

China to launch first cargo spacecraft Tianzhou-1

China's first cargo spacecraft Tianzhou-1 is scheduled for launch at 7:41 p.m. Thursday from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in southern China's Hainan Province, the office of China's manned space program said Wednesday.

The cargo spacecraft will be carried into orbit by a Long March-7 Y2 carrier rocket, the office said.

Fuelled by liquid oxygen and kerosene, the medium-sized rocket is able to carry cargo spacecraft and man-made satellites. It made its maiden flight June 2016.

Tianzhou-1 is the first cargo ship independently developed by the country. It is expected to operate in orbit at an altitude of 380 kilometers before docking with the orbiting Tiangong-2 space lab, it said.

The cargo spacecraft will also carry out space experiments, including one on non-Newtonian gravitation, before falling back to earth.

The launch of Tianzhou-1 will mark a crucial step for China in building a space station by 2020.