Abstract

In all essays about the history of Buddhism reception in Europe, the first transmission of informations about Buddhism is said to be at the beginning of the 19th century. No research mentions the Jesuits letters from Japan which had been the first source about Japanese Buddhism in Europe. I examined the letters that the jesuitic missionaries wrote about Japan between 1547 and 1552 and how detailed and useful these informations about Buddhism were. I also tried to find out how far these informations were spread in Europe in the second half of the 16th century. From 1549 to 1551 Francis Xavier travelled with some companions throughout Japan. During this period he and his companions wrote several letters to their brothers in India and Europe and described detailed and carefully all about the Japanese culture and religion they had seen and heard. They made some big mistakes in understanding the foreign religious instructions because these were totally different to the Christian ones. They failed by incorrect translations of Japanese words into Portuguese or Spanish terms. But nevertheless the Jesuits got a lot of informations about Buddhism. All these letters were sent to Europe and immediately copied by the Order of the Jesuits and printed and published to inform about the activities and the success of the Jesuit Order in Asia. The result of my research is that the Jesuits letters were an excellent source for the transfer of knowledge about Buddhism in Europe, qualitativly and quantitativly much more better than the medieval travel descriptions about Asia.