



# USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) Media Release



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## **AN Dongyang Zheng: The Real Steel**

**By Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Brian G. Reynolds, Enterprise Carrier Strike Group Public Affairs**

USS ENTERPRISE, At Sea -- "America has given me a lot," said Airman Dongyang Zheng. "I am proud to be a member of the strongest military force in the world. I still love my home country, China. I love both. I think joining the military, especially in another country, is my way of showing my appreciation. I'm making a difference, being independent and earning this for myself."

If 16th Century British playwright, William Shakespeare was alive and serving on aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65), and met Zheng, he would most likely be inspired with the demeanor of the person he saw.

It is safe to say Zheng is no Julius Caesar; not a MacBeth; and definitely has nothing in common with Elizabethan literature. But what Zheng does have is the quality that answers the question in the Shakespearean play, Hamlet - "To be, or not to be?"

Zheng's story begins on the other side of the planet and long before he ever stepped foot in a recruiting station. Zheng was born to a working-class family in China. His parents, both factory workers, were educated and used that to their advantage when they opened a small business in the early 1990s - as the

communist Chinese government began opening economic boundaries to free market ideas.

"It was around that time that my mother opened up a small business," Zheng said. "Before she knew it, she was making 10 times as much as the others who were still working in the factories."

Shortly thereafter, that small business grew into a much larger one. By the early 2000's, Zheng's parents owned several large businesses, including a tool hardware company and a large mineral mining company.

Needless to say, Zheng eventually found himself in an extremely wealthy family. Neither money nor material assets were a problem for the Zheng family.

"At that point I had become a rich kid in my school," Zheng said. "Because I was an only child, my mom always gave me whatever I wanted. I always thought that everything would come easy for me. I would earn a college degree, enjoy the college life, then go back home. I would just live like my friends - running their parents' business or traveling."

Shortly before the world-economic decline of 2008, Zheng's parents sent him to the United States to attend college.

"When I found out that I was coming to the United States, I was very excited," Zheng said. "I was happy to get the opportunity to go to another country and talk to those people. Back in China, we all watch a lot of American movies. I imagined that if I could be a part of it and be a part of that country, I would be very happy."

It was around that time that Zheng found himself standing in front of a Navy recruiting station. As Zheng peered in the window, he saw a recruiter in uniform. Zheng was in awe of the figure standing in that recruiting office, wearing his pristine, sharply-pressed service uniform.

"I was very jealous of him," Zheng said. "I always dreamed of putting on a uniform and being in the military, but my career was already set in front of me by my family."

Something changed Zheng that day. Despite his dilemma, something tugged so hard at Zheng's heart that he felt compelled to join. It wasn't only the recruiter standing in the window, it was more than that. It just made sense.

Despite his family's wealth, to Zheng, the military experience was a necessity. It was necessary so that his future endeavors would fall into place. Zheng's heart was telling him to learn what it meant to become truly independent. He had lost his desire to have the world handed to him. At this point, he wanted to earn it.

"I didn't have to join the military for college or money," Zheng said. "My parents told me to go to the United States, earn a degree and come back. But I am independent. I joined the Navy because I was following my heart."

Zheng joined the Navy as an undesignated airman. He is currently a plane captain attached to the Rooks of VAQ- 137. His typical 16-hour workday is long, arduous, and usually spent in the scorching heat of the flight deck. But no one would ever hear Zheng complain.

"My job is hard work," said Zheng. "After 18 hours of work, I look into the mirror at myself in uniform, I see a service member. I realize that I raised my right hand and said that I will obey the orders of those (appointed) over me. I am a service member. That is my commitment."

Commitment is the fuel that drives just about every aspect of Zheng's life. He shares his motivation with his shipmates and hopes to use that motivation to help him in his future business endeavors.

"Right now, I am the senior plane captain in my shop," said Zheng. "It gives me the opportunity to exercise leadership. After I go back to school, and go back home to run my parents' company, this is an experience that I can use."

In Zheng's world, every experience is an opportunity to prepare him for the future. In a world where cultural differences often blur reality, Zheng is using his experience in the military as a platform to be a kind of ambassador of good will to both countries.

"There are some things we cannot change," said Zheng. "For example, I am Chinese. I want to show the best face of my community. It is my goal to set a good example for my family and community. "

Although he is not exactly doing what his parents had intended for him to do when they sent him to the U.S., Zheng's parents could not be prouder of the man and the Sailor that he has become.

"I sent a picture of the Secretary of Defense and myself to my parents, back in China," said Zheng. "And they are so proud of me... They are so proud."

Initially, Zheng came to the U.S. for a singular purpose. His purpose was to go to college, earn a degree and travel back to China to join his family's lucrative business - all of which are still on his agenda. Although he has not yet achieved these goals, he has found something much more here.

As each chapter of Zheng's life comes to a close, another begins. He has answered Shakespeare's age-old and clichéd question, "To be; or not to be?" with brutal clarity and honesty.

"I will not be defeated by difficulty," said Zheng. "It's like fire. It can destroy you or it can make you the real steel. I want to be the real steel."