History of Rocketry and Astronautics

Proceedings of the Thirtieth History Symposium of
the International Academy of Astronautics

Beijing, China, 1996

Hervé Moulin and Donald C. Elder
Volume Editors

Donald C. Elder, Series Editor

AAS History Series, Volume 25

A Supplement to Advances in the Astronautical Sciences

IAA History Symposia, Volume 16

AAS Publications Office
P.O. Box 28130
San Diego, California 92198

Affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science
Member of the International Astronautical Federation

First Printing 2003

ISSN 0730-3564

ISBN 0-87703-498-2 (Hard Cover)
ISBN 0-87703-499-0 (Soft Cover)

Published for the American Astronautical Society
by Univelt, Incorporated, P.O. Box 28130, San Diego, California 92198
Web Site: http://www.univelt.com

Printed and Bound in the U.S.A.

Chapter 8

The Historical Progress and Development of Space Technology and Education in China*

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Introduction

Space technology is a synthetical technology of astronautical sciences for the design, manufacture, test, launch, reentry, control and management of spacecraft and their launch vehicles, and is used to explore and utilize space and celestial bodies beyond the earth. Early from the 1960s up to the present, in the field of space technology, China had been successful not only in developing scientific experimental satellites, earth-observing satellites, communication satellites and meteorological satellites of different kinds and different functions as well as the Long March Series launch vehicles, but also in developing satellite application systems and space medicine engineering experimental research.

I. Space Activities in China

1. Launch Vehicles

A launch vehicle is a space transportation means composed of multi-staged rockets, and its function is to send the artificial satellite or other payload to a predetermined orbit. China developed a launch vehicle on the basis of the

* Presented at the Thirtieth History Symposium of the International Academy of Astronautics, Beijing, China, 1996.

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ballistic missile. Up to 1989, China had successfully developed and put into use 6 models of launch vehicles with capacities to send the satellites into near-earth orbit, sun-synchronous orbit and geostationary orbit.

1.1 Long March-1 Launch Vehicle

In order to launch the DFH-1 (dongfanhong-1) satellite, China began developing the Long March-1, namely the Changzheng-1 (CZ-1) launch vehicle in the second half of 1965.

The long March-1 (CZ-1) launch vehicle was a tandem three-stage rocket. The first and second stages adopted liquid rocket engines used by the intermediate/long range surface-to-surface missile, while the third stage used a solid rocket motor. The lift-off mass of the entire vehicle was 81.5 tons, the lift-off thrust was 1020 kN (104 Tonf), the total length was 29.46 m, the maximum diameter was 2.25 m and the near-earth orbit payload capacity was 300 kg. After the second stage was completely separated from the third stage, a spin rocket spun the third stage to keep it in stable flight. In order to increase the payload capacity of the vehicle and orbit altitude, the vehicle flew in a powerless glide flight phase for over 200 seconds after the second stage engine had finished its work and before the third stage would start igniting. Corresponding to this, an attitude control system in the gliding phase was added to the second stage to control the vehicle in its gravity-free state utilizing residual liquid propellant.

The transformation from ballistic missile to launch vehicle requires a solution to a series of technical problems due to the difference in the kinds of payloads and requirements.

In the mid 1960s, technically, China had just finished the whole course of developing miniature solid rocket engines. So, developing the third stage solid rocket motor with a diameter of 770 mm, a length of about 4 m, and a charge of 1.8 tons needed by the Long March-1 launch vehicle was a completely new subject. Especially, the requirement that the motor should be ignited reliably in high altitude and work under a rotating condition of 180 rev/min added more difficulties to the development work.

From May 1969 to January 1970, four full thrust tests of the engine under different states and one flight test of a two-stage rocket composed of the first two stages were carried out successfully, one after another, for the Long March-1 launch vehicle.

On April 24, 1970, the Long March-1 launch vehicle carrying the DFH-1 satellite rose slowly from the launching pad and sent China's first satellite into space. After less than one year, the Long March-1 launch vehicle once again successfully launched the Practice-1 scientific experiment satellite.

1.2 Long March-2 Launch Vehicle

In order to launch recoverable remote sensing satellites, The Chinese Academy of Launching Vehicle Technology under president Ren Xinmin, started developing the Long March-2 launch vehicle on the basis of the intercontinental missile in 1970. This launch vehicle was a tandem two-stage liquid rocket with a total length of 32 m, a maximum diameter of 3.35 m and a lift-off mass of 190 tons. Four sets of liquid rocket engines with swiveling thrust chambers were mounted on the first stage with a total ground thrust of 2746 kN (280 tonf); and one set of main engines with a vacuum thrust of 716 kN (73 tonf), and four sets of vernier engines with swiveling thrust chambers having a total thrust of 46 kN (4.7 tonf) were mounted on the second stage. The control system adopted the platform-computer inertial guidance technique. The development personnel under the charge of Tu Shou'e, the chief designer, solved a series of problems.

After the successful development of the Long March-2 launch vehicle, the development personnel, in accordance with the demand of launching other types of satellites, conducted many adaptive modifications for the configuration of the vehicle. Thus, it evolved into the Long March-2C launch vehicle. Both the technical performance and payload capacity of the Long March-2C launch vehicle were enhanced in comparison with those of the Long March-2 launch vehicle, and its payload capacity for a near-earth orbit was 2500 kg.

Since its first mission of launching an application recoverable remote sensing satellite on September 9, 1982, until August 1988, the Long March-2C launch vehicle successfully sent 6 applications-type and 2 new-type recoverable remote sensing satellites into space in succession.

The Long March-2 and Long March-2C launch vehicles increased the near-earth orbit payload capacity of China's launch vehicles from the 300 kg of the Long March-1 launch vehicle to two tons, so that China's launch vehicle technology reached a new level, and a solid foundation for developing Long March series launch vehicles was laid down. Moreover, the Long March-2E, with Wang Yongzhi serving as the Chief designer, with 4-strap on boosters increased its payload capacity for LEO to 9200 kg.

1.3 Long March-3 Launch Vehicles

The Long March-3 launch vehicle was a tandem three-stage liquid rocket. The surface-to-surface intercontinental ballistic missile was taken as the prototype for developing the first and second stages. The third stage adopted a liquid hydrogen-oxygen engine with a vacuum thrust of 44 kN (4.5 tonf), which could be started twice. The lift-off mass of the vehicle was 202 tons; the total length was 43.25 m; the diameter of the first two stages was 3.35 m and the diameter of the third stages was 2.25 m. The payload capacity of the vehicle was 5000 kg for near-earth orbit, 2900 kg for sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 900 km, and 1400 kg for the transfer orbit of a geostationary orbit satellite (transfer orbit inclination: 31.5°, perigee altitude: 200 km, apogee altitude: 35786 km).

On the road to scaling new heights in space launch technology and marching towards a geostationary orbit, the development personnel of the Long March-3 launch vehicle, through indomitable struggle, resolved a series of very difficult technical problems.

The utmost peculiarity of the Long March-3 launch vehicle was that the third stage adopted a liquid hydrogen-oxygen rocket engine. This kind of engine is superior in performance and advanced in technology, its combustion product is safe and non-poisonous, and its vacuum specific thrust is 50 percent more than that of the conventional propellant engine. But, the boiling points of liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen are low (–253°C and –183°C respectively) and they are inflammable and explosive. To develop such a kind of engine, not only a breakthrough in development technique of the engine itself was necessary, but all special problems caused by low temperature had to be solved also. Furthermore, it was required that the engine should be started twice under a high vacuum environment and microgravitational conditions. Besides, how to suppress the longitudinal coupling vibration was another key problem. These problems were successfully settled under the leadership of chief designer Xie Guanxuan.

On April 8, 1984, the Long March-3 launch vehicle successfully launched the second experimental communications satellite into a geosynchronous transfer orbit. Afterwards, the Long March-3 launch vehicle successfully launched one practical communications and broadcast satellite and two practical communications satellites in 1986 and 1988 in succession.

The successful development of the Long March-2 and -3 launch vehicles showed that China had the capability to launch a geostationary orbit satellite, and the Chinese launch vehicle technology had entered into the world's advanced rank.

1.4 Storm-1 and Long March-4 Launch Vehicles

The Storm-1 was about the same as the Long March-2 launch vehicle in payload capacity and was also a two-stage launch vehicle developed with the intercontinental surface-to-surface missile as its prototype.

In the autumn of 1969, in order to unfold the development of the Storm-1 launch vehicle, a development team with the Shanghai No.2 Bureau of Mechanic-Electrical Industry as the backbone was formed. The general system design was started in December the same year.

After the successful development of the Storm-1 launch vehicle, the Shanghai Administration of Astronautics satisfactorily fulfilled the development of the Long March-4 launch vehicle in cooperation with the department concerned.

The Long March-4 launch vehicle with Sun Jingliang serving as the chief designer, was a tandem three-stage liquid launch vehicle used mainly for launching sun-synchronous orbit satellites and for launching geostationary orbit satellites, too. Its configuration of the first two stages was close to that of the Long March-3 launch vehicle. The third stage adopted two sets of newly developed conventional propellant rocket engines of bi-directional swing with a vacuum thrust of 59 kN (5.1 tonf). The total length of the vehicle was 41.9 m, the maximum diameter was 3.35 m, the lift-off mass was 240 tons and the lift-off thrust was 2942 kN (300 tonf). It could send a satellite of 1400 kg into a sun-synchronous orbit of 900 km altitude. The Long March-4 launch vehicle started its conceptional design in 1978; it was assigned to be the launch vehicle of the Fengyun-1 meteorological satellite in March 1982, and its development work was started in the Shanghai Administration of Astronautics and the liquid rocket engine bases of the Ministry of Aerospace Industry.

On September 7, 1988, the first launching of the Long March-4 launch vehicle was a success with a single action. It sent the Fengyun-1 meteorological satellite precisely into a 901 km high sun-synchronous orbit. The successful development of the Long March-4 launch vehicle added a carrier of sun-synchronous orbit satellites to the launch vehicle series of China and made a new contribution to the development of China's space carrier technology.

2. Artificial Satellites

In 1968, the Chinese Academy of Space and Technology, (CAST) which was in charge of developing satellites, was set up.

The scientific experimental satellite is an artificial earth satellite used for scientific exploration and research. China, from 1970 to 1981, successfully launched 5 scientific experimental satellites, i.e. DFH-1, Practice-1, Practice-2, Practice-2A and Practice-2B.

The DFH-1 satellite is the first artificial satellite successfully sent into orbit on April 24, 1970 by a Long March vehicle CZ-1 from Jiuquan. It was composed of seven systems, i.e. the structure, thermal control, power supply. "The East Is Red" melody generating device, short wave telemetry, tracking and radio system, and attitude measuring subassembly. The total mass of the satellite was 173 kg and its appearance was seventy-two-face polyhedron approximate to a sphere of 1 m diameter. The satellite adopted the method of spin stabilization during its flight in space.

In order to guarantee the successful launching of the satellite around 1970, the research development personnel of CAST, headed by Min Guiyong, made great efforts to tackle a series of technical problems, e.g. a thermal vacuum simulation test.

On March 3, 1971, the Practice-1 satellite was launched successfully. The design life of the satellite was one year, but actually, it operated in space for more than 8 years. On June 11, 1979, the satellite fell down due to the end of its orbit life. During the eight years, the performance of the solar power supply system, thermal control system and long-term telemetering system remained normal all the time.

On November 26, 1975, the experimental satellite was, for the first time, sent into the predetermined orbit by the Long March-2 (CZ-2) launch vehicle. Three days after, the satellite returned to the ground on schedule, obtaining the data for the predetermined region. This flight test revealed also that the skirt of the return capsule, some wires, and instruments were burnt during reentry into the atmosphere and that the deviation of landing point of the return capsule was relatively large. The Chinese Academy of Space Technology organized the development personnel to find out the cause, and some relevant improvement measures were put forward. In December 1976 and January 1978, two improved experimental satellites were launched respectively by the Long March-2 launch vehicle. The flight test was successful and the return and recovery of the return capsule were fully realized.

The successful development of the experimental satellite made China the third country that mastered the technology of satellite recovery in the world following the United States and the Soviet Union.

On the basis of the experimental satellite, China developed and launched recoverable application remote sensing satellites (called application satellites for short) and new type recoverable remote satellites (called new type satellites for short) in succession.

In the summer of 1977, China decided to use the Storm-1 (Fengbao-1 or FB-1) launch vehicle to launch the Practice-2 satellite. As the Storm-1 launch vehicle had a payload capacity of more than one ton for near-earth orbit, it was decided to use one Storm-1 launch vehicle to launch 3 satellites, i.e. Practice-2, Practice-2A and Practice-2B, so as to obtain results in many respects with one launch.

On September 20, 1981, the one rocket with 3 satellites was launched successfully. This achievement made China the fourth country that could use one rocket to launch multi-satellites in the world following the Soviet Union, the United States and the European Space Agency.

On January 29, 1984 an experimental communications satellite was launched for the first time. The satellite had not been pushed into the predetermined orbit but parked in a near-earth orbit. The Weinan Satellite TT&C (tracking, telemetering and command) Center adopted some measurement and control measures to save the satellite. As a result, after the apogee engine of the satellite was ignited, the satellite was transferred from the parking orbit to an elliptic orbit with an apogee at 6480 km, so that many tests such as satellite data communication, TV and telephone retransmission were successfully conducted.

On April 8, 1984, the second experimental communications satellite was successfully launched. On April 16, the satellite was positioned at 125°E over the equator. Up to now, this was the first Chinese communications satellite in a geostationary orbit, which was a great breakthrough in the development of space technology in China. This success made China the fifth country that could launch a geostationary satellite in the world.

On September 7, 1988 the Fengyun-1 sun-synchronous meteorological satellite was successfully launched by the Long March-4 (CZ-4), launch vehicle for the first time. The satellite entered into the predetermined orbit and the satellite onboard instruments all worked normally. On that day, China Central Television broadcasted the pictures of cloud charts obtained by the Fengyun-1 satellite in a weather broadcasting program. The picture images were clear. This test fulfilled the task of verifying the performances of the satellite onboard instruments and equipment and proved that the general system design scheme of the satellite was correct.

The Fengyun-1 satellite worked normally in space for only 39 days due to failures in the control system. The development personnel adopted improved measures for the second Fengyun-1 satellite according to the problems discovered in the test.

On August 14, 1992, China successfully launched a US-made Australian telecommunications satellite with a Long March-2E launch vehicle. The launch took place at the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre (XSLC) in Sichuan Province, Southwest China. It was the second attempt to send the Aussat B1 satellite into orbit. The first abortive attempt was on March 22, that year, when a fault in the booster rocket's ignition system caused an emergency shutdown of the rocket engines.

Eleven minutes after the liftoff, the satellite was successfully separated from the rocket to begin its ten-day journey to a geostationary orbit 36000 kilometers above the earth.

On December 21, 1992, the second Australian communications satellite Aussat B2 was blasted into its planned initial orbit successfully by the Chinese launch vehicle Long March-2E at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center. The successful launch meant that the contract signed by the China Great Wall Industry Corp., the US Hughes Aircraft Corp. and the Australian Aussat Pty. Ltd. in 1988 had been fully honored. But it is a pity that the outward signal from the satellite was lost. An investigation concluded that the failure had nothing to do with any design, manufacture, or assembly flaw of the launch vehicle and nothing on the satellite had been found to be responsible for the explosion.

On February 8, 1994 the Long March-3A, a powerful launch vehicle newly developed by China, successfully launched a scientific satellite and a simulated satellite into space at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center. Based on the LM-3, the LM-3A is designed to launch large communications satellites and has a capability of launching a 2.5-ton satellite into geosynchronous transfer orbit. The scientific satellite launched by the LM-3A, named Shijian (Practice) 4, with 6 detectors onboard, is designed for space environment monitoring and environmental effect testing.

Again, the Long March-3 launch vehicle successfully launched a communications satellite, Apstar-1, at 18:31, July 21, 1994, from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center.

The Xi'an Satellite Control Center, the Yuanwang Instrumentation Ship, and other control centers, which monitored and controlled the satellite's flight, said the satellite separated from the LM-3 launch vehicle 24 minutes after launching, and entered into a geosynchronous transfer orbit, which has a perigee of 205,96 km, and an apogee of 42261.2 km and an inclination of 26.8°.

The Apstar-1 satellite, weighing about 1.4 tons and owned by the APT Satellite Company, is a HS376 model made by the Hughes Space and Communications Co. of the United States. It is equipped with 24 C-band transponders and has a service life of 10 years. The satellite was positioned at longitude 131° east over the equator, and operated by the APT Satellite Company.

The Australian Optus-B3 communications satellite was successfully sent into space by a Long March launch vehicle from Xichang Satellite Launch Centre. The 49.7-meter high LM-2E was launched at 7:10am, August 28, 1994, and put the satellite into a near earth orbit accurately and precisely after an 11-minute flight. The satellite was then handed over to Hughes, who would control the transfer of the satellite into the final geosynchronous orbit.

The Optus-B3 was built to replace the B2, which exploded and was lost during a launch by a LM-2E in December 1992, as stated above.

The Lockheed martin EchoStar-1 communications satellite was successfully sent into orbit by a Chinese LM-2E booster. The satellite went into an orbit with a perigee of 185.34 kilometers, an apogee of 306.71 kilometers and an inclination of 28 degrees after a launch from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre at 7:50, December 28, 1995.

The LM-3B, a new version in the Long March family, lifted off at 3:01 February 15, 1996, with the Intelsat 708 but began to experience an anomaly in attitude about 2 seconds later, pitching down and yawing to the right side of the launching direction. It touched down with its nose at about T+22s and exploded violently, leaving basically no major debris of the launcher and its payload. The Chief-Designer System for the launch vehicle organized an analysis team on the same day of the accident. Interpretation and analysis of the telemetered data have shown that the crash was caused by a change in the inertial reference, which is to be confirmed through further analysis and demonstration. XSLC did its best to rescue the wounded after the explosion, which killed six and injured 57. Of those killed two were senior engineers with CASC.

On July 3, 1996, an Asia-Pacific-IA communication satellite was successfully sent to the predetermined orbit by CM-3. This is the 41st launching of Long March series, collaborated by the Chinese Academy of Space Vehicle Technology and the Shanghai Bureau of Astronautics.

II. Principal Space Organizations

The national space program falls under the aegis of the Ministry of Aerospace Industry, now called the China Aerospace Corporation (CASC), since 1993. CASC performs the action of a government department when dealing with foreign affairs in the name of the China National Space Administration (CNSA). But commercial activities are directed by the China Great Wall Industry Corporation.

There are five main research Academies under CASC: the Chinese Academy of Launch Vehicles Technology (CALVT) in charge of designs and manufactures of the Long March series, the Chinese Academy of Space Technology in charge of design and manufactures of satellites, the Academy of Solid Rockets, the Academy of Tactical Missiles Technology, and the Academy of Cruise Missiles Technology.

The China Great Wall Industry Corporation (CGWIC), a foreign trade company under the Ministry of Aero Space Industry of China, is an exclusive organization in China, responsible for launch service marketing, commercial negotiation, contract execution, and performance with a legal person status.

The CGWIC has established business relations with a number of companies and research institutions in the United States, Sweden, Germany, France, Australia, Britain, Brazil, and with many international organizations throughout the world, as well as the International Communications Satellites Organization and International Marine Satellites Organization contracts and agreements signed for satellites launch and piggyback payload service.

The CGWIC will continue with its friendly exchanges and cooperation with the people of all circles in all the countries and regions in the world in wider fields so as to make a greater contribution to the development of the cause of space and the promotion of economic propriety in the world.

III. Colleges and Universities of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Early around 1940, Tsing Hua University, Shanghai Chao-Tang University, Central University and Xhejiang University established departments of Aeronautics. And around 1958, Beijing Aeronautical Institute, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xarbin Polytechnical University, Xarbin Military Institute of Technology and others established their departments of astronautics. Among these departments of astronautics, Northwestern Polytechnical University is uninterrupted since 1958. Thus far, it has graduated more than 5000 Bachelors, 500 Masters and 80 Ph.D.s. Most of the others were interrupted and only after 1985 were they resumed. In these departments, there are specialties: Flight Vehicle Design, Rocket Engines, Control Engineering, Flight Mechanics, Electronics, Avionics and Computer Sciences. These departments of Astronautics are now called colleges of Astronautics.

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Table 1
LONG MARCH LAUNCH VEHICLES TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

LONG MARCH LAUNCH VEHICLES TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION						
	First Stage propellant	Second Stage propellant	Third Stage propellant	Launch Mission	Payload Capacity (kg)	Commercial Availability (Year)
LM-1D	UDMH/ HNO_3-27S	UDMH/ N_2O_4	Solid	LEO	1,000	1995
LM-2C	UDMH/ N_2O_4	UDMH/ N_2O_4	——	LEO	2,800	1976
LM-3	UDMH/ N_2O_4	UDMH/ N_2O_4	LH/LOX	GTO	1,450	1986
LM-2E	UDMH/ N_2O_4	UDMH/ N_2O_4	——	LEO	9,200	1991
LM-3B	UDMH/ N_2O_4	UDMH/ N_2O_4	LH/LOX	GTO	4,800	1995
LM-3A	UDMH/ N_2O_4	UDMH/ N_2O_4	LH/LOX	GTO	2,300	1993

Table 2

LONG MARCH FAMILY FLIGHT RECORD					
No.	Version	Launch Date	Orbit	Launch Site	Result
1	LM−1	Apr.24, 1970	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
2	LM−1	Mar.3, 1971	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
3	LM−2A	Nov.5, 1974	LEO	Jiuquan	Fail
4	LM−2C	Nov.26, 1975	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
5	LM−2C	Dec.7, 1976	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
6	LM−2C	Jan.26, 1978	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
7	LM−2C	Sept.9, 1982	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
8	LM−2C	Aug.19, 1983	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
9	LM−3	Jan.29, 1984	GTO	Xichang	Partial Sucs
10	LM−3	Apr.8, 1984	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
11	LM−2C	Sept.12, 1984	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
12	LM−2C	Oct.21, 1985	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
13	LM−3	Feb.1, 1986	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
14	LM−2C	Oct.6, 1986	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
15	LM−2C	Aug.5, 1987	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
16	LM−2C	Sept.9, 1987	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
17	LM−3	Mar.7, 1988	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
18	LM−2C	Aug.5, 1988	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
19	LM−4	Sept.7, 1988	SSO	Taiyuan	Sucs.
20	LM−3	Dec.4, 1990	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
21	LM−3	Feb.4, 1990	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
22	LM−3	Apr.7, 1990	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
23	LM−2E	July.16, 1990	LEO	Xichang	Sucs.
24	LM−4	Sept.3, 1990	SSO	Taiyuan	Sucs.
25	LM−2C	Oct.5, 1990	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
26	LM−3	Dec.28, 1991	GTO	Xichang	Fail

27	LM–2E	Mar.22, 1992	LEO	Xichang	Fail
28	LM–2D	Aug.9, 1992	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
29	LM–2E	Aug.14, 1992	LEO	Xichang	Sucs.
30	LM–2C	Oct.6, 1992	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
31	LM–2E	Dec.21, 1992	LEO	Xichang	Sucs.
32	LM–3A	Feb.8, 1994	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
33	LM–2D	July.3, 1994	LEO	Jiuquan	Sucs.
34	LM–3	July.21, 1994	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
35	LM–2E	Aug.28, 1994	LEO	Xichang	Sucs.
36	LM–3A	Nov.30, 1994	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.
37	LM–2E	Jan.12, 1995	LEO	Xichang	Fail
38	LM–2E	Nov.28, 1995	LEO	Xichang	Sucs.
39	LM–2E	Dec. 28, 1995	LEO	Xichang	Sucs.
40	LM–3B	Feb.15, 1996	GTO	Xichang	Fail
41	LM–3	July.3, 1996	GTO	Xichang	Sucs.

Note: LM–4 and LM–2D are developed by Shanghai Bureau of Astronautics. Others are developed by CALT.

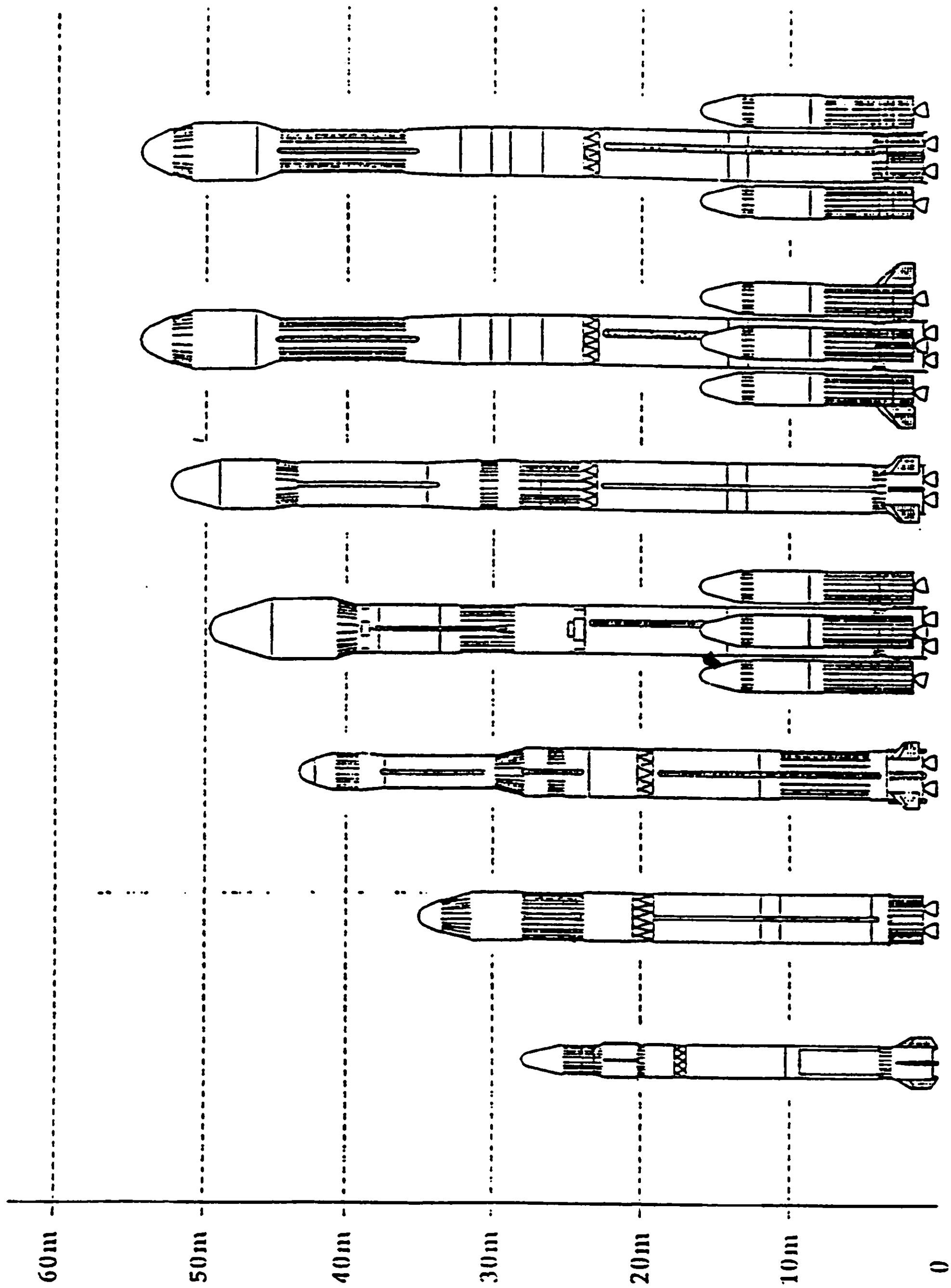

Figure 1 Long March Launch Vehicle Family.