Abstract

Buddhism and Christianity are foreign religions that have attempted to plant their roots in China. Both, however, have obtained very different results. The former was well-received and incorporated into part of Chinese culture; the latter however is still regarded as a foreign religion in China today. The academic exercise traces the development of both Buddhism and Christianity in China and aims to investigate the different factors leading to the two very different outcomes.

Many studies have been made on the development of Buddhism or Christianity in China separately, but few have done any comparative study of the two religions in China. Hence, my primary aim of such a comparative study is to give the reader a more comprehensive explanation of the two different outcomes by comparing the development of these two religions in China.

Many have argued that Buddhism was well received by the Chinese because its doctrines are more akin to that of the Chinese and its ability to adapt to the Chinese culture. Christianity, on the other hand, has failed because its doctrines are totally incompatible with the Chinese culture. Many have hence put the blame on the inflexibility of Christianity. Are all these conclusions justifiable? My academic exercise seeks to answer some of these questions. In my discussion, I will look into the relationship of the two religions with the Chinese rulers and the common people, the political and social background at that time, the ways and techniques adapted by both the religions and the doctrinal differences of the two religions, exploring how all these factors have affected their development in China.

My study has led to the following observations:
• Although doctrinal difference could have been one of the factors leading to the two different results, it is however not the main factor. Other factors like social and political factors seem to be the more important ones;

• The development of Buddhism in China took almost a thousand years before it is totally incorporated into the Chinese culture. Christianity in China, on the other hand, has a shorter history. Hence it is too early to give any conclusion now. Given time, Christianity may still be accepted by the Chinese. The planting of one religion into a foreign soil takes time, as with the implementation of any cultural value from abroad.

• In any cultural exchange, the process has to take place naturally. Conflicts are inevitable but with time and efforts made, understandings can be reached. Different degrees of accommodation need to be made during the process.