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CHINA'S INCLUSION IN MULTINATIONAL SPACE EXPLORATION EFFORTS: CHINA'S SPACE POLICY COMMUNITY AND THE PROSPECTS FOR CHINESE PARTICIPATION

Abstract

China is the most important recent entrant to the space exploration endeavour. China's participation in multinational exploration efforts to destinations such as the Moon and Mars and in precursor activities will influence how far and fast these missions proceed and how future global mechanisms and architectures for coordinated space exploration develop.

Which space exploration efforts is China willing and able to join? What are Chinese priorities for international cooperation on space exploration? What are the most promising means to pursuing multilateral cooperation with China on shared space exploration goals?

This paper first examines what capabilities and resources China can bring to collaborative exploration efforts, including those under development in its current and planned exploration and human spaceflight activities.

This paper then examines how evolving attitudes within China's emerging space policy community are changing the prospects for the country's participation in international exploration projects.

In a third section, the paper suggests opportunities for cooperation with China today that could enhance the prospects of collaborative space exploration tomorrow. To make the most of the opportunities presented by China's capabilities, the international community could make a sustained and coordinated effort to engage Chinese space professionals and to understand China's space policymaking goals and priorities.

In the short term, the most promising way to achieve these ends is to foster an internationally networked Chinese space community. Several means to this goal are available to other spacefaring countries, but remain under-utilized.

In the medium term, Chinese and international space specialists can focus their collaborative efforts on projects that yield maximal payoffs for future exploration missions but carry minimal political stakes. A promising example is the elaboration of common protocols for collecting data on astronaut health and performance in space.

The findings expressed in this paper are based on original research conducted in China, including extensive interviews with Chinese space professionals.