

A Chinese 3D print studio fuses ancient art with modern tech

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In northwest Shaanxi province's capital of Xi'an, home to such historic sites as the clay Terracotta Army and the 1,000-year-old Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, a small studio and factory uses 3D printing technology to manufacture replicas of ancient art.

The small, ornate figurines look like relics of a bygone age: a serene Buddha's head from the Tang dynasty, or a collection of stone-faced soldiers from the Qin era.

The creation process, however, is decidedly modern.

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"All the intricate details of the original design are preserved in a 3D mould," Xi Xin, the president of the Xian Chizi Digital Technology company, told AFP.

"Human workers may not be able to produce everything we want in the design, but the printer can do it all."

The firm, whose products are sold at museum shops and to personal collectors, is among the businesses taking advantage of China's foray into 3D printing—a rapidly-growing industry that has been incorporated into the country's national manufacturing strategy.

"In the last five years, 3D printing in China has grown from a one billion yuan (\$149 million) industry to a more than 100 billion yuan (\$14.9 billion) industry," Luo Jun, the head of the China 3D Printing Technology Industry Alliance, told AFP.

Technological breakthrough

3D printing came to China in the 90s, Luo said, after Tsinghua University and Huazhong University of Science and Technology professors brought the technology back from the United States.

Domestic development of the methods were slow at first, but the industry has gained momentum with government support.

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