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“TAI-PING GUANG JI”: MOTIVES RELATED TO THE DEAD SOULS

A well-known anthology of the early Chinese prose “Tai-ping guang ji” (“太平廣記”, “Extended Records of Tai-ping Years”, hereinafter referred to as TPGJ) was completed in 978. This compilation was drawn up under the order of the Song emperor Tai-zong (ruled from 967 to 998) by a board of scientists directed by a famous minister and erudite Li Fang (李防, 924—996). The introduction to TPGJ tells that during its compilation the board used 344 prose collections (recent research shows that there were about five hundred collections) that date back to the Han era till the beginning of the Song era (from 206 BC to 977 AD). Material in TPGJ is organized in 52 thematic sections, whose titles include key concepts (categories) of the traditional Chinese culture. All these circumstances as well as the fact that many of those collections that Li Fang's board used in the given anthology have been lost, make TPGJ a unique writing artefact from different perspectives. We are interested in TPGJ above all as a source of invaluable information on traditional Chinese beliefs about the spirits of the dead (“鬼”, *gui*).

Speaking about traditional culture or traditional world image in the course of studying the written sources, we don't consider the universe integral and consistent. It reflects the views of people from different social classes from intelligent scribes to ignorant “silent majority”. On the one hand these views are similar in respect to those common things that a member of a certain culture takes in with mother's milk. On the other hand they have significant differences caused by such factors as education, religious denomination, etc. Usually the views of educated minority are analyzed, mostly because they are reflected in theoretical tracts, official papers and writings, i. e. in the so-called “classic literature”, while the layer of ordinary cultural is often disregarded. This is also true for the Chinese

culture. We have a much better idea about the worldview of specific philosophers and the religious-philosophical systems *per se*, than about the “silent majority” worldview. Nevertheless, the ordinary world image (or some of its significant elements) can be restored on the basis of Chinese written sources and above all on the basis of the prose materials of *xiaoshuo* “小說” that constitutes the main part of TPGJ. Traditional *xiaoshuo* prose doesn't refer to classic literature, however it was created not by ordinary people but by educated scribes. It was in the prose *xiaoshuo* (that of course isn't literature in the modern sense of the word) that personal and mental peculiarities of the authors became blurred and less evident, while the subject matter was ordinary, common, and equally familiar to the top and to the bottom. The authors of *xiaoshuo* regarded these texts from the cultural viewpoint, compiling crumbs of information, history, and tales into a comprehensive whole. They knew the same things as ordinary people and even more, that is why their cultural intention was able to arrange heterogeneous material and develop a common universe for different authors. *Xiaoshuo* shows folk beliefs and traditional views not in a natural and spontaneous form of their existence, but in a manner arranged by the culture representatives themselves. This is the case with TPGJ, since the task of the compilers was to make a most representative compendium choosing the most characteristic, striking, and typical features. The collection compiled in the 10th century claims to explain the essence of notions or categories included into the titles of 52 sections as they were represented in classic “low” prose and, consequently, in the common consciousness of that time to a certain extent. Without exaggerating, TPGJ can be called a mirror of traditional spiritual Chinese culture of the 10th century.