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The Frontier Issue between China and its Neighboring Countries

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China is vast both in land and maritime territories. China has more than 18,000 kilometers of coastline, more than 6,500 islands bigger than 500 square meters; it has jurisdiction over three million square kilometers of sea area and has eight marine neighbors. Compared with other countries, China has more marine neighbors and more complicated marine surroundings. The disputes in the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and the South China Sea still remain unsettled. The dispute between China and South Korea over the border demarcation of the Yellow Sea is not only over the boundary of an exclusive economic zone but also over the continental shelf. The main dispute over this issue is that China advocates applying both the natural extension principle and the "equity" principle. South Korea, however, advocates applying the "intermediate line" principle. Since the late 1960s, huge amounts of undersea oil reserves have been discovered in the East China Sea, highlighting the issue in this region. In the east continental shelf of the East China Sea, there are considerable overlaps among China, South Korea and Japan. Among the 560,000 square kilometers of marine jurisdiction China claims on the East China Sea, there are about 210,000 square kilometers overlapped between China and Japan, and 120,000 square kilometers between China and South Korea. Because of disagreements among China, South Korea and Japan over principles and standpoints on the boundary issues of the East China Sea and relevant islands including the Diaoyu Islands and Suyan Island, it is hard to achieve substantial progress in the border demarcation of the East China Sea. In the South China Sea, there remain many challenging issues among China, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei relating to the border demarcation of the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf. The issue of the South China Sea borderlines has yet to be put on the agenda of the relevant countries because of unresolved issues. Maritime boundaries not only relate to vital political benefits but also to economic benefits.

There is a long way to go until these disagreements among relevant countries can be radically resolved. Territorial disputes may be settled through the observation of international practices and through bilateral diplomatic negotiation. In recent years, concerning sea boundary issues, China and its neighboring countries put in a great deal of effort to achieve some success through diplomatic negotiations. Relevant countries can resolve these problems through consultation and peace negotiations. Moreover, relevant countries have discussed temporary agreements which can lay the foundation for a final settlement of the boundary question. It is possible for these countries to either cooperate or collide on the issue of the sea frontier and other unresolved difficulties. The methods, ways and measurements to settle the issue still need improvement, and it is hard to predict the time when it can be totally resolved. If the concerned countries follow the basic principles of the boundary issue, they can promote mutual trust to properly settle maritime boundary problems.