Abstract

Previous studies on Matteo Ricci have focused on his methods of preaching as well as the cultural exchange during his missionary activities in China; little attention was paid to the content of preaching. This thesis aims to reveal how Ricci’s understanding of the three Chinese major traditional religions -- Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism -- might have informed his missionary activities in China.

In Chapter 1, I will begin by examining the overall background of Ricci and introduce his two important works written in terms of their objectives, targeted audience, and contents. The two works are *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas* (利瑪竇中國傳教史) and *Tianzhu shi yi* (天主實義).

In Chapter 2, I will explain the missionary purpose of Ricci’s coming to China. He paid close attention to the characteristics of Chinese technology, language, geography, and culture, and based on his observations, Ricci formed his accommodative methods of preaching.

In Chapter 3, I will explain how the Jesuits’ opposition to religious reform influenced Ricci’s missionary activities in China, especially regarding his accommodation of Confucianism and his rejection of Buddhism. Ricci believe that “the light of reason” from heaven and its meaning of guidance could be heard by every human race, and he did not deny the possibility of salvation to the ancient Chinese that was given by God. In his process of searching for God in China, he accepted the concept of *Shangdi* (Lord on High) in the Chinese classics and claimed that “God and *Shangdi* are the same” because he believed that the attributes of *Shangdi* as described in the classics...
were equivalent to those of God. On the other hand, he rejected the concept of *taiji* (Great Ultimate), *kong* (emptiness), and *wu* (nonbeing), because he thought these concepts did not match the attributes of God.

In conclusion, I argue that Ricci’s missionary activities in China were a process of God-searching, which was based on his understanding of Chinese religions as well as his own beliefs in Christianity prevalent in Rome.