

CHINA



From left: Zhao Rui displays his dough sculpting skills during the ongoing China Intangible Cultural Heritage Wheaten Food Carnival in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. Zhao's dough figurine of Sun Wukong has attracted many fans during the festival.



Traditional craft captivates taste of modern audiences

Dough figurine of Sun Wukong a stunning attraction at Taiyuan carnival

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and CHEN LIANG

The soaring global popularity of the Chinese video game *Black Myth: Wukong* has inspired a sculptor to create a traditional dough figurine of its main character. Handcrafted by Zhao Rui, the detailed and colorful figurine of Sun Wukong from the classic novel *Journey to the West* has captivated visitors during the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Wheaten Food Carnival in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. The festival runs until Sept 8. Zhao, a 35-year-old resident of Wanrong county in Shanxi, hails from a family deeply rooted in the art of dough sculpture and is a sixth-generation inheritor of the Wanrong dough sculpture tradition, which can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). It took Zhao about 16 hours to knead, roll and shape the 50-centimeter-tall figure. He told China Daily it was a challenge to capture the character's expressions and the details in his costume. "The game, featuring 27 historical sites in Shanxi, has filled me, a native of Shanxi, with pride and satisfaction," he said.

"Through the medium of dough sculpture, I aim to cater to the younger generation's love for animation and gaming, and thereby contribute to the cultural and tourism development of the province." His exquisite creation has been well-received by attendees during the carnival. "The craftsmanship is exquisite, from the armor to the facial expressions, exuding a sense of grandeur," one visitor remarked. Zhao, who graduated from Beijing Humanities Research Institute with a degree in art and design in 2012, chose to return to Wanrong to carry forward his family's craft. In the beginning, he set up a stall in Wanrong where he showcased and sold dough figurines portraying a variety of cartoon characters, targeting children as his initial clientele. Gradually, he discovered a demand for lifelike dough figurines among adults, and so expanded his market reach. Over the course of more than a decade, he honed his skills, learning from seasoned dough sculptors and pastry chefs in Beijing, Tianjin, Taiyuan and Xi'an in Shaanxi province. Today his expertise has garnered wide recognition. "As demand surged, people started com-

missioning me to create personalized renditions of their beloved characters, such as some movie stars," he said. Through the years, he kept exploring superior materials and ingredients to enhance the durability and longevity of his figurines. His dedication to preserving and innovating traditional craftsmanship has not gone unnoticed. His mother, a fifth-generation inheritor of Wanrong dough sculpture, is proud of her son's achievements, noting his contributions to propelling the craft onto the international stage. In 2013, Zhao opened a dough figurine shop on e-commerce platform Taobao, and has showcased his artistry in countries such as Malaysia, Morocco and Spain, receiving acclaim for introducing Chinese intangible cultural heritage to foreign audiences. In 2014, he launched a summer training course to teach children the traditional craft in Yuncheng city, Shanxi, and has also established a Wanrong dough sculpture research center to train apprentices. Zhao's dough sculpture workshop has undergone remarkable growth, transitioning from a modest 8 square meters to a sprawling space spanning 900 sq m. With



A dough figurine of Sun Wukong handcrafted by Zhao Rui. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

an annual sales volume of 2 million yuan (\$280,000), his business has directly and indirectly provided employment opportunities for over 400 individuals. "People's warm reception to my Sun Wukong figurine has bolstered my confidence in sharing the traditional art with a

broader audience," he said. "Through my hard work and innovation, I hope to better pass down the old tradition to future generations." Contact the writers at zhuxingxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Enterprises break tech frontiers thanks to Xiamen Torch Hi-tech Zone

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A group of manufacturers in the Xiamen Torch Development Zone for High Technology Industries have climbed to the forefront of their sectors in recent years through constant innovation. Their achievement is the result of the zone's focus on industrial development, cultivation of specialized fields and its system to support enterprises at different levels. Data show that since its establishment in 1990, the zone in Xiamen city, Fujian province, has fostered 10 important "manufacturing individual champion enterprises".

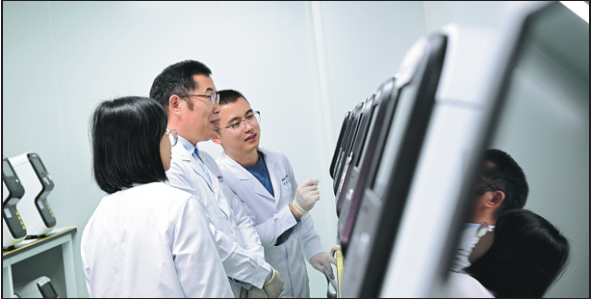
Specializing Manufacturing individual champion enterprises represent the top level in specialized fields. Many such enterprises in the zone were established more than 10 years ago, focusing on their specific fields and innovating to advance core technologies, and positioning themselves at critical parts of the industry and supply chains. Advanced 3D printing products launched by Xiamen Hanin drew attention at the TCT Asia 2024 — a leading design-to-manufacturing event focused on 3D printing, engineering and product development — held in Shanghai in May. Lin Yang, the company's product director, said: "It is the result of years of accumulation in the 3D printing field. As early as 2017, we partnered with Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College to establish a laboratory for technological research in advance." The company has invested substantial funds in research and development over many years, gradually promoting the commercialization of research results, Lin added. In 2021, the company was recognized as a national-level manufacturing individual champion enterprise for its thermal printers. Today, Xiamen Hanin has become a leading global manufacturer of printing equipment, with products exported to more than 80 countries and regions. The Xiamen Torch Hi-tech Zone has long been committed to building a modern industrial system, enhanc-



A workshop of Xiamen Hanin, a printer supplier in the Xiamen Torch Development Zone for High Technology Industries. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ing the industry and innovation chain, promoting the upgrading and coordination of the panel display and software industry chains, and also expediting the development of new quality productive forces. Three advanced production lines of new-type display screens entered trial production and mass production in the zone in June. Peng Jianfeng, vice-chairman of China Video Industry Association, said: "The Xiamen Torch Hi-tech Zone now covers all mainstream types of new display production lines." It combines investment attraction with incubation and cultivation to build a new-type display industry ecosystem and plays an important role in promoting the growth of Xiamen's display industry to the value chain's high level, Peng said.

Encouraging R&D At the workshop of Xiamen Zeesan Biotech in the zone, there are neatly arranged test kits for various tuberculosis strains. Due to its diagnostic reagents and instruments, the company



Xiamen Zeesan Biotech in the zone has made achievements in molecular diagnostic technology of tuberculosis in recent years.

is among the latest batch of national-level manufacturing individual champion enterprises announced by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. It was selected as a national-level postdoctoral research station in May, indicating that the company is qualified to recruit and train postdoctoral researchers. Li Qingge, chairman of the company, said that since its estab-

lishment in 2010, the company has adhered to a technology-oriented approach, focused on the field of molecular diagnostics and maintained close ties with the School of Life Sciences at Xiamen University. It continuously enhanced innovation capabilities and aims to provide high-quality molecular diagnostic reagents and instruments. Li said that the biopharmaceutical

industry has a long R&D cycle. The Xiamen Torch Hi-tech Zone encourages companies to focus on R&D, providing policy support and financial subsidies to companies that increase R&D input and capabilities. This allows the technology team to focus on innovation and transform research results into products, Li said, adding that over the past 20-plus years, technologists have developed multiple molecular diagnostic products, involving tuberculosis screening and drug resistance testing, genetic disease screening, blood and tumor screening and diagnosis, HPV types and drug genome testing. The Xiamen Torch Hi-tech Zone emphasizes basic research and original innovation, and with its help, scientific and technological fruits have sprung up. Based on a joint laboratory, SmartCmeta Materials Technologies in the zone made a new breakthrough in the field of graphene applications and launched related air purification products in March. Wang Yan, general manager of the company, said that with the zone as a

matchmaker, the company established a joint laboratory with the College of Physical Science and Technology at Xiamen University, focusing on the R&D of graphene oxide and downstream products. Their collaborative innovation has accelerated the application and industrialization of scientific achievements, Wang said. The Xiamen Torch Hi-tech Zone released a series of measures to support the innovation and high-quality development of scientific and technological companies in May. It can provide a company with subsidies of up to 1 million yuan (\$140,300) for industry-academia-research cooperation that meets certain requirements. Based on the principle of "developing high technology and achieving industrialization", the zone has attracted more than 29,000 enterprises. Every year, it selects a group of enterprises that boast core technologies in specialized fields and good growth potential. The zone then takes measures such as classification guidance and policy support to help them enter a higher level. Lin said that in the early days of Xiamen Hanin's establishment, the zone not only provided crucial R&D funding support for the company but helped it overcome technological barriers. The zone also offered efficient services and resource matching platforms and coordinated upstream and downstream collaborative innovation to help companies reduce operating costs, shorten R&D cycles and accelerate the application of technologies. Since the beginning of this year, the zone has launched measures that focus on building shared platforms, tax incentives and financial services, simplifying the policy implementation to accelerate the growth of enterprises. It plans to carry out support policies for technology companies at different stages of development, improve the cultivation of these enterprises and boost enterprise innovation and development. Guo Wei and Liu Qing contributed to this story.