

China spacecraft set to return to Earth Friday

June 28 2012

A Chinese spacecraft with three astronauts aboard will return to Earth Friday after a nearly two-week mission that included the country's first manual docking in orbit, state media said.

The Shenzhou-9 will return to Earth around 10:00 am (0200 GMT) on Friday, the state [Xinhua news agency](#) said Thursday, quoting an unnamed space programme official.

China launched the spacecraft carrying three crew, including the country's first female astronaut, from the remote [Gobi desert](#) in the nation's northwest on June 16.

The Shenzhou-9 manually linked with the Tiangong-1 space module in orbit on Sunday, the key goal of the mission and a milestone in an ambitious programme to build a space station by the end of the decade.

China's rulers sees the space programme as a symbol of the country's rising global stature, growing technical expertise and the Communist Party's success in turning around the fortunes of the once poverty-stricken nation.

The spacecraft had docked automatically early in its mission, but mastering manual docking is necessary as a back-up to reduce risk.

The [manoeuvre](#) -- successfully completed by the Americans and Russians in the 1960s -- involves two vessels orbiting Earth at thousands

of kilometres (miles) per hour coming together gently to avoid destroying each other.

In preparation for the return, the Shenzhou-9 on Thursday separated from the Tiangong-1, where the [astronauts](#) had been living, Xinhua said.

The spacecraft will land by parachute in the northern Chinese region of Inner Mongolia, which has been used for all previous missions, and [forecasters](#) say the weather will be suitable, according to Xinhua.

China's first woman in space, Liu Yang, has been hailed as a national heroine with her every move followed excitedly in the Chinese media and on the country's popular microblogs.

The other astronauts are team leader Jing Haipeng and Liu Wang, who performed the manual docking.

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: China spacecraft set to return to Earth Friday (2012, June 28) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-china-spacecraft-earth-friday.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--