# Over the weekend, China debuted a new rocket on the nation’s path to the Moon

These startups operate with the blessing of China’s government and, in many cases, got their start by utilizing surplus military equipment and investment from Chinese local or provincial governments. However, the Chinese Communist Party has allowed them to raise capital from private sources, and they operate on a commercial basis, almost exclusively to serve domestic Chinese markets.

In some cases, these launch startups compete for commercial contracts directly with the government-backed Long March rocket family. The Long March 12 could be in the mix for launching large batches of spacecraft for China’s planned satellite Internet networks.

Some of these launch companies are working on reusable rockets similar in appearance to SpaceX’s Falcon 9. All of these rockets, government and commercial, are part of an ecosystem of Chinese launchers tasked with hauling military and commercial satellites into orbit.

The Long March 12 launch Saturday was China’s 58th orbital launch attempt of 2024, and no single subvariant of a Chinese rocket has flown more than seven times this year. This is in sharp contrast to the United States, which has logged 142 orbital launch attempts so far this year, 119 of them by SpaceX’s Falcon 9 or Falcon Heavy rockets.

There are around a dozen US orbital-class launch vehicle types you might call operational. But a few of these, such as

Northrop Grumman’s Pegasus XL and Minotaur, and NASA’s Space Launch System, haven’t flown for several years.

SpaceX’s Falcon 9 is now the dominant leader in the US launch industry. Most of the Falcon 9 launches are filled to capacity with SpaceX’s own Starlink Internet satellites, but many missions fly with their payload fairings only partially full. Still, the Falcon 9 is more affordable on a per-kilogram basis than any other US rocket.

In China, on the other hand, none of the commercial launch startups have emerged as a clear leader. When that happens, if China allows the market to function in a truly commercial manner, some of these Chinese rocket companies will likely fold.

However, China’s government has a strategic interest in maintaining a portfolio of rockets and launch sites, same as the US government. For example, Chinese officials said the new launch site at Wenchang, where the Long March 12 took off from over the weekend, can accommodate 10 or more different types of rockets.

https://arstechnica.com/space/2024/12/you-can-add-another-new-rocket-to-chinas-growing-stable-of-launch-vehicles/