

Feature: A senior Lebanese businessman's life-long China story



Adnan Kassar, honorary chairman of General Union of Chambers of Commerce Industry and Agriculture in the Arab countries, is in an interview with Xinhua in Beirut, Lebanon, on May 21, 2015. (Xinhua Photo)

BEIRUT, May 23 (Xinhua) -- Back in ancient times, the Phoenicians, ancestors of modern Lebanese, had already traveled to China, and brought back to Beirut commodities, including silk, which they also introduced to the European markets.

Since then, China and Lebanon have begun to grow their trade connections that have continued to this day because of the dedicated people in both countries, like Adnan Kassar.

Mr. Kassar is the honorary chairman of General Union of Chambers of Commerce Industry and Agriculture in the Arab countries. He has spent much of his life in promoting bilateral commerce bonds between China and Lebanon.

In 1955, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) had yet to form diplomatic ties with Lebanon. Yet that did not prevent Mr. Kassar from helping a Chinese business delegation visit Lebanon.

The ice-breaking trip not only saw the signing of the first trade agreement between the two sides, but also boosted the development of China's relationship with the wider Arab world.

And in that same year, China also set up a trade representative office in the country with the assistance of Mr. Kassar.

Noting that this year marks the 60th anniversary of that first trade agreement, Kassar felt very excited.

The deal has not only brought Chinese goods to Lebanon, but to the whole Arab world, and China has grown to become the Arab world's second largest trading partner last year, he said with a conspicuous sense of pride.

According to official data, the two-way trade between China and Lebanon reached two billion U.S. dollars in 2014, making Beijing Beirut's top trading partner.



Jiang Jiang, Chinese ambassador to Lebanon (1st L), and Adnan Kassar, chairman of the Fransabank Group (2nd L), jointly launch the first China Union Pay credit card in Lebanon on Feb. 16, 2015 in Beirut, Lebanon. (Xinhua/Web Photo)

However, the maiden trade accord was not the end of Kassar's work. It simply inspired him to do more to promote Chinese goods across the Arab world.

Meanwhile, Kassar has also done a lot to boost trade relations between the two countries. In 1972, when he was elected president of the Lebanese Federation of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, Kassar picked China as the destination of his first official foreign visit.

He also proposed to form the Chinese-Arab chamber of commerce at the Damascus meeting of the General Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in 1988.

In his years serving at Fransabank, Kassar also worked to boost the bank's relations with his Chinese counterparts. In February, Fransabank issued its first China UnionPay credit card, and has been well received by Lebanese business community.

Now at the age of 85, Kassar has visited China more than 50 times since the 1950s, and considered himself a living eye-witness of China's ever deepening relations with both his country and region as well.

The bonds between China and Lebanon are now facing a new and unprecedented opportunity as Beijing has proposed the "Belt and Road" initiative in a bid to revive the glory of the ancient Silk Road.

"China has become a part of my life. I will continue to promote and contribute in the Belt and Road initiative for as long as I live," he said.

"My business career is closely linked with the Chinese... I learned a lot from China... I am already 85 years old, and as long as I live, I will continue to promote bilateral relations."