



China's First Astronaut Meets Buzz Aldrin

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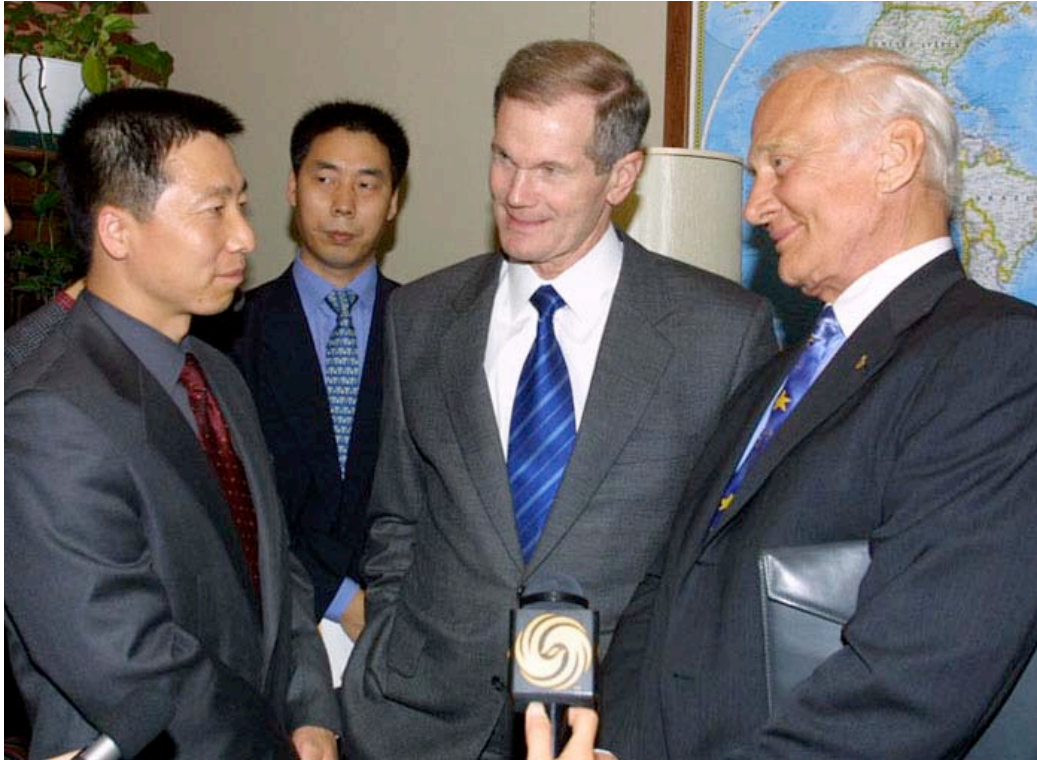


Photo by Adele Starr

Chinese astronaut Yang Liwei meets Senator Bill Nelson and former astronaut Buzz Aldrin in Nelson's office on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, Thursday May 20, 2004.

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Three generations of space travelers met Thursday when Buzz Aldrin was introduced to China's first astronaut, Col. Yang Liwei in the offices of U.S. Senator Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), the only serving member of Congress to have ever flown in space.

Nelson received Yang and a small delegation that included China's ambassador to the United States, Yang Jiechi, on the second day of the "taikonaut's" tour of the United States.

Yang, who made history last October by flying China's first manned space mission, Shenzhou-5, met with Secretary-General Kofi Annan Wednesday and presented two UN flags he carried with him on his space flight. Yang's itinerary includes a tour of Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Monday.

Nelson congratulated Yang on his successful mission, talked about his own experience as a space shuttle astronaut, and brought Yang and the other guests on a tour of his space art collection. Speaking with reporters through a translator, Yang reflected on his

experience as China's first astronaut.

"The most touching thing during my flight in outer space was the beautiful site of our peaceful Earth," Yang said. "It made me think the Earth is a cradle for the whole of humankind . . . and it made me think there is no excuse that we should not cherish the Earth and we should also cherish our lives and our home."

Yang told Nelson he believed "that you may have (had) the same ideas yourself when you flew in outer space."

Yes, I did, Nelson said. I look back and saw the planet and saw that it was home.

The meeting took a historic turn when Nelson announced the presence of a surprise visitor, astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the second human being on the moon.

The delegation was visibly excited to meet the U.S. space legend and Yang greeted Aldrin cordially. As one of the earliest humans who landed on the moon, you are a pioneer for a space man, said Yang.

You and I have something in common, Aldrin said. I am very anxious to bring together the people who have flown in space who are not the early pioneers but who have added so much recently by flying into orbit.

I believe that as peers in the space field we could cooperate with each other very well and contribute together (for) the whole of humankind, Yang said.

Later during the visit, Nelson returned to the topic of U.S.-Chinese cooperation. So when are China and the United States going to cooperate together in space exploration, Mr Ambassador?"

Responding through an interpreter, the Chinese ambassador said that through efforts of astronauts and politicians such as Nelson, the cooperation between China and the United States will evolve, including in the field of aerospace.

I want us to go to Mars, Nelson said, and I think we ought to go to Mars together.

Before the ambassador could respond to Nelson's suggestion, Aldrin jumped in with a pitch of his own.

Before we go to Mars, this August there is a gathering of all astronauts called the Association of Space Explorers in Moscow, Aldrin said. I hope to be there. I hope that that organization has extended to China membership in that organization.

Aldrin and Nelson, both card-carrying members of the Association of Space Explorers, pulled their cards from their wallets to show Yang. One side of the card is in English, the other side is in Russian. Nelson suggested that the card could be redesigned to include Chinese as well.

Before the visit ended with more photographs of the three astronauts together, Nelson reminded Ambassador Jiechi that he would like to visit the Chinese space agency when he travels to Beijing in August as part of an unrelated congressional delegation.

Source: http://www.space.com/missionlaunches/liwei_aldrin_040521.html