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Space Mail from Chinese Shenzhou 5 First Manned Spacecraft

By Lin Da An

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The Shenzhou 5 first manned spacecraft launched by an LM-2F rocket at Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre at 9:00 am on 15 October 2003 with China's first taikonaut Yang Liwei onboard and safely landed at 6:28 am on 16 October 2003 at A-Mu-Gu-Lang grassland, Si-zi-wang-qi, Inner Mongolia ("A-Mu-Gu-Lang" means "peace" in Mongolian), only 4.8 km from the planned landing target. Yang Liwei was able to exit the cabin independently.

The Shenzhou 5 has a total length of 8.86 m and a total weight of 7840 kg. The spacecraft orbit ranged from 210-343 km, with an inclination angle of 43°, and an orbit period of 92 minutes.

The Shenzhou 5 spacecraft and Shenzhou 4 are basically similar, the main difference being that Shenzhou 5 head is a cylinder, while Shenzhou 4 head is a half sphere. In addition, Shenzhou 5 also has a port for future docking with the space station.

The successful launch and landing of Shenzhou 5 marked a historic breakthrough in China's manned space programme. China has become the third country in the world to carry out manned space activities independently after the USSR/Russia and the USA.

The following pages present some of the space mail loaded on the Shenzhou 5 first manned spacecraft. Each flown space item is accompanied by a notary certificate (Figure 1) from the Beijing Notary Public Office, and on each flown space item, there is a dry seal of the Notary Office.

China Institute of Space Medico Engineering (CISME) prepared the official flown envelope (Figure 2).

Only one copy of this cover flew. Inside the cover was a mini-flag of PR of China and the United Nations. It was specially prepared in accordance with the requirements of the space operation plan for China's first manned space mission. At 18:40 Beijing time on 15 October 2003, when Shenzhou 5 arrived over the Indian Ocean on its 7th orbit around the earth, Yang Liwei removed the two flags from the envelope to display in public and offer his best wishes to the whole world (Figure 3). Live telecast pictures were broadcast through the Yuanwang 4 maritime tracking ship.

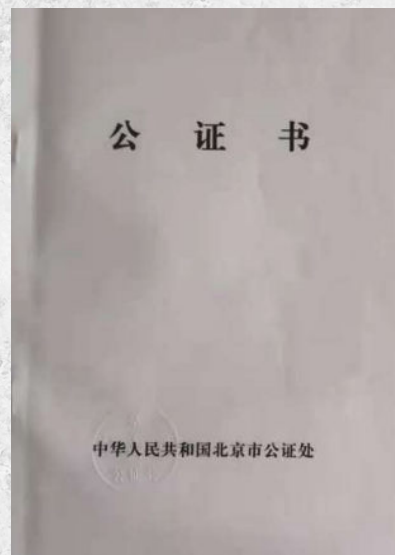


Figure 1 - Notary certificate from the Beijing Notary Public Office.



Figure 3 - Yang Liwei shows the flags of China and the United Nations during his flight.



Figure 2 - CISME official flown cover of Shenzhou 5 (size 29.5×19 cm).

The envelope had been cancelled on the upper left corner with the blue cachet “Spaceflight Special Flown Envelope - This Envelope Carried a Mini-flag of PR China and of United Nation, Accompanied the China First Manned Spacecraft of Shenzhou 5 in Space” and the red cachet “Commemorating China Shenzhou 5 manned spacecraft flight in orbit, 2003.10.15-16”. A postmark was added with the date of the opening of the cabin of the recovery capsule “Beijing 2003.10.18.20 Space City 1”, with the seal of Beijing Notary Public Office. In the middle of the envelope is printed in black letters “Show Use Flag”.

Below, on the right, a blue 4-line rubber stamp summarizes details on the spacecraft, mission, launch site and landing site. On the left Taikonaut Yang Liwei added his greeting words “Use Space Peacefully to Benefit All Human Beings”. He signed the cover and provided details on the date of launching at “2003 10 15” and landing at “2003 10 16”. In addition to this special official flown envelope, on 6 September 2003 AM 10, Space Mail was loaded into the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft.



Figure 4 - Postbag parcel #1 (front).



Figure 5 - Postbag parcel #1 (back).

The Postbag Parcels

The No. 001 out of the 7 flown parcel postbags (size: 31 × 23.6 cm) was made by CMSE but presented to the application for notarization in the name of CISME. Approx 200 flown covers can be contained in each bag. The front side of the parcel bag (Figure 4) was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10 (6 September 2003, 10am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft” and the chop of “China first manned spaceflight, 2003. 9. 6. Space mail letter (exclusively use) - China Jiuquan”, signed by the postmaster of “Xie Jingshun” and the deputy postmaster of “Wang Zhicheng” at the right-upper corner, and closed with a half steel seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office (Figure 7) on the left-middle side of the bag and cancelled with a “No. 01007” blue security chop. This blue chop was signed by two notaries of “Xiong Ling” and “Jin Dongxia” on the date “2003 9 6”.



Figure 6.

The reverse side of the bag bears a special mark “China first manned spaceflight, Space mail letter (exclusively use) China Jiuquan CMSE 2003. 09.06”. and was signed by 3 Taikonauts of Yang Liwei, Zhai Zhigang and Nie Haishen (Figure 5).



Figure 7 - The “flown seal” of the Beijing Public Notary Office of PR China taped on parcel postbag of Shenzhou 5 spacecraft.

After putting the flown covers in the parcel postbag and obtaining the postmark at the military post office at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, two notaries signed the “security” chop, and the parcel bag was loaded into the cabin of spacecraft (Figure 6).



Figure 8 - Postbag parcel #5 (front).



Figure 9 - Postbag parcel #5 (back).

The No. 005 of the 7 flown parcel postbags (Figure 8, size: 31×23.6 cm) with a specially printed mark on the reverse side was made by CISME. The front side of the parcel bag was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10 (6 September 2003, 10am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft” and the chop “China first manned spaceflight, 2003. 9. 6. Space mail letter (exclusively use) - China Jiuquan”, signed by the postmaster of “Xie Jingshun” and the deputy postmaster of “Wang Zhicheng” at the right-upper corner, and closed with a half seal of Beijing Public Notary Office on the left-middle side of the bag and cancelled with a “No. 01007” blue security chop. This blue chop was signed by two notaries of “Xiong Ling” and “Jin Dongxia” on “2003 9 6”.

The reverse side of the bag bears the special mark “China first manned spaceflight, Space mail letter (exclusively use) China Jiuquan 2003. 09.06” and Chinese calligraphy “China Institute of Space Medico Engineering The 3 Taikonauts Yang Liwei, Zhai Zhigang and Nie Haishen signed the parcel bag (Figure 9).

Postcards

BITTT prepared and embarked on the cabin 4 postcard made by using a set of colour trial proofs of a Yemen stamp issued in 1969 to commemorate China’s first manned spaceflight mission of the world, the legendary first rocket flight pioneer Wan Hu, and the 503rd anniversary of his flight. (Figure 10)

Only 4 flown postcards exist (numbered from 000 to 003).



Figure 10 - BTTT postcard with color trial proofs of Yemen stamps.



Figure 11 - Recovery postmark.

The front side of the postcard was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10 (6 September 2003, 10am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft” and the chop “China first manned spaceflight, 2003. 9. 6 (6 September 2003) space mail letter (exclusively use) - China Jiuquan”, also closed with the seal of Beijing Public Notary Office on the right side of stamp proof.

The reverse side of the postcard was tied with the recovery postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1” (Figure 11).

The Flown Covers

BITTT prepared and loaded into the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft also 10 launch covers (numbered from 001 to 010) (Figure 12) signed by 7 of China’s first 14 taikonauts: Jing Haipeng, Zhai Zhigang, Zhang Xiaoguang, Li Qinglong, Deng Qingming, Zhao Chuandong, Chen Quan. The covers were cancelled with the “flown-proof” postmark “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10 (6 September 2003 10am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft”. There is no postmark on the reverse side of the 10 covers.



Figure 12 - BTTT flown launch cover.

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These 10 landing covers (numbered from 0001 to 0010) (Figure 13) were signed by the other 7 China's first 14 taikonauts: Yang Liwei, Nie Haishen, Liu Boming, Fei Junlong, Liu Wang, Wu Jie, Pan Zhanchun. The covers were postmarked with the "flown-proof" cancel "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10 (6 September 2003 10am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft". There is no postmark on the reverse side of the 10 covers.



Figure 13 - BITTT flown landing cover.



Figure 14 - BITTT flown unsigned cover.

BITTT also loaded on Shenzhou 5 spacecraft 58 covers (numbered from 001 to 058) (Figure 14) that were tied with the "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and the chop of "China first manned spaceflight, 2003. 9. 6 (6 September 2003) space mail letter (exclusively use) - China Jiuquan". On the reverse side of the cover was put the postmark with the date of the opening of the capsule's cabin: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1".

The flown covers were signed by the 14 taikonauts of China's first batch. 201 similar flown covers existed (numbered from 00001 to 00200 and 02003. The number "02003" is to record the spaceflight of Shenzhou 5 in 2003).

The covers are signed by Yang Liwei, Nie Haishen, Jing Haipeng, Liu Boming, Zhai Zhigang, Fei Junlong, Liu Wang, Zhang Xiaoguang, Wu Jie, Li Qinglong, Deng Qingming, Zhao Chuandong, Pan Zhanchun, Chen Quan.

They bear the "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and are impressed with the seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office.

On the reverse side of the cover was put the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1" (Figure 15).



Figure 15 - CISME flown cover signed by 14 Taikonauts.



Below: Figure 16 - CISME flown cover signed by Yang Liwei.

A total of 200 CISME flown covers (numbered from 00201 to 00400) are signed by China's first taikonaut Yang Liwei (Figure 16). They are tied with the usual "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and closed with the seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office. On the reverse side of the cover is the postmark of the capsule cabin's opening date: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1".



Figure 17 - CISME flown cover signed by Nie Haishen, Zhai Zhigang.

200 CISME flown covers (numbered from 00401 to 00600) are signed by China's first taikonaut Yang Liwei and backup taikonaut Nie Haishen, Zhai Zhigang (Figure 17). They are postmarked with the usual "flown-proof" cancel "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and sealed with the steel seal of "Beijing Public Notary Office". The reverse side of the cover bears the cancel with the date of the opening of the capsule cabin: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1".



Figure 18 - CAST flown cover signed by Yang Liwei.

A total of 567 covers were loaded by CAST on the Shenzhou 5 cabin. They are numbered from 05010001 to 05010567. Only 106 covers (numbered from 05010001 to 05010106) are signed by China's first taikonaut Yang Liwei (Figure 18).

The covers are tied with the "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and closed with the seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office. The reverse side of the cover bears the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1".

80 CAST flown covers, numbered from 05010107 to 05010186, bear the signature of the backup taikonaut of Shenzhou 5: Zhai Zhigang, but some covers are without any stamp, cancellation, or postmark. They are however still sealed with the dry steel seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office (Figure 19).



Figure 19 - CAST flown cover signed by Zhai Zhigang.



Figure 20 - CAST flown cover signed by Nie Haishen.

A total of 80 flown covers numbered from 05010187 to 05010266 (Figure 20) bear the signature of the backup taikonaut of Shenzhou 5: Nie Haishen. The covers are tied with the "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and bear the impressed seal of Beijing Public Notary Office. The reverse side of the cover bears the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1".

Finally, a total of 301 flown covers (numbered from 05010267 to 05010567) were not signed by any of the taikonauts. They were tied with the "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and closed with the seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office. On the reverse side of the cover was added the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1"

A total of 2000 flown covers (numbered from 00001 to 02000) were issued by the China Manned Space Engineering Office (CMSEO) (Figure 21).

On the covers, a "space mail" label was applied together with a genuine guarantee label. The covers are tied with the "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft" and the chop of "China first manned spaceflight, 2003. 9. 6 (6 September 2003) space mail letter (exclusively use) - China Jiuquan".

The reverse side of the cover has the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1".



Figure 21 - Silk CMSEO flown cover.



Figure 22 - DAWN flown cover.

A total of 200 flown covers issued by Beijing DAWN Aerospace Bio-tech Co. LTD exist (numbered from 0000001 to 0000200) (Figure 22). They are tied with the “flown-proof” postmark “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 9. 6. 10, loaded in the cabin of spacecraft” and are cancelled with the capsule recovery opening cabin date red postmark “Beijing 2003. 10. 18 (18 October 2003), recovery of space mail letter (exclusively use)” issued by Beijing Space City post office. They also bear the seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office. The reverse side of the cover bears the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 Space City 1”.

100 sheets of the stamps of the successful flight of China’s first manned Shenzhou 5 spacecraft (numbered from 0001 to 0100) were flown and notarized at BITTT’s request (Figure 23). On the front of the stamp sheet in the middle left, was added a label with a numbered identification mark (from 0001 to 0100). An additional identification mark (from 0001 to 0100) is used on the sheet stamps. It is divided into two parts. One part is applied on the back of the sheet stamp (Figure 24), and the other part is kept in the notary office.

Figure 24 - Identification mark.



Figure 23 - Flown Shenzhou 5 stamp sheet.



Additional space mail was loaded into the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft on 6 Oct. 2003 (one month later).



Figure 25 - Flown CMSEO FDC cover.

A total of 300 FDCs (numbered from 001 to 300) were loaded on Oct. 6 of 2003 (30 days later than the scheduled loading date on September 6, 2003) franked with the new stamp still to be issued. The cover was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 10. 6. 9 (6 October 2003, 9am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft” and the chop “in commemoration of China first manned spaceflight, 2003. 10. - China Jiuquan” issued by the China Manned Space Engineering Office (CMSEO), also sealed with the steel seal of “Beijing Public Notary Office”. The reverse side of the cover bears the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 10 (18 October 2003, 10am) Space City 1” (Figure 25). This time, AM 10, is also different from the other flown’



Figure 26 - Flown CMSEO FDC cover signed by 3 Taikonauts.



Figure 27 - Flown CMSEO FDC cover signed by Yang Liwei.

Only 11 covers out of the 300 CMSEO FDC were signed by 3 Taikonauts: Yang Liwei, Zhai Zhigang and Nie Haisheng (Figure 26) and 11 were signed by Yang Liwei alone (Figure 27).

12 launch flown covers (numbered from 10001 to 10012) were issued by CMSEO (Figure 28). They are signed by 7 of China's first 14 taikonauts: Liu Boming, Fei Junlong, Liu Wang, Wu Jie, Pan Zhanchun, Zhao Chuandong, and Chen Quan. They are cancelled with the "flown-proof" postmark "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 10. 6. 10 (6 October 2003, 10am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft".



Above: Figure 28 - Flown CMSEO launch cover.

The reverse side of the cover has the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: "Beijing 18 Oct. 2003, 20:00 Space City 2" (Figure 29).

Right: Figure 28 - Postmark on the reverse side.



Figure 30 - Flown CMSEO landing cover.

12 landing covers issued by CMSEO (numbered from 20001 to 20012) were loaded in the cabin (Figure 30). They were signed by the remaining 7 of China's first 14 taikonauts Yang Liwei, Nie Haishen, Jing Haipeng, Zhai Zhigang, Zhang Xiaoguang, Li Qinglong, Deng Qingming. The covers were tied with the "flown-proof" postmark of "China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2003. 10. 6. 10 (6 October 2003, 10am), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft". The reverse side of the cover bears the postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: "Beijing 2003. 10. 18. 20 (18 October 2003, 20pm) Space City 2".

Non-flown covers

Because of the weight limits some covers could not be loaded into the cabin of the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft. In such covers neither the front side of the item is sealed with the seal of the Beijing Public Notary Office nor the reverse side of the cover is tied with the postmark of the capsule opening cabin.

Some examples of non-flown covers are shown below.



Our member from India, Satish Sondhi has sent two covers from the National Philatelic Exhibition AMRITPEX 2023 held from 11th-15th February 2023, in New Delhi, India. India Posts issued number of special covers. Two covers (below) depicts the achievements and contributions of India's Women Power in the field of science and technology, and some of the remarkable milestones that India achieved during its 75 years of independence.

