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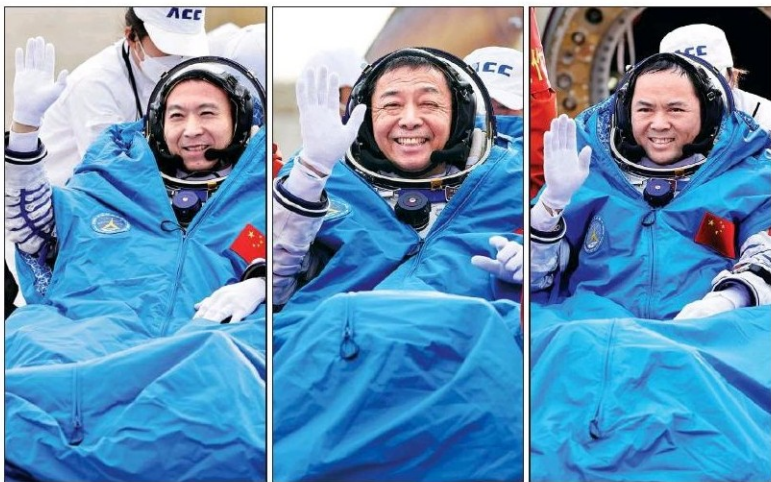
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Mission declared a success



Shenzhou XV mission commander Major General Fei Junlong (left) and crew members Senior Colonel Deng Qingming (center) and Senior Colonel Zhang Lu wave on Sunday morning after completing their six-month space station mission and returning to Earth. The China Manned Space Agency declared the Shenzhou XV mission a success after the spacecraft's return capsule touched down at the Dongfeng landing site in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region at 6:33 am. PHOTOS BY GU JIANWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY [See story, page 3](#)

Shenzhou XV crew returns safely to Earth

Astronauts back after several fruitful experiments, say they feel 'pretty good'

By ZHAO LEI
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The Shenzhou XV crew returned to Earth on Sunday morning after a six-month mission that witnessed the completion of the Tiangong space station.

A reentry capsule carrying the three astronauts — mission commander Major General Fei Junlong, Senior Colonel Deng Qingming and Senior Colonel Zhang Lu — touched down at the Dongfeng Landing Site in northwestern China's Gobi Desert at 6:33 am after flying for nine hours on a reentry trajectory.

Ground recovery personnel opened the hatch of the capsule and conducted a preliminary examination of the astronauts' condition. The crew members told ground controllers in Beijing via radio that they had landed safely and were "feeling pretty good".

The astronauts were carried out and placed on chairs in front of the capsule, and shared their experiences with a reporter from China Central Television in a live program.

Mission commander Fei, who also participated in the country's second manned space mission in October 2005, said the Shenzhou XV crew members completed all their scheduled tasks before returning safely to their motherland.

Deng, the last among the first generation of Chinese astronauts to go to space, told the State broadcaster that he was very happy to return to "the embrace of Earth and my motherland" and see so many friends.

"At this moment, I wish to thank all Chinese people for their attention, support and encouragement. I also want to thank all space industry workers involved in this mission for their company over the past 180-plus days," he said.

Deng, 56, trained for 25 years before he finally got an opportunity to fly to space, becoming a shining example of the dedication and perseverance of Chinese astronauts. He said his experiences over the years reinforced his belief in the power of dreams and persistence. "No matter how old I am, I feel so happy to have been summoned to serve my motherland," he added.

Zhang, one of the nation's second batch of astronauts, recalled that he often tried to spot China, his hometown in Hunan province, as well as the Dongting Lake, when the Tiangong space station flew over Earth.

"Although these places were often hidden by thick clouds, they were always in my heart and mind. We will go back to training as soon as our bodies permit, and will always be ready to return to space to contribute to this great new era and fulfill the duties given by the Party and the people," he said.

After the interview, the astronauts were moved into special

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Zhang Lu,
senior colonel and astronaut

vehicles for health checks. They were flown back to Beijing on Sunday afternoon. The three were taken to the Astronaut Center of China in northwestern Beijing to start several months of medical quarantine, health observation and recuperation.

As the fourth group to go to the Chinese space station, Fei and his teammates were launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China on Nov. 29. They docked at Tiangong the next day and met their Shenzhou XIV peers.

Their meeting marked the first time six Chinese astronauts were in outer space at the same time and also the first in-orbit handover between Chinese crews.

The Shenzhou XV astronauts conducted four spacewalks and installed equipment outside the Tiangong station, becoming the most experienced Chinese team in terms of extravehicular space activities.

The crew lived and worked in the Tiangong complex for 186 days and conducted a number of fruitful experiments.

The astronauts successfully obtained three-dimensional structural images of their skin cells with China's self-developed two-photon microscope. This achievement, the first of its kind, marked the success of the in-orbit verification experiments of the two-photon microscope, providing a promising tool for future health monitoring of astronauts in orbit.

China also successfully performed the first in-orbit ignition test in the Mengtian space lab module's combustion cabinet during the Shenzhou XV mission.

On Friday afternoon, a brief handover ceremony took place inside Tiangong, with Fei and his crew formally giving control to the Shenzhou XVI flight team that reached the space station on Tuesday. The Shenzhou XV astronauts left Tiangong at 9:29 pm on Saturday.

Xinhua contributed to this story