

SCIENCE

ASTRONAUT REVEALS FATE OF SILKWORMS

Secondary school pupils who designed space experiment told insects died in fridge as trio encourage youngsters to reach for the stars

Viola Zhou
viola.zhou@scmp.com

Pupils who designed a silkworm experiment for China's space mission last year have been told the insects came to a frozen end.

Six silkworms blasted off into space last October as part of a project suggested by those at the Christian and Missionary Alliance Sun Kei Secondary School.

On meeting the astronauts involved for the first time yesterday, they were told the silkworms had died in the name of science.

"We could not let them turn into moths, which would damage the silk they made," astronaut

men conducted three scientific experiments designed by pupils at city secondary schools.

The silkworms were part of a study into how the larvae produce silk in a weightless environment.

In a video played to youngsters, a white silkworm was seen wriggling as it drifted inside the spaceship, tied in silk to the fingers of an astronaut.

During a question and answer session, Chen admitted the worms were killed in order to preserve the silk. "I believe scientists have been analysing how the silk is different from that produced on Earth," he said. "I hope you can come up with more creative ideas like this. In the next space trip, we may not have silkworms. We can study other little animals."

Astronauts also encouraged youngsters to take part in the space programme as engineers or astronauts.

Yang Liwei, who piloted China's first manned spacecraft, said the recruitment of astronauts from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan was being considered.

"I hope we can look at the sky and realise our dreams together," Yang said. "We will take our country's aerospace industry to a higher level."

The astronauts will today address those at a science and technology exhibition being held at Victoria Park, Causeway Bay.

Many pupils were excited by the prospect of space travel after meeting the men. Wong Chiu-yin, from SKH Li Fook Hing Secondary School, said he wanted to become an astronaut. "If I go to space, I will see things that cannot be seen on the ground," Wong said.

Suki Ng Yi-suen, from St Bonaventure Catholic Primary School, was also inspired. "I want to fly," she said. "In space, I will fly around freely."

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WONG CHIU-YIN, IMPRESSED PUPIL

Chen Dong said. "So we put the cocoons into a fridge, and the silkworms lost their lives under the low temperature."

Three astronauts are visiting the city as part of celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of the return to Chinese sovereignty.

Speaking at the Chinese Foundation Secondary School, they shared their experiences in space with 700 youngsters from 27 primary and secondary schools.

Chen and fellow astronaut Jing Haipeng went on a 33-day trip in China's longest manned space mission. During their stay in the Tiangong-2 space laboratory, the



Astronauts Jing Haipeng, Yang Liwei and Chen Dong. Photo: K. Y. Cheng