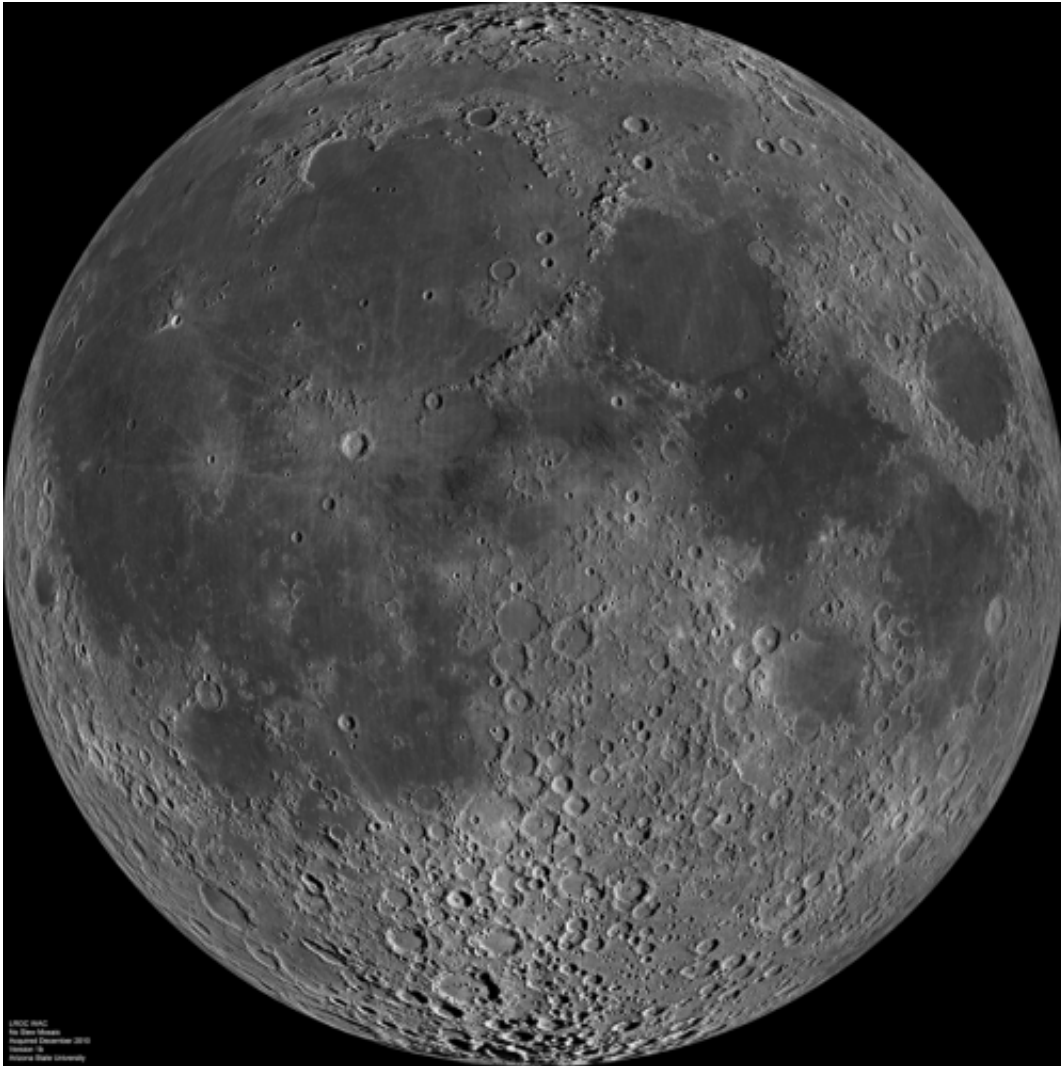


China to send orbiter to moon and back

October 22 2014



This is a composite image of the lunar nearside taken by the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter in June 2009, note the presence of dark areas of maria on this side of the moon. Credit: NASA

China will launch its latest lunar orbiter in the coming days, state media said Wednesday, in its first attempt to send a spacecraft around the moon and back to Earth.

The spacecraft, which has not been named, will launch between Friday and Sunday, China's official Xinhua news agency reported.

It is China's first [lunar module](#) capable of returning to Earth, which will require withstanding the high temperatures that develop when a probe re-enters the terrestrial atmosphere.

It 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, according to China's State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (SASTIND).

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.

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 one moon 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.

A Xinhua report last week said that the Jade Rabbit had "entered its 11th

dormancy as lunar night falls, with its functions degrading gracefully".

According to the Chinese Business View newspaper, the latest probe will be launched from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in the southwestern province of Sichuan.

"After flying around the moon for about one week, the [spacecraft](#) will return to earth, landing somewhere within our country's borders," the paper said.

"This will mark the first time in the work of the Chang'e series that a craft will have 'returned home' from the [moon](#)," it added.

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