

Recitation E

A Japanese Mother goes into Space

On April 20th, 2010 Japanese astronaut Naoko Yamazaki returned to Earth after completing her mission at the International Space Station (ISS). She is the first Japanese mother to have gone into space. She and her husband have a seven-year-old daughter.

Ms. Yamazaki was selected as an astronaut candidate in 1999 by Japan's National Space Development Agency. She attended the ISS Astronaut Basic Training program from April 1999, and was certified as an astronaut in September 2001. She has also participated in ISS Advanced Training and supported the development and operation of the Japanese Experiment Module. In 2004, she arrived at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, to begin Astronaut Candidate Training. She was assigned to the Astronaut Office Robotics Branch. Although, she became the second Japanese woman to fly in space after Dr. Chiaki Mukai in 1994 and 1998, it had been eleven long years since she was chosen as an astronaut candidate.

During the 15-day flight, Ms. Yamazaki and her fellow crewmembers carried supplies to the orbiting space station. She operated the shuttle's robot arm. The ISS is a multi-national research facility currently being assembled by the United States, Russia, Japan, Canada and 11 European countries.

"I am honored to be involved in the completion of the station. I would like my mission to be a success," she told a press conference.

"My next ambition is to stay for an extended period on the ISS and afterwards, if Japan aims for the moon, I would also like to be involved," she said, referring to Japan's goal of sending an astronaut to the moon by 2020.

She said that she was inspired to become an astronaut as a teenager after watching the Challenger shuttle explode live on television in 1986, killing all seven astronauts on board. "I was really shocked. But I thought that I would like to study more about space, which I love," she said.

(318 words)