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## Galactic Energy plans sea launches

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Galactic Energy, a private space company in Beijing, plans to launch one of its own rockets from the sea in the coming summer, which, if it succeeds, will become the first sea-based launch by the country's private sector.

Xia Dongkun, a vice-president at Galactic Energy, said on Thursday that the prospective launch has been scheduled to take place in the Yellow Sea off the coast of Shandong province sometime between June and August.

"One of our Ceres 1 rockets will blast off from a launcher vehicle that will be aboard a modified deck barge. The rocket will transport five to six small satellites to a low-Earth orbit," he said.

So far, China has performed five sea-based launches — four by the Long March 11 rocket and one by the Smart Dragon 3. Both are products of the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, a subsidiary of the State-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

"We chose to carry out sea-based launches because this method gives us an alternative to our country's land-based launch facilities that are already busy handling government-backed programs. It enables us to make more launches each year," Xia said.

Another consideration is safety and efficiency, he noted.

Compared with conventional land-based launches, a sea mission has a lower risk for densely populated areas along the rocket's trajectory. The method also allows launches to be made near the equator, which increases the rocket's carrying capacity, lowers launch costs and extends the life span of some satellites, according to Xia.

Galactic Energy has achieved five successive successes in orbital launch with its Ceres 1 model, far outperforming other private competitors. The five flights took off from the Jiuguan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China's Gobi Desert and placed 19 satellites into space.

There are a number of private rocket companies in China but only Galactic Energy and i-Space, also a Beijing-based company, have succeeded in orbital missions, which refers to spaceflight by a rocket that deploys payloads into an orbit in outer space.