

China to select third group of astronauts this year



Three astronauts including China's first female astronaut are ready for the Shenzhou-9 mission in 2012. [Photo/China.org.cn]

China will select its third group of astronauts this year, Yang Liwei, deputy director of China Manned Space Engineering Office said Wednesday.

The first and second astronaut groups were all previously airforce pilots. However, the selection of the third group will also include engineers who will be responsible for maintenance, assembly and other tasks, Yang, China's first astronaut, said at the opening ceremony of the country's inaugural astronaut photography exhibition.

Photos taken by astronauts from different periods reflect the development of China's space exploration, he said.

"When I was on the spacecraft, I took photos through two windows. Astronauts on the Tiangong space lab had more perspectives for photography. They had a better working environment and living space than before," he said.

Looking at the Earth from space is different with looking out from an airplane, Yang said. "The higher you are, the larger your angle of view is. The Earth seen from space is sphere-shaped, and mountains and rivers also look different."

"As Chinese, we are so proud when we look at the Earth," he said, reminiscing about viewing the motherland from space.

Yang hopes the exhibition will cultivate an increased interest in space among the general public. "Space exploration is a massive project which needs the support of more people, especially youth," said Yang.