

# Japan's first lunar probe ends mission

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In this artist rendition released by Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), Japan's first lunar probe Kaguya orbits the moon in space. Kaguya made a controlled crash-landing on the moon Thursday, June 11, 2009, successfully completing a 19-month mission studying Earth's nearest neighbor, JAXA said. (AP Photo/Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, HO)

(AP) -- Japan's first lunar probe made a controlled crash landing on the moon Thursday, successfully completing a 19-month mission to study the Earth's nearest neighbor, Japan's space agency said.

The remotely controlled satellite, named after the folklore princess Kaguya, had been orbiting the moon to map its surface and study its mineral distribution and gravity levels. It was dropped onto the surface of the moon at 3:25 am. (1825 GMT), the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, said in a statement.

"The mission was a success. Thanks to Kaguya, we will have a very detailed map of the [lunar surface](#)," said JAXA spokesman Shinichi Sobue. The Japanese space agency will analyze data sent by Kaguya and plans to publish the results online in November.

The 55 billion yen (\$560 million) lunar mission launched in September 2007 is the largest in scope and ambition since the U.S. Apollo program of the 1960s and 70s, Sobue said.

"With data from Kaguya, we hope to shed light on the evolution of the moon," Sobue said.

During the Kaguya project, Japan launched two other orbiters to relay data. One landed on the moon in February, while the other has been measuring gravity around the moon and is still in orbit. Japan launched a [moon](#) probe in 1990, but that was a flyby mission.

Japan launched its first satellite in 1970 and has achieved several major scientific coups in space, including the launch of a probe that made a rendezvous with an asteroid. The Japanese-produced H-2A rocket is one of the world's most advanced and consistent.

In January, Japan launched the first satellite to monitor greenhouse gases, a tool to help scientists better judge where global warming emissions are coming from, and how much is being absorbed by the oceans and forests.

But its space program has also been beset by delays and mishaps.

In 2007, one of its four spy satellites became unresponsive due to apparent electrical problems. The other three satellites were functioning normally, but the failure left its multibillion dollar, long-awaited spy network with a significant hole.

A mission to Mars had to be abandoned in 2003 after a probe moved off course.

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