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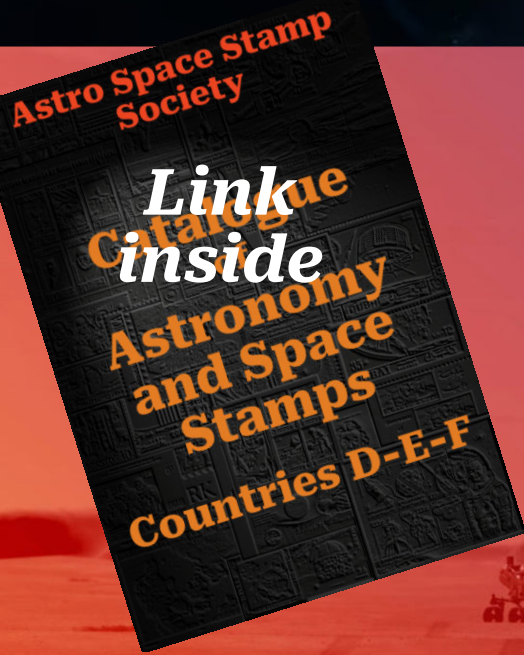
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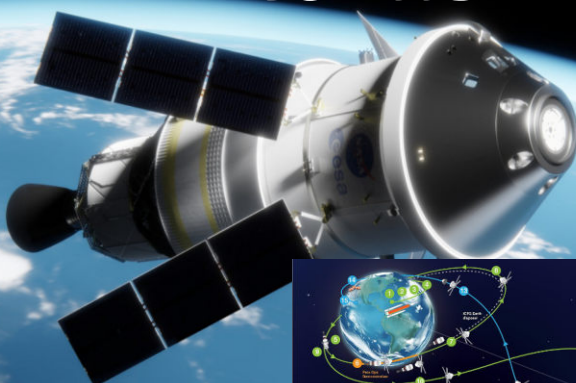
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Space Mail from Chinese Shenzhou 7 Manned Spacecraft

by Lin Da An

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Shenzhou 7 is the seventh spacecraft launched in China's manned space program and third Chinese manned space flight mission. It started the second phase of China's "three-step" space exploration strategy, with Space laboratory and extravehicular activities

The Shenzhou 7 manned spacecraft was launched on top of the LM-2F rocket lifted-off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre on 25 September 2008 at 9:10 p.m. Onboard were the three taikonauts Zhai Zhigang, Liu Boming and Jing Haipeng, who safely landed on 28 September 2008 at 5:37 p.m. near Si-zi-wang-qi in Inner Mongolia.

Shenzhou 7 spacecraft consists of four parts, namely airlock capsule, orbital capsule, re-entry capsule and propellant capsule. The Shenzhou 7 has a total length of 9.19 m and a total weight of 12000 kg. The LM-2F carrier rocket and the escape tower together reached a total height of 58.3 m.

On 27 September, Zhai Zhigang, wearing a Chinese-developed Feitian space suit, conducted a 22-minute space walk, the first ever for a Chinese astronaut. At 4:35 PM Zhai Zhigang, opened the hatch of the spacecraft and first extended his head – assisted by Liu Boming in the airlock – and waved to the default closed circuit camera outside the cabin with the Chinese small five-star red flag. Zhai Zhigang then retrieved the solid lubricant experiment samples exposed outside the cabin. After successfully completing the extra-vehicular activities, Zhai Zhigang at 4:58 p.m. returned to the orbital module. The hatch was closed at 5:01 p.m.

Then the spacecraft released a cube satellite, which took pictures of the spacecraft.

Below, I introduce some examples (not exhaustive) of the space mail flown with the Shenzhou 7 manned spacecraft.

Each flown space item is accompanied by a notary certificate (Fig. 1) from the Beijing Notary Public Office. What's more, on each flown space item, there is a steel seal or cachet of the Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office (the original Beijing Notary Public Office).

公 证 书

中华人民共和国北京市方圆公证处

Fig. 1: Each mail flown on the Shenzhou 7 is accompanied by a notary certificate released from the Beijing Notary Public Office.

Two embroidered silk covers (see note) were embarked on the cabin of the Shenzhou 7 spacecraft for CMSEO (China Manned Space Engineering Office), The 2 flown covers (Fig. 2) were numbered No. 00 and No. 01. They were made by the Chinese embroidery master Mrs Zhang Yuqin who hands down the ancient Chinese embroidery art of the West Han dynasty.



Fig. 2: CSME Xiang embroidery flown covers made by master Zhang Yuqin.

(Note: This kind of silk is called “Xiang embroidery”, after the name of “Xiang”, Hunan Province).

The front side of the cover was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark of “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2008. 09. 22. 08. (22 Sep. 2008 8:00 a.m.), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft”. Also put the recovery postmark with the date of the capsule opening cabin: “Beijing 2008. 1. 10” (1st Oct. 2008, 10:00 a.m.) Space City 1”. The 2 flown covers were signed by the three Shenzhou 7 taikonauts Zhai Zhigang, Liu Boming and Jing Haipeng. The reverse side of the cover was cancelled with a red cachet of “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office” (Fig. 3 & 4).



Fig. 3: On the left is the reverse side of the embroidery, and on the right is the original design of the cover.

Fig. 4: Reverse side of the cover

10 similar “Xiang embroidered covers” were additionally prepared for CMSEO (China Manned Space Engineering Office). They were made by different embroidery technicians who inherited the embroidery art of China’s ancient West Han dynasty. The covers are numbered from No. 01 to No. 10 (see Fig. 5)

The front side of the cover was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark of “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2008. 09. 22. 08. (22 Sep. 2008 8:00 a.m.), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft”, and a recovery postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2008. 10. 1. 10 (1 Oct. 2008 10:00 a.m.) Space City 1”. The 10 flown covers were signed by the three Shenzhou 7 taikonauts Zhai Zhigang, Liu Boming and Jing Haipeng.



Fig. 5: On the left: one of the 10 CMSE embroidered covers made by different embroidery technicians, On the right; Original design.

The reverse side of the covers was cancelled with a red cachet of the “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office” (Fig. 6).

Three such covers (No.06 to 08) were carried on the International Space Station by the Soyuz TMA-14, and postmarked on the reverse side aboard the ISS on 28 March 2009, on the day of docking of Soyuz TMA-14 with ISS (Fig. 7). After 198 days, they returned to Earth on 11 October 2009.



Fig. 6: Reverse side with the red cachet of “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office”. On the right: details of the embroidery.

The ISS onboard seal was applied on the front of the covers and they were signed by the resident crew: Gennady Padalka (Russia), Roman Romanenko (Russia), Michael Barratt (USA), Frank De Winne (Germany), Robert Thirsk (Canada) and Koichi Wakata (若田光一-Japan). (Fig.7).



Fig. 7: Three CMSE covers were carried to the ISS. On the right: the reverse side of the cover postmarked onboard the ISS.

CMSEO were also embarked on Shenzhou 7, and flew in the cabin, 2177 “Su” silk covers (This kind of silk embroidery is called “Su embroidery”, where “Su” is short for Jiang-Su Province) cover (Fig. 8) .

The front side of the cover was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark of “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2008. 09. 22. 08. (22 Sep. 2008 8:00 a.m.), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft”, and an octagonal rubber stamp with launch day: “China 2008. 09. 25. 21 Shenzhou 7 spacecraft”, also sealed with the steel seal of “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office”. A “space mail” label was added to this cover.

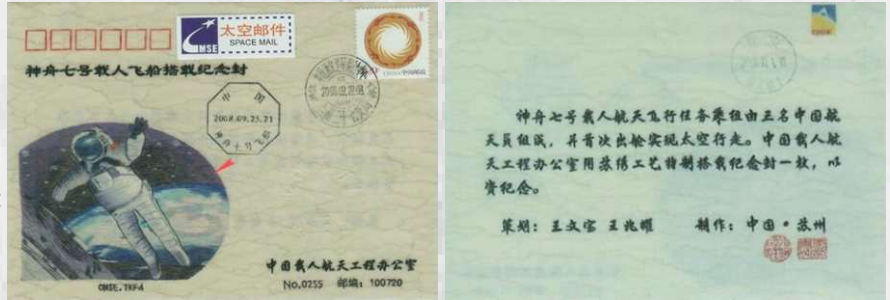


Fig. 8: CMSE “Su” silk covers.

On the reverse side of the cover was put the recovery postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2008. 10. 1. 10 (1 Oct. 2008 10:00 a.m.) Space City 1” (Fig. 8).

27 flown covers exist (numbered from No. 0001 to 0027) prepared by CMSEO (Fig. 9). The cover was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark of “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2008. 09. 22. 08. (22 Sep. 2008 8:00 a.m.), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft”, and an octagonal rubber stamp with the launch day: “China 2008. 09. 25. 21 Shenzhou 7 spacecraft”. Also, a rocket rubber stamp was added: “To commemorate the launch of Shenzhou 7 manned space flight mission 2008.9 China Jiuquan”. Each cover was stamped with the dry seal of “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office”.



Fig. 9: CMSE cover.

On the reverse side of the cover was tied with the recovery postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2008. 10. 1. 10 (1 Oct. 2008 10:00 a.m.) Space City 1”.

China Beijing Aerospace City (CBAC) issued 74 flown covers numbered from No. 0001 to 0074 (Fig. 10). The covers were tied with the “flown-proof” postmark of “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2008. 09. 22. 08. (22 Sep. 2008 8:00 a.m.), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft”, and an octagonal at launch day cachet: “CBAC 2008. 09. 25. 21 Shenzhou 7 spacecraft”.



Fig. 10: Busta CBAC cover.

The cover were also stamped with the steel seal of “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office”. A “space mail” label was applied to each cover.

Each cover was signed by Zhai Zhigang. On the reverse side of the cover was put the recovery postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2008. 10. 1. 10 (1 Oct. 2008 10:00 a.m.) Space City 1”.

Two such covers (No.0037 and 0048) were then carried to the ISS by the Soyuz TMA-14, and postmarked on 28 March 2009, on the day of the docking of Soyuz TMA-14 with ISS. After 198 days on board the ISS they returned back to Earth on 11 October 2009. The covers are signed by Gennady Padalka (Russia), Roman Romanenko (Russia), Michael Barratt (USA), Frank De Winne (Germany), Robert Thirsk (Canada) and Koichi Wakata (若田光一 - Japan).

The Heilongjiang Aerospace Philately Association succeeded in loading on the Shenzhou 7 a total of 13 covers (Fig. 11) numbered from No. 001 to 013. The covers were postmarked with the “flown-proof” postmark of “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2008. 09. 22.

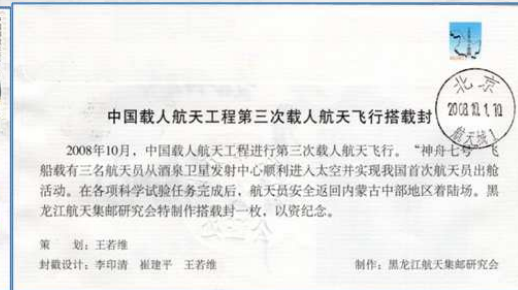


Fig.11: HAPA cover.

08. (22 Sep. 2008 8:00 a.m.), loaded in the cabin of spacecraft”, and the red octagonal non-postal rubber stamp from the Heilongjiang Aerospace Philatelic Association: “To commemorate the flight of Shenzhou 7 HLJHT”. Also impressed with the steel seal of “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office”. A “space mail” label was applied on these covers that were then signed by the three Shenzhou 7 taikonauts Zhai Zhigang, Liu Boming and Jing Haipeng.

On the reverse side of the cover was put the recovery postmark of the capsule opening cabin date: “Beijing 2008. 10. 1. 10 (1 Oct. 2008 10:00 a.m.) Space City 1”.

The China Space Philately Association (CSPA). Issued and loaded on the Shenzhou 7 spacecraft a total of 138 covers (Fig. 12), numbered from No. 0001 to 0138. The cover was tied with the “flown-proof” postmark of “China Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre, M.P.O., Lanzhou 27th Branch post office, 2008. 09. 22. 08. (22 Sep. 2008 8:00 a.m.), loaded in the cabin of the spacecraft”, and a rubber cachet: “Space Mail used exclusively 2008. 09. 22”. Another cachet: “To commemorate the first successful extravehicular walk by Chinese taikonaut”. Also sealed with the steel seal of “Beijing Fang-yuan Notary Public Office”. A space mail label is applied.



Fig. 12: CSPA cover.

On the reverse side, the cover was tied with the recovery postmark with the date of the day in which the capsule was opened: “Beijing 2008. 10. 1. 10 (1 Oct. 2008 10:00 a.m.) Space City 1”.

A total of 20 covers (Fig. 13) issued by BITTT (Beijing Institute of Tracking and Telecommunications Technology) were successfully embarked and flown on the Shenzhou 7 spacecraft. Also, this cover was made of silk. It was cancelled on the day of loading at the Lanzhou 27 Military Post Office with the usual “flown-proof” postmark “22 Sep 2008” and embossed with the Official Beijing Notary dry seal.



Fig. 13: BITTT silk cover.

On the back side of the cover was put the cancel of the date of the cabin opening.

More covers and items flew onboard the Shenzhou 7 spacecraft, often in very limited quantities.

The one presented is mainly a selection of covers I have in my collection and reflects the information I know.

Non-flown covers

Because of weight limits and other reasons some covers prepared for embarking could not be loaded in the cabin of the Shenzhou 7 spacecraft.

In such covers neither the front side of the item is embossed with the seal (or the red cachet) of the Beijing Fang-yuan Public Notary Office, nor the reverse side of the cover is tied with the postmark with the capsule opening cabin date.



On the left: cover issued by the Heilongjiang Aerospace Philatelic Research Association; on the right: silk cover issued by the Beijing Institute of Tracking and Telecommunications Technology.