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## Hidden heroes work hard in country's space industry

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As many Chinese people celebrated the nation's latest spacewalk, in which Wang Yaping became China's first female spacewalker on Sunday evening and early Monday morning, they were also thinking of the heroes behind the great achievements that China's space industry has made.

Deng Qingming, the only currently serving member of China's first group of astronauts who has yet to take part in a spaceflight, is one of these heroes and has recently become a popular figure

on social media as Chinese internet users show respect and gratitude to him.

On Sina Weibo and WeChat Moments, major microblogging service platforms in China, posts about Deng, a 55-year-old member of the People's Liberation Army Astronaut Division, have surged since mid-October when China launched its latest manned flight — Shenzhou XIII — to its Tiangong space station. Microbloggers shared Deng's story or posted media reports about the veteran astronaut to salute him.

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### Space: Backup astronauts wait to make their dreams come true

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The posts were usually followed by comments such as "I truly wish he could realize his dream", "Respect to this relentless warrior" or "He is my hero".

China Central Television's flagship daily news show *Xinwen Lianbo* also published a short video clip on its various social-media platforms to honor Deng, saying that he is a model of perseverance and devotion.

Deng, who was born to a farming family in Jiangxi province's Yihuang county in March 1966, has four younger brothers and sisters.

"My parents were not so well educated, but they often told me to study hard and be honest when I was a little boy. I always remember their hopes for me," he told China Daily in an earlier interview at the Astronaut Center of China in northwestern Beijing.

A diligent student, Deng joined the PLA Air Force in June 1984 and started training as a pilot at a flight college in Hebei province.

After graduating in November 1987, the young pilot was assigned to a fighter jet regiment in Jilin province.

In 1996, Deng began to take part in the PLA Air Force's selection of astronaut candidates and was finally selected with another 13 male aviators. The 14 pilots became the first members of the PLA Astronaut Division in January 1998.

That first group included Yang Liwei, the first Chinese citizen sent into space in 2003. Zhai Zhigang, who conducted his second spacewalk on Sunday, and Nie Haisheng, who returned from the Shenzhou XII mission in September.

In the following years, Deng dedicated almost all of his time to training and barely had time to take care of family matters.

"In those years, my wife had to undertake all of the family chores and take care of our daughter's education. She always supports my choices. I owe her a lot," Deng said.

Although Deng has spared no efforts to strive for an opportunity to fly into space, he has always been inches away from good luck. He was selected for the backup crew for the Shenzhou IX, X and XI missions, but has yet to make it into space.

The astronaut's daughter, Deng Manqi, was selected as a member of China's manned space program after her graduation from university in 2012 and started working at the Beijing Aerospace Control Center.

In June 2013, both the father and daughter were at the Jinqian Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China, preparing for the Shenzhou X mission. The older Deng had not returned home for almost a year due to intense training and was under medical quarantine as a backup crew member.

#### Keep going

He recalled: "We had to see each other through the fence outside the astronauts' residential complex. My daughter said to me, 'Dad, you are only one step away from making your dream come true. You must hold on to your dream, no matter what awaits you.'"

In a letter to her father, Deng Manqi described him as "a man devoting himself to the motherland and the country's space endeavors, and the greatest hero in my heart".

In January 2014, five of the first group of Chinese astronauts — Li Qinglong, Wu Jie, Chen Quan, Pan Zhandun and Zhao Chuandong — retired from active service in the PLA Astronaut Division.

"I clearly remember what Chen said to me at the retirement ceremony: 'No matter whether you take part in a flight or still remain a backup, Deng, please continue trying your best and don't give up,'" Deng Qingming said.