

China to attempt first space rendezvous

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Yang Liwei detailed the next stages of China's human spaceflight programme during a press visit to Space City in Beijing, a research and training centre normally closed to the public.

"Our next goal is to realise a [space docking](#) of two vehicles during the

second half of 2011," said Yang, whose journey into space in 2003 made him the first Chinese astronaut.

The [manoeuvre](#) will involve the Tiangong 1 module and the Shenzhou 8 rocket, said Yang, confirming an announcement made last October.

Tiangong means "Celestial Palace" and the eight-tonne orbiter is on a two-year mission that will see it rendezvous in 2012 with the Shenzhou 9 and 10 rockets, both of which will have astronauts on board.

Before 2016, China will launch a space laboratory and, Yang said, "around 2020, we plan to realise the construction of a space station in [orbit](#) for long-term stays in space".

China's space station will be made up of a core module, two laboratories, a [cargo ship](#) and a manned rocket, with a total weight of 60 tonnes, compared with 137 tonnes for the Russian station Mir and 419 tonnes for the [International Space Station](#) (ISS), the China Daily reported this week.

"China would like to cooperate with other countries" on the peaceful use of space, said Yang, who holds the rank of major general in the Chinese army, which runs the country's manned space flight programme.

Asked about Chinese plans to send men to the moon, he said: "The Chinese have no specific [lunar mission](#) now," but added that such a project was under consideration.

"I really experienced the prestige that space can bring to a country," he said.

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