

China launches first mission to moon and back

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A rocket carrying an experimental spacecraft intended for the moon and back launches from Xichang space base in China's Sichuan province on October 24, 2014

China launched its first space mission to the moon and back early Friday, authorities said, the latest step forward for Beijing's ambitious programme to one day land a Chinese citizen on the Earth's only natural satellite.

The unnamed, [unmanned probe](#) will travel to the moon, fly around it and head back to Earth, re-entering the atmosphere and landing, the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (SASTIND) said in a statement.

"The first stage of the first return journey test in China's moon probe programme has been successful," it said after the launch, from the Xichang space base in the southwestern province of Sichuan.

The module will be 413,000 kilometres from Earth at its furthest point on the eight-day mission, it added.

The official Xinhua news agency said it would re-enter the atmosphere at 11.2 kilometres per second (25,000 mph) before slowing down—a process that generates extremely high temperatures—and landing in northern China's Inner Mongolia region.

The mission is intended to test technology to be used in the Chang'e-5, China's fourth lunar probe, which aims to gather samples from the moon's surface and will be launched around 2017, SASTIND said previously.

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



Map of China locating the Xichang space facility, where the country's first space mission to the moon and back was launched Friday

The military-run project has plans for a permanent orbiting station by 2020 and eventually to send a human to the moon.

China currently has a rover, the Jade Rabbit, on the surface of the moon.

The craft, launched as part of the Chang'e-3 lunar mission late last year, has been declared a success by Chinese authorities, although it has been

beset by mechanical troubles.

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