

**“Prayer” as a focal concept for  
understanding commonalities among and  
differences between religions**

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# Religious communication and Internet use

- Why we study religious communication in general?
  - To understand the social movement
  - To establish a typology of religious organization
  - To understand the process of acceptance and change of attitude -- i.e., conversion
  - To understand the difference from “profane” communication

# The studies of media use by religions in Japan

- Started in 1970's
- Mainly focused on New Religions
- Media use in proselytization and education: radio, television, newspaper, magazine, communication satellite, cable TV, video, computer, manga, etc.
- Merely the research on the actual situations; lacking the answer to the questions about religious communication

# The reason the study of media use didn't deepen in Japan

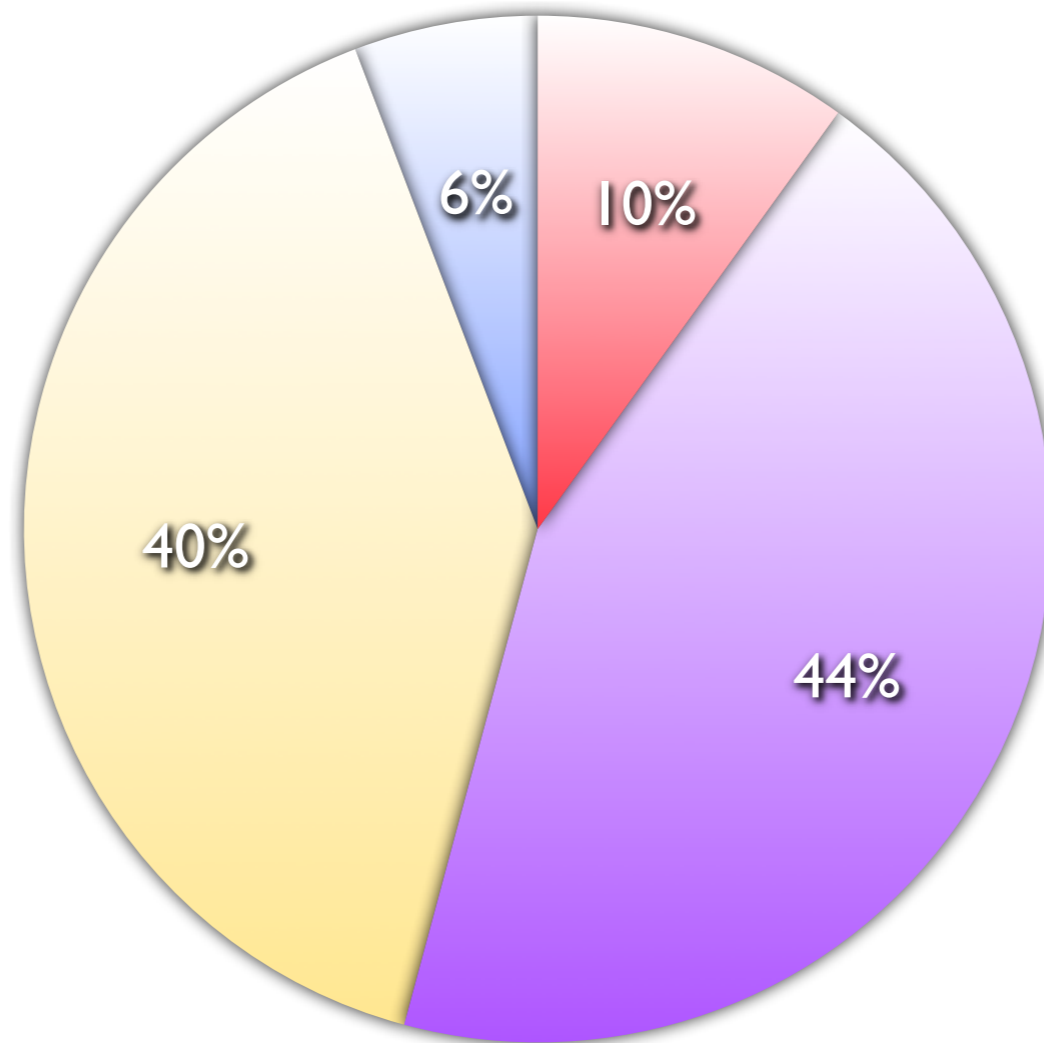
- Y. Abe's consideration (1990):
  - New Religion as a place for a mutual communication among people separated from traditional villages

# The possibility and difficulty in focusing on the Internet use

- CMC as a multidirectional and plastic interactive medium: conforming to people's religious needs?
- Actually, religious uses are very few (in Japan); especially in traditional religions such as Shinto

# Percentage of websites registered in Yahoo! Japan (Sep 2006)

● Shinto    ● Buddhism    ● Christianity    ● Others



# Back to the starting point of our investigation

- Focusing on the central matter of religion:  
the manifestation of “prayer”



# “Prayer” as a basic and common practice of religions

- F. Heiler’s classical work (1918):
  - Religious people, students of religion, theologians of all creeds and tendencies, agree in thinking that prayer is the central phenomenon of religion, the very hearthstone of all piety. [Heiler 1932 (1918): xii]

# Prayer in the Internet

- The merit: the source for the study is more possible to retrieve and analyze than the usual situation of prayer which are mostly done personally and in silence.
- “Prayer Request” in a Christian mailing list [Kurosaki 2000]
  - Posts on problems in one’s actual life: leading to long threads of others’ responses -- exchange of the same experience, comments, opinions, etc.
  - cf. Posts of sermons: leading no response.

# Prayer in the Internet

- Keta Jinja (Shinto shrine located in the Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan): accepts the visitors' posts about the successful love by the prayer to the gods of Keta.
- Over 150,000 users are registered to its mobile phone site.

# Notational classification and controversy on prayer

- Heiler's complex criteria of distinction between prayer in mysticism and prayer in prophetic religion [Miyajima 2004]:
- Historical emergence / Psychic fundamental experience and other psychic characteristics / Concept of God / Evaluation to history / Attitude to authority / Sin and Salvation / Attitude to ethics / Attitude to social community / Attitude to culture and world / vision of the other world / monism and dualism

# Notational classification and controversy on prayer

- Suzuki Daisetsu's classification (1946): objective and intellectual / absolute and spiritual
- He used this conception to criticize Shintoists' discourse on prayer as lacking the spiritual awareness.

# Notational classification and controversy on prayer

- Sugawara Michizane's verse cited in Shintoists' discourse in the Medieval Age:
  - If your heart meets the way of sincerity, the gods will guard you without prayer.
- Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land Sect), the largest traditional Buddhist sect in Japan, denies prayer.
- However, Suzuki Daisetsu (1946) interprets Amida Buddha's "Hongan" as a spiritual prayer.

# Looking for the appropriate axes of coordinates on prayer

- 300 samples
- 44 questions on religious consciousness
  - 5 questions on prayer:
    - I feel God or Buddha is looking over me when I put my hands together in prayer. (Guard)
    - The purpose of praying should include the pursuit of actual happiness. (Actual Happiness)
    - Praying that results in happiness or the removal of misfortune is purely coincidental. (Coincidence)
    - Humans cannot exist without praying to a god. (Reflection)
    - I somehow feel that praying to a god eases uneasiness and pressures. (Healing)

# Result of the survey

- Principal Component Analysis (after Varimax Rotation)

|                  | 1      | 2               |
|------------------|--------|-----------------|
| Guard            | .600   | .424            |
| Actual Happiness | .085   | .666            |
| Coincidence      | -.118  | -.829           |
| Reflection       | .850   | -.138           |
| Healing          | .760   | .375            |
| Interpretation   | Mental | Worldly Benefit |



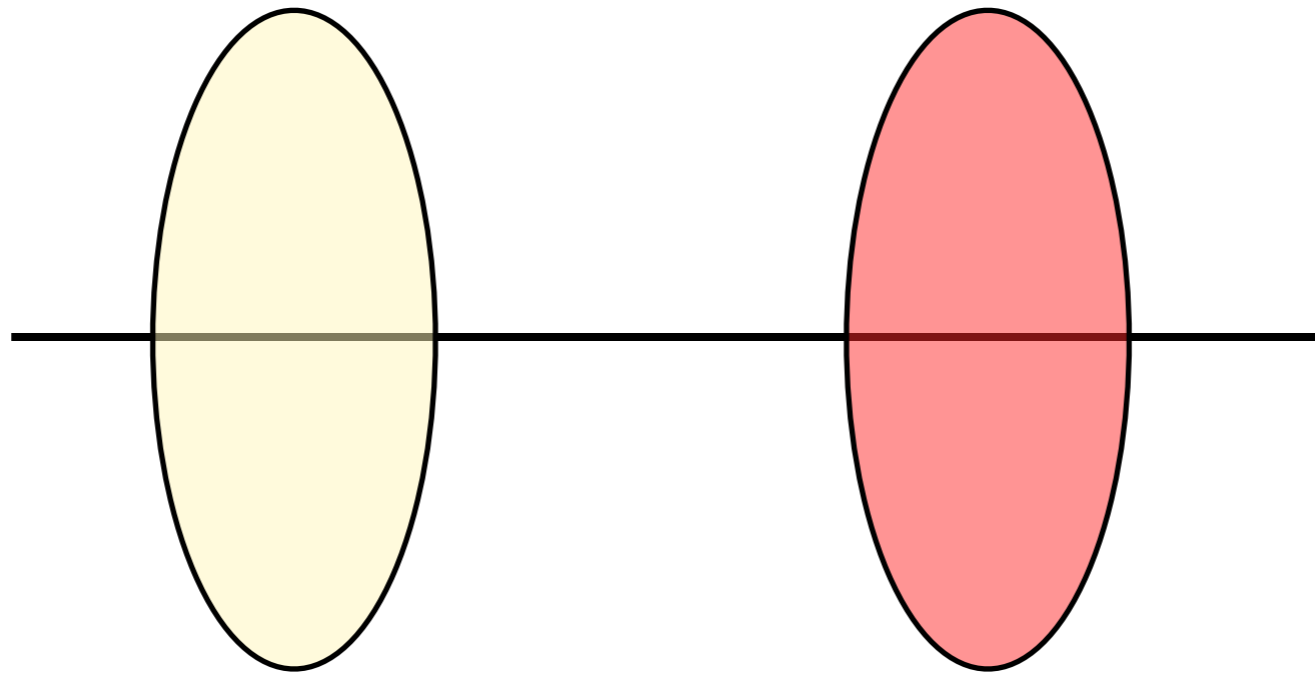
# Correlation with other consciousness on religion

- 12 factors from Principal Component Analysis for other 39 questions (after Varimax Rotation)

| Factor                                           | Mental | Worldly Benefit |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------------|
| 1. Quest for better life and society             | .302** | .229**          |
| 2. Altruism                                      | .138*  | .210**          |
| 3. Sense of autonomy                             | .038   | .124*           |
| 4. Self-realization                              | .011   | .033            |
| 5. Self-expression                               | .065   | .015            |
| 6. Fortune-telling and lucky charms              | -.038  | -.057           |
| 7. Afterlife, soul, unseen huge power            | .117*  | .174**          |
| 8. Heteronomy and tolerance                      | .011   | .036            |
| 9. Abuse and dubiety                             | .046   | -.122*          |
| 10. Fortune-telling, afterlife, soul, unfairness | .324** | .176**          |
| 11. Supernatural phenomenon                      | -.019  | .010            |
| 12. Group and organization                       | .021   | .107            |

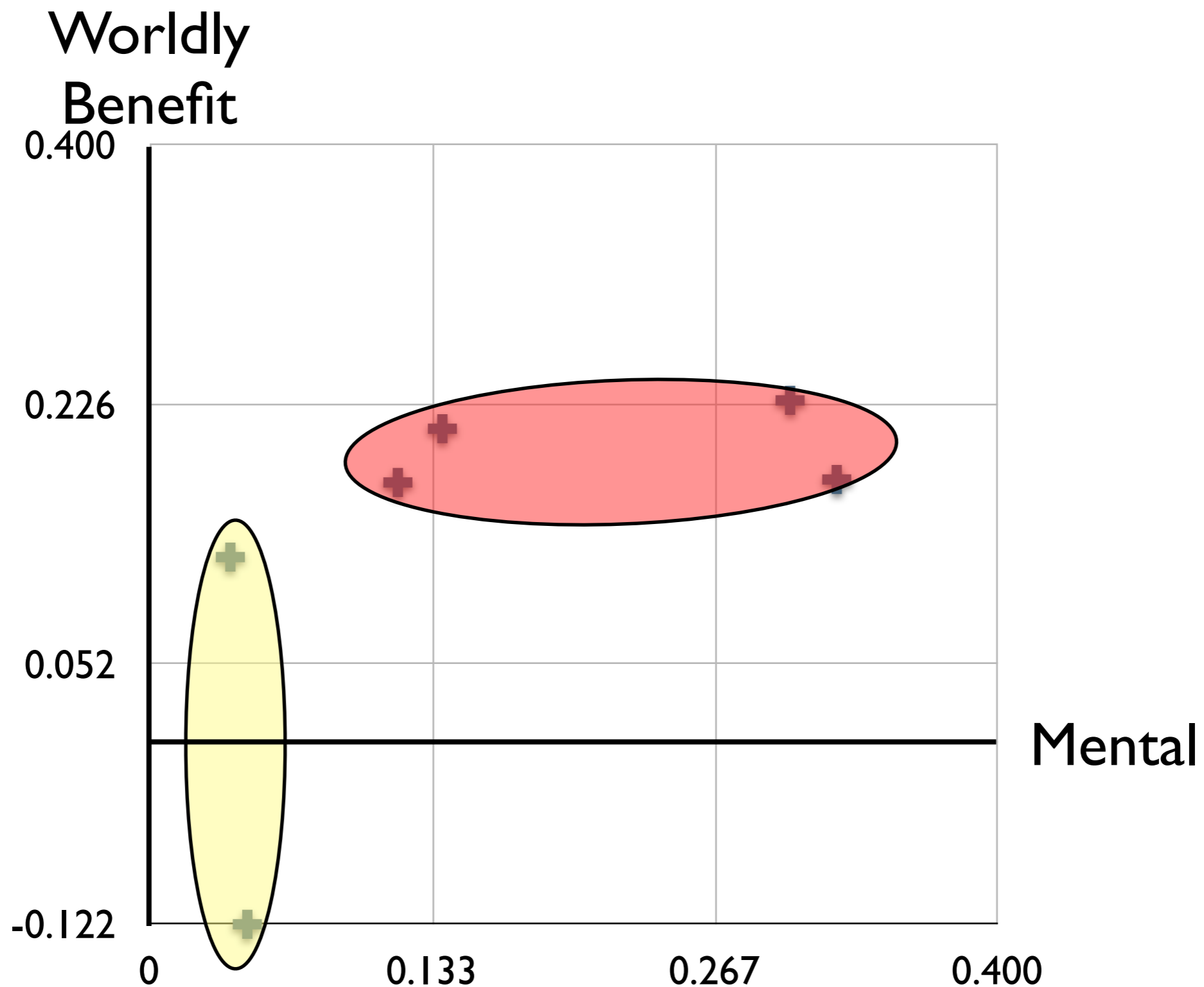
# Conventional axis

Worldly  
Benefit



(Varieties of)  
'True' Prayer

# Two independent axes



# Correlation with other consciousness on religion

- There are factors correlated both with the factor of the prayer as a mental thing and with the one of the prayer for the worldly benefit; the quest for better life and society, the altruism, and the belief in fortune-telling and afterlife.
- But there are factors correlated only with the factor of the worldly benefit; the sense of autonomy and not-recognizing the abuse and dubiety of religion.

# Conclusions and further question

- By focusing on “prayer,” we can expect to see a mutual religious communication in the Internet.
- The survey analysis of the religious consciousness leads to two notational axes: the attitude toward a mental thing and the one toward a worldly benefit. There are factors of religious consciousness correlated only with the latter.
- Further question: Does this configuration cause conflicts -- e.g. long threads in the mailing lists -- in the religious communication in the Internet?