

## China To Launch Manned Spacecraft In June

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<http://www.asianscientist.com/topnews/china-plans-mid-june-shenzhou-9-manned-docking-with-tiangong-1-2012/>

*AsianScientist (Jun. 11, 2012)* - China's Shenzhou-9 manned spacecraft and Long March 2F rocket were moved to the launch pad at the Jianquan Satellite Launch Center on Saturday, marking a significant step for their launch this month, according to the Chinese news agency *Xinhua*.

The mission is being keenly observed by space experts and space agencies from all over the world because it will demonstrate China's capability to execute a manned docking with its orbiting space station, Tiangong-1.

The event takes place nearly a fortnight after a private unmanned U.S. spacecraft, Dragon of SpaceX, docked with the International Space Station and returned to earth after a successful mission.

Shenzhou-9 will have a three-man crew and one could be a woman taikonaut (Chinese term for astronaut). The final decision regarding the composition of the crew, however, is expected to be taken at the last moment.

According to *Xinhua*, the critical docking exercise will be carried out manually. The plans envisage one of the crew members not boarding Tiangong-1, but remaining on Shenzhou-9 to cope with any possible emergency.

There is no indication as yet as to how long the taikonauts will remain in orbit and when they will return to earth.

Tiangong-1 was launched on September 29, 2011 and it was lowered to a docking orbit a few days ago. Tiangong means Heavenly Palace.

It may be recalled that last Wednesday China's permanent representative to the UN and other international organizations in Vienna, Cheng Jingye, [announced at the 55th session](#) of the UN Committee On The Peaceful Uses of Outer Space that Shenzhou-9 would be launched "later this year." Perhaps he was unaware at that point of time that 72 hours later the rocket and the spacecraft would be moved to the launch pad in preparation for the much-awaited lift off.

As a part of the pre-launch activity, scientists will conduct tests on the spacecraft, rocket, ground systems, and crew during the next few days.

Zhou Jianping, chief designer of the manned space program, has been quoted as saying that the mission will mark a significant step in China's manned space flight history.

In December, the Chinese government announced a five-year plan for space exploration which includes

launching a space lab and collecting samples from the moon by 2016.

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