

The “Belt and Road Initiative” and China-Israeli Relations

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Abstract: *As a key state along China’s “land and maritime Silk Road initiative”, Israel has many important features, such as a unique geographic location, a stable political and social order, a highly developed economic system, and advanced sciences and technology. All these are of great value to China’s new Silk Road initiative and Israel can play a key role with China as a strategic partner. In the past more than 60 years, Sino-Israeli relations went through a long and twisty road. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, the relationship between the two countries has been developing smoothly, but there is still a big margin to fill. In the new circumstance of China’s “land and maritime Silk Road initiative”, China-Israel relations can be greatly promoted through areas like infrastructure construction, people-to-people exchanges, economic and trade cooperation.*

Key Words: *China-Israeli Relations; “Belt and Road” Economic Cooperation; People-to-people Exchange; Infrastructure Construction*

Although Israel is a small country judged from factors of land area, population and resources, it is recognized as a “science and technology power”, “military power”, “diplomatic power”, “economic power” and “education power”. And thanks to its unique geostrategic position, the special relationship with the

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United States and bonds Jewish people across the globe, Israel, as the only Jewish state, plays an important role in international affairs that is out of proportion to its size and population. China-Israel relations have experienced complex and tortuous development. Today in China's strategy of the "Belt and Road", Israel is an important key state in the Middle East along the Belt and Road; its relation with China has also caught extraordinary attention.

I. Historical Perspective on China-Israeli Relations

Israel is the first country in the Middle East to recognize the People's Republic of China but the last one to establish diplomatic relations with China. On the 100th day after the founding of the People's Republic of China, on September 1, 1950, Israel decided to acknowledge the new China. China has expressed appreciation and expressed its wish to formally establish diplomatic relations with Israel as soon as possible. However, due to the Korean War and opposition of pro-American groups in Israel, the Israeli authorities were reluctant to establish diplomatic relations with China and took a wait-and-see attitude. This resulted in China and Israel losing the opportunity of establishing diplomatic relations in the early 1950s.

After the end of the Korean War, the two sides had numerous contacts for the establishment of diplomatic relations. But, then, in the 1955 Bandung conference, when Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai made contacts with Egyptian president Nasser and other Arab leaders, he developed a better understanding of the Middle East situation; he decided to give priority to the development of relations with Arab countries and supported the Arab countries on the Palestinian issue. Though at that time, Israel had decided to establish diplomatic relations with China and gave a formal letter to China, it was too late (Yin, G., 2010: 32). From May to

September 1956, China established diplomatic relations with Egypt, Syria and Yemen. In October 1956, during the Suez War, China strongly supported Egypt and broke off all contacts with Israel. Besides, China criticized publicly Israel's policy toward Arab countries. From then on, China-Israel relations entered a "frozen period" of 30 years.

Although in October 1971, during the 26th General Assembly of the United Nations, Israel voted for the expulsion of Taiwan and the resumption of China's legal seat at the UNSC, China did not change its pro-Arab stance or its anti-Israeli policy. However, China's attitude was different from some radical Arab countries, for China did not agree to the slogan of "throwing Israel into the sea" and explicitly opposed the activities carried out by some Palestinian factions who resorted to plane hijacking or killing Israeli hostages. In October 1977, China supported Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's attempts to resolve the conflict peacefully following his visit to Israel. Israel has always recognized the People's Republic of China and has not developed relations with Taiwan. By the early 1980s, China began to implement the reform and opening up policy. It also has made great adjustments and established normal diplomatic relations with more and more countries. China-Israel relations gradually started to thaw.

Since the mid-1980s, China and Israel have increased nongovernmental contacts. The two sides cooperated in the fields of economy and technology through nongovernmental exchanges. Since 1982, China has allowed Israeli scholars to visit China as individuals. In June 1985, an Israeli delegation composed of businessmen visited Beijing, while a Chinese delegation of agricultural experts visited Israel. In the case of increasing nongovernment exchanges, China and Israel established official contacts. After 1987, Chinese and Israeli officials made many contacts in Paris, New York, and elsewhere. In the beginning of

1990, the China National Travel Service set up an office in Tel Aviv. Israel established the Liaison Office of Israel Academies of Sciences and Humanities in Beijing. Because both these institutions enjoyed diplomatic status, China and Israel had established de-facto consular relations.

After the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference in 1991, the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was natural. On January 24, 1992, Israeli deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister David Levy signed the Communiqué of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with former Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen in Beijing and announced the ambassadorial-level establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Israel. It opened a new chapter in the relationship between the two countries. Because as early as in 1950 they had already recognized each other, some people said that this establishment was “a 42 years’ delay in action” (Goldstein, J., 2004).

Since China and Israel established diplomatic relations, their relationship has developed rapidly. In politics, the two sides’ top leaders paid frequent visits to each other. Israeli top leaders, including president Herzog (1994), Weizmann (1999), Katsav (2003), Peres (2008, 2014) and Prime Minister Rabin (1995), Netanyahu (1998, 2013), Olmert (2007) and Levy, Shalom, Barak have visited China. Chinese former chairman of the National People’s Congress Li Peng and president Jiang Zemin visited Israel in 1999 and 2000, respectively. China’s top leaders like Li Lanqing, Wen Jiabao, Qian Qichen, Tang Jiaxuan, Yang Jiechi, Liu Yunshan, Zhang Gaoli and Liu Yandong have also visited Israel. This not only showed that both sides attached great importance to the two countries’ relations, but also reflected the smooth development of bilateral relationship.

Well before China and Israel established diplomatic relations, Israel had set up a Consulate General in Hong Kong that was

responsible for liaison work with China. After the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, Israel set up an embassy in Beijing. It also set up a consulate general in Shanghai in 1994, one in Guangzhou in 2009 and another one in Chengdu in 2014.

Because the two economies had strong complementarity, for more than 20 years, the two countries have signed a number of economic agreements. The trade volumes have increased rapidly. China has become Israel’s largest trading partner in Asia and the second largest partner in the world following the US. Chinese companies have built a number of projects in Israel. The number of Chinese workers in Israel once was close to 40,000. Israeli agricultural technology is advanced. Agriculture is one of the earliest areas of cooperation between China and Israel. Exchanges and cooperation between the two in culture, education, sports and other areas are also expanding.

Although China-Israel relations are developing smoothly and the two countries do not have historical issues or direct conflict of interest, their relations are always affected by the third party. For example, relations between China and Israel were often affected by relations between Israel and the US. The typical example was the “AWACS EVENT” in July 2000. Sino-Arab relations and Sino-Iranian relations also influence China-Israel relations.

II. Recent Economic and Trade Cooperation and Cultural Exchanges between China and Israel

The economies of China and Israel are highly complementary. Their economic ties are developing rapidly, and the trade volume has been increasing year by year. Trade volume in 1992 was only \$50 million; bilateral trade volume reached \$3 billion in 2005, and in 2013 it exceeded \$10 billion. According to Chinese customs statistics, in 2014, bilateral trade between China and Israel maintained a steady growth; imports and exports amounted to \$11

billion, an increase of 0.5% (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016: January). For a long time, Israel's exports to China consisted of high-tech products, including electronics, optical products, and agricultural technology, while China's exports to the Israeli market include popular and competitive raw materials, textile products and consumer goods.

With the enhancement in the level of trade, trade structure is also in the continuous optimization, turning from trade of electronics, diamond, chemical and other traditional products, to the direction of high-tech, new energy, bio technology, and modern medicine; product portfolio also shows a trend of diversification. In 2013, for example, Israel's export commodities to China presented the structure as below: computer, electronics and optical products accounted for 52.5%, chemical products accounted for 20.5%, other economic products accounted for 15%, diamond products accounted for 7.2%, machinery and equipment accounted for 4.8%; China's merchandise exports to Israel mainly include coal, steel, copper, cars (including a complete set of spare parts), etc. China's Roewe cars, the Great Wall pickup truck, ZTE intelligent mobile phones and other high value-added products successfully entered the market in Israel; Lenovo notebook computer became the best-selling product among the local brands in the same industry, accounted for about a quarter of the market share (Zhang, Q., 2015: 315). The service trade between China and Israel has a strong development momentum, in the first three quarters of 2014, the bilateral trade in services amounted to \$510 million, in which China's service exports amounted to \$280 million, import was \$230 million, mainly concentrated in the field of tourism, transportation, consulting and so on (Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 2015: May 26).

In 2014, China's \$11 billion bilateral trade with Israel ranked 8 among the 22 countries of the Middle East, following trade of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Oman,

and Egypt with China. Those Middle East countries with top ranks have a large population, or the countries where China imports its oil from (Zhang, J. & Duan, Q., 2015: 11). Israel is a small country with little oil and a population of only 8 million. It is remarkable that China and Israel can have a trade volume of \$11 billion a year. However, China's trade with Israel is still less than 10% of the total amount of foreign trade in Israel, and is only 1/3 of the trade between Europe and Israel, as well as 1/4 of trade between North America and Israel.^① There has always been a big deficit in China-Israel trade. In 2014, for example, in the bilateral trade volume of \$11 billion, China's exports accounted for 70%, while exports from Israel accounted for only 30%.

In March 2015, Premier Li Keqiang underscored in the "Report on the Work of the Government" that China should "promote Free Trade Area negotiations with GCC, Israel and other countries". At the end of March, the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce said that China and Israel had completed feasibility study for establishment of free trade area. With a positive conclusion, the two sides will start negotiations on free trade zone within the year (Qin, L., 2015: March 17).

In recent years, a new trend of economic cooperation shows the flow of Chinese capital to Israel. At present, China's overseas investment is more and more aimed at the brand and technology, which is the advantage of Israel. China has now become one of the financial sources of Israeli high-tech enterprises. Baidu, Qihoo 360, Lenovo, Ping An and other famous companies of science and technology are investing in Israel's science and technology funds. In May 2013, China Fosun Pharmaceutical Company acquired 95%

^① China is Israel's second largest trading partner after the United States. The European Union and the United States are still Israel's most important trading partners in 2013, the European Union and the United States accounted for 33% of the total foreign trade and 20% of the total foreign trade of Israel, respectively, while China only accounted for 8.5% of its total foreign trade.

of the ALMA Lasers' equity for \$220 million. The largest investment from China to Israel is from Bright Food of China. The company acquired a dairy based food company named Tnuva of Israel in April 2015 (Zhang, Q., 2015: 319).

Israel is an innovative country; its R & D investment accounts for 4.5% of GDP, ranking the first in the world for a long time; and it ranks third in the world's innovation. In May 2013, during Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to China, he said, Israeli government would like to mobilize the business sector and the scientific and technological circles to turn the steering wheel to China, building Israel into China's R & D laboratory (Fu, L., 2015: February 2). China also attaches great importance to Israel's scientific and technological innovation capacity. In May 2014, Liu Yandong, Deputy Prime Minister of China visited Israel. He attended the first Innovation Conference in Israel, and published an article entitled "To Make China-Israel STI Cooperation Bloom" on the *Jerusalem Post*. In January 2015, the first meeting of China-Israel Innovation Cooperation Joint Committee was held in Beijing. The two sides signed The Three-Year Action Plan for Cooperative Innovation, including the establishment of the Cooperative Innovation Center, set-up of China-Israel "7+7 University Research Federation", agreement on the 2015-2019 Cultural Cooperation Action Plan, and the start of construction of China-Israel Changzhou Innovation Park (Liu, Y., 2014: May 18).

Tourism cooperation has a broad prospect. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, with the Israel Airlines opened an international flight between Tel Aviv and Beijing in 1993 and in 1994 China and Israel signed agreements on cooperation in tourism, a lot of Israeli tourists traveled to China, but at that time, few Chinese tourists went to Israel for travel. Tourism is an important industry in Israel. Each year, it receives about 3 million foreign tourists. In June 2005, China announced that Israel would be a destination of Chinese citizens' overseas

tourism; in June 2013, Israel announced that it would accept personal tourist visa application for non- travel agents. Only 3,000-4,000 Chinese tourists visited Israel annually 10 years ago, but in 2014, the number of Chinese tourists travelling to Israel was more than 30,000, an increase of more than 30% than that in 2013 (Liu, J., 2014: December 26). Israel Airlines has changed their round-trip flights between Tel Aviv and Beijing from the original two flights a week to three flights a week at present. The non-stop round-trip flights between Hong Kong and Tel Aviv also increased to six flights per week. China Hainan Airlines opened a direct flight route from Beijing to Tel Aviv on April 2016, three flights a week. The Chief Representative of Israel’s Tourism Ministry in China, Bental Jonathan, said in August 2014 that Israel’s goal was to increase the number of Chinese tourists to Israel to 100,000 people in three years.

Education is one of the key areas of civil cooperation. Since 1993, the two governments began to exchange students; in 2000, the two countries signed the “China-Israel Education Cooperation Agreement”. There are more than 3,000 Chinese students and scholars to date that have gone to Israel for study. In recent years, the number of Chinese students studying in Israel has been maintained at more than 300; while there are more than 100 Israeli students studying in China; most of them study in China at their own expense. In order to strengthen education cooperation with China, from 2012 and every year thereafter, the Israeli government granted ILS 40 million to provide 250 scholarships quota to China. With the rise of “China Craze” and “Chinese Craze” in Israel in recent years, in 2010, the Israeli Ministry of Education decided to include Chinese language in the curriculum of universities and primary and secondary schools. Some colleges and universities have also established Chinese Departments, Departments of East Asian and Chinese Research Institutes. Respectively, in 2007 and 2014, Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

established the Confucius Institutes with the help of China. At present, the number of people who learn Chinese in Israel is only second to that of learning English (Zhang, Q., 2015: 294-296). Peking University and Shanghai International Studies University also set up the major of Hebrew language.

The Li Ka-shing Foundation in Hong Kong announced in September 2013 that it would donate \$130 million to Israel's Science and Engineering Institute, helping it found the "Guangdong Technion-Israel Institute of Technology" (TGIT) in Shantou, Guangdong, in order to promote China's education, research and innovation in the field of engineering, science and life science. This is one of the major projects of China-Israel education cooperation, and it is one of the most generous fundings that Israeli universities have ever received. Guangdong and Shantou will also contribute 900 million yuan (close to \$150 million) and more than 600 Chinese *mu* of land (about 400,000 square meters) to support the construction of TGIT. In December 2015, the construction of Guangdong Technion-Israel Institute of Technology was officially launched. Former President Peres, the Guangdong Provincial Party Secretary Hu Chunhua, Mr. Li Ka-shing, and presidents of the two universities attended the launching ceremony. The project has been formally approved by the Ministry of Education in April 2015; the first phase will be completed by the end of 2016 and enrollment will start subsequently; the second phase is expected to be completed in 2018.

Cultural exchanges between China and Israel have rich content and good foundations. In 1993, the two countries signed the agreement on cultural cooperation and in the subsequent years they signed the annual action plan for six times, which effectively promoted the exchanges and cooperation in the fields of culture, art, cultural relics, film, television, literature and so on. Israel's music and art have a good reputation in the world. Israel's Corps

de Ballet, Kibbutz Modern Dance Company, Philharmonic Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra, and Youth Philharmonic Orchestra all performed in China. Israel also participated in the Shanghai World Expo 2010 in the form of self-built pavilion for the first time. In 2007, Israel held a “Chinese Cultural Festival”; in 2009 it held a large-scale cultural exchange activity named, “Perception of China, Visit of Israel”, and in recent years, it hosted cultural activities under the theme of “Happy Spring Festival”, which has been widely welcomed by the people of Israel. In 2012, in order to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the two sides also held a series of large-scale cultural exchange activities. As of 2014, a total of 19 provinces and municipalities of China and Israel have become friendly provinces and municipalities.^①

It is worth mentioning that, in ancient times, there had been some Jews coming to China along the Silk Road. They lived in Kaifeng of Henan province and other places for a long time, and eventually assimilated to the Chinese nation. In modern times, some Jews came to China from a British colony or from Russia, living in Shanghai, Harbin, Shenyang, Tianjin and other cities. The number reached up to 20,000-30,000 people. During World War II, nearly 30,000 Jewish refugees came from Europe to Shanghai to escape Nazi persecution; they lived there until the end of the war (Pan, G. & Wang, J., 2010: 16-34). Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s parents were born in Harbin; his grandfather is buried in a cemetery also in Harbin. Israel has also established a “Former Chinese Jews Association”. Members include Jews used to live in China and their children and descendants. After the reform and opening-up of China, they have come to Shanghai and Harbin to visit the site of the Jews’ who lived there. Shanghai also classified Tilanqiao area in Hongkou District as the “Protection

^① See official website of China International Friendly Cities Association, <http://www.cifca.org.cn/Web/Index.aspx>.

Zone of Jewish Historical Style”, built the monument and re-built a Jewish synagogue in the “Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum”.

“Jews in Shanghai” and “Jews in Harbin” have become the symbol and brand of friendship between China and Israel. There are not only many books and catalogs published, but also some films and TV series about this topic. Numerous exhibitions were held in China, Israel and other countries. When former president Chaim Weizmann, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Olmert visited China, they usually went to Shanghai to visit the site of the Jews. In August 2015, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese people’s Anti-Japanese War and the world’s anti-Fascist war, the Israeli Consulate General in Shanghai made a promotional video named “Thank You Shanghai”, to express the sincere thanks from people of Israel to the Chinese people. At the end of the promotional film, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu personally expressed gratitude to the Chinese people, “we will always thank you, and will never forget about this history.”

III. China-Israel Cooperation under the “Belt and Road” Initiative

By the end of 2013, China proposed the “Belt and Road initiative”. Israel did not declare its stands at the beginning. In October 2014, China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The deadline to join and apply for a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was March 31, 2015. Israel is one of the last seven countries that applied to join. On March 31, 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu formally signed an application to join the AIIB and become one of the 57 founding member states. Joining the AIIB has proved that Israel responded positively to China’s “Belt and Road Initiative”.

On May 28, 2015, Israel’s Minister of Transportation Israel

Katz spoke highly of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" during the signing ceremony of the 25-year franchise right for the Shanghai International Port Group at the new port of the Bayer of Haifa. Katz also said that Israel was in a stage of rapid development of infrastructure construction; it was building the new airport, port, railway and highway with annual investment of about 40 billion dollars. He believed that the cooperation in infrastructure between the two countries has huge potential and would benefit both sides (Yang, Z., 2015: May 29). It can be considered as the most formal positive attitude from the Israeli authorities towards China's "Belt and Road Initiative". From 2014 to 2015, Chinese companies have gained access to Israel's two major infrastructure projects:

The first is the Port Engineering Construction project of China Harbor Engineering Company in southern Israel Ashdod, in June 2014. Ashdod new port project is one of Israel's largest investment projects, with a total investment of 3.3 billion new shekels (about \$930 million), and is the largest port construction project contracted by Chinese enterprises in overseas market. China Harbor Engineering Company won the project with lower prices through public bidding, beating the other three companies. The main content of the port project includes the construction of 1200 meters of the port, 2800 meters of the breakwater, as well as the entrance road and warehouse, office and other ancillary works. The project will be completed in 2022. Once the port is completed, it is expected to have a container handling capability of 1 million standard containers, and will become the most important port in southern Israel. The Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, the Finance Minister Rapides, Minister of Transportation Katz, City Mayor of Ashdod Lashley, and former Chinese ambassador to Israel Gao Yanping attended the agreement signing ceremony at the end of September and the operation ceremony on October 30, 2014. This has shown that the two sides both attached great importance to the project (Wang, S., 2014: October 5).

The second is the Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG) granted with the 25-year franchise right at the new port of the Bayer of Haifa in March 2015. On May 28, 2015, the Israeli Port Development and Assets Company and the port group Shanghai International Port Group signed the agreement in Tel Aviv. The new Haifa Port construction is expected to be completed in 2020; after the completion, the pier length will be as long as 1500 meters. It is designed for annual handling capacity of 1.86 million standard containers. It covers an area of 78 hectares in total; the frontier has a maximum depth of -17.3 meters, and has the ability to load and unload the world's largest container ships (19,000 standard container ships). It will be the largest seaport in Israel. Shanghai International Port Group is expected to invest over \$2 billion. The Haifa Port will be built into a global international freight center (Wang, Z., 2015: March 28).

The high-speed rail project from Tel Aviv to Eilat, namely the so-called "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed railway" (RED-MED high-speed railway) project is of greater concern. Planned high-speed rail project has a total length of about 350 km, of which 260 km in the South of Beersheba needs to be re-built. The designed speed is 250 km/h. After the completion, transportation from Tel Aviv to Eilat will only last 2 hours—at present, transportation by car needs 5 hours.

For Israel, in terms of economic significance, the railway is conducive to the north-south traffic, which can accelerate the development of the southern region (the Negev region); Eilat, located at the southernmost point, will develop from a small city with a population of only 48,000, to a medium-level city with a population of 150,000 (Neuman, N., 2013: February 11). From the perspective of strategic value, for Israel (and other countries in the world), this is a land access through Eurasia, connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea; it was even referred to as the "Suez Canal on land" by some critics. Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu identified it as the country's priority development projects. Israel's cabinet meeting on February 5, 2012 officially adopted the high-speed rail program of the construction of the "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed railway" (Keinon, H., 2012: February 5).

According to Israeli documents, the construction of the railway will set up 63 bridges with a total length of up to 4.5 km, the digging of 5 tunnels with a total length of 9.5 kilometers, and a total budget of \$8 billion-\$13 billion; the project is expected to complete within 5-6 years. Israel hopes to invest in the construction of this railway through international cooperation. Since the announcement of "The RED-MED high-speed railway" project, there has been 10 countries such as India and Spain that expressed interest in this cooperation project (Hazelcorn, S., 2012: May 30; Blumenkranz, Z., 2012: June 25). However, so far, only China has truly entered into substantive negotiations with Israel. Early in September 2011, Israeli Minister of Transportation Katz visited China. He discussed and reached a preliminary agreement with the then Chinese Minister for Transportation and Communications Li Shenglin in the field of bilateral cooperation in transport infrastructure. In July 2012, when Katz visited China again, he signed a strategic cooperation memorandum with China, which explicitly includes the cooperation between the two sides in the "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed rail" project. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also welcomed China's participation in the "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed railway" construction (Jamestown Foundation, 2014: October 10). For Israel, China's involvement also means that China's banks and investment companies will invest in the project. The railway construction companies in China, which have mature experience and technology, will also be responsible for the project. Because the "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed rail project" is of great significance, many ordinary Israelis are very concerned about it,

and also have high expectations on China's participation.^①

The "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed railway" also has important strategic significance for China. Through it, Chinese goods could arrive in North Africa and Europe more conveniently, and the Suez Canal route will no longer be the only way. From an economic point of view, the construction of this project will contribute to China's capital, technology and enterprises' going out, and provide employment opportunities for China's labor overseas. So for both sides, the "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed railway" would become a mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation project. In this sense, the Ashdod port project and Haifa port project can be viewed as the preparatory work of the "Red Sea-Mediterranean high-speed railway".

In the "Belt and Road initiative", another important cooperation field between China and Israel is agriculture. Both sides have reached a consensus. In June 2014, the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture and Israeli Ministry of Agriculture signed a cooperation memorandum in Jerusalem, integrating the agricultural cooperation between the two sides into the framework of the "Belt and Road" strategic cooperation (Feng, Z., 2014: June 16). On a visit to Israel in November 2014, Wang Yang, Vice Premier of the State Council of China, also stressed that agricultural cooperation between China and Israel has great potential; the two sides can make a good use of complementary advantages and deepen agricultural cooperation between the two sides. If the cooperation in the field of infrastructure construction is China's "going out" to the west, then cooperation in the agricultural areas of is a "coming in" of Israel.

Israel's agricultural science and technology is advanced in the

^① When the author was a visiting scholar in Israel's Ben Gurion University in June-July 2014, many Israeli scholars, media professionals and ordinary citizens were eager to talk with the author about this project and expressed their expectations for China to participate in the construction.

world. Agriculture is one of the areas China and Israel carry out cooperation at early stage, including the establishment of training centers, seminars, demonstration projects, groups and other forms of mutual visits. Early in 1993, the two sides set up an agricultural training center at the Beijing Agricultural University, established the demonstration farm in the suburb of Beijing, and established agricultural demonstration base of agricultural cultivation, planting flowers, dairy farming, water-saving in Shandong, Shaanxi, Yunnan and Xinjiang. In the past few years, many provinces and cities in China have sent representatives to carry out agricultural research, and established a specific agricultural cooperative relation with Israel (Zhang, Q., 2015: 329). The focus is the introduction of Israel's agricultural water-saving irrigation technology, cultivation, breeding and cultivation technology as well as livestock cultivation technology to China, such as the implementation of "China-Israel Dry Farming Agriculture Demonstration Cooperation Projects" in Xinjiang and the China-Israel Cooperation Demonstration Farm in Fujian and so on. The number of China and Israel's agricultural science and technology cooperation projects is large, involving a wide range of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, which is unique compared to cooperation between China and any other country.

Israel is one of the countries owning the world's most advanced water technology; in addition to agricultural water-saving irrigation technology, Israel's sewage treatment and desalination technology are also very advanced and practical. China is also a country with serious water shortage, especially in recent years, the rapid development of urbanization has led to the increasingly acute water shortage. Therefore, in the use of water resources, China and Israel have a wide range of cooperative space. In May 2013, during Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to China, one of the cooperation agreements the two sides

reached was that Israel would help China implement the “Water Technology Demonstration City” project. After the inspection, the two sides selected Shouguang City in China’s Shandong Province as the demonstration city of Israel’s water technology, and it was officially launched in November 2014 when Israel Economic Minister Bennett’s paid a visit to China. Shouguang City will learn from Israel’s desalination, sewage treatment, irrigation, water supply and sewage purification technology, explore new mode for efficient water use, water conservation, sewage treatment, and water recycling, and lay the foundation for further promotion and application if the pilot project is successful (Feng, Z., 2014: November 28). In fact, Israel’s desalination technology has been applied in some coastal cities in China, easing the pressure of supply of fresh water in these cities.

As Netanyahu said at a joint press conference with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Jerusalem in December 2013, “our strength is complementary. China has a huge industrial influence and global influence, and Israel has advanced technology in all high-tech fields” (junshi81, 2014: March 30).

IV. Conclusion

Based on the development of China-Israel relations in the past 20 years, and changes in the Middle East situation in recent years, especially from the perspective of China’s “Belt and Road initiative”, and in order to explore the future development of China-Israel relations, the author made the following analyses:

1. In the construction of China “Belt and Road Initiative”, Israel has an important geopolitical and geo-economic value. As a Middle East country, Israel has a democratic system, sound system for the rule of law, economic prosperity, social stability, advanced education, leading power in science and technology, and has a significant talent advantage. Israel can play an

important strategic role, and is a strategic partner with which China should strengthen exchanges. China can utilize the "Belt and Road initiative" as an opportunity to further enhance economic and trade exchanges, cultural exchanges and other aspects of cooperation with Israel.

2. China and Israel appreciate each other, and need each other; the two sides have a good foundation for cooperation and great potential for development. Israel, whether at the official level or public level, is friendly to China. Israel is seldom critical of China's political system and ideology compared to Western developed countries. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, almost every Israeli prime minister and president visited China once. In China, the public community also generally has a good impression on the Jewish people. In recent years, bilateral relations have continued to intensify; the level of cooperation between the two countries has reached an unprecedented level.

Since China proposed the "Belt and Road initiative", the Israeli government and public have shown a strong interest. Israel values China's enormous economies of scale and market potential, and its strong influence in international affairs as a permanent member of the United Nations, and the prospect of Chinese mode and path of development to solve the problem in the Middle East (Wang, S., 2014: April 9); and China values Israel's advanced hi-tech and innovation ability in many areas, and extensive ties with Europe in commerce, and its unique and important geographical location.

In the construction of five "connections" in the "Belt and Road", China and Israel can focus on strengthening in cooperation in "facilities connection" and "civil connection", and meanwhile strengthen cooperation in science and technology, education, culture, tourism and cultural exchanges, to finish the implementation of a series of exchange agreement reached in 2015 as soon as possible (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016:

January). In terms of trade flows and financial intermediation, the two sides have also fully enhanced the level of cooperation on the status quo.

3. There are neither historical problems nor direct conflicts of interest between the two countries, but bilateral relations were sometimes affected by third parties, especially in some political, military and security problems. For example, the military technical cooperation between China and Israel was seriously affected due to US interference; moreover, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iranian nuclear issue also have had an impact on the relationship between the two sides. However, based on the situation in the past two years, the role of such a “third party effect” is declining. Israel has accelerated the pace of “Look East” and “integration into the region”. An Israeli analyst believes that now Israel is no longer in need of a “protector”, but needs a “partner”, it wants to transform from a country “being protected by others” into a country “integrating into the region” (Valantin, J., 2015: June 8).

Both Palestine and Israel have maintained good relations with China, and are looking forward to China’s greater role in the peace process. In May 2013, the Palestinian and Israeli leaders visited China almost at the same time. Similarly, with Iran’s nuclear agreement reached in 2015, the two types of relationships (China-Iran and China-Israel) are no longer as incompatible like fire and water as before. As the “third party effect” is weakening, it is a good opportunity to accelerate the development of the relationship.

4. Despite Israel’s political and social stability, the investment and development cooperation is also facing both opportunities and challenges. At present, the biggest risk of economic and technological cooperation with Israel still comes from its external environment. It remains difficult for Israel to fully integrate into the Middle East in the future. Its security environment cannot be fundamentally improved. Secondly, a serious dependence of Israel

on the US in aspects of political, economic and security areas, especially those involving political, military and security projects. Thirdly, from an economic point of view, the Israeli economic scale is limited. It lacks natural resources and the foreign dependency is high. It is easy to be affected by the international market as well as the price fluctuation; although Israel has a market economy, it also suffers from several problems, such as bureaucracy, inefficiency and lack of transparency (rules and regulations are not transparent); Israel has a large degree of freedom and the people frequently express their appeal through marches, protests, and strikes. These might affect some cooperation projects.

5. To promote the cultural exchanges between the two sides and enhance mutual understanding; to strengthen the research on Israel and correct cognitive bias. The "Belt and Road Initiative" is not only about economy, cultural exchanges and civil connections are also its meanings. Although in recent years China and Israel have carried out a large number of cultural exchanges between the people of the two countries, which has also achieved very good results, but there are still some misunderstandings between the two peoples. In China, some people are only aware of Israel's image as an "occupier" with tough stance. They fail to see the country's grim security situation and urgent security demands. Some people see an unstable Israel with wars, while ignoring the good image of its diplomatic democracy, economic prosperity and social stability; some people only see a special relationship between Israel and the US, simply categorize Israel as America's "servant", while ignoring the independence and autonomy of Israel as a nation, and ignoring the interest conflicts in the US-Israel relations (Zhang, Q., 2015: 344). At the same time, there are also some people that excessively beautify Israel, exaggerating its achievements and capabilities, and exaggerating its gratitude and friendship to China. These cognitive biases should be

corrected by objective and thorough studies on Israel.

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