

SPOTLIGHT

New Orders, New Directions: Ningbo Companies Reinvent Themselves

By Jin Yuhan

Amid a shifting and increasingly complex global landscape, several Ningbo-based enterprises are stepping up to the challenge. By embracing technological innovation and upgrading to intelligent manufacturing, they are driving forward industrial transformation, reflected in a wave of new orders and expanded market presence.

The Brand-Building Journey of a Tuna Company

For decades, Ningbo Today Food Co., Ltd. made its mark abroad as China's first canned tuna producer. But when the company turned its focus to the domestic market in 2020, it faced an unfamiliar challenge: building a brand from the ground up for a product few Chinese consumers regularly buy.

On a summer afternoon at Today Food's production facility in Xikou, Fenghua, the assembly line hums with activity. Hundreds of workers efficiently process whole tunas into boneless fillets, then flash-freeze and package the fish. Each year, the company ships 100,000 tons of tuna worldwide.

"We're currently fulfilling an order for Yonghui Superstores," said Chen Shengnan, the company's deputy general manager. As China's first canned tuna producer, Today Food had long focused on European and American markets. However, in 2020, the company pivoted to the domestic market, aiming to tap into the rising demand for seafood by marketing its offerings under its own brand.

The transition was not without setbacks. With limited brand awareness and low consumer familiarity, the company struggled to gain traction in the domestic market, and early sales figures fell short of expectations. In China, tuna is not widely consumed, and canned products remain less



Ningbo Today Food Company. [Photo to provided to Ningbo Times]

popular than fresh foods. To address these challenges, Today Food adopted a new sales strategy.

The company partnered with a Hangzhou-based operations team to establish a joint venture. The partner team took responsibility for front-end operations including sales, packaging design, and consumer targeting, while Today Food remained focused on R&D and production. The collaboration helped stabilize the business, though overall growth remained modest.

A breakthrough came when the company decided to prioritize direct-to-consumer retail over traditional wholesale channels. On April 7, when Yonghui Superstores issued an open call for high-quality suppliers, Today Food responded immediately.

"Talks moved swiftly. With Yonghui's green light, we shipped goods by April 17," Chen recalled.

Simultaneously, Today Food reworked its product lineup to meet Yonghui's specifications, introducing smaller tuna cans in more flavors. Within just 10 days, the revamped products hit the shelves in Yonghui stores across Beijing, Fujian, and other locations.

Today, the company's

online sales in China have surged by nearly 20 million yuan, with offline revenue rising by a similar amount. Today Food forecasts its domestic market share will reach 30%.

"Building our own brand has been tough, but it's necessary," Chen said. "Our brand gives us market influence, which is our competitive edge. We've invested tens of millions in R&D and sales over the past two years, and it's starting to pay off."

Through strategic partnerships, rapid adaptation, and innovative product offerings, Ningbo Today Food is redefining the future of tuna in China.

From Machines to Solutions

In July, at the Baiqida Intelligent Technology (Ningbo) Co., Ltd. facility, workers disassembled, packed, and wrapped several large machines in protective film.

"This is a 30-million-yuan order for a leading magnetic materials manufacturer in northern China," said Wang Hanquan, chairman of Baiqida.

Specializing in the R&D and production of magnetic material processing equipment, Baiqida already supplies most of the mag-

netic material producers in Ningbo. But this order represented a new challenge.

In late spring 2024, Wang received a call from the client in northern China. Rather than purchasing individual machines, the company was seeking a fully automated, intelligent production line.

"They weren't just looking for equipment—they wanted a blueprint for a 'factory of the future,'" Wang said. In addition to smart machinery, the client demanded integrated planning for utility layouts, logistics, data flows, and system interfaces—all in line with national policies promoting green and intelligent manufacturing.

While Baiqida had years of experience in building standalone automated machines, managing the coordinated operation of a fully integrated system was unfamiliar territory.

"This pushed us to evolve—from an equipment manufacturer into a provider of end-to-end intelligent solutions," Wang said. Delivering on this vision required optimizing the client's entire magnetic materials production chain, an ambitious goal rarely attempted in the industry.

Processes that once required manual input now had to be fully automated. But with roughly 70% of potential operating scenarios too complex to

simulate digitally, the team had to rely on intensive brainstorming and repeated physical testing.

Wang left nothing to chance.

To ensure consistent machine performance, he personally selected raw material suppliers that could guarantee purity and uniformity.

During development, Baiqida's top R&D team held weekly sessions with the client to refine design details, ultimately producing more than a dozen iterations.

To strengthen the firm's software capabilities, Wang brought in outside experts. The team integrated AI-powered learning into the control systems, designed custom software platforms in-house, and standardized data interfaces to ensure compatibility across all components.

By late May, Baiqida delivered a fully tailored solution that met the client's requirements. The signed contract signaled the start of large-scale production and shipment.

"This project marks a turning point for us," Wang said. "It has positioned us as a full-solution provider and opened the door to a wider client base." He expects the company's output value to rise significantly in the months ahead.

Ningbo Freeze-Drying Firm Helps Farmers and Flavors Go Global

By Zhao Yu

In Xinjiang's goji berry fields, among the Hami melon vines, and on deer farms in Jilin's Changchun, hulking vacuum freeze-dryers from Ningbo are at work. In coastal Weihai, Shandong, too, these giant machines are preserving everything from sea cucumbers to abalone—turning fresh produce into lightweight, shelf-stable goods that help farmers boost income and reduce waste.

Even overseas, these machines are reshaping the food supply chain. On production lines in Europe, they're transforming raspberries, strawberries, walnuts, and hazelnuts into crisp freeze-dried ingredients that add complex flavor and crunch to premium chocolates.

Behind it all is Ningbo Scientz Freeze Drying Technology Co., Ltd., a firm based in Zhaobao Smart Manufacturing Valley in Zhenhai District.

Inside its workshop on a recent morning, workers were assembling a massive vacuum freeze-dryer—14 meters long, 3 meters wide, and 4 meters tall. The unit can process up to a ton of fresh figs in one cycle.

"The key is ultra-low temperatures and vacuum conditions," said general manager Yang Shuwei. He explained that the machine flash-freezes the product at minus 30 to 40 degrees Celsius, then removes moisture in a vacuum chamber through sublimation—the transformation of solid ice directly into gaseous water molecules.

The result: the original shape, color, and nutrients are preserved, with moisture content dropping to less than 5%. This not only extends food products' shelf life but also retains flavor and nutritional value—critical for both quality and export potential.

Freeze-drying has become a go-to method for agricultural producers looking to stretch the value chain. Products travel farther, spoil less, and open new market opportunities—from rural farms to international buyers.

Ningbo Scientz has spent over a decade refining its technology. The company now holds 10 invention patents and received Ningbo's official certification for a producing a first-of-its-kind manufacturing system.

And the applications go far beyond food. Scientz equipment is now used in biopharmaceuticals, high-value traditional Chinese medicine ingredients, and even pet food.

"Our systems can reach minus 111 degrees Celsius," Yang said. "With that kind of performance, we're only scratching the surface of what's possible."

In the first half of 2025, Scientz delivered 700 units of freeze-drying equipment. Its output value is still expected to rise.

"We're confident we can continue expanding into new fields," Yang added. "This 'Ningbo freeze' will serve more industries—and more people—around the world."

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Ningbo-CEEC Trade Tops 30 Billion Yuan in H1

By Jin Lu

In the first half of 2025, trade between Ningbo and Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) reached 30.67 billion yuan (\$4.27 billion), up 13.7% year-on-year, according to data from Ningbo Customs.

Exports totaled 25.25 billion yuan, surging 20.1%, while imports came in at 5.42 billion yuan. The figures underscore Ningbo's growing role as a key hub for economic cooperation between China and CEEC.

Seven countries - Poland, Slovakia, Greece, Czechia, Romania, Hungary, and Slovenia - accounted for nearly 90% of Ningbo's trade with the region.

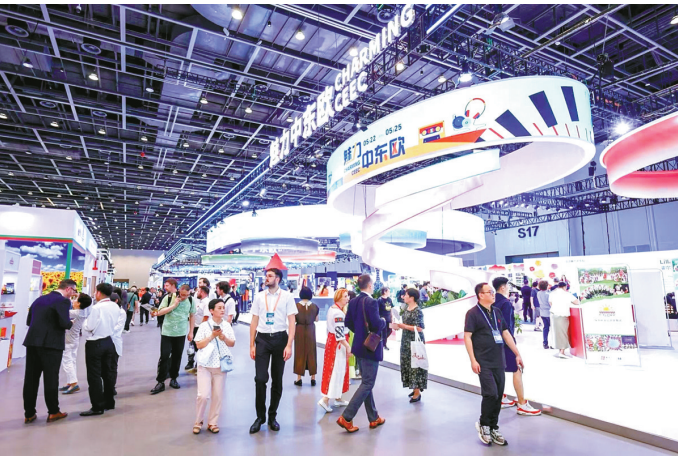
Exports of mechanical and electrical goods, including household appliances, electrical components, and auto parts, drove much of the growth, contributing 12.6 percentage points to the overall increase.

Mint Group, a Ningbo-based auto parts firm, exported 250 million yuan to CEEC markets, marking a 3.8-fold increase. The com-

pany's strategy of exporting Chinese technologies to Serbia for local assembly has helped lower costs and tailor products to regional needs. "The CEEC market is our launchpad for global growth," said Yu Ke, the firm's customs manager.

On the import side, CEEC goods are gaining ground in China. High-value items such as automobiles and industrial equipment are joined by rising imports of Polish dairy, Hungarian wine, and Serbian agricultural products.

To support growing



The 4th China-CEEC Expo.
[Photo to provided to Ningbo Times]

trade volumes, Ningbo Customs has rolled out an online platform for users to check the list of approved CEEC agro-food imports and con-

tinues to release EU export compliance updates through the China-CEEC Customs Information Center.

