

**“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

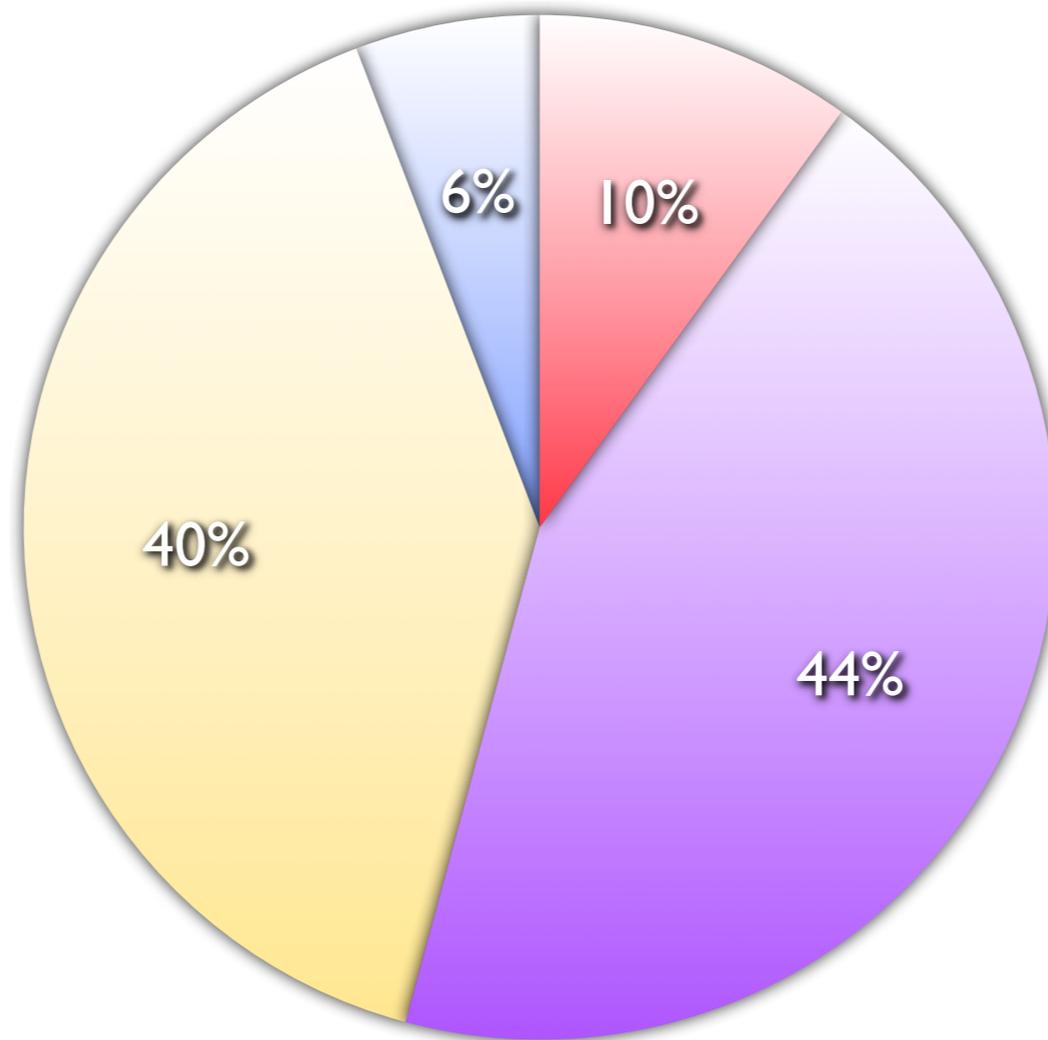
- Y. Abe's consideration (1990):
 - New Religion as a place for a mutual communication among people separated from traditional villages

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

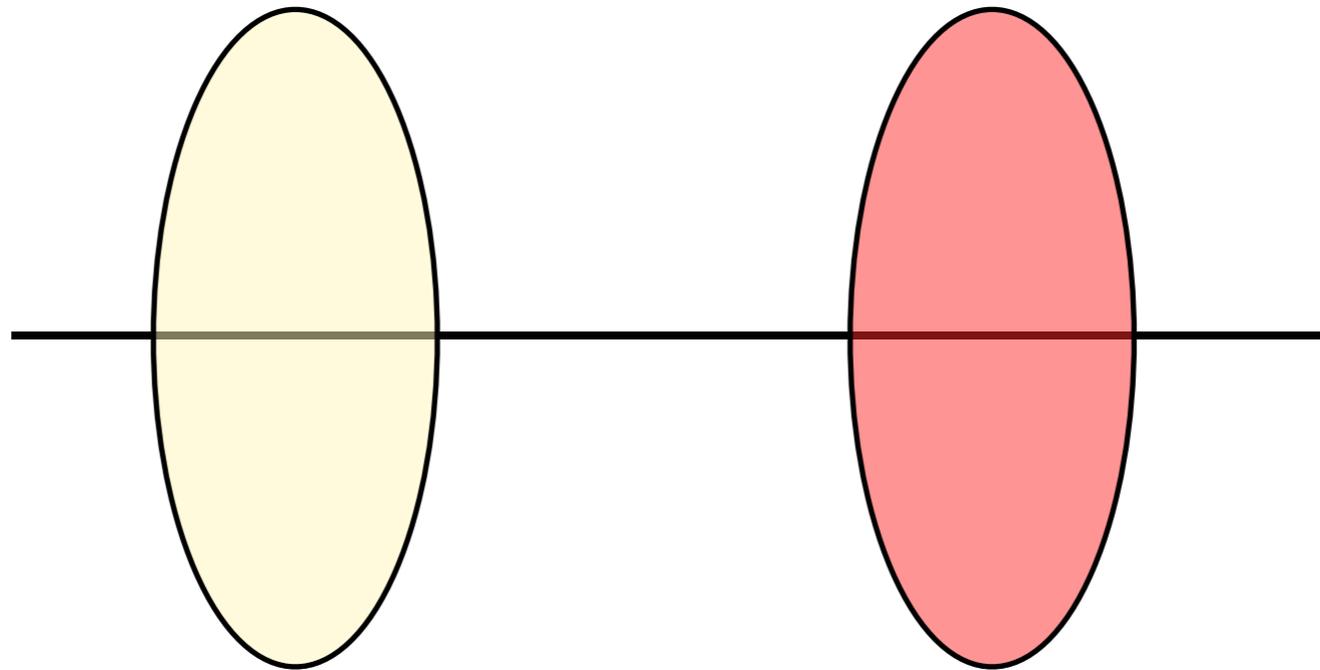
Correlation with other consciousness on religion

- 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

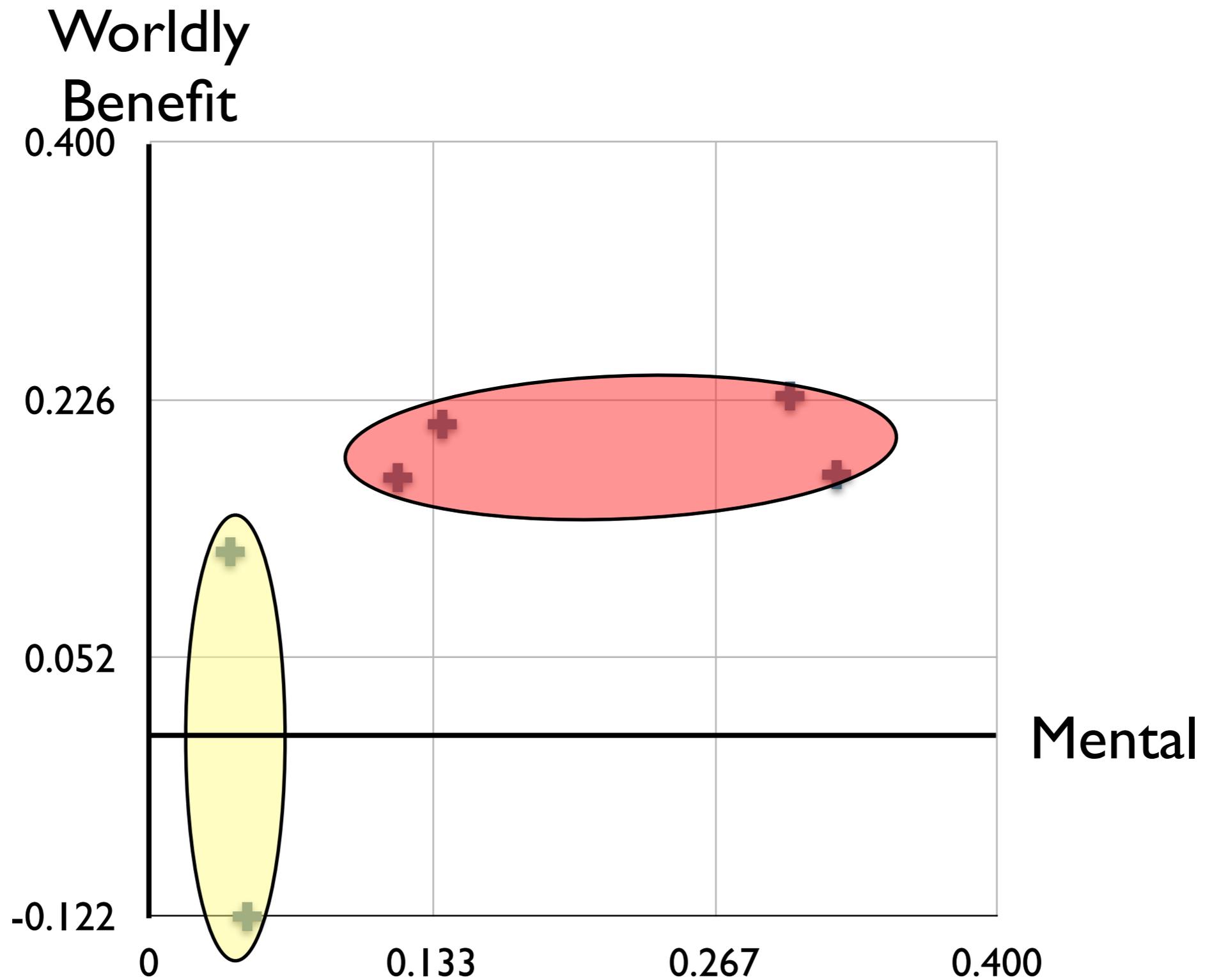
Conventional axis

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?