



Translation and Time: Exploring the Temporal Dimension of Cross-cultural Transfer

Presentation Details

Title of Paper:

“No Beginning, No End, and Is the Beginning and Root of Ten Thousand Things”:
The Jesuit Translation of Christian Temporal Concepts into Chinese

Abstract:

For Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), Chinese culture is endowed with admirable antiquity, yet however long the Chinese people’s concept of time might be, they merely focus on transient pleasure and the amassment of wealth and power within their own lives and seldom recognize an existence beyond this world and this life. This paper will discuss certain time-related passages in the Chinese works by key Jesuit figures such as Ricci, Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666) and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688). In his *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義 *Tiānzhǔ shíyì*), Ricci attempts to persuade his Chinese interlocutor that there exists a true Creator who has “no beginning, no end, and is the beginning and root of ten thousand things”. Inheriting Saint Augustine’s (354–430) view on the finite humanity and the eternal one Creator, Ricci re-interprets concepts such as ‘the after generations’ (後世 *hòushì*), ‘ten thousand years’ (萬祀 *wànsì*) and ‘the above past’ (上古 *shàngǔ*) through the Christian notions of the afterlife, heaven and hell, the imperishable soul, foreknowledge and the spiritual. Based on Ricci, Schall von Bell highlights constancy over the matter of the universe, while Verbiest reviews problems regarding the self through the trinity. My paper will show how Ricci and his Jesuit successors attempted to alter the Ming-Qing literati’s perception of time and transform the Ruist tradition in translating Christian thought into Chinese, which has influenced the approaches of later Christian missionaries in China.

Author's Biography:

Chen I-Hsin is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Translation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, sponsored by the Faculty of Arts and a grant from the Hong Kong Research Council for the project 'Conceptualizing China through Translation' (Project number 14603115). Her current research examines the translation and interpretation of *jiào* 教 (teaching) in relation to religion in English scholarship. Her article on Legge's interpretation of Chinese terms on high deities has been published in the journal *Translation Studies*. She received her Ph.D. in translation and intercultural studies at The University of Manchester, UK. Her doctoral thesis discussed religion, dialogism and intertextuality in James Legge's translation of the *Lúnyǔ* (*Confucian Analects*). Her research interests include translation studies, Chinese studies, philosophy and religious studies, and cross-cultural communication.