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When the Economy Slows, the Balls Roll: How China's Economic Slowdown Reshapes Billiards

Culture

As discussed in the exploratory essay, recently, billiards has experienced a resurgence and transformation in China, with the game once again becoming one of the country's most popular leisure activities. However, after the exploratory essay research, we have realized that its revival in popularity does not come alone – the economic slowdown in China accompanies it, and we came up with the following research question: To what extent does China's recent economic slowdown contribute to the resurgence of billiards and the change in the billiards playing environment? To find an answer to that question, we concluded that on the one hand, the decline in consumption leads Chinese citizens to choose more affordable forms of leisure, where billiards perfectly fits in; On the other hand, rising unemployment changes the demographics of players, resulting in a less pleasant playing environment in billiards halls. After analyzing all these phenomena, we concluded the following argument: China's economic slowdown has transformed the billiards playing environment by making the sport more accessible and popular among a broader population, but at the cost of declining manners and atmosphere within billiards clubs. This source synthesis essay will discuss the sources I found during research and make connections between them.

Positive Effect

The most significant positive effect is the popularity itself. As we discussed in the exploratory essay, it is driven by the affordability of billiards and an increasing demand for leisure activities. It is challenging to find sources specifically addressing this topic in China; however,

the following study focuses on a similar issue in the US. Scholars Lai, Chen, and Petrick's study from Texas A&M University demonstrates how people tend to reduce their expenditures on costly leisure pursuits during a recession: limited income narrows their options and encourages them to opt for more affordable activities(Lai). This pattern can also explain the popularity of billiards in China by connecting it with another non-scholarly source we discussed in the explanatory essay before, which explicitly states the economic state in China. According to the economic research institute McKinsey, China is currently experiencing an economic slowdown(Zipser). Under such circumstances, billiards, which costs only about 20 yuan per hour, significantly cheaper than alternatives such as travel or other activities requiring a large field, becomes one of the best choices.

Another study in the Journal of Political Economy: Macroeconomics by Taschereau-Dumouchel, Kopytov, and Roussanov supports this view by showing that consumers increasingly turn to inexpensive leisure activities, such as video games or streaming, when budgets shrink, creating long-term shifts in how people spend their free time(Kopytov). Also, billiards is not explicitly mentioned. However, it has similarities with video games and streaming, so we can use it to explain the advantage of billiards compared to other activities: billiards not only has the same level of low cost and flexibility as digital entertainment but also provides a moderate amount of physical exercise, which appeals to people concerned about health. In fact, another source about leisure studies highlights strong evidence that health benefits are a key consideration in leisure choices(Fancourt). The affordability and health benefits of billiards make it the top choice in an economic slowdown situation.

Regarding the positive effect, I also found sources about increasing accessibility. The data mining institute iiMedia indicates that the number of 24-hour self-service pool halls has increased by approximately 25% annually, which is a clear indication that the market is responding to its popularity(艾媒咨询). The increase is apparently caused by the growth in popularity of billiards, as more investment is attracted to it. On the other hand, better accessibility makes billiards more popular, which forms a positive feedback to its popularity.

Negative Impact

Regarding the negative impact, I found the following sources that discuss the unemployment problem in China. According to the South China Morning Post, China's youth unemployment rate reached 17.8 percent in mid-2025, the highest level in recent years(Wu). Because of unemployment, more individuals with free time but not enough budget for leisure activities choose to play billiards and occupy a significant portion of today's billiards players.

I also found the following article, which states the culture and spirit of billiards in history and in China, so that we can make comparisons with current players. As Yiting Fan's paper Analysis and Explanation of Snooker's Sports Culture and Mode of Communication explains, snooker developed aristocratic roots as a "gentleman's sport," emphasizing etiquette such as formal dress, quiet concentration, politeness, and mutual respect between players(Fan). Players in the past were more likely to show manners while enjoying the game because, unlike many current participants who choose billiards primarily for its affordability, they were attracted by the sport for its gentlemanly tradition. That is why the atmosphere of playing changes in a less pleasant way over the years.

Another negative impact we concluded in the exploratory essay is the impact of smoking, which can be supported by evidence from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) China Survey. They studied smokers from six major cities and revealed that 84 percent reported smoking in recreational spaces such as restaurants, coffee shops, and karaoke lounges. The study concluded that exemptions to smoke-free regulations, social acceptance of smoking, and weak enforcement were key drivers of this high prevalence(Li). Billiards halls, which mainly operate with minimal regulation due to their low-cost running, follow a similar pattern: smoke is tolerated as part of the leisure atmosphere, which physically alters the playing environment less pleasantly.

Looking Ahead

As my essay discusses a niche topic, billiards, it is challenging to find essays directly addressing the problem. So, what I did and will do is consider this particular topic in a more

general aspect and use those more general social research findings to support my specific argument. The contribution I can make is to establish a starting point for discussing how economic factors influence the sport of billiards by drawing connections between existing social research.

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