MANAGING DISPUTES FOR COMMON DEVELOPMENT—REDISCOVER THE HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTION OF DENG XIAOPING TO THE PEACE IN ASIA-PACIFIC

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Since 2009, Asia-Pacific region has witnessed a series of turbulences and disorders, disputes over territorial and maritime rights and interests, widening differences among countries on different occasions resulting setbacks to regional political, economic and trade cooperation. Despite being highly concerned about the trends in the future, people are seemingly unable to find a solution. However, the solution is at hand, that is, to rediscover the historical contributions and realistic significance of Deng Xiaoping's strategic concept of "shelving disputes for common development" for managing disputes between countries and maintaining regional peace and development which developed in later 1970s.

I. Development of Deng Xiaoping's Strategic Concept of "Shelving Disputes for Common Exploitation"

Once mentioning of Deng Xiaoping, people always remember his landmark policy of Reform and Opening up, which to a certain extent, resulted in overshadowing his historical contributions to maintaining regional peace. As early as 35 years ago, Chinese government made a strategic assessment that "it is possible to avoid a world war" and decided to take the road of Reform and Opening up. However, how to overcome the security challenges posed by Soviet's one million strong army on the border, resolve disputes

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over the Diaoyu Island and South China Sea and border disputes with India and foster a peace and stable neighboring environment became the priority of Chinese leaders at that time. It was in this context, Deng Xiaoping began to explore new approaches to solve disputes and initiated the strategic concept of "shelving disputes for common development".

When China and Japan were negotiating the peace and friendship treaty in 1978, Deng Xiaoping for the first time proposed to shelve disputes over the sovereign right of Diaoyu Island and helped both sides bypass this obstacle and reach the peace and friendship treaty. In the following several years, he put forward the idea of "common development" on the basis of "shelving disputes". In his dialogues with leaders of India, America, Philippines and Vietnam, he brought forward this position and was positively responded by them.

In Oct. 1982, when meeting an Indian delegation, Deng Xiaoping pointed out, since China and India are developing countries and close neighbors. Therefore, they should strengthen mutual understanding and establish friendship. "Problem between China and India is not very big. China does not threat India, neither does India. The issue between two countries is nothing but border issue." "So long as both sides adopt fair and reasonable manner, I don't think it is difficult to solve the border issue." "Even if we cannot solve it at present, we can put it aside and do more efforts in various fields such as trade, economy and culture." What is actually meant is that, the overall interest of common development of both countries should not be affected by the disputes.

In Feb. 1984, when meeting with an American delegation, Deng Xiaoping said, "We will finally find solutions to a number of disputes in the world. I have been thinking about a way to solve issues of this kind with peaceful means rather than war." He went further and highlighted, "Issues of this type should be solved by finding a new way with respect to reality." "We may first do not talk about the sovereignty, but to carry out common exploration", which was the first time that Deng Xiaoping connected "shelving disputes" with "common development" and signified the final formation of the strategic concept.

In June 1986, when meeting with Mr. Laurel, then Vice President and concurrently Foreign Minister of Philippines, Deng Xiaoping said that, we could put aside the South China Sea issue for a while and should not let this issue hinder friendly relations between China and Philippines and other countries. With regard to the issues in dispute, we insisted on solving them "with peaceful means rather than means of force." In April 1988, when

meeting with Mr. Aquino, then President of Philippines, he reiterated this position and highlighted "both countries should make good use of the peaceful environment to develop their own economies." In both meetings, both leaders of Philippines made positive response to Deng Xiaoping's position, which laid theoretical foundation for stabilizing situation in South China Sea and deepening cooperation between two countries.

Ⅱ. Connotation of Deng Xiaoping's Strategic Concept

The original intention of Deng Xiaoping's strategic concept of "shelving disputes for common development" was to find a way to solve territorial disputes. But considering its practice and influence, we found that its value has gone far beyond solving territorial disputes per se. There is a dialectical relationship between "shelving disputes" and "common development". The concept has very rich connotation.

"Shelving disputes" comprises two opposite meanings in unity. On the one hand, it does not deny objective existence of dispute. It adheres to the principle of safeguarding national sovereignty and interests in the course of solving disputes. On the other hand, it admits the complexity and difficulty of disputes. To avoid negative influence on relations between countries and even confrontation caused by endless disputes, it is wise to be flexible and shelve the disputes. Here, "shelving" does not mean to give up efforts to solve the disputes, but to provide concerned parties with relatively loose span of time and enable them to seek win-win solution through dialogues, broadening of consensus and building trust. So-called "dispute" does not solely confine to territorial issues, but refers to various types of disputes and differences, including not only disputes of territorial and maritime rights and interests left over by history, religious disputes and ethnic conflicts, etc, but also disputes over economic, trade, cultural and strategic interests and differences of values, as well as various disputes interweaving above-mentioned both kinds of disputes.

"Common exploitation" means joint exploitation, sharing the benefits and common development on the basis of shelving disputes. In its narrow sense, it means joint exploitation of the resources in the disputed region of territorial and maritime rights and interests, and sharing of resources and interests, so as to lay a foundation of common interests for the final resolution of the disputes. In its broad sense, it requires to go beyond exploitation of natural resources, to properly manage differences of various types, to promote economic, trade,

cultural, social and security cooperation gradually for common development and at the same time to create conditions for peaceful resolution of disputes.

Therefore, it is fair to say that the concept of "shelving disputes for common development" is definitely neither a stopgap measure nor a reluctant move. Rather, it is a historical choice in line with the trend of the times. It is not to accumulate strength and bide the time to solve the issues, but to involve every concerned country to look into the future and solve disputes by consultation, coordination and cooperation, with development and prosperity as the core objective and shared development and prosperity as the ideal end state. The concept embodies strategic wisdom and art of leadership of "seizing the big and freeing the small" of the older generation of Chinese leadership with Deng Xiaoping as the representative. It is a new strategic choice of shaking off traditional concept of international politics and getting rid of thinking of zero-sum game. The world has already developed into a inter-connected and interdependent community and opening up and cooperation has become the fundamental means to guarantee stability and development. Against this background, the old way of judging the world affairs with the standard of "either black or white, either enemy or friend" became outdated. Co-existence of both competition and cooperation in international relations has become normal phenomenon. Practice of giving up or refusing cooperation because of disputes and differences is actually getting half the result with twice the effort. The concept of "shelving disputes for common exploitation" has conformed to the current trend and has promoted cooperation and development between countries.

Ⅲ. Historical Contribution of the Strategic Concept

In the narrow sense, under the guidance of this concept, with joint efforts of concerned parties, China successively reached Declaration on Conduct in the South China Sea with ASEAN, signed Sino-Vietnamese Land Border Treaty with Vietnam and Agreement on the Settlement of the India-China Boundary, which effectively maintained regional peace and stability. There is no more successful practice of this strategic concept than the solution of border issues between China, Russia and some Central Asian countries. Since the beginning of border dispute negotiation between China and Soviet Union in the late 1980s to the final agreements of border issues between China and Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan respectively, in the spirit of mutual understanding, mutual accommodation and common development.

Relevant parties successfully solved border issues which had accumulated for several hundred years after more than 100 rounds of talks in above 20 years. Finally, they established a regional mechanism for security cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, and non-targeting the third party.

In its broad sense, in the past 30 years, Asia has realized rise in group with double-digit economic growth rate. Political, economic, cultural, S&T, people-to-people exchanges have become ever increasingly close. A good situation of common development and common prosperity between countries of different systems and cultures has really come true. Only with the trade between China and other Asia-Pacific countries as an example, in the past 30 years, Sino-US trade volume increased about 160 times, trade volume between China and ASEAN countries increased as much as 40 times, so did that between China and Japan. It is the strategic consensus of "shelving disputes for common exploitation" that guaranteed the peace, cooperation and rapid development in Asia-Pacific region. However, when the whole world is discussing about the East Asia Miracle, they always neglected the fundamental role that Deng Xiaoping's strategic concept played in catalyzing the East Asia Miracle.

Today, when relevant countries are wrangling over the issues of the ownership of some islands and maritime demarcation and even preparing to use force when some forces push forward for final resolution of the issues regardless of real conditions in light of their own political agenda, it is very necessary for us to rediscover the historical value and realistic significance of Deng Xiaoping's strategic concept of "shelving disputes for common development". It is also necessary for us to inherit and carry forward Deng Xiaoping's thinking in light of the changes and development of the situation to actively and properly manage various differences and disputes in the principle of "managing disputes for common development", to prevent the historical process of peace and development in Asia-Pacific being impacted or even interrupted by narrow political interests, so as to realize the Asian Dream of common development and prosperity.

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