“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: 6%
- Buddhism: 10%
- Christianity: 40%
- Others: 44%
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.
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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guard</td>
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<td>.424</td>
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<td>Actual Happiness</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.666</td>
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<td>Coincidence</td>
<td>-.118</td>
<td>-.829</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>-.138</td>
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<td>Healing</td>
<td>.760</td>
<td>.375</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>Worldly Benefit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Correlation with other consciousness on religion

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

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

Worldly Benefit

(Varieties of) ‘True’ Prayer
Two independent axes

Worldly Benefit

Mental

-0.122

0.052

0.226

0.400

0.133

0.267

0.400
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?