

Xuanyu Zhou

Alokabho Pal

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Correlation between Economic Slowdown and Billiards Development in China

In China, the popularity of billiards games, including Chinese Pool, American Pool, and snooker, has significantly increased over the years. The data mining institute iiMedia Research predicted, "... market size of billiards in China was 87.20 billion yuan in 2024, with a year-on-year growth of 20.5%. It is expected to reach 192.02 billion yuan by 2023."("艾媒咨询") However, it is not the first time that billiards have reached such popularity in China. When it is first imported there, People's Daily reported, "In a stretch of less than 10 kilometers, there are over 200 pool tables on the street."(, Google Translate trans.) Unlike other concurrent leisure activities, billiards have somehow survived the spread of the Internet and computer games, and nowadays they are regaining their popularity. As a decent pool player who spends a lot of time in billiards clubs, I've noticed that the environment of pool playing has undergone a change recently. Some of those changes are favorable, including the increasing number of clubs opening, which makes the game more accessible; however, others are annoying. For instance, smoking is more and more common in clubs even if there are signs to prohibit it, and clubs are more and more noisy as more people are here to play for fun but not to practise. Also, on the Internet, more and more mean comments towards tutorials appear. My attitude towards the resurgence is now two-way. On one hand, I personally benefit from its better accessibility; on the other hand, I dislike the worse playing environment brought about by its popularity. That makes me wonder what is actually happening to billiards and how and why it gets such popularity.

When researching this phenomenon, one concept has been, if not explicitly mentioned, then repeatedly implied: the economic slowdown. According to data

summarized by Wave on the Chinese online media 36kr, money spent on leisure activities has reduced in recent years: “..., driven by economic factors, mainstream Chinese entertainment has undergone significant changes. Low-cost, healthy activities ... have become increasingly popular, while demand for high-cost, relatively unhealthy entertainment options ... has declined significantly”(“台球市场太火了”; Google Translate trans.) . However, for some political reason, most mainstream media do not explicitly use a terminology to describe the current societal environment; instead, it is replaced by “economic factors”. Based on personal experience and discussions online, the factor referred to in the article can be summarized as an economic slowdown. That is how it comes to the 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?

When considering an economic slowdown, the simplest consequence is that lower income leads to lower spending. According to China Marketing Corp, “China has experienced a phenomenon known as consumer downgrading, where consumers increasingly opt for more affordable or value-oriented products over luxury or high-end goods.”(“新常态下的中国消费”; Google Translate trans.) On the consumer side, because of the reduction in income, people tend to spend less money on nearly everything, especially on entertainment. Billiards, a sport that only needs a table to play, satisfies the demand for a low-cost way of entertainment. According to Wave on 36kr, the average price to play pool in China is 20 yuan per hour, which is approximately 3 US dollars. Suppose one plays for an extended period. In that case, a bigger discount is available.(“台球市场太火了”) On the business side, because of the low cost and simple process of running a billiards club – only indoor space and tables required – it attracts more and more investment. As iiMedia investigated, the account of the 24-hour self-service pool hall increased by a yearly growth rate of 25%. (“艾媒咨询”) As the game becomes more accessible, more people are involved in it. In conclusion, due to the economic slowdown, people’s consumption habits have shifted towards less spending on entertainment, which aligns with billiards and thus

contributes to the growth of billiards' popularity in China.

Another significant phenomenon resulting from the economic slowdown is unemployment. Reported by South China Morning Post, "China's youth unemployment hit 17.8 percent in July, the figure's highest level since August 2024, as millions of degree holders seek work." ("South China Morning Post") Higher unemployment means that more individuals need to kill more time, which can also be substantiated by statistics in the Annual Report on the Development of China's Leisure Industry: "The average daily leisure time of urban residents, rural residents, and retirees increased by 39.38%, 23.91%, and 14.55%, respectively, compared to 2022." ("《中国休闲发展报告 (2023-2024)》"; Google Translate trans.) Billiards, a relatively relaxing activity with a general acceptance by Chinese people, naturally becomes one of the best choices to kill time. As a result, the unemployed have occupied a significant proportion of customers in pool halls nowadays. However, it was not the case in the past. Billiards, especially snooker, and carom, used to be noble games in Europe, and when it was first introduced to China, the chivalry carried on. Players who continued to play the game after its initial popularity surge generally respect and agree with its culture. Compared to the current playing population, which has a certain percentage of unemployed players, players from years ago are more likely to exhibit better manners when playing the game. That explains why the playing environment has shifted over the years to a less favorable way. Unemployment caused by economic slowdown alters the player structure, as fewer people understand the gentlemanly culture behind the game, resulting in a poorer playing environment.

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