

SPOTLIGHT

Ningbo Shipowner Defies Global Freight Hikes Amid Middle East Conflict

By Jin Yuhan

Amid escalating conflicts in the Middle East, nearly 3,000 containers shipped by Ningbo Jihang Shipping Co., Ltd. continue to move across key sea routes.

While global shipping giants such as Maersk and MSC have raised freight rates in response to rising risks, Jihang's founder Zhu Chuanshu has taken a markedly different approach.

"Despite the current situation in the Middle East, we will not impose any additional surcharges on cargo already in transit," he said in a recent video statement.

Ningbo Jihang Shipping Co., Ltd. is Zhejiang province's first private container liner company and one of only two of its kind in the province. Zhu's decision to hold rates steady comes despite mounting costs linked to fuel, security, insurance and rerouting, a move he said was not made lightly.

Ningbo Firm Holds Rates as Rivals Hike Prices

In March, conflict and uncertainty in the Middle East has made Red Sea routes highly risky, driving up operating costs across the shipping industry. For most carriers, raising prices is the standard response. Reports of freight rate increases—an extra \$2,000 for standard containers and \$3,000 for high-cube units—have added to pressure on Chinese exporters.

According to industry data provider Alphaliner, the global container fleet comprises more than 7,000 vessels with a combined capacity of about 32 million TEUs, roughly one-third of which carry goods made in China. Broad-based rate hikes could add more than \$10 billion in



A ship from the fleet of Ningbo Jihang Shipping Co., Ltd. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

costs for Chinese foreign trade, further squeezing margins for small and medium-sized exporters. Major international carriers control close to 90% of global shipping capacity, leaving limited room for smaller players to influence pricing trends.

Against this backdrop, Zhu's decision to maintain existing rates has drawn attention within the industry.

His fleet, carrying goods bound for destinations including Dubai, Yemen and Djibouti, serves hundreds of exporters across China. Following suit and raising prices would have offset rising costs and generated additional profit. Zhu said his company chose to prioritize its clients instead. "Many exporters are already under pressure. We do not want to add to their burden," he said.

Shortly after making the

commitment, the company encountered disruptions. One vessel carrying more than 120 containers scheduled for transshipment in Dubai was forced to offload at India's Mundra port. Under standard industry practice, the additional costs would be passed on to cargo owners. Zhu, however, decided that the company would absorb the expense.

"We sent our own vessel to retrieve the containers. All additional costs were borne by us," he said. The operation cost more than \$300,000, with no extra charges passed on to clients.

Zhejiang's First Private Liner Breaks Monopoly

Zhu's determination to hold rates steady comes from his company's hard-won experience.

Jihang, as a private Chinese shipping firm, has already fought its way into an industry long dominated by global giants and proven it can weather extreme challenges.

Container shipping involves providing transport services on fixed vessel schedules and routes for cargo that may not be regularly booked. This a sector long dominated by a few major players.

As the world's largest exporter, China has little say in the pricing of maritime transport. Over 70% of exports are on FOB terms, leaving Chinese exporters at the mercy of foreign buyers and shipping giants. Container shortages and soaring freight rates are common hurdles for Chinese exporters.

For a private firm, entering the container shipping game is daunting. "A single 2,000-

TEU vessel costs at least 200 million yuan. Building a stable route network requires three to five ships, plus containers and leased berths—initial investments easily reach billions," Zhu said. Furthermore, running a shipping operation requires maintaining a global presence to support vessels at ports around the world, while navigating complex local trade rules and port regulations.

Jihang has carved its path despite these challenges. Choosing not to be an asset-light operator, Zhu insists on owning his fleet. "Owning assets is tough and risky, but it provides stability. At critical moments, you can have your cargo owners' back," he said.

This foundation gave Zhu the confidence to hold rates steady amid rising global costs—a move that has earned praise from clients both at home and abroad.

Ningbo Airport Sees Surge in Trade in First Two Months

By Zhao Yu

Ningbo Airport reported strong growth in trade in the first two months of the year, according to data released by Ningbo Airport Customs. Total import and export cargo volume reached 9,749.9 tonnes, up 72.5% year on year, while total trade value climbed 208.6% to 4.98 billion yuan.

Exports led the increase, totaling 3.86 billion yuan, a rise of 257.7% from a year earlier. Mechanical and electrical products accounted for the bulk of outbound shipments, with exports reaching 3.29 billion yuan—up 472.5%—and making up more than 85% of the airport's total export value.

TXC Ningbo Electronics Co., Ltd., a manufacturer of quartz components—crystals, oscillators, and frequency components—used in automotive electronics, reported a revenue of 150 million yuan in the first two months. "Trade has been strong this year, with January revenues rising more than 30% from the previous month," said general manager Zhao Minjiang.

Imports at Ningbo Airport also posted solid growth, reaching 1.12 billion yuan, up 109.3% year on year. Agricultural products were a key driver, with imports of items such as lobsters, crabs and eels totaling 210 million yuan, a surge of 337.7%. Lobster imports alone increased more than fifteenfold.

The Hong Kong SAR remained Ningbo Airport's largest trading partner during the period, with trade totaling 2.72 billion yuan, up 598.3% and accounting for 54.6% of the airport's total trade value.

Officials attributed the growth in part to the expansion of international cargo routes. The airport currently operates nine international routes linking Ningbo with destinations including Liège, New York, Dhaka and Hong Kong, forming a network that connects major markets across Europe, North America and Asia.

Multimodal logistics have also supported trade flows. Through air-to-air transfers and air-road connections, Ningbo Airport has strengthened links with domestic hubs, allowing cargo to and from surrounding regions to move more efficiently through its network.

Chief Adviser: Zhao Qingchuan
Proofreader: Jin Yuhan

Ningbo Exporters Eye Global Growth at Russia Expo

By Jin Lu

Nearly 100 export company representatives from Ningbo are preparing to depart for Moscow, where MosHome Ningbo 2026 is held from March 31 to April 3. Over 20 Ningbo companies are set to participate, marking the third time the city has organized a consumer goods fair in Russia.

The initiative comes as Ningbo's traditional export destinations face slower growth, rising costs and mounting uncertainty. For many Ningbo companies,

Russia and the broader CIS region are emerging as promising markets to expand their presence and drive demand.

The exhibition is jointly organized by the Ningbo Municipal Bureau of Commerce, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Ningbo Committee and ITE Group, focusing on home and consumer goods.

Several Ningbo companies are returning after previous participation. One home goods manufacturer, which connected with six professional buyers at last year's event, has

refined its product lineup with more targeted, application-focused designs aimed at Russia's local market preferences.

Other participants are first-time exhibitors looking to move beyond traditional markets in Europe and North America. They are bringing a range of products, including home goods, pet supplies and furniture, to explore opportunities in emerging markets.

This year's event will also feature a dedicated matchmaking area to facilitate one-on-one meetings between buyers and suppliers.



Russian merchants show interest in Ningbo products.

[Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

