

## 0 SPOTLIGHT

# Ningbo Companies Expand Presence in the Middle East as Trade Ties Gain Momentum

By Zhao Yu

The 2025 China (Saudi Arabia) Export Brand Joint Exhibition was held recently, drawing strong interest from global buyers and offering new market opportunities for Ningbo-based companies.

As the largest consumer goods exhibition held in Saudi Arabia this year, the three-day event attracted an estimated 20,000 professional buyers. Intended transaction value exceeded \$60 million, according to preliminary figures.

For many Ningbo exporters, the exhibition marked a strategic step toward diversifying overseas markets.

## Saudi Arabia Emerges as a New Growth Market

"It was our first time exhibiting in the region, and demand was stronger than we anticipated," said Chen Jin, director of Ningbo Z & H Foreign Trade Co., Ltd. The company's first appearance in the Middle East exceeded expectations. Chen noted that the firm secured dozens of preliminary orders during the event.

Z & H, which produces a wide range of apparel, had long focused on European and U.S. markets, where orders once accounted for more than 90% of its business. In recent years, however, the shifting geopolitical landscape prompted the company to seek growth in new markets - such as the Middle East. "We showcased men's wear and sportswear, including standard designs as well as products featuring tie-dye techniques and functional fabrics with UV protection and quick-drying properties," said Chen.

Other Ningbo companies reported similar interest. Luo Tao, whose team was conducting market research in Riyadh alongside the exhibition, said local retail visits revealed strong demand for



The 2025 China (Saudi Arabia) Export Brand Joint Exhibition. [Photo by Zhu Yan, Sun Jiali]

household appliances such as heaters, though product offerings remained relatively conventional.

"Saudi Arabia has a young consumer base," Luo said. "Products that combine competitive pricing with distinctive design and practical functions align well with local demand, both online and offline."

## Building a Stronger Foothold in Saudi Arabia

This year marks the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia. As the Belt and Road Initiative continues to align with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, business ties between Ningbo and Saudi Arabia continue to strengthen.

Data from Ningbo Customs show that from January to November, the city's total import and export volume with Saudi Arabia reached 24.03 billion yuan, up 15.2%

year on year.

A growing number of Ningbo companies are expanding their operations in the Saudi market. Ningbo Sanxing Medical Electric Co., Ltd. is among those that have made steady progress.

Saudi Arabia's predominantly desert climate poses strict requirements for product durability. Medical devices entering the market must undergo a three-month aging test under extreme conditions, including temperatures of up to 80°C and humidity levels of 95%.

According to a company representative, Sanxing's products passed all testing requirements on the first attempt. During peak periods, the company's monthly production capacity has exceeded 600,000 units.

Industry observers note that Ningbo firms are no longer focused solely on exporting products, but are increasingly competing through technology, branding, and services. These efforts reflect a broader shift among Chinese manufacturers

toward higher value-added, quality-driven, and technology-oriented global engagement.

## Playing the Long Game in the Middle East

The Middle East remains a complex market where business dynamics intersect with regional tensions, and cultural and religious sensitivities can make missteps costly.

"The Middle East is a relationship-driven market," said Fang Zu, chief representative of the Zhejiang Council of CCPIT (China Council for the Promotion of International Trade) in Saudi Arabia. "Clients in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries place a high value on trust and personal connections. It can take three to six months from initial negotiation to order confirmation."

Fang added that once a supplier earns acceptance, it often leads to long-term, stable business. "In my 20 years of working in Saudi Arabia, most of our current orders come from

repeat customers."

This cautious approach also slows product turnover, giving durable, well-established consumer goods—such as home appliances, furniture, textiles, and apparel from Ningbo—an opportunity to gain a lasting market edge. Fang advises Ningbo companies to adopt a patient, long-term perspective when entering the region.

Cheng Yijun, general manager of external cooperation at Meorient, noted that consumption in markets like Saudi Arabia and the UAE is highly segmented. Strong demand exists in catering, tea beverages, beauty products, electronics, food, and beverages, while e-commerce, electric vehicles, and infrastructure projects continue to grow rapidly.

"With policies such as 100% foreign ownership of onshore companies in the UAE and Saudi Arabia's new investment law offering equal treatment for domestic and foreign investors, the Middle East presents a promising path for Ningbo enterprises seeking global expansion," Cheng said.

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## Ningbo Expands Long-Term Care Insurance Coverage

By Jin Lu

Ningbo's long-term care insurance program is providing thousands of care-dependent residents with professional in-home care while easing the burden on their families.

Since 2017, Ningbo - one of the first national long-term care insurance pilot cities - has gradually expanded coverage to 8.39 million insured residents. The program now serves nearly 50,000 people with severe functional limitations, reaching every township and neighborhood across the city. Even remote islands and mountainous areas are supported through local stations staffed by trained community caregivers.

The city has pioneered a "one hour per day" model, offering daily home visits that include 42 basic care tasks and 10 medical services at patients' bedsides. Recently, a caregiver visited a resident in Fuming Subdistrict, assisting with turning, massage, joint exercises, and hygiene. "Caring for my bedridden husband used to take up all my time. Daily visits from a professional caregiver have given me some relief," said the man's wife.

The program has also built a dedicated, professional workforce, with over 8,000 certified caregivers trained in areas such as pressure sore prevention, feeding, and psychological support.

A digital platform enhances transparency and accountability. Families can apply for care, select services, and review records directly from their phones. Caregivers must scan a code and verify their identity using facial recognition during each visit. Administrators can monitor service delivery in real time and conduct spot checks via video or follow-up calls.

Local authorities say Ningbo is continuing to expand services, including in-home bathing assistance and dementia support, ensuring long-term care remains accessible and high-quality throughout the city.

# After 68 Trips to China, Former Florence Councilor Proposes "Ningbo Day"

By Lu Xinyan

Recently, Mario Razzanelli, a former Florence city councilor in his 80s, submitted a formal proposal at Florence City Hall calling for the establishment of an official "Ningbo Day."

Razzanelli proposed October 21 as the commemorative date, citing its symbolic significance for both cities. On that date nineteen years ago, a full-scale replica of Michelangelo's David was unveiled in Ningbo, an event that drew wide attention in both China and Italy and became a milestone in cultural exchanges between the two cities.

Razzanelli played a key role in advancing that ex-

change. In 2003, while serving as a Florence city councilor and president of the Florence Menswear Association, he made his first trip to China to attend the Ningbo International Fashion Festival. Impressed by the city, he began promoting exchanges between Ningbo and Florence.

Over the past 22 years, Razzanelli has traveled to China 68 times, facilitating partnerships in culture and trade. In recognition of his contributions, he was named an honorary citizen of Ningbo and has been dubbed a "modern-day Marco Polo" by his collaborators in Ningbo.

Ties between the two cities deepened steadily under these efforts. Following the installation of David in

Ningbo in 2006, Florence and Ningbo formally established sister-city relations in 2008. Subsequent milestones included the unveiling of a bronze bust of Dante Alighieri in Ningbo in 2011 and the opening of the China (Ningbo) - Italy Industrial Park in 2014.

Razzanelli also pointed to historical connections between the two cities. A 13th-century map of China preserved in Florence's Palazzo Vecchio includes the Latin inscription for Ningbo. He noted that the proposal for "Ningbo Day" coincides with the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Italy.

Under the proposal, "Ningbo Day" would serve as



Mario Razzanelli. [Photo by Sun Yuzhuo]

a platform for expanded cooperation, including mayoral-level exchanges, joint cultural exhibitions and performances, and business partnerships focused on sustainable technology and fashion innovation.

The initiative has received positive responses from Florence officials. Giovanni Bettarini, Florence's councilor for culture, described the proposal as a meaningful step in strengthening cultural ties, while Massimo Mancini, president of the Florence Chamber of Commerce, pledged support. The Ningbo Foreign Affairs Office said the initiative could inject new momentum into the sister-city relationship.

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