

Ruoyu Ji

Adviser: Lloyd Kramer

“Universalism Calling: French Distortion and Invention of the Image of China, From Jesuits to Enlightenment Philosophes Circa 1560-1800”



In my thesis, I re-examined the dichotomies of “Jesuits vs. Philosophes” and “Sinophiles vs. Sinophobes” by studying their writings and I argue in three chapters that the French writers who wrote about China in the early modern period, no matter if they were Jesuits or Enlightenment philosophes, or if they were praising or criticizing China, all fell into a recurring pattern: The conceptions of China in their writings were dynamically shaped by the universalistic beliefs they individually held and they all needed to process, to some extent, the image of China by distortion, invention, or selection, to match their original intellectual purpose in using China for a larger cultural purpose.