

# China to land first moon probe next year (Update)

July 31 2012, by Kelly Olsen

---



This file photo shows a Long March 3C rocket blasting off from the launch centre in Xichang, China's southwestern province of Sichuan, in 2010. China will next year attempt to land an exploratory craft on the moon for the first time, state media reported, in the latest project in the country's ambitious space programme.

China has said it will land an exploratory craft on the moon for the first time next year, as part of an ambitious space programme that includes a long-term plan to put a man on the moon.

China's third lunar probe will blast off in the second half of 2013 and attempt to land and transmit back a survey of the moon's surface, state television reported late Monday.

If it succeeds, experts said it would be the first craft to land on the moon

as part of a mission -- as opposed to performing a controlled crash landing at the end of one -- since the Soviet space programme achieved the feat in the 1970s.

"They (China) want a space programme that can be considered one of the finest in the world," said Morris Jones, an independent space analyst based in Sydney, Australia.

"If you want to be world leader in space, then you have to do missions like this."

The landing planned for next year would be China's first on the lunar surface and mark a new milestone in its space development. It is part of a project to orbit, land on and return from the moon, the official Xinhua news agency said.

Beijing sees its multi-billion-dollar space programme as a symbol of its rising global stature, growing technical expertise, and the Communist Party's success in turning around the fortunes of the once poverty-stricken nation.

The Asian superpower has been ramping up its manned activities as the United States, long the leader in the field, has scaled back some of its programmes, such as retiring its iconic space shuttle fleet.

## China in space

China will attempt to land an exploratory craft on the moon for the first time in 2013

### Key developments



Graphic on key developments in China's space programme

In its last white paper on space, China said it was working towards landing a man on the moon -- a feat so far only achieved by the United States, most recently in 1972 -- although it did not give a time frame.

It has spent about 39 billion yuan (\$6.1 billion) on its manned space programme since it began 20 years ago, state media have said.

Most recently, a 13-day voyage of the Shenzhou-9 spacecraft became

China's longest-ever space mission and was notable for including the nation's first woman astronaut among its three-member crew.

The crew also achieved China's first manual docking with an orbital module, the Tiangong-1, a highly complex manoeuvre first conducted by the Americans in the 1960s and essential to building a permanent manned space station.

The first key achievement in that programme came in 1999 with the launch of the unmanned Shenzhou-1 craft.

Two years later, Shenzhou-2 lifted off carrying small animals, and in 2003, China sent its first man into space. Since then, it has completed a space walk in 2008 and an unmanned docking between a module and rocket last year.

Next year's planned lunar probe launch will follow the Chang'e 1 in 2007 and Chang'e 2 in 2010, both named for the Chinese goddess of the moon.

Xinhua quoted the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense as saying the project was proceeding smoothly.

"I think it's well within China's capability and budget," Chen Lan, an independent space analyst, told AFP of next year's planned mission.

He said, however, that the third stage that calls for landing and then returning from the moon would require further technical progress in launch capability.

Chen said he envisions a timeframe of 2015-2016 for China to be ready to carry out that mission. But he did not see a manned mission to the

moon as China's near-term objective.

"It's not a technical decision," he said. "It's a political decision."

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: China to land first moon probe next year (Update) (2012, July 31) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-china-moon-probe-state-media.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--