

Beat: Miscellaneous

China safely soft-lands first rover on the moon

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USPA News - A Chinese spacecraft landed on the moon on late Saturday, marking the country's first soft landing on an extraterrestrial body and the world's first soft landing of a space probe on the moon in nearly four decades, state-run media reported on Sunday. The unmanned Chang'e-3 spacecraft blasted off from the Xichang satellite launch site in southwest China's Sichuan Province aboard a Long March-3B carrier rocket at 1:30 a.m. local time on Monday.

The spacecraft initiated the soft-landing at 9 p.m. China Standard Time (CST) on Saturday, touching down about 11 minutes later in the Sinus Iridum region of the moon. The Beijing Aerospace Command and Control Center said the probe used automated controls to slow down and hover about 100 meters (330 feet) above the lunar surface before using fitted sensors to locate a landing spot. The craft's four "legs" were equipped with shock absorbers to minimize the impact on landing. Several hours later, China's first moon rover separated from the craft and touched the lunar surface at 4:35 a.m. CST Sunday, leaving a deep trace on the loose lunar soil. The 140 kilogram (308 pounds) rover, which is called Yutu, or Jade Rabbit, will now start taking photos of the environment. Saturday's landing makes China the third country after the United States and the Soviet Union to soft-land on the moon. During the mission on the surface over the coming three months, the moon rover will work to survey the moon's structure and substance and scope out natural resources. The series of Chang'e probes are named after a mythical Chinese moon goddess and Yutu refers to her pet. The first spacecraft was launched in October 2007 and maintained a 16-month lunar orbit, more than the expected one-year duration of the probe. The second probe was launched in October 2010 to take high-resolution photographs of Sinus Iridum and collected data for the lunar landing.

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