

## Transmission of probability theory into China

SIU, Man Keung\*

The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China mathsiu@hku.hk

LIH, Ko Wei

Institute of Mathematics of Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan makwlih@sinica.edu.tw

In spite of the occurrence of many uncertain events in human experience in different civilizations since antiquity, be it in the East or the West, a quantitative approach to probability was not developed until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Western Europe. This peculiar “miss” is particularly notable in the history of Chinese mathematics, even though knowledge and skill in numerical calculation had long been well developed in ancient and medieval China. The first introduction of probability into China came in the form of a book *Jueyi Shuxue* (with literal meaning: “mathematics to resolve uncertainty”), translated around 1880 through the collaboration of the British missionary John Fryer (1839-1928) and the Chinese mathematician HUA Heng-fang (1833-1902) from an article on probability written by Thomas Galloway (1796-1851) for *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which was published separately as the book *A Treatise on Probability*. This presentation is about this episode with some discussion about related issues.

Key Words: *Jueyi Shuxue*, Western learning in Qing China