

From Ningbo to Almaty: Expanding Horizons in Central Asian Markets



Kazakhstan locals experience graphic printing. [Photo by Shan Yuzifeng]

By Zhao Yu

On August 6, our correspondent traveled to Almaty, Kazakhstan, alongside more than 100 Ningbo exporters for the HomeTech & Electra 2025 International Exhibition.

The delegation carried not only samples of Ningbo-manufactured products, but also ambitions to deepen China-Kazakhstan trade ties, building on the momentum of the 2025 China-Central Asia Summit and positioning Ningbo among the first to advance cooperation on the ground.

Lights Out, Business On

At 9:50 a.m. on August 8, just ten minutes before opening time at the Almaty International Exhibition Center in Kazakhstan, the lights went out.

The correspondent had been speaking with Azat, the local organizer's on-site coordinator, about Ningbo's reputation for efficiency when

the hall was suddenly plunged into darkness. For several seconds there was only silence, followed by a few quiet murmurs, before the emergency lights flickered on.

By the glow of phone screens, the correspondent and Azat traded wry smiles. Then, just as abruptly, the main lights came back.

Across the hall at Handian Group's booth, business was already underway. Marketing Director Wang Wanxue was already welcoming their first visitor of the day, Ruslanbek, from the Turkistan Region.

Speaking in Russian and holding a Handian product catalog, Ruslanbek explained that he runs a 200-square-meter appliance store with more than a dozen employees. "I came to a Chinese trade fair here in Almaty last year," he said. "The goods I bought sold out quickly—people here trust Chinese brands."

He pointed to a refrigerator on display. "I drove over 1,000 kilometers this

time to order more appliances from Ningbo. High-power cooling models are the most popular."

As he worked out quantities with the sales team, he tapped the brochure to highlight a particular model: "This one sold out last time. I need to stock up more this time."

The brief blackout was already a forgotten footnote in a hall buzzing with deals and conversations.

Finding Common Ground on Foreign Soil

On the evening of August 6, at the Almaty International Exhibition Center in Kazakhstan, Ding Zhihua of Zhejiang Huaheng Electric Power Technology Co., Ltd., based in Ningbo, was carefully adjusting a microwave-sized model of a compact substation—a 1:100 scale version specially designed for the exhibition. He was assisted by Wang Haoyu of Xi'an Changhong Electronic

Control Equipment Factory, a Shaanxi-based company.

"Apologies for being tied up earlier today; now we finally have time to chat," Ding said to the correspondent with a smile. Turning to Wang, he added, "And to our surprise, we've already found a potential client."

Wang, also smiling, took over the conversation. "After setting up our booth this afternoon, we decided to explore the Ningbo section. It's like we've discovered a new world," he remarked.

The two companies, both manufacturers of electrical control equipment, were exhibiting side by side, an unusual scenario given their competitive nature. Yet, despite this, the interaction between the two sparked a sense of camaraderie.

Ding noted, "I've always believed in the power of collaboration." He emphasized that cooperation and mutual learning within the industry are far more valuable than cutthroat competition.

Pointing to the substation

model, Ding explained that it was designed for long-distance transportation and could be used in photovoltaic power stations and wind farms across Central Asia. He also highlighted the complementary nature of the two companies' business: since Xi'an Changhong specializes in small distribution boxes for the north-west Chinese market, Huaheng could refer clients to them or work with them on collaborative projects.

During a break, Ding recalled a conversation at the Canton Fair earlier that year, where a Kazakh distributor had expressed a need not only for power distribution equipment but for partners to explore business opportunities with. In his planner, Ding had written down "meet with two local companies after the exhibition to discuss client referrals."

As his phone buzzed with a message about a wind power project in southern China, Ding smiled and texted back, "Let's discuss the details after we wrap up here at the exhibition."

Village Museum Chronicles Industrial Roots and Modern Transformation

By Jin Yuhan

Walking into the Chenhua Village History Museum in Xiapu Subdistrict, Beilun District, visitors are greeted by two old-fashioned cameras on display.

"This is the first-generation Beilun-brand camera produced by our village collective enterprise in 1978," said Zhou Guohong, Party Branch Secretary of Chenhua Village, carefully lifting one of the cameras. "It costed 10 yuan at the time—about half a month's wages for an average worker. The one next to it is the second-generation model."

Both cameras' shutters still work. Behind them lies an entrepreneurial story little known outside the village.

Pointing to an old photo on a display board, Zhou continued: "This is Zhang Hejun, who once made molds for our village's camera factory. Few could have imagined he would later found Ningbo Deye Technology Co., Ltd., now a listed company."

Zhang's rise—from moldmaker to leading the development of air-conditioning parts meeting Japanese standards, and later securing contracts for all domestic plastic components of the Haval SUV—mirrors the rapid growth of Ningbo's mold industry. Today, Deye's dehumidifiers lead the national market.

The museum's "Famous Figures" section features another village icon: Zhou Keding. In a faded photograph, he is seen adjusting a vintage camera.

"He was the first photographer in Beilun," Zhou Guohong said. "During the war, he donated 90,000 yuan to buy a fighter jet for the front lines." Zhou Keding's photographs were published in Kodak magazines, and he later served as a technical advisor to the village camera factory.

Beyond industrial history, the museum houses donated heirlooms such as rice cake molds and antique rulers. "When we opened the museum in January, many villagers brought items from their own homes," Zhou said. "The owner of these two Beilun cameras even turned down compensation."

Today, Chenhua Village is a far cry from its modest beginnings. The local industrial park generated 5 million yuan in collective income last year, up 500,000 yuan from the year before.

Standing outside the museum, Zhou gestured toward the distance. "Over there is our Han Dynasty tomb cluster, where precious relics were unearthed. Further east is a Qing Dynasty water conservancy monument, a testament to our ancestors' skills in flood control."

"From Han tombs to industrial parks, from 10-yuan cameras to a listed company—our village has many stories worth telling," Zhou said with a proud smile.

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Zhenhai's Master Tailor Keeps Tradition Alive at 71

By Jin Lu

At dawn in the old town of Zhaobaoshan, the lights of a small tailor shop flicker on. Inside, the rhythmic ka-tak of a sewing machine blends with the quiet morning.

71-year-old He Xingyue moves with the practiced ease of more than five decades behind the sewing table, measuring, marking, and cutting fabric.

A few neighbors chat nearby. He joins in occasionally, his hands never stopping. Within an hour, a finished garment takes shape.

"Master He's work is flawless — precise cuts,

perfect fit. I've been coming here for more than ten years," said a longtime customer.

Another customer, a young man, holds up a photo of a trendy jacket. The old tailor peers over his glasses, studies the fabric, and smiles: "No problem. I can make one that's even better."

He's craftsmanship has been honed for more than half a century. "You need a calm mind and a steady hand," he said, his eyes bright. "Miss by a centimeter, and the whole piece is ruined."

Born in Guisi, a rural part of Zhenhai, in the 1950s, He was a slight boy whose mother feared farm work would be too demand-

ing. At 19, he apprenticed with a local tailor. An early mishap — accidentally cutting into a customer's corduroy — drove home the importance of precision. He scoured the market that night to replace the fabric. Since then, he has worked with an unwavering commitment to precision, determined never to repeat such an error.

His reputation grew in an era when tailoring was largely women's work. He joined a garment factory, sewing by day and taking private orders by night. There he met his wife, Qiu Xiue. In 1999, the couple opened their own shop in Zhaobaoshan.



71-year-old He Xingyue is measuring, marking, and cutting fabric. [Photo by Shen Sunhui]

Ready-to-wear stores and online shopping have transformed the clothing market, but He has stayed true to his calling. "Our daughter tells us to retire, but my customers trust me,"

he said. "I can't sit idle."

Asked about the future, He grinned: "I want to keep sewing for as long as I can." For him, it's more than a job; it's a lifelong dedication to his craft.

