

SPOTLIGHT

A Legacy of Support: Ningbo and Kuqa's Enduring Partnership

By Zhao Yu

"Supporting Kuqa is Developing Ningbo." This slogan captures the essence of the enduring partnership between Ningbo and Kuqa in Xinjiang, which has flourished over fifteen years of paired assistance.

As a new phase of support to Xinjiang unfolds, Ningbo's efforts in the region continue to yield remarkable results. Through these initiatives, heartfelt stories of collaboration, bridging geography and ethnicity, have emerged, showcasing the lasting impact of this ongoing commitment.

Raising Mud Crabs in the Desert

Setting out from Kuqa and heading west down National Highway 217, the landscape gradually shifts from lush greenery to vast stretches of yellow sand. After a six-hour drive along the Taklamakan Desert, a vast square pond comes into view.

This pond serves as both the experimental field for Li Yuntao, a Ningbo University doctoral student in his late 20s, and a new habitat for Sanmen mud crabs.

"Look, these are the 1.2 million mud crab larvae we released at the end of April. They've molted four times now," said Li, holding a freshly caught crab at the breeding base of the Sixteenth Regiment, First Division of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.

Li and his supervisor, Wang Huan, a specially appointed researcher and doctoral advisor at Ningbo University's School of Marine Sciences, have been promoting the technology of raising mud crabs on saline-alkali land. Their work has already seen success in Henan, Ningxia, Shaanxi, and other regions.



Omar focuses intently on shaping a small clay cup. [Photo by Chen Chi]

But could the mud crabs adapt to Xinjiang's unique soil and water conditions? That was the question during their first visit to Xinjiang in April last year. Li recalls, "Our location is right next to the desert, with vast areas of highly saline-alkali land. The roadsides are lined with endless corn or cotton fields. I wondered if the local people would even eat seafood."

A year later, that uncertainty has turned into success. The mud crabs harvested from the pond sold out immediately after harvest, fetching prices as high as 400 yuan per kilogram.

"I really didn't expect such strong demand. It shows that even inland consumers appreciate fresh seafood," said mud crab farmer Zhang Falong. Over the past year, he formed a strong partnership with Li. "I've got the hands-on know-how, he's got the data. Together, we're raising better crabs—

bigger and tastier," Zhang said as they walked by the pond.

Building on the success of the pilot project, the Sixteenth Regiment of the First Division secured investment in late 2023 to establish Xinjiang San'a Agricultural Development Co., Ltd.

Over 25 million yuan will go into a new saline-alkali aquaculture farm at the regiment. Once fully operational, the farm is expected to create over 50 new jobs, benefit more than 300 farmers, and generate over 50 million yuan in output value.

Young Pottery Artisan in the Making

Walking along the ancient city wall of Kuqa, the dusty yellow landscape gives way to a burst of color—the Kuchean Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop.

Inside the 1,200-square-meter space, 12-year-old Omar Kurban was spending

his summer break the way he always has: learning the art of pottery from his grandfather. Seated at a wheel, Omar focused intently on shaping a small clay cup. "Since I was five, I've come here after school or during vacations to make pottery with grandpa," he says. "It's so much fun."

Nearby, his grandfather, 68-year-old Tursun Asan, was tallying the day's production. A seventh-generation clay pottery maker, Tursun is skilled in more than 200 styles and techniques. "While it's quiet in the morning, I'm preparing bases for a few pots ordered by visitors from Fujian," he said.

But business hasn't always been this steady. "We used to work out of our old home in Qingshui Village," Omar recalled. "Hardly any tourists came. The roads weren't good, and few people knew about our craft."

That began to change with the opening of the Kuchean Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop—an initiative sup-

ported by Ningbo's aid program in Xinjiang. "The idea was to bring together artisans from Kuqa and nearby areas, and give them a place to showcase their skills," said an official from the Ningbo Aid Xinjiang Command. In 2023, the team invested 3 million yuan to repurpose an old grain warehouse on Restan Street, transforming it into a public exhibition space in just three months.

Now home to 25 types of intangible cultural heritage crafts, the workshop attracts more than 1,000 visitors a day. It offers hands-on activities, live demonstrations, digital exhibitions, and retail options, creating an immersive space where tradition and tourism meet.

After the crowds thin out, Omar returned to his wheel, fingers coated in clay as he shaped the next piece. "I want more people to know about Kuqa's pottery," he said. "And one day, I want to open a bigger workshop of my own."



On the Water, a Tin-smith Keeps Tradition Alive

By Jin Yuhan

On a humid afternoon in Zhenhai, the steady clang of metal echoes over the water, cutting through the heat. Seated on a low stool inside a wooden boat, 64-year-old Du Guangjie hunches over a sheet of tin, hammer in hand. Sweat darkens his shirt, but his focus never wavers.

For nearly four decades, Du has lived and worked aboard two modest boats moored along the riverbank—one his home, the other his tin workshop. He left his hometown of Yancheng, Jiangsu, at 25, eventually settling in Zhenhai with his family and taking up the life of a river-based tin-smith.

"I used to travel from place to place—Luotuo Bridge, Zhuangshi, Guisi—earning a living as I went," he says. "But when high-rises started going up, I anchored here for good."

Du's craft is labor-intensive and meticulous. Whether it's the tinware that calls for light, precise taps or the copper pieces that demand heavier blows, every item is handcrafted from start to finish. Among Du's specialties is the huocong—a traditional tin handwarmer. It was long regarded as one of eastern Zhejiang's "Three Essential Dowry Items", symbolizing warmth and harmony in marriage.

To date, Du estimates he has made more than 6,000 huocong, each one sent off with a quiet wish for the newlyweds who receive it. "Machine-made ones all look the same. They have no warmth, no soul," he says. The process—melting, shaping, engraving, polishing—requires not only skill but physical endurance. His hammer weighs roughly a kilogram. Most would tire within minutes, but Du spends hours at his craft each day.

His signature design features a pair of mandarin ducks, a motif symbolizing love and fidelity. Etching the birds' feather patterns takes three chisels of varying sizes. The smallest, just 2 millimeters wide, is used to carve out their eyes. "The ducks' eyes should sparkle with life. Their feathers should feel like they could move," Du says. "The newlyweds should feel that energy in their hands."

In 2023, Du was named an official Intangible Cultural Heritage heir of Zhenhai District for his contribution to traditional tin-smithing. With help from the local market regulation bureau, he recently moved his workshop ashore—something he had long hoped for.

Still, his joy is tempered by concern for the craft's future. "I've taught four or five apprentices, but they all moved on. This kind of work takes patience," he says. Even so, Du remains committed. "If someone truly wants to learn, I'll teach them wholeheartedly," he says. "As long as there are families who want these items, I'll keep on making them."

Chief Adviser: Zhao Qingchuan
Proofreader: Zhao Yu

Ningbo's Economy Maintains Steady Growth in H1

By Jin Lu

Ningbo's GDP grew 5.1% year-on-year in the first half of 2025, reaching 886.1 billion yuan (\$123.7 billion), driven by robust performance across agriculture, industry, and services.

The value added of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries reached 20.47 billion yuan, up 3.7% year-on-year. The added value of industrial enterprises above designated size rose 5.7%, while the services sector grew 5.6%.

Retail sales rebounded, reaching 269.77 billion yuan,

a 2.2% increase, boosted by policy measures like the consumer goods trade-in program. Fixed asset investment, excluding real estate, rose 7.9%, while infrastructure investment surged 24%, accounting for more than a third of total investment.

Residents' per capita disposable income grew to 43,797 yuan, up 4.5%, while the urban-rural income ratio narrowed to 1.62.

Foreign trade showed resilience, with Ningbo's imports and exports totaling 721.8 billion yuan, marking a 6.1% year-on-year increase. Private enterprises played a



Yinzhou District. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

crucial role, contributing 77.5% of the total trade volume.

Ningbo's trade with Africa, ASEAN, and the European

Union increased by 25.2%, 20.8% and 12.1%, respectively. Meanwhile, its imports and exports with the Belt and Road

countries and Central and Eastern European countries rose by 13.4% and 13.7%, respectively.

