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China Launches World's First All-Electric Cargo Ship

By [Zainab Calcuttawala](#) - Dec 06, 2017, 4:00 PM CST



Tesla is not the only one bringing electric engines to cargo transport.

China just [launched](#) its first all-electric cargo ship, which will travel 50 miles at a top speed of 8 miles per hour on a single charge. Though it will be able to carry 2,200 tons of cargo with every haul, that battery capacity is barely enough to fulfill any transatlantic shipments. It will take just two hours to recharge, which is about as much time the vessel needs to unload at a destination.

Of course, the vessel is the first of its kind, so ports will have to be fitted with charging stations specifically for the ship. So far, only two ports have received the special upgrade.

“As the ship is fully electric powered, it poses no threats to the environment. The technology will soon be likely ... used in passenger or engineering ships,” Huang Jialin, head of Hangzhou Modern Ship Design & Research Co, said regarding his company’s new innovation.

Claiming it poses “no threat to the environment” is a stretch though. Electric vehicles are only as green as the manufacturing of their batteries and the sourcing of the electricity that powers them. Charging the ship with the Chinese electric grid in its current form—which is largely powered by fossil fuels—will definitely contribute to more carbon emissions. But China is diversifying away from oil and gas quickly, meaning the electric engine will get greener by default in the coming years.

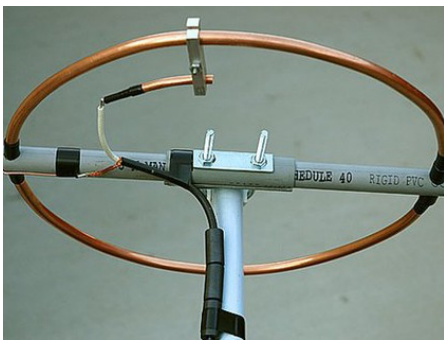
The battery system contains 1,000 lithium-ion packs, which can be supported with additional units if the cargo is heavier or needs to travel a longer distance.

The biggest impact of this innovation could be seen in consumer markets. Goods transported on the new ships can cut some transportation costs since the price of electricity is cheaper than the

equivalent price of diesel for massive combustion engines. BUT, the ship is currently slated to primarily ship coal up and down the Pearl River. Oh, the irony.

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“This kind of ship takes into consideration the harmony between humans and nature and can protect water quality and marine life, and should be copied by other ships sailing on local rivers,” says [Chinese environmentalist](#) Wang Yongchen. Still, the ship, which took its maiden voyage in November, has a long way to go before it can be considered as a green contribution to the shipping industry.



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Tesla, Daimler, Cummins, and Toyota are working on the trucking end of the equation. Most containers spend at least a portion of their lives on trucks, after being hauled across an ocean and over hundreds of miles of train tracks.

“This is no mere ‘truck.’ It will transform into a giant robot, fight aliens, and makes one hell of a latte,” Tesla CEO Elon Musk said of his company’s latest bid to increase the scope of electric vehicles.

The other three major companies taking on this challenge have equal promise, but lack the Apple-like fanfare that Tesla enjoys. The Chinese innovators who got the first electric cargo ship going will face a similar fate. The concept will need to be tested out in Asian markets—with more ships on more rivers carrying more kinds of cargo—before Hangzhou can hope to sell the model abroad, if that is the firm’s game-plan.

China is the leading producer of solar panels and wind turbines, as well as a speedy adopter of natural gas and other alternative fuels. The development of this major innovation in China means that the ship will have ample exposure to innovators in green space who could help the electric ship become a global product.

By Zainab Calcuttawala for Oilprice.com

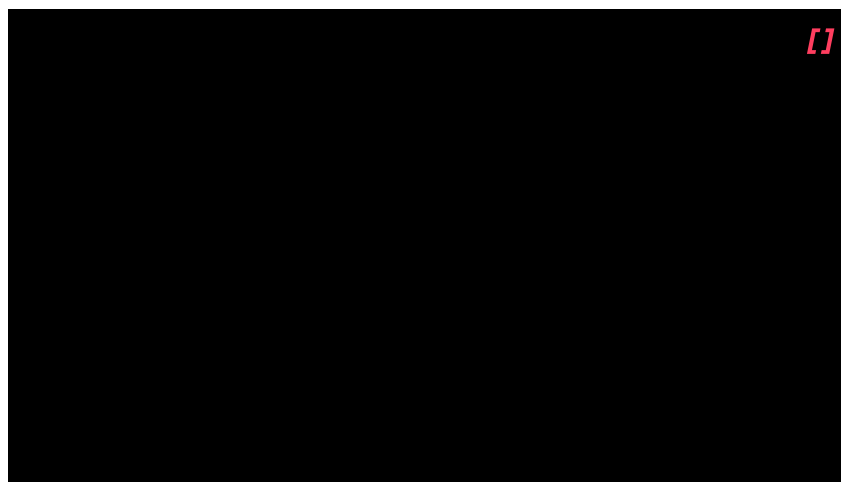
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Mario Neiva on December 06 2017 said:

I keep seeing this "manufacturing of batteries" and what's used to produce the electricity. I never see the drilling of the oil, the transport of the oil"(tankers, pipelines), the storage of the oil, the refining of the oil, the transport to the gas stations, the storage at the gas stations and even the pumping at the gas stations. Any of these have environmental impacts but people just remember the burning of the fuel in the engine.