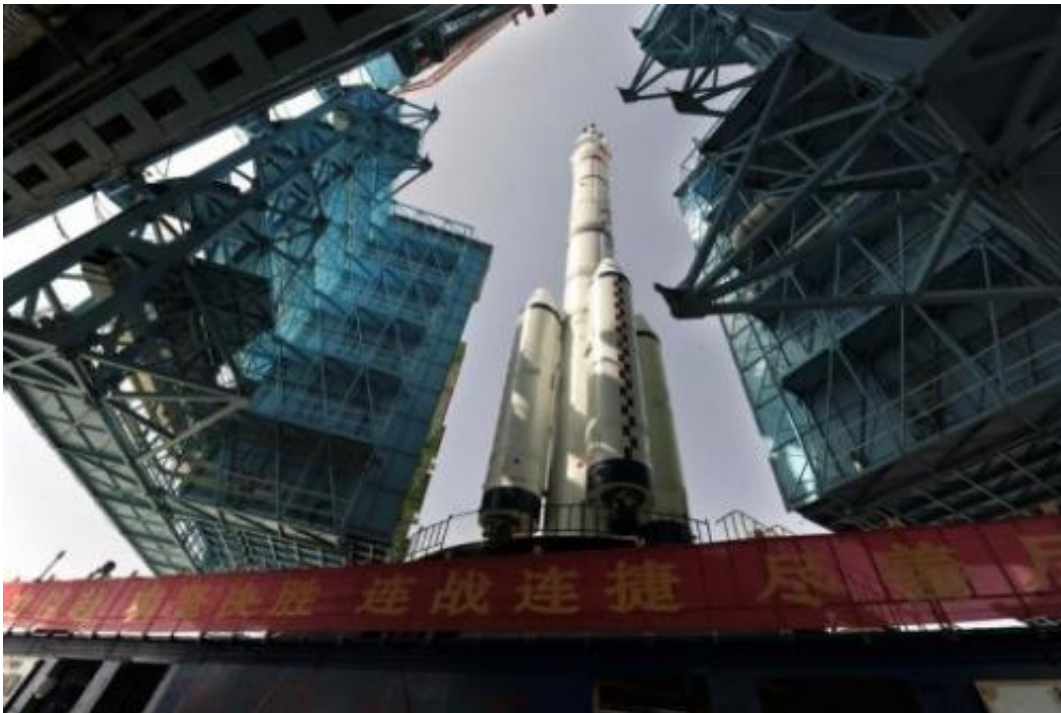


China to launch longest-ever manned space mission

June 11 2013



The Shenzhou-10 on its launch pad in Jiuquan, in the Gobi desert, on June 3, 2013. The Shenzhou-10—the name means "Divine Vessel"—was due to lift off at 0938 GMT.

China was to launch its longest-ever manned space mission Tuesday, with its second woman astronaut among the crew, as it steps up its ambitious space programme, a symbol of the country's growing power.

President Xi Jinping arrived at the Jiuquan launch centre in the Gobi

desert to watch the lift-off of Shenzhou-10—the name means "Divine Vessel"—due at 0938 GMT.

UPDATE: [Chinese spacecraft blasts off with three astronauts](#)

Beijing sees the multi-billion-dollar space programme as a marker of its rising global stature and mounting technical expertise, as well as the ruling Communist Party's success in turning around the fortunes of the once poverty-stricken nation.

The programme is heavily promoted to the domestic audience, and state broadcaster CCTV began continuous coverage several hours before the launch.

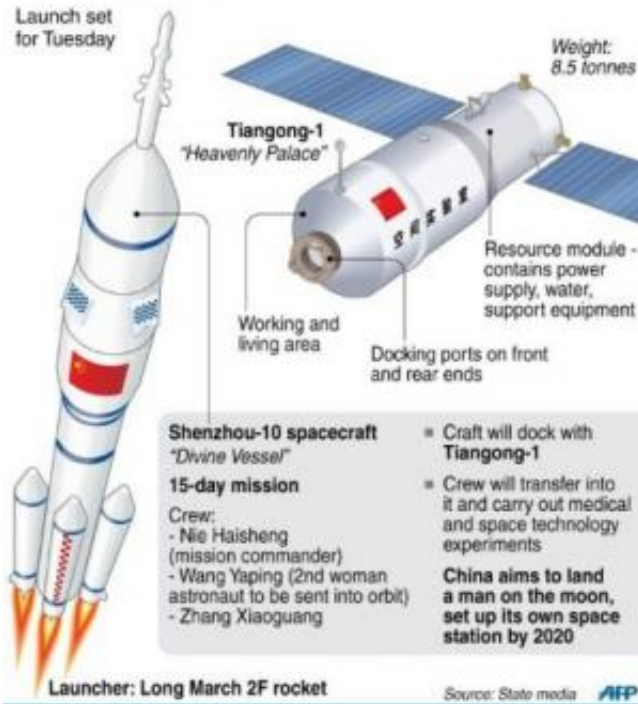
Xi told the three astronauts, who include female air force pilot Wang Yaping, 33, and are due to spend 15 days in space, that he had come to see them off on behalf of the Communist Party, the government, the military and "all the nationalities and people of the entire nation".

"You make all the Chinese people feel proud. Your mission is both glorious and sacred", he added.

Mission commander Nie Haisheng responded: "We will certainly obey orders, comply with commands, be steady and calm, work with utmost care and perfectly complete the Shenzhou-10 mission."

China in space

The longest mission yet



Graphic fact file on China's space launch set for Tuesday.

The three crew, in white space suits, emerged from a building and greeted crowds of well-wishers waving flags and artificial flowers, some in traditional costumes, before getting into a bus for transfer to the launch pad.

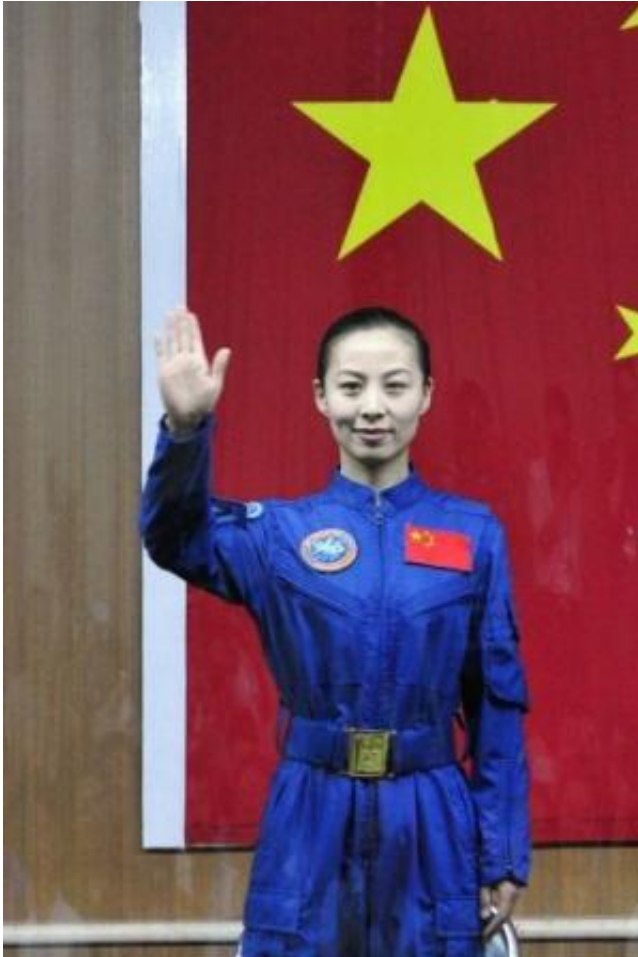
State-run newspapers also gave the mission blanket coverage, with stories and pictures of the astronauts on almost every front page.

Wang will teach lessons to schoolchildren via video link during the mission, officials said.

"We are all students in facing the vast universe. We are looking forward to joining our young friends to learn and explore the mystical and

beautiful universe," she told a press conference on Monday.

The official Xinhua news agency ran profiles of the three astronauts, and said that Wang has 1,600 hours of flying experience, including dispelling clouds for the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics in 2008.



Crew member of the Shenzhou-10, Wang Yaping, during a press conference on June 10, 2013. She is China's second woman astronaut.

She is a major in the military and a member of the Communist Party.

"The experience of doing farm work since an early age has made her strong, and the habit of long-distance running tempered her will," Xinhua said.

It quoted her as saying that during parachute exercises in the air force: "We girls all cried while singing an inspiring song 'A Hero Never Dies' on our way back after the training."

The third crew member, senior colonel Zhang Xiaoguang, has previously tried for selection for space missions but was not picked, Xinhua said.

"If success is part of our life, so are setbacks. If those who had never failed are winners, so are those who always keep on trying," it quoted him as saying.



Crew members of the Shenzhou-10 attend a press conference in Jiuquan, northwest China, on June 10, 2013. The three astronauts are scheduled to spend 15 days in space.

The Shenzhou-10 will dock with the Tiangong-1—"Heavenly Palace"—space laboratory, and the crew will transfer into it and carry out medical and space technology experiments.

China first sent a human into space only in 2003 and its capabilities still lag behind the US and Russia, but its programme is highly ambitious and includes plans to land a man on the moon and build a station orbiting earth by 2020.

At the same time the United States, long the leader in the field, has scaled back some of its projects, such as retiring its space shuttle fleet.

Independent space analyst Morris Jones, who is based in Sydney, Australia, said: "I think the fact that they're flying a very long and complex mission shows that China's astronaut programme has reached a full degree of maturity.

"They are very steadily laying the groundwork that they will need to build their own space station."

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