

Between Scientificity and Esotericism: Vladimir Eremeev's Reconstruction of the Yijing in Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Thought

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Research Article

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Abstract

This article broadens the study of Russian thought by examining Vladimir Eremeev's reconstruction of the *Yijing* and *xiangshu* in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Through contextual intellectual history and conceptual analysis, it interprets "arithmosemiotics" as a modern epistemic transformation that reorganized materials from exegesis, divination, cosmology, and technical practice into a formal system of codes, positions, and transformations. The project emerged at the intersection of Soviet scientificity, cybernetics and semiotics, structural analysis in Russian Sinology, and esoteric ideas of universal correspondence and lost knowledge. The *Yijing* consequently became a metamodel connecting cosmos, body, psyche, society, and different civilizations, as well as the basis of Eremeev's "lost universal science." This reconstruction challenged the Eurocentric genealogy of "Greece–Europe–modern science" and made Chinese thought a resource for Russian debates over rationality, science, and universality. Yet Eremeev's movement from formal similarity to ontological unity and historical diffusion joined claims requiring different forms of evidence. The article defines his project as a historically situated form of "Russian universalism": not an expression of national essence, but a strategy for renegotiating universal knowledge through non-Western traditions. The case also exposes a central problem in global intellectual history: shifting the geographical centre of knowledge may reproduce a new single-origin narrative unless comparison remains accountable to historical evidence and difference.

Introduction: Chinese Thought and the Problem of Russian Universalism

Scholarship on "Russian thought" has traditionally centred on Russian intellectuals' interpretations of their country's history, national identity, and historical destiny. Yet Russian thought has also taken shape through cross-linguistic and cross-civilizational circulations of knowledge. As Bykova and Steiner (2021) observe, "Russian thought" encompasses a broader intellectual domain than philosophy understood in a strictly professional sense: literature, religion, social theory, and cultural criticism can all serve as important modes of intellectual expression. A critical reassessment should therefore avoid treating it as an immutable national spirit. It should instead examine how intellectual claims emerged within particular epistemic contexts and how they, in turn, participated in redrawing the boundaries among philosophical, scientific, and cultural authority (Bykova 2025). Chinese and other non-Western traditions were part of this process: they were objects of interpretation but also resources for reconsidering Russia's relationship to Europe, modern science, and universal knowledge.

This cross-civilizational production of knowledge became especially visible during the transition from the late Soviet to the post-Soviet period. The philosophy of the natural sciences, logic, semiotics, structuralism, and various forms of unofficial spiritual culture intersected and overlapped, producing a complex and polyphonic intellectual landscape (Epstein 2019). After 1991, religious philosophy, Western theory, and previously marginal bodies of knowledge re-entered public debate as disciplinary hierarchies weakened. DeBlasio (2014) characterizes the 1990s as a period of "philosophical boom" in Russia,

emphasizing the close relationship between the expansion of philosophical activity and the redefinition of what counted as philosophy. Vladimir Evstigneevich Ereemeev's (Владимир Евстигнеевич Еремеев, 1953–2011) research on the *Yijing* took shape within precisely this intellectual milieu, which bridged the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

Ereemeev's scholarly trajectory traversed engineering, the natural sciences, the history of science, philosophy, and Sinology. His subsequent turn to Russian Sinology and the history of Chinese science redirected this concern toward the ancient Chinese categories of images (*xiang*), numbers (*shu*), hexagrams (*gua*), and lines (*yao*), as well as the modes of organizing knowledge associated with them (Kobzev 2012a). From *A Blueprint of the Anthropocosmos* and *The Theory of Psychosemiosis and Ancient Anthropocosmology* to *The Arithmosemiotics of the Book of Changes, Symbols and Numbers of the Book of Changes*, and *Traditional Chinese Science: A Brief History and Its Ideas*, his research gradually expanded from specific problems in Chinese thought to an inquiry into the underlying relations among nature, life, the psyche, music, and social order (Ereemeev 1993, 1996, 2001, 2005a, 2011). His concept of "arithmosemiotics" (*arifmosemiotika*) recast numbers, images, and diagrams as formal structures capable of encoding, transformation, and transfer across domains. The *Yijing* thereby became a model for reconstructing an integrated order of knowledge.

Existing studies clarify Ereemeev's biography, writings, and interpretive system. Kobzev emphasizes his scientific background and aspiration to overcome disciplinary division. He also observes that, within Ereemeev's project, ancient civilizations such as China and India perform a crucial function in the reconstruction of a unified system of knowledge (Kobzev 2012a). Rykov (2016) situates Ereemeev within the Russian Sinological tradition of structural analysis associated with Spirin, Karapetyants, and Kobzev, arguing that this approach seeks to locate intellectual meaning within textual parallelisms, numerical configurations, and formal structures. Orlova (2013), in turn, offers a systematic reconstruction of Ereemeev's arguments concerning the symbolic structures, rational organization, and semantic mechanisms of the *Yijing*. Less attention has been paid to why a universal formalization of Chinese *xiangshu* emerged in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, or how science, philosophy, and esoteric knowledge converged within it.

This article calls that intellectual strategy "Russian universalism." The term denotes neither a national essence nor an inherently Russian claim to universal truth, but a historically situated effort to reformulate universality through materials from several civilizations. Ereemeev combined structural analysis from Russian Sinology, the formal vocabulary of the systems sciences, and an esoteric imaginary of universal correspondences, shared archetypes, and lost epistemic unity. The resulting project challenged the genealogy "Greece–Europe–modern science," yet its formalization of ancient materials also risked subordinating textual, institutional, and historical differences to a new unifying model. The analysis therefore asks how heterogeneous *xiangshu* materials were recoded as arithmosemiotics and how that reconstruction generated claims about scientific rationality, civilizational isomorphism, and knowledge transmission. Following Skinner (1969), context is treated not as an external background to intellectual texts but as an integral dimension of the analysis—one that clarifies

the epistemic predicaments Eremeev confronted, the conceptual resources available to him, and the specific ways in which those resources entered his reconstruction of the *Yijing*. His significance lies less in whether arithmosemiotics can be validated as universal science than in how it used China to redefine the relations among science, civilization, and universal knowledge.

Eremeev in the Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Intellectual Context

Eremeev's research on the *Yijing* grew out of work in engineering, the natural sciences, and the history of science. Trained in radio engineering, he worked at institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences and taught physics before turning toward historical and philosophical questions. After joining the Institute for the History of Natural Science and Technology of the USSR Academy of Sciences in the late 1980s, he gradually shifted his attention from scientific practice to historical and philosophical questions concerning scientific knowledge (Kobzev 2012b). His later studies of Chinese space and time, the psyche, music, medicine, and cross-civilizational numerical systems retained this concern with formal relations and models.

This trajectory belonged to a late Soviet culture that placed considerable value on scientificity (*nauchnost'*). Guseinov and Lektorsky (2009) characterize this period as one of renewed professionalization in Soviet philosophy, during which scholars formulated philosophical problems in dialogue with the natural sciences and redirected discussion away from the interpretation of political doctrine toward the structure of knowledge, mechanisms of cognition, and scientific theory itself. Scientificity thus included empirical warrant, but also systematicity, formalization, and general explanatory power. Eremeev accordingly treated discernible structure and internal logic as the grounds on which ancient knowledge could exceed the categories of myth or fragmentary belief.

Cybernetics and systems theory supplied the operative vocabulary. Peters's study of Soviet computer network projects demonstrates that cybernetics was not merely a technical instrument in this period; it also embodied the epistemic ideal of understanding and organizing complex processes through unified information structures (Peters 2016). Eremeev's early studies of ancient Chinese models of space and time and the logical-semantic organization of the *Yijing* already treated hexagram figures as formal relations capable of arrangement, transformation, and the generation of meaning (Eremeev 1989, 1990). Terms such as coding, feedback, model, and system therefore linked his technical training to the formalization of Chinese materials.

Semiotics extended this mode of analysis into the humanities. As Waldstein (2008) observes, the significance of this scholarly tradition lay not only in its creation of new methods of textual analysis but also in its formation of an interdisciplinary intellectual space connecting linguistics, mathematics, history, and cultural studies. Russian Sinology provided a more direct precedent. In *The Construction of Ancient Chinese Texts*, Spirin analyzed pre-Qin writings through textual parallelisms, semantic positions, and formal correspondences, arguing that textual construction itself could convey philosophical information rather than merely serving as an external form for intellectual content (Spirin 1976). Between

1985 and 1990, the China Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences also organized an interdisciplinary seminar entitled “Structural Studies of the Chinese Classics.” Its participants, including Eremeev, came from Sinology, philosophy, linguistics, and fields with mathematical and scientific orientations (Rykov 2009). Eremeev extended this method from textual structures to relations among astronomy, medicine, music, and theories of the psyche.

These scientific and Sinological sources do not by themselves explain the project’s universalist reach. His 1991 essay “Once Again on the Enneagram” demonstrates that, even at an early stage in his systematic interpretation of Chinese *xiangshu*, Eremeev was already experimenting with numerically and geometrically structured diagrams as instruments of cross-cultural comparison (Eremeev 1991). The Gurdjieffian system connected cosmology, music, psychology, and spiritual practice. Its epistemology rested on the premise that different levels of existence share an underlying formal order (Wellbeloved 2003). Such ideas were not simply external intrusions into Soviet rationality. The studies collected by Rosenthal demonstrate that no clearly fixed boundary separated Theosophy, cosmism, and other alternative intellectual currents from modern science; many forms of intellectual practice emerged precisely in the borderlands where religion, science, and philosophy borrowed concepts from one another (Rosenthal 1997). Systems science explained how unity could be modeled; esotericism expanded what that unity might encompass.

The Soviet collapse altered the institutional legitimacy of this synthesis. Bazhanov (1999) observes that the removal of ideological restrictions broadened the space for public discussion of religious philosophy, the history of philosophy, and various heterodox theories. Eremeev moved from specialized papers toward systematic works and later held positions in institutions spanning the history of science, Chinese philosophy, and traditional culture. Gerasimov and Semyonov (2022) argue that, as the post-Soviet humanities lost their former institutional stability, they were compelled to redefine their disciplinary boundaries, public functions, and forms of epistemic authority. Eremeev’s project joined the Soviet concern with formal structure and scientific legitimacy to newly accessible esoteric and cross-civilizational resources. Chinese *xiangshu* consequently became the conceptual nexus through which nature, mind, and civilization could be reintegrated.

From Xiangshu to Arithmosemiotics: Conceptual Translation and Reconstruction

Arithmosemiotics combines *arithmos*, “number,” with semiotics. In Eremeev’s usage, signs derive meaning from their structural positions, while formal rules can migrate across domains through new substantive assignments. Images, numbers, hexagrams, and lines dispersed across exegesis, divination, cosmology, and technical practices are thereby organized as a system of elements, positions, and transformations. The concept does not simply name a pre-existing object; it helps produce that object.

Historical *xiangshu*, however, was not a stable system. Xiang could denote hexagram configurations, natural phenomena, omens, or perceptible relations; *shu* included parity, order, quantity, cycles, orientation, and classification. Later traditions of *Yijing* scholarship developed techniques and diagrams involving hexagram transformations (*guabian*), nuclear or interlocking trigrams (*huti*), the *najia* system,

hexagram *qi* (*guaqi*), the *Hetu* and *Luoshu*, and numerous forms of numerical arrangement, thereby incorporating *xiangshu* into different interpretive traditions and epistemic practices (Nielsen 2013). The early *Zhouyi* belonged to divination, decision-making, and ritual, whereas later canonical interpretation attached the same signs to ethics and politics. Once incorporated into the system of canonical learning, the same signs were employed to discuss virtue, political order, and historical change (Raphals 2013; Hon 2005). *Xiangshu* therefore contains historical strata whose unity is already an interpretive achievement.

Eremeev's encoding of the trigrams illustrates his translation. Yin and yang lines become 0 and 1, while their three positions become X, Y, and Z. These positions receive the functions subject, process, and object; line changes and hexagram relations are redescribed as transformation, feedback, and information processing. He consequently interprets the eight trigrams as a "universal semantic code" transferable across different domains of objects (Eremeev 2012, 156–166). Coding preserves the combinatorial character of *xiangshu* but changes its epistemic form: yin and yang become binary states, and historically embedded line positions become variables open to new semantic assignments.

His treatment of time shows that formalization also generates meaning. Traditional notions of change encompassed seasonal, calendrical, divinatory, and cyclical temporalities. Eremeev assigned positions the functions cause, action, and result, correlating them with past, present, and future. By rearranging symmetrical relations and positional differences within hexagram diagrams, he made configurations originally characterized by cyclicity and correspondence display a causal direction (Eremeev 2003). Neither the binary coding nor these semantic assignments are uniquely dictated by the diagrams. Selection, equivalence-making, and the definition of variables are interpretive operations through which the model acquires unity.

Arithmosemiotics is therefore a conceptual translation between epistemic paradigms. New relations of translation redraw conceptual boundaries and place existing materials within structures of inquiry that did not previously exist (Liu 1995). *Xiang* and *shu* become signs and codes; change becomes formal transformation; cosmological correspondence becomes systemic isomorphism. These terms alter what can be studied and which questions the *Yijing* can answer. The same process complicates any opposition between discovery and invention. Chinese materials did contain combinations, positions, transformations, and correspondences, but their consolidation into a generalized formal system was modern knowledge production. Kurtz's study of the modern constitution of "Chinese logic" offers a parallel. When modern scholars established logic as a field on the basis of ancient Chinese materials, they relied on historically attested practices of reasoning. On the other hand, they used modern disciplinary classifications to redefine which materials could be included within the domain of "logic" (Kurtz 2011). Eremeev likewise recovered historically attested relations by reconstructing them through systems science and semiotics.

Once established, arithmosemiotics became a metalanguage rather than a method confined to the *Yijing*. He also applied comparable structural methods to the twelve *lǚ* pitch standards in music, bodily

rhythms in traditional medicine, and levels of the psyche and types of emotion (Eremeev 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008). This extension made *xiangshu* visible as theoretically organized knowledge and challenged its Eurocentric classification as mystical or prelogical. Yet recognition still depended on modern criteria such as encodability, formalization, systemic relations, and transferability. Modern scientific language both contested the exclusion of Chinese thought from rational theory and selected which parts of that thought could be recognized as rational. This tension prepared the move from conceptual translation to “universal science.”

Between Scientificity and Esotericism: The “Lost Universal Science”

Eremeev used arithmosemiotics to interpret medicine, music, the psyche, and society as manifestations of a common order. Early civilizations were imagined to have possessed integrated knowledge that modern disciplines later divided among separate objects. Civilizational differentiation and ruptures in transmission dispersed this unity; remnants survived in myth, numerical symbolism, religious diagrams, technical practices, and philosophy. The phrase “lost universal science” designates this epistemic imaginary: dispersed formal relations could be identified and recombined to restore an order obscured by specialization.

The *Yijing* became the central model because its finite elements and transformational rules appeared to store and generate relations. In his account, the *zangfu* organs and bodily rhythms; the five tones and twelve *lǚ* pitch standards; the psycho-spiritual categories of *hun* (ethereal soul), *po* (corporeal soul), *shen* (spirit), *yi* (intention), and *zhi* (will); and different social positions could all be rearranged within a shared matrix constituted by yin and yang, the Five Phases, the eight trigrams, and numerical-positional relations (Eremeev 1987, 2006d, 2010). These objects differ empirically, but analogous positions and cycles allow formal comparison. Eremeev interpreted their recurrence not as analytical convenience but as evidence of a common generative order governing cosmos, body, psyche, music, and society.

This inference moves among propositions requiring different arguments. Formal similarity establishes comparability; similarity in modes of cognition supports a typology; the claim that different domains obey one law is ontological; and an account of shared inheritance or transmission is historical. Eremeev’s universalism gains force by moving across these levels: recurrent forms suggest world unity, and presumed unity supports a common civilizational source. A model may integrate heterogeneous material without proving that its objects are ontologically isomorphic.

Scientificity legitimates this movement. Eremeev compared texts and diagrams, specified variables, and sought internal consistency. The terms system, structure, coding, feedback, and self-organization made *xiangshu* legible to modern scholarship. Gieryn’s boundary-work helps explain this operation. By emphasizing empirical grounding, formal rigor, explanatory power, and practical utility, researchers continually redraw the boundaries governing which forms of knowledge may acquire scientific status (Gieryn 1983). Eremeev similarly moved *xiangshu* from divination or “prescience” toward model-building

knowledge, thereby redefining both the Chinese tradition and the category of science. Formal integration, however, cannot by itself establish a true structure of reality.

Esotericism supplies the stronger assumption of unity. Faivre's study of Western esotericism places particular emphasis on correspondences, living nature, symbolic mediation, and the possibility of concordance among different traditions (Faivre & Voss 1995). These categories do not define *xiangshu*, but they clarify why recurring numbers and diagrams could be treated as traces of hidden order. The affinity appears most clearly in Eremeev's engagement with Gurdjieff. Through the enneagram, the "Fourth Way" incorporated cosmic processes, human psychological development, musical proportions, and spiritual practice into a shared numerical-symbolic structure, interpreting different levels of existence as distinct manifestations of universal laws (Cusack 2020). Eremeev nevertheless subjected that tradition to historical analysis. He examined the intellectual sources of Gurdjieff's teaching, traced many of its ideas to the historical convergence of modern European science, philosophy, and esoteric thought, and sought to analyze the provenance and formal construction of the enneagram and its associated numerical structures (Eremeev 2005). This critical distance did not remove their epistemic affinity. Scientific concepts and esoteric ideas have long been connected through processes of borrowing, reinterpretation, and boundary negotiation (Asprem 2018).

Scientificity and esotericism thus perform complementary functions. Systems science explains how unity can be formalized; esotericism explains why unity should be sought across domains and civilizations. The *Yijing* likewise has a dual role: modern concepts reorganize it as a model, while it becomes a basis for criticizing modern fragmentation and imagining science as integrated knowledge of nature, life, spirit, and value. This move expands what may count as theory, but it also compresses historically distinct practices into one matrix. Similar problems and formal patterns do not in themselves generate the same system of knowledge (Lloyd & Sivin 2002). Eremeev's creativity and his central limitation follow from the same effort to convert formal integration into ontological and historical unity.

China as a Resource for Russia's Global Epistemic Imaginary

China functioned in Eremeev's project as more than an object of Sinology. The *Yijing* and *xiangshu* became means of testing whether modern classifications of philosophy, science, and reason possess cross-civilizational validity. Eurocentrism operates not only by denying Chinese achievements but by treating Greek philosophy and modern European science as normative origins, then positioning other civilizations by their distance from that path. Technical experience, correlative thinking, religious cosmology, and symbolic systems are thereby readily relegated to a level distinct from that of "genuine theoretical knowledge." Goody's notion of the "theft of history" addresses precisely this epistemic mechanism through which Europe's historically particular experience is retold as the universal path of world history (Goody 2006). When Chinese thought is required to prove whether it "counts as philosophy," the criteria of judgment already embody historically specific assumptions about concepts, argumentation, and disciplinary boundaries (Defoort 2001).

Eremeev did not simply add Chinese discoveries to a European history of science. Together with Kobzev, he interpreted *xiangshu* as a mechanism that performed both worldview-forming and methodological functions within traditional Chinese knowledge, and sought to compare its role with that occupied by formal logic in the European intellectual tradition (Kobzev and Eremeev 2014). Numbers, cycles, positions, and correspondences organized domains that modern disciplines separate. The question therefore shifted from whether China produced modern science to how Chinese practices constituted objects and credible knowledge. Forms of rationality do not exist in advance of, or independently from, their social environments; divergent practices of debate, forms of political organization, and epistemic communities all contribute to determining what counts as credible knowledge (Lloyd 2004). *Xiangshu* thus broadened the materials recognized by global histories of philosophy and science.

The means of recognition nevertheless remained asymmetrical. Chinese knowledge gained theoretical status through concepts such as system, code, information, and model. Modern science continued to legitimate an anti-Eurocentric project even as Chinese materials expanded its boundaries. Jenco's criterion for cross-cultural learning sharpens this problem. Cross-cultural transformation in the fuller sense requires changes in the recipient's own concepts and criteria of judgment (Jenco 2015). Eremeev's translation was incomplete but consequential: scientific language reorganized *xiangshu*, while its relational and cross-domain logic pushed him beyond analytical separation and localized causality. Anti-Eurocentrism and scientific authority became interdependent rather than simply opposed.

Civilizational typology created a related tension. Eremeev often contrasted a processual, holistic, correlative China with a substantialist, analytical, mechanistic West. This displaced linear causality as the only rational form but risked fixing historical differences as civilizational essences. Early Chinese thought itself offered no single cosmology across texts and periods. Understandings of the relations between gods and humans, order and change, and unity and difference were themselves continually contested and reconstructed (Puett 2002). European Pythagoreanism, Stoicism, natural magic, Leibnizian philosophy, and systems theory likewise resist reduction to one mechanistic genealogy. Eremeev's own search for correspondences repeatedly crossed the boundaries his typology appeared to stabilize.

This contradiction belongs to the history of Russian thought. Russian accounts of "the East" helped position Russia in relation to Europe, Asia, and world civilization. Geography alone did not determine the idea that Russia stood between Europe and Asia. Rather, it constituted a historically produced spatial imaginary that was repeatedly redefined through imperial expansion and debates over national identity and modernization (Bassin 1991). Russian Orientalists sometimes challenged Western racial hierarchy and civilizational stasis, but this critique could support a Russian claim to privileged understanding. Yet the claim that Russia could understand the East better than Western Europe could itself develop into an imaginary of Russia's distinctive civilizational position and historical mission (Tolz 2011). China thus became a site for renegotiating Russian relations with European epistemic authority and universal history.

Eremeev's answer differed from Slavophilism and classical Eurasianism. He did not make Orthodoxy, the Russian nation, or a "third civilization" the source of truth. Russia instead functioned as an intellectual location from which Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Greek, Jewish esoteric, and European traditions could be translated and recombined. This article calls that strategy Russian universalism. Russian Cosmism, with its attempt to reconnect science, life, ethics, and cosmic order, offers a prominent example (Young 2012). Eremeev, however, drew on late Soviet systems science, Russian Sinology, and post-Soviet esoteric resources to contest who could define universal knowledge. This decentring also recentred: scientificity selected representative Chinese materials, and civilizational binaries organized their meaning. China opened Eurocentric boundaries while supplying material for a new universalism whose own acts of selection, abstraction, and classification require scrutiny.

Diffusion, the Axial Age, and the Limits of Universalism

Diffusionism converts arithmosemiotics from an interpretation of Chinese knowledge into a genealogy of early human knowledge. Eremeev argued that Western Zhou China possessed a coherent system linking numbers, hexagrams, directions, cycles, and cosmic order. After political rupture, parts of this system may have moved through the Quanrong and Central Asian steppe corridors, been transformed in Iranian religion, entered Greek Pythagoreanism, and found analogues in Indian Sāṃkhya. Numerical configurations, cosmic hierarchies, and psychological structures found in different civilizations were therefore treated not simply as analogous intellectual forms, but as divergent configurations produced through the transmission, fragmentation, and partial preservation of an earlier system of knowledge (Eremeev 2013, pp. 238–250, 533–545).

This account also reinterpreted the Axial Age. Jaspers treated the transformations of the eighth to second centuries BCE as broadly contemporaneous responses in several civilizations. Their commonality did not depend on the transmission of a mature doctrine from one civilizational centre to other regions; rather, it lay in the profound responses that different societies formulated to questions of existence, death, transcendence, and ethical responsibility (Jaspers 1953). Eremeev instead made simultaneity the later effect of earlier diffusion: Western Zhou structures formed a prototype subsequently preserved and reorganized in different traditions. As Boy and Torpey observe, the "Axial Age" has never been merely a chronological category; it is also a means of organizing world history and explaining both civilizational difference and the commonality of humankind (Boy and Torpey 2013). Eremeev relocated that commonality in diffusion and shared origins.

The argument joins four propositions that require different evidence. Similar sequences, diagrams, or hierarchies establish formal comparison. Similar understandings of binary relations, cycles, or totality support a typological judgment. The movement of people, artefacts, technologies, and ideas establishes historical contact. A causal claim of transmission requires evidence that a particular system moved from Western Zhou China to another region and produced identifiable effects there. Formal similarity can pose a comparative question; it cannot establish chronology, routes, mediators, textual traces, or recontextualization.

Eurasia was not composed of isolated civilizations. Archaeological research has long demonstrated that the steppe constituted a polycentric arena of interaction shaped by mobile pastoralist communities, metallurgical technologies, and regional exchange networks, through which people, materials, and technologies circulated continuously (Frachetti 2012). Northern China and steppe societies exchanged and recombined objects, technologies, and visual forms. Weapons, chariot and horse equipment, burial materials, and craft traditions all preserve identifiable evidence of transregional connections (Rawson 2017). Such networks make China–Central Asia–Iran contact historically plausible, but possible movement does not prove that an abstract numerical-cosmological system followed the same routes.

Specific mediating mechanisms therefore matter more than geographical possibility. Secord's concept of "knowledge in transit" emphasizes that knowledge does not retain a fixed form as it moves; rather, it is continually reshaped by textual forms, personal networks, sites of practice, media of transmission, and the purposes of its recipients (Secord 2004). Burkert's account of Near Eastern influence on Greece is persuasive because it combines structural comparison with identifiable carriers and practices. It also examines the migration of artisans and religious specialists, writing technologies, ritual practices, linguistic traces, and their chronological relationships (Burkert 1992). A diffusion hypothesis must show who carried knowledge, how it was preserved, where it was reinterpreted, and how it entered another epistemic community.

Eremeev's existing argument establishes comparison more securely than directional transmission. It does not yet specify which signs or cosmological structures moved, which groups controlled them, or how recipients reorganized them. Chronology adds another difficulty. The received *Yijing* contains textual and interpretive strata, and reorganizing them as a complete Western Zhou code is Eremeev's reconstruction rather than a direct account of contemporary divinatory and ritual understandings. Modern scholarship on the *Yijing* frequently emphasizes the different dates at which the canonical text, its commentaries, and later *xiangshu* interpretations were formed, thereby presenting a classical tradition whose epistemic functions were continually transformed through successive acts of interpretation (Shaughnessy 1993; Rutt 1996). At the same time, both the date of Zoroaster and the formation of the earliest Zoroastrian texts remain matters of complex scholarly debate (Malandra 2005). Temporal priority is necessary for influence but is not evidence of influence by itself.

Eremeev nevertheless needed diffusionism for the theoretical aims of his universalism. If similar structures arose independently, arithmosemiotics would remain a comparative language. A common source gives its forms civilizational-historical identity: "lost universal science" becomes knowledge that once existed and later fragmented. The explanatory risk is that systems language first defines what counts as a Western Zhou system, then formal correspondences perform the work of historical causation. Eisenstadt's research on Axial civilizations, by contrast, emphasizes a different historical picture: comparable intellectual breakthroughs interacted with distinct forms of social differentiation, political structures, and epistemic communities, thereby generating divergent civilizational trajectories (Eisenstadt 2012). Common forms cannot replace an account of multiple mechanisms of formation.

A critical assessment should therefore avoid a simple verdict that transmission did or did not occur. Ereemeev's achievement was to place China near the centre of early Eurasian knowledge formation, challenging the linear genealogy "Greece–Europe–modern science" and drawing attention to long-distance contact. That decentring raises a higher evidentiary burden. Unless structural similarity, typological affinity, contact, and directional transmission are distinguished, a Chinese single-origin narrative may replace a European one without changing the structure of intellectual history. Ancient Chinese knowledge does not need to displace Greece to enter global intellectual history. A genuinely plural account should explain how exchange, independent development, selective reception, and recontextualization produced interwoven but irreducible histories of reason, science, and world order.

Conclusion: A Critical Reassessment of Ereemeev's Intellectual Project

Ereemeev's work is best understood neither by classifying arithmosemiotics as science, philosophy, or esotericism nor by issuing a final verdict on his diffusion hypotheses. It was an epistemic reconstruction formed from late Soviet scientificity, Russian Sinological structural analysis, and post-Soviet access to esoteric resources. The project used Chinese thought to reconsider the unity of knowledge and the meaning of universality across disciplinary and civilizational boundaries.

Its defining feature is the simultaneity of recovery and construction. Ereemeev identified real combinatorial, positional, and correlative relations in the *Yijing* and used them to challenge the exclusion of Chinese thought as mystical or prelogical. Translating those relations into codes, models, and information structures also allowed modern scientific language to determine which ancient materials could appear rational. *Xiangshu* gained theoretical visibility by becoming a more unified object than its historically diverse exegetical, divinatory, and technical practices.

The same duality structures his "universal science." The *Yijing* ceased to be judged solely by modern standards and became a resource for questioning disciplinary fragmentation. Yet the effort to connect medicine, music, the psyche, society, and civilizations through one structure pushed historical contexts into the background. Formal similarity supports comparison; it does not establish ontological unity or common historical origin. Diffusionism makes this limit especially visible because the inference from similarity to common origin requires a continuous chain of textual, linguistic, material, and institutional evidence.

For this reason, Ereemeev belongs to the history of Russian thought as well as Russian Sinology. His project's "Russianness" lies not in affirming a national spirit or Orthodox mission but in the intellectual position from which European science, Soviet epistemic culture, and Asian traditions were translated and recombined. Russia was not a new civilizational centre; it was the location from which China could mediate a reconsideration of Russia's relations with Europe, Asia, and the global order of knowledge.

The case broadens the category of Russian thought beyond direct answers to “what Russia is.” It includes Russian participation in debates over who may define universal knowledge and which civilizations enter global intellectual history. It also shows that multiplying knowledge centres does not necessarily transform the structure of knowledge: anti-Eurocentrism may open new space while producing another centred narrative. Eremeev’s enduring legacy is therefore not a universal science awaiting verification but a Russian intellectual experiment in the possibility of universal knowledge. Its value lies in making universality itself a historical and comparative problem that remains open to debate.

Declarations

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Author Contribution

Peiyong Lv was responsible for the conceptualization and methodological design of the study, the collection and analysis of primary and secondary sources, and the preparation and revision of the original manuscript. Yuan Tao contributed to the development of the conceptual and methodological framework, supervised the research, and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript.

Data availability

Not applicable.

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