



# New Chinese Aircraft Carrier to Carry 50 Percent More Fighters

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to interviews with Chinese naval experts, China’s new carrier, the Type 001A, will be able to carry 36 J-15 fighter aircraft. The new aircraft carrier was launched in 2017 and is undergoing sea trials.

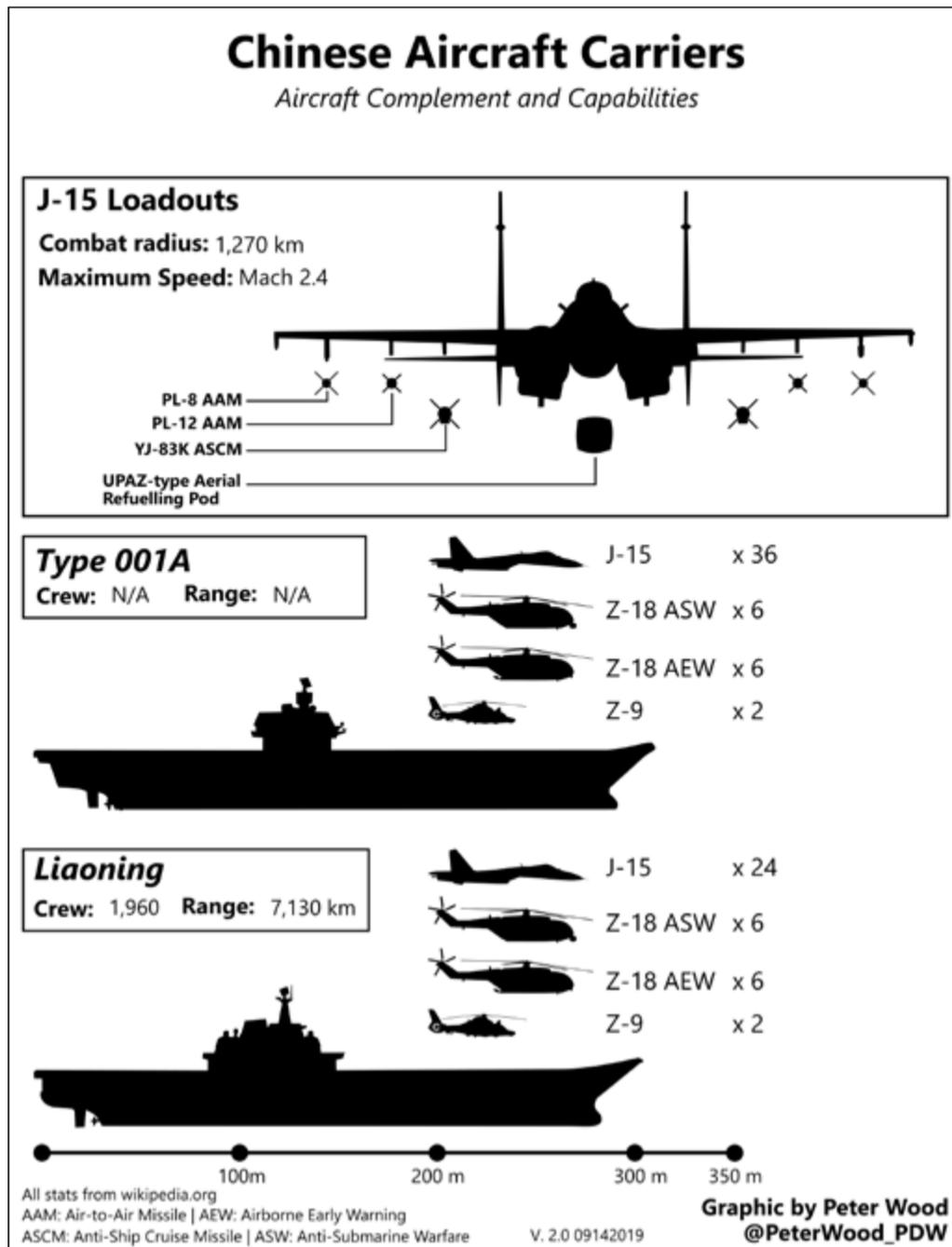
The Liaoning, China’s first aircraft carrier, is a refurbished Soviet Riga/Varyag-class aircraft cruiser built at Mykolaiv shipyard in Ukraine. In the mid-80s, the Chinese military purchased the former Royal Australian Navy HMAS Melbourne, a light aircraft carrier, which it later scrapped. China then purchased two other ex-Soviet heavy aircraft cruisers, the Kiev and Minsk, both since converted to theme parks.

In addition to 24 J-15 fighters, the Liaoning carries some 14 helicopters, including a mix of Z-18 medium transport and early warning helicopters (the latter equipped with an extendable radar array) and lighter Z-9 helicopters (see chart for comparison).

In the article, naval expert Li Jie notes that the Type 001A’s larger hanger space comes at the cost of reduced missile storage area. One of the major limitations of conventionally-propelled carriers compared to nuclear carriers is magazine depth—the amount of ordnance for shipborne aircraft that can be carried. The need for large fuel tanks compared to a nuclear drive system reduces space for other features. A larger hanger deck could therefore indicate significantly smaller magazine or otherwise reduced fuel stores. It is possible that the Type 901 fast axillary vessel [901型综合补给舰; Type 901 comprehensive supply vessel in the PLA’s parlance] developed for the carriers are meant to help address this deficiency. Two of the ships have entered service with the PLA Navy.

The J-15 itself is significantly limited in its armaments due to both carriers’ use of a ski-jump ramp to launch the fighters, rather than a steam or electromagnetic catapult (EMALS), and its relatively under-powered engines. Early indications appear to point to the adoption of catapult technologies for subsequent carriers. This will be even more important due to China’s desire for more powerful airborne early warning aircraft, such as the KJ-600.

While larger hangers may help the new Type 001A accommodate additional fighters, it is at best an intermediate step toward a more powerful carrier fleet. It is clear that China intends to build additional aircraft carriers, with various reports claiming that they will be equipped with stealth fighters. As noted in the article, China’s shipbuilding industry has gained a tremendous amount of experience in recent years both from the two carriers but also from construction of a large number of other modern surface combatants. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



Graphic by Peter Wood.

*“China now has a mature development and construction team, and the average age of team members is only 36...Whatever type of aircraft carrier our country wants to develop in the future, we can make it on our own...” — Hu Wenming [胡问鸣], Chairman of China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC) and leader of China’s aircraft carrier program.*



# Continued: New Chinese Aircraft Carrier to Carry 50 Percent More Fighters

Source: “Second aircraft carrier can carry 36 J-15 fighters,” *Global Times*, 16 August 2019. [english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-08/14/content\\_9589268.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-08/14/content_9589268.htm)

China’s second aircraft carrier can carry at least 36 domestically developed J-15 fighter jets, some 50 percent more than the country’s first, China’s state broadcaster reported on Tuesday. China’s first aircraft carrier the Liaoning can carry 24 J-15 fighter jets, China Central Television (CCTV) reported, noting the new ship’s increased number of jets will add to its capability.

Although the second carrier known as the Type 001A is similar to the Liaoning, it has an optimized flight deck, reduced weapon areas and a smaller superstructure with added deck areas, Li Jie, a Beijing naval expert, told the *Global Times* on Tuesday. Li noted that it also has an enlarged hangar, but reduced space for missile storage compared to the Liaoning. These extra areas allow the new carrier to carry 50 percent more J-15 fighter jets, Li said.

The 24 J-15s of the Liaoning could be a limiting factor as regional combat might require about 40 aircraft to seize air supremacy, Li said. The 36 jets on the Type 001A would expand its combat capability, he said.

In addition to the 36 J-15 fighter jets, the Type 001A can carry other types of aircraft including helicopters, Chinese analysts said.

The United States operates much larger aircraft carriers, including the Nimitz class which can carry about 60 aircraft, while the country’s latest Ford class can carry about 75. Hu Wenming, chairman of China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation and head of China’s aircraft carrier program, said “China now has a mature development and construction team, and the average age of team members is only 36,” CCTV reported. “Whatever type of aircraft carrier our country wants to develop in the future, we can make it on our own,” Hu said.

Given its expertise the team can build any other type of warship, Hu noted. It took 26 months to build and launch the Type 001A, which is China’s first domestically developed aircraft carrier, CCTV reported, or almost half the time of a foreign aircraft carrier of similar type to finish construction.

The Type 001A was launched in April 2017 and has undertaken six sea trials since May 2018.

It is reportedly conducting its seventh, after setting sail on August 1. There were no signs the ship had returned to its dock as of press time. Li said the latest, lengthy sea trial could be in preparation for its final delivery to the Chinese navy.

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