

China's space station plan delayed for 'technical reasons'

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Models of the Long March rocket are seen at the Sichuan Science and Technology Museum in Chengdu, southwestern China. China has postponed the next step in its ambitious space station programme until 2011 for technical reasons, state media said.

China has postponed the next step in its ambitious space station programme until 2011 for technical reasons, state media said Wednesday.

China had originally planned to place the Tiangong-1 space module in orbit late this year and undertake experimental docking manoeuvres in subsequent missions, Xinhua news agency cited rocket designer Qi Faren as saying.

But the initial launch has now been delayed by a year due to "technical reasons", Qi said, without elaborating.

Qi was speaking to the media on the sidelines of a meeting of a legislative advisory body, which convened on Wednesday, two days before the start of the annual session of China's rubber-stamp parliament.

[China](#) became the third nation to put a man in space when Yang Liwei piloted the one-man Shenzhou-5 [space mission](#) in 2003.

In September 2008, the Shenzhou-7, piloted by three "taikonauts" or astronauts, carried out China's first space walk.

The Tiangong-1, or "Heavenly Palace," is seen as the building block of China's maiden [space station](#).

Weighing about 8.5 tonnes, it would provide a "safe room" for Chinese astronauts to live in and conduct research in [zero gravity](#).

After being placed in orbit, the Tiangong-1 would dock with the unmanned Shenzhou-8 spacecraft in the country's first [space docking](#) -- a feat to be controlled remotely by scientists on the ground.

Qi said Shenzhou-9 and Shenzhou-10, carrying two to three astronauts, would also dock with the orbiting module in successive years.

He said other key technologies being worked on in the space station programme include the replenishment of propellant, air, water and food for the space module as well as a life support system.

The [International Space Station](#) began with the launch into orbit of the first station element, a Russian-built module, in 1998. The first full-time

crew arrived two years later.

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