

Chinese military

China launches biggest amphibious assault ship in projection of military power

Vessel described as 'light aircraft carrier' unveiled a day after test flights of new fighter jet prototypes



China's new amphibious assault ship is equipped with an electromagnetic launch system, suggesting large drones and even crewed fighter aircraft can take off from its deck © Pu Haiyang/VCG/Reuters

Kathrin Hille in Taipei 8 HOURS AGO

China has launched the world's largest amphibious assault ship, in the latest demonstration of how Beijing's industrial capacity is strengthening its military power amid rising geopolitical tensions with the US.

Combining elements of amphibious landing vessels — which are designed to carry and support an invasion force — with those of an aircraft carrier, the ship significantly strengthens Beijing's ability to project power globally. It also adds to [China](#)'s capabilities in the event of an invasion of Taiwan.

Chinese navy officials christened the ship Sichuan in a ceremony on Friday at the Hudong Shipyard in Shanghai while its dock slowly filled with water, according to Chinese official media reports.

The launch came a day after test flights of prototypes for a new Chinese fighter jet. According to videos posted online by Chinese internet users, the aircraft were spotted over the north-eastern city of Shenyang and the south-western city of Chengdu on Thursday. The two cities host institutes developing rival projects for a new stealth fighter.





A Chinese military aircraft flying near Chengdu on Thursday © Reuters

A mock-up of the Chengdu model was on display at China's twice-yearly Zhuhai air show last month, where China [debuted the J-35](#), its latest stealth fighter.

Although the exact specifications of the fighter prototypes remain unclear and it could be years from entering service, the test flights and launch of the amphibious assault ship underscored Beijing's rapid production of new military hardware. It also comes at a time when capacity bottlenecks have started to constrain the expansion of Washington's military arsenal.

The People's Liberation Army started tendering for the design and construction of the new amphibious ship, which is called Type 076, just four years ago. The PLA Navy has three amphibious assault ships, the first of which only entered service in 2021.

The new class is not only much larger than those of [its Type 075 predecessor](#), and can carry more aircraft or amphibious landing vessels on a lower deck. It is also equipped with an electromagnetic launch system, suggesting large drones and even crewed fighter aircraft can take off from its deck. Traditional amphibious assault ships typically only carry helicopters.

Chinese military commentator Song Zhongping has called the new class a "light aircraft carrier". At 260 metres, it is longer than the America Class, the US Navy's largest amphibious assault ship, and the Izumo, a Japanese class of helicopter carriers.

"With this, we are entering the four-carrier era!" said a Chinese military enthusiast

who often posts pictures and comments on new PLA weapons systems. The Fujian, the PLA Navy's third aircraft carrier, is [undergoing sea trials](#) after its launch earlier this year.

US think-tank CSIS estimated in August that China's new ship would have a displacement of 50,000 tonnes, compared with the America Class's 45,000. Chinese official reports on Friday put its displacement at "more than 40,000" tonnes.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2024. All rights reserved.
