



The exhibit documents the Chinese Human Space Programme.

China was the third country to independently send humans into space, but its march to space has been a long one, and the origin of the Programme is in great part still shrouded in secrecy, especially during the chaotic period of Mao's Cultural Revolution. No astrophilately document is available regarding the Shuguang-1 project to launch a Chinese man into space, that was cancelled for political reasons in 1972. Nor are available documents for the second China's crewed space programme that was announced in 1978 with the open publishing of details and impressive photos showing Chinese taikonauts in space suits being trained in altitude chambers. The programme was abruptly cancelled in December 1980.

Particularly important was the Fanhui Shi Weixing program, or FSW (known in the West as Recoverable Test Satellites program) developed from 1966, with some contradictory stop-and-go. Recoverable Test Satellites – launched for military and civilian observation tasks – greatly helped to test new technologies useful for future manned space missions, and especially for return to Earth.

Three models of recoverable satellites were developed: FSW-0, FSW-1 and FSW-2.

Nine FSW-0 satellites were successfully launched and recovered. But they are hardly documented in astrophilately, since early China's space missions were top secret. It was not until after the mid-1980s that space launches started to be recorded with commemorative covers serviced by military personnel in secretive conditions.

Five FSW-1 satellites, were successfully launched and recovered with the exception of FSW-1-5 known as Recoverable Test Satellite 14.

Three FSW-2 satellites followed between August 1992 and October 1996.

Under the secretive "Project 921", the third Chinese Manned Space programme later known as "Shenzhou", manned spaceflight techniques were developed, such as extravehicular activity, rendezvous and docking. This craft later served as a ferry to the Chinese Space Stations.

A Chinese Lunar programme, consisting of three phases of Chang'e robotic spacecraft was started in 2005. During the third phase, and after successfully testing the still unnamed New-Generation Spacecraft, designed for trips to Moon and Mars, China announced future crewed moon landings.

The exhibit shows some very rare early items. Unusual hard-to-find material is in general preferred and shown, including – besides flown items – hand-designed helicopter-flown covers, and items that were produced in very limited quantity and prepared for flying in space, but not embarked in the spacecraft due to weight limits or other payload constraints.

Since Chinese postmarks are often little known, also because of the language barrier, sometimes more detailed description is provided.

Sources

- Ling Fugen "The record and Study of China's Space Flown Philatelic Items" (2016)
- Own research
- Correspondance with experts in China


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