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Astronauts mark New Year with livestream from space

Crew answers questions from youth about living, working in orbit

By ZHANG ZHIHAO
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From hosting a children's art gallery in space to answering questions about manned spaceflight, the three astronauts onboard China's Tiangong space station celebrated the New Year by cultivating science and inspiration in the country's youth.

On Saturday afternoon, astronauts Zhai Zhigang, Wang Yaping and Ye Guangfu hosted a live video call and interacted with college students at venues in Beijing and the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions. They are the first Chinese astronauts to welcome the New Year in space.

On Oct 16, the Shenzhou XIII mission sent the three astronauts into the core module of the Tiangong space station called Tianhe, meaning "Harmony of the Heavens". Since then, they have conducted two spacewalks and are scheduled to spend six months working in the station, making it China's longest space mission.

During the livestream, the crew answered questions and shared their experiences living and working in space. Wang said it brings her great joy to teach children about space while she is spending her time there, referring to the two science lectures she gave in 2013 and last month.

"My family told me that many netizens compared photos of my two lectures and found that our 'space classroom' is now bigger, the content of the class is more varied and interesting, and the livestream is smoother and in higher definition," she said.

"These small changes reflect our nation's growing prosperity and capability and the rapid development of China's manned spaceflight program," she said. "As an astronaut, I am deeply honored to have been born in this great era, in this great country."

Wang said she is deeply moved by the fact that some of the young adults that tuned into her first lecture in 2013 are now working in China's manned spaceflight sector.

"I hope the Tiangong classes lead more teenagers to shoes for the stars and plant the seeds of passion for science, aspiration and exploring the unknown in their hearts," she said.

Answering a question on how



Above: Three Chinese astronauts on the Tiangong space station interact with college students in Beijing via a livestream on New Year's Day. They also talked with students in the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions. **JIN LIANGXIAI / XINHUA**
Left: A college student (center) in Hong Kong poses for a photo during the livestream. The astronauts answered questions from the audience at the event. **LI ZHIHUA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE**

astronauts handle emergencies in space. Ye said although they are far from home, they never feel alone because tens of thousands of dedicated staff are monitoring and helping them from the ground at all times.

"When we encounter an issue, our staff will send their guidance and assistance across the sky. These actions warm our hearts and give us strength," he said.

Even if crew members were to encounter an obstacle that they must tackle on their own, Ye said their strong knowledge and mental fortitude sharpened through rigorous training would prepare them for the challenge, and ultimately they would succeed.

During the crew's first spacewalk, all three astronauts said they were "feeling good" after going into space. This prompted netizens on China's social media to affectionately call them the "feel good crew".

When commenting on their monitor, Zhai said they were simply paying homage to a time-honored tradition in China's manned space program, as

Yang Liwei, China's first astronaut to go to space, spoke these words after returning to Earth in 2003. Zhai said he uttered the same phrase during his first spacewalk in 2008.

"The words 'feeling good' are a genuine and spontaneous expression from our hearts after overcoming numerous challenges," he said.

For example, a long-term stay in the microgravity of space can lead to muscle atrophy and calcium loss in bones, Zhai said. Living in a confined space away from Earth can also lead to feelings of anxiety and loneliness.

However, by exercising and maintaining good mental health, coupled with constant monitoring and guidance from ground control, Zhai said the crew is in good shape for their mission.

"We may encounter various issues and difficulties in future missions, but we firmly believe we will still be feeling good after completing our objectives and returning home to meet our countrymen," he said.

Near the end of the livestream, the Tiangong crew revealed that the interior of the space station had been

decorated with more than 20 pictures drawn by children from central and western regions of China.

These pictures featured astronauts, rockets, planets and aliens, showcasing their imagination and love for science and space. For example, a middle school student from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region drew a "space zoo", with robots taking care of live animals including crocodiles, lions and sheep.

Wong Kam-fai, an engineering professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said it was the third time that Hong Kong took part in a live video call with Chinese astronauts, and these events have bolstered the love for science and the country in Hong Kong's youth.

Dai Wen, a doctoral candidate from Tsinghua University's School of Aerospace Engineering, said she felt very excited and motivated after watching the livestream.

"Seeing how healthy our astronauts are, and how clean and organized our space station is, I can see the strong progress of our nation's aerospace industry," Dai said.

Nation's space feat wins praise from HK youth

By CHEN SHUMAN
and WILLIAM XU in Hong Kong

Hong Kong young people expressed their admiration of the nation's space development after they participated in a real-time space call on Saturday with taikonauts in orbit, in the second such interaction between Chinese students and scientists.

The taikonauts' holiday greetings were broadcast to 600 students at three ground venues — the University of Hong Kong, the University of Macau and a studio at Beijing's China Media Group — and also to the public via the internet.

During the event, the three taikonauts — Zhai Zhigang, Wang Yaping and Ye Guangfu — took six questions from students on the ground. The questions included how the taikonauts have been keeping themselves in good condition in outer space, as well as their expectations and wishes for the new year.

One of the approximately 300 young people who attended the event in Hong Kong — Wang Yifan, 23, who is pursuing a master's degree in traditional Chinese medicine at the University of Hong Kong — said he was excited to have real-time communication with the taikonauts and was inspired by how they have been tackling their problems, which he could take a leaf from and study.

Wang called the event a wonderful journey as it provided a rare opportunity for space fans like him to experience the country's development in space engineering.

Zhao Chongyu, a 26-year-old postgraduate student in computer science at HKU, said he was proud and delighted to know more about the nation's aerospace advancements through the live dialogue with the taikonauts.

He said he was most impressed

by the phrase "I'm feeling good" — which was repeated by all the three taikonauts when they were conducting extravehicular activities.

"When I watched them say it on TV, it only struck me that the experiment is perfect. But after today's dialogue, I realized there were, in fact, many sacrifices and contributions from both the researchers and the taikonauts behind what we saw," Zhao said.

Zhao added that the taikonauts' words have greatly inspired him to adopt a hardworking spirit in his future career development.

Yu Hongjie, a third-year HKU doctoral student in nutritional epidemiology, expressed his gratitude and admiration for the taikonauts as their relentless efforts to pursue the space dream advanced the development of the nation's space technology.

Yu's medical background made him curious about the life support system used in outer space. The 30-year-old student also wanted to know what taikonauts would expect from medical technology to help them do their job better.

The three crew members, who were sent into outer space by the Shenzhou XIII manned spaceship on Oct 16, are expected to be stationed at China's Tiangong space station for six months, making it the longest ever manned space mission in China's history.

The crew beamed back a video lesson from the space station on Dec 9 to more than 1,400 young people in Beijing, Hong Kong, Macao, Sichuan province and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. During the space course, the crew conducted experiments at the space station, which impressed the students.

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