

China has just returned the first-ever samples from the far side of the moon

A Chinese probe has returned to Earth carrying the first samples ever taken from the far side of the moon. Chinese state television broadcast images Tuesday of the capsule holding the samples, as it floated down under parachute onto the grassy steppe of Inner Mongolia.

Scientists say the rocks inside the little space capsule could open a new window into how our nearest neighbor formed.

Chang'e 6, which landed on the far side in early June, wouldn't be the first space mission to send home moon rocks that rewrote textbooks. Samples taken by Neil Armstrong during the Apollo 11 mission in 1969 upended what was then the prevailing theory about how the moon came to be.

Prior to Apollo, researchers had thought that it formed when a bunch of asteroids near Earth gradually glommed together. But the minerals in the moon rocks that the astronauts brought back suggested a much more violent origin story, according to Richard Carlson, director emeritus of the Earth and Planets Laboratory at Carnegie Science in Washington D.C.

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