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Ekaterina Zavidovskaia,
Polina Rud

Popular Religion in Early Republican China Based on Vasilii Alekseev's Materials from to the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography RAS (fund No. 2054)¹

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Abstract: One of the founding fathers of Russian sinology Vasilii Mikhailovich Alekseev (1881–1951) had acquired an impressive collection during his ethnographic expedition to the southern regions of China (May 4 — August 19, 1912), which was organized by the Russian Committee for Middle and East Asia Exploration and initiated by the Committee's head, founder academician Vasilii Vasilievich Radlov (1837–1918). Alekseev's expedition started from Vladivostok and passed through Harbin, Shanghai, Ningbo, Putuoshan, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Shantou, Guangzhou and ended up in Hong Kong. Alekseev has collected about 1083 artifacts making up “a collection exclusively on popular Buddhist and Daoist religion, items of household usage, daily life and cult, as well as revolutionary leaflets and posters of 1912”,² now this collection is kept at the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences (MAE, RAS) with registration No. 2054. During his earlier studies in China in 1906–1909 Alekseev acquired large collections of ethnographic materials and folk art (mainly popular woodblock prints *nianhua* 年畫) from the northern regions of China, which had later for the most part entered collections of the State Hermitage and the State Museum of the History of Religion (GMIR) in St. Petersburg. For his expedition of 1912 Alekseev had lined out a plan based on his observations of northern religious practices, e.g. he was particularly interested in the worship of City God *chenghuang*, child giving goddesses *niangniang* and God of Wealth *caishen*, but he quickly realized how different was the southern religious terrain and focused on local specifics.

© Ekaterina A. Zavidovskaia, PhD (Philology), assistant professor, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan (katushaza@yahoo.com)

© Polina V. Rud, Research Fellow, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (prud@kunstkamera.ru)

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² ALEKSEEV 2012: 497.

This paper discusses a large portion of printed ritual texts used for religious purposes in Fujian and Guangdong provinces and dated by the early 20th c. Our survey of several dozens of printed materials from fund No. 2054 reveals prevalence of documents used by ritual specialists — Daoists for funerary rituals and ancestor worship, funeral various types of talismans occupy a central place. Apparently, the form and content of these texts have been preserved in the local religious practice up to present days.

Key words: Vasilii M. Alekseev (1881–1951), MAE, RAS, Daoist ritual documents, talisman, salvation ritual, image

Introduction

Parts of Alekseev’s travel diary, which he carefully kept during his expedition in 1912, have been added to the new edition of Alekseev’s travelogue *V Starom Kitae* (In Old China, 2012, first edition 1958) by the volume’s editor Boris L. Riftin.³ T. Vinogradova’s research on Alekseev’s diaries catalogued in his “sinological file cabinet” revealed that there were diaries from Ningbo and Canton (Guangzhou), which whereabouts are not known for certain. One of the suggestions is that they may have been handed over to the St. Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences by Alekseev’s family members.⁴ Hand notes made by the future academician during his visit to the island of Putuoshan 普陀山 (June 6–22, 1912) are kept at the State Museum of the History of Religion (GMIR). Upon his return back to Russia in 1912 Vasilii Alekseev delivered a report to the Russian Committee for Middle and East Asia Exploration about his mission. An typewritten archival inventory enumerates all acquired artifacts and becomes a very helpful source for the attribution of the ethnographic objects and various printed materials from this fund.⁵ Yet, some terms used in the inventory for describing

³ ALEKSEEV 2012: 444–501.

⁴ VINOGRADOVA 2017: 240.

⁵ This inventory allowed to track some objects which have been borrowed from MAE, RAS to be exhibited at the Antireligious exhibitions in 1930 and 1932 in Leningrad and later remained at the State Museum of the History of Religion, including a miniature statue of the child-giving goddess *Jinhua niangniang* 金花娘娘 (No. Л-4621/1-3-VII ГМИР-КП-20961/1–3) and ancestor name tablet (Б-1839-VII ГМИР-КП-19226). From personal communication with the research fellow of the GMIR Maria Kormanovskaia (April, 2020). The State Hermitage Museum on-line catalogue of woodblock prints contains around ten pieces collected by Alekseev in southern China, among them sheets No. ЛТ-6283, ЛТ-6289, ЛТ-6290 have detailed pencil notes of the collector, which are not intelligible from the screen, being

various documents appear lacking accuracy, one of the goals of this study has been to clarify of these terms and purpose of the documents. In early 2020, technical staff of MAE, RAS has completed photographing and scanning of the large scope of the No. 2054 fund's objects, some of the artifacts previously unseen by anyone from outside of the Museum are analyzed in this paper, which continues the authors previous research on the Alekseev's fund No. 2054 from MAE, RAS.⁶

Part of Alekseev's travel diary published in 2012 mentions that acquired objects allowed "studying religion in its intimacy, instead of randomly relying on book translations or some extracts",⁷ which was seen by the collector as one of the most positive results of the expedition. Total amount of the objects of religious nature reached 686 pieces out of 1083. In his report Alekseev expressed intention to write a paper on "spells from Fuzhou", but did not realize his plan. Alekseev's travel notes at our disposal barely mention when and how he purchased various kinds of ritual objects. This our knowledge of their place of origin, purpose and context may only derive from consulting similar well-studied ritual documents produced in abundance by the southern popular Daoism. Written texts played important part in the liturgy of the Zhengyi 正一 Taoist school prevailing in the southeastern China. Detailed and reliable study of the sequence and meaning of Taoist ritual practice is possible if ritual manuals *keyiben* 科儀本 kept by the masters and field observations are both available. In our case we only have "disposable materials" like empty forms which were probably sold at temple shops and purchased by customers before the ritual. Below we take closer look at a series of textual memorials and talismans.

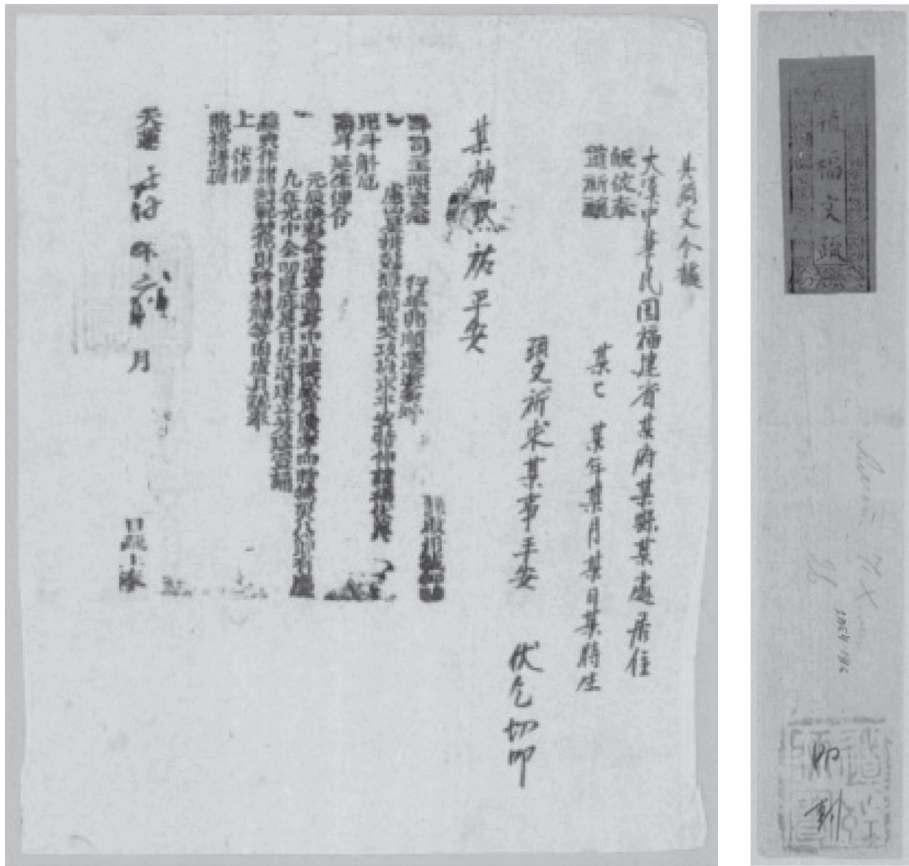
No. 2054-191/1, 2 (Pl. 1)

Museum attributes this piece as "envelope with a prayer for happiness", envelope has rectangular piece of red paper with words "Memorial bringing good fortune" *zhifu shuwen* 植福疏文 (No. 2054-191/2) glued on top, inside

"official documents" issued to expel evil spirit which has brought fire and other misfortunes upon a house, sheets No. JIT-6284, JIT-6288 from Guangdong prefecture are addresses to local child-giving deity Flower King *huawang* 花王 with images and text, these prints can be viewed by inputting object number (e.g. JIT-6289) into a search window in <http://collections.hermitage.ru/>.

⁶ ZAVIDOVSKAIA & RUD 2020.

⁷ ALEKSEEV 2012: 497.



pl. 1

is a standard prayer text requiring filling in personal data. Information about location is the following: “Great Han Republic of China, Fujian province...” 大漢中華民國福建省 (there is word “Amoy” *Xiamen* 廈門 written in Russian with pencil on the envelope⁸), administrative units prefecture *fu* 府, county *xian* 縣, address, particular date, are to be written in. To the very left there is a date: 6th of year *renzi* 壬子 (1912). Document says: “memorial *shuwen* to pray for peace/luck concerning a certain matter (to be written in), pray to some deity to protect peace and make a bow”. Right part of the document is hand

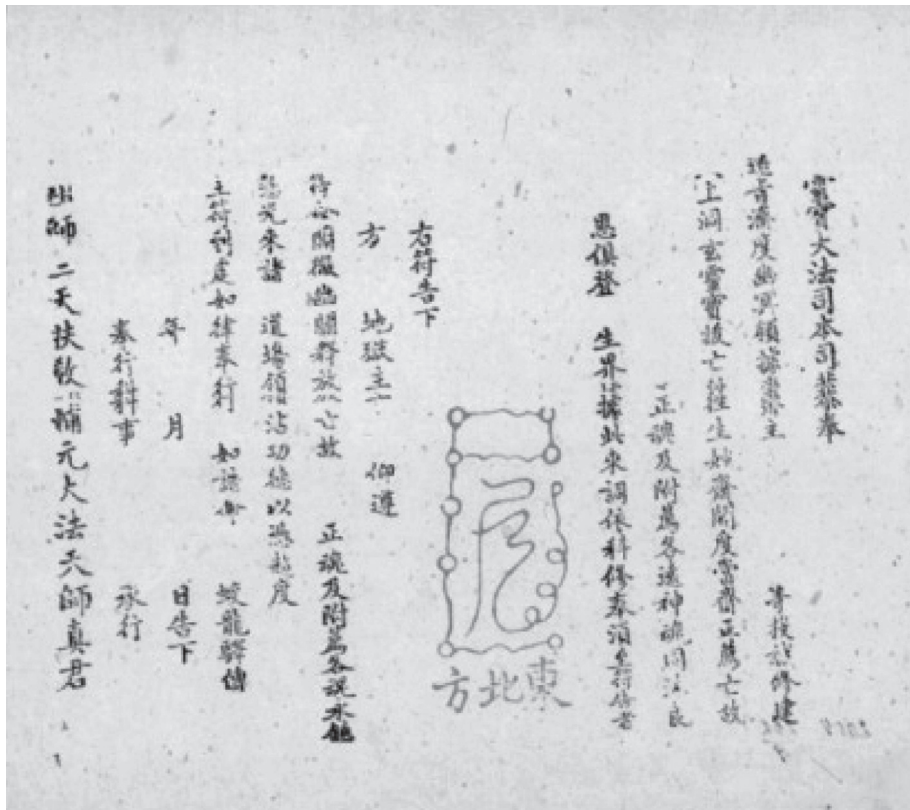
⁸ In his diary Alekseev mentions that during his visit to Amoy on July 4th he was impressed by a temple festival of the City God *chenghuang* and was very sorry to leave Amoy so quickly (ALEKSEEV 2012: 484).

written, while memorial is printed with use of a woodblock, where we see a prayer to the Host of the Dipper department *dousizhu* 斗司主 to minimize influences of malicious stars, addresses to North Dipper *beidou* 北斗 relieving from misfortune and South Dipper *nandou* 南斗 prolonging lifespan. Further text mentions star influences upon human fate. We suggest that this document might have been recited in the temple upon believer's request in the beginning of a new year in order to minimize misfortunes caused by stars, since each person's birth date and hour determined different star influences he/she experienced each year, after the ceremony the memorial would be burnt with paper money.

No. 2054-202/1-9 (Pl. 2)

This set of printed documents including nine sheets is termed in the Museum inventory as “talismans for the netherworld”. All sheets have similar textual part and nine different talismanic characters in the central part, talisman was seen to be the most potent part the document. All these talismans are issued by the Bureau of Great Methods of the Numinous Treasure *Lingbao dafasi* 靈寶大法司, related to the “Great Law of the Great Clarity Numinous Treasure” *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法, *juan* 10 by Wang Qizhen 王契真 of Northern Song.⁹ The ritual is performed by Heavenly master Zhang 張天師 whose full title is written to the very left of the document — *Zushi santian fujiao fuyuan tianfa tianshi zhenjun* 祖師三天扶教輔元大法天師真君, ritual is conducted on behalf of the chief mourner *zhaizhu* 齋主, who hires ritual specialists to arrange passage *chaodu* 超度 of the deceased from the trials of the underworld to the paradise in the West. As mentioned in this memorial, the soul of the deceased is to be bathed, afterwards each of talisman is probably placed in one of the nine directions (south, north, west, east, center, south-east, south-west, north-west, north-east). Each direction has a Host of hell *diyuzhu* 地獄主, believed to be a demon-king overthrown to hell by the Bodhisattva Manjushri. Susan Huang mentioned that figure “nine” in salvation ritual is related to the ninefold darkness *jiuyou-jiao* 九幽醮 associated with the Yellow Register fast. Taoist salvation rituals,

⁹ In his study of Taoist rituals observed in southern Taiwan John Lagerwey mentions that Taoist Master Ch'en followed the Great Method of the Numinous Treasure founded by Ning Ch'üan-chen 寧全真 (1101–1181), whose alias was Real Man Who Saves from Distress (LAGERWEY 1987: 193), therefore ritual practice seen in Taiwan and earlier documents in this study may be considered as produced by the same school.



pl. 2

which grew largely after Song, had a special ritual space reserved for the souls and consisted of earth mounds marked by lamps and banners to symbolize the multichambered prisons in which the suffering souls were trapped, in the cause of the ritual the ritual master gradually moved toward main altar while leading the summoned souls onto the path of purity and salvation.¹⁰ In our case nine talismans could be placed in different directions for the souls to be saved.

In Taoist ritual, “bathing” is the name of one of the rites performed as a part of the Yellow Register fast *huanglu zhai* 黃籙齋 and the ritual of merit *gongde* 功德 for the salvation of the deceased, during which the spirit of the deceased is summoned and bathed during the ceremony of purification. After

¹⁰ HUANG 2015: 974.

it has been released from the underworld, he is bathed, purified and given a change of clothes.¹¹ Ritual of soul bathing *muyu* 沐浴 is mentioned as a part of initial summoning of the souls of the deceased ancestors *zhaohun* 招魂 on the first day of the mourning ceremony.¹² It was performed to for soul saved out of netherworld during an “incense and flower” Buddhist funeral service of Guangdong province.¹³

Another set of printed documents discussed below seems to be a set of talismans and memorials used for the salvation ritual as well.

No. 2054-217/1-9

A series of nine sheets printed with red ink and termed as “talismans for the relief from sufferings in the upcoming life” in the inventory were probably sold as one set for the funeral service performed by Taoists. Based on the information from sheet nine (2054–217/9) we learn that this set of documents was produced in Guangdong 廣東 province.¹⁴ In his travel diary describing visit to Canton Alekseev mentioned purchasing a lot of printed materials on three cults,¹⁵ but we don’t find any details on talismans related to mortuary rituals.

Sheet 2054–217/1 is covered by columns of accurately printed mystic Taoist characters representing talismans.

Sheet 2054–217/2 has vertical inscription “Genuine Talisman Saving from Distress of Yellow Register Addressing Gods” *huanglu baijian jiuku zhenfu* 黃籙白簡救苦真符, to the left is the talisman per se, the text to its left starts with mentioning *Yuanshi fuming* 元始符命 talisman,¹⁶ together with above mentioned Yellow Register talisman it is summoning one hundred and twen-

¹¹ HARUJI 2013: 156.

¹² JONES 2016: 76.

¹³ TAM 2012: 48.

¹⁴ Some Guangdong talismans to drive away thieves (№ 2054–187/3–1) and secure happy marriage (№ 2054–187/4–3) acquired by Alekseev in 1912 have been introduced in (ZAVIDOVSKAIA 2019: 102).

¹⁵ ALEKSEEV 2012: 489.

¹⁶ In his description of a three-day ritual observed in rural Fujian K. Dean mentions this talisman in the context of the consecration *kaiguang* 開光 ritual, when the priest burns *Yuanshi fuming* talisman asking Great God of the Five Roads to open the way for the scattered *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 souls of the deceased (DEAN 1988: 50). This talisman is originating from “Great Law of the Great Clarity Numinous Treasure” *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法, *juan* 46.

ty soldiers, five emperors, official investigators and mighty evil spirit warriors *lishi* 力士 from Ten directions, Three Palaces and Nine prefectures and Nine hells for deities to make fines, for Departments of Soldiers *bingsi* 兵司, Official's salary *lusi* 祿司, Fate *mingsi* 命司 and Merits *gongsì* 功司, demon Cow head, Soldiers of hell and Six demons of three directions to save the soul (a blank for the name of the deceased) from hell and for it to turn into an ancestor and see the light, to be cleaned of sins, take up Nine prohibitions *jiuzhen miaojie* 九真妙戒 and be reborn in paradise.

Sheet 2054–217/3 is a ritual text signed by The Supreme One, the Heavenly Venerable who Saves from Distress *taiyi jiuku tianzun* 太乙救苦天尊, “the principle deity to whom funeral services are directed”.¹⁷ The title of the memorial called “Heavenly Treasure Register of Passing Life of the Supreme Lord” *taishang baodusheng tianbaolu* 太上寶度生天寶籙 is borrowed from “Great Law of the Great Clarity Luminous Treasure” *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法, *juan* 44 by Wang Qizhen, where its original title sounds like “Heavenly Luminous Register of Supreme Mysterious and Primordial Lord ordering pardoning to the living” *yuanshang xuanyuan taishang chi shesheng tianbao lu* 元上玄元太上敕赦生天寶籙. This whole *juan* of Wang Qizhen's writing is consisted of memorials and official forms relevant to the ritual of saving hungry ghosts from underworld.

The original text from “Great Law of the Great Clarity Luminous Treasure” is represented below, on the sheet No. 2054–217/3 it has been printed with slight discrepancies, representing a list of entities (prefectures, seas, peaks, passes) and deities in charge of the underworld prisons summoned for the ritual:

告下十方三界，天曹地府，山川海嶽，泉曲冥關，北都羅酆，
六洞十宮，三官九府，百二十曹，鬱絕之鄉，
幽塗之境，諸大地獄，九州分野，福地名山，
城隍社令，神物司臨之所，仙曹典錄之墟，
較量罪福，考察功過，一切天牢地獄主者，咸領符命¹⁸。

The next passage from the original memorial is omitted and continued with the passage below depicting the process of transformation into Daoist saints *xian* 仙, divinities and overcoming the sufferings in underworld prisons:

¹⁷ DEAN 1988: 56.

¹⁸ From: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=298610> (access date: May 14, 2020).



pl. 3

承此太上慈恩，並與疾除罪簿，落滅惡根，不得拘留。徑出地獄，永離幽陰，皆證妙果。如擔砂負石、漣汲溟波之眾，驅雷役電、掃山穿地、貫天引水之徒，並與斷地逮役，永使逍遙。即令上件亡魂，七炁成真，六儀運虛，五靈續絕，二曜扶衰，旋網躡空，飛步雲宮，胚胎有始，塵劫元終，金城孕質，玉洞凝神，真炁內養，以成真人。上入太虛，下洞幽泉，雲官寶闕，中有真魂，出入福鄉，周旋生門，咀嚼靈芝，灌漱金泉，甘露川流，懸澎丹田，紫霞朝映，三炁凝煙，瓊室化仙，安座金蓮，真儀掩日，塵劫為年，一如告命。

The talisman is activated by the Supreme One, the Heavenly Venerable who Saves from Distress whose name is printed to the left on our document.

Sheet four (2054–217/4) contains both talisman and textual part, probably its purpose is to address the abode of the immortals *xianjie* 仙界 so that the host's body (the body of the deceased) is to go through the salvation and re-birth together with his soul.

Sheet five (2054–217/5) represents an order on behalf of the Three Pure Ones *sanqing* 三清 to transform the soul of the deceased into a “correct soul”

zhenghun 正魂, or an ancestor, the order is supported by a circular seal Precious circle *baohuan* 寶環, there are blank spaces for date and a name two masters witnessing this process.

Sheet six (2054–217/6) contains a talisman and textual part which mentions “The Most Excellent and Scripture of Limitless Salvation” *yuanshi du-ren shangpin jing* 元始度人上品經¹⁹ used to annihilate three evils, after that the saved soul to the Heavenly gate *tianmen* 天門 and sublimated on the Cinnabar hill *zhuling* 朱陵.²⁰

Sheet seven (2054–217/7, Pl. 3) contains the image of the soul-catcher called the Lad of Five Directions and Five Souls *wufang wuling tongzi* 五方五靈童子, who wears boys hairstyle, carrying a soul-banner *lingfan* 靈幡 with words “bring [soul] to the West” *yinjie xifang* 接引西方 on it, the text to the right mentions Passer from Three palaces *sangong duzhe* 三宮度者, Five emperors interrogation officials *wudi kaoguan* 五帝考官 who can exclude the soul’s sin record. The text to the right pleads the Lad to lead the soul with the banner.

Sheet nine (2054–217/9) representing a notice *bang* 榜 is most likely the first one used in the sequence of the salvation ritual, its purpose is to announce start of the salvation ritual and summon gods and demons to descend to the altar.

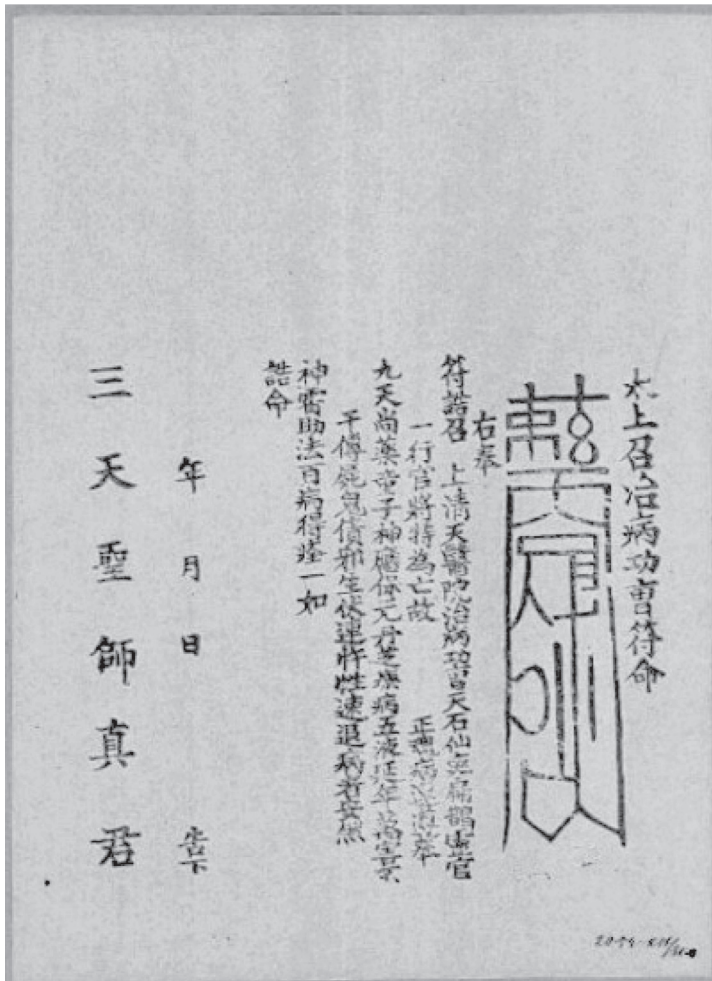
As was shown above, the sheet enumeration made by the Museum does not reflect the sequence of their use in the cause of the Taoist soul salvation ritual, which bears many features similar to the liturgy of modern Fujian and Taiwan.

No. 2054–218/1-35

This series of thirty five yellow sheets are termed as “posthumous talismans” in the inventory. Indeed, they were supposed to be used in the cause of

¹⁹ This scripture from the original fifth century Lingbao corpus is related to the idea of saving those suffering in the world or in hells, depicts the salvation of the Most High Lord to ensure salvation of the ancestors (PREGADIO 2013: 150).

²⁰ Three-day funeral rite in modern Fujian also has the Calling of the Soul, the incense is offered to the Three Pure Ones and all the gods, then the chief priest recalls the great vow of the One who Saves All from Distress to save all souls, then the chief reads the Memorial and waves the soul banner. The souls are led from the underworld to the altar and on to salvation (DEAN 1988: 50). In south Taiwan the soul-banner has narrow strips with the names of the seven terrestrial souls *po* 魄, the wide strip is the real soul-banner; its inscription calls on the Savior from Distress to save the “correct soul(s)” *cheng-hun* 正魂 of the deceased from hell and ensure its passage to the paradise in the West (LAGERWEY 1987: 176).



pl. 4

salvation ritual and present a valuable source of information, since each talisman has incantation formula explaining its meaning. The style of characters allows suggesting that this set was produced by the same shop in Guangdong along with set No. 2054–217. These talismans were used by a Taoist priest to activate such ritual acts as pardoning all the misdeeds and sins of the deceased, healing all his previous wounds and illnesses (No. 2054–218/10, Pl. 4), bathing and cleansing the body, preparing new clothes to enter the abode of the

immortals, passing through the Gates of different death causes, summoning gods and spirits. Some of these talismans were borrowed from *juan 5* of “The Jasper Mirror of the Luminous Treasure” *lingbao yujian* 靈寶玉鑑²¹ written by unknown author of Song dynasty, which has a section “Genuine Talismans of Opening Eight Gates for Salvation” *kaidu bamen zhenfu* 開度八門真符, some talisman titles originate from “Great Law of the Great Clarity Numinous Treasure” *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法, *juan 46*.

No. 2054–263/2 (Pl. 5)

A printed document with text and image of the Supreme One, the Heavenly Venerable who Saves from Distress *taiyi jiuku tianzun* 太乙救苦天尊 inside a frame composed of auspicious objects. The inventory attributes it as “talisman”, but what we see here is a “permit” for the soul of the deceased to be out from the netherworld *mingtu luyin* 冥途路引. Lagerwey calls it “‘dark path road-puller’, that is, a device like a flag for pulling the soul along the road that leads out of the underworld. It is issued in the name of the Heavenly Master of the Great Method of the Three Heavens, Chang (Tao-ling), and is addressed to the Savior from Distress, whose image appears between the end of the text and title of the Heavenly Master”.²² It is important to note that, the design of the document observed in southern Taiwan in 1980s basically matches the one from Alekseev’s collection, which was produced in Guangdong province. When discussing funerary practices of Guangdong Li Zhitian mentions that *mingtu luyin* 冥途路引, or “road passport” *lupiao* 路票, is issued to the souls of the deceased by Taoist by means of burning this passport, which says that the Supreme One, the Heavenly Venerable who Saves from Distress offers the passport to the soul so that no obstacles are created on its way by various hell departments and checkpoints, in other words, such passport guarantees smooth traveling of the soul out of the underworld.²³

A document identical to No. 2054–263/2 is kept in the collection of GMIR (No. Ⅱ-3272–VII), Alekseev probably sold it to the Museum in 1938 together with around one thousand other pictures and objects. In our previous paper we have discussed “license for the soul of the deceased” *shenhun zhizhao*

²¹ <https://cext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=453122> (access date: June 8, 2020).


²² LAGERWEY 1987: 199.

²³ LI 2007: 213.

2019-201
2-2

福地龍虎山冥途路引

三天扶教輔元體道天法天師真君



太乙救苦天尊

靈寶大法司

太上元君... 龍虎山... 冥途路引... 執照

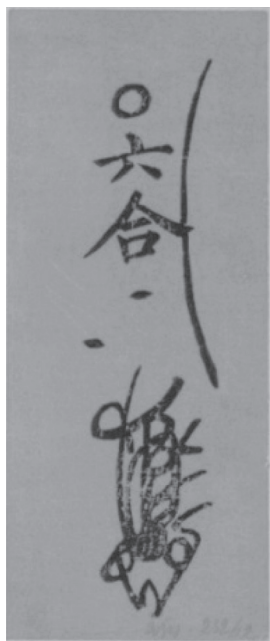
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2-2

pl. 5

神魂執照,²⁴ which “the soul of the deceased receives after bathing and putting on clean clothes, and it is transmitted to it by the ‘servant’ of the Three Pure Ones, that is, the priest, whose ordination has made him an ‘immortal official’. In this ritual the priest is making the soul of the deceased a Taoist initiate, an initiation that is at once comparable to and dependent upon his own ordination”.²⁵ Therefore two documents, “dark road-puller” and “soul passport”, were used during the stages of the salvation ritual.

No. 2054–232/1–12

In the inventory a series of twelve talismans and characters printed on orange paper with black ink are termed as “incantation formulas”, but this term does not seem to be accurate. They are: *tianyi* 天乙, *kun* 坤, *li* 離, *dui* 兌, *zhen* 震, *kan* 坎, *dingfu* 定福, *guiren* 貴人, *jinma* 金馬, *yutang* 玉堂, *tongchun* 同春, *liuhe* 六合. Among them *kun* 坤, *li* 離, *dui* 兌, *zhen* 震, *kan* 坎 represent



pl. 6

four out of eight hexagrams, therefore this set of prints was probably used for divination purposes, supposedly, to determine person’s luck. *Tianyi* 天乙 is one of the four basic astral forces that may bring luck and misfortune upon a person, *guiren* 貴人 is a term describing some helping person or an auspicious deity (in this case they are stars), who could positively affect one’s fortune. Divination methods based on “eight birth characters” aim to determine a *guiren* star of a particular parson. Notions *jinma* 金馬 (“golden horse”) and *yutang* 玉堂 (“jade hall”) are probably metaphors for respectful address an to academician of Hanlin academy, in divination practice they may be used to determine person’s chances during exams; *tongchun* 同春 as a part of the wish for longevity *guihe tongchun* 龜鶴同春, could be used to determine person’s life span, *liuhe* 六合 “six cardinal points” (No. 2054–232/12, Pl. 6) was widely used by diviners to check whether a man and a woman are suitable for marriage.

²⁴ ZAVIDOVSKAIA & RUD 2020: 271–272.

²⁵ LAGERWEY 1987: 184.

No. 2054–197/1–5

A series of five sheets of different color with the same talisman, text and image printed with black ink, the talisman contains an image of a boy (probably deity Mangshen 芒神) holding a banner with words “Clay ox gives peace and protects” *tuniu anzhen* 土牛安鎮 with a “clay ox”²⁶ depicted next to a boy. The inventory marked this series as “farmers’ talismans”. The printing board and writing on it are rather coarse, which is a characteristic of the cheapest products consumed by common folks (No. 2054–197/1, pl. 7). The phrase on top “Talisman of the Highest for pacifying earth” *taishang antu fuming* 太上安土符命 points at the widely spread practice of using talismans to pacify earth spirits of five directions, who could be disturbed by people digging the ground, for instance, in the result of digging a grave. We also have five talismans matching five directions, therefore they are probably a set. *Juan* 30 of the collection of Daoist religious texts “The Reprieved Pearls from the Sea of Methods” *fahai yizhu* 法海遺珠 by unknown author of late Yuan early Ming period contains “Earth pacifying talismans of five directions” *wufang antu fu* 五方安土符, whose purpose is to address Dragon Kings of Five Directions protecting a lodging *wufang zhenzhai longwang* 五方鎮宅龍王.²⁷ Our talisman is signed by Heavenly Worthies Five Saints Dragon Kings bringing peace *taisheng wulong anzhen tianzun* 太聖五龍安鎮天尊. In this case talisman concerns probably Yin lodging *yinzhai* 陰宅, a term for a grave.



pl. 7

²⁶ Earth, or clay, ox *tuniu* 土牛 is normally associated with the ritual of beating an ox figure made of clay and welcoming spring rather than funerary practice.

²⁷ Five Dragon Kings are mentioned as protectors of the grave in various Daoist documents.

No. 2054–372/1–19

We may be certain that this set of paper icons *zhima* 紙馬 was produced in Foshan 佛山, the largest centre of woodblock prints production in south-eastern China. Inventory terms them as “popular prints, images of Liuhai 劉海 and Hehe 和合”. Alekseev could have purchased them either in Guangzhou or in Shantou, where Foshan printing shops had multiple branches. One of the features of Foshan paper icons was to use colored paper with one color imprint made with black ink, gold color was probably added in some parts by hand. Our icons have similar composition: on top tier is an image of two figures —

probably gods of harmony Hehe 和合, on the bottom level there are compositions with human figures, but who are the deities in the centre? On the sheet No. 2054–372/17 (pl. 8) we probably see Nezha 哪咤 wearing a princely crown holding longevity peaches on a tray, below him stands Longevity god Shouxing 壽星 with a peach. On the sheet No. 2054–372/16 a female figure in the centre is most likely the Queen of the West Xiwangmu 西王母 also holding a tray with peaches and Shouxing flying a crane below her. Such icons could be used for the 60th birthday celebration or for some ritual of praying for longevity of an elder family member.



pl. 8

Conclusion: Regional Variations in Talisman Usage

One of the objectives of this study has been to reveal and summarize regional specifics of early Republican popular religion based on the printed objects brought by Vasilii M. Alekseev from South China. Apparently, Alekseev purchased printed Taoist ritual documents texts & drawings without being able to look through them in detail and observe the process of their application in the ritual practice. Yet he was rather familiar with Chinese talismans per se, since he had acquired several dozens of them during his studies in China in 1906–1909, now most of them are stored at the GMIR.²⁸

What makes northern talismans different from southern ones is that majority of them are painted with a brush with Zhang Daoling's 張道陵 magic stamp on top and serve concrete purposes such as driving away evil spirits (No. Д-2848-VII, pl. 9), "five poisonous creatures", curing illnesses etc. Due to his interest for "demon conqueror" Zhong Kui, Alekseev purchased large amount of talismans and pictures related to Duanwu 端午 festival (No. Д-2828-VII, pl. 9), which make up a large part of his collection of northern talismans. Notably, northern talismans do not bear obvious signs of being a part of a larger ritual, neither do specimens collected by Alekseev relate to salvation ritual, which appears to be central for the southern tradition judging from randomly selected prints from fund No. 2054 in MAE RAS. Northern talismans seem to have been bought straight by their end users, rural and urban believers, from producers, who could be either "roaming Daoists" or some shops associated with them. Afterwards people just glued talismans on the wall or burned them with paper money after chanting an incantation (this part could be performed by a professional for a pay).²⁹ Shape and content of northern talismans reflects the status and role of Daoists in the northern regions of China, where monastic tradition of Quanzhen 全真 Daoism prevailed. As for the southern specimens discussed in this paper, they represent

²⁸ <http://alekseev-collection.gmir.ru/en/catalog-eng/category/fu-talismans> (Access date: June 19, 2020). Among them longevity talisman № Д-3303-VII has Alekseev's stamp, also produced in southern China in 1912.

²⁹ James Hayes characterizes charm producers in late imperial China in the following way: "The provision of charms was an important service for communities as well as for individuals. Specialist practitioners were often called upon by communities when they were thought to be imperiled by evil forces that made themselves felt through sickness and death of animals and humans. The ritual and charm specialists could be found in most subdistricts and even in many of the larger villages" (HAYES 1985: 97).



pl. 9

just one aspect of the funerary ritual practice, which was carried on by priests with use of special liturgical books *keyiben* 科儀本, accompanied by music, chanting and ritual actions, and these aspects are not reproducible based just on the documents we have. Yet it would be legible to claim that tradition of “Great Law of the Great Clarity Numinous Treasure” seems to have been prevailing in the area of Fujian and Guangdong provinces. Nevertheless, a larger portion of documents collected by Alekseev needs to be thoroughly studied in order to make final conclusions about regional specifics.

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