

In the Light and Shadow of the *Dao*— Two Figurists, Two Intellectual Webs

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Abstract

Seen through the lens of André Lefevere's concept of rewriting, a translation is not simply a static text, but a cultural and even a political act exercised by players at both the individual and institutional levels during the translation process. Jesuit missionary-translators in early Qing China especially encountered pressures, challenges and support from their patrons as factors of control in their translations. Joachim Bouvet and his two protégés, Joseph de Prémare and Jean François Foucquet, were the three representative Figurists of the time. The Figurists, a group of Jesuits who focused on the re-interpretation of Chinese classics, advocated the esoteric doctrines of the *Dao*. Despite both being called followers of Bouvet, Prémare and Foucquet diverged in their separate interpretations of the *Dao*. Their own preferences and propensities were part of the reason for this, though patronage also played a significant role, which reinforced and supported their personal interpretations of the *Dao*. This paper will examine two intellectual webs of relationships and auspices, those of Prémare and Foucquet. Examining their correspondences and manuscripts stored in the Vatican Library and the Archives Jesuites de Paris, I will outline the profiles of the two Figurists and identify the institutional or individual support each received. Furthermore, the intellectual webs of their patrons not only made an impact on how each man developed and circulated his knowledge of the Chinese classics, but also influenced how they interpreted the *Dao* and the *Daodejing*. Each of their trajectories in associating Christianity with the *Dao* also made a lasting impact on the next generation of Jesuits in China on their understanding of *Dao* and Daoism.

Keywords

Dao, Daodejing, patronage, figurists

1. Introduction

Seen through the lens of André Lefevere's concept of rewriting, a translation is not simply a static text, but a cultural and even a political act exercised by players at both the individual and institutional levels during the translation process. Patronage, he says, is "any power (person, institution) that can further or hinder the reading, writing and rewriting of literature" (Lefevere 1992, 15). As a factor of control, patronage works, for Lefevere, on three distinct levels: ideology, economics, and status. Jesuit missionary-translators in early Qing China especially encountered pressures, challenges and support from their patrons as factors of control in their translations. Joachim Bouvet and his two protégés, Joseph de Prémare and Jean François Foucquet, were the three representative Figurists of the time. The Figurists, a group of Jesuits who focused on the re-interpretation of Chinese classics, advocated the esoteric doctrines of the *Dao*. They followed Matteo Ricci's strategy of identifying *Tian* or *Di* in the Chinese classics as traces of the Christian God; they also advanced the idea of equating the *Dao* with *Deus*. Joachim Bouvet, Joseph de Prémare, and Jean François Foucquet, all leading Figurists, conducted intensive studies into the Confucian and early Daoist classics; the Figurism they embraced is concerned with the symbolic and allegoric anticipation of Christ's revelation.

Despite both being called followers of Bouvet, Prémare and Foucquet diverged in their separate interpretations of the *Dao*. Their own preferences and propensities were part of the reason for this, though patronage also played a significant role, which reinforced and supported their personal interpretations of the *Dao*. This paper will examine two intellectual webs of relationships and auspices, those of Prémare and Foucquet. Examining their correspondences and manuscripts stored in the Vatican Library and the Archives Jesuites de Paris, I will outline the profiles of the two Figurists and identify the institutional or individual support each received. Webs of supporters and opponents drove Prémare and Foucquet on their own individual path in Figurism. While Prémare was stationed and propagated Christianity in Jiangxi Province, he learned from the local literati, such as Liu Ning 劉凝, about the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters). While in Canton he also maintained contact with Étienne Fourmont. Foucquet, for his part, explicated the *Yijing* 易經 and *Daodejing* 道德經 and simultaneously withstood pressures from the domineering Kangxi Emperor in the

imperial court and from other missions in China. Furthermore, the intellectual webs of patrons not only made an impact on how each developed and circulated their knowledge of the Chinese classics, but also influenced how they interpreted the *Dao* and the *Daodejing*. Prémare focused on the association between the Holy Trinity and *Dao* while Foucquet especially selected certain chapters in the *Daodejing* for theological interpretation, as well as for Chinese chronology. Each of their trajectories in associating Christianity with the *Dao* also made a lasting impact on the next generation of Jesuits in China regarding their understanding of *Dao* and Daoism.

2. Background: The Figurists

In addition, [different *Yin* and *Yang* of] the six positions in the *Yi* may become a composition. In antiquity, our great master picked the tangible forms between Heaven and Earth, which could be as small as our bodies in modern times, and followed each disposition, to compare them with the words embedded with deep and mysterious symbols. [The symbols were] regarded as characters and compositions, which are hidden items that lead people to exhaust their principles. [The symbols] detect ancient relics and look for hidden [messages], which reach the ultimately spiritual and clear virtue of *Shangzhu* [上主, the Lord above] and probe into nature and imitates the delicacy of his virtue. The efforts stop at the ultimate goodness and then preserve the greatness of the permanent life after one's death. The classics, such as the *Shijing* and *Shujing*, together with the other ancient classics, whose *Dao* and studies are all based on the great *Yi*, their compositions, characters, and compounds contain hidden and mystic [messages]. They must have the same principles with the *Yi* and they are no different.

又云易六位而成章，蓋古之先師，取天地之間有形，係現代身命之小，隨各類之情，比擬蘊藏深奧印符之字，以為文為章，隱類率人窮理，探蹟索隱，鉤深致遠，通無窮上主至神至明之德，盡性效法其至德之精微，止于至善而保身後永命之大。詩書等經，並諸古典籍，其道其學，俱既本于大易，其章其文其字之隱藏深奧，與易亦必一揆而無不同。(Bouvet Borg. Cin. 317 No. 2, p. 2. Author's translation)

The Jesuit Figurists are called *suoyin pai jiaoshi* 索隱派教士 (missionaries who seek the obscure) in Chinese. The above passage, from the second page of the *Yiyao* 易鑰 (The *Yijing* as the Keys to Christianity), may explain their approach to proselytizing in China, that is, *suoyin* 索隱—

seeking the mystical and hidden messages of God embedded in the Chinese classics, especially the *Yijing*, which in their eyes was the origin and basis of all classics (Wei 2015, 183). This group of Jesuit Figurists viewed the *Yijing* as a prophetic book that contained Christian mysteries. Thus, they tried to link the *Yijing* with the *Prisca Theologia* (ancient theology).¹

Different from Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits of the Ming Dynasty, who focused on converting the Chinese literati, Bouvet instead targeted the Kangxi Emperor and Chinese literati of the imperial court. Bouvet's mission started with his legation to China. He was sent in 1685 as one of the six "Mathématiciens du Roi" (Royal Mathematicians) (Pouillon 2008, 144). Bouvet and Jean-François Gerbillon remained in the imperial court and were appointed teachers of the European sciences for the Kangxi Emperor. It was then that his close interaction with the Kangxi Emperor began. In 1693, Bouvet was sent back to Europe as legate of the emperor. He was also advised by the emperor to bring new Jesuits back to China. On the one hand, he found that the Vicar Apostolic of Fujian 福建代牧主教, Charles Maigrot MEP, was going to issue his Mandate dated 19 March 1693, valid for the whole of China, which prohibited Chinese Christians from using *Taiji* 太極 as a name for the Christian God and placed restrictions on Christians reading "superstitious" Chinese classics, including the *Yijing* (Standaert 2017, 165–166). This was the result of a long period of suspicion that the Catholic Church had held against the Jesuit Figurists' interpretation of the *Yijing* and its association with Christianity.

After his audience in Versailles in 1697 at the court of Louis XIV, who provided a considerable sum for the French mission in China, Bouvet returned to China in 1698 with several Jesuits, including Joseph de Prémare. Prémare was summoned to Peking in 1714, but he did not win favor from the Kangxi Emperor, which might have helped him adapt to the environment of the imperial court. He then returned in 1716 to Jiangxi, where he worked as a missionary until 1724, when he was banished to Canton by the Chinese government. While in exile, he composed the *Notitia Linguae Sinicae*, a treatise on the structure of the Chinese language, which formed the basis of academic sinology in Europe for more than a century (it was reprinted as late as 1893). It was because Étienne Fourmont kept Prémare's manuscripts without publishing them and even plagiarized part of them in his own work, the *Linguae Sinarum Mandarinicae Hieroglyphicae Grammatical Duplex, Latine et cum Characteribus Sinensium* (Lundbaek 1991, 25–104).

However, Étienne Fourmont's enthusiasm for Chinese language and grammar indeed encouraged Prémare to explicate his reinterpretation of the *Dao* 道, *Li* 理, and *Qi* 氣 and to have constant correspondence with Fourmont, in order to persuade him to disseminate the Figurists' ideas in France. Extant letters with Fourmont became solid proof of patronage as an influencing factor in Prémare's interpretation of the *Dao*. Individual support and the "false" patronage Prémare received will be further discussed in the next section.

Bouvet's other protégé, Jean François Foucquet, after his arrival in Amoy, worked as a missionary in Jiangxi, Nanchang, and Fuzhou. Foucquet belonged to the Figurist circle around Joachim Bouvet from the early period of his stay in China; they corresponded with other missionaries and literati in a small scientific-missionary private academy following the example of Chinese academies. In 1711, he was ordered to Peking to assist Bouvet in his research of the *Yijing*; he stayed till 1717.

But in Peking, Foucquet was ordered by his superiors to work on astronomy, distracting him from assisting Bouvet and his work on Figurism. Responding to interests and pressure from the Kangxi Emperor, Foucquet wrote several astronomical and mathematical treatises. The French superior in Peking, Pierre Vincent de Tartre (1669–1724), and a Jesuit visitor named Kilian Stumpf (1655–1720), thought that the research on the *Yijing* was a danger for the mission, because at that time the Chinese Rites Controversy was just becoming heated. The Figurists seemed dangerous to the Roman Catholic Church because of the former's interpretation of certain Chinese books, and Chinese history gave the impression that the Chinese had possessed the whole Christian revelation at some earlier time. Then Foucquet started to shift his focus to Daoism and its Christian interpretation rather than the *Yijing*. Relations between Foucquet and his brethren—not only the French Jesuits but also Jesuits from other countries, such as Portugal (Witek 1982, 158–186)—deteriorated due to his research on Figurism being banned. In the end he decided to return to Europe.

Thereafter, Foucquet and Prémare each received institutional and individual support, though also challenges resulting from demands from the Holy See complicated inconsistencies between the French mission and the national interests of France, and the factional conflicts among different orders and missions. Foucquet, remaining in the imperial court, received institutional support from the emperor and also experienced factional conflicts with his own brethren in the Roman

Catholic Church, while Prémare received more individual support and interaction from local scholars in the provinces of Jiangxi and Canton. Next, I will elaborate on the intellectual webs of patronage for Foucquet and Prémare and how the patronage influenced their trajectory of translations.

3. The Kangxi Emperor—A Domineering Patron

The Kangxi Emperor had always been a domineering ruler, even in his interactions with the Jesuits and Chinese literati, and this was especially so after the accusation made by Yang Guangxian 楊光先 (1597–1669) concerning Johann Adam Schall von Bell's (1591–1666) use of Western astronomy in the beginning of the Emperor's reign.² In the *Shengzu Ren Huangdi tingxun geyan* 聖祖仁皇帝庭訓格言 (Aphorisms from the Familiar Instructions of Shengzu, the Emperor Ren), he explains:

During my, the Sovereign's, childhood, the Chinese imperial astronomer did not get along with the Westerners [Jesuits] and they examined and verified [what they reported] with each other; [they fought several times] even until one side was sentenced to death. Yang Guangxian and Tang Ruowang [Johann Adam Schall von Bell] stood in front of nine ministers out of the Wu Gate and bet on measuring the shadow cast by the sun. However, none among the nine ministers knew the [calendrical] laws. I, the Sovereign, thought that if I myself do not understand [the calendrical laws], how could I make the right judgment? Therefore, I prodded myself to learn it.

朕幼時，欽天監漢官和西洋人不睦，相互參劾，幾至大辟。楊光先、湯若望於午門外九卿前，當面賭測日影，奈九卿中無一人知法者。朕思，己不知，焉能斷人之是非？因自憤而學焉。(Kangxi Emperor 2006, 69. Author's translation)

Therefore, the Kangxi Emperor was motivated to thoroughly understand the laws of mathematics and astronomy by his own power. His studious attention prodded these Jesuit Figurists to translate Western science, including astronomy, but also imposed great pressure on their intensive and extensive interpretation of the *Yijing*.

The Kangxi Emperor was still doubtful, from time to time, however, about their interpretation of the *Yijing*. Bouvet expressed difficulties he might have had about the re-interpretation and his hopes for the

Kangxi Emperor's guidance, but also for his patience. When the emperor repeatedly asked to see his writings, Bouvet felt he was not ready for the explication and explained that he needed extra time for research. The increasing pressure from the emperor was imposed both on Bouvet and Foucquet.

The following passage shows that Foucquet was assigned to work with Bouvet and demonstrates the emperor's full attention on tracking their research progress:

The imperial decree was issued, asking me, "My minister, Bai Jin [Bouvet], how is your progress?" Your minister kowtowed and replied with due respect, "The *Yigao* I prepared might be too rough and shallow, which might offend your reading.... I, your minister, have dedicated my limited understanding to the numbers of the *Yijing*. If I have some inspiration, I will list them all in the charts. If these are just my humble views, it might be too hard to believe. Foucquet may have views similar to mine, but his [directions] are, however, not the same as mine. The emperor's brilliant excellence was heavenly inspired, and you are the only one who possesses the authority to interpret authentic studies of the great *Yijing*. You also examined them [my views] in person. I feel humbled if I say I have obtained the tricks of the *Yi* numbers. If the emperor does not feel that my work is too rough and shallow, you may provide us with your guidance and instruction; you may also agree and offer us a grace period. Foucquet and I will work very hard and prepare thoroughly to present [our studies] for your honorable reading.

有旨問，臣白晉你的《易經》如何？臣叩首謹奏。臣先所備《易稿》粗疏淺陋，冒瀆皇上御覽，蒙聖心宏仁寬容，臣感激無極。臣固日久專于《易經》之數管見，若得其頭緒盡列之於數圖，若止臣一人愚見，如此未敢輕信。傅聖澤雖與臣所見同，然非我。皇上天縱聰明，唯一實握大易正學之權，親加考證，臣所得易數之頭緒不敢當，以為皇上若不棄鄙陋，教訓引導，寬假日期，則臣二人同專心預備，敬呈御覽。
(Bouvet Borg. Cin. 439 (a), 17. Author's translation)

The above message manifested the difference in interpretation between Bouvet and Foucquet. The Kangxi Emperor further ordered Bouvet to interpret the calendrical laws, a proposition which he was more enthusiastic about. The next passage further indicates why Foucquet started to change his focus to astronomical and calendrical studies rather than the *Yijing*:

I, your minister, Fu Shengze [Foucquet], am an obtuse scholar who does not understand the meaning of Chinese works. Thanks to our Emperor's great grace, [I] was ordered to compile and edit the origin of the calendrical laws.... I beg [your Majesty] that I may stay in the capital and hope to recover from illness. I may then extend my feeble efforts and finish the book of calendrical laws as soon as possible. I have just roughly finished the book named *Yueli* [The Movement of the Moon]. I will wait for your Majesty's return and submit it for your Majesty's reading. I beg for your Majesty's instruction. Your humble minister reports thus to your Majesty.

臣傅聖澤系愚儒，不通中國文義，蒙我皇上洪恩，命臣纂修曆法之根，……今求在京，望漸得愈，再盡微力，即速作曆法之書，可以速完。草成《月離》，候駕回京，恭呈御覽，再求皇上教導。謹此奏聞。
(Bouvet Borg. Cin. 439 (a), 13. Author's translation)

Receiving both support and demands from the Kangxi Emperor, Foucquet turned to his expertise, astronomical and calendrical studies, and linked his findings with the Bible stories.

His work, *Ju gujing zhuan kao tianxiang bu junqi* 據古經傳攷天象不均齊 (The Examination of the Irregularities in the Sky based on the Ancient Classics) (Foucquet Borg. Cin.317 (13), 1), was written based on catechism, the question-and-answer format popularly used in the proselytization of Christianity. In it, he investigated the ancestors of the Chinese people. First, he used his excellent astronomical knowledge to explain that the chaos and the irregularity in the universe and the five stars 五緯 (*Chenxing* 辰星, *Taibai* 太白, *Yinghuo* 熒惑, *Suixing* 歲星 and *Zhenxing* 鎮星) were actually the delicate arrangement of God (Foucquet Borg. Cin.317 (13), 1). The Manuscript call no. Borg. Cin. 380 was a replicate of the manuscript call no. Borg. Cin. 317 (13), but this one contains not only his work in Chinese, but also a Latin translation for European readers. The work in Chinese was intended to attract the attention of the Kangxi Emperor, due to his great interest in mathematics and astronomy. On the other hand, the Latin translation also aimed to persuade European readers, especially the Roman Catholic Church, that God had been shown to exist in the ancient Chinese classics. In addition, Foucquet also used his mastery of calendrical studies to explain his definitions of *Xian tian* 先天 (The Former Heaven) and *Hou tian* 後天 (The Latter Heaven) and to parallel the Chinese chronology with the timeline of the Bible. Foucquet tried to show the orderly balance and arrangement

of the universe based on the following passage from the *Shuo gua zhuan* 說卦傳 (Explanation of the Trigrams):

[The symbols of] heaven and earth received their determinate positions; [those for] mountains and collections of water interchanged their influences; [those for] thunder and wind excited each other the more; and [those for] water and fire did each other no harm. [Then] among these eight symbols there was a mutual communication. (Fouquet Borg. Cin. 317 (13), 4–5. James Legge’s translation from the *Yijing*)³

He further quoted from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Masters of Huainan) to show the irregularities existing in the Latter Heaven: “The pillars of *Tian* (Heaven) were toppled and the dimensions of *Di* (Earth) were ended.” Who caused this drastic change? he asked. To answer this question, he analyzed Yan Junping’s 嚴君平 commentaries on the *Daodejing* and reasoned that it was the fault of *Xianzu* 先祖 (the ancestor of human beings). Compare this to the Bible, where Adam was the one who committed sins and “offended against Heaven” 獲罪於天 (Fouquet Borg. Cin.317 (13), 16, 24). That was why there were irregularities in the universe—as a punishment from God. Fouquet quotes from the *Huainanzi* and *Chunqiu* 春秋 (the Spring and Autumn Annals) to indicate that such terms as *sheng* 聖 (saint), *shen* 神 (spirit), *hou* 后 (empress), *jun* 君 (lord) and *shi* 師 (master) are names referring to Jesus Christ, and in the end he quotes from Chapter 18 of the *Daodejing* to explain why the *Da sheng* 大聖 (the great sage) was born (Fouquet Borg. Cin. 317 (13), 25). As he puts it, the sage arose because there was no virtue between Heaven and Earth; the sage was born to save the whole of mankind. While he followed Bouvet by pursuing his interest in Figurism, Fouquet also used his astronomical and calendrical knowledge to take a different path in his interpretation of the *Daodejing*. His purpose, like the other missionaries, was to convert Chinese readers to the Christian faith. But that was not his sole purpose: he sought to persuade European readers that the *Dao* was *Deus*.

Later in his letter to Prémare, Fouquet also claimed that he had discovered that *Tian* 天 (Heaven), *Shangdi* 上帝 (The Lord above), *Taiji* 太極 (The Grand Ultimate), *Li* 理 (The Rational Principle) are actually the same concept, as indicated by the Kangxi Emperor in the emperor’s own works. With the emperor’s written works to support his points, Fouquet was now a trailblazer, taking a path different from the previous Jesuits. Previous Jesuits had identified *Tian* and *Di* with the Christian

God. Such an interpretation was considered by the other orders of the Roman Catholic Church as profane. Now, Foucquet regarded the *Yijing* and *Daodejing* as sacred books that contained the mysterious messages of God.

In manuscript No. Borg. Cin. 371, *Problèmes théologiques*, Foucquet elaborated for more than 330 pages on his interpretation of the *Dao* and how to equate the *Dao* with Deus. Through detailed analysis and annotations of the *Daodejing*, he singled out three terms as referring to God—*Shangdi*, *Tian* and *Dao* (Foucquet Borg. Cin. 371, 44). Among these three terms, Foucquet explained that the *Dao* is the most inclusive and that its interpretation may include both *Shangdi* and *Tian*. In addition, the term *Sheng ren* 聖人 (Saint) in Chapters 34, 47, 49, 58, 70 and 78 of the *Daodejing* was identified with the Holy Son of the Bible.

4. Support from the Chinese Literati and Scribes

In the imperial court, Foucquet faced the same pressure and support from the Kangxi Emperor as Bouvet; he also bore the brunt of the attacks from the other orders of Catholic missionaries. Some of the help with reading and transcribing manuscripts from Chinese literati and scribes was also transferred from Bouvet to Foucquet.

One of the examples of this was Wanyan Hesu 完顏和素 (1652–1718),⁴ a descendent of the Jurchen people. Hesu was a famous translator of the Manchu language during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, as well as the teacher of the Emperor's sons and the director-in-chief of the Wuying Dian Palace 武英殿總監造, the official publisher of the imperial court. People identified him as one of the Manchus who was well versed in both the Chinese and Manchu languages. In one of his memorials to the Kangxi Emperor, he also stated the importance of Foucquet:

The Westerners Bernard-Kilian Stumpf [紀理安, 1655–1720]⁵, Jean-François Foucquet [傅聖澤, 1665–1741], Franz Thilisch [楊秉義, 1670–1716] and Pierre Jartoux [杜德海, 1669–1720] completed the calculation and translation of the numerical tables, which were named *Shubiao wenda* [數表問答, The Questions and Answers for Numerical Tables]. [The title] was written on the front page and one copy has arrived. According to Kilian Stumpf, “We will make our best efforts in the calculation. After completing the translation, we are still not sure

about its accuracy. We will wait for the guidance and the instruction of Your Majesty to continue our calculation. After the whole translation is done, the total will be about six or seven volumes.”

西洋人吉利安(紀理安)，富生哲(傅聖澤)，楊秉義，杜德海將對數表翻譯後，起名數表問答，繕於前面，送來一本。據吉利安等曰：我等將此書盡力計算後，翻譯完竣，亦不知對錯。聖上指教奪定後，我等再陸續計算，翻譯具奏，大約能編六七本。(Hesu 1996, 878)

There were also “catechist” names in some of their manuscripts. These were the converted Chinese Catholics who helped write notes and commentaries in Chinese. In Chinese, they were called *xianggong* 相公. Some examples include Lozenro Zhu 朱老楞佐, who was in the position of Supervisor of the Five Offices in the Qing Astronomical Bureau (*qin tian jian wuguan jian hou* 欽天監五官監侯), and Lu Ruohan 陸若翰, who was a *juren* 舉人 (a successful candidate in the imperial provincial examination). Though their help with the transcription might not have influenced Foucquet’s interpretation of the *Dao*, these transcribed manuscripts helped preserve Foucquet’s extensive notes and were later carried back to Europe by Foucquet.

5. Liu Ning: The Influence of Language Ideology on Prémare

While Foucquet mainly focused on his interaction with the Kangxi Emperor and gaining support from the publisher in the imperial court, Prémare lived in local communities and focused his attention on learning Chinese languages and writing Chinese in the most popular literary form of the Ming and Qing dynasties, that of the vernacular novel. Prémare’s interest in the Chinese languages and folk religions explain his path of translation of the *Dao*. He also learned much about Chinese philology from his interactions with Liu Ning 劉凝.

Liu Ning was a scholar of Chinese philology and a Chinese Catholic living in the province of Jiangxi. He never served in the imperial court but was very active in his studies of Chinese philology and of God. His works include the *Liu shu kuai* 六書夬 (The Classifications of Six Methods), and *Shuo wen jie zi yun yuan* 說文解字韻原 (The Charm and the Origin of Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters). It is thought that Prémare met Liu Ning around 1702. Prémare himself was dedicated to studying Chinese languages and philology, and he commented several times about the influence he received from Liu Ning (Li 2014, 46).

Previous literature indicates that Prémare may have learned from Liu Ning. For example, Prémare mentioned Liu Ning by name several times in his Chinese works, such as the *Jingzhuan yi lun* 經傳議論 (Discussions on the Classics and Commentaries) and *Liu shu shi yi* 六書實義 (The True Meaning of Six Methods of Writing) (Li 2014, 46). In this paper, I will further show Liu Ning's influence on Prémare's interpretation of the *Dao*, focusing especially on the manuscripts called the *Taiji lue shuo* 太極略說 (A Rough Explanation of the Taiji), *Selecta quaedam vestigia praecipuorum christianae religionis dogmatum ex antiquis sinarum libris eruta* (Selected Vestiges of Certain Preeminent Christian Religious Dogmas Extracted from Ancient Books of the Chinese, Prémare No. Chinois 9248) and *Exposé du symbole* (The Report of Symbols, Prémare No. Brotier 120), major works by Prémare. Because the authors are mislabeled, these manuscripts have not been sufficiently investigated for the purpose of explaining the link between Liu Ning and Prémare.

In the *Taiji lue shuo* and *Selecta quaedam vestigia praecipuorum christianae religionis dogmatum ex antiquis sinarum libris eruta*, Liu Ning's principles of deciphering Chinese characters have been a recurring theme. Prémare elaborated on Liu Ning's theory of *yi* 一 (One), *er* 二 (Two) and *san* 三 (Three) and their indicating of the *Dao* of *Tian* 天, *Di* 地, and *Ren* 人, respectively. Liu said that these three words are employed under the principle of *zhishi* 指事 (indication), not *xiangxing* 象形 (pictograph) (Prémare Borg. Cin. 317. No. 5, 8).⁶

Liu Ning said: the Chinese characters 一 [one], 二 [two], and 三 [three] are based on the principle of indication. Two and three are not simply composed of piling separate 一 [one] all together. This is because 一 [one] works as *Dao*, and there is nothing it cannot penetrate. 二 [two] is actually 一 [one] and 三 [three] is actually 一 [one]. The *Dao* of *Tian* 天 [heaven], *Di* 地 [earth], and *Ren* 人 [mankind] is equal to 一 [one], though there are discrepancies between *Yin* and *Yang*, between the firm and the yielding, and between benevolence and righteousness. It is actually 一 [one]... That is the reason why Laozi did not say that 三 [three] gives birth to 四 [four] but said that 三 [three] gives birth to myriads of things [萬物]. This is because the visible is procreated by the invisible while the numbers originate from 三一 [three one]. 一三 [One three] are not numbers.

劉凝曰：一二三皆指事，非疊一而為二三，……蓋一之為道，無所不貫，二即一也，三即一也。……天地人之道，雖有陰陽剛柔仁義之異。其實一而已。……是以老子不曰三生四，而曰三生萬物，蓋言

形生於無形，數生於三一。一三非數也。(Prémare Borg. Cin. 317. No. 5)

Since Liu Ning was a Chinese Catholic, the belief in the Holy Trinity might have prodded him to integrate the principle of indication and the numbers 一三 (one three) and 三一 (three one). In this manuscript, Prémare indicated that he was firmly influenced by Liu Ning and believed in the *Taiji* 太極, which is the One encompassing Three and Three composed in One. With his strong interest and talent in Chinese characters and language, Prémare further employed another commentator's commentaries on the Three-One.

In *Exposé du symbole*, Manuscript No. Brotier 120 stored in Archives Jesuites de Paris, Prémare explained that he found the following passage in Chapter 14 of the *Daodejing*:

We look at it, and we do not see it, and we name it “the Equable.” We listen to it, and we do not hear it, and we name it “the Inaudible.” We try to grasp it, and do not get hold of it, and we name it “the Subtle.” With these three qualities, it cannot be made the subject of description; and hence we blend them together and obtain the One.

視之不見，名曰夷；聽之不聞，名曰希；搏之不得，名曰微。此三者不可致詰，故混而為一。

Prémare took advantage of the pronunciations of *Yi* 希, *Hi* 夷, and *Wei* 微 and identified them with Jehovah (Prémare Brotier 120, 134. Author's translation). Jehovah is a Latinization of the Hebrew יהוה one vocalization of the Tetragrammaton יהוה (YHWH), and the historical vocalization of the יהוה is most likely Yahweh 耶和華. The pronunciation of Yahweh was very similar to the pronunciation of *Yi*, *Hi*, and *Wei* from the *Daodejing*. Prémare then extrapolated that *Yi*, *Hi*, and *Wei* together were an alias of Yahweh. They refer to the same God, only by a different name.

In addition to transcribing from the *Daodejing*, Prémare assumed the role of commentator of Chinese classics and quoted from Li Rong's 李榮 commentaries on the *Daodejing* in this manuscript. Adopting Li Rong's interpretation of the *Daodejing* was a great leap forward in Jesuit theological interpretation, especially when we see how Prémare candidly explained the association in this manuscript and planned to show it to European readers. This was because Li Rong's interpretation was quite different from the previous Jesuits' accommodationist policy, which

mainly focused on Confucianism. Li Rong was a representative Daoist scholar of the Chongxuan school 重玄派 of religious Daoism in the Tang Dynasty, who emphasized the theory of Three One. By looking at Li Rong's interpretation of the *Dao*, we can see how Prémare believed his theory and related it to the Holy Trinity. The Chongxuan school of Daoism incorporated elements of Buddhism. Li Rong's own interpretation attached great importance to *Yi*, *Hi*, and *Wei*.

One is not One alone; it is One because of Three. Three is not Three alone; Three comes from One. From One to Three, so Three is One Three. From Three to One, so One is Three One. When One is Three One, One is not One anymore; when Three is One Three, Three is not Three any more. When Three is not Three, then there is no Three; when One is not One, then there is no One. When there are no One or Three, words may be forsaken. If one sticks to One or Three, [it] will topple this profound and coherent religion [Daoism].

一不自一，由三故一；三不自三，由一故三。由一故三，三是一三；由三故一，一是三一。一是三一，一不成一；三是一三，三不成三。三不成三則無三，一不成一則無一。無一無三，自棄忘言之理；執三執一，翻滯玄通之教也。(Li 1986, 29. Author's translation)⁷

What is One? What is Three? According to Li Rong's interpretation, the *Dao* is the essence of the universe; it is One. There are three features in the *Dao*, namely *Yi*, *Hi*, and *Wei*; so it is also Three. It is especially emphasized that the *Dao* cannot be called either One or Three. It is actually a combination of the essence, One, and the three features, Three. Therefore, the *Dao* should be called Three One or One Three, which means Three-in-One and One-included-in-Three.

This Daoist interpretation of *Yi*, *Hi*, and *Wei* not only fits with Bouvet's previous interpretation of the concept of Trinity, but also corresponds with Prémare's approach to transcription and translation. In their theory, *Yi*, *Hi*, and *Wei* were together referring to Yahweh and also the three features of the triune creator in the Christian tradition. Li Rong's interpretation in his own translation of the *Daodejing* also helped them to refute Ricci's explanation of the *Dao* and *Taiji*, which he considered only a kind of material rather than a spiritual representation of God (Ricci 1966, 21–23).⁸ Following Li Rong's commentary and opening a new dimension, Prémare was also an advocate of the *Dao*.

In addition, due to the long-term exchanges between Liu Ning and

Prémare, Prémare paid high respect to Liu Ning's scholarship in Chinese philology, especially his studies of the *Shuowen jiezi*:

I received several volumes of works written by Mr. Liu Erzhi [Liu Ning]; Mr. Liu may be called the master of philology in our dynasty. This is something the literati had not encountered since the Qin and Han dynasties. 又得南豐劉二至先生著述若干卷；夫劉子可謂我國朝字學之英，而發秦漢以來諸儒所未發者也。(Prémare No. Chinois 7164, 2. Author's translation)

Prémare was so influenced by Liu Ning that he further adopted the theories in the *Shuowen jiezi* to indicate the triune unity in the Chinese character *Dao* 道：

The character 道 *Tao* is composed, according to *Choué-ven* 說文, of 首 and 辵. This last letter means to do, to move, to advance 行也. Because the *Choué-ven* explaining the letter 延 says: 正行也, to walk or to act rightly: meaning that springs from the two parts of this letter. So how does 正 mean what is right, thus 辵 means to act, to walk? 首 *cheou*, which is the second part of your letter 道 *Tao*, is the same thing as head principle, source, and is written clearly 首. It consists of—which marks the triune unity, according to what has been said, and of 自 *isee*, which means from the beginning and by oneself. If we look for the true meaning of the letter 道, will it be 道 *Tao*, head and principle of any movement, or first motor, or in sharper terms will it be the Unity-trine, always acting from the beginning, that is to say from all eternity and by oneself? And what is this, I ask you, except God Himself? Hence, vulgarly means rule, law, wisdom, reason, truth, way, word, ideas, which, although they are suitable as well as possible for creatures, nevertheless designate properly and first of all God, who is the eternal law, the infinite wisdom, reason remaining by itself, the way, the truth, and life. Finally, 道 is the doctrine, the discourse, the word. (Prémare 1878, 122–123. Author's translation)⁹

Following his patron's ideology in Chinese language and philology, Prémare elaborated on his interpretation of the *Dao* and demonstrated it as a manifest symbol of triune unity. However, Liu Ning was not highly regarded in the Chinese literati circles. Therefore, Prémare needed to seek support from another possible patron, Étienne Fourmont, for the publication of his works in Europe.

6. Fourmont—The Intended Readership’s Ideology

In 1724, the Yongzheng Emperor banned Catholicism and ordered all Christians to renounce their faith. The Yongzheng Emperor issued an imperial decree that all missionaries, excluding those who were contributing to scientific exchanges in Peking, should be expelled to Macau. The missionaries remaining in the imperial court, such as Bouvet, Dominique Parrenin, Jean-Baptiste Régis, and Joseph-Francois-Marie-Anne de Moyriac de Mailla, tried to persuade the Emperor that the missionaries could be confined to Canton, where it would be easy to maintain connections with Europe and the Roman Catholic Church. Prémare went into exile in Canton, where he began correspondence with Étienne Fourmont. These unpublished letters to Fourmont not only showed his scrupulousness in revealing his Figurist views, but also showed his enthusiasm for the Chinese language and characters. His letters aimed to circumvent the Roman Catholic Church’s suppression of the Figurists and persuade Fourmont to publish his works, by which he hoped to win the financial support of the French king. In one of the unpublished letters to Fourmont, *Unpublished letter from Fr. Prémare on the monotheism of the Chinese* (Lettre inédite du P. Prémare sur le monothéisme des Chinois), he stated as follows:

Some foreigners have claimed that, according to 朱熹 *Tchou-hi*, 上帝 *Chang-ti* is nothing but 太極 *Thaï-khi*, and that Thaï-khi is only one 理 *Li* imprisoned in the matter, a blind *Li*, without knowledge, without thought, without any power! And here is a Chinese doctor, a hundred times more skillful than they in these matters (without being wrong), which, in addition to *Li* and this *Khi*, that is to say against this *Thaï-khi* as they have imagined, proposes us an absolute true master 真宰 *Tchîn tsai*; a very intelligent being 至靈 *tchi ling*; an august Lord and supreme, 皇皇上帝 *hoâng hoâng Chàng-ti*; finally a majesty who has his eyes on us and who knows what we do, rewarding the virtue of all kinds of happiness, and punishing the crime of all kinds of evils. I have never seen any Chinese writer who dared to say the same of *Thaï-khi*. (Prémare *Lettre*, 20. Author’s translation)¹⁰

In their constant correspondences, Fourmont once sided with Prémare, stating:

Chinese history goes back beyond Noah’s Deluge, and does not consist of fables: consequently, the first humans it mentions are the Patriarchs

whom the Bible places before the deluge. This is stated on the one hand by the critics, and on the other hand by competent missionaries like Bouvet, Foucquet... (Fourmont *Réflexions* 1735, 396)

However, Fourmont never accepted Figurism and also failed to publish Prémare's works on the *Dao* and the Chinese language, including the *Notitia Linguae Sinicae*. Prémare's efforts to seek the patronage of Fourmont were futile and his manuscripts were buried in the Royal Library in France. They did not see the light of day until they were published almost one century later. However, two disciples of Fourmont, Michel Le Roux Deshauterayes and Joseph de Guignes, may have profited from these manuscripts, since Fourmont kept the whole Chinese-related collection of the Royal Library at his place and the two disciples had access to them (App 2010, 197–198). Prémare's influence on next-generation Sinologists like de Guignes and Antoine Gaubil will be further investigated in the next stage of research.

7. Conclusion

In the light and shadow of the *Dao*, Prémare's and Foucquet's separate journeys through Figurism were marked by vicissitudes. Foucquet received both support and pressure from the Kangxi emperor for his astronomical and calendrical studies. He further extended his interest to the new interpretation of the *Dao*, but he also encountered institutional counterattacks from various missions in China. With the help of Chinese scribes, he managed to bring his notes on the *Dao* and Chinese classics back to Europe. All the while, Prémare was engaged in proselytization in Jiangxi Province and later in Canton and Macau. Prémare was inspired by Liu Ning and became interested in the Three One theory, which provided a new facet of interpretation of the *Dao*. Having given a more comprehensive account of these Figurists' translation activities, we can see now how the support, opposition, pressure, and inspiration for their new interpretations of the *Dao* may have been strong incentives for their subsequent decisions. Such patronage cannot be ignored. This paper follows the traces left by patronage in these rarely-investigated manuscripts and thus links their support with the translations and activities of these two Figurists—Prémare and Foucquet. Thanks to the benefactors, Figurism in China was neither a temporary fad or a historical contingency. Their precious manuscripts on the *Dao* and the

Daodejing left a lasting legacy by impacting the European understanding of the *Dao*.

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Notes

- 1 Hermeticists believed in the *Prisca Theologia*, the doctrine that a single, true theology exists, that it exists in all religions, and even exists in pagan writings. The doctrine holds that God gave religious doctrines to humanity in antiquity, and that He embedded messages in symbols, images, and hieroglyphs used by the ancient Egyptians. To manifest the truth of the doctrine of *Prisca Theologia*, Christians appropriated the Hermetic teachings for their own interpretation. According to these Christian writers, Hermes Trismegistus was either a contemporary of Moses or the third in a line of men named Hermes—Enoch, Noah, and the Egyptian priest-king who is known to us as Hermes Trismegistus. The Hermetic tradition was popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not only because it satisfied the desire for information about ancient Egyptian mysticism, but also because it synchronized pagan thoughts with the stories and teachings of Christianity.
- 2 Yang Guangxian 楊光先 was a Chinese Muslim Confucian writer and astronomer who was the head of the Bureau of Astronomy 欽天監 from 1665 to 1669. He instigated the Calendar Case in the early years of the Kangxi reign 康熙曆獄. He reported that Schall was responsible for the death of Consort Donggo in 1660 due to his choosing an inauspicious day for the burial of her son in 1658. In 1665, Johann Adam Schall von Bell and seven of his Chinese assistants were sentenced to death. Johann Adam Schall von Bell died in 1666 and did not have the chance to see his ban lifted in 1671. Though Yang later became the head of the Bureau of Astronomy, he was removed from his post and replaced by Ferdinand Verbiest. The previous case was reinvestigated according to the imperial order of the Kangxi Emperor and the decision was reversed. Yang was sentenced to death and died the next year on his way home.

- 3 天地定位，山澤通氣，雷風相薄，水火不相射，八卦相錯。James Legge's translation.
- 4 Hesu's Manchu translation of *Xingshi yaoyan* 醒世要言 (The Gist to Awaken the World) was published in 1704. He was also the editor-in-chief of the Manchu translation of all the classics and of *Zi zhi tongjian gangmu* 資治通鑑綱目 (Essentials of the Mirror to Guide the Government), published in 1691. In addition, he edited the *Qing wenjian* 清文鑑 (Dictionary of the Manchu Language), which compiled entries of all the Manchu usages and their explanations in the Manchu language and was published in 1708.
- 5 In the manuscripts, the names of the Western missionaries were sometimes transcribed with different Chinese characters, though not with any consistency. For example, Bouvet's Chinese name was given as 白進 or 白晉, while Foucquet's Chinese name was transcribed as 富生哲 or 傅聖澤. In this case, Bernard-Kilian Stumpf was transcribed variously as 吉利安 or 紀理安.
- 6 Also in Prémare *Selecta quaedam vestigia proecipuorum christianae religionis dogmatum ex antiquis sinarum libris eruta*, 39–41.
- 7 See also Prémare 1878, 45.
- 8 This book was written in the format of a scholarly debate between a Chinese scholar and a Western scholar. Through their arguments and discussions about Western philosophy and the Chinese classics, written in the voice of a Western scholar, Matteo Ricci expressed that the principles of *Dao* are contrary to those of God and that he hated it as much as he wished he could vindicate it with reason.
- 9 The original in French is: “Le caractère 道 *Tao* est composé, selon le *Choué-ven*, de 首 et de 辵. Cette dernière lettre signifie faire, mouvoir, s'avancer 行也. Car le Choué-ven expliquant la lettre 延 dit: 正行也, marcher ou droitement agir : sens qui naît des deux parties de cette lettre. Donc comme 正 signifie ce qui est droit, ainsi 辵 signifie agir, marcher, 首 cheou qui est la seconde partie de ta lettre 道 *tao* est la même chose que tête principe, source, et s'écrit proprement 百. Il se compose de — qui marque l'unité trine, selon ce qui a été dit, et de 自 *tsee*, qui signifie dès le commencement et par soi. Si nous cherchons là le vrai sens de la lettre 道. Ce sera 道 *Tao*, tête et principe de tout mouvement, ou premier moteur, ou en termes plus nets ce sera l'Unité-trine, agissant toujours dès le commencement, c'est-à-dire de toute éternité et par soi-même ? Et qu'est-ce que cela, je vous le demande, sinon Dieu lui-même. De là 道 signifie vulgairement règle, loi, sagesse, raison, vérité, voie, parole, idées, qui,

quoiqu'elles conviennent tant bien que mal aux créatures, désignent cependant proprement et premièrement Dieu qui est la loi éternelle, la sagesse infinie, la raison subsistant par elle-même, la voie, la vérité et la vie. Enfin 道 est la doctrine, le discours, la parole.”

- 10 The original in French is: “Quelques étrangers ont prétendu que, selon *Tchou-hi*, 上帝 *Chang-ti* n'est autre chose que 太極 *Thai-khi*, et que *Thai-khi* n'est qu'un 理 *Li* emprisonné dans la matière, un *Li* aveugle, sans connaissance, sans pensée, sans aucun pouvoir! Et voici un docteur chinois, cent fois plus habile qu'eux dans ces matières (sans leur faire tort), qui, outre ce *Li* et ce *Khi*, c'est-à-dire contre ce *Thai-khi* tel qu'ils l'ont imaginé, nous propose un Maître véritable et absolu 真宰 *Tchîn tsai*; un être très-intelligent 至靈 *tchi ling*; un Seigneur auguste et suprême, 皇上帝 *hoâng hoâng Chàng-ti*; enfin une Majesté qui a les yeux attachés sur nous et qui sait ce que nous faisons, récompensant la vertu de toutes sortes de bonheurs, et punissant le crime de toutes sortes de maux. Je n'ai jamais vu aucun écrivain chinois qui ait osé en dire autant de *Thai-khi*.”

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