceivable on the basis of the topics proposed by project members: “Defining the Self, Drawing Boundaries,” “Mutual Perceptions and Dispositions among Sunnis and Shi’is,” “Devotion to the ‘Alids and Imams across Sunni-Shi’i Boundaries,” “Situations Defying Binary Categorization,” and “Problematizing Academic (Mis)Conceptions.” This call for papers, however, is issued partly with the aim of broadening the conceptual lenses of the conference. Any topic relevant to the concerns outlined above without regard to temporal or geographical location of the subject discussed will therefore be welcomed by the conveners. Contributions dealing with contemporary materials are also welcome, insofar as they offer theoretical insights that may prove useful for historical research.

Venue: Large Conference Room, 4th Floor (Southeast Corner), Institute for Research in Humanities (Main Building), Kyoto University

(For direction: <https://www.zinbun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/english/>)

Convened by: Kazuo Morimoto (The University of Tokyo), Tatsuya Nakanishi (Kyoto University), and Teruaki Moriyama (Doshisha University)

Sponsored by: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Kakenhi Grant-in-Aid 23K25371 “‘Sunnis’ and ‘Shi‘is’: Historical Inquiries into Confessional Identities and Mutual Perceptions”; Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo (Tobunken Symposium); Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University; Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions, Doshisha University.

How to Participate:

The conference will be held in a hybrid format, combining in-person and online participation. Prospective in-person participants are encouraged to register by the end of September 11 (JST). The registration deadline for online participation is September 16 (JST). All registered participants will receive the Zoom link on September 17.

Registration Form: <https://forms.gle/J879jR9hTHgeg4aJ6>

Inquiries

For all inquiries, please contact Mr. Naoki Nishiyama at n-nishiyama@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp.

Program

September 19, 2026 (Sat)

Arrival & Coffee 10:00–10:30

Opening Remarks

10:30–10:45

Panel 1 Hadith Transmitters and Scholars

Chair: *Takao Ito (Kobe University)*

10:45–11:15 *I-Wen Su (National Chengchi University)*

‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl (d. bet. 140/757–8 and 145/762): A Systematic Forger of ‘Alī’s *Faḍā’il* among the *Ahl al-Bayt*

11:15–11:45 *Takahiro Hirano (University of Tsukuba)*

Reliable Sunni Transmitters and *Muwaththaq* Hadith in Imami Hadith Collections

11:45–12:15 *Teruaki Moriyama (Doshisha University)*

The Contested Boundaries of Ahl al-Sunna: Who Could Be Counted as Sunnis?

Lunch

Panel 2 Sayyids and Sharifs in Differing Confessional Ecologies

Chair: *Lloyd Ridgeon (The University of Tokyo)*

13:30–14:00 *Shamim Hodayun (The University of Tokyo)*

Migrant Sayyids and Sacred Authority Across Sunni-Shi‘i Boundaries in the Hindu Kush

14:00–14:30 *Mara Leichtman (Michigan State University)*

Ambiguities of Shi‘i Islam in Sufi Senegal: The Case of Mozdahir International

14:30–15:00 *Matsunaga, Yasuyuki (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)*

How and Why *Ṭarīqa ‘Alīyya Qādiriyya Kasnāzāniyya*, an Iraqi-based Sunni Sufi Order, Attracts Shi‘i *Murīds* from Iran and What Does This Tell Us about Confessional Identities, Mutual Perceptions, and Academic (Mis)Conceptions?

Break

Panel 3 Early Modern Imperial Contexts and the Qizilbash

Chair: TBA

15:20–15:50 *Hüseyin Ongan Arslan (American University of the Middle East)*

Negotiating Confessional Boundaries: A Qizilbash Voice from the Ottoman–

Safavid World (online presentation)

15:50–16:20 *Seyed Saleh Pezhman (University of Tehran)*

From Contestation to Synthesis: Competing Currents in the Making of Safavid-Period Shī'ism

16:20–16:50 *Tatsuya Nakanishi (Kyoto University)*

De-Shiitization of the Legend of “‘Alī Bābā and the Forty”: Discourses of Sufi Mendicants in Central Asia and Hui Muslims in China

Break

Keynote

Chair: *Kazuo Morimoto (The University of Tokyo)*

17:05–18:15 *Andrew Newman (The University of Edinburgh)*

Academic (Mis)conceptions as Barriers to Understanding ‘Sunnis’ and ‘Shi’is’
Across History: The Case of the Study Twelver Shi’ism

Conference Dinner at the popular (*sha ‘bī/mardomī*) Japanese Restaurant *Omuraya* (open only to those invited by the organizers. A participation fee will apply, except for invited overseas speakers)

For details of Omuraya: <https://www.deepkyoto.com/omuraya/>

*Please note that seating is on tatami mats at low tables, in the traditional Japanese style.

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September 20, 2026 (Sun)

Panel 4 Determining Identity: Emic and Etic Perspectives

Chair: TBA

10:00–10:30 *Ayako Ninomiya (Aoyama Gakuin University)*

“Official” Sunnism in Fourteenth-Century India

10:30–11:00 *Kazuhiro Arai (Keio University)*

The Twentieth-Century Debates Surrounding the Sect of Ahmad bin ‘Isa al-Muhajir, a Sayyid Who Migrated to Hadramawt in the Tenth Century

11:00–11:30 *Ethel Sara Wolper (The University of New Hampshire)*

Ottoman Support of ‘Alid Shrines in Mosul: Problematizing Shrines as Proofs of “Sunni”- “Shi’i” Boundaries

11:30–12:00 *Kazuo Morimoto (The University of Tokyo)*

Terminology for Non-Shi‘i and Supra-Confessional Veneration of the ‘Alids and the Twelver Imams: Towards Better-Informed Choices

Lunch

Panel 5 “Sunni” Veneration of the Imams

Chair: *Majid Daneshgar (Kyoto University)*

- 12:45–13:15 *Alyssa Gabbay (University of North Carolina at Greensboro)*
“From the Highest Heaven”: Amir Khusraw’s Exaltation of ‘Ali in His *Dībācha-yi Dīvān-i Ghurraṭ al-Kamāl*
- 13:15–13:45 *Ryo Mizukami (Japan Women’s University)*
The Transformation of Sunni Imamophilism within an Intellectual Family in 17th–18th Century Mughal India
- 13:45–14:15 *Ryuichi Sugiyama (Kyoto Tachibana University)*
The Rise of Emām Reżā’s Authority after His Martyrdom: A Study of Persian Poetry and Sufi Literature in a Sunni Context

Break

Panel 6 Sunni Perceptions of the Shi‘a

Chair: *Ken’ichi Isogai (Kyoto University)*

- 14:35–15:05 *Naoki Nishiyama (The University of Tokyo)*
Between Heterodoxy and Infidelity: Ibn Taymiyyah’s Categorization of Shī‘ī Sects
- 15:05–15:35 *Yayoi Kawahara (The University of Tokyo)*
19th-Century Central Asian Hajj Travelogues: Sectarian Perception and Route Choice
- 15:35–16:05 *Yoichi Yajima (Nara Women’s University)*
The Enslavement of Shi‘i Muslims

Break

General Discussion

16:20–17:30

Closing Remarks

17:30–17:40

Abstracts and Short Bios

Arai, Kazuhiro (Keio University)

The Twentieth-Century Debates Surrounding the Sect of Ahmad bin ‘Isa al-Muhajir, a Sayyid Who Migrated to Hadramawt in the Tenth Century

This presentation reviews the dispute surrounding the sect of Ahmad b. ‘Isa al-Muhajir, a Sayyid who migrated from Basra to Hadramawt in the 10th century. One of the insults directed at Sunni Sayyids, or the Prophet’s family, is that they are actually Shi‘a. Given that the Imams of various Shi‘i sects came from the Prophet’s family, it is not surprising that those who criticize the Prophet’s family for whatever reason might use such labeling as a strategy. However, being Shi‘a does not automatically carry negative connotations. Nevertheless, for Sayyids who act as protectors of Sunni Islam, such accusations are unacceptable.

The Sayyids of Hadramawt are one of the groups that are particularly attached to their Sunni identity. Their common ancestor, Ahmad al-Muhajir the migrant, is now considered to have been a Sunni Shafi‘i, the major sect and school of jurisprudence in Hadramawt as well as other parts of the Indian Ocean maritime region, upon arriving at the region. However, in the 20th century, objections to this view began to be raised by Sayyids themselves, who were re-examining their own history. Specifically, they argued that he was an Imami in Basra, Iraq, his place of origin. This argument crossed the sea, and counterarguments were also raised by Sayyids who had emigrated to Malaya, namely ‘Alawi bin Tahir al-Haddad, the Mufti of the Johor. In this presentation, after tracing the history of the debate regarding the religious affiliation of Ahmad, I would like to examine, including my own views, whether the “Imamiyya,” which is said to have been Ahmad’s religious affiliation, actually meant Shi‘ite, or whether other interpretations are possible.

Kazuhiro Arai is a Professor at the Faculty of Business and Commerce, Keio University, teaching Islamic history, Islam in Southeast Asia, Sufism and other related subjects. He has been working on the history of Arab migration in the Indian Ocean with special attention to the activities of the Sayyids from Hadramawt. He obtained Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, the United States with a thesis on the history of the al-‘Attas family in Hadramawt and Southeast Asia. His current research projects include the recent dispute over the authenticity of sayyids’ genealogy in Indonesia, Arab residents in the turn of the 20th century Netherlands India with special reference to colonial cosmopolitanism, and the movements of dhow centered on al-Mukalla, Hadramawt, in the mid-twentieth century.

Arslan, Hüseyin Ongan (American University of the Middle East)
Negotiating Confessional Boundaries: A Qizilbash Voice from the Ottoman–Safavid World

The early sixteenth century witnessed the emergence of the Ottoman–Safavid rivalry as one of the defining political and religious conflicts of early modern West Asia. During this period, Ottoman historians, bureaucrats, and jurists increasingly portrayed the Qizilbash as religious deviants and political enemies, contributing to the articulation of a more sharply defined Sunni imperial identity. Yet our understanding of Qizilbash beliefs and self-perceptions continues to rely overwhelmingly on sources produced by their opponents.

This paper seeks to redress that imbalance by introducing an unpublished Turkish treatise preserved within a little-known composite manuscript compiled by an Ottoman-born Qizilbash who later migrated to the Safavid Empire in the mid-sixteenth century. Written after his migration but recounting his experiences in Ottoman Anatolia, the treatise preserves a rare Qizilbash perspective on the formative decades of the Ottoman–Safavid conflict. At its center lies the public prosecution of the author’s shaykh during the reign of Selim I (r. 1512–1520). The author reproduces the imperial decree ordering the trial together with a detailed account of the judicial proceedings before transforming the narrative into a sustained Sunni–Shi‘i polemic and a defense of Qizilbash belief.

The paper first situates the treatise within the broader context of the Ottoman–Safavid rivalry and examines how Ottoman administrative and historiographical sources represented the Qizilbash while simultaneously articulating the confessional identity of the Ottoman ruling elite. It then turns to the Qizilbash treatise itself to explore how its author understood Islam, defined the boundaries of his religious community, and responded to Ottoman accusations of heresy. By placing these competing perspectives into dialogue, the paper argues that this unique source not only provides one of the earliest surviving examples of Qizilbash self-representation but also offers new insight into the negotiation of confessional boundaries and the meaning of “Qizilbash” in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Hüseyin Ongan Arslan, PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from Indiana University in 2020, teaches history at the American University of the Middle East in Kuwait. He has published articles and book chapters on the intersection of religion, politics, and historiography in late medieval and early modern West Asia, with a particular focus on the Timurid, Safavid, and Ottoman worlds. His recent research examines the formation of sectarian consciousness and its historiographical expressions in the Ottoman and Safavid realms, as well as Sufi figures, networks, and intellectual traditions in late medieval West Asia.

Gabbay, Alyssa (University of North Carolina at Greensboro)

“From the Highest Heaven”: Amir Khusraw’s Exaltation of ‘Ali in His *Dībācha-yi Dīvān-i Ghurraṭ al-Kamāl*

Amir Khusraw Dihlavi (d. 1325), whose career as a court poet spanned the reigns of numerous princes and sultans in India, is celebrated for his many romances and histories, as well as his contributions to the development of South Asian devotional music (*qawwālī*). He is also responsible for a 100-page preface, the *Dībācha-yi Dīvān-i Ghurraṭ al-Kamāl* (Preface to the Full Moon of Perfection), which serves both as an autobiography and a striking manifesto of his views on literature and religion. Though Khusraw clearly saw all four Rashidun caliphs as legitimate, naming and praising them in the first part of the *Dībācha*, and favorably mentions figures such as ‘Aisha and Abu Hanifa, he nevertheless elevates ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib to a very exalted position throughout. For example, he lauds the poetry written by ‘Ali, quoting and elaborating upon a hadith of the Prophet saying that “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Ali is its gate.” This hadith is often cited by Shi‘is as a means of supporting the imamate. Elsewhere, Khusraw writes of ‘Ali that “the titles of honor for all came down from the heavens, and ‘Ali’s title came from the highest heaven,” and notes that ‘Ali’s statements can be compared to those of the Prophet. My paper will draw from my new translation of the *Dībācha* (published by Harvard University Press in 2026) to demonstrate that Khusraw defies the easy binary of Sunni-Shi‘i, even though he is normally considered Sunni. It will argue that his status as a devotee of the Chishti Sufi order – among other factors – helped shape his attitude toward ‘Ali. Khusraw’s example, though but one data point, helps to correct the “distorted picture of historical realities on the ground,” showing that the image of hardened confessional identities in opposition to each other does not always apply.

Alyssa Gabbay is Associate Professor Emerita of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dr. Gabbay received her Ph.D. from University of Chicago’s Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, specializing in classical Persian literature and medieval Islamic history. Her research interests include women and gender in Islam, Shi‘ism, Sufism in the medieval Persianate world, and the Babi and Baha’i faiths. She is the author of *Islamic Tolerance: Amir Khusraw and Pluralism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) and *Gender and Succession in Medieval and Early Modern Islam: Bilateral Descent and the Legacy of Fatima* (London: I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury, 2020), and *Exquisite Things and Strange Wonders: In Defense of Persian Poetry* (Murty Classical Library of India, Harvard University Press, 2026). Dr. Gabbay is the recipient of a Fulbright fellowship for study in India and the Foundation for Iranian Studies’ Best Ph.D. Dissertation on a Topic of Iranian Studies award, among other honors.

Hirano, Takahiro (University of Tsukuba)

Reliable Sunni Transmitters and *Muwaththaq* Hadith in Imami Hadith Collections

This paper examines the presence of traditions transmitted by reliable (*thiqa*) Sunni transmitters in Imami Shi'i hadith collections and their possible contribution to the transmission of Imami teachings. In modern Imami hadith scholarship, traditions are classified into at least four categories according to their authenticity: *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, *muwaththaq*, and *ḍa'īf*. Among these, *muwaththaq* refers to a tradition whose *isnād* includes one or more reliable transmitters who are not Imami Muslims. These categories were introduced in the thirteenth century. Since the four books (*al-kutub al-arba'a*) of Shi'i hadith were compiled before the introduction of the hadith classification, they were not regarded as *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith collections comparable to the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* in Sunni Islam. The traditions contained in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*, the most authoritative Imami hadith collection, have been subjected to extensive analysis over many centuries. According to the majority of modern Imami scholars, *al-Kāfī* contains 5,072 *ṣaḥīḥ* traditions, 144 *ḥasan* traditions, 1,118 *muwaththaq* traditions, 302 *qawī* traditions, and 9,485 *ḍa'īf* traditions. However, this classification of the traditions in *al-Kāfī* was probably not fully established until around the eighteenth century, and no comparable systematic authentication has been carried out for the other three hadith collections of the four books.

This paper identifies the hadiths transmitted by Sunni transmitters whom at least one of the authors of the four principal Shi'i *rijāl* works (*Rijāl al-Kashshī*, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, and *Fihrist al-Ṭūsī*) regarded as reliable, by extracting them from al-Kulaynī's corpus. It argues that these Sunni traditions deal with various subjects, including jurisprudence, Imamate, and ethics. On this basis, the paper suggests that traditions transmitted by reliable Sunni transmitters—constituting a portion of the *muwaththaq* category—made a limited contribution to the development of certain aspects of Imami thought.

Takahiro Hirano is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at University of Tsukuba, Japan. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo with a dissertation on early Imami Shi'i hadith collections and Qur'anic exegesis. His subsequent research has focused on Twelver Shi'i perceptions of other Islamic sects, examining how various Muslim communities have been defined within Imami jurisprudence and theology. More recently, he has returned to hadith studies, with interests in *rijāl* criticism and the role of Sunni and other non-Imami transmitters in the transmission of Imami hadith. His research explores the formation and transmission of early Imami religious thought.

Homayun, Shamim (The University of Tokyo)
Migrant Sayyids and Sacred Authority Across Sunni-Shi'i Boundaries in the Hindu Kush

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, a number of Sayyids and Sufis moved across the Hindu Kush mountains, which at that time were a sparsely administered frontier between Transoxiana and northern India. Their movements were part of a wider pattern of sacred mobility across the Indo-Afghan world. While some passed through, others settled in valleys along caravan routes. Families tracing their descent from these migrants became custodians of shrines that shaped the region's sacred geography. This paper examines Mir Sayyid 'Ali Yakhsūz, a semi-legendary migrant saint whose Musawi Sayyid descendants settled in the Bamiyan region, occupying an intermediary position between the Sunni valleys and the Shi'i highlands. Yakhsūz's shrine attracted visitors from both communities and served as a site of healing and dispute resolution. Anthropologists have used the concept of segmentary opposition to theorize the authority of sacred outsiders in some Muslim societies, especially in Swat and the Moroccan Atlas. In the classical model, the saint stands outside the field of rival segments yet ritually above it, enabling opposing groups to accept his mediation without submitting to one another. This paper argues that although Sunni and Shi'i communities in the Hindu Kush were not equivalent lineage segments, the broader principle remains relevant. Both recognized Prophetic descent as a source of sacred authority, even if they understood the status of Sayyids differently. Yakhsūz's descendants wielded influence through their custodianship of confessionally ambiguous shrines, where Sunnis and Shi'is both recognized the saint's immanent presence and efficacy. This trans-confessional authority may have enabled Sayyids to travel and settle in frontier spaces that were dangerous and politically fragmented. But it also made them vulnerable in times of civil conflict and confessional polarization, when the ambiguity that enabled them to mediate also exposed them to suspicion and competing attempts to co-opt their authority.

Dr Shamim Homayun is a JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo. His postdoctoral project examines the late medieval and early modern history of Bamiyan. In 2025, he obtained his PhD in anthropology from the Australian National University, focusing on senses of place and landscape in Afghanistan. In 2023, as a Visiting Fellow at the Bodleian Libraries, he conducted research on Bamiyan's post-Mongol history and the medieval geography of the Hindu Kush. His publications include "Unearthing Rabi'a's Grave: Placemaking, Shrines, and Contested Traditions in Balkh, Afghanistan" (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2023) and "Deceptive Sanctity: The Geopolitics of Shrines and Concealed Antiquities in Afghanistan" (*Cultural Anthropology*, 2026).

Kawahara, Yayoi (The University of Tokyo)

19th-Century Central Asian Hajj Travelogues: Sectarian Perception and Route Choice

This presentation examines the sectarian perceptions of Sunni Central Asians toward Shiite Iran and the context behind their choice of pilgrimage routes, focusing on nineteenth-century Central Asian Hajj travelogues. While relations between Central Asia and Iran since the early modern period are frequently discussed within the framework of Sunni-Shiite sectarian conflict, this study explores the specific aspects of how this confrontation manifested through actual accounts in travel narratives.

As the primary source, this study utilizes the *Muntakhab al-tawārikh* (Selected History), a Persian-written work that contains a detailed account of the author's travels, composed by Muhammad Hakīm Khān, an intellectual from the Khanate of Khoqand. On his journey, he traversed the Russian route on his outward journey and the Iranian route on his return, demonstrating distinct attitudes toward each region. This study focuses on contrasting his experiences on the Iranian route — such as concealing his Sunni identity, pretending to be Shiite, and engaging in skirmishes — with his admiring accounts of passing through Russia, which notably lack an awareness of any impending geopolitical threat. Furthermore, this study aims to contextualize these descriptions by referencing other contemporary pilgrimage records, such as the travelogue of Sayyid Ahmad Khwāja as well as multiple accounts written by other pilgrims who traveled via the Russian route.

Through these considerations, this presentation ultimately attempts to relativize how these travelogues functioned to reproduce prevailing contemporary values regarding sectarian borders and practical route choices.

Yayoi Kawahara received her Doctor of Letters from the University of Tokyo. She specializes in the history of Central Asia and Islamic studies, with a primary focus on the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Her scholarly work centers on the social and religious history of the Khanate of Khoqand, an area on which she has published multiple papers examining its chronicles and social structures. Her historical research is deeply rooted in the textual analysis of primary sources from the Ferghana Valley. Within this framework, she authored *Private Archives on a Makhdūmzāda Family in Marghilan*, a volume compiling and analyzing privately possessed historical documents. She is also the co-editor of a critical edition of the *Muntakhab al-tawārikh* (Selected History).

Leichtman, Mara A. (Michigan State University)

Ambiguities of Shi'i Islam in Sufi Senegal: The Case of Mozdahir International

In Sunni-majority Senegal, Shi'i Islam is a relatively recent development. Some Senegalese “converted” through interactions with established Lebanese populations and exposure to Iranian revolutionary ideologies. They disseminated minority religious authenticity through teaching, conferences, holiday celebrations, and media publicity. Revisionist historical accounts of the spread of (Shi'i) Islam to West Africa further narrated autochthony. Some Senegalese ambiguously kept their feet in both Sunni and Shi'i worlds.

Cherif Muhammad Ali Aidara claims to be the first *sharif* to declare himself a Twelver Shi'i in Senegal. Using Prophetic genealogy to establish Islamic authority, he advocates for a Senegalese Shi'ism that does not follow the *marja' iyya*. Self-taught, Aidara's asserted genealogy holds more weight than his education, as he did not graduate from a prestigious international *hawza*. Born to a revered Tijani Sufi shaykh father, Aidara traces his family's origins through the line of Imam Hasan in an effort to pave an indigenous Shi'i path independent of geographically-situated power structures located in Senegalese Sufi headquarters and Middle Eastern Shi'i shrine cities.

Aidara leads Institut Mozdahir International in educational, agricultural, and economic development work. His spiritual-and-material development organization preaches a model its leaders contrast with Sufi predestination that fails to bring Senegalese out of poverty. In stressing similarities between Sufi and Shi'i Islam, the NGO trains youth searching for Islamic belonging to compare Sufi and Shi'i texts. Conferences commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn during the Shi'i mourning period of Muharram cater to Sufis beyond the sectarian divide who also love the Prophet's family. Disciples attracted to Mozdahir's “community,” in competition with dominant local Sufi orders, are charged with responsibilities to carry out Imam al-Mahdi's work in Senegal. This paper offers ethnographic examples grounded in anthropological theory, West African history, and Islamic studies scholarship that highlight a Senegalese Shi'ism defiant of binary categorization.

Dr. Mara A. Leichtman is author of *Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion in Senegal* and co-editor of *New Perspectives on Islam in Senegal: Conversion, Migration, Wealth, Power, and Femininity*. Among other publications, she co-edited two special journal issues: *The Shi'a of Lebanon: New Approaches to Modern History, Contemporary Politics, and Religion* in *Die Welt des Islams* and *Muslim Cosmopolitanism: Movement, Identity, and Contemporary Reconfigurations* in *City and Society*. As a Fulbright Scholar at American University of Kuwait, she launched a second project on Gulf Islamic humanitarianism in Africa. Dr. Leichtman was a Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) Fellow, a Luce/ACLS Fellow in Religion, Journalism and International Affairs, an Institute of Advanced Study Fellow at Durham University, UK, and an Aarhus University Research Foundation Visiting Fellow in Denmark. She teaches courses on Islam in Africa, Anthropology of the Middle East, Anthropology of Religion, and Ethnographic Field Methods.

Matsunaga, Yasuyuki (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

How and Why *Ṭarīqa ‘Aliyya Qādiriyya Kasnazāniyya*, an Iraqi-based Sunni Sufi Order, Attracts Shi‘i *Murīds* from Iran and What Does This Tell Us about Confessional Identities, Mutual Perceptions, and Academic (Mis)Conceptions?

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Gailānī (d. 561/1166), as he is known in Iraq today, was a Persian *sayyid* from Gilan turned a popular Hanbali preacher in a Baghdad madrasa founded by his teacher. His contemporaries did not know him as a Sufi shaykh until his son posthumously made him an impeccable saint figure, or *qutb al-aqṭāb*. Two centuries later his fame as an intercessor had spread across current-day Iraq and Syria. His tomb/shrine was destroyed by the forces of Shah Ismā‘īl when the Safavids captured Baghdad in 1508, only to be rebuilt with a dome by Sultan Sulaymān after the Ottomans retook it in 1534. Today, one branch (*firqa*) of the Qādiriyya, called *Ṭarīqa Kasnazāniyya*, which is now headquartered in Sulaymaniyyah but had briefly been based in Baghdad under Saddam Husayn’s rule, attracts a large number of Shi‘i *murīds* from Iran despite its Sunni credentials. This aspect is unique even among other Iraqi Qādiri orders, namely, the Barzanjīs and the Khālīsī-Tālabānīs, not to mention the Qādiriyya in the rest of the Islamic world. This paper examines the doctrinal and social historical reasons behind the unique cross-confessional appeal of the *Ṭarīqa ‘Aliyya Qādiriyya Kasnazāniyya* to its Shi‘i *murīds* from Iran, as well as possible reasons behind active recruitment strategies on the side of the Order. Through in-depth examinations of available literature in Arabic, Persian, Kurdish and European languages, and the author’s fieldwork in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan, the paper seeks to contribute to a wider discussion on Sunni-Shi‘i confessional identities, perceptions and attitudes among them, and our academic understandings of them. In particular, the paper will reflect, among others, on the notion of intercessors and the importance of genealogy that may help cut across confessional boundaries as well as mitigate the effects of political rivalries in matters relating to congregational activities.

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Mizukami, Ryo (Japan Women's University)

The Transformation of Sunni Imamophilism within an Intellectual Family in 17th–18th Century Mughal India

This study explores the divergence and transformation of Sunni imamophilism (veneration of the Shi'i Imams) in two Persian works by Kashfī Tirmidhī (d. 1650 or 1651), a celebrated Sufi poet in seventeenth-century Mughal India: *Manāqib-i Murtaḍawī* and *I'jāz-i Muṣṭafawī*. Kashfī was affiliated with both the Ni'matullāhī and Chishtī Sufi orders, claimed descent from Shāh Ni'matullā Walī (d. 1431), and served Shāh Jahān (r. 1628–66) as a calligrapher. Although he completed *Manāqib-i Murtaḍawī*, he died before finishing *I'jāz-i Muṣṭafawī*; the latter was completed by his descendant Mīr 'Abd Allāh in 1744–45.

In the introduction to *Manāqib-i Murtaḍawī*, a work on 'Alī, Kashfī explicitly affirms his strong Sunni identity. He describes a Muslim scholar from Tabrīz, whom readers would undoubtedly regard as a Shi'i, and criticizes forms of Shi'i devotion to the Twelve Imams that regarded condemnation of the first three caliphs as an expression of love for the Imams. Instead, Kashfī emphasizes the compatibility of venerating the Imams with respecting the caliphs.

I'jāz-i Muṣṭafawī, a work dealing with the Prophet Muḥammad and the Twelve Imams, consists of three sections. In the first section, devoted to the life of the Prophet, the author expresses respect for the first three caliphs and the Prophet's Companions. However, in the second and third sections, which deal with events following Muḥammad's death, negative portrayals of the first three caliphs and the Companions appear. The imamophilism reflected in these sections thus differs markedly from that of the first section. These later sections therefore likely reflect not the confessional views of Kashfī himself but those of Mīr 'Abd Allāh. The shift in tone toward the caliphs suggests that, within this intellectual family, both imamophilism and confessional identity acquired an increasingly Shi'i orientation.

Ryo Mizukami is an Associated Professor at Japan Women's University. He received his PhD in Asian History from the University of Tokyo in 2023. He studies the Sunni-Shi'i relations in the spread of imamophilism (veneration of the Twelve Shi'i Imams) by focusing on the *fadā'il* works on the Imams. He is the author of "A Medinese Scholar in Injuid Shiraz: Shams al-Dīn al-Zarandī and His Theorisation of Sunni Imamophilism," *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* (forthcoming), and "Writing the Imam's Virtues under the Interconfessional Policy of al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh: Ibn al-Bitṭīq al-Ḥillī and His Faḍā'il Works," in *Knowledge and Power in Muslim Societies: Approaches in Intellectual History* (ed. K. Morimoto and S. Rizvi), Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2023, pp. 193–220. He is also a co-editor of a critical edition of Abu al-Qāsim al-Qāshānī's *Tārīkh-i Ūljāyātū* (Research Institute for Language and Culture of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2026).

Morimoto, Kazuo (The University of Tokyo)

Terminology for Non-Shi‘i and Supra-Confessional Veneration of the ‘Alids and the Twelver Imams: Towards Better-Informed Choices

Various terms have been proposed in modern scholarship to describe non-Shi‘i or supra-confessional veneration of the kinfolk of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and/or the Twelver Imams. These include “*ahl al-baytism*” (McChesney), “Alid loyalism” (Hodgson), “imamophilism” (Melvin-Koushki), “philo-‘Alidism” (Scarcia Amoretti), “Alidism” (Bernheimer), “Shi‘i-Sunnism” (Melvin-Koushki), and “Twelver-Imāmī Sunnism” (*Tasannun-i dawāzda-imāmī*; Ja‘fariyān, following the earlier *Sunniyān-i dawāzda-imāmī* of Dānish-pazhūh and Maḥjūb). Closely related is Woods’s concept of “confessional ambiguity.” Although these labels are often treated as near-synonyms, they embody different assumptions about the nature, scope, and historical significance of the phenomena they seek to describe.

Rather than asking which term is the “correct” or the “best” one, this presentation asks why these different concepts were coined in the first place. It reconstructs the intellectual and historiographical contexts in which they emerged and examines the distinct analytical purposes they were intended to serve. Doing so not only enables more informed terminological choices but also reveals changing scholarly understandings of non-Shi‘i and supra-confessional devotion to the ‘Alids and the Twelver Imams.

The presentation also highlights the often overlooked ambiguity of the terms “Alids” and “Ahl al-Bayt,” both in primary sources and in modern scholarship. Depending on the context, they may denote ‘Alī’s kin broadly or, more specifically, the figures central to Twelver Shi‘ism.

Rather than advocating a single preferred term, the presentation argues that researchers should make conscious terminological choices with a clear awareness of the conceptual baggage and historiographical assumptions carried by each.

Kazuo Morimoto is Professor of Islamic and Iranian History at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo. His research seeks to revisit diverse aspects of Islamic history through the lens of the study of sayyids and sharifs. One question that has emerged from this line of inquiry is whether the conventional categories “Sunni” and “Shi‘i” require reconsideration. The joint research project under which this conference is organized, and the conference itself, represent his attempt to explore this question further. His recent publications include “Alid-Najafi Genealogists and a Twelver Shi‘i Network in the Era of Supraconfessional Philo-‘Alidism: Insights from a Genealogist’s Notebook from the Fifteenth Century,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 46-1 (2026), and “A Genealogist’s Account of an ‘Impostor’ Claiming Prophetic Descent: Al-Jawwānī in Aleppo, 1188,” *Orient: Journal of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan* 61 (2026).

Moriyama, Teruaki (Doshisha University)

The Contested Boundaries of Ahl al-Sunna: Who Could Be Counted as Sunnis?

The term Aṣḥāb/Ahl al-Ḥadīth emerged between the late eighth and early ninth centuries and was used in two related senses: “hadith scholars” and “partisans of hadith.” In the first half of the ninth century, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), a leading figure among the Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, steadfastly resisted the imposition of Muʿtazilite theology during the *miḥna*. As a result, the term Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth acquired more explicitly sectarian and confessional connotations and was widely adopted as a self-designation by *ʿulamāʾ* who regarded themselves as followers of the Prophetic Sunna as transmitted through hadith—that is, as Ahl al-Sunna. They defined themselves in opposition to the Muʿtazilites, or Ahl al-Kalām (theologians), as well as to Ahl al-Raʾy (partisans of reasoned opinion) and the Shiʿis, whom they collectively classified as Ahl al-Bidʿa (people of innovation).

Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, however, was never a monolithic category. From the tenth through the thirteenth centuries in the Mashriq, Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī scholars, each claiming the designation Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, competed over who legitimately represented Ahl al-Sunna. Ḥanbalī Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, such as Abū Ismāʿīl al-Anṣārī (d. 1089), denounced prominent Shāfiʿī Hadith scholars such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 1071), declaring them to be Ahl al-Bidʿa. The principal reason given for this condemnation was that the Shāfiʿīs included the Ashʿarīs within Ahl al-Sunna, whereas the Ḥanbalīs classified the Ashʿarīs as Ahl al-Kalām and thus as essentially akin to the Muʿtazilites. The conflict therefore concerned the authority to determine the boundaries of Sunni orthodoxy. By examining these Ḥanbalī attacks on Shāfiʿī Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth and the Shāfiʿī responses to them, this paper considers the wavering boundaries of Ahl al-Sunna and the historical circumstances that shaped them.

Teruaki Moriyama is Professor of Islamic Studies at the School of Theology and Director of the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of the Monotheistic Religions (CISMOR), Doshisha University. He received his Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Tokyo in 2009. His research focuses on the social and intellectual history of medieval Islam, particularly the Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth (Companions of Hadith), the formation of Sunni identity, and the development of Sunni scholarly traditions between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. His work explores how hadith scholars established religious authority through the transmission and strategic use of hadith, as well as through the principles and methodologies of hadith scholarship. His publications examine the scholarly practices of the Shāfiʿī Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, the emergence of local biographical dictionaries as a genre of hadith literature, and the relationship between hadith scholarship, local historical writing, and the formation of Sunni communal identity. His recent research examines how the title Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth functioned as a marker of Sunni identity and how the transmission of hadith was employed to define sectarian boundaries in medieval Islam.

Nakanishi, Tatsuya (Kyoto University)

De-Shiitization of the Legend of “‘Alī Bābā and the Forty”: Discourses of Sufi Mendicants in Central Asia and Hui Muslims in China

This paper focuses on an epic relating the Prophet’s ascendance to the heaven (*mi‘rāj*) that Pseud-Khaṭā’īs variously narrated in Anatolia. These enigmatic poets, who called themselves by a pseudonym of Shāh Ismā‘īl Safavī (Khaṭā’ī), were extreme Shiis. They described in the verses that forty persons led by ‘Alī, the lion of Allāh, enlightened the Prophet who joined their mystical gathering after his celestial journey. Alevī-Bektashīs in Anatolia attributed the root of their important ritual *ayn-i cem* to this legendary tale. Meanwhile, the story of the Shii Forty was narrated with various revisions by Naqshbandī *qalandars* in Central Asia including Bābā Ḥājī ‘Abd al-Raḥīm who flourished under the rule of Janid dynasty in the second half of the 17th century. Furthermore, it was retold among Hui Muslims after the 18th century as forty or forty-one mendicants (*qalandar* or *faqīr*) who are said to have been respectively buried in various sites of China after their preaching Islam there. A Hui Sufi master emphasized the Islamic authenticity of a Qādirī order he led on the basis of the legend of “forty mendicants” in the 19th century. This paper explores how the extreme Shii story was de-Shiitized by Naqshbandī *qalandars* in Central Asia and Hui Muslims in China. Whereas the former may have felt anti-Shiite pressure from Uzbek rulers and other Naqshbandīs, the latter were unaware of the Shiite presence, recognizing themselves as belonging to the Hanafite rather than the Sunnite. Analyzing what elements of the story were regarded as “unsound” by them, this study illuminates various senses of difference between the two major sects of Islam.

Tatsuya Nakanishi has studied the intellectual history of Hui Muslims (Chinese-speaking Muslims) for approximately 20 years, especially focusing on how they adjusted Islamic beliefs and practices to Chinese milieu during the 17th–20th centuries. He has examined relevant issues by investigating Chinese, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish historical sources, some of which he found through his fieldworks in China.

Nakanishi received the Ph.D. degree in Letters from Kyoto University in 2008. Based on his doctoral dissertation, he published a Japanese monograph, titled *Chūka to taiwa suru isuramu: 17–19 seiki chūgoku musurimu no shisōteki ei* (2013) which elucidated how Chinese Muslims harmonized Islamic thoughts and cultures (Sufism, Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas, Hanafite jurisprudence, and Persian culture) with Chinese dominant religions (Confucianism and Taoism) and social situations during the 17th–19th centuries. For this monograph, he was awarded the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities in 2013.

Newman, Andrew (The University of Edinburgh)

Keynote Lecture

**Academic (Mis)conceptions as Barriers to Understanding ‘Sunnis’ and ‘Shi’is’
Across History: The Case of the Study Twelver Shi’ism**

The binary conceptualisation of Sunnis and Shi’is has long dominated the Academy and, more recently and as, or perhaps more, importantly, ‘public’/‘lay’ discourse, both all the more so since the Iranian Revolution.

The question set for this gathering is less one of history per se, but of historiography – that is, the study of the study of history. This, to identify the presumptions/agendas and resulting paradigms of analysis that have underpinned the continued reference to the binary.

This paper explores the binary in relation to the study of Twelver Shi’ism across both the pre- and post-Revolution period to argue that although the Revolution might have prompted a re-evaluation of the dominance of binary academic discourse on the faith to that time, in fact, post-1979 the Academy only doubled down on the pre-1979 discourse. Thus, the larger Sunni-Shi’i binary prevalent before the Revolution was not only given new life but, more importantly, in its revitalised form the binary has been deployed in more recent public discourse on ‘sectarianism’ in Islam.

The binary issue gets to the heart of our role as academics. Do we ask the same question(s) that have been asked by earlier generations, use the same, or even, ‘new’ sources in the same way, and thereby expect to generate anything other but the same, albeit longer, answers, and thereby reinforce the binary? Or, do we pose new and original questions, use the same/new sources in a different way?

The paper will conclude by proposing new/different approaches/questions to the faith’s history which would reveal evidence that challenges that binary understanding.

Andrew Newman holds a BA in History from Dartmouth College and an MA and PhD in Islamic Studies from UCLA. He came to Edinburgh in 1996 from the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine and Green College, Oxford, where he was researching topics in the history of Islamic medicine.

Newman has published on early Twelver Shi’ism and Shi’i history and thought and on Shi’ism in Safavid Iran. His most recent publication is the edited collection *Iranian/Persianate Subalterns in the Safavid Period: Their Role and Depiction: Recovering Lost Voices*, Berlin: Gerlach, 2022 and his most recent article is ‘The Safavids: An Argument for the Retention of Sovereignty on the Domestic and International Scenes’, in Shabnam Holliday, ed., *Sovereignty in Iran: Challenges to Eurocentrism from Ancient Iran to the Islamic Republic*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2026, pp. 137–163.

Newman is the founder/moderator of Shii News and Resources.

Ninomiya, Ayako (Aoyama Gakuin University)
“Official” Sunnism in Fourteenth-Century India

It is commonly understood that the Delhi Sultanate espoused Sunnism. Its adherence to Sunnism has primarily been discussed in the context of political authority, particularly associated with the early Sultanate's pursuit of legitimacy through the (nominal) recognition by the Abbasid caliphate and the sultans' attachment to or detachment from the Abbasids. Consequently, there has been limited analysis of the way how the Sunnism was expressed or understood by Indian Muslims themselves. This presentation explores the “official” Sunnism during the reign of Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq (r. 1351–1388), the third (or fourth) ruler of the Tughluq dynasty, and its historical context. It has been pointed out that Sunni-Shi'i polemics, alongside the rise of Sunni consciousness, emerged during his reign. The “Sunniness” advocated under Fīrūz Shāh was expressed not only through the opposition to those labeled as heretics (*rāfiḍī*, *mulḥid*, etc.) and pagans (*kāfir*). References to classical scholars such as Ghazālī, Abū Shukūr Sālimī, and Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, the government's diplomatic interactions with the Abbasids in Cairo, the presence of Sufi saints, the introduction of holy relics of Prophet Muḥammad, and the policy change from the Fīrūz's predecessor, Muḥammad Tughluq, also contributed to this expression of Sunnism, which can be understood as an attempt to construct ‘proper’ practices of Indian Islam. These depictions, presented in historical literature, an anonymous work, and inscription recording the sultan's achievements, must have been widely and loosely shared among those involved in the administration. The concept of a ‘proper’ practice of Islam under Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq, expressed in political sphere, was intertwined with the idea of tradition of the Muslim sultans of India, and employed to obtain legitimacy. In this regard, the concept of ‘Sunna’ itself surely was convenient for the purpose.

Ayako Ninomiya is a Professor at the History Department, Faculty of Letters, Aoyama Gakuin University. She received her Ph.D. at Kyoto University. She also stayed in Aligarh Muslim University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as a visiting researcher. Her research interest is social and cultural aspects of Sufism and cultural trends among Muslims in Northern India since the 14th century. Recently, she works on the Islamic intellectual tradition under the Jaunpur Kingdom, focusing on works of Shihab al-Din Dawlatabadi and Ashraf Jahangir Simnani. Her first book, *Socio-Cultural History of Medieval India: Voices from Sufism* was published from Manohar in May 2026.

Nishiyama, Naoki (The University of Tokyo)

Between Heterodoxy and Infidelity: Ibn Taymiyyah's Categorization of Shī'ī Sects

The *Minhāj al-sunnah al-nabawiyah* by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), a prominent Ḥanbalī scholar who flourished under the Mamluk Sultanate, is widely recognized as a representative Sunnī refutation of Shī'ism. This monumental work was composed as a direct response to the *Minhāj al-karāmah*—a treatise authored by his Twelver Shī'ī contemporary al-ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) at the request of Öljeitü, the eighth Ilkhan, to demonstrate the truth of the Twelver Shī'ī doctrine of the Imamate and to criticize Sunnism. Formatted as a *sharḥ* (commentary) on the *Minhāj al-karāmah*, Ibn Taymiyyah's work not only comprehensively refutes Twelver Shī'ī claims through the verification of hadiths and the redefinition of theological history, but also contains extensive references to various other Shī'ī sub-sects.

While Ibn Taymiyyah's fierce criticism of Shī'ism and his denunciation (*takfīr*) of groups he deemed extremist, particularly the Qarmatians, are well-documented, his specific evaluations of distinct Shī'ī sub-sects—such as the Zaydiyyah, Ismā'īliyyah, Nuṣayriyyah, and Twelvers—have yet to be fully examined. To address this gap, this presentation analyzes his understanding of Shī'ī history, from the emergence of the sect to its subsequent fragmentation, focusing primarily on the *Minhāj al-sunnah* alongside selected fatwas. Based on this historical perception, this study then examines how he characterizes each Shī'ī sub-sect, demonstrating a clear gradation in his evaluations of them. Furthermore, by investigating whether he includes each sect within the fold of Islam or deems them apostates who have entirely fallen into infidelity, this presentation explores what constituted the boundary dividing heterodoxy from infidelity for Ibn Taymiyyah.

Naoki Nishiyama is a Project Researcher at the University of Tokyo's Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia. He received his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Tokyo, where he is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Islamic Studies. His research focuses on medieval Islamic thought, Shia Islam, and ethics, with a particular emphasis on the 13th-century scholar Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. His recent work deepens this expertise by exploring the historical philosophy of Islamic education, the evolution of Imamate theories during the Mongol period, and the ethical frameworks surrounding gender within classical and medieval Islamic texts.

Pezhman, Seyed Saleh (University of Tehran)

From Contestation to Synthesis: Competing Currents in the Making of Safavid-Period Shī'ism

The prevailing scholarly consensus attributes the emergence of Iran as a predominantly Shī'ī society to the Safavid state's coercive program of Shī'itization, executed with the doctrinal and juridical support of the 'Āmilī scholars. Yet a closer examination of the religious landscape of post-Safavid Persia—and of the distinctive forms of Shī'ī religiosity that have endured since—suggests a more complex trajectory. The version of Shī'ism that gradually consolidated its dominance between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries was not, in its essential features, identical to the normative, scholastic Twelver tradition articulated in the classical sources. Rather, the mature Safavid-era Shī'ī religiosity was also profoundly shaped by two additional and historically significant strands of Shī'ī expression: (1) the indigenous, mystical “spiritual Shī'ism” cultivated by Sufī circles, especially the two major Kubrawī offshoots, the Nūrbakhshiyya and the Dhahabiyya; and (2) the popular, eclectic, and *ghulātī* religiosity of groups affiliated with the Safaviyya Sufi order, most notably the Qizilbāsh.

By challenging dominant narratives of Safavid Shī'itization, this paper argues that the form of Shī'ism that ultimately became the prevailing religious identity of the Iranian populace was neither wholly imported nor exclusively imposed. Instead, it emerged from the dynamic interaction—and often contestation—between three distinct yet interrelated currents: the organically evolved pre-Safavid Shī'ism of segments of the Iranian intellectual elite; the Levantine Twelver orthodoxy introduced by the 'Āmilī jurists; and the Anatolian Shī'ī *ghuluww* embodied by the Qizilbāsh. This understanding not only offers a more nuanced explanation for the success of the Safavid project of religious transformation, but also illuminates the intellectual framework that later facilitated several influential post-Safavid doctrinal developments until our time. Among these are the elaboration of new theories of *walāya*, including the Shaykhī idea of the *Rukn-i Rābi'* (Fourth Pillar) and the doctrine of *Walāyat-i Faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist).

Seyed Saleh Pezhman is an Assistant Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Theology, where he teaches courses in Sufism, Shī'ism, and Islamic Codicology. He received his PhD in Islamic Studies from McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies in 2024, and his research focuses primarily on late-medieval and early modern Persian Sufism and its interrelations with the Shī'ī tradition. He also serves as Head of International Communications at the Malek National Museum and Library, and holds a senior researcher position at Iran's National Library, where he works on Sufī and mystical codices.

Su, I-Wen (National Chengchi University)

‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl (d. bet. 140/757–8 and 145/762): A Systematic Forger of ‘Alī’s *Faḍā’il* among the *Ahl al-Bayt*

This paper examines the life and scholarly activity of Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl (d. between 140/757–8 and 145/762), a Successor, jurist, and traditionist belonging to the ‘Aqīlid lineage. It argues that this ‘Aqīlid scholar systematically fabricated hadith that exalt the merits of ‘Alī. Drawing on *isnād-cum-matn* analysis, this study demonstrates that ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl was likely the originator of a hadith that designates the first two caliphs and ‘Alī as the “men of Paradise.” He further propagated additional *faḍā’il* traditions honouring ‘Alī by proliferating new lines of transmission, attributing these narrations to the Companion Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh—an authority from whom he almost certainly did not receive direct transmission.

The conclusion that ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl falsified both the *matn* and *isnād* of ‘Alī’s *faḍā’il* traditions is not unprecedented. Early ninth-century hadith critics already issued negative evaluations of his reliability, and he was far from being unique in fabricating or misattributing prophetic traditions in this period. Nevertheless, his efforts to disseminate ‘Alī’s merit traditions beyond Medina offer valuable insight into the evolving recognition of ‘Alī’s religious and political standing in Syria and the Jazīra, two regions whose history of hadith transmission remains comparatively understudied in modern scholarship. Furthermore, the case of ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl illuminates how Ṭālibid elites negotiated and consolidated their social status through active participation in the scholarly enterprise of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. His scholarly career also advances our understanding of knowledge formation within the nascent Shī‘ī community, particularly the traditions associated with the Sixth Imam, Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765), a near contemporary of this study’s focal scholar.

Dr. I-Wen Su is a Distinguished Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Arabic Language and Culture at National Chengchi University, Taiwan. She earned her MSc and PhD in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Edinburgh, UK. Her research spans early Islamic historiography, hadith studies, formative hadith criticism, and the genesis of Sunni and Shī‘ī sectarian identities, with a methodological focus on *isnād-cum-matn* analysis. Dr. Su is the author of *The Shī‘ī Past in the Great Book of the Songs* (Gorgias Press, 2021) and has published extensively on the *faḍā’il* hadith and early hadith critics.

Sugiyama, Ryuichi (Kyoto Tachibana University)

The Rise of Emām Reżā's Authority after His Martyrdom: A Study of Persian Poetry and Sufi Literature in a Sunni Context

Emām Reżā (‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā), the eighth Twelver Shiite Imam, died in 818—according to Shiite belief, as a martyr—in what is now the city of Mashhad in the Islamic Republic of Iran during his journey with the Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn from Marv to Baghdad, after the latter had designated him as his successor. Compared with other prominent Imams, such as the first Shiite Imam, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and the third Imam, Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, his achievements during his lifetime were not particularly distinguished. Nevertheless, veneration of him gradually deepened in the Iranian region, where Sunnis constituted the majority before the establishment of the Shiite Safavid dynasty in 1501.

Several scholars have made important observations regarding the growth of his veneration under the Sunni dynasties between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. For example, Kathryn Babayan and John Dechant have argued that the adoption of the *laqab* “Sulṭān” may have enhanced his authority during the Mongol period in the Iranian region. Although their insights are valuable, further research based on historical sources is needed to explain the adoption of this *laqab*. In particular, while this *laqab* appears in expressions of mourning for Reżā in the works of early Persian poets, this aspect has not been examined in previous studies. Furthermore, Sufi literature contains accounts describing the relationship between Reżā and the Sufis, and a thorough examination of these accounts is necessary to clarify the rise of his authority.

This study aims to elucidate the process and background of the development of Reżā's authority in Iranian region, focusing particularly on Persian poetry and Sufi literature compiled within a Sunni context before sixteenth century.

Ryuichi Sugiyama is an Associate Professor of History at Kyoto Tachibana University, Japan. He earned Ph.D. in 2011 from Keio University, Tokyo. He has studied the history of Iran and contemporary Iranian studies, especially the historical development and transformation of the mausoleum of Emam Reza (the eighth Twelver Shiite Imam) from Safavid period to the present day. His academic works include “The Mausoleum of Emam Reza during the Afsharid Period: A Consideration of its Organization and Administration in the 18th Century Based on the Source *Tumar-e ‘Alishahi* (Scroll of ‘Ali Shah) (I–II)” (*The Memoirs of the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia*, Nos. 177–178, 2020–21 [in Japanese]), “The Mausoleum of Imam Reza under the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Administration and Activities of the Twelver Shiite Imamate Mausoleum in Iran” (*Journal of Islamic Area Studies*, No. 11, 2019).

Wolper, Ethel Sara (The University of New Hampshire)

Ottoman Support of ‘Alid Shrines in Mosul: Problematizing Shrines as Proofs of “Sunni”- “Shi’i” Boundaries

This paper is part of a larger project exploring shrines in medieval and early modern Mosul. It examines twelve shrines associated with Badr al-Din Lu’lu’, the de facto ruler of Mosul between 1234 and 1259. Now mostly destroyed, these shrines have remained one of the most difficult objects of study for understanding the intersection between religious policy and building support in medieval and early modern Mosul. In large part, these problems have arisen from the nature of these shrines and how they have been studied. Frequently rebuilt and often displaying remnants from other buildings, they have been difficult to date and define. Although these shrines are often upheld as proof of Badr al-Din Lu’lu’s adoption of Shi’ism, recent scholarship has problematized the dating and attribution of these shrines arguing that many of them need to be understood as honoring ‘Alid figures. They also point out that it was only through later additions of epigraphic panels and cenotaphs that a more restrictive Twelver Imami program was signaled. This paper traces changes in how these buildings were distinguished, defined, and adapted during and after their initial construction through a study of the few preserved building fragments and the description of these shrines in Ottoman sources.

Ethel Sara Wolper is Associate Professor of History at the University of New Hampshire. She received a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from the University of California in Los Angeles. Her main area of research is the architecture of medieval Anatolia and northern Iraq. She is the author of *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia* (Penn State University Press, 2003), and an editor with Daphna Ephrat and Paulo Pinto of *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes* (Brill, 2021). Wolper’s current research focuses on the shrines of Mosul. Recent articles and chapters on these shrines include ‘Prophet Shrines and Religious Communities in Iraq’ (Brill, 2023) and ‘Agency and Invisibility in the Islamic City: Qadib al-Ban and the City’s Edge’ (Archaeopress, 2025). She is also the principal investigator of a website on the shrines from Mosul: (www.rememberingmosul.org).

Yajima, Yoichi (Nara Women's University)
The Enslavement of Shi'i Muslims

Although Islamic law prohibits the enslavement of Muslims, Sunnis often regarded Shi'i Muslims as unbelievers and therefore considered them eligible for enslavement. Following the Safavid conversion of Iran to Shi'ism, Shi'i Muslims became subject to enslavement in the neighboring and rival Sunni world, particularly in Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire. In Central Asia, Turkmens abducted Shi'i Muslims from Khurasan and sold them in the slave markets of Khiva and Bukhara. Documents relating to the sale, inheritance and emancipation of slaves in Central Asia frequently refer to slaves described as being "of Khurasani origin." In the Ottoman Empire, although *fatwās* were issued declaring Iranian Shi'i Muslims to be unbelievers and thus liable to enslavement, such legal opinions did not necessarily result in their enslavement in practice; indeed, decrees were also promulgated prohibiting their enslavement. Upon his accession to the throne, Nādir Shāh, the founder of the Afsharid dynasty, gained support by presenting himself as a liberator of Iranians from Ottoman enslavement. In diplomatic negotiations with the Ottoman Empire, he also demanded the prohibition of enslavement and the emancipation of enslaved Iranians. The permissibility of enslaving Shi'i Muslims was therefore determined not solely by Islamic legal doctrine but also by political and diplomatic considerations.

Yoichi Yajima is currently a Professor at Nara Women's University. He received his Ph.D. in Literature from Kyoto University in 2002. His research focuses mainly on Central Asian history and historical documents in Persian and Turkic. His recent publications include "Commentary of Turkic Documents in Arabic Script from the Otani Collection in the National Museum of Korea," Kwon Youngwoo (ed.), *Ancient Central Asian Writings in the National Museum of Korea II: Written Materials Excavated from the Tarim Basin* (Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2022, in Korean) and several articles on the history of Persianate world.

Image on the Cover/Title Page:

Reverse of a silver *tanka* of the Timurid ruler Iskandar Sulṭān (r. 812–817/1410–1415), Album no. 2398.2. Private collection. Obverse on the back cover. Photographed by Masatsugu Nokubo (The University of Tokyo).

“The reverse bears the names of the 12 Shi‘ite Imams in 12 petals attached to the central circle, within which is inscribed the kalima followed by *‘ali wali Allah*, surrounded by the names of the four Rashidun. It seems that Iskandar was attempting to authorize a coinage that would be equally acceptable to both Sunnis and Shi‘ites.” (Stephen Album, *Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 3rd ed., Santa Rosa, CA: Stephen Album Rare Coins, 2011, 260)

