

SPOTLIGHT

Ningbo's Private Exporters Top 1 Trillion Yuan as Firms Adapt to Global Headwinds

By Zhao Yu

Ningbo's 28,000 private businesses with actual import and export records surpassed the trillion-yuan mark in total trade one month ahead of schedule, posting year-on-year growth of 4%. Their share of the city's total foreign trade rose 1.2 percentage points from the same period last year, reaching 77.6%, according to a report released by Ningbo Customs on December 10.

Despite unprecedented uncertainties in global trade this year, private enterprises helped to boost Ningbo's overall import and export volume by 3 percentage points during the first 11 months.

Exports from private companies totaled 737.6 billion yuan, up 5.1% year on year, representing 82.8% of the city's total export value. Imports reached 288.35 billion yuan, rising 1.1% and accounting for 66.8% of Ningbo's total import value.

Resilience Through Structural Optimization

Inside the standardized smart manufacturing facility of Ningbo Jingwei System-technik Ltd., automated production lines run with high precision and efficiency.

After passing rigorous quality inspections, intelligent fabric-tailoring machines equipped with IoT modules are being prepared and packaged for shipment to Slovenia, where they will support the digital upgrading of local textile manufacturers.

Built with customizable configurations and standardized modules, the equipment allows users to run fully automated production lines, moving directly from design input to finished output. It can raise production efficiency by up to 300% and push material utilization above 90%, said Zheng Zhaoze, deputy general manager of Jingwei.



Zhejiang Aiyimei Clothing Co., Ltd. [Photo by Cheng Cheng, Sun Jiali]

The company now serves more than 30,000 clients worldwide. In the first 11 months of this year, its export value reached 120 million yuan.

Jingwei is one of many Ningbo-based private enterprises strengthening their competitiveness through technological upgrading. By enhancing in-house capabilities and shifting exports toward more technology-intensive and greener products, these firms are improving the resilience of their global sales through structural optimization.

According to Ningbo Customs, private businesses in the city exported 430.96 billion yuan worth of mechanical and electrical products in the first 11 months of 2025, up 6.9% year on year. These products accounted for 58.4% of total exports by Ningbo's private sector during the period, forming a key pillar of export stability.

At Zhejiang Zhongzhe New Energy Technology Co., Ltd, vice president Chen Bin demonstrated both older and newer models of energy

storage batteries. "The new generation is lighter and more compact, while delivering stronger storage performance," he said, attributing the improvement to higher energy density.

The market has responded positively. This year, Zhongzhe's exports of energy storage batteries to ASEAN markets exceeded 20 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of more than 50%.

"By being laser focused on our core product lineup, we've expanded our new energy business to more than 40 countries and regions," said Chen.

Seizing Opportunities Through Flexibility and Adaptation

"With the launch of a new business model, our export value reached 160 million yuan in the first 11 months of this year, up more than 10% year on year," said Zhou Bin, head of Zhejiang Aiyimei Clothing Co., Ltd., standing beside a shipment of made-to-order suits awaiting export.

The growth stems from what Zhou describes as a dual

strategy combining cross-border e-commerce with customization.

Aiyimei traces its roots to the craftsmanship of Ningbo's traditional "Hongbang tailors," but for years relied mainly on OEM manufacturing. As garments are highly standardized and face low technical barriers, export margins steadily narrowed.

To break the cycle, Aiyimei partnered with six local partners to establish Ningbo Fengshang Technology Co., Ltd., shifting toward a cross-border supply-chain service model aimed at small and medium-sized buyers overseas.

Through the platform, customers can select styles and submit measurements using 3D virtual fitting tools, fully customizing their pieces. Finished garments can be shipped to Europe and the United States in as little as three days. This new business model helped the company secure overseas orders.

New policies are also creating new momentum. On Oct. 28, China and ASEAN signed an upgraded version of the China - ASEAN Free Trade Area agreement, known as CAFTA 3.0, which introduces

new rules covering the digital economy, green development and supply-chain connectivity.

"Many ASEAN countries are moving toward Industry 4.0, generating strong demand for industrial automation and robotics," said Ke Sisi, foreign trade director of Ningbo Limon Robot Company. "The upgraded agreement is expected to further enhance the competitiveness of our intelligent manufacturing products in ASEAN."

Limon Robot is intensifying research and development of controllable magnetic levitation conveyor systems tailored to ASEAN markets. The company expects exports to the region to exceed 20 million yuan next year, with annual growth of around 20%.

According to Ningbo Customs, ASEAN is currently the third-largest trading partner of Ningbo's private sector and is expected to rise to second place. In the first 11 months of this year, trade between Ningbo and ASEAN totaled 148.67 billion yuan, up 12.8% year on year.

Despite global uncertainties, Ningbo's private exporters remain confident of their global sales and presence.

Zhenhai Folk Art Meets British Fashion Design in Innovative Cross-Cultural Project

By Lu Xinyan

A cross-cultural collaboration blending Zhenhai's intangible cultural heritage with British fashion design has recently taken shape at the Sino-UK College of Fashion and Design of Zhejiang Fashion Institute of Technology.

Gao Ni'e, a municipal-level inheritor of Xiepu Folk Painting, worked alongside British designer Adam to reimagine the traditional art form through a contemporary fashion lens. They integrated the folk painting's auspicious "Harvest Fish" motif with classic British patterns, creating a visual dialogue that bridges Eastern folk aesthetics and Western design language.

Adam first encountered Xiepu Folk Painting at Zhenhai's Zhengshi Shiqifang, a cluster of historical dwellings. "The expressiveness of the colors and the simplicity of the brushstrokes left a deep impression on me," he said. He is now using AI-assisted tools to analyze the paintings' color schemes and composition, translating them into design elements suitable for international fashion markets.

The collaboration is part of an innovative teaching model that combines hand-drawn traditional art, AI-generated design assistance, and international design translation. Students are guided to transform intangible cultural heritage symbols into contemporary design drafts in real time.

"The students are confident, highly engaged, and eager to explore how traditional culture can be expressed in contemporary and global contexts," said Li Ling, vice dean of the Sino-UK College of Fashion and Design. She said the project supports Zhenhai's efforts to transform intangible cultural heritage into wearable products for global markets.

Work has begun on turning the designs into garments. With official authorization, Adam and his team are developing shawls and traditional Chinese pleated skirts, incorporating elements from Xiepu Folk Painting. The designs capture the simple, rustic spirit of the original paintings while adapting them for a global audience. Two designs are expected to enter the prototyping stage soon.

Students in Britain will wear the garments in their communities, bringing Xiepu Folk Painting and Zhenhai's cultural heritage to audiences around the world.

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Ningbo's Intangible Cultural Heritage Shines at UN and Columbia University

By Jin Lu

A new collection of Ningbo's culturally inspired merchandise recently took center stage at the United Nations headquarters in New York and at Columbia University, showcasing the elegance of Eastern art through modern interpretations of intangible cultural heritage.

Exhibits included oil-paper umbrellas inspired by the twenty-four solar terms and embroidered eye masks, offering international audiences a glimpse into Chinese tradition reimagined for modern life.

The twenty-four solar terms, inscribed on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list, was the main theme of the exhibition. A collection of Song dynasty-style porcelain pieces, each representing one of the solar terms, was showcased at the event. Featuring Chinese characters that indicate the corresponding solar term, the collection beautifully combined traditional craftsmanship with seasonal symbolism.

Titled "Cultural Exchange and Harmonious Coexistence", the exhibition featured more than 100

works by inheritors of China's intangible cultural heritage (ICH), skilled artisans, and cross-cultural designers. Ningbo-based MIC ICH Cultural Management Co. played a leading role in organizing the showcase. Xu Kezhao, an executive at the company, said the creations represent "a lifestyle rooted in Oriental aesthetics" and serve as a bridge for global cultural dialogue.

The exhibition drew strong interest from international viewers. Marco Suazo, Head of UNITAR's office at the United Nations in New York, praised the solar-term



A UN official and an exhibitor pose for a photo with 24-solar-term-themed umbrellas. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

oil-paper umbrellas, saying: "These works are not only rich in cultural meaning but also

very stylish. I truly love the creativity and craftsmanship behind them."

