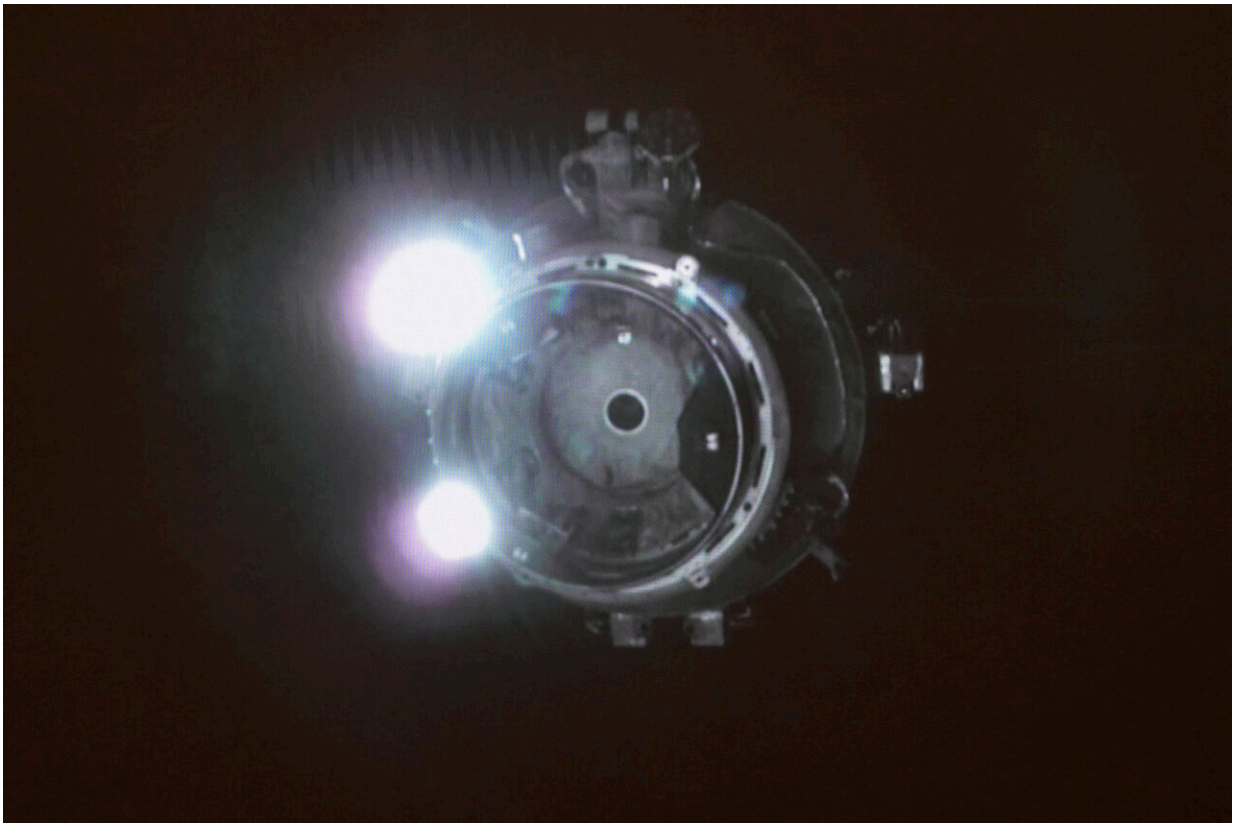


New crew docks at China's first permanent space station

October 16 2021



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, screen image captured at Beijing Aerospace Control Center in Beijing, Saturday, Oct. 16, 2021 shows a view from the Tianhe space station as the Shenzhou-13 prepares to dock. China's Shenzhou-13 spacecraft carrying three Chinese astronauts on Saturday docked at its space station, kicking off a record-setting six-month stay as the country moves toward completing the new orbiting outpost. Credit: Tian Dingyu/Xinhua via AP

Chinese astronauts began Saturday their six-month mission on China's first permanent space station, after successfully docking aboard their spacecraft.

The astronauts, two men and a woman, were seen floating around the module before speaking via a live-streamed video.

The new crew includes Wang Yaping, 41, who is the first Chinese woman to board the Tiangong space [station](#), and is expected to become China's first female spacewalker.

"We'll co-operate with each other, carefully conduct maneuvers, and try to accomplish all tasks successfully in this round of exploration of the universe," said Wang in the video.

The space travelers' Shenzhou-13 spacecraft was launched by a Long March-2F rocket at 12:23 a.m. Saturday and docked with the Tianhe core module of the space station at 6:56 a.m.

The three astronauts entered the station's core module at about 10 a.m., the China Manned Space Agency said.

They are the second crew to move into China's Tiangong space station, which was launched last April. The first crew stayed three months.

The new crew includes two veterans of space travel—Zhai Zhigang, 55, and Wang. The third member, Ye Guangfu, 41, is making his first trip to space.



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, the crewed spaceship Shenzhou-13, atop a Long March-2F carrier rocket, is launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China's Gobi Desert, Oct. 16, 2021. Credit: Li Gang/Xinhua via AP

The mission's launch was seen off by a military band and supporters singing "Ode to the Motherland," underscoring national pride in the space program, which has advanced rapidly in recent years.

The crew will do three spacewalks to install equipment in preparation for expanding the station, assess living conditions in the Tianhe module, and conduct experiments in space medicine and other fields.

China's military-run [space program](#) plans to send multiple crews to the

station over the next two years to make it fully functional.

When completed with the addition of two more sections—named Mengtian and Wentian—the station will weigh about 66 tons, much smaller than the International Space Station, which launched its first module in 1998 and weighs around 450 tons.

Two more Chinese modules are due to be launched before the end of next year during the stay of the yet-to-be-named Shenzhou-14 crew.



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, screen image captured at Beijing Aerospace Control Center in Beijing, China, Saturday, Oct. 16, 2021 shows three Chinese astronauts, from left, Ye Guangfu, Zhai Zhigang and Wang Yaping waving after entering the space station core module Tianhe. China's Shenzhou-13 spacecraft carrying three Chinese astronauts on Saturday docked at its space station, kicking off a record-setting six-month stay as the country

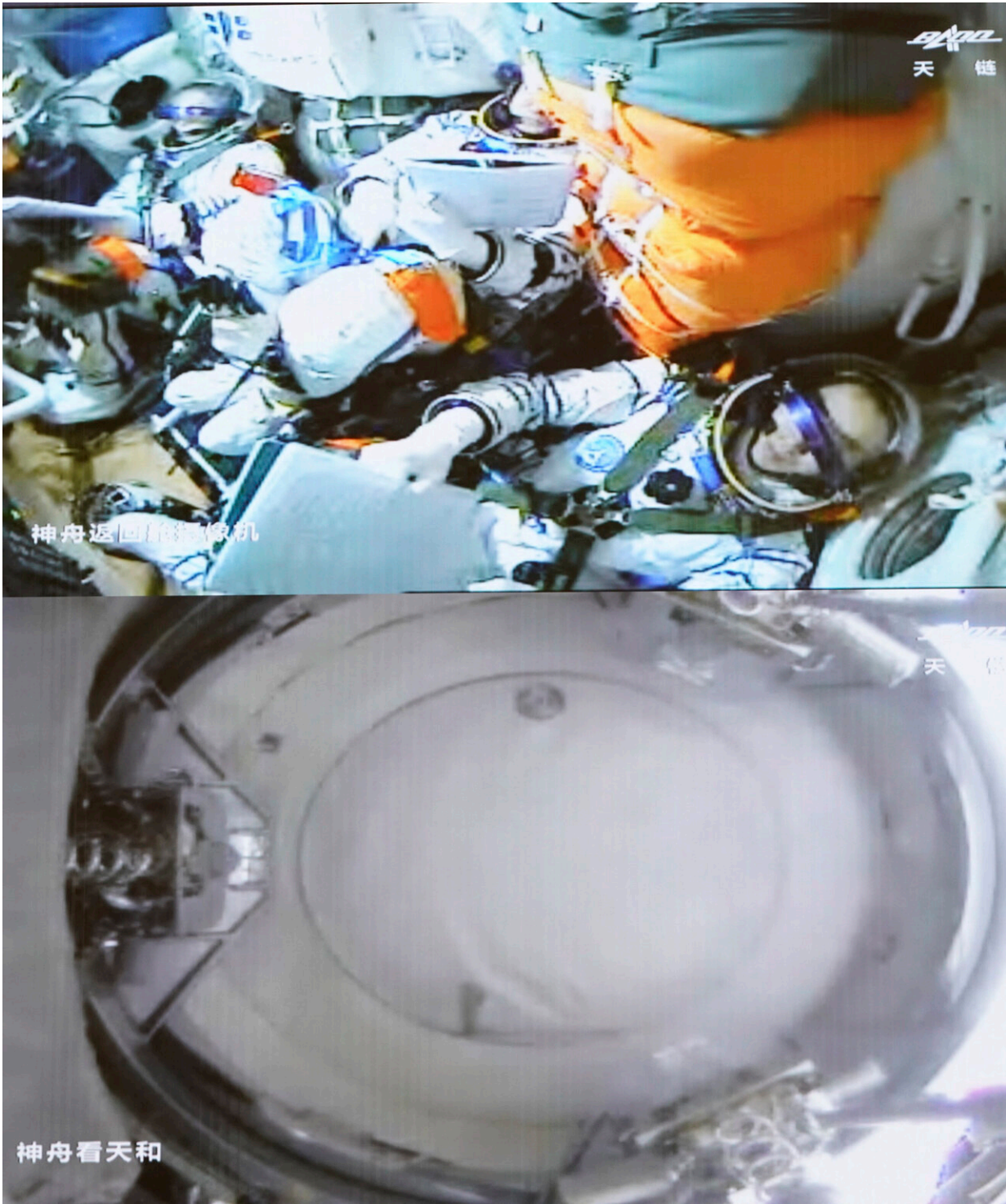
moves toward completing the new orbiting outpost. Chinese characters, left, read "Platform Camera B." Credit: Tian Dingyu/Xinhua via AP

China's Foreign Ministry on Friday renewed its commitment to cooperation with other nations in the peaceful use of space.

Spokesperson Zhao Lijian said sending humans into space was a "common cause of mankind." China would "continue to extend the depth and breadth of international cooperation and exchanges" in crewed spaceflight and "make positive contributions to the exploration of the mysteries of the universe," he said.

China was excluded from the International Space Station largely due to U.S. objections over the Chinese program's secretive nature and close military ties, prompting it to launch two experimental modules before starting on the permanent station.

U.S. law requires congressional approval for contact between the American and Chinese space programs, but China is cooperating with space experts from other countries including France, Sweden, Russia and Italy. Chinese officials have said they look forward to hosting astronauts from other countries aboard the space station once it becomes fully functional.



In this combination of photos released by Xinhua News Agency, screen image captured at Beijing Aerospace Control Center in Beijing, Saturday, Oct. 16, 2021 shows China's Shenzhou-13 crewed spaceship docking with the radial port

of the space station core module Tianhe. China's Shenzhou-13 spacecraft carrying three Chinese astronauts on Saturday docked at its space station, kicking off a record-setting six-month stay as the country moves toward completing the new orbiting outpost. Credit: Tian Dingyu/Xinhua via AP

China has launched seven crewed missions with a total of 14 astronauts aboard—two have flown twice—since 2003, when it became only the third country after the former Soviet Union and the United States to put a person in space on its own.

China has also expanded its work on lunar and Mars exploration, including landing a rover on the little-explored far side of the Moon and returning lunar rocks to Earth for the first time since the 1970s.



The crewed spaceship Shenzhou-13, atop a Long March-2F carrier rocket, is launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China's Gobi Desert, Oct. 16, 2021 Credit: Chinatopix Via AP

This year, China also landed its Tianwen-1 space probe on Mars, whose accompanying Zhurong rover has been exploring for evidence of life on the red planet.

Other Chinese space programs call for collecting soil from an asteroid and bringing back additional lunar samples. China has also expressed an aspiration to land people on the moon and possibly build a scientific base there, although no timeline has been proposed for such projects. A highly secretive [space](#) plane is also reportedly under development.

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