

SPOTLIGHT

As Global Attention Grows, Ningbo Expands Its Story Beyond Trade

By Jin Yuhan

Journalists from media outlets across Europe and Asia recently visited Ningbo on a reporting tour focused on the city's manufacturing sector and industrial transformation.

The delegation included reporters from the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan and Singapore. Their coverage has generated more than 500 reports, offering international audiences a closer look at Ningbo's economic development, industrial upgrading and growing global connections.

As foreign journalists spent time in the city, many found themselves looking beyond the factories, ports and export figures that have long defined Ningbo's international reputation.

A More Complete Picture of the City

During the trip, Shibata Tomoya, a journalist with Japan's Kyodo News, took time to explore Xiushui Street, a revived traditional neighborhood that is now a brand-new commercial area in downtown Ningbo.

Unlike previous reporting visits that focused largely on ports, factories and industrial parks, Shibata said the traditional architecture, heritage craft stores and lively street life offered a different perspective on the city.

"Previously, I mainly associated Ningbo with its port and export-oriented industries," he said. "Walking through Xiushui Street, I saw a different side of the city, one with a strong consumer economy and a distinctive cultural atmosphere."

Industry observers say international coverage of Ningbo is becoming increasingly multidimensional, extending beyond economic performance to include innovation, urban development and cultural identity.

The shift is particularly evident in coverage of the



Ningbo Eastern New Town. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

manufacturing sector.

"This wasn't my first interview with international media, but the depth of the discussions was noticeable this time," said Luo Licheng, chairman of SLPT Automotive. "One Italian journalist spent an entire morning asking about our R&D capabilities, digital transformation efforts and global strategy in the electric vehicle sector."

Coverage of Ningbo's port sector has also evolved. Rather than focusing solely on cargo throughput and shipping volumes, journalists are paying closer attention to automation, green technologies and international logistics networks.

During this year's SCO Forum on Green and Sustainable Development held in Ningbo, more than 400 international media outlets, including Associated Press and Agencia EFE, published a total of 560 reports highlighting Ningbo's smart energy management practices and low-carbon industrial development. Many viewed the city's best practices in green manufacturing and sustainable growth as highly informative for other regions.

Expanding Ningbo's International Connections

As global supply chains are reshaped and cities compete more aggressively for

investment, talent and international attention, strengthening global communication has become increasingly important for Ningbo, according to Gong Yingyan, chief expert at the East Zhejiang Cultural Research Institute at Ningbo University.

In recent years, the city has hosted many major international events, including the China-CEEC Expo, the Maritime Silk Road Port Cooperation Forum and the China-ASEAN Senior Officials' Consultation.

People-to-people exchanges have also expanded through initiatives such as the Overseas Ningbo Week and friendship-city programs, alongside international sporting events including the Ningbo Open and the ISSF World Cup. Culture promotion events held overseas, including photography exhibitions and tradition showcases, have further extended the city's international reach.

According to the Ningbo Foreign Affairs Office, the city has established friendship city ties with 120 cities across 60 countries and regions, placing it among Zhejiang's most internationally connected cities.

The growing international exposure is also attracting more overseas visitors. Among them is Vincent Lemarchand, an honorary citizen of Ningbo from France who has visited

the city more than 60 times over the past three decades and describes the city as a second home.

"It combines the convenience of a major city with a comfortable quality of life," Lemarchand said. "It's safe and welcoming. Wherever you go, there's a strong sense of everyday vitality."

Making Ningbo More Internationally Visible

Despite its strong economic profile, observers say Ningbo still has room to raise its international profile beyond trade and manufacturing compared to other major Chinese cities.

One area of opportunity lies in making better use of the city's cultural assets and overseas connections. Gong said Ningbo does not need to rely solely on large-scale promotional campaigns to build international recognition. Instead, he suggested the city could draw greater attention to historical artifacts and cultural heritage that help tell its story in a more tangible way. "These cultural links provide a natural starting point for introducing Ningbo to international audiences."

Beyond cultural heritage, Ningbo's globally active business community has also become an important channel for raising the city's visibility

abroad.

With one of China's most export-oriented manufacturing sectors and a strong private economy, Ningbo has increasingly sought to combine trade promotion with cultural outreach.

One example is the city's "Culture + Trade Shows" initiative, which has been introduced at major international trade fairs in more than 30 countries and regions. They showcase not only products and businesses, but also elements of Ningbo's identity.

Other overseas promotion programs have adopted a similar approach. "Ningbo in Photograph", an international photography and cultural exhibition held at Ningbo companies' overseas sites, has reached a combined audience of 500,000 in more than 20 countries and regions. Meanwhile, the "One-Square-Meter Space" initiative has established small cultural exhibition areas at overseas industrial parks, factories and business sites linked to Ningbo companies, creating additional opportunities to introduce the city to international visitors. These efforts reflect a broader shift in how Ningbo presents itself overseas, moving beyond its traditional image as a manufacturing and port city to highlight its cultural heritage, quality of life and broader urban identity.

Nearly €100 Million in Intended Deals Reached at First Dutch Private Business Delegation Visit to Ningbo

By Zhao Yu

The China (Ningbo) - Netherlands Economic and Trade Conference was held in Ningbo on June 18, bringing together more than 30 Dutch business representatives and around 100 Chinese participants.

The two sides reached preliminary deals worth nearly €100 million, spanning traditional manufacturing and emerging sectors such as new materials, biochar, and biopharmaceuticals.

"This is the first time a Dutch private business association has organized a delegation to visit Ningbo," said Li Jinshi, vice president of the Netherlands - China Economic and Trade Promotion Association.

Ningbo and the Netherlands have complementary industrial structures that provide a strong foundation for cooperation. Ningbo, a port of departure along the Maritime Silk Road, is home to the Ningbo Zhoushan Port, the world's largest cargo-handling port, as well as a well-developed industrial base in high-end equipment, automotive manufacturing, and new materials.

The Netherlands, with the Port of Rotterdam as a key logistics hub and a deferred import VAT system that allows goods to enter the market before tax settlement, has become an important gateway for Chinese companies entering Europe.

Official data show that the Netherlands is Ningbo's second-largest trading partner in the European Union, with two-way trade reaching \$4.53 billion in 2025.

Piet Kepser, a representative of a Dutch biochemical company, said he was visiting Ningbo for the first time to explore potential suppliers. "I'm very impressed by the city's industrial sector and its port capacity," he said. His accompanying family members also reached preliminary agreements with local firms in home products such as PVC panels, driven by competitive pricing and supply advantages.

Beyond meeting Dutch demand, Chinese companies at the event also sought insights into European market opportunities. Salim Hossaini, CEO of Dutch law firm Tanger Advocaten N.V., said opportunities for Chinese companies in Europe are mainly concentrated in two areas.

The first is the energy transition, where demand is growing in sectors such as hydrogen, solar power, and energy storage, areas where Chinese firms have strong manufacturing and technological capabilities.

The second is deeper integration into Europe's innovation ecosystem, supported by universities, research institutes, and technology parks. He said this could help Chinese companies move beyond export-driven models toward localized research and development and stronger brand presence in Europe.

Ningbo's 'New Trio' Exports Surge 140% in First Five Months

By Jin Lu

Ningbo's exports of electric vehicles (EVs), lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic (PV) products — known as the "new trio" of China — continued to grow rapidly in the first five months of 2026.

Exports of the three categories totaled 28.51 billion yuan from January to May, up 140% year on year. EV exports accounted for 18.11 billion yuan, while lithium-ion batteries and PV products contributed 5.95 billion yuan and 4.44 billion yuan, respectively.

Private businesses remained the main driver of growth, generating 27.12 billion yuan in exports, or 95.1% of the city's total "new trio" exports during the period.

The growth reflects a broader shift among Ningbo manufacturers from exporting products alone to exporting technology, standards, and tailored green energy solutions.

Ningbo Ulica Solar has strengthened its international operations through a sales company and warehouse in Germany while expanding into emerging markets along

the Belt and Road, such as Ukraine. The company reported a 48.1% increase in PV product exports during the first five months of the year.

Meanwhile, Shuangyili (Ningbo) Battery has secured energy storage projects in the United States and Malaysia, deploying its liquid-cooled commercial and industrial systems; it is also expanding into markets across the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa. The company's lithium battery exports rose 230% year on year.

To support the sector's



Ningbo Zhoushan Port. [Photo by Jiang Xiaodong]

growth, Ningbo Customs has introduced measures to help battery exporters better comply with hazardous-goods packaging requirements. Officials

said the initiatives have reduced packaging costs by about 30% while maintaining inspection pass rates above 99%.

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