

Divine Language to Decipher God's Encoded Messages: Jesuit Figurists' Transformation of the *Yijing*'s Numbers

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For the proselytization of Christianity in Early Qing Dynasty, the Jesuit figurists located traces of God in Chinese classics and conducted the intra-lingual translation of the *Yijing* 易經 (the Book of Changes) to persuade the Kangxi Emperor and Chinese literati. They were emphatic about the use of figures and numbers in their theological interpretations. When they focused on the studies of the *Yijing* and its association with God's gospels and messages, the numbers in the *Yijing* became their divine language to decipher God's encoded messages, especially catering to the Emperor Kangxi's interests in mathematics.

Transformed by the figurists, the numbers in the *Yijing* were thus coated with a mysterious layer of galvanization of Christian stories. They not only followed their predecessor's, Athanasius Kircher, use of triangles, but also appropriated the knowledge of Western mathematics in their re-interpretation of the *Yijing*. Among more than four hundred pages of handwritten manuscripts about the *Yijing* in Chinese stored in the Vatican Library, half of them are about the charts and numbers the Jesuit figurists designed and used for the *Yijing*, including *Tian zun di bei tu* 天尊地卑圖 (Diagram of Heaven's Exaltedness and Earth's Lowliness). This paper explores these rarely investigated charts and numbers in these manuscripts and thus demonstrates how the Jesuit figurists divinized numbers in the *Yijing* and then managed to employ this divine language in their theological interpretation. The Kangxi Emperor also received their teaching of numbers, thus proposing the theory that Arithmetic originated from China.