

# An Exploration of China's New South China Sea Strategy from the Perspective of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road

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**Abstract:** In the context of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, the South China Sea serves as a vital “throat” and necessary passage for the two ocean transportation routes connecting the Maritime Silk Road to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It is a sea area where neighboring countries have numerous contradictions and disputes over issues such as territorial sea boundaries, island and reef sovereignty, and marine energy resource exploitation. It is also a strategic “arena” for neighboring countries and extraregional powers. Furthermore, it is a “testing sea” and demonstration area for neighboring countries and related countries to build a “community with a shared future for mankind at sea.” Under the backdrop of “profound changes unseen in a century,” China’s new South China Sea strategy requires macro considerations of China’s grand strategy for sea power and meso-level considerations of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. Regarding the latter, China’s new South China Sea strategy should be implemented from two dimensions: ASEAN and extraregional powers, addressing the issue with a “two-pronged approach.” Specifically, it should enhance the willingness and ability of both China and ASEAN to shape the order in the South China Sea, with economic cooperation as the main axis, political mutual trust as the foundation, and humanistic exchanges as the support. The most critical aspect of extraregional powers is the strategic game and competition between China and the United States in the South China Sea. For China, it should seize the opportunity of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road to expand cooperation areas and converging interests between China and the United States in the South China Sea, increase mutual trust and clarify misunderstandings on the basis of respecting each other’s core concerns, reduce strategic misjudgments, and maximize the weakening and reduction of the “negative energy” of the United States on the South China Sea issue.

**Keywords:** 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road; South China Sea; new strategy

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## I. Introduction

In October 2013, when visiting Indonesia, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed, “China is willing to strengthen maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries, make good use of the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund established by the Chinese government, develop a good partnership for marine cooperation, and jointly build the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”(Xi, 2013). The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (hereinafter referred to as the “Maritime Silk Road”) was introduced for the first time and, together with the previously proposed “New Silk Road Economic Belt,” was collectively known as the “Belt and Road Initiative.” The proposal of the “Belt and Road Initiative” is closely related to changes in domestic and foreign situations and is an expression of the complementary national ideals and world ideals of China as it enters a new era of socialist construction (Men, 2018). From a geopolitical perspective, the “Belt and Road Initiative” adheres to the development concept and open strategy of integrated land and sea development, outlining a future development blueprint and a new pattern of a comprehensive opening-up strategy for China, which is rising. The Maritime Silk Road is an important part of this new strategic pattern, satisfying and meeting the common needs of China, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and other countries in promoting economic and trade exchanges, humanistic exchanges, infrastructure construction, educational cooperation, and people-to-people communication. It is a grand vision and rational choice to enhance the well-being of countries and peoples along the route. Examining the extension trajectory of the Maritime Silk Road, it can be seen that the South China Sea is a necessary sea area for the Maritime Silk Road and a key geopolitical node carrying the strategic layout of the Maritime Silk Road. However, since the end of World War II, especially with the discovery of oil and gas resources in the Nansha seabed in the late 1960s, disputes and conflicts between China and six countries and regions, namely Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Taiwan, China, over issues such as the ownership of islands and reefs in the South China Sea, seabed oil and gas exploitation, and territorial sea

boundaries have never ceased. Since 2010, the South China Sea issue has become increasingly prominent in the structural and strategic contradictions between the United States and China. Especially as China includes the South China Sea in its core national interests and the United States advances its “Asia-Pacific Rebalancing” strategy, this issue has become an important trigger for friction between China and the United States (Xin, 2016). The intervention of extraregional powers such as the United States and Japan has intensified tensions in the South China Sea and also posed many uncertainties, resistances, and obstacles to the implementation of the Maritime Silk Road. Therefore, as the initiator and major participant of the Maritime Silk Road, China needs to actively devise a new strategy for the South China Sea to cope with the current changes in the regional landscape, and create a favorable external environment and advantageous objective conditions for the implementation of the Maritime Silk Road initiative.

## **II. The South China Sea in the Perspective of the Maritime Silk Road**

### **2.1 The South China Sea is the inevitable and crucial “throat” passage for the two maritime transportation routes of the Maritime Silk Road leading to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.**

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the American military theorist Alfred T. Mahan proposed the “Sea Power Theory,” which had a profound impact on later generations. The view that “controlling the seas and competing for sea power will dominate the fate of a country and even the world” has prevailed for more than a century. It should be clarified that the “control of the seas” mentioned by Mahan mainly refers to the control of geostrategically significant maritime passages. Whoever controls the world’s core throat waterways, canals, and shipping routes controls the gates of the world’s economy and energy transportation; whoever controls these gates controls the economic and security lifelines of countries around the world; and whoever controls these lifelines controls the entire world (Liu, 2016). From the authoritative “Belt and Road” map released by CCTV, it can be seen that the Maritime Silk Road has two main sea routes: one from China’s coastal ports through the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, extending to Europe, and the other from China’s coastal ports through the South China Sea to the South Pacific. Therefore, the South China Sea has become an unavoidable strategic passage for China’s coastal ports to reach the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Currently, 21 of China’s 39 ocean shipping routes pass through the South China Sea, and 60% of China’s total foreign trade transportation passes through this sea area, with 60% of China’s ships passing through the Strait of Malacca daily to various ports around the world. Therefore, the South China Sea is known as China’s “economic lifeline.” The “Malacca Dilemma” of China’s ocean shipping routes also stems from this. Therefore, the South China Sea is not only an important sea area for the Maritime Silk Road to bring peace, development, cooperation, and security benefits to countries and people along the route and the world but also a crucial sea area for China to build a narrow sense of sea power.

### **2.2 The South China Sea is a sea area with numerous contradictions and disputes among countries along the Maritime Silk Road regarding territorial sea boundaries, island and reef sovereignty, and the exploitation of marine energy resources.**

Geographically, the South China Sea belongs to the western Pacific Ocean and is one of China’s three marginal seas. The natural sea area of the South China Sea is approximately 3.5 million square kilometers, with over 200 uninhabited islands, rocks, and reefs. Among them, the Dongsha Islands, Xisha Islands, Zhongsha Islands, and Nansha Islands belong to China, with the Xisha Islands being the largest. The South China Sea is rich in marine oil and gas mineral resources, marine shipping resources, coastal and island tourism resources, and marine energy resources. Taking oil and natural gas as examples, the South China Sea is China’s largest marine oil and gas reserve area, with proven oil reserves of approximately 640 million tons and natural gas reserves of 980 billion cubic meters. It is one of the world’s four major offshore oil reserves and enjoys the reputation of the second “Persian Gulf.” In addition, the reserves of combustible ice on the seabed of the South China Sea are also extremely impressive, conservatively estimated to be about 19.4 billion tons of oil equivalent. The formal entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1994 gradually brought to the surface the contradictions and conflicts among countries surrounding the South China Sea regarding territorial sea boundaries, exclusive economic zones, continental shelves, island and reef sovereignty, and the development of marine resources and energy. These conflicts have intensified and expanded over time. As of the end of 2019, the countries involved in disputes in the South China Sea mainly included China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Taiwan region of China, totaling seven parties from six countries. Among them, the disputes between China and Vietnam, the Philippines, and Brunei are mainly over the sovereignty of islands and reefs in the South China Sea. The disputes between Malaysia and Indonesia mainly focus on the delineation of the continental shelf and exclusive economic zones in the South China Sea. Brunei and Malaysia hold differing views on the delineation of the continental shelf, exclusive economic zones, and the sovereignty of islands and reefs in the South China Sea, and neither side is willing to back down. As the “competition on the sea surface” intensifies, the “competition under the sea,” namely the competition for the exploitation of oil and gas and mineral resources on the seabed of the South China Sea, is also intensifying. However, whether it is the “competition on the sea

surface” or the “competition under the sea” in the South China Sea, there is no lack of intervention and involvement by extraregional powers. As the only country with global strategic planning, coordination, and operational capabilities, the evolution of the United States’ strategy in the South China Sea and its high-profile intervention in South China Sea issues are the biggest external variables in whether disputes in the South China Sea can be properly resolved (Xin, 2016; Zhou, 2015; Wang, 2014; Deng, 2011).

### **2.3 The South China Sea is a strategic “arena” for countries along the Maritime Silk Road and extraregional powers.**

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative primarily passes through Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is not only an important partner for China in conducting neighboring diplomacy but also a crucial region for demonstrating major power responsibilities (Xia & Liu, 2017). Looking across Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the regional cooperation organization with the broadest geographical coverage, the largest number of members, and the greatest influence. ASEAN was officially declared established in 1976 and has now existed for 43 years. In the current context of widespread anti-globalization sentiments and frustrated regional economic integration, ASEAN still demonstrates strong development momentum and a promising development vision, standing out as a “unique success.” Undoubtedly, ASEAN is a pivotal actor in the South China Sea region and an important force in maintaining stability there. Since the early 1990s, relations between China and ASEAN have entered the “express lane” of development. The increasingly deepening and close relations between China and ASEAN are the fruit of China’s implementation of the neighboring diplomacy concept of “developing good relationship and partnership with neighboring countries,” as well as the “amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness,” and also the positive outcome of ASEAN’s rational and pragmatic diplomatic strategic choice in response to China’s rapid rise. However, disputes in the South China Sea between China and ASEAN have become a “stumbling block” to further developing bilateral relations. Some dispute topics are regarded as core interests by both sides. The tough attitudes and positions of some ASEAN countries on certain topics, as well as their excessive dependence on the intervention of extraregional powers, will inevitably become focal points and “triggers” for conflict and confrontation between the two sides. This poses severe challenges and real-world tests for the further development of China-ASEAN relations in the future.

Apart from the competition among countries along the Maritime Silk Road over the South China Sea issue, the intervention of extraregional powers such as the United States, Japan, and India has exacerbated tensions in the South China Sea and increased the difficulty and unpredictability of resolving disputes there. Among them, the influence of U.S. intervention is the most significant. Since the Cold War, U.S. involvement in the South China Sea issue has evolved from initial “piecemeal” actions into a systematic strategy. In 2009, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced with high profile the U.S. return to Southeast Asia. Subsequently, the U.S. has taken frequent actions in Southeast Asia, leaving countries overwhelmed. The series of “combination punches” by the U.S. in Southeast Asia has shown to the world that the “return to the Asia-Pacific” is not unfounded. However, during Obama’s second term, the U.S. replaced the “return to the Asia-Pacific” strategy with the “Asia-Pacific Rebalance.” One of the important pivots of the “rebalance” is the South China Sea, where the U.S. strategy has shifted from passive reaction to proactive engagement. By stirring up the “wedge” in the South China Sea, the U.S. can exert influence in multiple areas including U.S.-China, U.S.-Taiwan, U.S.-ASEAN, and U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Australia relations, strengthen its military presence in the region, suppress strategic competitors on the front lines, and maintain regional partnerships and dominance in regional affairs through security ties (Xin, 2016). Compared with the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia differ significantly in their level of involvement and approach to the South China Sea issue. Specifically, Japan and India focus on the geopolitical strategic position of the South China Sea’s impact on their national security and the economic interests of jointly developing resources and energy in the South China Sea with countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines. Australia, as a U.S. “ally,” actively participates in the U.S. strategic containment of China in the South China Sea. A tree may wish to stay still, but the wind will not cease to blow. The “infighting” and “internal and external strife” among countries along the Maritime Silk Road have made the South China Sea a “arena” for great power strategies.

### **2.4 The South China Sea is the “test sea” and demonstration area for countries along the Maritime Silk Road to build a “marine community with a shared future.”**

On April 23, 2019, when meeting with the heads of foreign delegations invited to attend the multinational naval activities celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy, President Xi Jinping proposed, “The blue planet we inhabit is not divided into isolated islands by oceans, but is connected by oceans into a community with a shared future, where the safety and well-being of people of all countries are closely linked.” “China proposes the joint construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, hoping to promote maritime interconnection and pragmatic cooperation in various fields, boost the blue economy, facilitate the integration of marine cultures, and jointly enhance maritime well-being” (Xi, 2019). The proposal of a marine community with a shared future represents China’s approach and wisdom in fully

and deeply participating in global ocean governance. President Xi Jinping's hopes for the Maritime Silk Road in this speech express China's determination and confidence to build a marine community with a shared future with countries along the route.

The Maritime Silk Road is one of the two pillars of the Belt and Road Initiative. As a constructive cooperation initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative primarily encompasses triple connotations: economic, security, and humanistic. Firstly, its economic connotation lies in expanding mutually beneficial cooperation between China and countries and regions along the route and promoting coordinated economic and social development in the related regions. Secondly, although the security connotation of the Belt and Road Initiative does not involve sensitive areas such as politics, military, and security, it objectively requires China and countries and regions along the route to jointly combat the "three forces" and create a peaceful and stable "microenvironment" along the route and an international "macroenvironment." Finally, its humanistic connotation aims to promote mutual understanding, respect, and trust among different civilizations through strengthened humanistic exchanges and cooperation between countries, creating favorable conditions for building a community with a shared future for mankind. Comparing the triple connotations of the Belt and Road Initiative, it can be found that although the implementation of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative faces numerous difficulties, there are also favorable "hard power" and "soft environments." Taking China and ASEAN as an example, although both sides have long-standing disputes over the South China Sea issue, they have expressed their willingness to abide by the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and to resolve differences and contradictions through peaceful negotiations. The fact that the 2012 Huangyan Island incident between China and the Philippines and the 2016 unilaterally proposed arbitration case by the Philippines on the South China Sea did not lead to a loss of control of the situation in the South China Sea is evidence of this. Secondly, cooperation between China and ASEAN in areas such as economy, tourism, culture, and non-traditional security cooperation far outweighs the differences and contradictions between the two sides in the South China Sea. On November 13, 2017, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang attended the 20th China-ASEAN (10+1) Leaders' Meeting. The cooperation documents signed at this meeting, including the Joint Statement on Further Deepening Cooperation on Infrastructure Connectivity between China and ASEAN, the Joint Statement on Tourism Cooperation between China and ASEAN, and the Declaration on Coastal and Marine Environmental Protection in the South China Sea for the Decade (2017-2027), fully demonstrate that China and ASEAN remain inseparable good partners and good neighbors who help and support each other. The "meddling" and intervention of extraregional powers such as the United States, Japan, India, and Australia in the South China Sea are not universally supported, cohesive, or immediately effective. For example, although the U.S. cheered for the victory of the arbitration case unilaterally provoked by the Philippines in the South China Sea, most ASEAN countries did not "buy the U.S.'s account." As for the U.S. military deterrence against China in the South China Sea, most ASEAN countries are merely spectators and have not provided sufficient support and cooperation. All of these indicate that the South China Sea can become the "test sea" and demonstration area for Maritime Silk Road countries to build a marine community with a shared future.

### **III. China's New Strategy for the South China Sea in the Perspective of the Maritime Silk Road**

Facing the "profound changes unseen in a century" and the accelerating pace of China's construction of a "marine power," China's maritime power strategy in the new era is about to emerge. The South China Sea is one of China's three marginal seas, but its unique geostrategic location and its close connection with the Maritime Silk Road necessitate the formulation of a forward-looking new strategy for the South China Sea within the framework of China's maritime power strategy and the Maritime Silk Road. This paper argues that the fundamental objective of China's new strategy for the South China Sea in the new era is to safeguard China's core interests in the South China Sea, with the ultimate goal of building a marine community with a shared future. The achievement of the fundamental and ultimate goals requires China to seize the opportunity of the Maritime Silk Road and adopt a "two-pronged approach" from the dimensions of ASEAN and extraregional powers to coordinate and steadily implement the strategy.

#### **3.1 ASEAN Dimension: Enhancing the willingness and capacity of both China and ASEAN to shape the order in the South China Sea, with economic cooperation as the main axis, political mutual trust as the foundation, and cultural exchanges as the support.**

Economic cooperation is the "highlight" of China-ASEAN bilateral relations and the top priority in the construction of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA). In 2010, the CAFTA was officially established. The establishment and development of the CAFTA have shown that it has become a "model" of regional economic cooperation globally. Currently, China is ASEAN's largest trading partner, and ASEAN is one of the main export markets for "Made in China," ranking among the top three export destinations for Chinese products alongside Europe and the United States. According to customs statistics, in 2018, trade between China and ASEAN reached a record high of \$587.87 billion, up 14.1% year-on-year, outpacing the average growth rate of

China's foreign trade.<sup>1</sup> Besides remarkable trade growth, China and ASEAN have achieved significant accomplishments in industries, investment, and the establishment of expositions. It is worth mentioning that the China-ASEAN Expo and the Free Trade Area complement each other and enhance each other's effectiveness. The latter provides market drivers for the in-depth development of the former, while the former offers opportunities to showcase cooperation achievements for the latter, providing a strong guarantee for deepening economic and trade cooperation between the two sides and expanding the market space for cooperation. In the face of the currently complex and volatile situation in the South China Sea, China and ASEAN urgently need to further innovate institutional arrangements for economic and trade cooperation based on the construction of the Free Trade Area and supported by the China-ASEAN Expo, promoting economic and trade cooperation to move from traditional fields to high-end, sophisticated, and cutting-edge areas to achieve mutual benefit and win-win results and further tighten the economic cooperation ties between the two sides.

For a considerable period since the establishment of ASEAN, China and ASEAN have been good neighbors and partners. In 1955, Zhou Enlai, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, led the Chinese government delegation to attend the Bandung Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia. This was the debut of the newly founded People's Republic of China on the international diplomatic stage. The Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation adopted at the conference embodied the spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence advocated by China and became a universally recognized basic norm for handling relations between countries. After the end of the Cold War, the development of China-ASEAN relations entered a new historical period. In 1996, China became a full dialogue partner of ASEAN. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang have successively participated in the China-ASEAN Leaders' Meetings, injecting new vitality and momentum into the development of bilateral relations. In 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping visited Indonesia and first proposed the initiative to jointly build the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. In 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping attended the commemorative activities for the 60th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, demonstrating the sincerity and determination of the new Chinese government to further expand exchanges, deepen cooperation, and develop bilateral relations with ASEAN. On November 3, 2019, Premier Li Keqiang attended the 22nd China-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in Bangkok. In his speech, Premier Li Keqiang proposed that China has always regarded ASEAN as a priority in its neighboring diplomacy and a key region for jointly building the Belt and Road, supporting the building of the ASEAN Community, ASEAN's central role in East Asian cooperation, and ASEAN's greater role in shaping an open and inclusive regional architecture.<sup>2</sup> Currently, China-ASEAN political mutual trust has reached a new historical starting point, and both sides need to further strengthen existing political mutual trust and continuously expand channels for political mutual trust, pushing China-ASEAN political mutual trust to a new level.

Cultural exchanges have consistently occupied a prominent position in China-ASEAN relations, with a long history and deep roots. As early as the Ming and Qing dynasties, China established bilateral relations with some Southeast Asian countries. Although this bilateral relationship was subordinate to the tribute system based on asymmetrical power, it built a bridge for humanistic exchanges between the two sides and became an important part of the ancient Maritime Silk Road. As important members of the Confucian cultural circle, most countries in ASEAN and China have retained customs and distinct marks of Confucian culture to this day. After the end of the Cold War, with the restoration and development of China-ASEAN relations, the channels, methods, and content of humanistic exchanges between the two sides have made significant progress. Overall, humanistic exchanges between China and ASEAN include four channels: overseas Chinese organizations in Southeast Asia, higher education, the China-ASEAN Expo, and academic exchanges between the two sides. Taking the exchange of higher education between China and ASEAN as an example, besides mutual exchanges of students and teachers between the two sides, China has established Confucius Institutes in Southeast Asian countries to promote Chinese language education and spread traditional Chinese culture. Most ASEAN member countries have established various scholarship programs to encourage their students to study Chinese at local Confucius Institutes or in China, thereby deepening their understanding of Chinese culture. The friendship between countries lies in the friendship between their people. Humanistic exchanges are the spiritual dialogue and communication between different countries and nations, and also the most direct and effective means to eliminate estrangement, doubts, and establish trust and understanding among different countries and nations. China and ASEAN need to continue to expand humanistic exchanges and create a good public opinion atmosphere and

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<sup>1</sup>In 2018, China ASEAN economic and trade cooperation achieved new success.

<http://asean.mofcom.gov.cn/article/zthdt/dmjmtj/201905/20190502867536.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup>Li Keqiang: Speech at the 22nd China ASEAN Leaders' Meeting.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com//2019-11/04/c\\_1125187703.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com//2019-11/04/c_1125187703.htm).

humanistic environment for dialogue, exchanges, and cooperation in other fields between the two sides.

**3.2 Extraregional Powers Dimension: The most important aspect of this dimension is the strategic game between China and the United States in the South China Sea. For China, seizing the opportunity of the Maritime Silk Road to expand areas of cooperation and converging interests between China and the United States in the South China Sea, and increase mutual trust and dispel doubts on the basis of respecting each other's core concerns to reduce strategic misjudgments.**

For China's new strategy for the South China Sea in the new era, the biggest extraregional variable is the United States. If China can handle this most tricky extraregional variable well, other extraregional variables will be easily solved. Currently, the prominent contradiction between China and the United States on the South China Sea issue can be summarized in one sentence: the rise of a rising power's vigorous rights protection in the South China Sea and the active intervention of a status quo power in the South China Sea. In other words, how to handle and respond to the contradictions and differences caused by vigorous rights protection and active intervention.

First, China needs to seize the opportunity of the Maritime Silk Road to expand areas of cooperation and converging interests between China and the United States in the South China Sea, making the United States a participant and shaper of the order in the South China Sea. Despite ongoing disagreements between China and the United States on the South China Sea issue, the top decision-making layers of both countries have maintained considerable strategic restraint, preventing the South China Sea issue from escalating into a trigger for comprehensive confrontation between China and the United States. This is the strategic bottom line and consensus of both sides. This provides important conditions for China and the United States to expand areas of cooperation and converging interests based on the Maritime Silk Road. Therefore, China and the United States can establish normalized cooperation mechanisms in the fields of navigation safety and daily search and rescue, combating transnational crimes at sea, marine scientific research, marine environmental protection, marine tourism, and maritime law enforcement in the South China Sea, guiding the United States to become a participant and shaper of the order in the South China Sea guided by the concepts of peace, development, and cooperation.

From an international perspective, China's sustained and rapid development is the greatest political and economic variable in today's world. This is an objective reality that no one can deny. China's sustained and rapid development has brought tremendous impacts on the world, profoundly changing the international geopolitical and economic development trends to some extent (Xing, 2014). In the face of China's continued rise, it is inevitable that the United States will have varying degrees of strategic doubts and concerns about China and make overreactions. The United States' high-profile involvement and active intervention in the South China Sea issue are largely a manifestation of its overreaction. As an important participant in the South China Sea dispute, it is unrealistic and impossible for China. Therefore, for China, it is better to open the door to communication and treat others with sincerity rather than engage in a "closed, air-gap dialogue" and confrontation. For instance, China can establish a hotline between high-level officials of China and the United States on the South China Sea issue to enable direct communication and dialogue, and include policy explanations on the South China Sea in the existing high-level hotline and military emergency communication mechanism between China and the United States. In response to China's series of actions in the South China Sea, such as land reclamation, expansion of military facilities, and strengthening of actual jurisdiction, China can invite personnel from the United States and other relevant parties to conduct field inspections of the construction on the Xisha and Nansha Islands and reefs to demonstrate China's sincerity and measures in providing international public goods to all parties concerned in the South China Sea. This will enhance mutual trust, clarify doubts, and reduce strategic misjudgments.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "We are now closer to, more confident in, and capable of achieving the goal of national rejuvenation than ever before in history" (Xi, 2017). The Maritime Silk Road is a long and winding path fraught with risks and challenges, yet woven with glory and dreams, propelling the Chinese nation towards great rejuvenation. As domestic scholars have stated, the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road is not only a route for trade but also a path for cultural exchange, national and military strengthening, and win-win cooperation (Zheng, 2017). It is the indispensable path for China to deepen its reform and opening-up and achieve national rejuvenation. The existence of disputes in the South China Sea is an objective fact and a significant issue that China must confront and resolve in building itself into a maritime power over an extended period in the future. This paper analyzes and constructs a new strategy for the South China Sea in the new era from the perspective of the Maritime Silk Road, proposing ASEAN and extraregional powers as two crucial pivots and breakthrough points for China's new South China Sea strategy, transforming the South China Sea into a "test sea" and demonstration area for China and other countries to build a maritime community with a shared future. From China's perspective, continuing to uphold, develop, and improve the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity are the top political priorities at present. They are also

China's long-term strategies to maintain strategic resilience, seize the opportunity of building the Maritime Silk Road, and implement the new South China Sea strategy.

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