

Chinese astronauts visit Hong Kong

August 10 2012

Three astronauts from China's first manual space docking mission received a rowdy welcome from hundreds of flag-waving children as they arrived in Hong Kong on Friday for a four-day visit.

Astronauts Jing Haipeng, Liu Wang and Liu Yang, China's first female in space, successfully completed the country's first manual space docking with the orbiting Tiangong-1 module in June, becoming national heroes.

Wearing blue jumpsuits and flanked by officials and military chiefs, the astronauts posed stiffly for the cameras after arriving in the southern city at the invitation of Hong Kong's government.

"I'm very happy that I met the astronauts. I want to be an astronaut in the future because I want to see what space looks like," said Joe Yu, 10, one of the students at the airport.

Nancy Wong, 10, said she was pleased to see the astronauts but had no intention of pursuing a career in space.

"I don't want to be an astronaut because the rocket goes into the air very fast like a roller coaster. It's frightening," she said.

Some people queued overnight Tuesday to snap up tickets to see the astronauts at a variety show on Saturday, local media reported.

The official Xinhua news agency described the trip to the semi-

autonomous former British colony as a "charm offensive", but some residents dismissed it as an empty propaganda stunt.

"There's no meaning in inviting them to Hong Kong -- it's just a show," said 38-year-old clerk Stanley So, adding that the whole trip was a waste of the city government's money.

More than 40 people accompanied the astronauts from Beijing, including what Xinhua called "key commanders" and designers of China's manned space programme.

Speaking in Mandarin, Liu Wang said he was delighted to be in the mainly Cantonese-speaking territory.

"In space, Hong Kong's night lights are very pretty," he told a press conference, where the astronauts thanked the city for its support.

Liu Yang recited a pre-prepared speech in which she described the "supreme honour" of representing Chinese women.

Mission commander Jing Haipeng recalled how his tears welled in zero-gravity as he spoke to President Hu Jintao from space.

"I could feel the love of the Communist Party and the people all over China," he said.

Aside from the variety show, the astronauts are due to meet students and open a space exhibition over the weekend, before leaving on Monday for the nearby territory of Macau.

The astronauts are the second high-profile visitors to Hong Kong from the mainland since July 1, when Hu came to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the territory's handover from British rule.

The "charm offensive" comes amid opinion polls showing loyalty to China among Hong Kong's seven million people is at a low ebb, with one survey last year showing only 16.6 percent identified themselves as Chinese citizens.

The docking procedure marked a major milestone in an ambitious Chinese space programme that aims to build a space station by the end of the decade.

China has said it will land its first exploratory craft on the moon next year.

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

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: Chinese astronauts visit Hong Kong (2012, August 10) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-08-chinese-astronauts-hong-kong.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>
--