

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

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Active in the early Qing China, Joachim Bouvet and his two protégés, Joseph de Prémare and Jean Francois Foucquet, were the three main representatives of Figurism. The three were also known for focusing on the re-interpretation of Chinese classics. However, while past Western scholarship dubbed them all “the Figurists,” this paper will examine the differences in the intellectual webs of relationships and auspices of Prémare and Foucquet. This paper will look into their correspondences and manuscripts stored in the British Library and the Vatican Library to distinguish the profiles of these two Figurists. Webs of supporters and opponents helped Prémare and Foucquet embark on different journeys in Figurism. While Prémare stationed himself in, and propagated Christianity from, the province of Jiangxi and learned from local literati, such as Liu Ning 劉凝 about the *Liu Shu* 六書 (*Six Principles for Writing*), Foucquet explicated the *Yijing* and *Dao De Jing* and bore pressure of submitting commentaries from the domineering Kangxi Emperor in the imperial court. Furthermore, the intellectual webs of patrons not only made an impact on how Prémare and Foucquet developed and circulated their knowledge of the Chinese classics but also influenced how they interpreted the *Dao* and the *Dao De Jing*. Prémare did research on Li Rong’s 李榮 commentary and focused on the association between the Holy Trinity and the *Dao*, while Foucquet chose certain chapters from the *Dao De Jing* for theological interpretation as well as for Chinese chronology. In addition to the production and the interpretation of Chinese knowledge, the intellectual web also helped each to preserve and circulate their manuscripts for publication. In the light and shadow of the *Dao*, Prémare and Foucquet’s Figurist journeys were marked by vicissitudes, but thanks to these benefactors, Figurism in China was not a temporary fad. Instead, their precious manuscripts on the *Dao* and the *Dao De Jing* left a lasting legacy and impacted the European understanding of the *Dao*.