

China's Jade Rabbit rover comes 'back to life', officials say

February 13 2014, by Neil Connor



This screen grab taken from CCTV footage shows a photo of the Jade Rabbit moon rover taken by the Chang'e-3 probe lander on December 15, 2013

China's troubled Jade Rabbit lunar rover has survived a bitterly cold 14-day lunar night, officials said Thursday, prompting hopes it can be repaired after suffering a malfunction last month.

The problem was a setback for Beijing's ambitious military-run space programme, which includes plans for a permanent orbiting station by 2020 and eventually sending a human to the moon.

"The [rover](#) stands a chance of being saved as it is still alive," Pei Zhaoyu, spokesman for China's lunar probe programme told the official news agency Xinhua.

An [earlier report](#) by the semi-official China News Service said an attempt to restore the vehicle to full functionality on Monday had been unsuccessful.

The rover, named Yutu or Jade Rabbit after the pet of Chang'e, the goddess of the moon in Chinese mythology, experienced a "mechanical control abnormality" as the lunar night fell on January 25, provoking an outpouring of sympathy from Chinese Internet users.

Scientists had been concerned it might not be able to survive the extremely low temperatures of the lunar night, when it was supposed to remain dormant, but it was now receiving signals normally, Xinhua cited Pei as saying.

"Yutu has come back to life!", he said, adding that the rover "went into sleep under an abnormal status".

Experts were still working to establish the causes of its mechanical control abnormality, the agency reported, without giving details.

Australia-based independent space expert Morris Jones told AFP that the problem involved a solar panel on the rover failing to close.

"This allowed heat to escape from the rover in the cold lunar night. The cold has probably damaged some parts of the rover permanently, but it seems that some parts are still working," he said.

Beijing sees the space programme as a symbol of China's rising global stature and technological advancement, as well as the Communist Party's

success in reversing the fortunes of the once-impoverished nation.

The Jade Rabbit was deployed on the moon's surface on December 15, several hours after the Chang'e-3 probe landed.

The landing—the third such soft-landing in history, and the first of its kind since the Soviet Union's mission nearly four decades ago—was a huge source of pride in China, where millions across the country charted the rover's accomplishments.

An unverified Weibo user "Jade Rabbit Lunar Rover", which has posted first-person accounts in the voice of the probe, on Thursday made its first update since January.

"Hi, anybody there?" it said, prompting thousands of comments within minutes.

"I have missed you rabbit! Glad you are back!" said one poster, with another adding: "Yutu - you have finally woken. This is great!"

Xinhua has said the account is "believed to belong to space enthusiasts who have been following Yutu's journey to the moon".

In a previous online posting following the "abnormality", it said: "The sun here has fallen, and the temperature is dropping fast. I've said a lot today, but I still feel it's not enough.

"I'll tell everyone a little secret. I'm actually not that sad. I'm just in my own adventure story, and like any protagonist, I encountered a bit of a problem. Goodnight, Earth. Goodnight, humans."

More than 6,000 Internet users wrote messages in response, many of them expressing hope that the rover had not seen its last day.

"We'll always remember that you're watching us on the moon," wrote one poster. "One day, we'll bring you home."

China first sent an astronaut into space a decade ago and is the third country to carry out a [lunar rover](#) mission after the United States and the former Soviet Union.

The central government has said the latest mission was "a milestone in the development of China's aerospace industry under the leadership of... Comrade Xi Jinping".

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