Abstract

Previous studies on the Jesuits in the sixteenth century China always focused on their methods of propagating Christianity in China, as well as the cultural exchange during this process. Little attention was paid to the Jesuits' writings about China circulated in manuscripts and printed books during the second half of the sixteenth century. These writings had in fact exerted great influence on the European's views on China in the form of confirmatory evidence of the geographical location of China, and varied cultural dimensions which had previously been overlooked by them. This study was thus prompted by the need to establish an overview of the image of sixteenth century China as perceived by the Jesuits.

Of the numerous writings of the Jesuits, the Journals of Matteo Ricci was chosen for this study. Ricci's long stay of thirty years in China (1582-1610) had made him a China expert possessing vast and profound knowledge on Chinese classics and culture. Hence, the authenticity of his works is much pledged when compared with his forerunners, whose writings on China were, to a very large extent, based on hearsay. This research highlighted some of the important political and social entities mentioned in Ricci's journals, with the help of other historical documents, in order to present a clearer and comprehensible portrayal of the Jesuits' views on China as represented by Ricci. By examining the diverse information in the journals, this dissertation hopes to present a systematic analysis of Ricci's views that can be served as a check upon Chinese sources. This dissertation also provides an interesting insight into the social and political situations of Ming China in the eyes of the European Jesuits.