

Broadcasting to the Public: China's Influence Efforts on Israeli Public Opinion

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China is undertaking efforts to influence the Israeli public through China Radio International (CRI), embassy activities that include journalist delegations and the publication of articles and interviews in Israeli media, and collaborations with local media outlets. While China works to promote narratives favorable to its global image, it is important that the public be able to distinguish between legitimate influence efforts and covert operations aimed at shaping public consciousness. Therefore, the Israeli media should examine the sources of information coming from China with transparency and caution while balancing openness with a deep understanding of the actors involved in the media landscape. At the same time, it should strengthen collaborations with Chinese media through a critical lens that ensures balanced information flows in both directions and prevents unchecked influence.

The China Index, published annually by the Taiwanese research institute DoubleThink Lab, ranks the extent of China's influence and penetration into countries across a range of domains. Israel ranks relatively well in this context; in the 2024 survey, it [placed](#) 81st out of 101 countries. In [first place](#), Pakistan is the most influenced country, while North Macedonia, ranked 101st, is the least affected among those surveyed.

As with many other countries, China seeks to influence public opinion in Israel, viewing it as a strategic target due to its Western alignment and potential for technological collaboration. Thus, Israel's relatively low ranking likely reflects a degree of resilience rather than a lack of Chinese interest in exerting influence over it. However, this resilience may not suffice in the future, especially as Israel becomes an increasingly contentious aspect of the great power competition, potentially triggering more intense influence attempts.

China's involvement in Israel's media merits close examination, particularly given the media's impact on public discourse—especially over the past year and a half. Furthermore, although mechanisms exist to monitor Chinese investments in Israel (such as the [Advisory Committee for Evaluating National Security Aspects in Foreign Investments](#)), the media sector remains unregulated. This lack of regulation leaves room for China to influence Israeli public opinion through various means, including direct communication with Israeli citizens via Chinese and Israeli media, as well as through Israeli journalists who convey Chinese messaging to their audiences. In many cases, however, the public remains unaware of the foreign interests underlying the content it consumes.

The Chinese Embassy in Israel

The Chinese Embassy in Israel is the natural conduit for conveying messages from China to the Israeli public. Over the years, the embassy has consistently worked to present its positions in

the Israeli media—but only through a very limited number of outlets. Specifically, apart from [one article](#) in *Haaretz* intended to refute claims made against China, all articles published by Chinese ambassadors or embassy spokespersons since 2015 have appeared in just two Israeli media outlets: *The Jerusalem Post*, which published 21 articles, and *Israel Hayom*, which published eight. From the 30 published articles, one can discern the messages the Chinese government deems important for Israeli citizens to internalize. Nearly half of the articles—14 in total—dealt with issues unrelated to Israel and were likely published by Chinese embassy staff worldwide in local media outlets, indicating globally coordinated messaging around core issues of China’s domestic and foreign policy. Recurring themes include opposition to tariffs and trade restrictions imposed on China, insistence on China’s (self-defined) right to act in the South China Sea, and the importance of the “reunification” of Taiwan with mainland China. Another ten articles focused on Israel–China relations, emphasizing key points in the bilateral relationship while criticizing the United States, which, according to the Chinese perspective, seeks to drive a wedge between the two countries. The central message of these articles is that China–Israel relations have immense potential and that the United States is a disruptive force whose influence should be curtailed. Two additional articles addressed the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust—a topic the Chinese government considers highly significant. From its perspective, the rescue efforts laid the foundation for ties between the Chinese and Jewish peoples and strengthened their mutual commitment. Finally, four articles discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and China’s handling of it, with the main message being that China was stable, capable of managing the crisis, and interested in global cooperation on the matter—likely intended to refute American accusations that the Chinese government concealed the outbreak until it was too late.

Chinese embassy officials in Israel closely monitor how their country is portrayed in the Israeli media and express their dissatisfaction when coverage does not align with China’s interests. Sometimes the embassy issues harsh [responses](#), such as when false and defamatory reports alleged that a thermal mug gifted by the Chinese ambassador to senior Israeli officials contained a suspicious electronic component. In other cases, even legitimate criticism by Israeli journalists has provoked indignant and personal reactions. For instance, the embassy [expressed](#) its displeasure to *Haaretz* following a report on organ harvesting in China. It accused the newspaper and its editor-in-chief, Aluf Benn, of unprofessionalism and of yielding to foreign agendas—even though the [article](#) cited information from a study published in a leading scientific journal. A similar incident [occurred](#) with the *Jerusalem Post*’s former editor, Yaakov Katz. A journalist from another outlet even received a message on his personal phone from an unidentified number following the publication of a critical article about China. A Chinese embassy staff member contacted him and asked to meet regarding “the article he published.”

An examination of China’s treatment of foreign journalists who criticize its conduct reveals that the response does not always stop at reprimands or damage to professional reputations. For example, American journalists who criticized China have been [denied](#) visas, and there have been instances in which Chinese authorities have [hacked](#) journalists’ phones to obtain information to use against them.

China Radio International

Another channel of influence operating alongside the Chinese Embassy in Israel is China Radio International ([CRI](#)), an organ of the Chinese Communist Party, which broadcasts in approximately 50 languages. CRI is no longer merely a radio station but has evolved into a massive media corporation that produces content across all formats. It operates in Israel and broadcasts in Hebrew, although only a small portion of its website's [content](#) is related to Israel. In addition to the website, CRI maintains a Hebrew-language [Facebook page](#) with around 150,000 followers, alongside another [page](#) belonging to a prominent figure and deputy head of the station's Hebrew department, known as "Itzik the Chinese," who has around 30,000 followers.

Over the past few years, Itzik has become a relatively well-known figure in Israel, having been interviewed in numerous [features](#) about China—speaking fluent Hebrew. Through this friendly persona, CRI manages to reach audiences that are traditionally more difficult for China to access. For example, "Itzik" has been [interviewed](#) in the Shas party's publication for the ultra-Orthodox Sephardic community, appeared on Channel 12's satirical program [Eretz Nehederet](#), and even produced a promotional [video](#) for the Tel Aviv Municipality—an oddity, considering "Itzik" is an official government employee of a foreign state.

Israeli media outlets collaborate with Chinese entities, including CRI. In many such instances, media organizations do not sufficiently inform their audiences about who funded the content. For example, in 2017, Channel 12 (then Channel 2) aired a [series of reports](#) titled "Made in China" about China's industrial and consumer miracles. Only at the end of the reports, in very small text in the credits, did it state that the reports were produced "in collaboration with China Radio International." While this constitutes a formal disclosure, it raises the question of whether it is adequate and whether the involvement of a foreign government-controlled entity should be disclosed to viewers at the beginning of the report, allowing them to engage with the content with appropriate framing. Roughly four years later, the same channel aired a [segment](#) featuring "Itzik the Chinese" without mentioning his official government position—even in the closing credits.

Disclosure becomes more serious when there is an official collaboration between the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation and a foreign entity. In 2020, the investigative site The Seventh Eye [revealed](#) that the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation Kan signed an agreement worth approximately 800,000 NIS with CRI. While such a partnership between two state-media organizations is, in principle, legitimate, the problematic aspect lies in a clause that obligated Kan to align itself with China's "cultural sensitivities." This clause is often interpreted as a demand to avoid criticism and conform to China's messaging. The broadcasting corporation indeed produced a 20-episode video [series](#) starring "Itzik the Chinese" and his wife "Yael," including footage of Itzik entering and filming at the Golani Brigade's training base.

Collaborations with Israeli Media

When the Chinese Embassy in Israel and CRI have been unable to effectively convey their messages directly to the Israeli public, they attempt to do so through sponsored delegations

of Israeli journalists visiting China at China's expense. Several entities host such delegations. Xinhua, China's official news agency, [hosted](#) a delegation of Israeli journalists after a reciprocal visit to Israel by Chinese journalists. The Chinese embassy and the Association of Chinese Companies in Israel have also hosted such groups. One journalist who participated in a delegation noted that, although official Chinese representatives accompanied the group, they did not interfere with the content.

In most cases, the outcome of these delegations has been relatively positive coverage. One [article](#) on the treatment of the Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjiang was unusually favorable and was the result of a delegation of international journalists that included an Israeli reporter. This article was notable in that it nearly praised—and effectively normalized—China's treatment of this minority, which the United States [defined](#) as genocide, a designation accepted by secretaries of state from both political parties. Only [one article](#), written by one of the five journalists on the delegation, included negative messaging and criticism of the genocide perpetrated by the Chinese regime against the Uyghur minority.

It appears that the influence efforts described above were relatively effective until their impact diminished during the COVID-19 pandemic and, more significantly, following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023—an event that China has yet to condemn while issuing harsh denunciations of Israeli actions. Since the start of the war in Gaza, 25% of the Israeli public has [changed](#) its opinion of China for the worse. The Pew Research Center surveys illustrate the eroding Israeli public opinion in response to these crises. In a 2019 [survey](#) conducted before the pandemic, 66% of Israelis held a favorable view of China, while 25% had an unfavorable view—making Israel one of only nine countries where public opinion of China had improved. In a 2022 [survey](#), after the pandemic's impact had become fully apparent, only 48% of Israelis viewed China positively (an 18-point drop), and by 2024, during the war in Gaza, that number had [plummeted](#) to 33%. These figures—especially given that in 2019, Israelis held more favorable views of China than the global average (40%)—suggest that while China's influence efforts initially bore fruit, the two major crises significantly undermined their relative success.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Like any other country, China seeks to influence how foreign audiences perceive it. This effort is relevant to Israel, which China regards as doubly important: a major technological hub with broad potential for cooperation and, simultaneously, a key ally of the United States—China's strategic competitor. It appears that China has temporarily paused its influence efforts in Israel, apart from the extensive media activity of its new ambassador, who has published op-eds and participated in [interviews](#) and [podcasts](#). However, it is likely that once current tensions subside, these efforts will resume. Therefore, the current pause should be used both to strengthen resilience against influence attempts and to prepare for constructive collaboration.

1. **Strengthen constructive cooperation:** It is important to remember that not all foreign influence efforts among the Israeli public are illegitimate or necessarily damaging. There is nothing inherently wrong with Israelis being exposed to content that presents

China and its positions in an unmediated way. On the contrary—China is a major power and Israel’s third-largest trading partner (after the United States and the European Union), and it should be understood and studied. In this context, there is value in sending Israeli journalist delegations to China, in the media activities of the Chinese Embassy, and CRI’s operations in Israel. These activities should be supported and expanded. Additional visits by Israeli journalists to China should be initiated—with appropriate preparation—as well as reciprocal visits by Chinese journalists to Israel. Such engagement will enhance Israeli journalists’ understanding of China and the potential for bilateral ties while also equipping them to identify challenges. At the same time, it will expose Chinese journalists to Israel, which is essential given the anti-Israel sentiment among some sectors of the Chinese public.

2. **Demand transparency from media outlets:** Israeli media should be held to standards of transparency—whether by disclosing partners and affiliations in content production or in the terms of significant collaborations. This is especially important when it comes to public broadcasting. Journalists and editorial teams should continue criticizing China when warranted while recognizing that not every Chinese action is inherently negative.
3. **Promote public literacy:** In an era where disinformation is widespread and often disseminated by states—including China—through carefully planned influence operations, the public must be educated to recognize and resist fake news. Such training can take the form of media literacy courses in schools, universities, and civic forums, similar to programs in other countries. This is particularly important in the case of China, a state with cultural and normative frameworks vastly different from those in Israel, which may make it harder for the Israeli public to recognize foreign interference.

Although Israel ranks relatively well in terms of its exposure to Chinese influence in the media and by the public, several vulnerabilities remain that enable interference and run counter to Israeli interests. Enhancing resilience will require, first and foremost, a clear distinction between legitimate, desirable cooperation and influence that conflicts with Israel’s strategic goals.

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