

CHINESE ASTRONAUTS BACK IN EARTH AFTER SIX MONTHS

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Astronaut Ye Guangfu after landing in China's Inner Mongolia.AFPSTR

Three Chinese astronauts returned to Earth on Saturday after 183 days in space, ending China's longest crewed mission as it continues its quest to become a major space power.

The Shenzhou-13 spacecraft was the latest mission in Beijing's drive to rival the U.S., after landing a rover on Mars and sending probes to the Moon.

Live footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed the capsule landing in a cloud of dust, with ground crew who had kept clear of the landing site rushing in helicopters to reach the capsule.

The two men and one woman — Zhai Zhigang, Ye Guangfu and Wang Yaping — returned to Earth shortly before 10 a.m. Beijing time (0200 GMT), after six months aboard the Tianhe core module of China's Tiangong space station.

Ground crew applauded as the astronauts each took turns to report that they were in good physical condition. Mr. Zhai was the first to emerge from the capsule roughly 45 minutes after the landing.

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