

China to launch second lunar probe: state media

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Models of the Long March rocket are seen at the Sichuan Science and Technology Museum in Chengdu, southwestern China. The country will launch its second moon orbiter next October, state media have reported, as it powers ahead with a space programme that has sparked concerns abroad.

China will launch its second moon orbiter next October, state media reported Friday, as it powers ahead with a space programme that has sparked concerns abroad.

"It will orbit 100 kilometres (62 miles) closer to the [moon](#) and be equipped with better facilities," the official China Daily quoted Ye Peijian -- chief designer of Chang'e-1, the country's first lunar probe -- as saying.

"We expect to acquire more scientific data about the moon with increased accuracy."

The Chang'e-2 mission will carry out tests in preparation for a [lunar landing](#) and an unmanned rover on the moon's surface, expected to be launched before 2013, the report said. A manned mission is planned around 2020.

China's first [lunar probe](#) was launched in October 2007, signalling the Asian giant's rising [space](#) ambitions.

China has long maintained that rapid development of its space capabilities is peaceful in nature, but recent comments by air force commander Xu Qiliang sparked widespread concern that Beijing had other ideas.

Xu told state press earlier this month that China's armed forces should prepare for the "inevitable" militarisation of outer space -- a claim that was hastily disavowed by President Hu Jintao.

Chang'e-2, named after a legendary Chinese goddess who flew to the moon, has an improved carrying capacity. Its camera also has a higher resolution than its predecessor, the report said.

Ye said the landing site for the unmanned rover -- Chang'e-3 -- had already been chosen, adding it would study lunar geology and search for usable resources.

Scientists ultimately plan to build an observatory on the surface of the moon, the report said.

China became the world's third nation to put a man in space when Yang Liwei piloted the one-man Shenzhou-5 [space mission](#) in 2003.

In September 2008, the Shenzhou-7, piloted by three astronauts, carried out China's first [space walk](#).

In January 2007, China surprised the world by shooting down one of its own weather satellites in a test seen by many, including the United States, as a possible trigger of an arms race in space.

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