Sublime strings

Young musician intrigued by *pipa's* expressivity, delicate tonality LIFE, PAGE 9

Air China to purchase 18 Airbus jets

BUSINESS, PAGE 5

Appeal for calm

Four nations call for steps to stop violence in Afghanistan

WORLD, PAGE 7

CHINA DAILY

香港版
HONG KONG
WEEKEND EDITION

March 20-21, 2021 中国日報 www.chinadailyhk.com HK $10

Chang'e 5 mission far from over as experiments begin

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Following the successful return of lunar samples from the Chang'e 5 mission, a major section of the spacecraft has embarked on a new assignment in deep space.

China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, a State-owned conglomerate and the nation's leading space contractor, said on Friday that the Chang'e 5 orbiter entered an orbit around the Lagrange point 1 on Monday, and will remain there to carry out scientific tasks.

As of Thursday, the orbiter was about 937,000 kilometers from Earth and in good condition, the company said, adding that it had begun to fly around the point and would circle it every six months.

According to space scientists, Lagrange point 1 is an ideal position for monitoring solar activities as the location is where gravity from the Earth and the sun are in balance so that a spacecraft may orbit the sun in a synchronized fashion with the Earth without using excessive fuel.

Mission planners now want the orbiter to investigate environmental elements near the Lagrange point 1 such as solar rays and radiation, and also conduct technological experiments, according to space officials.

As the most significant event in China's space program last year and also one of the world's most notable space activities during the period, the Chang'e 5 robotic mission was launched on Nov 24 at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province and the landing capsule of the Chang'e 5 probe successfully landed on the moon on Dec 1, becoming the world's third spacecraft to touch down on the lunar surface since the mid-1970s after its two predecessors — the Chang'e 3 and 4.

The landmark mission brought 1,731 grams of lunar rocks and soil back to Earth on Dec 17, achieving a historic accomplishment about 44 years after the last lunar substances were brought back from the moon.

The 23-day mission was China's first space journey to retrieve lunar samples, and made China the third country to achieve such a feat, after the United States and the former Soviet Union did so previously.

The samples were delivered to the National Astronomical Observatories of China.