

U.S. Naval War College

## U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons

---

CMSI Translations

China Maritime Studies Institute

---

2-23-2026

### CMSI Translations #27: What is the Significance of the PLAN Type 055 Destroyer Zunyi Task Force's Distant Deployment to Australia?

Zong He

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-translations>

---

#### Recommended Citation

He, Zong, "CMSI Translations #27: What is the Significance of the PLAN Type 055 Destroyer Zunyi Task Force's Distant Deployment to Australia?" (2026). *CMSI Translations*. 35.  
<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-translations/35>

This CMSI Translation is brought to you for free and open access by the China Maritime Studies Institute at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in CMSI Translations by an authorized administrator of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

CMSI

---

# 翻译

TRANSLATIONS

---

**What is the Significance of the PLAN Type 055  
Destroyer *Zunyi* Task Force's  
Distant Deployment to Australia?**



**中国海事研究所**  
China Maritime Studies Institute



CHINA MARITIME STUDIES INSTITUTE  
CENTER FOR NAVAL WARFARE STUDIES  
U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
686 CUSHING ROAD (3C)  
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND 02841



## What is the Significance of the PLAN Type 055 Destroyer *Zunyi* Task Force's Distant Deployment to Australia?<sup>1</sup>

By Zong He

In February 2025, a distant-ocean task force led by Chinese Navy Type 055 destroyer *Zunyi* made its first appearance in Australia's near seas, conducting live-fire exercises in the Tasman Sea. This action not only set a record for the Chinese Navy's activities in the waters surrounding Australia, but also attracted widespread international attention due to its overwhelming technological superiority and strategic deterrence. This article will analyze the deeper significance of this action from the perspectives of task force composition, deployment process, technical performance, and geopolitical impact.

### Task Force Formation and Ship Performance

This distant-ocean task force consisted of three ships:

The Type 055 guided-missile destroyer *Zunyi* (hull number 107): As the core of the task force, this ship is one of the first batch of eight Type 055 destroyers in China. It was commissioned in April 2023 and has a full-load displacement of about 13,000 tons. It is one of the most advanced surface combat ships currently in service in the world.

The Type 055 large guided-missile destroyer is 180 meters long and 20 meters wide, and it has a draft of 6.6 meters. It is equipped with six gas turbine generators with a total power output of 30 megawatts; using all-gas turbine propulsion, it has a total power output of 112 megawatts. It has a speed of 30 knots, a range of 5,000 nautical miles, and it can carry two medium/large helicopters. In a surface action group, the Type 055 destroyer serves as the command ship and is primarily responsible for air defense, anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and land attack missions. The Type 055 destroyer's combat system is equipped with advanced electronic weaponry. Based on its operational mission, a top-level design and layered decomposition (层层分解) approach was adopted to optimize the architecture's rationality and integration, achieving integrated command and control. This architecture ensures complete sharing of standard information and common benchmarks, as well as the miniaturization, generalization, integration,

---

<sup>1</sup> 宗合 [Zong He], 中国海军 055 型大型驱逐舰“遵义”舰编队远航澳大利亚，意味着什么？ [“What is the Significance of the PLAN Type 055 Destroyer *Zunyi* Task Force's Distant Deployment to Australia?”], 兵工科技 [Ordnance Industry Science and Technology], no. 6 (2025), pp. 30-33.

**Translator's Note:** *Ordnance Industry Science and Technology* is a magazine published by the Shaanxi Provincial Association for Science and Technology. The author, Zong He, is a frequent contributor to the magazine.

and standardization of equipment. With the integration of radar, electronic countermeasures, and communication antennas,



*Schematic diagram of the Zunyi task force's distant voyage*

the layout of deck-mounted electronic equipment is streamlined. Furthermore, the open, universal interface display and control cabinets will facilitate future upgrades. In terms of operations, these changes simplify command levels, reduce the number of battle stations, and alleviate the workloads of operators.

The *Zunyi* warship embodies the highest level of development in Chinese naval equipment:

----- p. 30 begins -----



*Ship No.107 Zunyi*



*Ship No. 568 Hengyang*

**Firepower Configuration:** Equipped with a 112-cell large universal vertical launch system (VLS), compatible with YJ-18 anti-ship missiles (with a range of 600 km), YJ-21 hypersonic missiles (with a range of 1,500 km), HQ-9B air defense missiles (with a range of 260 km), and CJ-10 land attack cruise missiles (with a range of more than 1,000 km), it forms a three-dimensional strike system with “integrated offense and defense.”

**Radar and Information Systems:** Equipped with the Type 346B active phased array radar and integrated radio frequency system, it can simultaneously track hundreds of air, surface, and underwater targets and command the task force in coordinated operations. It can maintain battlespace awareness at a radius of 600 kilometers, far exceeding the detection capabilities of the main warships of the Australian Navy.

Stealth and Power: The integrated mast design and stealth coating significantly reduce the radar cross-section. Four CGT-25M gas turbines provide a speed of over 30 knots, meeting the needs of rapid maneuverability in distant oceans.

Another ship in the flotilla, the Type 054A guided-missile frigate *Hengyang*, is tasked with anti-submarine warfare and coordinated air defense. Equipped with a 32-cell VLS, it can carry HQ-16 surface-to-air missiles and Yu-8 anti-submarine torpedoes, serving as a multi-mission support platform for the fleet. The Type 054A frigate is 135 meters long and 16 meters wide, has a full-load displacement of 4,200 tons, and reaches a maximum speed of 30+ knots. This class of ship possesses considerable air defense capabilities and a certain degree of anti-submarine warfare capability.

The third ship in the flotilla, the Type 903A replenishment ship *Weishanhu*, provides distant-ocean logistics support. It can carry fuel, fresh water, ammunition, and food, ensuring that the task force can sail continuously for more than 30 days without needing to make port calls. The Type 903A, nicknamed the "aircraft carrier's milkmaid," was China's largest and most advanced replenishment ship before the Type 901. This type of ship has a full-load displacement of 23,000 tons and can carry 10,500 tons of fuel, 250 tons of fresh water, and 680 tons of dry cargo and ammunition, with a maximum speed of 19 knots. One Type 903A replenishment ship is fully capable of meeting the distant-ocean replenishment needs of a surface task force consisting of two to three vessels.

----- p. 31 begins -----



*Type 903A replenishment ship Weishanhu*



*The Zunyi warship cutting through the waves of the Pacific Ocean*

### **Route Selection for this Distant-Ocean Deployment**

The *Zunyi* naval task force departed from the South China Sea, traversed the Mindoro Strait in the Philippines and the Banda Sea in Indonesia, entered the Coral Sea to the northeast of Australia, and finally approached the Tasman Sea, about 150 nautical miles (278 kilometers) east of Sydney. After conducting live-fire exercises in this area, the task force continued south along the east coast of Australia, passing Tasmania and entering the Great Australian Bight. After circumnavigating the Australian continent, it turned west, sailing directly to the waters off Perth, a city in southwestern Australia, and then northwest across the Indian Ocean back to the South China Sea, completing its first circumnavigation of Australia, with a total distance exceeding 20,000 kilometers. This voyage demonstrated the powerful long-range navigation capabilities of the People's Liberation Army Navy's new-type naval task force, as well as its ability to adapt to international waterways.

According to a CCTV interview with the officers and sailors of the *Zunyi*, the formation sailed continuously for more than a month, covering a total distance of more than 12,000 nautical miles, or about 22,000 kilometers, enough to circle half of the earth. It also broke the long-distance voyage record previously set by a task force led by the *Nanchang* (number 101), a ship of the same class.

The PLA Navy's *Zunyi* task force remained in high seas (公海) the entire time and did not enter Australia's 12-nautical-mile territorial waters. However, the live-fire exercise demonstrated the universality of "freedom of navigation" and directly responded to the previous illegal intrusion of Australian military aircraft into China's Paracel Islands airspace.<sup>2</sup>

### **Drill Subjects and Tactical Verification**

According to official reports, a naval task force consisting of the ships *Zunyi*, *Hengyang*, and *Weishanhu* conducted a far-seas combat exercise in a certain area of the South Pacific to test the task force's coordinated combat capabilities and emergency response capabilities.

---

<sup>2</sup> **Translator's Note:** The author is likely referring to an incident that occurred in February 2025: <https://news.usni.org/2025/02/13/chinese-fighter-harrasses-australian-surveillance-aircraft-over-south-china-sea-officials-say>.

At the training site, the task force command post, based on the performance characteristics of the ships, mission

----- p. 32 begins -----



*The replenishment ship "Weishanhu" during its voyage around Australia*

requirements, and maritime conditions, directed each ship to form sections, quickly switch tactical formations, and occupy advantageous positions in accordance with drill subjects such as maritime strike and area air defense. The ships cooperated closely, and the officers and sailors acted swiftly upon receiving orders, rapidly moving to their battle stations.

During the training, the task force moved to multiple areas in the Pacific Ocean, conducting comprehensive multi-subject exercises under realistic combat conditions. Officers and sailors maintained a high state of alert throughout, practicing command, skills, and coordination to continuously improve their ability to fulfill mission objectives. This routine training exercise was organized in accordance with the annual work plan and complied with relevant international laws and practices. It was not directed at any specific country or objective.

Live-Fire Exercises: Anti-surface, air defense, and land attack drills were conducted in the central Tasman Sea to verify multi-target coordinated combat capabilities under complex maritime conditions.

Distant-Ocean Replenishment: The *Weishanhu* comprehensive supply ship completed multiple underway replenishments, demonstrating the task force's sustained combat capability. According to information made publicly available online, the Type 055 destroyer has a self-sufficient range of approximately 7,000 nautical miles at a speed of 18 knots, while the Type 054A frigate has a range of only 4,000 nautical miles. This means that from departure to return, the *Weishanhu* replenishment ship needed to conduct at least three at-sea replenishments of fuel and supplies for the two warships.

Electronic Warfare: A “one-way transparency” (单向透明) situation on the battlefield was achieved through the utilization of shipborne electronic warfare systems to interfere with the reconnaissance capabilities of Australian P-8A patrol aircraft.

**The *Zunyi* Naval Task Force Was Entirely in Accordance with International Law, and Australia Was “Not Very Used to This.”**

The Australian Department of Defence stated in an email on the evening of February 19 that three Chinese warships were spotted sailing in international waters off the eastern coast of Sydney, but these vessels did not violate any maritime laws and posed no threat. Experts interviewed by the *Global Times* stated that the international community should not be alarmed, since the Chinese fleet's far-seas training exercises are normal activities for the Chinese Navy.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported that the three Chinese warships were the Type 055 guided-missile destroyer *Zunyi*, the Type 054A guided-missile frigate *Hengyang*, and the ocean-going replenishment ship *Weishanhu*. The *Financial Times* reported that these warships were then about 150 nautical miles (approximately 278 kilometers) east of Sydney.



*The Hengyang and Weishanhu ships conducting training in the Tasman Sea.*

----- p. 33 begins -----

The statement reported that the task force had been heading south along the coastline after it was spotted sailing off the northeastern coast of Australia the previous week. "The Department of Defence regularly monitors all maritime traffic within Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone and its sea lanes."

According to ABC News, Australian Defence Minister Marles stated on the 20th that the Chinese warships were "acting in accordance with international law" and did not intrude into Australian territorial waters; "they have the right to remain where they are." Marles declined to speculate on the purpose of the Chinese Navy's mission but indicated that the Australian Department of Defence was carefully studying the situation. He said, "Regardless of when the Chinese fleet's mission concludes, what we need to do is conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Chinese fleet's objectives in this mission."

Military experts stated in an interview on the 20th that the Type 055 destroyer *Zunyi* task force mentioned by Australia had crossed the Sulawesi Sea a few days ago and was now sailing in the South Pacific Ocean about 150 nautical miles east of Sydney. "As Australian officials have stated, this operation did not violate any maritime law. The Chinese naval task force, like those of other countries, enjoys freedom of navigation and overflight in this area, which is entirely in accordance with international law and practice."

The far-seas training conducted by the Type 055 guided-missile destroyer *Zunyi* task force is part of the Chinese Navy's normal training activities, aimed at enhancing its operational capabilities in the open ocean. Whether traversing the Sulawesi Sea or sailing in the South Pacific, the *Zunyi* task force strictly adhered to international law. "The Chinese Navy should deploy more frequently into far-seas areas and conduct various training activities to gradually acclimate the international community to its operations. While some countries are accustomed to the U.S. Navy's long-term, consistent navigation in their vicinity, they are still not very used to the Chinese Navy's routine navigation in these areas."

Military experts emphasized that the voyage of the *Zunyi* task force was completely different in nature from the recent intrusion of Australian military aircraft into China's airspace around the Paracel Islands. "According to international law, a country's military aircraft has no right to fly over the airspace of another country without authorization; it must obtain approval from the country in question."

#### **A Game of International Rules and Discourse Power**

First, this operation breaks the Western monopoly. The PLAN's first-ever naval exercise in Australia's near seas marks a shift in the South Pacific



*The Hengyang ship conducts live-fire training in the Tasman Sea*



*The Zunyi warship firing its close-in weapon system.*

from being a "Western backyard " to serving as a "multipolar arena." In the future, regular distant-ocean voyages and deployments of naval fleets may become possible. Australia, we will be visiting more often.

Second, this action counters double standards. The West has long glorified American close-in reconnaissance as "freedom of navigation," while stigmatizing Chinese high-seas exercises as "provocations." This action dismantles the West's narrative hegemony in a reciprocal manner.

Third, China is reshaping maritime rules. China has demonstrated through its strength that "freedom of navigation" is not solely a Western privilege, a perspective that provides a paradigm through which developing countries can advance their maritime rights.

### **Conclusion**

As some experts have noted, the colonialist logic that "truth exists only within the range of cannons" has been rewritten, and the "truth" of the new era is being redefined in the wake of Chinese warships. In the future, with the commissioning of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and a new generation of destroyers, the Chinese Navy may be able to write a new maritime narrative for the East, doing so with a more composed demeanor.