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History of the Psychology of Religion, East and West: Theoretical and Practical Principles for New (and Old) Histories

James M. Nelson

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Abstract History is a central part of any academic discipline, as how scholars write and think about the history of their field helps define its identity. This paper presents an overview of the key issues involved in writing histories of the psychology of religion, particularly as these issues appear in the Chinese context. Attention to these issues will help Chinese scholars write rich histories of their field that acknowledge their connection to Western research while appreciating the powerful distinctive characteristics of the Chinese situation. The paper provides a number of practical suggestions that may help Chinese researchers in this process.

Keywords Historiography · Psychology of religion

Introduction

Since the early development of the psychology of religion, scholars in the discipline have reflected on the history of their field. From the early survey of Coe (1920) to the negative assessment of Beit-Hallahmi (1974) and the rich sophisticated treatments of Wulff (1991, 1997), writers have struggled to develop narratives of a field marked by conceptual, disciplinary, and cultural diversity (Belzen 2001; Richards 1987; Smith 1988). A good history of the psychology of religion is important, as it helps us to understand those that have come before us, see positive directions in the field, and identify needs for change or further effort (Brock 2006; e.g., Hou and Zhang 2007; Lim et al. 2010). It can also help us understand the theoretical problems involved in our work and our broader connection to philosophy and the other sciences (Eysenck 1988). These histories have much in common with more general histories of psychology and science (Belzen 2005), but they also have their own unique features.

Histories of newly developing areas in psychology are particularly important, because they help define an understanding of the field and its key concepts. This self-understanding provides an *identity* for the field that constrains its object of study, goals and methods.

J. M. Nelson (✉)
Department of Psychology, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383, USA
e-mail: Jim.Nelson@Valpo.edu

Thus, history writing can have profound effects on the direction of a discipline, especially a new field such as the psychology of religion in China. The history must be carefully done or possible ways the field may contribute to social welfare may be stunted.

Although a number of good psychology of religion histories are available, little or nothing has been written about the theoretical and historiographical issues involved in producing such a history (Belzen 2008; cf. Woodward 1980; Hilgard et al. 1991). This is unfortunate, because the theoretical positions taken by the writer on issues like the nature of historical inquiry and its goals greatly influence the content and form of the final product (cf. Benjamin 1997). As with any scholarly work, it is better that writers fully understand the theoretical issues involved so that they can make informed choices about the kinds of assumptions they make. A strong development of these theoretical underpinnings is necessary for a healthy psychology of religion (cf. Yue 1994).

My review will proceed in a number of stages. First, I examine the basic concepts that underlie any history, including ones that attempts to capture the psychology of religion. Second, I look at some of the specific assumptions that historians of the field typically make when producing their narratives. Finally, I consider some of the practical implications of these concepts and assumptions, particularly as they relate to developing a history of the psychology of religion in China. The intent is to provide a conceptual structure that will help scholars construct better accounts of the field.

Basic concepts of historiography

What is the nature of historical writing? Historiographers and philosophers suggest that all history writing involves processes of (1) remembering, (2) forgetting, and (3) signification, or the making of meaning.

Remembering

History is a process of remembrance. It involves bringing things from the past (events, people, etc.) to the attention of the reader so that they may be mutually shared or remembered. This is a complex process that involves many important choices about exactly what should be remembered.

A first and fundamental decision in remembrance involves the question, where should the history begin, and where should it end? There is no ontologically real answer to this question; rather, it is a choice made by the historian. In the psychology of religion, short versions of history often begin with the publication of the *Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James in 1902, or perhaps with the establishment of the first psychological laboratory by William Wundt in 1879. However, other views are possible, particularly if one sees the psychology of religion as a part of the long dialogue between science and religion (Vidal 2006; cf. Nelson 2009, pp. 43–75).

After deciding where to begin, the scholar must next answer the question, what kinds of things need to be remembered? In histories of science, several types of things constitute a target for the historian's work.

1. The scholar may focus on the *concrete product of scientific inquiry* like experiments or the monographs that summarize them. Early histories of psychology of religion (e.g., Coe 1920) often focused on this task, and more modern reviews (e.g., Wulff 1997) also devote extensive sections to this kind of material.

2. Since the modern identity of psychology is closely tied to its status as a science, an attractive option for histories may be to focus on the development of *scientific practices* in the field (Brock 2006; cf. Danziger 1990, pp. 21–24). In psychology, questions of practice often revolve around methodologies and measurement procedures to operationalize variables of interest (e.g., "religion" or "spirituality"), a task that is problematic in many ways (Slife et al. 2005). In this view, a history of psychology is primarily a review of changes in method and measurement instruments over time (e.g., Rennie et al. 2002; Emmons and Paloutzian 2003). In the psychology of religion, many recent works take this approach and view the history of the field as a series of methodologies and key studies (e.g., Hood et al. 2009).
3. Alternatively, a historian may emphasize the development of *concepts*, so that the history of science becomes a branch of the history of ideas, or in the case of psychology a branch of theoretical psychology (cf. Stam 2003). Some recent histories in the psychology of religion (e.g., Nelson 2006; Paloutzian and Park 2005; Park and Paloutzian 2005) have taken this approach and have focused on important theoretical issues in addition to describing practices and results. Concept-oriented histories in the psychology of religion often try to associate the best parts of the field with a particular tradition within psychology, such as "objective" science (e.g., Cronbach 1933), psychodynamic psychology (e.g., Hiltner 1947), social psychology (e.g., Murphy 1929; Hunsberger 1980), or a particular practice like psychotherapy (e.g., Vande Kemp 1985).
4. Finally, the writer may choose to focus on the *individuals* involved in the scientific process, so that history of science is done as a type of biography (e.g., Drake 2001). In the psychology of religion, biographical treatments have focused on a variety of figures; William James is a common figure of interest (e.g., Nelson 2009, pp. 117–122), and other early individuals have also been the object of study (e.g., G. Stanley Hall in Vande Kemp 1992; Boisen in Griffin and Malony 1988; Leuba in Wulff 2000; Allport in Vande Kemp 2000). General historians of psychology have also produced works about figures important for the psychology of religion (e.g., Nicholson 2003). These narratives typically contain another important type of material: information about the larger context within which the psychology of religion is taking place. So, for instance, a biography of William James and his thought will include material on political, intellectual and economic developments that might have affected his work (e.g., Bordogna 2008).

All four types of content (products, practices, concepts, biography, and context) can be found in historical work about the psychology of religion and are important for understanding the field. Of course, it is difficult and perhaps counterproductive to completely disentangle these four types of remembrance from each other (Mills 2000), and modern histories have increasingly drawn from all of these genres in their descriptions. The decision of which genre to choose in a history of psychology of religion is important for its identity, for the choice of genre shows what the author thinks is the defining feature of the field: method, ideas, or the personal and social context within which an inquiry takes place.

Forgetting

History is also a process of forgetting (cf. Ricoeur 2004, pp. 412–456). That is, no history can include all the data that are potentially relevant to its narrative; some things must be

excluded by the historian or the story would be so massive as to be unintelligible. In a sense, it is a gift that the history writer gives to the reader, helping the reader to see order and purpose in an object of study. However, it is also a kind of violence that carries with it a cost. Eliminating information closes off some ways of thinking about the past. Certain identities are excluded in favor of others. Good histories depend on the ability of the writer to make these choices transparent to the reader so that they can intelligently evaluate the proposed history rather than be manipulated by it.

Forgetting is particularly important in historical treatments of psychology of religion because it an instrument for defining the field (cf. Coe 1920). The historian's view of what constitutes "psychology of religion" will affect the selection of what should be excluded from the narrative. This can have profound effects on the outcome of the work. For instance, the received view of the history of the psychology of religion argues that the field largely died out after the 1920s and only revived later in the twentieth century with the advent of work by figures like Gordon Allport (cf. Beit-Hallahmi 1974). However, this view depends on a narrow definition of psychology of religion as work done by psychologists using traditional (usually quantitative) psychological methodologies. If one adopts a broader definition of the field, which would include activity by psychoanalysts operating in Europe (e.g., Freud, Jung) and theologians writing in response (e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr), one could write a history of the field that shows considerable vitality at a time when it was supposed to be moribund.

Signification: the development of meaning

Any written history involves more than bringing forth a set of events for our consideration; it also aims to attach significance or meaning to these events. Thus, a historian must have an idea about where meaning is potentially located and be able to propose a possible meaning for the things that have been chosen for remembrance. Historiographers typically discuss three issues in relation to this problem, and positions taken on these issues have resulted in some typical kinds of signification in psychology of religion historical accounts.

Issue 1—the location of meaning Historiographers talk about two possible locations of meaning. In *internalist* accounts, meaning is found within the material being remembered, without reference to any kind of external forces or factors. So for instance, a history of scholarship in abnormal psychology might be written which simply looks at changes in ideas, beliefs, and methods over time. In *externalist* views, the search for meaning must be extended to include the surrounding context. Implicit in this position is the belief that outside forces affect the process of science and, potentially, the process of writing history. In this view, history is not seen as a mere recitation of facts but as "something that was open to alternative explanations, and those explanations were closely connected with current agendas" (Danziger in Brock 2006). In this view, a history of abnormal psychology must include things like the development of Western medicine, the pharmacological industry, and the professionalization of helping (e.g., Cushman 1995).

Particularly since the development of the *Annales school* of historiography in the early twentieth century (e.g., Bloch 1953; Febvre 1925, 1929; Braudel 1980; cf. Foucault 1988), historical accounts in general have become more externalist and sensitive to contextual factors (Iggers 2005; e.g., Golinski 2005). Histories of science, such as the famous work of Thomas Kuhn (1996), reflect the application of the externalist model to the understanding of scientific thought and progress.

Traditionally, histories of psychology have followed the positivist dominance in the discipline and tended to be more internalist and objectivist in nature. Much scholarship in the history of science has also followed this model (Coleman et al. 1993; e.g., Sarton 1952). This approach has probably also influenced histories of psychology written outside the Western cultural setting, as Western modernist ideas were imported into these other cultures through the positivistic naturalism assumed by Western psychology (Takasuna 2007a; Staeuble 2004; Nelson and Slife 2011; cf. Watson 1960). However, recent work has been more sensitive to the external context of psychological historiography and has moved toward a more international focus (e.g., Danziger 1990; Brozek 1990, 1999; Hoskovec 2004a,b; Littman 1991; Pickren and Rutherford 2010; cf. Lovett 2006). General histories of psychology in China have followed a similar course, with early work in a more internalist and positivist model influenced by the translation of Western works (e.g., Boring 1950; Gao 1984; on Boring see Kelly 1981; Hilgard et al. 1991), and recent accounts reflecting a more postmodern view that recognizes the socially constructed aspects of history and science (Ye 2008).

Issue 2—the role of the historian Another issue related to location is, to what extent is the meaning developed in a history something that is independent of the historian? Some historians hold an *objectivist* view that the meaning of events is to be found within the events and their temporal or causal sequence, and the historian plays onxly the role of an impartial observer who produces a "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986). In philosophy of science, this is sometimes referred to as realism, although it might more accurately be called *naive realism* (cf. Carrier 2000). Many Western histories in the psychology of religion seem to assume this view without reflection. Opposed to this is the *subjectivist* view that meaning is made entirely within the mind of the historian. This is a picture of the historical process as involving radical constructionism (cf. Gergen 1999). Postmodern historiography follows this approach and focuses on the role of the historian's presuppositions and motives in the creation of historical works (e.g., Jenkins 2003). This is a position that is very influential in contemporary historical work.

A moderate position attempts to bridge these extremes and argue that meaning is found both in events and the mind of the interpreter. This is a kind of *critical realist* stance found in some hermeneutic philosophies and approaches to science (e.g., Barbour 1997, pp. 117, 332; Davies 1996; Polkinghorne 1999, p. 17; Ricoeur 1981). Some revisionist historians of psychology (e.g., Danziger in Brock 2006) have tried to apply this critical realist position in their work, as have more recent historical treatments within the psychology of religion.

Issue 3—the point of view Another issue is the point of view from which one wishes to tell a history. The *presentist* point of view attempts to construct a history looking at the past from the perspective of the present. The meaning and validity of previous work is evaluated according to the standards and agenda of present investigators and historians. Often the past is assumed to be inferior to the present, reflecting a "Whiggish" view of progress (Stocking 1965; Seidman 1983; Butterfield 1965). A *historicist* point of view tries to tell the story of past work from the perspective of the original author and the past period within which the work was done (cf. Brock 2006). It wishes to evaluate past work on its own terms.

Contemporary history of science tends to emphasize a historicist view, but this may limit the relevance of the historical material to current concerns and applications (cf. Dehue 1998; Vande Kemp 2002). Most historical accounts in the psychology of religion (e.g., Paloutzian and Park 2005; Park and Paloutzian 2005) are presentist in their point of view.

In histories of the psychology of religion, several kinds of meanings have been proposed by scholars. A common approach has been to make sense out of events by providing explanations for them (e.g., Emmons and Paloutzian 2003). Another meaning that histories of psychology (including psychology of religion) often develop through their narrative is the idea that psychology of religion is a valuable enterprise. This can be done in a number of ways.

In a positive approach, work in the psychology of religion is viewed as offering great accomplishments, knowledge, or practical benefits, either in the past or at some unspecified time in the future; such histories may also discuss steps that need to be taken to realize these benefits (e.g., Chen et al. 2006). In a negative approach, the psychology of religion is contrasted with other ways of studying religion or religious and spiritual issues, and these alternate modes of inquiry are pictured as being of less value or even harmful (e.g., Leuba 1912, 1925).

The types of meanings found in psychology of religion histories are partly a product of important assumptions made by these historians, a topic which I now examine briefly.

Practical and theoretical assumptions

While the general process of history making involves processes like remembering, forgetting, and meaning-making, the construction of a specific history is dependent upon a variety of assumptions or presuppositions that the writer brings to his or her work (cf. Blackman 1994). Probably the most important assumption standing behind the work of the historian is their view of history. Writers in the history of the psychology of religion typically make important assumptions about the nature of history but seldom articulate their views and may in fact be unaware of their own beliefs, simply assuming a position that is commonly held by their contemporaries. Accordingly, it may be helpful to examine some common views of history and indicate how these assumptions have important effects on the historical narrative that is produced.

Views of history and their implications

There are many possible views of history and the historical process that might be taken by a writer. Three possibilities are of particular importance in the psychology of religion:

> We might see history as *progress*, a movement from a past that left much to be desired, through a present where many good things are happening, and on to a utopian future. Scientific narratives beginning in the early modern period were often of this type (e.g., Bacon 1989), as was the vision of history articulated in the twentieth century logical positivism that is very influential in psychology (cf. Nelson and Slife 2011).
>
> History might instead be seen as a kind of *tragedy*, a story where tragic flaws concealed beneath the surface make progress impossible and the current state of affairs very problematic. This is sometimes referred to as a *critical view of history*. Postmodern historical narratives (e.g., Foucault 1988) fit in this category.
>
> The sweep of history might also be viewed as a kind of complex *narrative*, with many threads and voices woven together in ways that are separate but interdependent. Less skeptical Continental views of history and narrative (e.g., Ricoeur 1965, 1984–1988) have this kind of a non-reductionist model in mind, and some historiographers (e.g., White 1987, 2010; cf. Jabri 2006) now encourage this way of conceptualizing and doing history.

These different conceptions of history on the part of the writer can have profound implications in a number of areas, including:

their purpose for writing a historical work
their view of the nature of time
their attitude toward the nature of change

The interaction of views in these three areas forms a typology that is summarized in Table 1. This provides a good starting place for understanding some of the histories that are found in the psychology of religion literature.

Purpose Histories—particularly those of the psychology of religion—are *rhetorical* documents; that is, they are produced by an author who has certain motives with respect to their audience, typically a wish to persuade the reader to view history in a particular way and to act in accordance with that view (Burke 1969; cf. Ash 1993). There are a number of things relevant to the formation of these motives, including the nature of the current scene or situation (e.g., the audience) and the individual choices of the historian who produces the rhetorical act.

Time Histories are narratives of events that take place in time and may have specific temporal relationships with each other that are significant. In Western thought, the dominant model has been a *linear view* that sees time as an arrow moving from the past to the future, with the past operating as the sole determinant of the present (eliminating teleological explanations of history; see Slife 1993). Other societies may have different views of time; for instance, many traditional Asian cultures (including that of China) tend to have a *cyclical view* of time, where events repeat themselves in regular patterns.

View of change Typically, histories are written about situations in which there is significant change in the past or present, or change that is anticipated in the future. This change may be thought of in a couple of ways. *Continuous views of change* tend to emphasize the importance—and perhaps inevitability—of steady forward progress. There may be stops and starts, but generally there is continuity in the process. Darwin's original view of evolutionary progress assumed this view. *Discontinuous views of change* see movement

Table 1 Implications of theoretical models of history

	History as Progress	History as Tragedy	History as Narrative
Purpose	Continue the present trajectory	Fundamentally change the present trajectory	Appreciate multiple trajectories
View of Time	Linear	Circular	Multidirectional
View of Change	Emphasizes continuity	Emphasizes discontinuity	Encompasses continuity and discontinuity
Advantages	Highly motivating	More realistic; helpful in seeing fundamental problems in current practices	Encompasses complexity, so avoids excessive simplicity and reductionism
Disadvantages	Often simplistic and unrealistic, has trouble seeing critical problems in current practices	Can be too simplistic and reductionistic	Encompasses complexity, so can produce models that are too complex and fragmented

taking place in stops and starts, with short intervals of massive, rapid change alternating with times of relative stability and slow change. The Kuhnian model of scientific revolution is an example of this latter view.

The identity of a field can be greatly affected by the view of history taken by its historians. For instance, a progress history assumes that the past has little to offer and therefore investigators should spend little time studying it. Other views of history are open to the possibility that traditional ways of thinking in the discipline and culture contain rich resources that should not be abandoned. The former approach has been more typical of Western psychology, while dialogical and Chinese approaches to the subject are generally more interested in what the past has to offer our modern society and so are more engaged in studying it.

Views of history found in psychology of religion writings

Progress, tragedy, and narrative views of history have all appeared in histories about the psychology of religion. Here we review each of these briefly, along with the effects of the view on the historical narrative.

History as progress This is perhaps the received or standard vision of history in the psychology of religion. For instance, in a recent historical survey, Paloutzian and Park describe older work in the field as involving only a few researchers operating in isolation, but the last 25 years of research as a period where the "initial strands grow into a field amazingly vast, with high-level research that uses myriad sophisticated methods and data-analytic techniques" that is headed for an "expansive future" (Paloutzian and Park 2005, p. 4; Park and Paloutzian 2005, p. 550). The effects of this view of progress permeate many aspects of received narratives.

1. *Purpose*. Scholars like Paloutzian and Park who see history as continual progress toward a desirable future state or goal are not looking for changes in direction in the field; after all, the current direction and its eventual outcome are generally good. These types of historical narratives typically have as their purpose the adoption of the following by the audience:

   a generally negative view of the distant past
   a generally positive, optimistic view of the current situation
   an exciting, idealistic view of future prospects
   a commitment to actions that (1) leave behind elements of the past that may be limiting progress, and/or (2) strengthen movement in the current direction

A typical progress narrative says in summary, "Look at how great we are, because our work has gotten us beyond past ignorance and has the potential for future benefits. Let's make our current good work even better and we will realize vast advantages." The impact of such a view of ever-expanding progress is to valorize the profession and perhaps limit the amount of fundamental criticism that may be directed toward it.

2. *Time*. Progressive views of history tend to have a linear view of time, with time moving from some past state to a future one that is different (and better) than the past. Thus, while the present and future may be dependent on the past, history is about the creation of novelty. Past wisdom or ways of doing things are outmoded and inherently inferior to what is new. This is clearly reflected in the Paloutzian and Park narrative.

3. *Change*. A view of history that is progressive and operating with a linear conception of time contains elements of both continuity and change. Change is good, but our present state is determined by the past and so there is an element of continuity. This is particularly true in narratives produced by historians with more positivistic-deterministic views, a typical situation within the field of psychology.

Leaving aside the question of whether or not a view of history as progress can be justified empirically or metaphysically, we can see some practical advantages and disadvantages to such an approach. The advantage is that these narratives promote optimism and motivate researchers to continue what they are doing and to do it better. The disadvantage is that such a view of history is incomplete; it neglects the negative side of progress (good things are left behind with change) and lacks the ability to make any fundamental critiques of current practices, since any such critique would severely challenge the overall thesis of progress.

History as tragedy Critical histories of the psychology of religion began to appear in the latter part of the twentieth century. Critical histories have focused on the neglect of psychology of religion (and religion in general) within the larger discipline of psychology (e.g., Page 1951; cf. Gorsuch 1988), the negative effects of problematic philosophies of science in the field such as positivism (Nelson 2006), or antitheistic bias (Slife and Reber 2009). For instance, Slife and Nelson edited a 2006 issue of the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* that contained a number of critical-historical works. In that issue, Nelson (2006) argued that the positivist heritage in the psychology of religion was preventing the field from claiming a number of opportunities for progress. This tragic-flaw view of history has implications that are in many ways the opposite of the progress model.

1. *Purpose*. Since from the tragic perspective the historian sees problems with the current status and direction of the field, the purpose of a tragic history is generally to help the reader see the perceived problems and take steps to change the situation for the better. Since the tragic account sees the flaws as due to some fundamental characteristics of the current way of doing things, proposed solutions will involve major changes in our understanding and practices.
2. *Time*. Tragic histories often have a circular view of time, where events are locked into a pattern of repetition. In the critical view, this pattern of repetition leads to negative effects and can only be broken by a fundamental change. Repetition rather than forward progress is the normal state of affairs.
3. *Change*. Because the tragic flow is seen to be deeply woven into the current way of doing things, a fundamental shift is needed to produce real, sustained change. Thus, tragedy models tend to see change as involving discontinuity rather than continuous progress. The critical histories of Slife and Nelson, for instance, have argued that the field needs to abandon its positivistic philosophy of science and embrace a hermeneutic basis for inquiry, a step that would involve a substantial shift in outlook and practices (Nelson and Slife 2011).

There are certainly advantages and disadvantages to the tragic or critical history. Critical histories fulfill a valuable role, showing us problems with our current approach such as cultural blindness. They move away from reductionism and simple attempts to "valorize the profession," upsetting any complacent consensus among scholars. They provide a more realistic vision of the world. However, this approach may challenge the moral certainties of the scientific community. Thus, critical histories are often not welcomed (Grunwald 1984;

Danziger 1984, 1994; Brock 2006). The disadvantage of the tragic view is its tendency toward simplicity, focusing on deficiencies and the problems that lead to them while leaving out many positive aspects.

History as narrative Narrative histories emphasize the multivocality of a field and see disciplines like psychology as consisting of various theoretical approaches and areas of research (e.g., Capps et al. 1976). This approach has not been as popular as other approaches to history within the psychology of religion. However, there are some fine examples, such as David Wulff's introduction to the psychology of religion (1991, 1997; see also Nelson 2009). This view of history provides a flexible and somewhat unpredictable underpinning for historical works.

1. *Purpose*. In keeping with the flexibility of narrative presentation, the purpose of narrative accounts is generally unconstrained. The author is not bound to advocating either for new or old ways of doing things. In fact, because a narrative approach can describe multiple threads of history, the author can feel free to provide a positive evaluation of both new and old ideas while criticizing others.
2. *Time*. Narrative accounts generally contain a multivocal view of time. Some threads of the account may use a linear view and describe a steady trend of either progress or decay; others may use circular views of time. Wulff, for instance, describes with equal skill the growth of some lines of research within psychology of religion (e.g., the neuroscience thread) and the decline of others (e.g., European phenomenology).
3. *Change*. Narrative history encompasses both change and continuity in an account. Narrative is a literary form that links events together, providing continuity by means of emplotment, constructing "meaningful totalities out of scattered events" (Ricoeur 1981, p. 278). A full narrative history can portray multiple narrative threads with varying degrees of interrelationships and discontinuity.

The advantages and disadvantages of narrative accounts revolve around issues of complexity. The greatest advantage of narrative is that it can make sense out of complex situations without sacrificing the richness of their diversity. Wulff's histories do this well. However, this richness is also a disadvantage. It is sometimes difficult to see common patterns or key weaknesses that may run across various research programs. In this situation, meaning has not been effectively communicated and thus the history fails at one of its primary tasks.

Summary Two general statements may be made about these different approaches. First, leaving aside judgments about ontological validity, each of these approaches can provide an appropriate foundation for history writing in the psychology of religion, depending on the particular situation and purposes of the writer. Second, some of these views of history offer more flexibility and power than others, with the progress view offering the least potential and narrative offering the most. We should keep these facts in mind as we move to consider practical applications of these historiographic concepts.

Practical implications: toward a historiography for a Chinese psychology of religion

A view of historiographic methods and assumptions helps us appreciate histories of psychology of religion, identify their presuppositions, and see how the assumptions of the historian serve to bias their narratives in certain ways. These issues relate to current tasks in

a Chinese psychology of religion in a number of ways. We consider five topics: identity, the role of the historian, ideas, memory, and views of history.

Identity: isolation vs. community

As we have seen, historical narratives are a key means of forming identity (cf. Ricoeur 1992). So, as the Chinese psychology of religion develops, it is critical that it be able to tell its own story. Thus, *histories of psychology of religion in China should be just that—a Chinese history told from a Chinese perspective*. This matches the tendency within more recent literature to develop culturally and nationally or regionally particular histories of psychology or psychology of religion (e.g., Cimino and Dazzi 2003; Belzen 2005). The values and theoretical ideas underlying the historiography of a Chinese psychology of religion will probably be different in some ways from Western models (cf. Takasuna 2007b). The culturally sensitive nature of psychological knowledge (Ho et al. 2001) suggests that a Chinese psychology of religion will have some unique content that should be reflected in its history.

However, at the same time, Chinese historians of religion must resist the tendency toward isolation. Like every other nation, China is part of a global intellectual community. The temptation toward isolation should be resisted, and a history should attempt to capture the interaction between Chinese and Western modes of psychology that has certainly been important in its development and current work (cf. Turtle 1989).

Role of the historian

Historians are scholars, and so one of the imperatives of historical work is that the writer should strive to maintain high standards of scholarship. In particular, *historians must understand the importance of historiographic principles and assumptions, make deliberate and informed choices about their approach, and clearly communicate to the reader the theoretical assumptions they have adopted in their work*. This helps the historian approach the topic in an appropriate manner and also helps the reader understand and evaluate the history produced by the writer. This has seldom been done in Western narratives of history in the psychology of religion, a mistake that Chinese scholars have an opportunity to avoid.

Ideas: new vs. old

A Chinese history of the psychology of religion has the potential to offer a tremendous gift to the field. Such a history can operate out of a significantly different worldview and set of values, helping us to look at history in a new way. Chinese scholars may easily see the assumptions built into Western scholarship and be able to ask hard questions about their suitability. Thus, *historians of psychology of religion in China should seek out new conceptual resources for historiography, including both non-Western and Western sources*. Certainly the rich history of Chinese intellectual thought also contains many resources that could be used to construct a historiography for the field. Some relatively neglected Western resources may also be helpful. For instance, the thought of William James (e.g., 1897; 1996a, b, 2003) stakes out a middle ground between naive realism and radical constructionism, extremes that can hopefully be avoided in historical approaches to the psychology of religion (Viney 2001). However, some aspects of James' thought, such as his individualistic emphasis, may need some modification to fit the Chinese situation.

The issue of presentism vs. historicism raises a caution here as we attempt to mine the past for possible ideas. Attempting to understand ancient authors through a modern lens (presentism) distorts the original meaning of the authors and thus presents significant problems. On the other hand, while looking at authors on their own terms (historicism) provides a fairer view of their ideas, the historical situation of ancient periods is quite different than our own, and the issues that were important to these writers may no longer be relevant. This issue needs to be carefully considered as Chinese psychologists of religion try to evaluate ideas from their culture's rich intellectual heritage, such as concepts from Taoism and Buddhism.

Despite the need to find new historiographic approaches appropriate to the Chinese situation, *old resources also need to be used, because historiography for a Chinese psychology of religion will face many of the same challenges as histories in the West.* Authors will need to make decisions about what should be included and excluded, whether to look at their subject from the present or the past, what view of history to take, and many other issues that are inherent in the process of writing history. The lessons of Western historians can provide great assistance to Chinese scholars attempting to construct good histories.

Memory: forgetting and remembering

As we have seen, a key question facing the historian is, what should be remembered and what should be forgotten? Important considerations at work in China suggest two very different answers to this question.

First, *the situation of the psychology of religion in China contains a number of factors calling for limited and focused histories*. Contemporary Chinese society struggles with generational diversity (e.g., Zhe 2006), rapid change, and the multiple possibilities offered by Western modernism, postmodernism, and traditional Chinese culture. Good histories will try to understand psychology of religion issues within this context of possibility, change, and tension (e.g., Chang et al. 2005). Very likely this means the production of multiple research literatures, each with its own history. Governmental imperatives for certain kinds of work, e.g., exploring how religion may be a force for social harmony, will create additional pressure for limited focus.

Second, however, *histories of psychology of religion in China must avoid the tendency to focus only on limited aspects of research, as this will lead to a distorted view of the object of study.* One of the imperatives driving contemporary psychology of religion in China seems to be a belief that religion can be a force for social harmony within the culture. If we accept this as a goal, histories of psychology of religion will select material and tell a story showing how the field has helped us to understand and promote this function of religion. There is no doubt that this will provide a valuable service and will take a view of psychology of religion quite different than those often pursued in Western scholarship, which tends to emphasize the benefits or disadvantages of religion to the individual. However, this kind of approach potentially involves a selective forgetting of other aspects of religion, for instance how it can become embroiled in violence (e.g., Girard 1977, 1986, 1987) or how it can help the individual deal with challenges to their physical and mental health (e.g., Nelson 2009, pp. 311–390). In order to be fair to its object of study, a history of psychology of religion needs to take a broad view of the ways religion can be important and influential.

Views of history: progress, tragedy, narrative

The idea that different views of history may be appropriate in different situations seems appropriate for the Chinese situation. Progress histories may be helpful in developing

support for the discipline. Tragic narratives may help take a critical perspective toward Western ideas and influences, helping scholars to see what works in the Chinese context and what must be discarded or modified. Overall, however, *the narrative view of history seems the most attractive, as it can help capture the diversity that a Chinese psychology of religion must develop to deal with its rich and varied subject*.

Conclusion

The early twenty-first century is an exciting time for the psychology of religion. One of the most important contemporary developments is the internationalization of the field, so that voices from many cultural traditions can join those of the West. A strong knowledge of the theoretical issues involved in writing history can help scholars from all cultural backgrounds best appreciate their own work and the work of others. This will facilitate the kind of rich dialogue we need to understand each others' traditions and maximize progress in the psychology of religion.

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