

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