



The Chinese Penetration of Israeli Media

by Roie Yellinek

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In 2009, China Radio International (CRI) began broadcasting in Hebrew. This venture has proven a success for the Chinese and a failure for the Israeli media, which uncritically swallow the messages sent out by CRI's Hebrew team.

Not long ago, the Israeli paper *Makor Rishon* published a [comprehensive cover story](#) on a Chinese individual who goes by the name Itzik HaSini ("Itzik the Chinese"). His original name is Xi Xiaoqi, and he works in the Hebrew Department of China Radio International (CRI), which was established in September 2009. The station, which operates websites and makes videos as well as producing radio broadcasts, went on the air in 1940 as a tool to promote Communist Party of China (CPC) ideology. It has expanded dramatically over the years and is now active [in over 60 languages](#).

The interview with Itzik, along with other statements provided by CRI representatives that are dutifully passed along without critical comment by the Israeli media, raises the concern that those media are inappropriately providing a platform for the Chinese Communist party (CPC). The concern is not that the messages are being broadcast to the Israeli public but that they are being disseminated without comment—in other words, that the Israeli media, which should be providing independent news reporting, are simply repeating Chinese messages verbatim, without interpretation or analysis. This undermines the essential role to be played in a democracy by an independent and critical media.

In the article, Itzik explains why CRI has a Hebrew department: to produce videos "that tell Israelis about China and about life there... [and improve] China's image through content that presents the country in a positive way". When he is asked whether this endeavor amounts to propaganda, he replies by pointing out the difference between the reality of what happens in Israel and

global public perceptions of it. According to Itzik, China is battling a similar gap between reality and perception. He then explicitly draws an analogy between allegations of Israeli treatment of Palestinians and Chinese treatment of various populations.

Instead of confronting Itzik with the significant differences between those situations and the reasons why it is a false analogy, the *Makor Rishon* reporter shifts the conversation to matters of copyright violation in China. In doing so, he falls for a standard Chinese interview tactic. It is commonplace for Chinese officials and representatives, when asked about their country, to make comparisons with other countries and thereby divert the discussion.

Itzik tried to sketch out a symmetry not only between China and Israel but also between China and the US. Thus, when asked if he, as a journalist, goes along with the restrictions on freedom of speech in his country, he replied:

Freedom of speech is not absolute in the US either. There, too, it is not allowed to post things that can damage state security. Look what they did to Edward Snowden.

In Israel, you can stand on the street and shout “Anyone but Bibi!” But in China, it is not customary to do so. It is not in Chinese culture. Over the past 30 years, the Communist Party has done a good job and there are not many complaints against it.

The reporter responded by asking Itzik if the poor in China would agree with his statement. He did not follow up on Itzik’s questionable point about freedom of speech and the actions of Edward Snowden.

It also would have been instructive to ask Itzik what he meant by the phrase “it is not customary to do so”, and to prod a little more deeply into his assertion that there is negligible criticism of the Communist Party in China. If this is true, is it because the party has served its people well or because of fear of the consequences of speaking out?

The reporter chose instead to focus on economic issues. He was told that thanks to reforms put in place by the party since the 1980s, tens of millions of Chinese have moved out of poverty—but did not point out in return that those millions were below the poverty line in the first place partly because of CPC policies. Itzik drew another parallel between Israel and China: he quoted Deng Xiaoping’s famous line, “It doesn't matter if it is a white cat or a black cat as long as it catches mice”, and said this practical approach is similar to that of the Israelis.

Itzik has appeared multiple times on the Israeli YouTube channel [Tzinor Layla](#), as well as on the Israeli [Kan](#) site. On Kan, Itzik and other representatives of the CRI present short videos on topics related to China. On [News 2](#), Itzik serves as a commentator about Chinese culture.

China's international radio station has reason to congratulate itself on its successful penetration of the Israeli mainstream media. It has established itself as a key source on everything related to China and can depend on the local media to swallow its messages without challenge or complaint.

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