

Japan rocket with manga art launches satellite into space

November 2 2016



Japan's H-2A rocket, carrying a Himawari-9 weather satellite, is launched on Tanegashima Island on November 2, 2016

A Japanese rocket that fired a weather satellite into space on Wednesday was decked out in colourful manga in a bid to raise awareness among kids about the wonders of the universe.

The H-IIA rocket carrying the Himawari-9 weather satellite blasted into a cloudy sky at the Tanegashima Space Center in southern Kagoshima prefecture at 3:20 pm (0620 GMT).

Japan's domestically developed mainstay rocket carried two pieces of manga artwork originally drawn by Chuya Koyama, known for his comic book on two brothers who dream about becoming astronauts.

"We believe it's the first time in the world to launch a rocket with manga art on it," said Hirokazu Kosada of Young Astronauts Club Japan, the foundation that organised the rocket art project.

The artworks were created by using 30,000 digital images of photographs and paintings sent by children across Japan, according to Kosada.

One of the manga, which in total measures three-metres (nine-feet) tall and occupies the upper part of the 53-metre long rocket, depicted 12 jumping children.

"We wanted children in Japan to be interested in space and the weather," Kosada told AFP.

Japan has a massive space programme and the country has achieved successes in both scientific and commercial satellite launches. It has sent astronauts on space shuttle and International Space Station missions.

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Citation: Japan rocket with manga art launches satellite into space (2016, November 2) retrieved 22 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-11-japan-rocket-manga-art-satellite.html>

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