

## SPOTLIGHT

# Twenty Years Later, Old Friends Reunite at the Canton Fair

By Zhao Yu

The 139th Canton Fair is being held in three phases in Guangzhou from April 15 to May 5. This session spans a total exhibition area of 1.55 million square metres, with 75,700 booths and more than 32,000 participating companies, all setting new records in scale. As of April 19, overseas buyers had exceeded 167,000.

According to the Ningbo Municipal Bureau of Commerce, the Ningbo delegation occupies more than 4,500 booths at this session, accounting for over 6% of the total and ranking first among sub-provincial trading delegations. Across all three phases, more than 2,400 Ningbo-based companies (counted by participation) are participating, an increase of over 200 from the previous session. Total participation is expected to exceed 20,000 representatives.

Long regarded as a barometer of China's foreign trade, the Canton Fair remains a key platform for Ningbo exporters to seal deals and forge long-term relationships.

Amid the crowds at this year's fair, a story spanning more than two decades unfolded.

At the booth of Ningbo Ruyi Joint Stock Co., Ltd., founder Chu Jiawang had just finished a conversation with a client when a team member quietly told him: "Mr. Chu, someone has been waiting for you for half an hour."

The visitor was Medhat, an Australian client of more than 20 years. He first discovered the company's products at a trade fair more than two decades ago and later visited its factory in Ninghai County. One moment from that first visit has stayed with him. When shaking hands, Chu noticed that Medhat was missing two fingers on his right hand and



The 139th Canton Fair. [Photo by Lu Xinyan]

asked whether he had lost them while operating a stamping press. Medhat recalled being taken aback, before nodding in reply.

Ruyi's deputy general manager Wei Chunhong recalled that in 2023, when she attended an exhibition in Australia, Medhat asked whether the company's founder had come and later sent her an old photograph.

In the image, both Chu and Medhat still had dark hair. Chu wore a red shirt under a dark blue jacket, while Medhat wore a tropical-print shirt with one hand resting on Chu's shoulder. Together they held up a calligraphy scroll reading: "China and Australia are one family; friendship in business

binds us together", written by Chu himself.

At the time, Chu was in his early sixties and Medhat in his forties. Today, one is in his eighties and the other in his sixties.

At the booth, Medhat turned to Wei and asked directly: "Do you remember the photo I sent? Is that 'young man' here?"

Chu's children often encouraged him to step back from the Canton Fair, given his age. But he still insists on going. He has attended every edition since first participating in 1987 and says this is his 75th.

For Chu, the fair remains a constant source of learning and connection — from new

products and industry trends to customer feedback and management ideas. He describes it as a "never-ending classroom." This restless drive is what Chu calls the "spirit of youth", a sentiment shared by Medhat.

"I've written at least 500 pieces of calligraphy for clients over the years, so I honestly don't remember every one," Chu said. "But I am deeply moved that he kept that piece for more than 20 years." When Medhat speaks of Chu Jiawang, his tone is full of respect. "He's a very kind, very simple person. He treats everyone equally."

Over the years, although Medhat has encountered many similar products, he said Ruyi's

remain the most reliable. "Otherwise, we wouldn't have worked together for more than 20 years," he said.

What began as a business relationship gradually developed into something more personal. According to Wei, Medhat often shares family updates with the company, from weddings and celebrations to grandchildren, along with photos of family gatherings.

"It feels like a friendship," she said. "He often says the company gives him a sense of home, not a purely transactional relationship."

The calligraphy gifted more than 20 years ago still hangs in Medhat's business in Australia, a quiet marker of a relationship that has endured.

## Ningbo Culture Showcased at Vietnam Plant Through Photo and Heritage Displays

By Lu Xinyan

A cultural showcase highlighting Ningbo's cityscape and traditional crafts was launched at Jintian Copper (Vietnam) Co., Ltd. on April 13, bringing elements of the Chinese city to the company's overseas operations.

The event featured a photography exhibition alongside a display of cultural and heritage-themed items. It quickly drew interest among both Chinese and Vietnamese employees, who gathered at the exhibition area during breaks.

The photography exhibition presented images of Ningbo's waterfronts, historic neighborhoods and urban development, offering a visual introduction to the city. The accompanying display featured handcrafted cultural items and decorative pieces reflecting traditional Chinese craftsmanship.

For employees at the Vietnam plant, the exhibition provided an opportunity to engage with the company's home city without leaving the factory grounds. Many Vietnamese staff said they had previously known little about Ningbo but gained a clearer impression through the displays.

Vu Thi Hong Yen, who has worked at the plant for more than three years, said the exhibition deepened her interest in Chinese culture. "The photos and cultural items gave me a better sense of Ningbo," she said, adding that she hopes to visit the city and receive training at the company's headquarters in the future.

Nguyen Vinh Tho, who has previously been to Ningbo for training, said the exhibition brought back memories. "It's a beautiful city with a great atmosphere," he said, expressing hope of returning.

For others, including Pham Thi Tuyet Ngan, the exhibition offered a first introduction. "The items on display are very delicate," she said, adding that she would like to visit Ningbo and experience both the company and local culture firsthand.

A representative of Jintian Copper Vietnam said the event helped strengthen connections among employees. By incorporating cultural elements into the workplace, the company aims to foster a stronger sense of shared identity across its overseas operations.

## China Puts World's Largest Electric Container Ship into Service

By Jin Lu

China's first all-electric container ship with a displacement over 10,000 tons, the world's largest of its kind, entered commercial service on April 15, marking a step forward in the electrification of coastal shipping.

The vessel, Ning Yuan Dian Kun, departed from Ningbo Zhoushan Port for Jiaying Port, a busy route traditionally served by fuel-powered ships. Designed by the Shanghai Merchant Ship Design and Research Institute, the ship uses a fully electric propulsion system with an integrated smart

control system, enabling zero-emission and high efficiency. It measures 127.8 metres in length and 21.6 metres in width, with a design draft of 6.2 metres, and has a capacity of 742 TEU.

It is powered by 10 containerised battery units with a total capacity of around 20,000 kWh and two 875-kW permanent-magnet propulsion motors. The ship is expected to cut carbon dioxide emissions by about 1,462 tonnes a year compared with conventional vessels. Its noise level will also be significantly lower. An open-deck design improves cargo handling efficiency, while a streamlined bow re-

duces air resistance by 15% to 20%.

The vessel's name references "Kun," a giant fish in the ancient Chinese text Zhuangzi. Its sister ship, Ning Yuan Dian Peng — named after a mythical bird from the same work — is scheduled for sea trials in May and delivery in June. The two vessels are expected to operate together on fixed routes as part of a scaled-up green shipping network.

"This project reflects our commitment to greener shipping and to China's carbon reduction goals," said Chen Xiaofeng, chairman of Ningbo Ocean Shipping Co., Ltd., the operator of the vessels.



China's first all-electric container ship. [Photo by Sun Jiajun]

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