


Article

Sheng Ren in the Figurists' Reinterpretation of the *Yijing*

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Received: 13 July 2019; Accepted: 20 September 2019; Published: 26 September 2019



Abstract: Christian missions to China have sought to make their message more acceptable to their Chinese audience by expressing, in translations of Christian texts, Christian terms and concepts in language borrowed from China's indigenous Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist traditions. The Jesuits were especially renowned for their accommodation policy. Interestingly, when the Jesuit Figurists arrived in China in the early Qing dynasty, they conducted exhaustive studies on the Chinese classics, studies in which they identified *Tian* and *Di* of Chinese culture with God or Deus in Latin; their descriptions of Jesus and Adam were decorated with “chinoiserie” through their association with the *Yijing* and Chinese mystical legends. Each Figurist, in investigating Figurism and interpreting the *Yijing*, had his own identity, focus, and trajectory. The Figurist use of *sheng ren* was employed in this paper to distinguish each signature approach and how they explained the image of Jesus and prelapsarian Adam using the ethical emotions and virtues of a *sheng ren* 聖人 in their reinterpretation of the *Yijing* and the *Dao*. This also led to the European people aspiring for a more in-depth understanding and more discussion of the *Yijing* and the *Dao*.

Keywords: Jesuit Figurists; *Yijing*; *sheng ren*; sage; Christianity; Confucianism; *Dao*

1. Introduction

Christian missions to China have sought to make their message more acceptable to their Chinese audience by expressing, in translations of Christian texts, Christian terms and concepts in language borrowed from China's indigenous Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist traditions. The Jesuits were especially renowned for their accommodation policy. Interestingly, when the Jesuit Figurists arrived in China in the early Qing dynasty, they conducted exhaustive studies on the Chinese classics, studies in which they identified *Tian* and *Di* of Chinese culture with God or *Deus* in Latin; their descriptions of Jesus and Adam were decorated with “chinoiserie” through their association with the *Yijing* and Chinese mystical legends. The Figurists explained the image of Jesus and prelapsarian Adam using the ethical emotions and virtues of a *sheng ren* 聖人 in their reinterpretation of the *Yijing* and the *Dao*.

The image of the *sheng ren* 聖人 (sage) depicted in the *Yijing* is that of a sage with high virtues who embodies the ideals of a sage king from Chinese history. The *sheng ren* enjoys a supreme status due to his virtues and flawlessness, as described in Confucianism and Daoism; Joachim Bouvet (1656–1730) thus describes Jesus as a Confucian sage for the purpose of proselytization and Joseph Henri-Marie de Prémare (1666–1736) and Jean François Foucquet (1665–1741) also applied this term to their description of Jesus in their Chinese writings and in their dissemination of the *Dao* to Europe. While staying in the imperial court, Foucquet, under pressure from the Kangxi Emperor (1654–1722), employed his expertise of astronomical knowledge and deciphered the images of hexagrams in the *Yijing*, using them to draw parallels between the fall of Adam and the hexagram *Yi* 頤 (Corners of the Mouth/Nourishment) and redefined Jesus as a *sheng ren*.

On the other hand, Prémare, after being deemed unfit for the imperial court, lived in the coastal areas of China. As one of the most knowledgeable missionaries who had a great command of both

Classical and vernacular Chinese, he analyzed the compositions of Chinese characters; it was he who used the two hexagrams *Tai* 泰 (Peace) and *Pi* 否 (Stalemate) to indicate the image of the *sheng ren*.

In this paper, the concept of *sheng ren* are explored through the Chinese, Latin and French manuscripts of those Figurists; a close comparison and examination of their Chinese writings and manuscripts in European languages is made to identify the similarities and differences in their approaches in identifying Jesus and Adam as a type of Jesus,¹ with *sheng ren*. In these rarely examined Chinese, Latin, and French manuscripts, Jesus, as a *sheng ren*, has plural and dialogic identities, which not only mitigated the differences between Christianity and the *Yijing* and reflected a new facet of the *sheng ren* to Chinese readers but also helped communicate the *Dao* to Europe.

2. Saint or Sage?

A saint is a person who is recognized as having an exceptional degree of holiness or likeness or closeness to God. However, the use of the term “saint” depends on the context and denomination. In the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Oriental Orthodox, and Lutheran doctrines, all the faithful deceased in Heaven are considered saints, but some are considered worthy of greater honor or emulation (Woodward 1996, p. 16). According to Lawrence Cunningham, there are four general categories of saints: (1) godly people, (2) the blessed ones who are in heaven, (3) the persons publicly recognized for their holiness by the process of canonization in the Catholic Church, and (4) the justified, as that distinction is understood in the scriptures of the New Testament (Cunningham 1980, p. 62). When Christianity was brought by the first batch of Jesuit missionaries and they found they needed to translate the word “saint” into Chinese, the holiness of a saint was transferred and carried into the Chinese term they chose for translation, *sheng ren* 聖人 (literal translation: the holy man; semantic translation: the sage). In Latin, *sanctus* was usually used to refer to a saint or a holy man; in Chinese, it was translated into *sheng ren* 聖人 in the first Catholic catechism in Chinese, *Tianzhu Shengjiao Shilu* 天主聖教實錄² (The True Records of the Lord of Heaven), which was written in Latin by Michael Ruggieri and translated into Chinese by Matteo Ricci and published in 1630. In that text, for example, when paradise was discussed in the format of catechism, “as the merits and virtues of a *holy man* are discussed, (the holy man) could immediately ascend to heaven after death.” In Chinese, it was written as “夫論聖人功德，死後即可升天” (Ruggieri 1584, p. 29). Another figure from the Bible, Moses (每瑟), was also referred to as a *sheng ren* in the *Tianzhu Shengjiao Shilu* (ibid., p. 32). Jesus, however, was still described as a godly figure, separate from the saints of Christianity. In this catechism, when there is a question about what the believers should believe in, the answer from a Western scholar concluded that the believers should believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (ibid., p. 35)³ and explained that after the crucifixion, Jesus went to limbo and saved the spirits of the condemned and the saints. In this Chinese work, *sheng ren* was mentioned more than 100 times, mostly as a descriptor of saints or men of virtue.

However, when it came to the early Qing dynasty, this group of Jesuit Figurists, Joachim Bouvet, Joseph Henri-Marie de Prémare, and Jean François Foucquet, took a bold step by describing Jesus as a *sheng ren* in their reinterpretations of the *Yijing*. The Figurists were first led by their most representative forerunner, Joachim Bouvet. Bouvet had been sent by one of the first French Jesuit missions sponsored by the French King Louis XIV to China in 1687. Possessing expertise in mathematics and astronomy, Bouvet also carried on the hermetic tradition and a passion for hieroglyph characters from Athanasius Kircher. Bouvet was devoted to deciphering Chinese characters and finding esoteric messages in one of the ancient Chinese classics, the *Yijing* 易經 (the Book of Changes). Just as Kircher had seen

¹ Types are prophetic in nature. They always point forward to messianic times. Events, persons, or statements in the Old Testament are seen as types pre-figuring events or aspects of Christ or his revelation described in the New Testament. In Romans 5:14, the apostle refers to Adam as a type of Jesus Christ.

² Ruggieri, Michael. S.J. 1584. *Tianzhu Shengjiao Shilu* 天主聖教實錄 (The True Records of the Lord of Heaven). Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 324. No. 1.

³ In Chinese, it is 當信耶穌身死，魂進於古聖寄所，名曰令薄。救出人類原祖亞當，及往古諸聖人之靈魂，引而升之於天堂受福。耶穌至於死後之第三日，以魂湊合其身，而復活於世。

the hieroglyphs as containing secret, divine significance, Bouvet saw the diagrams of the *Yijing* as containing the keys to reducing all phenomena of the world into quantitative elements of number, weight, and measure (Mungello 1985, p. 31). In addition to the exhaustive studies of Chinese classics, Bouvet's main focus lay in the *Yijing*, which contained, in his eyes, the most mystic of figures and elements embedded in text by God. As a Figurist, Bouvet endeavored to prove that the mystic figures, numbers and elements in the *Yijing* were from the same God or the representations of the same God in Christianity. In his Chinese manuscripts, he was also preoccupied with paralleling the timeline of the Bible with the one beginning with the Chinese ancient legends. He also saw more symbols and mystic creatures in the Chinese classics as types of Jesus or used to describe the birth of Jesus.

It may sound far-fetched to the modern readers, but this group of Jesuit Figurists truly believed in what they expounded. During his early stay in China, Bouvet first witnessed the prevailing influence of the *Yijing* on the literati and even the royal class, such as the crown prince (Collani 1985, p. 29). He realized that, rather than building rapport with the Chinese literati, persuading the Kangxi Emperor by the associations between the Bible and the *Yijing* may have been the ticket to Christianize the emperor and, from there, the whole Chinese empire. The *Yijing* was the primary medium bridging the gap between Christianity and Chinese culture.

Bouvet's two protégés, Joseph Henri-Marie de Prémare, and Jean François Foucquet, espoused Bouvet's ideas while also diverging onto different paths, and each had a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and history. 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. Prémare was one of those new Jesuits. He was summoned to Peking in 1714 but he did not win favor from the Kangxi Emperor. Foucquet instead received an imperial decree in 1711 to work with Bouvet on the *Yijing* and stayed in the imperial court until November 1720. As it turned out, Prémare became a master of the Chinese language and Chinese characters through his interactions with the local literati and his own hard work, while Foucquet exercised his astronomical knowledge during presentations on Figurism delivered to the Kangxi Emperor. The Figurists attempted to ease pressures from the Holy See and solve the Rites Controversies by means of such presentations, though their efforts failed. However, their bold attempts were not out of mere vain curiosity; thus, their serious intellectual studies of the *Yijing* demand further examination. In the following sections of this paper, I will identify each Figurist's approach of paralleling Jesus with *sheng ren* in their reinterpretations of the *Yijing*.

3. Bouvet's Confucian Sage

In the *Yijing*, *sheng ren* 聖人 is mentioned 38 times; the lines of hexagrams explained *sheng ren* as a model actor who waited for the right timing of nature and who practiced the virtues between Heaven and Earth. Its optimal image also coincides with the Confucian image of the *sheng ren* as a sage king possessing the virtues of *zhong* 忠 (loyalty; treating people right), *xiao* 孝 (filial piety), *ren* 仁 (benevolence) and *yi* 義 (righteousness).

A *sheng ren* depicted by Confucius in his works is modeled after the ancient sage kings, such as Fuxi 伏羲, Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, King Wen 文王, and King Wu 武王. While these ancient sage kings of Chinese myth were often treated as mystical, not historical, figures, it fit the needs and interests of Bouvet as he paralleled the timeline of these figures with the timeline of figures from the Bible. In addition, the image of *sheng ren* being a sage inside and assuming the outside identity of a king/ruler 內聖外王 coincides with the Jesuit Figurists' portrayal of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the image of a *sheng ren* in Confucianism was transposed onto the image of Jesus in Bouvet's manuscripts, to depict his filial piety and loyalty toward God as well as other Confucian virtues. With the transposed Confucian virtues, Jesus became true to life—the lives of the Chinese people.

Among Bouvet's hundreds of folios of manuscripts, it is most noted that two manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Da Yi Yuan Yi Nei Pian* 大易原義內篇⁴ (Inner Chapter of the Original Meaning of the Great Yi) and *Yi Gao* 易稿⁵ (The Draft of the *Yijing*), are his interpretations of the first twelve hexagrams of the *Yijing*, with the first two hexagrams, *Qian* 乾 (the Creative) and *Kun* 坤 (the Receptive) in *Da Yi Yuan Yi Nei Pian* 大易原義內篇 and the remaining ten in the *Yi Gao* 易稿. The reason he only chose the first twelve hexagrams was unknown, but each hexagram was linked with the stories from the Bible, especially how Jesus Christ rose as a sage and how Adam forsook the Confucian virtues, resulting in his fall. While more details about Bouvet's interpretation of the *Yijing* may be found in another of the present author's books, *Chinese Theology and Translation: the Christianity of the Jesuit Figurists and their Christianized Yijing*, this paper is an extension from that book and further examines the Confucian virtues of *zhong* 忠 (loyalty; treating people right), *xiao* 孝 (filial piety), *ren* 仁 (benevolence) and *yi* 義 (righteousness) were transposed onto Jesus and Adam before the fall.

Among these twelve hexagrams reinterpreted by Bouvet, there are a few innovative parallels between Jesus and the Confucian *sheng ren*. For example, *Bi* 比 (Holding Together), composed of *Kan* 坎 (the Abysmal) as the upper trigram and *Kun* 坤 (the Receptive) as the lower, originally meant that the ruler was close to his marquises and conferred property and land to each of them to win their trust and loyalty. Bouvet, in his interpretation, turned *Bi* 比 into a hexagram describing Jesus as a sage king with benevolence and care for his people.

The great sage (Jesus) with no errors and with original goodness and permanent perseverance took the throne to follow Pre-Heaven and to establish the kingdom of Latter Heaven. He was born following the order (of God). He has the virtues of benevolence and tenderness to nourish the people below and pardon the crimes of all quarters. ... Therefore, his loving of benevolence reached all four quarters, and people in the world felt that they were fortunate to be pardoned with no errors. This is the Savior who had a close bond with mankind and exhausted the ways to develop a close rapport between (God) above and (man) below in Latter Heaven.

(毫過貳元善永貞之大聖，繼先天立後天國之極，順命降生臨下，仁柔之德潤下，盡贖萬方之罪，... 由是仁恩四洽，世人幸沾赦罪咎之恩，... 比人球世之主，而窮後天上下互比之道。)(Bouvet Borg. Cin 317. No. 7, p. 18. Author's translation.)

From the above description, Jesus was depicted as a sage with benevolence who pardoned the crimes of mankind. *Da sheng* 大聖 (great sage) was employed very frequently as a name for the flawless Jesus. *Ren* 仁 (benevolence) may be a common virtue across Christianity and Confucianism; it is quite obvious that Bouvet can easily borrow *ren* 仁 from Confucianism to depict Jesus's character. In addition to the common use of *ren* 仁 in these two manuscripts, there are more parallels between Jesus and a Confucian sage with virtues such as *zhong* 忠 (loyalty; treating people right), *xiao* 孝 (filial piety), and *yi* 義 (righteousness). For example, the *yang* line of the beginning place 初九 of *Qian* 乾 (the Creative) originally meant that the superior man or sage should maintain a low profile while it is not the right time to optimally utilize his potential (潛龍勿用). However, in Bouvet's interpretation, the *yang* line of the beginning place 初九 of *Qian* 乾 (the Creative) was transformed to portray Jesus as a filial son who followed the Holy Father's order to be born to the world; the timing not being ideal, Jesus could not yet accomplish his merits (Bouvet Borg. Cin. 317. No. 9, p. 8). Jesus in Bouvet's Chinese writing was usually depicted as the Heavenly Son born with no beginning of the Lord of Heaven, the Heavenly Father 天主聖父始所生之天子. Filial piety applied here was intended to evoke the same filial emotions

⁴ Bouvet, Joachim. *Da Yi Yuan Yi Nei Pian* 大易原義內篇 (Inner Chapter of the Original Meaning of the Great Yi), Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 317. No. 9.

⁵ Bouvet, Joachim. *Yi Gao* 易稿 (The Drafts of Yi). Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 317. No. 7.

and filial values the Chinese people already held but redirect them towards God. Jesus was thus depicted as a sage with filial piety.

Furthermore, in *Kun* 坤 (the Receptive), a comparison between Adam and Jesus was made, Adam being a type of Jesus. According to Bouvet, Adam was modeled on the Holy Father, but he was lured by Satan, the arrogant dragon 亢龍, and disobeyed the orders of the Lord of Heaven (ibid., pp. 17–18). In this hexagram, contrasting with Adam's betrayal, Jesus was illustrated by Bouvet as a full sage with three suitable virtues, *zhong* 忠, *xiao* 孝, and *xin* 信 (respect) (忠孝信三順全聖) (ibid.). With these three virtues, Bouvet then explained that Jesus travelled across *Da Qin* 大秦 (the Roman Empire) and spread the Christian teachings to the people. Jesus' twelve apostles and 72 disciples were compared to Confucius' 72 disciples (ibid., p. 17). Then, Bouvet also treated Confucius as a type of Jesus born hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. Both wanted to spread the *Dao*, the way of God and the Christian teachings, to all people under Heaven.

Aside from these two manuscripts of twelve hexagrams, Bouvet also expounded in another of his Chinese works, the *Yi Yao* 易鑰⁶ (The *Yijing* as the Keys to Christianity), about how ultimate a sage Jesus was.

The Holy Son was ultimately submissive (to God) and was willing to shoulder the heavy responsibility. He sacrificed his body to pardon the crimes of all quarters. His sacrifice was for tens of thousands of people. His precious life was given on the cross to repair the faults of human beings, to correct their sins, and to rescue men from the ring of crimes. ... He was born as a god with infinite power. He was born to inherit the throne from God. He was ultimately divine, ultimately wise, ultimately righteous, ultimately benevolent, ultimately respectful, ultimately humble, and his true virtues may be paired with those of Heaven and Earth. He re-uplifted the heart of mankind and opened a new way (for mankind) in the period of Latter Heaven (after the birth of Jesus). He was an omnipotent, great sage.

聖子至順受命甘承重任，一躬付萬方之罪，自當犧牲代萬民，致其寶命，以十字權衡之平補之，而出大過，其罪之鑲，... 以為永不絕之神配誕於世，而為繼天立極、至神至明、至義至仁，至尊至謙，真德配天地，再造人心。開後天之道，全能一大聖。(Bouvet Borg. Cin. 317. No. 2, p. 19. Author's translation.)⁷

The seven mentions of the adjective "ultimate" 至 in the *Yi Yao* complements how Bouvet portrayed Jesus Christ as a Confucian sage with *zhong* 忠, *xiao* 孝, *xin* 信, *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義. The reinterpretation of these hexagrams in the *Yijing* amazed the Kangxi Emperor and he demanded more Chinese writings from Bouvet. However, the true agenda harbored by the Kangxi Emperor was that he wished to know more about Western mathematics and astronomy, which also prompted Fouquet, who stayed in the imperial court, to incorporate more astronomical studies.

4. The *Sheng Ren* in Fouquet's Astronomical Descriptions

Although these three main Figurists basically followed a consistent approach, identifying mystic symbols in the Chinese classics and treating them as messages left by God, each still had his own signature approach, based on his own expertise, and with the support and resources of the location he stayed in. Compared to Bouvet's eccentric association between the hexagrams and the Bible stories, Fouquet associated the irregularities of the constellations with his interpretation of the *Yijing*.

The French Jesuit Jean-François Fouquet had been in China since 1699, working as a missionary first in Fujian and then in Jiangxi. In 1711, he was summoned to the capital where he became involved in astronomy for several years. In the imperial court, he also needed to serve and satisfy the emperor

⁶ Bouvet, Joachim. *Yi Yao* 易鑰 (The *Yijing* as the Keys to Christianity). Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 317. No. 2.

⁷ This translation was also employed by the author in the third chapter of her book, *Chinese Theology and Translation: the Christianity of the Jesuit Figurists and their Christianized Yijing*, for a different purpose and explanation.

and his desire for astronomical knowledge and his enthusiasm for the *Yijing*. However, Foucquet, the Jesuit missionary with astronomical knowledge, was not the only source for the emperor's Western education. In addition to frequent debate with the Astronomical Bureau and the Office of Mathematics dominated by Chinese ministers, Foucquet also needed to bear the brunt of questioning from both his own confreres of the French mission and from the Jesuits of the Portuguese mission. The interpretation of the Chinese classics as well as views on how to put the sciences in the best interests of the mission divided the missionaries.

Surrounded by controversies, Foucquet's focus on astronomical studies worked as a means to protect the mission in China, while the optimistic attitude they had originally conveyed to their European audience turned into one of defense. *Ju Gu Jingzhuan Kao Tianxiang Bu Jun Qi* 據古經傳攷天象不均齊⁸ (The Examination of the Irregularities in the Sky Based on the Ancient Classics) was written by Foucquet within this historical context. According to Witek, this book was completed sometime between 1712 and 1715 while Foucquet was serving in the Kangxi Emperor's court (Witek 1982, p. 454). As a loyal protégé of Bouvet, Foucquet also made parallels between figures in the Bible with the *Yijing*.

What was in common between Bouvet and Foucquet was that both employed hexagrams to symbolize the characters of the fallen Adam and the Savior, Jesus. What is different about Foucquet's interpretation is that he linked more closely with the *Dao*. Foucquet also delved into the true meaning of the hexagrams to demonstrate the virtues of a *sheng ren*, in this case, Jesus.

Via questions and answers in the catechism in the Chinese work *Ju Gu Jingzhuan Kao Tianxiang Bu Jun Qi* 據古經傳攷天象不均齊, Foucquet first explained that the regularities and irregularities in the movements of constellations are just like the changes and non-changes in the *Yijing*, and that there must be a reason behind the irregularities. He further quoted from several ancient classics, such as *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master(s) from Huainan) and *Liezi* 列子 (Master Lie), to illustrate major changes from Pre-Heaven 先天 to Latter Heaven 後天. He indicated that Pre-Heaven does not refer to the stage before the creation of Heaven and Earth, but to the stage immediately after the creation of Heaven and Earth. Everything was in order and formed a dynamic and harmonious schema by mutual generation (*xiangsheng* 相生). It could be seen from the arrangement of the eight trigrams in Pre-Heaven. However, when it came to the Latter Heaven, Fire and Water are against each other, symbolizing the confrontation between man and Heaven. Summer turned into winter and everything was withering. The changes and the irregularities were caused by the errors of the ancestors. Who were the ancestors? Foucquet examined and refuted Yan Junping's theory 嚴君平, who examined the identity of human ancestors, and Foucquet especially pinpointed that the ancestors 先祖 in Yan Junping's *Laozi Zhigui* 老子指歸 (The Essential Meaning of the Laozi) were not the ancestors of the Han dynasty. Instead, the ancestors were the ancestors of the human beings in the Bible, Adam and Eve.



In addition, unlike Bouvet's detailed explanations for the first twelve hexagrams, Foucquet picked several hexagrams which were related to his interpretation of the Bible stories and fit these hexagrams in his explanations about why there were irregularities in the sky. For example, Foucquet applied *Gen* 艮 (Standing Still, Mountain) to depict the original virtue of Adam, whose character is pure and simple (有易簡之德. Author's translation). If Adam had been submissive to the order of God, his merits would have been great and lasting (Foucquet Borg. Cin. 317. No. 13, p. 8). However, Adam had alienated himself from the heart of *Meng* 蒙 (Youthful Folly) and now man suffers from desire, deceit, sadness from loss and from being an orphan or a widow (ibid., p. 10). Thirdly, the grace and pureness in *Pi* 賁 (Grace) were also added to the original virtues of Adam.

The ancestor was a loyal minister with sagacious benevolence. He is as white and pure as *Pi* 賁, without losing his virtues.

⁸ Foucquet, Jean François. *Ju Gu Jing 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). Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 317. No. 13.

先祖為善之忠臣，則賁白素朴不失其德。

(Foucquet Borg. Cin. 317. No. 13, p. 12. Author's translation)

Next, Foucquet further employed the symbol of *qiu* 丘 (a hill) in *Pi* 賁 (Grace) and *Yi* 頤 (the Corners of the Mouth) to compare the situations before and after Adam and Eve had committed their sins. The archaic character of *qiu* 丘 is  or , both of which symbolize two people standing on the ground (ibid.). In Foucquet's interpretation, they were similar to Adam and Eve in Eden. Originally, the *yin* line of the fifth place of *Pi* 賁 (賁之六五) meant: Grace in hills and gardens. The roll of silk is meager and small. Humiliation, but in the end good fortune⁹. This line was then transformed by Foucquet to depict Adam's prelapsarian purity. Interesting, another hexagram using the metaphor of *qiu* 丘, *Yi* 頤 (the Corners of the Mouth) was applied to indicate the dangers after Adam and Eve betrayed God.

Turning to the summit for nourishment,

Deviating from the path

To seek nourishment from the hill.

Continuing to do this brings misfortune.

(六二，，拂于丘，征凶。)

(ibid., pp. 12–13. Richard Wilhelm's translation. [Wilhelm 1977](#), p. 109.)

Adam, being lured by Satan, caused the irregularities of the five planets 五緯 (*Chenxing* [辰星], *Taibai* [太白], *Yinghuo* [熒惑], *Suixing* [歲星] and *Zhenxing* [鎮星]). *Qiu Yuan* 丘園 (The Garden, Eden) was turned into *qiu shu* 丘墟 (the ruins of the garden).

With the fall of Adam from being the ancestor with pure virtue to one tainted with sin, the sage, Jesus Christ, rises. Here, I compare his *Ju Gu Jingzhuan Kao Tianxiang Bu Jun Qi* 據古經傳攷天象不均齊¹⁰ (The Examination of the Irregularities in the Sky Based on the Ancient Classics) in Chinese and Latin. It was assumed to be written in Chinese first and followed by the Latin translation in manuscript Borg. Cin. 380. No. 6.

故垂誓命。必有大聖降。而道濟天下焉。此大聖非他。即古經籍所載。參天地。致中和。之大聖也。為人類之首，人倫之至。萬夫之望。百代真儒之所需待者 ... 凡古經稱為聖。為神。為后。為君。為師。為大人。為至誠至聖者。

... futurum aliquando ut magnus sanctus ad terras descenderet, et mundo succurrens, in integrum omnia restitueret. magnus ille sanctus non alius est ab aevo(?), quem Libri Canonici et caetera vetustissima monumenta (other most ancient monuments) celebrant; quem aiunt operari cum caelo et terrâ revocaturum res mundanas producentibus, quem asserunt adducturum concordiam, qua olim in medio | in Paradiso viguit: quem praedicant ut Caput humani generis, ut humanorum officiorum* apicem, ut spem bonorum omnium, ut eum quem ab aevo(?) veri sapientes expectant ...

quicumque in antiquis Libris vocatur sanctus aut summe sanctus item vocatur Spiritus et Praeclaris aut Principis et Regis aut Pastor, aut doctoris aut viri magni, aut summe veri, aut supremæ veritatis ipsius, nominibus κατ'ἐξοχήν insignitur, non alius ab ipso est.

⁹ In Chinese, it is 賁之六五，賁于丘園，束帛戔戔。吝，終吉。 The English is from Richard Wilhelm's translation ([Wilhelm 1977](#), p. 93).

¹⁰ Foucquet, Jean François. *Ju Gu Jing Zhuan Kao Tianxiang Bu Jun Qi* 據古經傳攷天象不均齊 (The Examination of the Irregularities in the Sky based on the Ancient Classics). Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 380. No. 6.

English translation from Latin: Sometime in the future the great holy man would descend to the earth, and while saving the world, would rebuild all things into a whole. That great holy man is no other than [unrecognizable?] whom the Canonic Book (經) and other most ancient monuments commemorate; whom they say to work with the Heaven and Earth, for recalling the worldly affairs to come forward; whom they claim for bringing harmony, which was once flourishing in the middle, in paradise: whom they praised as the Head of mankind (Caput humani generis), the climax of the offices* of humans (人倫), as the hope of all goodness, as the one whom the eternal true wise men (真儒) expect.

(Foucquet Borg. Cin. 380. No. 6, p. 28. Author's translation.)

In both versions, Foucquet depicts Jesus as a holy man, the bright one, the Lord and King, the pastor, the teacher, the great gentleman, the highest true one, or himself the supreme virtue. In this way, not only did Foucquet resonate with Bouvet's idea of Jesus harboring the virtues of a loyal minister, he also dug further into the true meaning of these hexagrams and decorated Jesus with terms with holiness: *sheng* 聖 (saint), *shen* 神 (spirit), *hou* 后 (empress), *jun* 君 (lord) and *shi* 師 (master) are names referring to Jesus Christ; in the end he quotes from Chapter 18 of the *Daodejing* to explain why the *da sheng* 大聖 (the great sage) was born (Foucquet Borg. Cin. 317. No. 13, p. 25). In manuscript No. Borg. Cin. 371, *Problèmes théologiques*¹¹, Foucquet elaborates for more than 330 pages on his interpretation of the *Dao* and his equation of the *Dao* with Deus. The term *sheng ren* 聖人在 Chapters 34, 47, 49, 58, 70 and 78 of the *Daodejing* was identified with the Holy Son of the Bible (Wei 2018, p. 10).

Remaining in the imperial court and working with Bouvet, Foucquet was still dedicated to locating God's traces and messages in the *Yijing*. In order to cater to the interests of the Kangxi Emperor, Foucquet spiced up his presentation of Figurism with his astronomical expertise. Going further than Bouvet, he further delved into the studies of the *Dao* and the *Daodejing* and linked Jesus with the *sheng ren* in the *Dao*, which may have aroused the interests of the European readers after the manuscripts were brought back to Europe. His correspondence with Voltaire and Montesquieu helped later French scholars to develop Sinology in France (Witek 1998, p. 220).

5. The *Sheng Ren* in Prémare's Anatomy of Chinese Characters and Hexagrams

Prémare, also a Figurist, had a different fate and path than those of Foucquet. After Foucquet rejected a confrere who had been appointed to be his superior, he then returned to France and became a bishop at the Propaganda Fide ([Sacred Congregation for the] Propagation of the Faith) in Rome. On the other hand, Prémare worked as a missionary mainly in Guangxi. When the Christian faith was prohibited by the Yongzheng Emperor (1678–1735) in January 1724, Prémare was confined with his colleagues to Canton. Later, a still more rigorous edict banished him to Macao. Without imperial support, Prémare could only look to the local mission and the local literati for assistance. Among these literati, Prémare learned the most from Liu Ning 劉凝, who he is thought to have met around 1702. In several of Prémare's Chinese works, such as the *Taiji Lüe Shuo* 太極略說¹² (The Rough Explanation of *Taiji*) and *Jingzhuan Yi Lun* 經傳議論 (Discussions on Classics and Commentaries), Liu Ning was praised and quoted to support Prémare's own analysis of Chinese words and characters. 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, p. 46; Wei 2018, p. 11).

Being away from the imperial court and dissenting from his mentor Bouvet's eccentric interpretations, Prémare had more freedom to concentrate on his own analysis of Chinese characters. The *sheng ren* 聖人 may be the most frequent term used in the *Yijing*, and Prémare also employed this term *sheng ren* in his Chinese works, such as *Jingzhuan Yi Lun* 經傳議論 as well as *Liu Shu Shi Yi* 六書實

¹¹ Foucquet, Jean François. *Problèmes théologiques*. Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 371.

¹² Prémare, Joseph Henri-Marie de. *Taiji Lüe Shuo* 太極略說 (The Rough Explanation of *Taiji*). Manuscripts stored in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Shelf Mark Borg. Cin. 317. No. 5.

義¹³ (The True Meaning of the Six Methods). This paper will further examine his interpretation of the *sheng ren*, which sets his Figurist approach apart from those of the other Figurists.

As the Jesuit missionary with the best command of Classical and vernacular Chinese, Prémare analyzed the composition of Chinese characters and treated each part as a symbol or message from God. One example given here is from compound ideographs (會意; *hui yi*; “joined meaning”), which are also called “associative compounds” or “logical aggregates”. These are compounds of two or more pictographic or ideographic characters to suggest the meaning of the word to be represented. *Yang* 羊 (lamb) was borrowed to indicate the image of a *sheng ren*. The correlation between the image of *yang* 羊 and Jesus as a *sheng ren* could easily be seen since the Bible refers to Jesus Christ as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29; Peter 1:19). In the *Liu Shu Shi Yi* 六書實義 (Prémare Manuscript no. Chinois 906, stored in Bibliothèque nationale de France, p. 20), Prémare described *yang* 羊 as an auspicious sign that meant fortune and benevolence. Therefore, the characters formed with *yang* 羊 as a constituent radical, such as *yi* 義 (righteousness), *mei* 美 (beauty) and *xiang* 祥 (auspiciousness) are all good characteristics of a *sheng ren*. In addition, the character, *shan* (goodness; an archaic character for 善) is composed by a lamb flanked by *yan* 言 (words; to speak) on both sides. According to Prémare’s anatomy, it must be an auspicious sign, while the right and the left of *Yang* 羊, the *sheng ren*, both *say* 言 something good and righteous (*ibid.*) about the *sheng ren*.

In addition, *Tai* 泰 (Peace) and *Pi* 否 (Stalemate) also are applied to explain that ䷊ ䷋ both follow the principle of *zhishi* 指事 (self-indicative) to represent *Tian* 天 (Heaven) and *Di* 地 (Earth) (*ibid.*, p. 14). In the next part, he further explains that *sheng ren* should stop *Pi* 否 (Stalemate) and open *Tai* 泰 (Peace).

Yi (易) is the sage of no shape, while the sage is the *Yi* in a tangible shape. *Qian* and *Kun* integrate and then the way of *Yi* facilitates. Because Heaven and Earth are positioned, a sage is then born. He towers high above the multitude of creatures, and all kingdoms are united in peace. Heaven above and man below are mutually communicating with one another. ... However, the one who could build the link between Heaven and man is the only sage. His position is central and correct, right and appropriate. Therefore, (he should) stop *Pi* and open *Tai* to solicit more blessings and original fortune.

(易者其無形之聖乎，而聖人者有形之易乎。乾坤合焉而易道行，天地位焉而聖人生。首出庶物，萬國咸寧。上天下人，互為相通。... 然天人締結而成一位，惟至聖一人而已。惟其位中而正，正而當，故休否而開泰，以祉元吉。) (*ibid.*, p. 15. Author’s translation.)

In addition to employing *Tai* 泰 (Peace) and *Pi* 否 (Stalemate) to indicate the harmonious relationship of the *sheng ren* between Heaven and Earth, Prémare also further utilized ䷊ ䷋ to indicate the image of the *sheng ren*. According to Prémare, “what the Great *Yi* may indicate is (the appearance) of the ultimate sage only” (*ibid.*, p. 16. Author’s translation). Therefore, ䷊ ䷋ was employed, which refers to the sage’s being able to be shaped. He further expounded that the *Hetu* 河圖 (Yellow River Chart), the *Luoshu* 洛書 (Inscription of the River Luo) and the Great *Yi* are all the representations and images of the *sheng ren* (*ibid.*, p. 16. Author’s translation).

In the *Liu Shu Shi Yi* 六書實義, Prémare expounded his definition of a *sheng ren* and how his analysis of Chinese characters and hexagrams was associated with the characters and virtues of a *sheng ren*. However, except for the implicit association of *yang* 羊 in archaic characters with Jesus as a *sheng ren*, the rest of the descriptions of the *sheng ren* only reflect Prémare’s deep influence from the local literati’s studies of Chinese literature and his lesser inclination to associate his interpretation with the stories in the Bible, as Bouvet and Foucquet had done. The location he was situated in and the support he received may have influenced his divergence from those two Figurists.

¹³ Prémare, Joseph Henri-Marie de. *Liu Shu Shi Yi* 六書實義 (*The True Meaning of Six Methods*), Manuscript no. Chinois 906, stored in Bibliothèque nationale de France.

6. Concluding Remarks

Past scholarship grouped these three Jesuit Figurists together, attributing to all of them a focus on the hermetic messages left by God in the Chinese classics. However, as I have shown herein, each Figurist, in investigating Figurism and interpreting the *Yijing*, had his own identity, focus, and trajectory. The Figurist use of *sheng ren* was employed in this paper to distinguish each signature approach. Prémare inherited his passion for Chinese characters from Bouvet; Foucquet possessed astronomical expertise, as did Bouvet. Although, unlike Bouvet's association of the lines in hexagrams with the image of Jesus or Adam, Prémare and Foucquet started from their own expertise, one from Chinese characters and the other from astronomical knowledge, to further investigate the meaning of hexagrams. This also led to the European people aspiring for a more in-depth understanding and more discussion of the *Yijing* and the *Dao*.

Funding: This paper was supported by Direct Grant offered by the Faculty of Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong [grant project code: 4051105], and 2018–2019 Early Career Scheme Grant: Genealogies of the *Dao*—the Jesuits' *Dao* Journey (Project Number: 24601818), sponsored by RGC during the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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