Thoughts and Practice of Islamic Mysticism in Turkey, İdiris Danışmaz (Nakanishiya Shuppan, 2019)

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1. Structure and Summary of the Book

This book is an analysis of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) based on the works of İsmâʻîl Hakkı Bursevî (d.1728), a prominent Muslim scholar during the Ottoman Empire.

This review summarizes the book and analyzes its significance in the field of Sufism research. First, the review looks into the significance of Bursevî's concept of the "unity of being" and, second, the significance of his interpretation of the Qur'ān. This review focuses on these two points to investigate the validity of Bursevî's "ethical and practical interpretation," which are used in the book as keywords for analyzing Bursevî's thoughts on Sufism.

The book is organized as follows:

Preface: Region covered by and summary of the book
1. Introduction
2. Research theme, objectives, and materials
3. History of research
4. Organization of the book

Chapter 1: İsmâʻîl Hakkı Bursevî
1. Introduction
2. Life of Bursevî (1)
   --From childhood to schooling years
3. Life of Bursevî (2)
   --From being a successor of a Tariqa Sheikh
4. Bursevî's works

Chapter 2: Bursevî's theories on mystical cosmology
1. "Five Divine Presences of Allah"
2. Bursevî's theory of the "Five Divine Presences of Allah"

3. "Ethical and practical interpretation" seen in Bursevî's thoughts on existence

Chapter 3: Interpretation of the Qur'ān—Focus on the Sufi interpretation of the Qur'ān

1. Introduction
2. Qur'an
   --Immutability of text and infinity of meaning
3. Exegesis of the Qur'ān (Tafsīr)
   --Overview of history, types, and methods of interpretation
4. Tafsirs of Sufism
5. Relationship of *ma'rifa*, as the Sufis' goal, and the Sufi interpretation

Chapter 4: Bursevî's interpretation of the Qur'ān

1. Tafsīrs in the Ottoman Empire
2. "Spirit of the Qur'ān"
3. Origins of interpretations in the "Spirit of the Qur'ān"
4. Format and method of the "Spirit of the Qur'ān"

Chapter 5: Examples of "ethical and practical interpretation" seen in the "Spirit of the Qur'ān"

1. Story of the "Companions of the Cave"
2. Story of the "Prophet Musa and Khidr"
3. Story of the "Two-horned One"
4. Comparison of Bursevî and other tafsir scholars

Conclusion

First, in the Preface, the author summarizes previous research and describes the distinct features of cosmology theories according to the Ibn Arabi School and of the Sufi interpretation of the Qur'ān. The author claims that previous Islamic scholarships have not thoroughly tackled the relationship between the knowledge that Sufis aim to acquire, and the knowledge obtained through the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Likewise, previous studies have not examined how the practical aspects of Sufism, such as the prayers and ascetic practices of the Sufi orders, are related to their cosmology theories and Qur'anic interpretations. The author aimed to comprehensively investigate Sufism according to Bursevî using the keywords "ethical and practical interpretation" rather than separately discussing cosmology theories and Qur'anic interpretations, as done in previous research.

Chapter 1 discusses the life and works of Bursevî. His experience as a tariqa sheikh appears to be important in establishing the necessity of the "ethical and practical

interpretation" emphasized in the book. The book provides a useful appendix of Bursevî's works at the end. Chapter 2 summarizes Bursevî's interpretations regarding the concept of the "unity of being" (*waḥda al-wujūd*), a major idea espoused by the Ibn Arabi School. The concept of the "unity of being" views the "sum of things (everything)" as a result of the self-manifestation of Allah, the Absolute One. Bursevî divided this process of Allah's self-revelation into five stages. He further explained the "unity of being" by comparing the relationship between Allah and the creatures to that of the "King and Vizier." As the Vizier does not exist without the King, the creatures also do not exist without Allah. The author mentions this figurative comparison of existence to the worldly social structure as an example of Bursevî's "ethical and practical interpretation."

Chapter 3 briefly explains the characteristics of the Sufi interpretation of the Qur'ān. Chapter 4 delves into the attributes of Bursevî's Qur'anic exegetic work, namely, the "Spirit of the Qur'ān," after giving a summary of Qur'anic exegesis in the Ottoman Empire. In particular, a very interesting point that the author makes is that other than explaining mystical inner knowledge (*'ilm al-bātin*) according to the conventional Sufi Qur'anic interpretation, Bursevî interpreted the Qur'ān using an "*exposition style that creates the atmosphere of listening to an actual sermon*" (p. 90). In Bursevî's "homiletic" expositions, he "*even used humorous anecdotes to draw the interest of the audience*" (p. 90), clearly showing that his experience of preaching at the Grand Mosque of Bursa heavily influenced his works.

In Chapter 5, to further examine the distinctive features of Bursevî's Qur'anic interpretation in detail, the author discusses Bursevî's expositions of stories in the Qur'ān that were favorite subjects of Sufi commentaries; namely, the stories of the "Companions of the Cave," the "Prophet Musa and Khidr," and the "Two-horned One." Bursevî's "ethical and practical interpretation" is characterized by a constant reference to the ascetic principles of Sufism, such as in pointing out the importance of solitary retreat (*khalwa*) in the "Companions of the Cave," and the proper attitudes for the master (*shaykh*) and the disciple (*murīd*) in the "Prophet Musa and Khidr." The author also compares Bursevî's interpretation with the tafsirs of Nûruddîn al-Âsam al-Karamânîand Naqshbandi, Anatolian Sufi thinkers during the Ottoman Empire. Through the comparison, the author shows that Bursevî represents a combination of these two thinkers—namely, al-Karamâanîi's mystical interpretation from the ascetic perspective and Naqshbandi's interpretation from Ibn Arabi's mystical-philosophical perspective—while being distinct in writing expositions based on his own experiences.

A distinct feature of the book is its discussion of the thoughts espoused by the Ibn Arabi School from the "ethical and practical" perspective. Traditionally, these thoughts were

analyzed in terms of their mystical-philosophical aspects. The "ethical and practical interpretation" that the author speaks of points to Bursevî's attempt to show that the mystical knowledge of Sufism is not confined to the elites; namely, the Islam scholars and Sufi saints. Bursevî tried to show that ordinary people could also personally experience this mystical knowledge and practice it as moral virtues for day-to-day life. As pointed out in the book, Bursevî wrote most of his works in Turkish so that ordinary people who did not speak Arabic or Persian, the academic languages of that time, could understand and practice Sufism (p. 23). The author has chosen the "Treatise of the Five Divine Presences of Allah" and the "Spirit of the Qur'ān" (a Qur'anic exegesis) as the primary materials for the book. The former was written for ordinary Turkish people who did not understand Arabic, while the latter emphasized the "homiletic" approach to enable ordinary people to understand and practice the message of the Qur'ān. The author's choice of materials appears to be effective in conveying the book's message.

The following sections look into a few arguments in the book that the reviewer found inconclusive.

2. Significance of Bursevî's Concept of the "Unity of Being"

First, in Chapter 2, the author explains Bursevî's concept of the "unity of being" based mainly on the "Treatise of the Five Divine Presences of Allah." There are only a few examples given, however, to explain Bursevî's "ethical and practical interpretation." Also, in this chapter, the author mentions the "*Allegory of the King*" (p. 27) as an analogy between the dependence of the subject's existence upon the King's existence and the dependence of the existence of all things upon Allah's existence. The author claims that this is an example of Bursevî's attempt to simply explain the ontological theories of the Ibn Arabi School to ordinary people. However, this could instead be interpreted as an attempt to validate the political powers' mystical legitimacy at that time. For example, Özkan Özturk discussed Bursevî's interpretation of the government system as a manifestation of Allah's diverse attributes as an example of the mystical political philosophy in the Ottoman Empire[1]. Theoceanssertions on esoteric political philosophy were not rare among adherents of Sufism. They can also be seen in Ibn 'Arabī's (d. 1240) "Divine Governance of the Human Kingdom" (*Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhīya*) and, during the Ottoman Empire, in Taşköprîzâde Ahmet Efendi's (d. 1561) "Epistle on the secret of the vicariousness and spiritual sovereignty of man" (*Risāla fī Bayān Asrār al-Khilāfa al-Insānīya wa al-Sulta al-Ma'nawīya*). Also, some researchers have pointed out that the

theories on the "stations of existence" and the "perfect man" by Shamd al-Dīn al-Sumatrāī (d. 1630), an adherent of the Ibn Arabi School from Southeast Asia, have been adopted by King Iskandar Muda to justify his existence and power as manifestations of Allah's will[2]. These examples point to other more persuasive arguments to demonstrate Bursevî's "ethical and practical interpretation." The author also claims that "*generally, scholars discuss the theory of the "Five Divine Presences of Allah" only at the ontological level; Bursevî, however, dared to carry out interpretations at the ethical and practical levels*" (p. 47). However, among the prominent adherents of the Ibn Arabi School, at least from the 17th century onwards, there are several examples of practical interpretations founded on the concept of the "unity of being" not as mere metaphysical philosophy. For example, Liu Zhi's (d. 1730) "The Five Phases of the Moon" explained the importance of man's spiritual perfection and discipline along with the self-manifestation process of Allah based on the concept of the "unity of being" using the metaphor of the waxing and waning of the moon[3]. Likewise, Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731), a contemporary of Bursevî and an adherent of the Ibn Arabi School from Arabia under the Ottoman Empire, tried to advance the concept of the "unity of being" as a universal message to humanity, as an undeniable truth both for Muslims and non-Muslims[4].

Sufism traditionally refers to the process of Allah's creating the creation as "descent" (*nuzūl*), the process of man's attaining truth through repeated training and discipline as "ascent" ('*urūj*), and this dynamic relationship between Allah and man as the "circle of existence" (*dā'ira al-wujūd*)[5]. Sufis had, therefore, spoken of ontological and practical theories that connect this circle of existence using these terminologies. These examples show that the author's arguments asserting Bursevî's originality as an "ethical and practical" exegetist of the concept of "unity of being" are not entirely persuasive.

3. Significance of Bursevî's interpretation of the Qur'ān

Next is Bursevî's "ethical and practical" approach in interpreting the Qur'ān, which Chapter 5 analyzes in detail. A mere comparison of his interpretations with those of al-Karamâanî and Naqshbandi, however, appears to be insufficient to demonstrate the originality of his interpretation throughout the history of Sufi Qur'anic exegesis. This section looks into Bursevî's interpretation of the story of the "Prophet Musa and Khidr," one of the examples discussed in this book, by referring to other major Sufi Qur'anic commentaries.

First is regarding the translation of the "two oceans" (*baḥarayn*) mentioned in "*I will not give up until I reach the junction of the two oceans even if I have to spend untold years in*

my quest" (Qur'an 18:60). Alī al-Qārī (d.1605), a leading Islam scholar in Arabia under the Ottoman Empire, interpreted the "two oceansoceans" in his Qur'anic commentary entitled "Lights of the Qur'ān and Mysteries of Wisdom (Anwār al-Qur'ān wa Asrār al-Furqān)" to mean contradicting states of mind, such as fear (*khawf*) and hope (*rajā*), tension (*qabḍ*) and relief (*basṭ*), or reverence (*hayba*) and intimacy (*'uns*)[6]. These "two oceansoceans" also point to the human heart (*qalb*) and ego (*nafs*), wherein virtue lies in the sea of the heart, while vice lies in the sea of the ego. According to al-Qārī, reaching the "junction of the two oceans" means finding a balance between conflicting emotions, and between the heart and the ego. Although this is consistent with the *maqaamat* (spiritual stations) philosophy of classic Sufism, focusing on human emotions appears to be an "ethical" interpretation typical among Sufis. Next, North African Sufi thinker Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība (d.1809), in his Qur'anic commentary entitled "The Immense Ocean (*al-Baḥr al-Madīd*)," viewed Musa as representing the futility of external knowledge, and Khidr as representing the futility of inner wisdom. Musa stood in the sea of Sharia, while Khidr stood in the sea of truth[7]. Ibn 'Ajība explained that Musa's quest to find Khidr was a quest for inner wisdom. Citing the authority of Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), he asserted that the search for inner wisdom, i.e., knowledge of Sufism, is the personal duty of Muslims because no one can escape from committing shameful mistakes and sins. Theoceanssertions are based on al-Ghazālī's works, namely, his discussions in the chapter on Salvation (*munjiyāt*) in Part 4 of "The Revival of the Religious Sciences (*Ihyā 'Ulūm al-Din*)" and the chapter on Repentance (*tawba*) in the "Forty Principles of the Religion (*Arba'īn fi Uṣūl al-Dīn*)." The search for inner wisdom underscores the importance of the ascetic life, i.e., man should face and repent from sin, purify his mind and body from vices, and aim to acquire virtue.

Next is the Sufi tradition of interpreting the story of the "Prophet Musa and Khidr" as a metaphor for the master-disciple relationship. Hugh Talat Halman discussed this in detail in his Ph.D. dissertation, which would have served as a useful material in analyzing Bursevî's Qur'anic interpretations, in addition to the discussions made in Chapter 5 of the book. For example, Halman asserted that according to the Qur'ānic commentary entitled "The Brides of Explanation on the Realities of the Qur'ān (*'Arā'is al-Bayān fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Qurān*)" by Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209), a Persian Sufi thinker, Allah caused Musa to encounter Khidr to enable Musa to ascertain the way (*ṭarīqa*). By so doing, Musa was to become an example for those seeking the truth by dedicating their lives as practitioners of Sufism (*murīdīn*) and as tariqa masters[8]. Interpretations that liken Khidr to the perfect master can be seen in the Ottoman Empire in the works of İsmâ'îl Rusûhî Anḳaravî (d. 1631). For example, in his main

work entitled "Stations of the Seekers (*Minhâcü'l-Fuḳarâ*)" on *maqaamat*, he viewed Khidr and Musa as examples of how to follow the master[9].

The above commentaries suggest that the lack of studies on Sufism dealing with the "ethical and practical" interpretations by Sufi thinkers is a problem that has to do with the researchers on Islamic thought. This method of interpretation could be more widespread among Sufis, not only during the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

This book is one of the most informative monographs in Japan regarding Bursevî, the greatest thinker in the history of Sufism in Anatolia during the Ottoman Empire. However, it should be noted that from the 17th to the 18th century, the influence of the Ibn Arabi School had spread from West Africa to Southeast Asia to different regions of the Islamic civilization. Thus, this is a period in history where many works were written to explain Sufism based on different intellectual backgrounds and local languages. Therefore, the historical and philosophical significance of Bursevî's works must be analyzed from a wide regional perspective beyond Anatolia. Further, regarding his "ethical and practical" approach to Sufism, which are emphasized as keywords in the book, also focusing on the aspect of the life of Bursevî as a tariqa sheikh (also mentioned in the book) would perhaps reveal more insights into his distinctive exegetic approach. For example, it would be interesting to look at how Bursevî discussed solitary retreat (mentioned in the book as part of his Qur'anic interpretation in p. 104) in his works on the ascetic practices and manners of the Celveti Order.

Sufism in the Ottoman Empire became the subject of active research worldwide particularly in the last 20 years. Therefore, this book is a groundbreaking monograph that considerably raises the standard for research on Sufism during the Ottoman Empire in Japan.

Notes

1 Özkan Özturk, *Siyaset ve Tasavvuf: Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesinde Tasavvufun Tezahürleri* (İstanbul: Degah Yayınları, 2015), p. 433.

2 Peter G. Riddel, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 113.

3 劉智『五更月』呉海鷹主編『回族典藏全書』第 26 巻、甘肅文化出版社、2008 年、1119-1134 頁。Liu Zhi, "The FivePhases of the Moon," Wu Haiying (ed.), The Hui Collection, Vol. 26, Gansu Cultural Publishing House, 2008, pp. 1119-1134.

4 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *Īḍāḥ al-Maqṣūd min Ma'nā Waḥda al-Wujūd*, Suleymaniye Kütüphanesi,

Halet Efendi 759, 115a.

[5] Muḥammad al-Dhawqī, *Sirr-e Dilbarān* (Karachi: Maḥfil Dhawqīye, 1998), p. 200.

[6] ʻAlī al-Qārī, *Anwār al-Qur'ān wa Asrār al-Furqān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʻIlmīya, 2013), p. 76.

[7] Ibn ʻAjība, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Majīd* (Cairo: n.p., 1999), vol. 3, p. 285.

[8] Hugh Talat Halman, "Where Two Oceans Meet: The Quranic Story of Khidr and Moses in Sufi Commentaries as a Model for Spiritual Guidance," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2000, p. 224.

[9] İsmâʻîl Rusûhî Anḳaravî, *Minhâcü'l-Fuḳarâ* (İstanbul: Vefa Yayınları, 2008), pp. 73-74.