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Mini Review on Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) Mission in the Study of Solid Earth

Weiwei Jiang*

College of Water Sciences, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China.

Corresponding author:
Weiwei Jiang, College of Water Sciences, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China. E-mail: jing.we@bnu.edu.cn

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The Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) mission has emerged as a pivotal tool in advancing our understanding of the Earth's solid structure and its dynamic processes. Launched in 2002 as a joint mission by NASA and the German Aerospace Center (DLR), GRACE utilizes twin satellites to measure variations in Earth's gravity field with unprecedented precision. This innovative approach has significantly contributed to our insights into various aspects of the solid Earth, including geophysics, hydrology, and climate-related phenomena.

Monitoring Mass Redistribution

GRACE's primary capability lies in detecting changes in mass distribution across the Earth's surface. By precisely measuring gravitational anomalies, the mission can monitor variations in water storage, ice melt, and even mass movements within the solid Earth. This capability is particularly valuable for studying phenomena like glacial isostatic adjustment, where the Earth's crust responds to changes in ice loads.

Understanding Geophysical Processes

The GRACE mission plays a crucial role in understanding geophysical processes such as post-glacial rebound, tectonic activity, and mantle dynamics. Changes in mass distribution influence the Earth's gravitational field, providing insights into subsurface processes. Researchers leverage GRACE data to study crustal deformation, seismic activity, and the dynamics of Earth's interior.

Water Resource Management

One of the key applications of GRACE is in monitoring changes in terrestrial water storage. By tracking variations in groundwater, soil moisture, and snow accumulation, the mission aids in water resource management. This is especially valuable for regions facing issues such as droughts or excessive groundwater extraction.

Ice Mass Balance

GRACE contributes significantly to monitoring ice mass balance in polar regions and glaciers worldwide. The satellites detect changes in gravitational pull caused by ice melt and glacier movement, offering critical information for assessing the impacts of climate change on Earth's ice sheets.

Climate Change Studies

The mission's ability to monitor variations in Earth's gravity field makes it an essential tool for climate change studies. GRACE data helps quantify the contributions of ice melt and changes in water storage to sea level rise, contributing to our understanding of global climate dynamics.

Ocean Mass and Circulation

GRACE also provides insights into ocean mass variations and large-scale ocean circulation patterns. Changes in ocean mass influence sea level and ocean dynamics, and GRACE contributes valuable data for studying these complex interactions.

Conclusion

In summary, the GRACE mission has revolutionized our ability to observe and understand the solid Earth's dynamics. Its precise measurements of gravitational anomalies have broad applications, from advancing our knowledge of geophysical processes to aiding in climate change studies and water resource management. As new missions like GRACE-FO (Follow-On) continue this legacy, ongoing and future research will further unravel the intricacies of our planet's solid structure and its response to dynamic forces.