THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHINESE CLASSICAL THOUGHT IN MATTEO RICCI'S THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHINA

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ABSTRACT

THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHINESE CLASSICAL THOUGHT IN MATTEO RICCI'S THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHINA.

By

David C. Wu

This dissertation is concerned with the question of theological contextualization in sixteenth century China. It looks at a model of such an endeavor provided by a Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci. His employment of Chinese Classical thought in making Christianity more meaningful to the Chinese was a courageous and significant attempt that warrants attention and study.

This dissertation examines the work of Matteo Ricci in its context. The first section explicates the context of China, politically, culturally and philosophically during the late Ming period when the Jesuits arrived. The second section examines Ricci's most important Chinese writing the T'ien-chu shih-i (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), which offers his theological understanding and interpretation of some of the most basic theological concepts, such as God the Creator, immortality of the soul, spiritual beings and human nature.

This dissertation contends that Matteo Ricci, through his method of theological contextualization, established a pattern for Christian inculturation worthy of study by theologians today who are confronting a culturally pluralistic world. It argues further that the connection, albeit precarious, between Christianity and Chinese thought in general, and the identification of the Chinese Shangti and T'ien with the God of the Bible in particular, are major achievements for which Ricci deserves recognition. Because of this, Christianity was able to make a meaningful contact not only with educated Chinese but also to open the way for later acceptance of Christian faith by a wider segment of the Chinese population.

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