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Next-generation manned spacecraft to debut in 4 or 5 years

By **ZHAO LEI**
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's new-generation crewed spacecraft is expected to make its maiden flight around 2027 or 2028, according to a leader of the country's manned space program.

Yang Liwei, the first Chinese astronaut in space and now a deputy chief planner of the nation's manned spaceflights, said at a sci-

ence teachers' forum in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, on Monday that the new spaceship is in the middle of research and development and will be able to carry up to seven astronauts, Science and Technology Daily reported on Tuesday.

The newspaper quoted Yang as saying that the new craft will be used in China's planned manned missions to the moon and deep space.

Designers at the China Academy of Space Technology have said that once put into service, the new spaceship will feature world-class designs and technologies, high reliability and flexibility, reusability and multiple functions.

The spacecraft will consist of two major parts — a reentry module that will house astronauts and serve as the control center for the entire craft during spaceflight, and a service

module that will contain power and propulsion systems.

The vehicle will be nearly 9 meters in length, 4.5 meters in diameter and weigh 22 metric tons.

Designers said that compared with the Shenzhou series, the nation's current crewed spacecraft, the new model will be able to conduct longer missions, carry more astronauts and cargo and operate in a tougher environment.