

Art of prosperity

Inheritor of gourd pyrography heritage helps improve villagers' lives [CHINA, PAGE 7](#)

Nascent innovation bonds promise to vitalize private firms

[BUSINESS, PAGE 13](#)



Battle unfolds

Macron, Le Pen spar over pensions as French election race tightens

[WORLD, PAGE 12](#)

CHINA DAILY

香港版
HONG KONG

WEDNESDAY, April 6, 2022

中國日報

www.chinadailyhk.com HK \$10

YOUTH

The countdown. Ignition. Liftoff. The ground shakes. Plumes of exhaust and flames billow. And then a roar as the rocket ascends. An audience, at a safe distance some kilometers away, watches in awe as the event unfolds as if, at first, in slow motion as the rocket almost reluctantly reaches for the sky. Some of those viewing are there not just to witness but to record the process on livestreams, or through videos and photos that they share online.

They're SpaceLens — a group of young volunteer photographers, mostly university students and recent graduates.

Xie Jixiao and his friends co-founded the group about a year ago because they wanted to film the launch of China's Tiangong Space Station's core module Tianhe.

Last year witnessed great achievements for China's space industry, such as the successful completion of the first phase of its ambitious Tiangong space station program and landing a rover on Mars for scientific exploration. Additionally, 55 orbital launches last year saw the country rank No. 1 globally in rocket launches.

When Xie first went to film rocket launches in 2020, he would take three or four cameras with tripods and different lenses. However, he soon realized that it meant he could only capture his own short videos and photos at a fixed spot.

"Many hands make light work, I thought. Why not get more people to shoot from different locations?" Xie, 22, who graduated from university last year, explains.

When the Tianhe core module was launched into space at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province last April, Xie and his friends rallied 40 volunteer photographers and 10 coordinators for their ambitious project.

The final short video went viral online, and Xinhua News Agency also posted it on their Bilibili account, attracting over 620,000 views.

"Good content matters. It's easier to make an excellent short video from lots of materials, gathered by everybody. Our work can be watched by more people, especially after being shared by a major media outlet," Xie says.

After that initial success, the group decided to regularly record China's rocket launches together.

The team films both the transfer and launch of a rocket and the core members arrive at least a week in advance to develop a specific production plan. Different filming locations and viewpoints have to be agreed upon, cameras assessed, discussions held and basic training and procedures about how to shoot the launch have to be undertaken and confirmed.

Over 200 photographers, aged between 18 and 35, have participated in the program. Last year, the team produced 10 short videos from six launches.

"Our videos are diverse and appealing. We also use memes that youngsters are familiar with, so that our work spreads quickly online," Xie says.

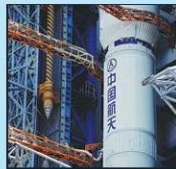
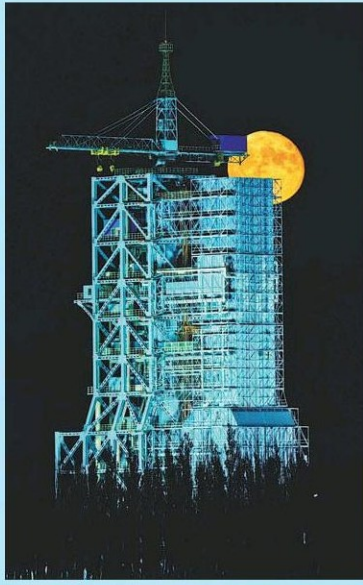
A passionate community

As well as the stunning background scenery of coconut trees and the ocean, they also capture the power and grandeur of ignition, when flame and smoke and noise fill the air, as if some ancient mythical beast has awakened. This is when audience reaction is at its most telling. He recalls one moment when a 6-year-old girl, sitting wide-eyed, and in obvious awe, on the shoulders of her father, as the afterburn from liftoff was reflected briefly on the national flag in her hand.

Xie says the team's launch livestreams attract about 600,000 views each time they're posted. It's a good vehicle for the popularization of aerospace sciences, because of the popularity of

Shooting stars

Group of young photographers zoom in on rocket launches to record the space program, Xu Lin reports.



Left: A full moon rises over the launch tower of the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu province during last year's Mid-Autumn Festival.

Top: The Tianzhou 3 cargo spacecraft preparing for takeoff at Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province last September.

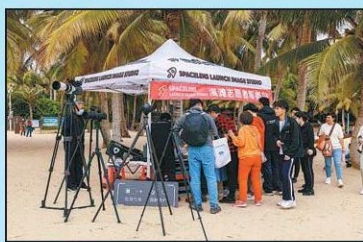
Above: The Tianzhou 2 cargo spacecraft, which was launched in Hainan in May.

Bottom: The transfer of the Tianzhou 3 to the launchpad in Hainan.

PHOTOS BY XIE JIXIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Below left: SpaceLens sets up a booth on the beach to promote knowledge about rocket launches near the center in Hainan.

YANG KUNYE / FOR CHINA DAILY



watching livestreams among younger Chinese.

"I'm glad that I've turned my hobby into a career with my friends," Xie says.

"We're like a young social community with common interests in aerospace and photography. These photographers can also spark their interest in the field among their friends."

All of the participants pay their own transportation and accommodation costs, but all other expenses are shared.

Xie says that the group solicits only basic sponsorship because it wants to maintain its noncommercial independence.

"The marketing of the aerospace sector has great potential, as the audience numbers have increased greatly in recent years. It's difficult, however, to balance the nonprofit and commercial aspects of the content so that we can continue the team's operation," Xie says.

The group has done some commercial projects, such as filming and science popularization, but it struggles to make ends meet.

He says the aerospace industry is not very commercialized, and the group is still exploring ways of cooperating with different brands.

Once, a rocket launch was canceled about an hour before its scheduled liftoff, and canceled again the following day, due to

safety concerns. Many photographers had to go home because they were unable to wait any longer.

"That was a rare occasion," Xie recalls. "We had to adjust our mentality and wait for a week until it was finally launched."

They recruited new photographers and managed to produce good-quality footage.

That, says Xie, is how he found that the spirit of aerospace industry had influenced him greatly.

A banner with a slogan is often hung nearby the launch platform.

Xie recalls that he noticed that the slogan changed each time the rocket launch was postponed. The final slogan read: "Only in hard times can courage and perseverance be manifested. Only after polishing can a piece of jade be finer."

"The experts faced problems when they tried to launch the rocket, and we also had to realize that our slogan was what they canceled the launch," Xie says.

A dream come true

Yang Jingchen, 19, a sophomore student from the Civil Aviation University of China in Tianjin, writes science popularization articles about aerospace for the social media accounts of SpaceLens.

"Being in the team allows me to have more opportunities to communicate with insiders and experts, enabling me to expand my professional knowledge. I can also share my understanding of the

aerospace sector via SpaceLens," he says.

When he was about 5 years old, he became interested in all things cosmic after reading children's books about the solar system and rockets.

The first rocket launch Yang recalls seeing was as a first-grade primary school student. It was a live TV broadcast that he watched with his family.

It was in September 2008 during the Shenzhou VII mission, when Zhai Zhigang became the first Chinese astronaut to conduct a spacewalk.

"I was thrilled to see the whole site suddenly illuminated as the rocket lifted off, and I couldn't help clapping my hands. When I watched the spacewalk, I was excited to see our awe-inspiring national flag," Yang says.

He watched the broadcast repeatedly until he knew the commentary by heart, and, bitten by the bug, he started reading related books in library.

In 2020, he went to witness his first rocket launch in person.

"I was overwhelmed by the brightness and the rumbling sound. It seemed that the ground was being ripped apart. I couldn't stop my legs from shaking," he recalls.

Yang only started to relax when the rocket disappeared among the clouds, he adds, and he began anxiously waiting for follow-up news. He breathed a sigh of relief when he read online that the rocket had successfully reached its orbit.

Yang suggests that the audience concentrate on the whole process, including the wait, and not just the fleeting moment of the launch.

The International Space Station is visible to the naked eye at specific times, resembling a star, trekking across the sky.

Yang recalls that, when he was about 13, he and his father saw the International Space Station at night. He asked whether China had its own space station, and his father answered with confidence that there would be one in the future.

That's why Yang was so thrilled to watch the launch of the Tianhe core module last year, shedding a few tears as he did so.

Attracting new fans

Such online videos about rocket launches have also inspired others, including Yu Jawei, who realized that watching a rocket launch on-site is not a pipe dream that can never be fulfilled.

She first went to film a rocket launch with a classmate, because they wanted to make a short documentary as their graduation project.

"It became an indelible memory when I watched it on the beach, surrounded by coconut trees," says Yu, 23. She became a full-time member of SpaceLens when she graduated from university last year.

"It's important for photographers to arrive several hours in advance to ensure a good spot for filming. Those who come for the first time often choose the tops of nearby buildings," she says. "The process of waiting is dull but it's worthwhile."

On the beach, tourists often have barbecues in front of their tents and walk their dogs, while waiting for the rocket launch.

"Beach, coconut trees, crowds and a rocket launch are perfect ingredients to arouse children's interest in aerospace and sow a seed in their hearts," Yu says.

She adds that they recently established a booth on the beach to promote knowledge about rocket launches and also provide services to photographers.

"A craze for aerospace events in China has emerged over the past two years. I'm happy that our team has made our contribution, inspiring the general public to watch rocket launches," she says.

Contact the writer at xulin@chinanews.com.cn

I was overwhelmed by the brightness and the rumbling sound. It seemed that the ground was being ripped apart. I couldn't stop my legs from shaking."

Yang Jingchen, 19, a sophomore student from the Civil Aviation University of China in Tianjin

