



AS IT IS

China Launches Attempt to Land Spacecraft on Mars

July 23, 2020

An unmanned Chinese **spacecraft** left Earth Thursday on a yearlong trip to the planet Mars. The launch marks the beginning of one of China's most important space **missions** yet.

China's national space agency launched the spacecraft, called Tianwen-1, from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch area on Hainan Island. Hundreds of people were watching and cheered as it rose into the sky.

The name Tianwen means "Heavenly Questions" or "Questions to Heaven" in Mandarin Chinese. The spacecraft is expected to reach the Red Planet by February of next year.

Once it begins orbiting the planet, a **probe** will leave the spacecraft and attempt to land on the Utopia Planitia area of Mars. Space agency officials say the probe will release a small **solar-powered** rover. They said the vehicle will explore the planet's surface for about three months.

A successful landing would make China only the second nation to place a spacecraft on the Martian planet. The United States has landed eight probes on Mars since 1976.

China would also be the first to successfully orbit, land and deploy a vehicle in the same mission.

This is China's first independent mission to Mars. A 2011 mission failed when a Russian rocket carrying a Chinese orbiter had problems after launch, and was unable to escape Earth's orbit.

Last year, China's Chang'e-4 spacecraft became the first to make a landing on the far side of the moon.

The Tianwen-1 is the third mission to Mars this year. On Monday, Japanese engineers launched a rocket. It is carrying an orbiter developed and built by the United Arab Emirates. The U.S. space agency NASA is set to launch a new Martian vehicle, named Perseverance, on July 30.

Another solar system

In a separate development, scientists have released, what they say, is the first image ever captured by a telescope of more than one planet orbiting a sun-like star. The European Southern Observatory (ESO) said Wednesday that the image came from its Extremely Large Telescope, in Chile's Atacama Desert.

The researchers said the star is part of the **constellation** Musca, or Fly. They believe it is just about 17 million years old. That is young when compared to Earth's sun, which is believed to be 4.5 billion years old.

The newly discovered solar system is about 300 **light-years** away from Earth.

A report on the discovery was published Tuesday in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*. Lead researcher Alexander Bohn of Leiden University described the star as very young and much like our own sun. He added that taking direct images provides the best chance to find life outside our solar system, if it exists.

I'm Anna Mateo.

VOA News reported this story. Susan Shand adapted it for Learning English. George Grow was the editor.

Words in This Story

spacecraft - *n.* a vehicle designed to fly in outer space

mission - *n.* a goal or a serious undertaking

probe - *n.* a vehicle that explores a planet's service

solar-powered - *adj.* something that draws its power from the sun

light-years - *n.* a unit of measure used to explain astronomical distances

constellation - *n.* a group of stars that appear to form pattern
