
The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

Binyamin Tjong-Alvares

The People's Republic of China was formally founded in October 1949, only eleven months after the state of Israel. Although situated on opposite ends of the Asian continent, both nations began as poor, agrarian societies, early in their formation facing many similar challenges such as territorial threats. However, the geographic distance between the Middle Kingdom and the Holy Land, their location vis-à-vis Europe and the West, and their contrasting experience with the former colonial powers decisively influenced their world outlook, keeping these two countries at arm's length for decades. The United States in particular played a decisive role as an impediment to the natural growth of a stronger relationship between these two ancient nations that have much in common. Now, as China and Israel complete the twentieth year of diplomatic relations, and as the Sino-Israeli relationship appears more independent from American influence than ever before, the two nations are finally poised to explore the abundance of synergies that bind them through deeper and broader interaction and a shared goal of bringing those benefits to the wider world.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Sino-Israeli bond antedated the official establishment of either state in the wake of World War II. As early as December 1918, Chen Lu, the vice-minister of foreign affairs of the Kuomintang (KMT) government in Nanjing, endorsed the Balfour Declaration, demonstrating a clearly positive attitude of the KMT toward the Jews and Zionism. In April 1920, the Republic of China's founding father and first president Sun Yat-sen wrote a letter in support of the Jewish resettlement of Palestine. Sun Yat-sen wrote to the Shanghai Zionists headed by Elie Kadoorie that "all lovers of democracy cannot help but support the movement to restore your wonderful and historic nation, which has contributed so much to the civilization of the world and which rightfully deserves an honorable place in the family of nations."¹

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

During the first term in office of Israel's main founder and first prime minister David Ben-Gurion (May 17, 1948—January 26, 1954), the Sino-Israeli relationship flourished. As prime minister, Ben-Gurion insisted that the Hebrew University have a department of Chinese. His close relationship with Burma's first prime minister U Nu, himself a staunch Israel supporter, strengthened Israel's ties with Asia and ultimately with China.²

Indeed, Israel was one of the first countries to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950. However, the chosen alliances of both states made it virtually impossible for both to establish strong direct relations in the early stages of their history. The PRC aligned with Soviet Russia and countries which had formerly been colonies of European empires and shared the same political outlook. Meanwhile, Israel cultivated close associations with countries committed to its safekeeping, among these were former imperialist states of Europe and the United States, which during the previous century had caused China great suffering.

It is noteworthy that it was Israel's need to develop its defense industry in response to the threat from its hostile neighbors, many of which had become China's allies, that created the conditions in the 1970s and 1980s for the two countries to rekindle their relationship. In the late 1970s, Shaul Eisenberg, the founder of Israel's largest holding company, the Israel Corporation, played a central role in Israel's development as an exporter in the defense industry worldwide and also pioneered arms deals between China and Israel. Other companies soon followed suit. The practical necessities relating to each country's survival drew the rising Jewish and Chinese states toward each other. China's foreign policy evolved from an anti-imperialist ideology to focus on pragmatic economic development in the form of international manufacturing and trade. For its part, Israel became a leader in advanced technologies.

ISOLATION VS. ASSIMILATION³

Despite being oppressed periodically over the millennia, the Chinese nation was never exiled from its ancestral land. Oppression for the Chinese came in the form of subjugation, not exile. "Recent" Chinese history suffered the invasion by England, France, Germany, and Japan. For the Chinese, the British-staged Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860) remain seminal events. The so-called "Century of Shame" characterized by China's capitulation and subsequent occupation would remain deeply engraved in China's national consciousness and strongly influential in its foreign policy decisions.

On the one hand, the Jewish people had been exiled from its ancestral homeland for nearly 1900 years before the establishment of the modern state of Israel. During the enforced exile, the Jews in the Diaspora learned to blend into

Jewish Political Studies Review

the fabric of the European states that grew out of the Roman Empire—the same power that had destroyed the Jewish homeland. This assimilation, though central to the Jewish plight, also equipped the Jewish people with the ability to navigate and understand foreign societies and cultures in a way the Chinese never experienced. Furthermore, the relative proximity of the ancestral Jewish homeland to the cradle of European civilization and the Jewish origins of Europe's primary religion, Christianity, formed the basis for a common language with Europe and the West that China never shared.

On the other hand, the Chinese reaction to the colonial tendencies of the West was to internalize a deep distrust of Europe and, by extension, the United States. This perpetual wariness strongly influenced Chinese foreign policy in the process of establishing itself as a sovereign state in the twentieth-century world order and in terms of the alliances it pursued. For example, while it allied with the USSR in 1949, perceiving the Soviet Union to be a leader and guide to the Communist world, China remained vigilant toward Russian encroachment on its territory, finally allying with the United States in the 1970s so as to counterbalance the power of the USSR.

For their part, the Jewish people sought support wherever they could find it as they strove for their eventual return to their ancestral homeland. In fact, some former enemies became some of Israel's staunchest allies.

COLD WAR RIFT

The young Jewish state initially sought to maintain a policy of nonalignment, hoping to build as wide a network of allies as possible. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 led to a great change in the direction of Israeli foreign policy.⁴ Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett was concerned that if the North Korean assault was not addressed it might create a precedent for future acts of aggression against Israel. The Jewish state was therefore quick to support the necessity of the UN Security Council intervention in the Korean War and the role of the United Nations in protecting any country from foreign aggression.⁵ In addition, Israel's leaders felt obligated to support American efforts, especially in light of the American Jewish community's utmost support for the establishment of the Jewish state.

Israel found itself obliged to abandon its nonidentification policy and align itself with the United States and the United Nations in the midst of the Cold War confrontation.⁶ Israeli officials favored a pro-Western foreign policy to one of nonalignment because they believed that Israel's very survival during that era depended on the patronage of Western countries. China, by contrast, viewed those same Western powers as a potential threat to its sovereignty, fearing that an American success in Korea could subsequently embolden it to encroach on China's borders.⁷

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

As the Cold War divided the world between the socialist bloc and the capitalist West, the United States had a vested interest in keeping the fledgling socialist Jewish state from growing any closer to the PRC. Following an initial contact between the Israeli and Chinese embassies in Helsinki, the Chinese government eventually invited Israel to establish an embassy in China. David Hacoheh, an Israeli politician who served as the Israeli envoy to Burma from 1953 to 1955, met with his counterpart, the Chinese ambassador Yao Chuming in December 1953, who affirmed Beijing's interest in diplomatic and trade relations. With the warm support of Prime Minister U Nu in Rangoon, Hacoheh met China's first premier, Zhou Enlai, in Burma's capital in June 1954. Zhou informed the People's Congress that negotiations were underway to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, and Hacoheh started planning for the establishment of an Israeli embassy in Beijing.

This development alarmed U.S. secretary of state John Foster Dulles, who took an uncompromising position against Communism worldwide, and pressured the Jewish state into abandoning the planned establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC. This sent a clear message to the PRC regarding Israel's semidependence on the United States and chilled the budding relationship. As an increasing number of countries recognized the PRC, the Chinese leadership expanded its alliances among the nations of the world that had formerly experienced European imperialism. Although Israel was the first country in the Middle East to recognize the PRC, the Jewish state's failure to normalize relations inclined Beijing to turn to the Arabs. In April 1955, at an international conference in New Delhi, the Chinese delegation voted for a resolution calling on Israel to reabsorb the Arab refugees who had fled during the War of Independence in 1948. The pivotal moment in the Sino-Israeli relationship would come later that year at a conference in Bandung, Indonesia.

The 1955 Bandung Conference, organized in part by Muslim Asian states, brought together newly independent African and Asian states with the objective of forming a bloc allied neither with the West nor the Soviets. One of the aims of the conference was to address these nations' dissatisfaction with Western powers and their perceived unwillingness to involve Asian nations in major decisions affecting Asia. The PRC was eager to assume a leading role in this Third World bloc, and therefore needed to win over the Arab states. While many Arab countries were invited, Israel was excluded. China did not have relations with the Arab world prior to this event because of its support for the Republic of China (Taiwan).

The common ground created between China and the Arab world at Bandung against perceived American hegemony, along with strong anti-imperialist sentiment, opened the way for a rapprochement between the two sides and eventually translated into Chinese support for Arab initiatives including the Arab boycott of Israel. At Bandung, Zhou Enlai met Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and

Jewish Political Studies Review

was introduced to the Arab case against Israel's founding as a Jewish state in the Middle East. Haj Amin al-Husseini, the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who incited riots against the Jews in Palestine during the 1930s and collaborated with Nazi Germany, was also among the prominent guests at the conference. According to Fatah strongman Salah Mesbah Khalaf, also known as Abu Iyad, deputy chief and head of intelligence for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), it was at Bandung that the Chinese reached out to the Palestinians. Ahmad al-Shukeiri, who would later become the first leader of the PLO, joined Nasser in his meetings with Zhou. Long before the West concerned itself with the "West Bank," which was then under Jordanian occupation, or the existence of a Palestine Liberation Organization, the PRC took an interest in the Arab cause in Palestine and eventually started arming the PLO.

China gradually increased its network of allies worldwide but remained outside of the United Nations, which, in 1945, had been cofounded by the Republic of China (ROC). The ROC was one of the "Big Four" allies in World War II, and together with the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, became one of the founding members of the United Nations.⁸ Given the ROC's status as an ally, President Franklin D. Roosevelt officially acknowledged China's effort in World War II and noted his desire to allow China to "play its proper role in maintaining peace and prosperity" in the world.⁹ Thus, despite opposition from other leaders, the ROC became a permanent member of the Security Council from its creation in 1945. When, in 1949, the government of the Communist Party of China seized power in mainland China and declared the People's Republic of China, the government of the ROC under the leadership of Chiang Kaishek retreated to the island of Taiwan and continued to maintain its seat in the United Nations and on the Security Council as the sole legitimate government of China.

By the 1960s, Communist allies and other nations friendly to the PRC, led by the People's Republic of Albania, moved an annual resolution in the UN General Assembly to expel the "representatives of Chiang Kaishek," an implicit reference to the ROC, and to permit the PRC to occupy the China seat at the United Nations. Year after year the United States sought to prevent the Communist bloc from gaining another permanent seat in the Security Council and assembled a majority of votes to block this resolution. But the admission of newly independent developing nations in the 1960s gradually turned the General Assembly from being Western-dominated to one dominated by countries sympathetic to Beijing.

Israel's diplomatic policy had been to abstain from such a vote, but in 1965 the Israeli envoy to the United Nations called in a young Foreign Service officer from its embassy in Colombia, Mordechai Arbell, who would change Israel's stance, and with it, Israel's relationship with the ROC and the PRC.

"Every time they voted it was a little more in the PRC's favor," Mordechai Arbell related. "The outcome was already known to be tied, and one vote could make

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

all the difference.” Arbell noted that this provided Israel’s UN representation the opportunity to send a clear message to Beijing. Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai had formally received the abovementioned Ahmad al-Shukeiri, the first chairman of the PLO, serving from 1964–1967. Therefore, Arbell suggested that it was time to send the PRC a sign of Israel’s disapproval. “The PRC knows that Israel’s policy is to abstain, so if they invite a terrorist like that, we’ll teach them a lesson. We won’t abstain. We will vote.” Arbell, a junior diplomat at the time, was the only one to suggest voting in favor of Taiwan. The delegation notified Golda Meir, Israel’s foreign minister, that all had decided to abstain except for Arbell. Meir sent back orders to follow Arbell’s lead. “The voting had already started and as it was in alphabetical order, I was told to run ahead and inform the Taiwanese delegation of Israel’s decision. When I informed them they lit up and said, ‘You saved us.’”¹⁰

Following the vote, the PRC’s rancor toward the Jewish state became increasingly radical as Beijing boosted its support for the PLO cause. During an official address with a PLO delegation in 1965, Mao characterized Taiwan and Israel as pawns created by the West in order to exercise control over them and depicted Israel as the target of the Arab battle against the West. “Imperialism fears China and the Arabs. Israel and Taiwan are bases of operation for Imperialism in Asia. They created Israel for the Arabs and Taiwan for us. They both have the same objective,” said Mao Zedong.¹¹

Meanwhile, Israel’s UN vote in favor of the ROC gained the Jewish state a new ally. Arbell, who eventually was stationed in Korea, was warmly invited to Taipei in order to arrange nondiplomatic relations between the ROC and Israel. In light of President Chiang Kaishek’s close relationship with King Hussein of Jordan, the Taiwan-based government was not open to establishing formal relations with Israel. Because Hussein’s grandfather had been killed in Jerusalem, Taiwan proposed establishing nondiplomatic, formal relations that were nonetheless very close. This allowed the Jewish state to maintain its relationship with the PRC, albeit at a low level.

As increasing numbers of Western countries chose the PRC over the ROC, on October 25, 1971, the General Assembly eventually passed Resolution 2758 with seventy-six countries in favor, thirty-five opposed, seventeen abstaining, and three not voting, thereby withdrawing recognition of the ROC as the legitimate government of China and recognizing the PRC as its sole legitimate government.¹² The ROC not only lost its seat on the Security Council but any representation in the United Nations.

At about the same time, the PRC gradually became more accessible to the West. China and the USSR went to war in 1969, and China came to regard the Soviet Union rather than the United States as the main hegemonic power threatening its national security. At this point, China initiated a gradual shift toward

Jewish Political Studies Review

the United States. In the wake of the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969, the PRC identified the United States as a useful counterbalance to the Soviet threat and the United States viewed its potential alliance with the PRC as a major redistribution of global power against the Soviets. As the two states slowly started building relations in 1971, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who was committed to global balance-of-power politics, was instrumental in guiding the United States and China in their eventual rapprochement. Although the anti-Communist sentiment that led the United States to pressure Israel into severing relations with the PRC had waned, it would take nearly twenty years before Israel and China could reconcile their differences.

HONG KONG AS A GATEWAY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

From 1961 to 1985, Israel would be represented by an honorary Consul in Hong Kong, Mr. Victor Zirinsky, a respected member of the Jewish community who had relocated from Shanghai some years before.¹³ The Israeli consulate in Hong Kong opened its doors in 1973 and was headed by Emanuel Gal Bar, but because of residual attitudes dating from the Cultural Revolution and the pro-Arab outlook of the Foreign Ministry there was no real possibility of changing the People Republic's attitude toward Israel. After two years of frustration and financial difficulties, the consulate was forced to close its doors in 1975.

The next serious opportunity for Israel to reengage China came as a result of the Sino-British negotiations of 1984 regulating the return of Hong Kong to China. A careful reading of the agreement by the Israeli MFA highlighted clause no. 11 in appendix 1 of the joint declaration on the return of Hong Kong. It stated that official representatives of countries in Hong Kong that did not have formal relations with the People's Republic by 1997 would be allowed to remain or become official delegations.¹⁴

Based on this clause, the Senior Deputy Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanan Bar-On, and Director General, David Kimchi, convinced Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir to reopen the consulate in Hong Kong in late 1984. A seasoned Israeli diplomat, Mr. Reuven Merhav, was appointed to explore ways for Israel to advance its relations with the People's Republic by working through Hong Kong. Following a five-week trip in May-June of 1985, Merhav determined that Hong Kong could indeed serve as a springboard for Israel to establish relations with China. At the same time, he learned that this program would have to be carried out in accordance with China's expectations. A patient, slow and respectful approach would be the only effective way to develop relations. Merhav, who had been sent as the Israeli consul, would eventually become Israel's ambassador.

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

The first step in establishing relations with the People's Republic would be through academic exchange. Merhav established a framework for Israeli students to study in institutions in Hong Kong. The next important development followed in December 1985 when the Foreign Minister of China, Fu Xuewen, made an official statement during his visit to Cairo. He declared that China would "not establish formal relations with Israel as long as Israel pursued its aggressive and expansionist policies". At the same time, he said that China distinguished between the Israeli authorities and the Israeli people and noted that academics and experts were allowed to participate in conferences in China as individuals through international organizations. This allowed for the immediate legitimization of academic and later student exchanges, which played a crucial role in increasing China's exposure to Israelis and ultimately the strengthening of relations. The first Israeli scientists to come to China served an important role because of their ability to give the Israeli diplomats in Hong Kong an accurate, first-hand report of the situation in China. In addition, they also served as Israel's "ambassadors" to China.

The considerable contribution of the Israeli scientists at the different international conferences in China and the prominence of other Jewish scientists, mainly from the United States, led the Chinese, who did not always distinguish between Israeli scientists and Jewish scientists from the United States, to praise what they identified as the Jewish intellect. At the same time, China was increasingly impressed with Israel's scientific achievements. When Prof. Yehoshua Yortner, then vice president of the National Academy for Sciences, participated under an unofficial title in the Second Beijing Conference for the Strategic Adjustment of Science and Technology for National Development, he established a personal connection with the Chinese minister of science and secured his support to allow Israeli scientists to participate freely.¹⁵ On the policy side progress was somewhat slower. Ambassador Merhav established contact with the vice president of Xinhua, China's official news agency, who was also in charge of communication with countries that did not have official relations with China, including South Korea, and South Africa. Li Zhou Wen and Ambassador Merhav established a warm rapport which eventually led Li to apply for permission from Beijing for an official meeting with Ambassador Merhav. This meeting, which took place in June 1987, was the first formal contact established between China and Israel. At about the same time, the Israeli government also initiated talks through the current director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Avraham Tamir, and the Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations in New York, Mr. Li Luyue.¹⁶ After Li Zhou Wen completed his term in Hong Kong in 1988, Ambassador Merhav maintained ties through his successor, Qi, setting a precedent later followed by Yoel Sar, who succeeded Merhav.

Following the completion of his term as ambassador in Hong Kong, Merhav traveled to China in September of 1988 to advance some of his initiatives.

Jewish Political Studies Review

These were the days of Rosh Hashana 5753, so he called foreign minister Peres to wish him “Shana Tova”. Mr. Peres was exhilarated to get his call from Beijing, most probably the first.

Merhav decided to focus on science, technology and agriculture, because the Chinese had expressed the most interest in those fields. In his view, this approach was the most likely to succeed and open the way for continued communication. While in Beijing, he contacted all the agencies with whom he had established indirect contacts from Hong Kong in the fields of science, space technology and tourism. Before leaving Beijing, he negotiated a letter of intent, expressing the wish of the Chinese Academy of Science to deepen its relationship with Israel. Building on previous contacts which he had established in Hong Kong, he also negotiated a general arrangement with the Chinese tourism agency (CITS) which permitted Israeli tourist groups to visit China, traveling on Israeli passports, something which previously had been nearly impossible. Following these negotiations and an unofficial visit by a Chinese delegation in the summer of 1989, the Chinese established a Tourist Office which served as the pioneering agency through which they gradually formalized relations. CITS’s office ultimately became the kernel of its diplomatic presence in Israel.

Ongoing talks between China and Israel via academic channels eventually bore fruit, and in 1989 two delegations comprised of scientists visited China accompanied by Ruth Kahanov, a diplomat who had also studied in Hong Kong, worked in the consulate and later in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following this visit, an office devoted to academic relations was opened in February 1990, which served as the kernel for Israel’s future diplomatic representation in Beijing. Gradually all relevant functions, consular, economic and cultural were added to this.

The economic operation was based on that of COPECO—a joint governmental company established in 1986 at the initiative of Merhav and Prof. S. Pohoryles, as the counterpart of a Chinese company, Hua Tai, which had been charged with promoting economic relations with Israel. The idea had been to follow the Chinese model, in goals and composition. Eventually, COPECO was completely integrated into the academic mission and the embassy. Though it officially focused on agricultural and scientific matters, it prepared a base from which diplomatic issues could be handled.

In the fall of 1990, Merhav suggested to China’s ambassador to the United Nations, Li Lu Ye, that the academic delegation required a policy advisor to guide them. After the Chinese accepted the request, Merhav appointed Zeev Sufott, who had served as Ambassador to the Netherlands, to assume the role. It was understood that if everything evolved according to plan Sufott would become Israel’s first ambassador to China. On a trip which Merhav subsequently took to Beijing, Sufott was officially introduced to all the relevant bodies in China as the first step for his future appointment as the ambassador of Israel to the People’s Republic of China.¹⁷

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

CHINA'S DECISION-MAKING ELITE

During the twenty years following the founding of the two states, both China and Israel experienced constant conflict which would have a profound impact on both domestic and foreign policy. Israel endured direct attacks aimed at its annihilation in 1948, 1967, and 1973, and China reacted to threats to its territorial sovereignty and unity both domestically and beyond its borders. Following the 1949 civil war, China struggled with self-initiated domestic upheavals including the Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956), the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). During these often devastating national programs, the PRC actively engaged in military conflicts with neighboring countries, reflecting its ideological stance as it indirectly confronted what it perceived to be the perpetual imperialist threat to Asia. The Korean War (1950–1953), the Taiwan Straits Crises (1954–1955, 1958), the Sino-Burmese Border War (1956), the Sino-Indian War (1962), the Sino-Soviet border clash (1969), and the Sino-Vietnamese War (1979–1980) were indicative of the Chinese leadership's prioritization of its territorial sovereignty and anxiety about the threat of foreign invasion.¹⁸

Despite the loss of blood and treasure resulting from these wars, China was compelled by its leadership to pursue the second Five-Year Plan (1958–1962),¹⁹ which included the Great Leap Forward campaign, toward a disastrous outcome. The Three Years of Great Chinese Famine (1958–1961) led to an estimated fifteen to forty-five million deaths owing largely to the massive institutional and policy changes which the Great Leap Forward entailed. Ultimately, this impelled the Chinese leadership to focus on feeding its nearly one billion people—a total almost doubled during Mao Zedong's leadership.

China's size requires a large administration as part of the intricate governmental system that was traditionally guided by careful planning and managed by the academic elite. With the exception of the period during the Cultural Revolution, academia has held a unique position in China that goes back to the establishment of the imperial examination system by the Sui Dynasty in 605 CE. The imperial system, predecessor of the modern examination system for selecting civil service staff, was a major influence both on society and culture and largely determined the position of academia in Chinese society and its relationship with China's leadership. Whereas China's leaders do not generally listen to or abide by the admonitions of international leaders, they are mindful of their own leading scholars who are entrusted with providing key information and analyses, which the leadership needs in order to make decisions. Consensus-building in decision-making is part of the Chinese system of governance and incorporates the influence of various players inside and outside the official foreign policy establishment.

The Communist Party of China (CPC), the Chinese government, and the

Jewish Political Studies Review

People's Liberation Army (PLA) form the core of the foreign policy structure, while the CPC's highest body—the Politburo Standing Committee—retains the ultimate decision-making power. CPC organs, government agencies, and departments of the PLA all shape foreign policy thinking and behavior. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, though part of the Chinese government bureaucracy, is only one of the movers in the realm of foreign policy, and by definition not the most important. The PLA has reemerged as a foreign policy player as PLA officers debate foreign policy in public and antagonize China's neighbors and the United States by displaying its power. Research institutes, made up of China's foremost scholars, have a vital impact on foreign policy in their advisory role. Although, over time, they have been joined by a host of other actors on the periphery of the traditional power structure, including resource companies, financial institutions, and the media, academia retains its preeminence as the advisory body to the Chinese leadership.

One such research institute influencing foreign policy is the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), one of China's largest²⁰ and oldest civilian research institutions for international studies. CICIR is affiliated with China's Ministry of State Security (MSS) and overseen by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It is thought that CICIR traces its origins to the Communist Party's intelligence operations during the Chinese civil war and Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). CICIR was the only international relations institute or university in China that did not close during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution. In 1980, amid Deng Xiaoping's reforms and opening to the outside world, CICIR was designated an "open" institution and authorized to engage with foreigners so as to facilitate intelligence collection. Of all the research institutes associated with the Chinese government, CICIR is its preeminent adviser, offering regular reports and advice on policy and issues as well as intelligence reports to the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China. Due in part to its close organizational proximity to the Communist Party's Central Committee, the Foreign Affairs Leading Group, the Foreign Affairs Office, and the MSS, CICIR has held considerable influence over China's foreign policy decision-making process.

Another important research institute is the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). CASS was established in 1977 with the aim of promoting the development of social sciences, which had been almost totally destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. Described by *Foreign Policy* as the top think tank in Asia,²¹ CASS is directly under the PRC State Council and is the foremost academic research organization in the fields of philosophy and social sciences as well as a national center for comprehensive studies in the PRC. Part of the basic mission of CASS is to promote research and to undertake and complete key state research projects in light of China's national conditions, economic and social development

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

strategies and to provide important research papers and policy suggestions to the CPC Central Committee and the State Council.

Given the fragile state of the Chinese economy following the decade-long Cultural Revolution and subsequent Sino-Soviet border war, China resolved to conduct a flexible foreign policy that, in December 1978, led to the New Open Door Policy. This policy launched China's economic transformation as part of Deng Xiaoping's new capitalist-inclined system that promoted market forces.

At the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Communist Party Congress in 1978, the PRC began to move away from ideology-based geostrategic relationships. Instead it strove to form bilateral bonds based on a new pragmatic approach of boosting domestic growth with the overarching goal of feeding the people. China no longer perceived itself as a "celestial" empire that possessed all things in prolific abundance lacking no product within its borders,"²² and it once again opened its coastline to international trade while remaining wary of foreign influence, closely monitoring its trade and development.

To support the rapidly growing economy that was creating jobs for its people, China needed to ensure an uninterrupted supply of natural resources. In the subsequent three decades, it invested billions of dollars in the Arab world. Middle Eastern and North African countries now sponsored massive infrastructure projects carried out by Chinese state-owned companies and became major importers of Chinese goods. Collectively they served as China's largest source of oil. Decades of unprecedented growth catapulted China forward as it capitalized on its abundant workforce. With most of the factories based in the coastal region, peasants from the interior thronged to seek employment in the affluent coastal cities. In addition, the rapid expansion of China's manufacturing capacity led to an environmental destruction that would be unsustainable over the long run.

The need for solutions to the problems created by unprecedented economic growth eventually would draw China closer to Israel. Relations were established when China realized it needed Israel's high level of technology, developed as a result of its need to defend itself against its neighbors, who were China's allies.

SINO-ISRAELI MILITARY TRADE

China and Israel's rapprochement began at the Paris Air Show in 1975, when a Chinese delegation's visit to the Israeli pavilion led to clandestine military exchanges between the Israel Defense Forces and the People's Liberation Army. Since the moment that China had identified Israel as an important strategic partner which would help promote its goals of economic and military modernization, Sino-Israeli relations advanced. The historic visit to Israel by Egyptian president

Jewish Political Studies Review

Anwar Sadat in 1977 further legitimized this adjustment in China's regional foreign policy.

China began to import Israeli technology in the fields of agriculture, solar energy, electronics, and construction. However, the PRC government avoided all public references to such trade because it feared that these would hurt its perceived neutrality in the Middle East. A careful five-year process toward the formalization of relations ensued. It began at the United Nations in 1987 and culminated in the final establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Israel in January 1992. At this point, Sino-Israeli trade soared.²³

Until the early years of the 2000s, when the United States forced Israel to give up two important military deals, military technology had been the main Israeli export. Russian arms sales to China during the 1990s topped those of all other countries combined, but Israel was China's second largest source of military aviation technology transfer in the 1990s.²⁴ Although Israel's stake in the market was seemingly inconsequential by comparison, its technological contribution was of great significance. With Western arms embargoes against China still in full force, Israel agreed to sell China its Phalcon Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) platform. Some defense experts at the time rated the Phalcon as the most advanced AEW&C system in the world. Chinese military planners understood that to succeed in a confrontation with Taiwan, which would likely include U.S. military intervention as well, it was essential to control the airspace over the Taiwan Strait. Following the Gulf War, Beijing understood how unequally equipped the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) was compared to the United States Air Force. AEW&C offered China a set of capabilities it would need so as to confront the U.S. Air Force over the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, Israel viewed a supplier-client relationship with a rising power like China as a golden opportunity for its small yet highly capable indigenous defense industry.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States no longer required the PRC as a counterweight to Russia and began to perceive the increasingly strong China as a threat to its own strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁵ Washington thus regarded Israel's readiness to sell military technology to China as a direct threat to its interests in the region. This damaged Washington's goodwill toward the Jewish state. Other Middle Eastern states in turn interpreted the public discontent resulting from Israel's willingness to trade with a potential military adversary of the United States as a sign of wavering support for Washington's chief ally in the region.

In 2000 and then again in 2005, Israel bowed to American pressure and withdrew from contracts for the sale and repair of military hardware to China. In July 2000, American pressure scuttled signed agreements where payments had already been made by China for its advanced airborne tracking system for the Phalcon reconnaissance aircraft, a deal valued at up to \$1 billion.²⁶ Then, in 2004, the United

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

States prevented Israel from returning the Harpy drone to China that was in Israel for repair. Washington had not objected to the original Sino-Israeli deal²⁷ negotiated in the mid-1990s on the Harpy UAV,²⁸ which, like the Phalcon, does not incorporate American technology, and it initially accepted Israel's agreement in 2003 to a Chinese request to renew its Harpy "spare-part inventory."

By December 2004, it was reported that Washington came to believe that Harpy components were returned to Israel not for "spare part replacement and routine overhaul" but for upgrading. They suspected that the alleged upgrading may have included advanced technologies and sensors from a new Harpy model sold to Taiwan. It was reported that the Pentagon was concerned that joint U.S.-Israeli technological achievements would be leaked to the Chinese.²⁹ The result of Israel withdrawing from these two long-term deals as a consequence of American pressure was a severe downgrade in relations between China and Israel. Prime Minister Ehud Barak had promised that China would receive Phalcon technology, leading President Jiang Zemin to make public statements to that effect.³⁰ Jiang lost face over what turned out to be empty promises, thus leading to a substantial diplomatic rift between the two sides. Unlike in the 1950s when Israel succumbed to pressure from Washington to repeal its intention to establish formal ties with the PRC, however, the cooling in the relationship was only temporary.

"The United States role is very important in the context of Sino-Israeli relations but it is not a decisive factor," Prof. Ye Hailin, deputy director and chief secretary of the Center of South Asia Studies at CASS, told the author.³¹ "Both China and Israel aim to enhance their partnership, a development the United States may not fully support. The United States can try to influence the gradual development of that relationship but they cannot stop it. They are like a brick. They can try to stop the cooperation but their impact is limited," he said.³²

Sino-Israeli relations are an important part of China's foreign policy, especially in light of Israel's unique relationship with the United States and strategic position in the Middle East. Over the past twenty years since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992, the two countries' relations have steadily progressed.

"Leaders of both countries have exchanged visits, with twenty-five officials from China and thirty-four officials of above minister-level traveling to Israel," Qi Qianjin, deputy director-general of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress of the PRC, told the author.³³ "All these exchanges have enabled the two countries to maintain in-depth and candid communication on a wide range of issues, which has also played a crucial role in enhancing mutual understanding and trust through deepening cooperation and coordination."³⁴

Nevertheless, the American factor in Sino-Israeli relations cannot be disregarded. Israel's relations with the United States from time to time affect Sino-Israeli relations, while China's relations with the United States do not have any effect on China's relations with Israel.

Jewish Political Studies Review

“As President Shimon Peres once told me, Israel’s small size compels it to rely for security purposes on its relationship with the United States—it simply can’t afford to jeopardize that relationship,” Dr. Li Guofu, a senior research fellow and director of the Center for Middle East Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), affiliated with China’s defense establishment, told the author.³⁵

“Despite China’s relations with Israel, and Israel’s efforts to develop further and closer bilateral relations with China, its reliance on the United States is always a factor, a shadow in the background. The question is to what extent the Israeli side will be willing to ignore that influence...this will directly determine the potential of our bilateral relationship,” Dr. Li Guofu said. “To the extent that the Israeli side can do that, the kind and level of cooperation China and Israel could have would greatly advance.”³⁶

“For China the United States is a country with which we have some shared interests in several important areas.... Nevertheless, China is not an ally of the United States and the United States sometimes sees China as a competitor,” Dr. Yang Guang, director-general of the Institute of West Asian and North African Studies at CASS, told SIGNAL, a newly established Israeli NGO dedicated to advancing Sino-Israeli relations through high-level academic interchange.³⁷ “Although China has no intention to compete, the United States worries about the rise of China and takes measures to contain China’s rise. It does not want Israel to help the rise of China.”³⁸

“For the United States the main concern in the Sino-Israeli cooperation is the transfer of high-tech know-how to China that allows China to improve its capability,” Dr. Ye Hailin said.³⁹

THE “ARAB SPRING” CREATES OPPORTUNITY

In the late 1990s, in its quest to secure access to natural resources in the region for its rapidly growing economy, China greatly increased its investment in infrastructure projects in the Middle East and Africa. Over the next decade, China’s investment in the Middle East grew as it appeared safe and isolated from the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan that ensued following the 9/11 attack. As oil imports from the Middle East increased, China’s state-owned enterprises dispatched additional construction teams to countries throughout the Middle East. Only after the onset of the “Arab Spring” in 2011 did the extent of China’s exposure to risk become clear. This unforeseen development caught China’s government and ruling party completely off guard.

The PRC leadership was in shock to discover that some thirty-six thousand of its citizens were working in Libya when the evacuation began. They were devastated by an estimated \$20 billion loss they incurred with the fall of Gaddafi.⁴⁰

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

Although their holdings in Syria were but a fraction of this, the financial loss there took a psychological toll, hammering home the realization that they lacked an accurate understanding of the Middle East. Despite China's growing economic ties to the region and its overall prowess in the world economy, it has so far held to its traditional policy of noninterference. "We will keep the UN from intervening in Syria," Dr. Ye Hailin said. "In China's perspective this is our contribution to avoiding another Libya case. Military intervention has not done anything good for Iraq, Pakistan, or Libya."⁴¹

Following the onset of the "Arab Spring" in 2011, an awareness of a crisis of oil availability reverberated through the policy echelons of the Communist Party. It became very clear that the sudden instability of the Middle East could pose an immediate threat to China's energy security. In response, the central government began encouraging its state-affiliated research centers and think tanks to develop a better understanding of the region, the individual states, their relationships, and the volatile developments that are redefining the Middle East. Dr. Yang Guang explained: "I believe that Chinese-Arab relations are a mutual dependency...it has nothing to do with Chinese-Israeli relations. With Israel we cooperate at a different level. For China it is not a problem.... The Arab world and Israel cannot be alternatives for each other."⁴²

Just as China's leaders directed their academic advisers to find new avenues for investigation, SIGNAL⁴³ held the first-ever China-Israel Strategy and Security Symposium. Taking place at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) in Herzliya and cohosted by the Center for Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA), a think tank that is part of the IDC, the symposium offered an ideal venue for China's major scholar-advisers to acquire a greater understanding of the region. Less than six months since the first wave of Arab upheavals gripped the world's attention, Chinese and Israeli academics, scholars, diplomats, and policy advisers quietly attended this geostrategic symposium for the purpose of exchanging insights into the sea change taking place in the Arab world. They learned that Israel is an island of stability while its geographic proximity to the Arab nations offers unique access without being drawn into the fray.

"China has learned the value of peace and pressing need for development, and realizes that only peace allows every country to live in prosperity and development," Qi Qianjin said. "Israel is a vital country regarding peace and stability in the Middle East. Therefore, China hopes a peaceful Middle East can be created through joint efforts by Israel and other countries."⁴⁴

Israel's improving ties with the Arab world indirectly permitted the evolution and growth of its synergetic relationship with China. China became deeply interested in Israel because, on the one hand, Israel was forced to develop technologically to assure its own long-term security and the sustainability of its development. On the other, Israel is a stronghold of stability in the midst of a sea of upheavals.

Jewish Political Studies Review

Israel's interest in China derives from its lack of natural allies. Therefore, Israel is highly approachable and open to those seeking a mutually beneficial relationship.

At about the same time, other organizations which focused on the Sino-Israeli relationship were established so as to take advantage of this seemingly auspicious new era for the two countries' relationship. The Schusterman Family Foundation, a U.S.-based Jewish philanthropic organization, sponsored two seminars, one at Peking University and the other at Shandong University. These allowed Chinese scholars of Israel, the Middle East, and Judaism to communicate and engage with Israeli and Arab scholars. In 2011, the Schusterman Foundation brought a delegation of prominent Chinese academic leaders to Israel to meet influential personalities across the political and social spectrum, including Israeli, Palestinian, and Israeli Arab leaders. The Israel Project (TIP), an international nonprofit organization that targets media worldwide to provide unbiased information about the Middle East, established a China department to facilitate the dissemination of information in China about Israel and the Middle East. On the academic level, another nonprofit, the Israel-Asia Center, was founded to focus on building a bridge between Israel and, among others, China by supporting foreign students studying in Israel.

China's relations with Israel had once been a sensitive topic. In the past, China limited cooperation to areas of technology, scientific innovation, and finance. However, Israel has slowly gained formal public approval, and the symposium held by SIGNAL was particularly helpful in that regard. This symposium was off the record. The media were not invited, so that both the Israeli and Chinese participants would be able to express their opinions freely and build intellectual relationships that hopefully will facilitate a long-term and mutually beneficial exchange of ideas.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Chinese global influence grew significantly in 2010 when it became the second largest economy in the world. The ruling party realizes that economic development is central to its position internationally but, perhaps more important, it is the key to domestic stability. The leadership is aware that while low-cost labor has been the engine for China's economy over the past three decades, it cannot suffice to move the nation forward in the coming years. In the summer of 2010, noting that economic modernization is a crucial element in maintaining the nation's long-term stability, China publicly announced its aim to transform the nation from the world's factory into a hub of innovation. China soon turned to Israel, with its internationally renowned innovators, as a valuable potential partner for China's economic development. This has led to a tectonic shift in China's perception. The Chinese leadership

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

began to view a healthy relationship with Israel as a way to address some of their most salient concerns. They see Israel with its unique technological innovations as potentially helping China face its developmental dilemma.

“China’s economic development cannot be sustainable without domestic markets and foreign countries’ resources such as Israel, which is popular for its advanced scientific and technological achievements,” Qi Qianjin said. “China needs to maintain a better linkage with Israel in economic and trade aspects.”⁴⁵

China’s emergence as a major industrial power has come with an unprecedented high cost in the form of environmental damage. Indeed, China’s environmental degradation is now so severe that it could cause an acute political challenge to the ruling Communist Party. According to China’s Ministry of Health, pollution has made cancer China’s leading cause of death. Ambient air pollution alone is blamed for hundreds of thousands of deaths each year. Furthermore, nearly 500 million people lack access to safe drinking water and only one percent of the country’s 560 million city dwellers breathe air considered safe by the European Union. Israel is uniquely positioned to address China’s challenges with regard to renewable energy, water conservation, clean tech, and sustainable growth.

“Although China has achieved very rapid economic growth, it is facing serious challenges to further economic development,” said Dr. Yang Guang, noting that the model of growth China has had is based on a huge, very intensive consumption of natural resources. “China needs to change the model of development and create a new model that is more resource saving.... In this regard, there are some experiences that China can learn from Israel. For instance, Israel is very strong in many fields such as water-saving irrigation technology and high yield agricultural technology.”⁴⁶

Yang noted that China and Israel are currently cooperating on the development of a sea-wave power generation project that would serve as an alternative to fossil-fuel energy and limit environmental harm. “In this sense I think China’s economic development and reform has made the bilateral relations closer. There is still a great deal of potential for further development of bilateral relations,” Dr. Yang Guang said.⁴⁷

Since its inception, Israel has coped with a variety of difficulties resulting from its limited natural resources and numerous political and geographical challenges. With over half of the country’s land area classified as desert, Israel was forced to place great emphasis on maximizing its water supply, famously turning much of its arid land into fertile agricultural soil. Indeed, Ben-Gurion, Israel’s founding father, proclaimed the goal of “making the desert bloom” as one of the new state’s central challenges. Israel’s first prime minister believed that this could be one of its main contributions to the world. Thus, since the state’s inception, water technologies have been a national priority. With one of the world’s most efficient and innovative water systems, Israel offers important solutions for China.⁴⁸

Jewish Political Studies Review

Given the Arab boycott of Israel and its own lack of energy resources until the present, Israel also had no choice but to conserve energy wherever possible, developing innovative, alternative, and sustainable solutions. Ranging from its decades-long use of solar thermal energy to its development of unique biofuels, the country has consistently turned its natural disadvantages around, attaining great success and resourcefully demonstrating expertise and knowledge in the field of sustainable energy.⁴⁹

Israel's innovative population has achieved considerable success because of the need for defense expertise, water, and energy conservation. Like China, Israel's most valuable asset is its human capital. Given Israel's geopolitical isolation and its lack of natural allies, the Jewish state learned early on that it could not always count on Europe or the United States for military technology. Accordingly, the government and society constantly emphasized the pursuit of education, science, and technology as a way to assure its long-term sustainability. Israel's defense needs and the creative entrepreneurial spirit of its people combined to develop considerable expertise in various fields of water⁵⁰ and energy⁵¹ conservation that are directly applicable to China's needs.

CHINA'S INCREASED POLITICAL ROLE

China's main goal is domestic stability. To ensure internal stability, the leadership of the world's most populous nation sees a need to contribute to regional stability in two ways: increased economic involvement and active diplomacy.

China aims to contribute to the economic prosperity of Middle Eastern countries by increasing its imports of oil and gas from them, boosting investment in the region, and providing manufacturing goods and construction services at lower prices.

Alternatively, China has also carefully engaged in its own noninterventionist version of active diplomacy with the objective of preventing conflicts from occurring. China sent a special envoy for mediation between Israel and the Arab countries and dispatched peacekeeping forces under UN auspices to Sudan as well as other Arab countries. Qi Qianjin said that "China stands for peace and opposes war; China stands for equality and opposes power politics; China stands for principles and opposes interference. China stands for dialogue and opposes confrontation while bearing in mind the fundamental and long-term interests of the people in the Middle East. China has made its own efforts to advance peace, stability, and development in the region. China will, as always, take a constructive part in the mediation and settlement of the hotspot issues in the Middle East."⁵²

Until recently, China's Middle East policy was relatively passive. Nonintervention was the mantra. Before the 1990s, China supported the Arabs in the Arab-

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

Israeli conflict. When the peace process was initiated at the beginning of the 1990s, China aimed for a more balanced policy and more actively promoted the peace process. Dr. Ye Hailin explained: "We hope that Israel will play more of a positive role in the Middle East. China does not agree with every move Israel makes but we do believe in supporting regional stability in a way that will also favor Israel."⁵³ Ye noted that the region is not dominated by any one country and added that other national actors should play a constructive role in the region, with China becoming increasingly important. "In the Middle East there are a lot of players, and the region should not be viewed only through the lens of the Arab-Israeli conflict.... We need another perspective for looking at the region," Dr. Ye Hailin said.⁵⁴

China recognizes Israel's affiliation with the United States as vital to its national interests. It is coming to understand that the American-Israeli relationship has for decades been supported by strong affinities stemming from the Judeo-Christian heritage and political traditions. Its leadership sees the American Jewish minority, the largest outside of Israel, as strong supporters of Israel, with an impressive percentage of Diaspora Jews continuing to back Israel. American Jewish support for Israel, in turn, boosts the durability of the American-Israeli alliance. Beijing also views the Israel-Diaspora relationship as an interesting model because the Chinese have their own diaspora.

While China has no prominent Jewish population, it is now interested in promoting a stronger bilateral relationship with Israel. The political and academic leaders of Israel and China recognize the importance of providing greater access to information about each other in both countries. There is currently a dearth of academic material available in Chinese, and with much of the media tending to focus on the conflict related to the Jewish state, the need for reliable information about Israel is urgent.⁵⁵

EXCHANGE IS THE FUTURE

The Chinese leadership is acutely aware that China reached its current level of global relevance twenty years earlier than expected. Consequently, China lacks the range and breadth of expertise it needs to enter the next decade as the great power it has the potential to become.

Today, as China stands poised for the first time in over a thousand years with both wealth and an international focus, it realizes that it must take a larger role in world affairs. Encouraging mutual understanding between China and Israel could contribute to China's ability to promote stability in a volatile region that is of acute importance to both nations.

"I always say to our Israeli friends, few Chinese scholars study Israel or fully

Jewish Political Studies Review

understand the Middle East,” said Dr. Li Guofu. “Frequent exchange including Chinese scholars, to see the people and mingle with them, would allow them a better understanding of certain issues...help them make better assessments of certain regional issues.... It is a very good idea for Israel to promote this kind of frequent exchange. Bringing more Chinese scholars—not necessarily Middle East scholars—to the region, to Israel, will greatly help them understand the regional concerns.”⁵⁶

During 2012 there was a significant growth of interest in the academic world, with an increasing number of China’s influential scholar/advisers seeking warmer relations with Israel.

On a recent visit to Israel, the head of the delegation from CASS, Director of International Studies Zhang Yunling, noted: “Everyone, including government and security professionals was quite open and frank in our discussions. More such meetings to understand Israel’s strategic concerns and policies can help us see how to contribute to regional stability.”⁵⁷

China’s elite academic community, which, as noted, serves as advisers to China’s leadership, is increasingly seeking ways to engage its Israeli counterparts. They have begun to reach out to Israeli institutes known to be concerned with deepening Sino-Israeli ties, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the value of Sino-Israeli relations for China’s and Israel’s long-term economic growth and geopolitical stability.

“Both sides realize the great potential for relations—political, social, cultural, technological—especially considering China’s transformation, making the opportunities huge. SIGNAL is playing an important role in expanding those relations,” commented Prof. Zhang during his October 2012 visit to Israel.⁵⁸

Prof. Zhang, at the end of his seven-day visit to Israel with four of his colleagues, remarked: “There is so much potential here, in our mutual exchange—so much potential for doing good, for learning from each other’s ancient civilizations, for sharing our music, art, and science. Things are different now—different for China, different for the Middle East. There is no doubt we have many interests in common. More exchanges like this, personal and professional, can lead to great things.”⁵⁹

In light of the amount of trade, and exchange of high officials, China’s relations with Israel show a huge potential for development. Although China’s trade with its original partners, including the Arab bloc, has developed very rapidly over the past ten years, its trade with Israel has risen more modestly. The strong synergies in the trade relationship, particularly with regard to Israel’s expertise in clean tech and China’s ability to commercialize new innovations, suggest the huge potential for both sides to cooperate and more than double trade if they were to tap the possibilities to the maximum. Israel has much to offer China in agriculture, high tech, and electronics, and there is great promise for cooperation in security and

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

economic planning as well. Israel and China have reached a historic moment in their relationship which should be carefully nurtured.⁶⁰

POSTSCRIPT

At the time this article was written, it became clear that there was a slight shift in China's disposition toward Israel. Chinese media's coverage of Operation Pillar of Defense, which began on November 14, 2012, in response to incessant rocket fire on Israel by Hamas, gave disproportionate exposure to the Arab perspective. Sources in the Israeli embassy in the Chinese capital noted that the media reports were indicative of a switch in China's approach to Israel as it made baby steps into the Middle East following the United States' pivot away from the region and toward East Asia. Faced with the discontentment of some Arab states following China's gradual increase in involvement in Middle East politics, China appears to be taking a harder stand on Israel and its bellicose Arab neighbors. It remains unclear how China's policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict will be affected, how involved China will be as a determining force in Middle East politics, and to what extent a policy shift is likely.

NOTES

1. Meron Medzini, "China, the Holocaust and the Birth of the Jewish State," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 7, 1 (2013): 113.
2. Author's interview with retired Ambassador Mordechai Arbell, Jerusalem, November 20, 2012.
3. George Friedman, "The State of the World: Assessing China's Strategy," *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, March 6, 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/state-world-assessing-chinas-strategy> (accessed September 2012).

China's international trade policy was also strongly affected following the Opium Wars. China's long coastline made it uniquely available to international trade, but its size caused the concentration of that trade along the coast. The coastal region's steady enrichment and exposure to foreign influences led to a growing disparity with the rest of the country.

George Friedman, "The Geopolitics of China: A Great Power Enclosed," *Stratfor Global Intelligence* (2008), <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/geopolitics-china-great-power-enclosed> (accessed September 2012). As the influence of foreigners over the coastal region increased, and the interests of foreigners and the coastal Chinese slowly converged, the central government's control weakened. British manipulation of the Chinese market leading up to the Opium Wars set a disastrous precedent that deeply scarred China's trust in international trade relations and would also determine China's approach to trade in the future.

Jewish Political Studies Review

4. Sam Ma Young, "Israel's role in the UN during the Korean War," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 4 (2010): 81–89.
5. James G. McDonald, *My Mission in Israel 1948–1951* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1951), 225–226.
6. "The Geopolitics of Israel: Biblical and Modern," *Stratfor Global Intelligence* (2011), <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/geopolitics-israel-biblical-and-modern> (accessed September 2012):

Israel has this problem: it would be secure if it could confine itself to protecting its interests from neighbors, but it cannot confine itself because its geographic location invariably draws larger, more distant powers toward Israel. Therefore, while Israel's military can focus only on immediate interests, its diplomatic interests must look much further. Israel is constantly entangled with global interests...seeking to deflect and align with broader global powers. When it fails in this diplomacy, the consequences can be catastrophic.
7. John S. Brown, *The Korean War: Chinese Intervention* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; CMH Publication, 19–8 edition, 2000).
8. 中国怎样加入的联合国的? 如何成为五大常任理事国的? <http://www.historykingdom.com/simple/?t132615.html>.
9. "National Economic Policy during War: The Call for Sacrifice," White House speech (fire-side chat), April 28, 1942.
10. Mordechai Arbell, interview, November 20, 2012.
11. Yan Lieshan (鄢烈山), "India-Pakistan crisis: Heart-felt hatred spinning out of control (印巴危机: 仇恨入心要发疯)," <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/guandian/26/20020627/762542.html>.
12. UNBISnet: Voting Record Search: A/RES/2758(XXVI).
13. Reuven Merhav, "The Dream of the Red Palaces: From the Fragrant Harbor to the Forbidden City/ From Hong Kong to Beijing," in Moshe Yegar, Yosef Govrin, and Aryeh Oded, eds., *The Foreign Ministry; The First Fifty Years* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002), 567 (in Hebrew). Also, "Preface," Jonathan Goldstein, ed., *China and Israel, 1948–1998: A Fifty Year Retrospective* (Praeger: Westport, CT, 1999), xxi-xxv.
14. Merhav, 568.
15. Ibid. 570.
16. Ibid, 571.
17. See E. Zeev Sufott, *A China Diary: Towards the Establishment of China-Israel Diplomatic Relations* (London: Frank Cass, 1997).
18. Friedman, "Geopolitics of China." Despite having a natural buffer zone of hilly jungle to the southwest and the Himalayas to the west, China has mostly relied on the artificial buffer provided by a ring of non-Han regions surrounding the Chinese heartland—Tibet, Xinjiang province (home of the Muslim Uyghurs), Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria (a historical name given to the region north of North Korea that now consists of the Chinese provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning). The traditional homeland of the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty that ruled China from 1280 to 1368 and the Qing (Manchu) dynasty that governed the Middle Kingdom from 1644 to 1911, justly constitutes China's northern barrier. Along with Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Manchuria shield China from the former Soviet Union. Meanwhile Tibet plays a pivotal role as a bulwark safeguarding China from Indian invasion. Controlling Tibet meant that India could not move across the

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

Himalayas and establish a secure base of operations on the Tibetan Plateau. There could be skirmishes in the Himalayas, but no one could push a multidivisional force across those mountains and keep it supplied.

19. The Korean War solidified the Sino-Soviet alliance against the West, and as Mao consolidated his regime's power domestically through the systematic repression of all potential dissidence to his authority, he launched the First Five-Year Plan (1953–1958) with the USSR's assistance. China aimed to replicate the Soviet economic model and sought to end Chinese dependence on agriculture so as to become a world power. Despite the relative success of the first plan, which laid the main foundations for China's socialist industrialization, the second Five-Year Plan, known as the Great Leap Forward, had a disastrous outcome.
20. CICIR has a staff of approximately 400, including 150 senior research fellows. It consists of eleven departments with different regional and functional concentrations, as well as two research divisions focusing on the Korean Peninsula and Central Asia under the direct supervision of CICIR leaders, and eight research centers.
21. CASS is now made up of thirty-two research institutes, research centers, and one graduate school (Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences). CASS is also in charge of 105 national academic communities throughout China.
22. "Excerpts from Two Edicts from the Qianlong Emperor, on the Occasion of Lord Macartney's Mission to China, September 1793," in J. Mason Gentzler, *Changing China: Readings in the History of China from the Opium War to the Present* (New York: Praeger, 1977).

Hitherto, all European nations, including your own country's barbarian merchants, have carried on their trade with Our Celestial Empire at Canton.... Our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its borders. There was therefore no need to import the manufactures of outside barbarians in exchange for our own produce.... But your Ambassador has now put forward new requests which completely fail to recognize the Throne's principle to "treat strangers from afar with indulgence," and to exercise a pacifying control over barbarian tribes, the world over...
23. In 1992, when China and Israel established diplomatic relations, bilateral trade was a mere \$50 million. By 2011, the volume had grown two-hundred-fold reaching \$9.78 billion.
24. Aron Shai, *Sino-Israeli Relations: Current Reality and Future Prospects*, Memorandum 100 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, September 2009), 26.
25. "U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China," report of the Select Committee, May 1999.
26. Israel later agreed to pay a \$350 million penalty on the canceled deal.
27. "The U.S. Factor in Israel's Military Relations with China," *China Brief* 5, no. 12 (2005) (accessed September 2012). By 1999, Israel had reportedly sold China about one hundred Harpy UAVs for about \$55–\$70 million. Unlike the aborted Phalcon deal (valued at \$250 million—\$1 billion), the Harpy deal was relatively small given Israel's total arms sales of about \$15 billion in 2000–2004.
28. Produced by Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI), the Harpy is a 500 km-range delta-wing lethal UAV with a day-and-night capability designed to detect, attack, and destroy radar emitters with a very high hit accuracy. Launched from a ground vehicle behind the battle zone, the Harpy is an all-weather autonomous weapon system that can effectively suppress hostile SAM (surface-to-air missile) and radar sites for a long duration.

Jewish Political Studies Review

29. The alleged upgrading was considered a threat to Taiwan (and the Seventh Fleet) and therefore seen as contrary to Israel's January 2003 decision to suspend all military export contacts with China and to assure Washington that it would not sell any item to China that could harm U.S. security.
30. Shai, *Sino-Israeli Relations*, 27.
31. Ye Hailin, phone interview with author, Shanghai, October 24, 2012.
32. Ibid.
33. Qi Qianjin, email message to author, October 30, 2012.
34. Ibid.
35. Li Guofu, phone interview with author, Shanghai, October 24, 2012.
36. Ibid.
37. Yang Guang, phone interview with author, Shanghai, October 24, 2012.
38. Ibid.
39. Ye Hailin, interview, October 24, 2012.
40. There are major differences in estimated losses calculated by different Chinese sources, but comments by officials from the Ministry of Commerce and the China International Contractors Association acknowledge that the losses were severe (see Huang Jingjing, "China Counting Financial Losses in Libya", *Global Times*, March 4, 2011) and an official estimate placed the total number of Chinese projects in Libya at fifty, with a total worth of \$18.8 billion. Zheng Yangpeng and Wang Yan, "NTL Recognized as Ruling Authority," *China Daily*, September 13, 2011.
41. Ye Hailin, interview, October 24, 2012.
42. Yang Guang, interview, October 24, 2012.
43. SIGNAL was created in 2011 for the purpose of enhancing China's and Israel's strategic, diplomatic, cultural, and economic relationship through academia. It is doing so by establishing significant, long-term academic alliances between China and Israel that are becoming the foundation for mutually beneficial and broad-based cooperation between the two nations.
44. Qi Qianjin, email, October 30, 2012.
45. Ibid.
46. Yang Guang, interview, October 24, 2012.
47. Ibid.
48. Israel NEWTech, "Water in Israel: A Global Leader in Resource Management," <http://www.investinisrael.gov.il/NR/exeres/0CB6A8B8-8561-4943-ABBE-A697DDDD1123.htm> (accessed September 2012). The Israeli water industry is recognized as a global leader thanks to breakthrough technological innovations in areas such as desalination, drip irrigation, and water security.

The Hadera seawater reverse osmosis (SWRO) desalination plant in Israel is one of the largest of its kind in the world. Israel reclaims almost 75 percent of its reused effluents in agriculture, the largest amount anywhere, with Spain (12 percent) a distant second; Israel's total water consumption has remained nearly the same since 1964, despite a growing population and agriculture. This feat has been enabled through improved efficiency and technological innovation. By 2020, Israel plans to obtain 750 mcm of water from desalination, an amount equal to Israel's total current household water consumption.

The Geography of Sino-Israeli Relations

49. Israel NEWTech, "Israel's Energy Industry: Electrifying Sustainable Energy Solutions," <http://www.investinisrael.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/38B4FF18-8DAA-4452-A1FA-14-E95F96DA9B/0/NewTechEnergybrochureforwebsinglesfinal.pdf> (accessed September 2012). The sustainable energy industry in Israel is considered a global pioneer thanks to breakthrough technological innovations in the fields of solar and geothermal, as well as biomass, wind, and wave energy.

Israel serves as the base for over a hundred startups in the sustainable energy sector. Solar water heaters are used in over 90 percent of Israeli homes, and Israel houses one of the world's largest solar energy dishes at the Ben-Gurion National Solar Energy Center. The Israeli Public Utility Authority and its National Infrastructures Ministry have established feed-in tariffs for the development of solar and wind power technology, encouraging major investment and innovation in these fields. As of October 2010, a consortium of leading Israeli companies, investors, and academic institutions began to develop and operate a brand-new technology center for sustainable energy in the south of the country. Israel is currently embarking on programs that will enable it to integrate alternative energy systems and implement energy-efficiency technologies to meet its climate-change challenges.
50. Water management, water for agriculture, water treatment, desalination, water safety and security, and water technology and communications.
51. Solar thermal, wind/turbine, photovoltaic systems, energy crops, biomass, and energy efficiency.
52. Qi Qianjin, email, October 30, 2012.
53. Ye Hailin, interview, October 24, 2012.
54. Ibid.
55. Until 2011, when SIGNAL established the first Israel Studies Program at Sichuan International Studies University in Chongqing, the major manufacturing center for Southwest China and one of China's thirteen emerging megacities, China had no academic programs focused on Israel. Since then SIGNAL has launched such programs at universities in four provinces across China including Henan, Xinjiang, and Shanghai.
56. Li Guofu, interview, October 24, 2012.
57. Zhang Yunling, interview with C. Witte, Tel Aviv, October 25, 2012.
58. Ibid.
59. Zhang Yunling, interview, October 25, 2012.
60. Li Guofu, interview, October 24, 2012.

BINYAMIN TJONG-ALVARES holds a BA from Middlebury College in International Politics and Chinese, as well as a MA from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. At the time of publication of this piece, Mr Tjong-Alvares was a researcher at SIGNAL. He served as SIGNAL's managing director (2011-13) and is now a SIGNAL fellow. He may be found on i24 news as international and business anchor. His diverse ethnic and cultural journey, combined with his insightful perspective on world on world events provide the foundation of his informed commentary on strategic geopolitical matters.