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## Reusable experimental spacecraft put into orbit

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China launched a Long March 2F carrier rocket at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Northwest China's Gobi Desert early on Friday morning, sending a reusable experimental spacecraft into orbit, according to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

The leading State-owned space conglomerate said in a news release that the test vehicle is scheduled to stay in orbit for a certain period of time and will then return to its preset landing site in China.

During the orbital flight, it is tasked with verifying reusable technologies and in-orbit service technologies, laying a technological foundation for the peaceful use of space, the company said.

It did not elaborate on the details of the mission and the spacecraft, or publish pictures of the liftoff or scenes inside the ground control hall.

The launch was the 18th flight of the Long March 2F rocket model, which is usually used to launch China's Shenzhou crewed missions. The rocket has a carrying capacity of just over eight metric tons to low Earth orbit.

The mission was the second time that China has made public the operations of its reusable experimental spacecraft.

The country's previous orbital test of a trial vehicle took place in September 2020, with the craft traveling for just under two days in orbit.

Space officials said that the mission was a complete success and resulted in major breakthroughs

for China's reusable spacecraft research. Once the spacecraft enters formal operations, it will be able to offer space round-trip services which are more convenient and affordable than existing ones, officials said.

According to experts, reusable spacecraft will have a wide range of applications, such as civilian space tours, transporting astronauts, resupplying space stations and putting satellites into orbit at a lower cost.

China's space contractors have been studying and demonstrating reusable technologies for their space programs for several years.

Wu Peixin, an aerospace industry observer in Beijing, said that China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp and China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp, the two largest

suppliers of rockets and spacecraft in the nation, are running their own programs that share the same goal — making their space products reusable — to reduce users' costs and improve operational efficiency.

"Reusability is a critical characteristic of next-generation spacecraft and is key to whether our products will be attractive and popular on the international market," he said.

In addition to State-owned enterprises, private space companies in China are also investing heavily in reusable models, Wu said, suggesting that the government should use favorable policies and financial support to help private players develop such advanced technologies to foster the overall competitiveness of the country's space industry.