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## Astronauts arrange new 'home' in space

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Astronauts on board the core module of China's space station have started to prepare their orbiting residence for operations over the next three months.

As soon as the three crew members — Major General Nie Haisheng, Major General Liu Boming and Senior Colonel Tang Hongbo — floated into the core module, named Tianhe, or Harmony of Heavens, on Thursday afternoon, they started to configure the electrolytic oxygen generators, install water tanks and arrange their sleeping quarters, according to the China Manned Space Agency.

After finishing these tasks, they enjoyed their first sleep on board the module, the biggest spacecraft China has built and the first and central section of the permanent space station, called Tiangong, or Heavenly Palace.

After they woke up on Friday morning, Nie and his crew members started to unpack the Wi-Fi signal equipment and install and set the devices, the agency said in a news release.

Sun Jun, chief controller of the Tiangong program at the Beijing Aerospace Control Center, said that the Wi-Fi equipment inside the core module is connected through relay



Astronauts enter the core module of China's space station from the Shenzhou XII spacecraft on Thursday. The crew have started to prepare their orbiting residence for operations for the next three months. JIN LIUWANG / XINHUA

satellites with the ground control's communication network.

"It enables our astronauts to talk with their family members or colleagues or even make video calls," he said.

They also entered the Tianzhou 2 cargo spaceship on Friday to begin moving their living materials and mission payloads to the core module.

Tianzhou 2, the country's second cargo spaceship, carried 6.8 tons of supplies for Tianhe when it docked

with it on May 29, including 2 tons of propellants, more than 160 packages of living and experimental materials as well as two extravehicular suits, each weighing around 100 kilograms, for astronauts to perform activities outside the core module.

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## Mission: Crew will test internal apparatus

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In the next few days, the crew will continue unpacking gear inside Tianhe and Tianzhou 2 and arranging their living and work quarters. At the same time, the astronauts will conduct internal apparatus tests.

The crew was transported to Tianhe on Thursday morning in

the Shenzhou XII spacecraft by a Long March 2F carrier rocket that blasted off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China, embarking on the nation's seventh manned spaceflight, which will last three months.

The Shenzhou XII mission is part of China's ambitious space station program that aims at complet-

ing a three-component station in a low-Earth orbit about 400 kilometers above the ground before the end of 2022.

In the near future, three manned missions and three robotic cargo flights will be conducted for the station's construction. Two large labs will also be taken into space to link up with the station.

## Fresh group of astronauts readying for orbit

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As construction of China's space station gradually unfolds, the country needs fresh vigor to carry out the ambitious endeavor.

Currently, the Astronaut Center of China in Beijing is training the third group of Chinese astronauts.

The 18 new astronauts — 17 men and one woman — are in three groups: seven will become spacecraft pilots, another seven will eventually be space flight engineers and the last four will become mission payload specialists, said the China Manned Space Agency.

They are undergoing systematic and sophisticated training before qualifying for space missions, the agency said.

Before this latest group, China had 21 astronauts from two generations. Among them, 12 have taken part in

space flight exercises during seven missions, including the latest Shenzhou XII. Seven in the two generations who had not taken part in any space flight activities during their service have already retired.

The selection for the third-generation team began in May 2018 and wrapped up in September 2020, involving three rounds of tests. About 2,500 applicants participated in the process.

The new spaceship pilots were chosen from aviators from the People's Liberation Army Air Force. The space flight engineers are former researchers or technicians in aeronautics, astronautics and other related fields, while mission payload specialists were selected from those involved in space science and applications for China's manned space program.

The manned space agency has yet to disclose criteria for the new generation of astronauts. An official with knowledge of the matter told China

Daily on condition of anonymity that the criteria were different from those for the previous two generations, because the new astronauts will be tasked with running the nation's space station — a mission with more challenges and higher requirements than those required of previous crewed flights.

Previously, all Chinese astronauts were selected from pilots of the PLA Air Force aged between 25 and 35, with heights ranging from 160 centimeters to 172 cm and body weights between 55 kilograms and 70 kg. They must be nonsmokers and have no signs of alcohol abuse and should have at least 600 hours of flight experience in fighter jets as well as a good service record in the PLA Air Force.

Once a candidate is admitted to the astronaut team, he or she needs to acquire knowledge in more than 30 subjects including physics, astronautics and astronomy and they must pass all exams in these subjects.