

SPOTLIGHT

Inside Ningbo Manufacturers' Playbook for Competing in a Challenging Global Economy

By Jin Yuhan

Nearly 30 journalists from media outlets in Europe and Asia, along with reporters from Chinese state media, visited Ningbo from June 2 to 3 for a reporting tour focused on the city's manufacturing sector and global expansion.

The delegation included journalists from the UK, France, Italy, Japan and Singapore, as well as Xinhua News Agency and CGTN. They visited a range of local companies across the city.

During the trip, reporters asked company executives about intensifying competition in global manufacturing, rising trade barriers, and the pace of technological upgrading. Executives said local firms are pursuing differentiated strategies to stay ahead as they adapt to new challenges, including faster R&D cycles, rising trade barriers, and fierce competition in the global manufacturing landscape.

Competing Beyond Price

"How can companies avoid competing solely on price when every sector is facing intense competition, especially in auto parts?" a visiting journalist asked during a tour of SLPT Automotive.

For Luo Licheng, chairman of SLPT Automotive, the answer lies in innovation. "Price competition exists in every industry. The automotive market remains enormous. We believe in transforming innovation into product value."

To stay ahead, the company is upgrading traditional product lines while using the latest technologies to manufacture electric car parts. The strategy, Luo said, is to differentiate through innovation rather than compete on price alone.

Consinee Group has taken a different approach. In the highly competitive textile industry, the company has strengthened its position by focusing on quality control and supply chain management. "The business environment has been



Consinee's highly-automated production line. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

challenging this year, and many companies in the industry have seen orders decline," said Xue Zhengli, president of Consinee Group. "But our order books remain full, and we continue to receive a steady stream of high-value orders."

According to Xue, the company oversees quality from the source, selecting premium cashmere directly from the best pastoral regions and maintaining strict standards throughout production. Combined with years of brand-building in international markets, that reputation has helped the company attract large orders from clients around the world.

Going Global Beyond Exports

As global trade becomes increasingly unpredictable, a recurring question from both Chinese and international journalists was how Ningbo manufacturers are moving beyond the traditional model of making products in China and selling them overseas, while reducing their exposure to market volatility.

For Wang Xianggui, chairman of Soundking Group, actively going global has been an effective way to gain access to new technology, expand distribution networks, and build up the company's international profile.

When the global financial crisis hit Europe and the US in 2008, several long-established British sound equipment brands were hit hard. Soundking moved quickly, acquiring three well-known British manufacturers within a matter of months.

Today, overseas markets account for 65% of the company's sales. Its products are used in professional performance venues around the world, and the company has served as an official sound system supplier for both the Beijing Olympics and the Hangzhou Asian Games.

Other Ningbo manufacturers have pursued different strategies for going global.

In 2009, SLPT Automotive acquired a factory in Oklahoma, establishing a manufacturing base in North America. It later set up a global technology headquarters in Detroit and an R&D and sales center in Munich, Germany. The company now serves customers through production facilities in both China and the US.

Consinee Group uses Hong Kong as its global business hub, bringing together designers, investors and industry partners, while its manufacturing operations remain in Ningbo and its R&D center is based in Italy. The diversified footprint helps reduce exposure to policy and market fluctuations in Europe and North America.

According to Shibata To-

moya, a journalist with Japan's Kyodo News, an increasing number of Ningbo companies are moving beyond low-cost, single-product exports. Instead, they are pursuing globalization across multiple fronts, including brand building, technology development and overseas production capacity.

By spreading operations and resources across different markets, he said, leading companies are becoming better positioned to weather fluctuations in global trade while creating new avenues for growth.

Automation Reshapes Manufacturing Jobs

Inside Consinee's cashmere production facility, billed by the company as the world's first "lights-out factory" for cashmere manufacturing, automation is visible throughout the production process.

In the more than 20,000-square-meter workshop, AGVs move raw materials between workstations, smart equipment completes yarn splicing in seconds, dye formulations are measured to within 0.01 gram, and digital systems monitor color consistency throughout production.

The technology has also changed how the company serves clients. While minimum order quantities in the industry typically run into the hundreds

of kilograms, Consinee has introduced a flexible ordering system that accepts orders as small as one kilogram. The rapid adoption of automation, however, has also raised questions about its impact on employment.

During the visit, a foreign journalist asked whether the growing use of machines in place of frontline workers could ultimately reduce manufacturing employment, slow the expansion of the middle-income population, and affect long-term economic growth.

Xue argued that intelligent manufacturing is reshaping rather than eliminating jobs by creating a closer match between labor demand and workforce skills.

As routine tasks become automated, employees are being retrained for positions such as equipment maintenance engineers, production line technicians and digital workshop inspectors, he said. At the same time, the shift toward intelligent manufacturing and higher-value production is creating new skilled positions that did not previously exist.

"Digitalization and intelligent manufacturing have become important drivers of new productive forces and are helping Ningbo strengthen its position in global supply chains," said Sun Bin, a journalist with the Hong Kong Commercial Daily. "Even more specialized manufacturers in Ningbo are set to emerge as global leaders in their respective sectors."

International Students Explore Recycling Innovation in Coastal Community

By Jin Lu

Ahead of World Environment Day, a group of international students from Ningbo University visited Chunhu Subdistrict in Fenghua District, Ningbo, on June 3. The group, which included students from Indonesia, Morocco, Tanzania and other countries, toured coastal villages and local companies engaged in environmental technology, learning how the region combines marine conservation with rural revitalization and digital innovation.

Their first stop was Zhanghu Village, where they took part in a fisheries-themed fuse bead craft workshop, making starfish, crabs and sea turtles. They also sampled local seafood specialties. One student said the village preserves an authentic fishing culture while undergoing a gradual modern transformation.

The visit then continued to a marine plastic waste treatment center operated by Ningbo Jianfeng New Materials Co., Ltd. With more than 20 kilometers of coastline and nearly 1,000 fishing vessels, the area had once been plagued by marine plastic waste. The facility, officially launched in June 2023, serves as a storage and transport hub for marine plastics bound for recycling and reuse.

Guided by interpreter Liu Yalan, the students observed smart sorting cabinets that automatically separated waste such as metals and fishing gear plastics. They were informed that via a local carbon credit platform, residents can earn points by depositing recyclable waste, which can be exchanged for small goods or beverages. Recovered marine plastics are then processed into everyday products, with full traceability across the chain.

"I have never seen such a complete waste recycling system before. Ningbo is a very clean and smart city," said Zheng Wenli, an Indonesian student.

"Environmental protection goes beyond national boundaries," said Waziri Miraji Mussa from Tanzania, who praised Fenghua's circular economy model as an example of strong commitment to marine conservation.

The visit highlighted the integration of ecological restoration, rural revitalization and technological innovation in coastal Fenghua. Through digitalized waste management systems and the recycling of discarded fishing gear into new materials, the area is advancing a model of sustainable development under China's broader push for green modernization.

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Hengkantou Village in Yuyao Named FAO Model for Digital Agriculture and Rural Innovation

By Zhao Yu

Hengkantou Village in Lianglong Town, Yuyao, Ningbo, has been selected as a "Science, Innovation, and Digital Village" under the Villages Recognition Initiative, a new global initiative launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), becoming one of the latest internationally-acclaimed examples of China's successful rural development innovation.

Aligned with FAO's vision of Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment, and a Better Life - leaving no one behind, the initiative recognizes

villages that embody resilience, innovation, and cultural heritage. These villages will be incorporated into the Food and Agriculture Museum and Network (MuNe), a global platform designed to showcase rural development models and share best practices.

In Hengkantou Village, local development has centered on a digitally enabled agricultural system, where the Internet of Things empowers industrial coordination and cooperative farming. The cultivation, packaging, and distribution of key crops such as cherries and tomatoes are digitally tracked from start to finish. The village reports that "farm-to-table" delivery can be completed in as little as three hours, with an-

nual online sales of specialty agricultural products exceeding 28 million yuan.

The village has also implemented full 5G coverage and introduced a range of smart applications, including drone-based field monitoring, digital household address systems and mobile payment services. Public services such as remote medical consultations and online education have also been extended to residents.

Officials say Hengkantou has developed a model that combines smart agriculture, digital governance and rural tourism, reshaping traditional village development through technology integration.

A spokesperson for the



In Hengkantou Village, local development has centered on a digitally enabled agricultural system.

[Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

Ningbo Municipal Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said the selection reflects the outcomes of Ningbo's efforts under Zhejiang's rural revitalization initiative and highlights the diversity of local development approaches.

The recognition is expected to raise the international profile of Ningbo's rural development practices and provide a platform for sharing its experience in agricultural modernization and digital transformation.

