

China to launch lunar lander by end of year

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China's Shenzhou-10 rocket blasts off from the Jiuquan space centre in northwest China's Gansu province on June 11, 2013. China will send its first probe to land on the moon by the end of the year, space administrators said Wednesday according to state media.

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Planning and construction for the unmanned Chang'e-3 mission have been completed and it has "officially entered its launch implementation

phase" the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence said, Xinhua reported.

It will be launched "at the end of this year", the official news agency said, adding that it will see a Chinese orbiter land on the moon for the first time, after using an unspecified technique to slow its speed.

In Chinese mythology, Chang'e is a woman who lives in a palace on the moon.

China's space programme is run by the People's Liberation Army and the original statement was not available to AFP.

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

The project is heavily promoted to the domestic audience, and President Xi Jinping attended the launch of its last [manned mission](#), Shenzhou-10, in June.

China's [space](#) capabilities remain far behind those of the United States and Russia, but it aims to build a station orbiting earth by 2020, with putting a man on the moon a future ambition.

The last human to walk on the Earth's [natural satellite](#) was Apollo 17 commander Eugene Cernan in 1972.

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