

Sent: Monday, December 10, 2012 1:16 AM

Subject: China's asteroid probe to arrive Thursday -- but remains 'missing in action'??

1. Astronomers are preparing for a close Earth fly-by of a small asteroid on Wednesday, during which it will be scanned by Earth-based radars.
2. The asteroid is named Toutatis, and it's about 2 x 4 kilometers in a potato shape.
3. News link here:
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/12/1204-asteroid-earth-science-space/?source=hp_dl4_news_asteriod_earth_20121206
4. MOST NEWSWORTHY: China has dispatched its first interplanetary probe to intercept the asteroid and take photographs.
5. Problem is: their official media has dropped all reference to the probe, months ago, and the continuing silence is suggesting to some observers that it has died on route. Otherwise there should have been a lot of anticipatory publicity for the intercept, which will occur a day after the asteroid's close path to Earth.
6. The most up-to-date technical descriptions will be posted at the website of the 'Planetary Society' in Pasadena, California, here:
Asteroid 4179 Toutatis' upcoming encounters with Earth and Chang'E 2

Posted By [Emily Lakdawalla](#) 2012/12/06 12:19 CST

<http://www.planetary.org/blogs/emily-lakdawalla/2012/12061004-toutatis-preview.html>

6. Another well-informed private forum is here:
<http://forum.nasaspaceflight.com/index.php?topic=19644.255>

7. If the Chinese succeed in this innovative mission, which involved redirecting a lunar orbital probe deeper into space after it had completed its original mapping mission, they will have moved into the front rank of deep space faring nations that includes the US, Europe, and a struggling Japan. Russia has not made a successful deep space mission in a quarter century.

8. If the Chinese probe fails, it still deserves high marks for sophistication and ambition.

9. On the other hand, they may start their press announcements any day now. But the silence, this close to the event, strikes me as unusual.