

# *Dancing Ping-Pong Promotes Global Collaboration*

*—At the Sports Economy and International Regional Cooperation Forum for the Belt and Road Initiative in 2018*

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**S**ichuan is the strongest province in western China, and Chengdu is the first stop of the Silk Road and the Yangtze River Economic Zone. Qingbaijiang, the inception point of the Chengdu-Europe express railway, is an important source of artifacts from the ancient Sichuan civilization, and Sichuan province, the land of abundance, is the cradle and base of ping-pong. Chengdu has been connected to the world since ancient times, and Qingbaijiang is happy to welcome guests from all over the world. Today, domestic and international experts, scholars, principals of industrial associations, and representatives of famous enterprises in sports are gathering here, to share their insights in sports economics and international regional cooperation and to talk about the important role of ping-pong in international communications and the Belt and Road Initiative, which is particularly of practical significance. I would like to extend my warm congratulations to the forum, and my sincere gratitude and welcome to all.

## **1. Ping-pong is a great invention and a shared hobby among people everywhere**

Opinions vary on when and where ping-pong originated but historic records say

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that in the early Qing Dynasty (17 century), around the mountainous areas bordering Sichuan and Yunnan, the Miao people played a popular “smelly orange” game, which was very similar to modern ping-pong in equipment and rules. Of course, many people believe ping-pong originated in Europe around the end of the 19th century, and that it was directly related to tennis. Among the stories of the birth of ping-pong, there is a funny one: two college students in London imitated tennis using a dining table as the table, books as rackets, and a bottle stopper as the ball. Thus, the game was called “table tennis.”

Johan Huizinga, a Dutch historian and one of the founders of modern cultural history, says: “civilization... arises in and as play, and never leaves it.” Games are a natural instinct of human beings, and have a long and cherished history. They have evolved from primitive randomness to modern rule consciousness, and have played an important and valuable role in history. Ping-pong is a popular game, and in China it bears the title of “national ball” game. This is not only because of the glorious performances of the Chinese team, but also because of its unique charm.

First, it is light and convenient, and suitable for the young and the old. Children down to 5 or 6 years old, and older people up to 80 years old can play ping-pong. In international matches, balls with a diameter of 40 mm and a weight of 2.7g, and a racket of 90g are used, which not only lowers the difficulties of using the sport’s equipment, but also makes it easy to carry and store.

Second, it is flexible, and good for athletics and entertainment. Ping-pong balls are small, but fast, and you can complete one to-and-fro in 0.2 seconds on average. The game is fast and entertaining. Ping-pong can be played by 2 or 4 people, singles, doubles and mixed doubles. You can feel free to choose your distance from the table, your posture

and how you hold the rackets, your manner of serving the ball and making returns. The various playing methods and skills make ping-pong a challenging sport to play and an entertaining sport to watch.

Third, it is widely applicable for professionals and amateurs. Ping-pong is popular due to its wide applicability and high physical training value. It requires only simple equipment, a small investment, and has no age, sex or physical limitations. With nearly 100 years of development, ping-pong has a set of well-established rules. For common people, the three essentials of serving, receiving the ball, and playing positions are all that are required to play the game. It requires low stamina, which makes this game widely popular throughout the world. Compared to other sports like basketball, volleyball or football, ping-pong is a relatively low energy sport and amateurs can easily adapt to it because the amount of energy needed to play Ping-pong is flexible yet it provides good all-round exercise, enhances our health, and entertains us.

Fourth, it is at once preventive and health caring, due to its health enhancement. Ping-pong is an exercise of the whole body requiring upper and lower limb coordination. Playing ping-pong frequently can help develop sensitivity and coordination, enhance our physical constitution, and develop our quality and determination, which is why ping-pong is often called the “sport of smart people.” Research shows that it can improve cardio-pulmonary functions, adjust the nervous system, build muscle strength, increase reflex speed, enhance sensitiveness, and promote overall physical and mental health. At the same time the efforts expended while playing ping-pong can be self-controlled. How fast and hard you play the game can be easily adjusted to avoid stress and injury, so it is reputed to be one of the safest sports.

## 2. Ping-pong plays the role of carrier in the Belt and Road Initiative

Ancient Greece is the cradle of western civilization, and ancient Greeks took sports as a necessary condition to become perfect humans. Physical education and intellectual education in ancient Greece had a perfect balance. In ancient China, there were “the Six Arts” which formed the basis of education in ancient Chinese culture, namely: Rites, Music, Archery, Charioteering, calligraphy, Mathematics. Of these, Music, Archery and Charioteering included a wide variety of sporting games and physical education which helped to make perfect personalities, attain harmony in heart, and promote harmonious mental and physical health. It was the common yearning for happiness that helped the two civilizations to have a common resonance in sports competition across the Eurasian Continent. One thousand years later, the Belt and Road Initiative, across 65 countries, has built a bridge of communications, facilitating the rise of harmonious resonance between eastern and western civilizations to a new height.

Interactions are a basic need of modern human societies and have developed into many diversified forms and carriers. Sporting competitions play an important role as interaction platforms and ping-pong is an epitome in this regard. The players, at each end of the table, use baffling tricks with rackets to direct the jumping to-and-fro small ball, which conveys the intelligence and peace of players, and the linking of the “five gates” of the future, for ping-pong has “five links” functions.

First, a link to sincerity. Sincerity is the largest capital and the maximum bonus of the market economy. But sincerity cannot be generated from nowhere. An ancient saying goes, “the superior man on grounds of culture meets with his friends, and by friendship helps his virtue” (*The Analects*

*of Confucius*), which tells us to make friends we need to have the aid of a medium through which to transfer customs, norms, and friendships. As a popular sport, ping-pong enhances understanding and emotions between people by exchanging skills, close cooperation, and repeated communications, to cultivate the trust and recognition needed to build contractual relationships.

Second, a link to culture. Ping-pong carries the history and culture of our nation, disseminates our national culture to the world, and allows the cultures of all nations to be communicated and transferred through the dancing ping-pong ball. Ping-pong is known as “national ball” in China, and holds up the flag of China’s way to sports power in the world. It also inherits our long-cherished history and culture, carries “harmony in diversity” as learning strength from others, and combines “hardness with softness” as strategies by acting according to circumstances, and defeating others by a surprise action. Ping-pong has created a transnational development history, from “prosperity in Europe, Japan ruling the roost, rise in China, European renaissance, competition between Europe and Asia, and to the great prosperity of China.” Meanwhile, with constant improvements and innovations of equipment and rules, Ping-pong has kept up with the times, and stayed vital.

Third, a link to friendship. Currently, global ping-pong matches include the World Table Tennis Championships, the World Cup Table Tennis Match, the Asian Table Tennis Championships and many others. In 1988, the Seoul Olympics first listed ping-pong as an official event of the Olympics, embodying the friendship, solidarity and fair play of the Olympics. Eastern civilizations attach importance to harmony and happiness between people, and harmony comes first, while in modern society, the sports morale of “friendship comes first, and contest comes second” has been

widely popularized. “Sports make us happy” is not groundless. Biological studies show that when doing sports, our bodies release more Sensactive VEG — endorphins. We know that the base of friendship is the pleasure felt between two persons. When playing ping-pong, two persons hit and ward off, and smash and spin in a contest of skill and wisdom, and we can taste endless pleasure in endless changes, and the base of friendship thus takes root.

Fourth, a link to economy. The development of sporting competitions is closely related to comprehensive national strength, for comprehensive national strength is the base for developing sporting competitions. The sports economy around the world exceeds 1 trillion USD, and the total scale of the Chinese sports industry has reached 2 trillion RMB yuan, among which the market scale of the ping-pong industry has reach 20 billion RMB yuan driven by sports equipment, matches and athletes, the sports industry of coordinated sectors including fitness and recreation, competition and performance, stadium services, agency and training, and sports equipment manufacturing and sales. The

sports industry of European and American nations has made great contributions to their GDP, and the Chinese government also thinks highly of sports undertakings, and is now striving to reach a total scale of 5 trillion RMB yuan for the sports industry by 2025. Ping-pong is widely accepted by the masses, and with proven skills, the “national ball” industry is now marching to the world and has the potential to bring benefits to all nations along the Belt and Road.

Fifth, a link to cooperation. Last year, the first Belt and Road International Ping-pong Open Tournament was successfully held in Chengdu which attracted more than 200 athletes from the countries and regions along the Belt and Road. Today, we gather here in Chengdu with our friends, both old and new, to compete and meet friends, inheriting the Silk Road spirit, and composing a splendid chapter of the Belt and Road Initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative provides wonderful opportunities and practical schemes for the global and regional economies. In 2017, Chinese enterprises built economic and trade cooperation zones in more than 20 countries, creating 1.1



*The First Belt and Road  
International Ping-pong Open  
Tournament in Chengdu*



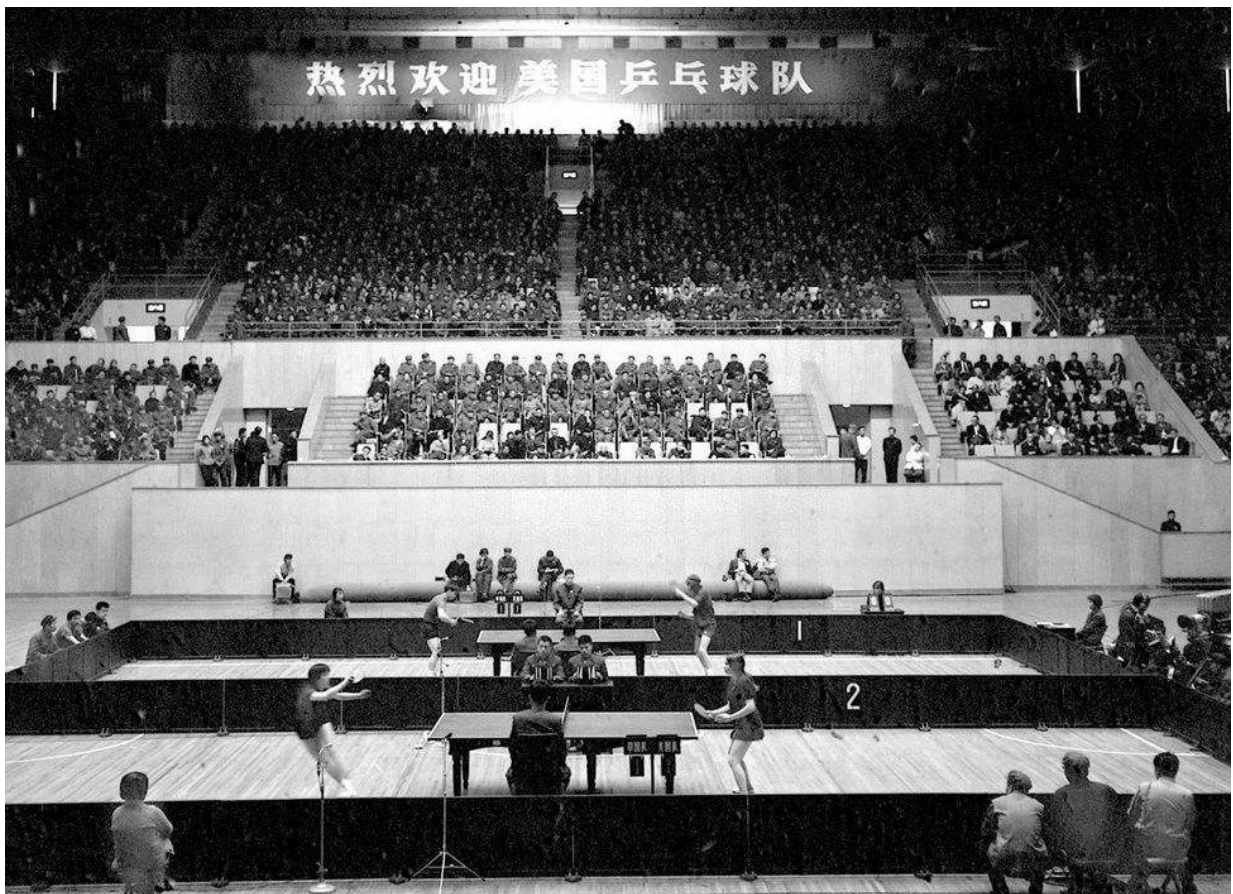
billion USD in taxes and nearly 180,000 jobs for local nations. The foundation for the future is development, and the foundation of development is cooperation, for only cooperation can help realize mutual benefits and win-win situations.

### 3. The small ball promoting global cooperation is a much-told story and a splendid case.

The small white celluloid ball is only 2.7g in weight, as light as a feather. The dark green ping-pong table is only 4 square meters, accounting for

a little tip of the 9,600,000 square kilometers of China. However, it is right in the “land” of the dark green plot that the Chinese ping-pong team has not only produced 109 world champions, and won 226 world gold medals, but also created many stories of diplomacy.

As early as the 1960s, “ping-pong diplomacy” began to take shape. Chinese ping-pong team visited Guinea, in Africa, as an envoy of friendship, and the first world champion Rong Guotuan showed splendid ping-pong performance before the local people, and the small ball helped bridge the friendship between China and Africa.



*ping-pong diplomacy*

1971 marked an impressive year in the Chinese history of diplomacy. Invited by chairman of Table Tennis Association Koji Goto, the Chinese Table Tennis Team participated in the 31st World Table Tennis Championships in Nagoya, Japan. It was this history-spanning match that not only opened the gates for China-Japan communications, but also broke the ice of China-US relations. China was called the “the farthest country on the planet,” which was drawn close by a young American ping-pong athlete Glenn Cowan who had a beautiful encounter with the Chinese Team. After this, the Chinese leadership played a loop drive to US president Nixon—inviting the US Table Tennis Delegation to visit China, and in October that year, China was restored to her legitimate seat in the United Nations. The next year, Nixon visited China, when China-US relations were normalized. This much-told story showed how “ping-pong diplomacy” with a small ball helped to facilitate new heights for global development.

#### 4. Sichuan's important position and role in the Belt and Road Initiative

Sichuan is an important node in the Belt and Road, enjoying an important position and playing an important role in the Belt and Road Initiative.

The road is an important channel for the exchange of needed goods, and domestic and international communications. It was exclaimed by Li Bai, a poet in the Tang Dynasty, “How dangerously high and steep, the way to Shu is more difficult than ascending the blue sky!” for the Sichuan Basin is surrounded by high mountains. Even so, Sichuan people have composed a splendid history of cutting into mountains for roads. Sichuan is located in the origin center of regional culture in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, was the political, economic and cultural center of ancient

Sichuan people cut into mountains for roads, opening the four roads of Yi, Zi, Li and Kui, and Sichuan was thus named so. The Ancient Tea-Horse Road led to the north and south, the Wuchi Road and Lingguan Road led to India and Burma, and the Yangtze River waterway, starting from Yibin worked even better in helping realize the dream of the inland leading to the ocean. The network of Sichuan roads linking internally and externally not only sped the unification of our multi-ethnic country, but also added a special “Sichuan taste” to the ancient Silk Road of cultural communications, and economic and trade interactions. It is this historic deposit that equips Sichuan with an historical endowment to be integrated into the Belt and Road Initiative.

The domestic center of the Belt and Road Initiative is western China, and the center of western China is Sichuan. Thanks to the large-scale development of the western regions, Sichuan has been the top developer in western China. Sichuan is in the heartland of the Silk Road Economic Zone, the Yangtze River Economic Zone, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor, gathering the east and the west, and linking the south and the north. It is this location advantage that equips Sichuan with the location endowment to be integrated into the Belt and Road Initiative.

In 2017, the economic aggregate of Sichuan ranked No.6 in China, and No. 23 in the world; among the Fortune Global 500, 331 enterprises have settled in Sichuan; the gross value of imports and exports of goods in trade is 68.12 billion USD; with 17 foreign consulates in Sichuan, and 108 international air routes from Sichuan, it is home to 6 industrial parks built in cooperation with nations and regions along the Belt and Road (Singapore-Sichuan Hi-Tech Innovation Park, Sichuan-France



Chengdu–Europe Express Railway

Ecological Sci-Tech Park, China-France (Chengdu) Eco-Industrial Park, China-Germany Industrial Park for Medium and Small Enterprises, China-Germany Emergency Response Industrial Park, and ASEAN International Industrial Park). The Chengdu-Europe Express Railway has realized its destinations to Moscow in the north, to Lodz, Poland in the middle, and Istanbul in the south Europe. 2017 marked a breakthrough of over 1,000 trips/year, realizing the operational efficiency of 3 trips per day on average. Meanwhile, the first comprehensive services platform for cooperation with Europe, the “China-Europe Center,” has been officially launched. Sichuan has been the frontier for China to open to the outside world, and the most attractive place in western China for investment. It is this solid foundation that equips Sichuan with the endowment to be integrated into the Belt and Road Initiative.

*The Report on the Work of Sichuan Provincial Government(2018)* suggests efforts should be made to enhance domestic and international communications and cooperations, and proposes we should speed up the high level construction of the China (Sichuan) Pilot Free Trade Zone, West China Financial Center, Tianfu New Area, Tianfu

International Airport and International Airport New Town. Efforts should be made to enhance the lead of the Belt and Road Initiative Sichuan 251 action plan, mobilize “one thousand enterprises to travel the Silk Road,” and deepen cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road in trade, production capacity, equipment, resources and energy, humanity and tourism. Meanwhile, we should take the initiative to participate in the development of the Yangtze River Economic Zone, facilitate the integrated development of the Chengdu-Chongqing urban agglomeration, and deepen the cooperation with the Pan-Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze River Delta, and Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei, establish a Sichuan-Hong Kong cooperation conference mechanism, and speed up the construction of the Cross-Straits Industrial Cooperation Zone. It is these scientific plans that equip Sichuan with the strength to master the future and to be integrated into the Belt and Road Initiative.

#### 4. Ping-pong skills serving the Belt and Road Initiative

Sichuan is an important base of the Chinese ping-pong undertaking, and has fine talent and



skill advantages along with important international influence. We should adequately tap these potentials and advantages to serve the Belt and Road Initiative.

In matches, ping-pong athletes attach importance to the coordination between the brain and the body, with the brain to tell the situation and strategies, and the body to change footwork and techniques, and with the “attack,” “chop” and “loop drive” skills to strike the opponents by surprise. In face of the important historical opportunity of the Belt and Road Initiative, in this sports competition, the key for scoring is to choose fine tactics, i.e. we should play the combined movements of “attack + chop + loop drive.”

First, attack. Attack here does not mean to attack others, but to take the initiative to win by speed. The Belt and Road Initiative is a historical opportunity for western China. We should keep our strategic positioning, take the initiative to ascertain our own positioning, and speed up further, wider and deeper communications and cooperation between Sichuan and the countries and regions along the Belt and Road.

Second, chop. The chop here does not mean to exploit others, but means to step backwards for moving

forwards, with superb skills and acute judgment to defeat the opponent and win the game. We should consolidate the foundation and enhance the strength, i.e. take scientific and technological innovation as strong impetus, and enhance the foundation of international communications and cooperation through the important strategies of rural revitalization, coordinated development of regions, and military-civilian integration development development.

Third, loop drive. The loop drive here does not mean to beat around the bush, but to have perfect timing to win with the mighty topspin. To stress the essentials and develop our characteristics, we should make good use of the Chengdu-Europe Express Railway, use this unique advantage, give full play to the hub linking Asia and Europe, tap the market potentials along the railway, and exchange needed goods, to make the "Made in Sichuan" and "Famous Brands of Sichuan" well known along the Chengdu-Europe Railway.

Finally, I would like to express my best wishes to all the athletes and distinguished guests here today. Please enjoy the cozy life in Chengdu this early summer.

*(Translator: Chen Youbin; Editor: Jia Fengrong)*



China (Sichuan) Pilot Free Trade Zone