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CHINA'S LUNAR EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES AND RELEVANT POLICIES

Abstract

Since the dawn of the new Millennium, a renewed interest in lunar exploration seems to be taking shape, with ESA, Japan, India and China, all of whom are major space players, considering missions to the lunar surface. China has made solid progress in this field with extensive and innovative achievements. This article will start by giving a brief introduction to China's Lunar Exploration Program, which is better known as Chang'e Program – named after the country's mythical Moon Goddess, followed by a summary of China's Lunar Exploration Activities conducted so far, with an analysis to the features of China's each mission. The author will then focus on China's relevant policies for its lunar exploration activities. China's lunar exploration activities have been part and parcel of China's space activities as a whole. They are subject to China's space policies in general as shown in the country's three white papers on its space activities as well as a limited level of space-related legislation. As China's competent authority for regulating its Lunar Exploration Program, China National Space Administration (CNSA) published on 1 September 2011 a Regulation on the Release of Scientific Data arising from China's Lunar Exploration Program. China's Lunar Exploration Program has so far been conducted exclusively by the government and state-owned enterprises, but such a status will have to be altered as required by an all-out endeavor to deepen reforms nationwide as initiated by the new Chinese paramount leader Xi Jinping since he took office in late 2012. In Nov 2014, the central government released new guidelines on further encouraging private investment in a wider range of fields, which include but are not limited to the participation by private capital in the construction of State civil space infrastructure. It is noteworthy that as a latest follow-up decision made by the Chinese space authorities, China declared in March 2015 that it will attempt to use private investment for its Chang'e-4 mission which is scheduled to be launched by 2020. It seems premature to forecast the roadmap on the part of China for plans beyond its current Lunar Exploration Program within the foreseeable future – such as building permanent manned lunar stations or even the future commercialization of lunar resources exploitation. Among all other contributing factors, international collaboration would most likely become an essential condition given the huge investment, risk and other unprecedented challenges involved for such megaprojects. China thus looks forward to united efforts by all nations to make this new space dream a reality in the near future while staying true to the notions of peaceful and sustainable uses of outer space for the benefits of all humankind.