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香港版  
HONG KONG  
WEEKEND  
EDITION

# CHINA DAILY

中國日報

www.chinadailyhk.com HK 110

September 18-19, 2021

## Shenzhou XII crew returns to Earth

By ZHAO LEI  
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Crew members of the Shenzhou XII mission returned to Earth on Friday afternoon, concluding a historic journey in China's Tiangong space station.

A reentry capsule carrying the astronauts — mission commander Major General Nie Haisheng, Major General Liu Boming and Senior Colonel Tang Hongbo — touched down at 1:34 pm at the Dongfeng Landing Site in the Badain Jaran Desert in

the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

They were welcomed by a group of ground personnel sent by the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, who rushed to the landing area in helicopters and off-road vehicles. The ground workers tracked and spotted their capsule as it pierced the upper atmosphere and descended toward the landing site.

After a number of technical and medical procedures, the astronauts were carried out from the capsule and placed on lounge

chairs because they needed some time to get their bodies to readapt to Earth's gravity and environment.

Friday was Liu's 55th birthday and it has become the most memorable of his birthdays, according to him.

"It is my fortune and honor that I could take part in this mission to make my second spaceflight and conduct spacewalks outside our own space station," he told China Central

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Astronauts Nie Haisheng (center), Liu Boming (right) and Tang Hongbo wave after they landed in the reentry capsule of the Shenzhou XII mission in Inner Mongolia autonomous region on Friday.

YANG YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Shenzhou XII landing debuts new site

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The successful completion of the Shenzhou XII mission on Friday means the Dongfeng Landing Site is likely to be prioritized over the Siziwang Banner Landing Site to receive returning Chinese astronauts in the future.

The return of the Shenzhou XII crew was the first time Chinese astronauts landed at Dongfeng as all of the nation's previous spaceflights ended at Siziwang. Both are in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region and the distance between them is about 900 kilometers.

Peng Huaqiang, technical supervisor of the recovery team sent by the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, said that Dongfeng was the

backup landing place in previous crewed missions.

"In the past, there was a lot of undeveloped grassland in Siziwang, making it an ideal place for spacecraft to land. Besides, its location fits well with reentry trajectory plans for previous manned flights.

"However, with the socioeconomic development in Siziwang rapidly occupying nearby land in recent years and the local population continuing to expand, Siziwang is no longer suitable for receiving returning spacecraft," Peng explained.

Meanwhile, Dongfeng has an outstanding advantage — it is closer to the Jiuquan center, which is in charge of the recovery of Chinese astronauts and their reentry capsules.

"The shorter distance between Dongfeng and the Jiuquan center allows us to maintain a standby search and recovery force at the site, and this is important because the construction and operation of the Tiangong space station will take more than 10 years, and our astronauts will spend long periods inside the craft. We must always be ready for possible emergencies in which astronauts will need to fly back at short notice," Peng said.

Bian Hancheng, deputy chief designer of the landing site system, said personnel at Dongfeng made comprehensive preparations and carried out several exercises for Shenzhou XII's landing.

Technical upgrades were also made to the site's search, navigation and communication facilities to boost its capability, Bian added.



The reentry capsule of the Shenzhou XII mission lands at the Dongfeng Landing Site in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region on Friday.

REN JUNCHUAN / XINHUA

## Space: Astronaut vows to 'fly higher, further, longer'

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Television at the landing site.

"I will continue striving to fly higher, further and longer and bring marvelous space and the magnificent scenes to the Chinese people."

The astronauts were then transported by helicopters to a nearby airport and took a jetliner from there to Beijing. The plane landed at a military airport in western Beijing on Friday evening. The crew members were escorted back to the Astronaut Center of China in the capital city's northwestern suburbs and started to undergo medical observation.

At a daily briefing on Friday afternoon, Zhao Lijian, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, told reporters that China's manned space programs have contributed greatly to mankind's peaceful development of outer space and the country will continue broadening and deepening its cooperation and communication with the international community to build the Chinese

space station into a shared laboratory to bring benefits to all people on the globe.

Nie and his crew spent 92 days in space since their Shenzhou XII spacecraft was launched at the Jiuquan center on June 17. They were the first inhabitants of China's permanent space station named Tiangong, or Heavenly Palace, living in the gigantic station for 90 days.

During their stay in Tiangong, the astronauts carried out two extravehicular activities, or spacewalks, using a large robotic arm and other equipment to install and adjust devices outside the station. They also performed a number of scientific experiments and technological tests, and had video calls with President Xi Jinping and hundreds of researchers, teachers and students in Hong Kong.

On Thursday morning, they completed their final tasks — configuring the space station, transmitting some experimental data back to ground control and arranging materials inside the station — and then left the station and

returned to the Shenzhou XII spacecraft, which later departed from the station.

Shenzhou XII was launched on a Long March 2F carrier rocket that blasted off on June 17 from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China. The astronauts entered Tiangong later that day.

Nie and his crew members were tasked with testing and verifying plans, technologies and equipment for crucial elements of the Tiangong station's construction and operation, such as astronauts' long-term mission arrangements, the life-support system, in-orbit resupply, extravehicular activity and spacecraft maintenance and repair.

Their work was expected to enable the China Manned Space Agency to accumulate experience and check the capability, performance and compatibility of systems involved in the space station program to prepare for the next steps in its construction.

The three-month Shenzhou XII

mission, the nation's seventh manned space mission, is part of the Tiangong program, which aims to complete a three-component station in low-Earth orbit before the end of 2022.

The next crewed spaceflight — Shenzhou XIII — is scheduled to be launched in October at the Jiuquan center, sending another three astronauts to the Tiangong station to work there for six months.

In 2022, two large space labs will be launched to connect with the core module. Moreover, two manned missions and two robotic cargo flights will be made that year to continue construction of the Chinese space station, which is scheduled to be completed and start formal operations around the end of next year.

Upon its completion, Tiangong will be manned regularly by groups of three astronauts in periods lasting several months. During handovers to new three-member crews, the station will accommodate up to six astronauts.