Matteo Ricci's Policy of Accommodation

Lynx Yuan

The Jesuit missions to China during the 16th century were perhaps one of the most influential events in bridging China with the Western world during the early modern era. These missions allowed not only for cross cultural understanding, but also for the exchange of ideas and belief systems between two vastly differing peoples. Most notably, these interactions played a significant role in introducing Western science to China, as well as for laying a small foundation for Christianity to develop. However, this transmission of knowledge would not have been possible without the unique practices the Jesuits took to assimilate and adapt to Chinese culture, earning their trust and allowing for more effective exchange in ideas. In particular, it was Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci’s Policy of Accommodation that was instrumental in propagating European knowledge in China.

In my research, I sought to find out what philosophies Ricci espoused in order to convert the Chinese to Christianity, and I learned that he attempted this by convincing them of the theistic compatibilities between Confucianism and Christianity. However, in order to make his points, Ricci appropriated Chinese texts and made various far-fetched claims, ultimately failing to win over a satisfactory number of converts.