

# Enhancing Snooker Player Development in China: A Comprehensive Analysis of Training System and Competition Setup

Zehao Tuo

Beijing Haidian Foreign Language Experimental School, Beijing, 100000, China

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development of snooker in China, focusing on the proliferation and challenges faced by snooker in China. It examines the inequalities in snooker popularity and specialization in China. By comparing youth development mechanisms in other sports, this paper argues that snooker needs better screening and development mechanisms to improve the quality and quantity of players. Also, Chinese snooker needs more tournaments held by local clubs to screen players for the higher levels of the game.

## KEYWORDS

Snooker; Youth Sports Training; China Snooker; Player Development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Billiards, a sport with a long history, traces its origins back to Europe in the fifteenth century. As the sport spread around the world, different forms of play began to develop. According to the format, billiards can be categorized into drop pocket billiards and pool. Pool, snooker, and corkscrew are the three main types of billiards, with the first two being drop bag and corkscrew being impact billiards (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998). Pool can be divided into 8-, 9-, and 10-ball. Of these, eight-ball is the most widespread type of billiards in the world, using fifteen target balls and a main ball, with the goal of scoring all the designated balls before scoring the eight ball. Snooker is more complex, using a total of twenty-two balls, with corresponding points awarded for hits into the balls. Carom, on the other hand, incorporates straight, three-top, and four-top.

Billiards was introduced to China in the late 19th century. The history of billiards in China is relatively short, but its growth has been impressive. In 1986, with the founding of the China Billiards Association, the sport of billiards was transformed from a recreational to a competitive sport in China. At the beginning of the 21st century, the popularity of Snooker started to grow rapidly as Chinese players like Ding Junhui became prominent in Snooker international tournaments (Pattinson et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the professionalization of Snookers in China has not progressed as rapidly as in other sports. The lack of well-organized professional league and high-quality coaching have impeded the development of professional billiards in China. There is need for strategic investment in coaching to nurture China's competitiveness in international competitions. Also, there is need for sponsorship and media coverage in building professional sports ecosystem (China Billiards Association, n.d.).

## 1.1. Billiard

Billiard can be categorized into three main types: pocket billiards, carom billiards, and snooker. Each of them has distinctive rules and popular areas.

### 1.1.1. Pocket Billiards:

Pocket billiards include games where players need to hit the cue ball to collide the target ball so that the target ball falls into the bag, and the player who cleans all target balls is going to win. The most common form of game in pocket billiard are 8-ball, 9-ball, and 10-ball. The table size is 9 feet(100\*50) for professional tournaments, but for recreational game, 7 feet(78\*39) and 8 feet(88\*44) are also common table size.

**8-Ball:** Played with one cue ball and fifteen object ball. Player needs to start with a drive shot, and the first ball pocked after the drive shot will be the designated ball( either stripes or solids) of that player. Player needs to pocket all designated balls and then pocket the black ball to win. This form of billiards is particularly popular in North America, Europe, and Asia.

**9-Ball:** Played with one cue ball and nine object ball. Player needs to start by a drive shot and pocket the balls in numerical order. Area where 9-Ball is popular are North America, Philippines, and Europe.

**10-Ball:** Similar to 9-Ball, player also need to pocket the balls in numerical order to win, but an additional object ball made 10-ball more challenging. In United States and Europe, 10-Ball are gaining popularity.

The main events in pocket billiard are as follows (Table. 1).

**Table 1.** Major Billiard races sorted

Competition Name	Type	Level
World 8-Ball Championship	8-Ball	World
U.S. Open 8-Ball Championship	8-Ball	National (U.S.)
World 9-Ball Championship	9-Ball	World
U.S. Open 9-Ball Championship	9-Ball	National (U.S.)
World 10-Ball Championship	10-Ball	World
European Pool Championship	8-Ball, 9-Ball, and 10-Ball	Continental (Europe)
WPA 9-Ball World Championship	9-Ball	World
Chinese 8-Ball World Championship	8-Ball	World
Derby City Classic	9-Ball, 10-Ball	International
Mosconi Cup	9-Ball	International (Team)
International 9-Ball Open	9-Ball	International

### 1.1.2. Snooker

Snooker can be treated as a more complex form of billiard. It is played with 22 balls: one cue ball, 15 red balls, and 6 colored balls. The goal for player is to pocket red ball and colored balls alternatively, and accumulate points based on the value of each ball, and Player that scores more points

is going to win the game. The table size of snooker is 12 feet ( 144\*72). Snooker is particularly popular in Europe and China, and main events in snooker are as follows (Table. 2).

**Table 2.** Major Snooker races sorted

Competition Name	Type	Level
World Snooker Championship	Snooker	World
UK Championship	Snooker	National (UK)
The Masters	Snooker	Invitation (Top 16)
China Open	Snooker	International
Welsh Open	Snooker	National (Wales)
German Masters	Snooker	International
Shanghai Masters	Snooker	International
Indian Open	Snooker	International
Scottish Open	Snooker	National (Scotland)
Players Championship	Snooker	International (Top 16)
Champion of Champions	Snooker	Invitational (Champions)

### 1.1.3. Carom Billiards

**Table 3.** Major Carom races sorted

Competition Name	Type	Level
World Three-Cushion Championship	Three-Cushion	World
European Three-Cushion Championship	Three-Cushion	Continental (Europe)
Pan American Three-Cushion Championship	Three-Cushion	Continental (Pan America)
Asian Three-Cushion Championship	Three-Cushion	Continental (Asia)
Three-Cushion World Cup	Three-Cushion	World
UMB World Championship	Three-Cushion	World
Verhoeven Open	Three-Cushion	International
Survival 3C Masters	Three-Cushion	International
Four-Cushion World Championship	Four-Cushion	World
European Four-Cushion Championship	Four-Cushion	Continental (Europe)
Pan American Four-Cushion Championship	Four-Cushion	Continental (Pan America)
Asian Four-Cushion Championship	Four-Cushion	Continental (Asia)
UMB Four-Cushion World Cup	Four-Cushion	World

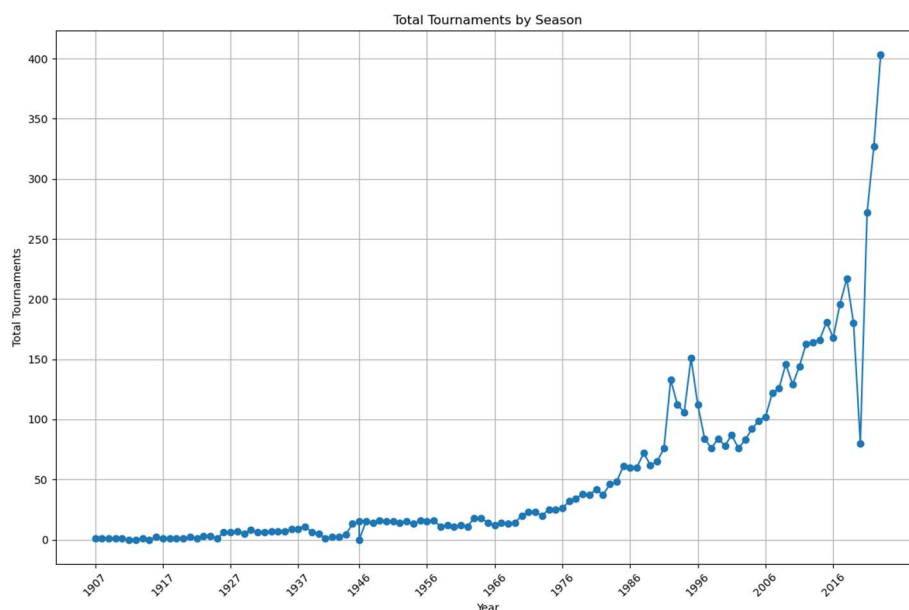
Carom billiards differs from snooker and pocket billiards as it does not have any pockets. The only objective for player is to hit the object balls using the cue ball. The most common form of game in carom billiards are three-cushion billiards and four-cushion billiards. The standard table size in carom billiards is 10 feet ( 112 \* 56).

**Three-Cushion Billiards:** The cue ball must hit at least three cushions( edge of the table)after hitting the first object ball and before hitting the second object ball. This form of carom billiard is popular in Europe, mainly in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

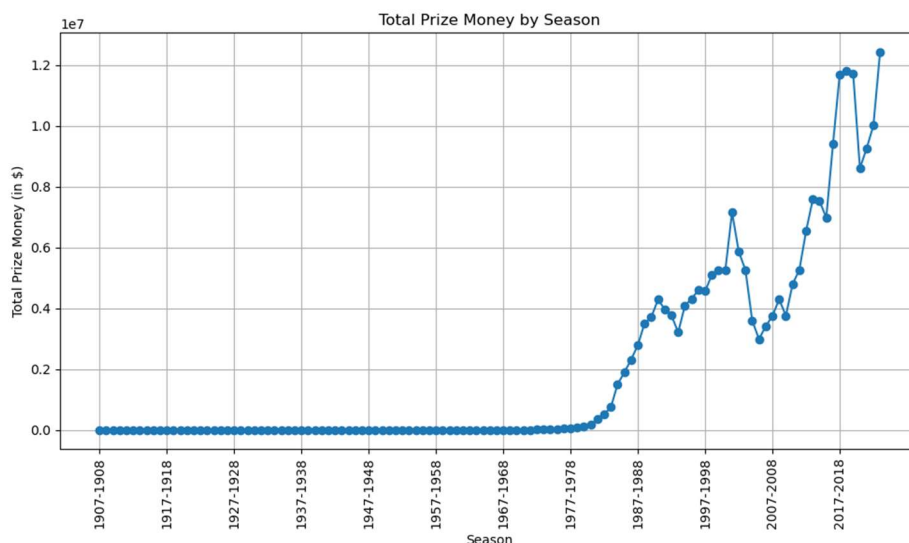
**Four-Cushion Billiards:** Similar to three-cushion but require one more cushion hit. It is also popular in Europe.

The main events in carom billiards are as follows (Table. 3)

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF SNOOKER

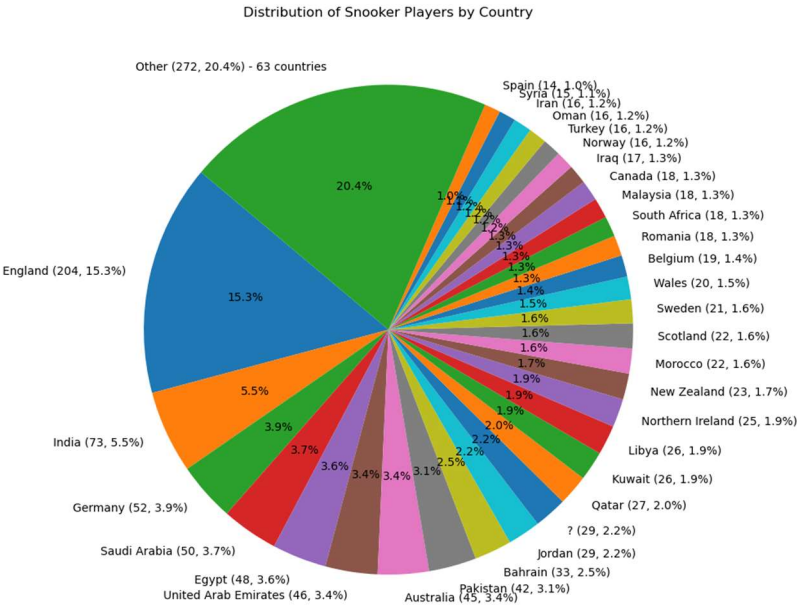


**Fig. 1** Number of snooker tournaments per season in the past

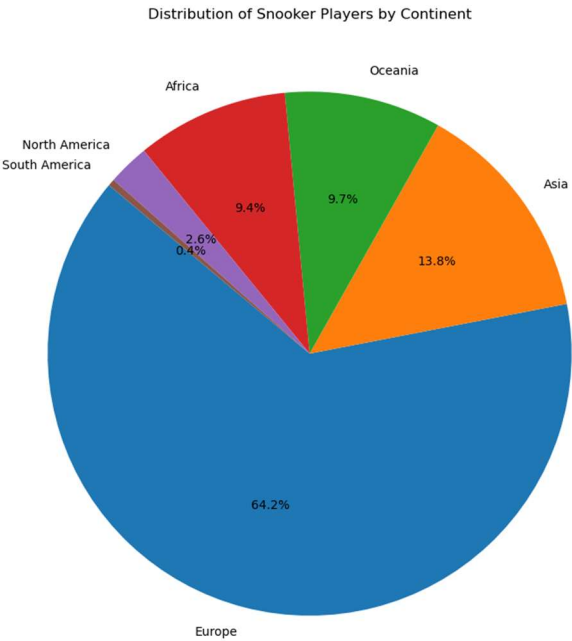


**Fig. 2** Total prize money for snooker tournaments in each past season

The number of tournaments and the amount of prize money in snooker is gradually increasing and this increase is exponential. There is no slowing down of this growth, which means that the market for snooker will continue to increase in the coming years. At the same time, snooker is gaining an international audience, especially in China. China have held China open, Shanghai Masters, International Championship, World Open, China Championship, and WSF Junior Open(Haigh, 2023; “Shanghai Masters 2023: Snooker’s Welcome Return to China as Ronnie O’Sullivan Set for Long-awaited Title Defence - Eurosport,” 2023). The fact that more and more major tournaments are being held in China means that snooker is becoming more popular. More and more people in the general public are learning about and starting to pay attention to the sport of snooker.



**Fig.3** Categorizing players by nationality



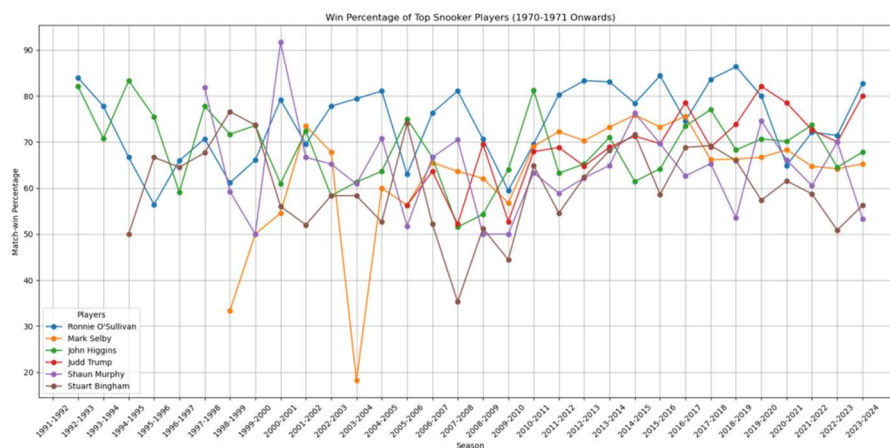
**Fig. 4** Categorizing players by nationality

From Fig.1 and Fig.2, it is clear that the vast majority of snooker players are from Europe, with the largest percentage of players from the UK, over fifteen percent. Sixty-three countries have less than one percent of players. But at the same time snooker has a rapidly expanding market in China. More and more tournaments are attracting Chinese spectators. This fragmentation means that snooker is currently a recreational sport, rather than a fully-fledged sport with a sophisticated training system. Therefore, this article addresses player development in terms of both the training of players during their teenage years and the availability of tournaments. (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4)

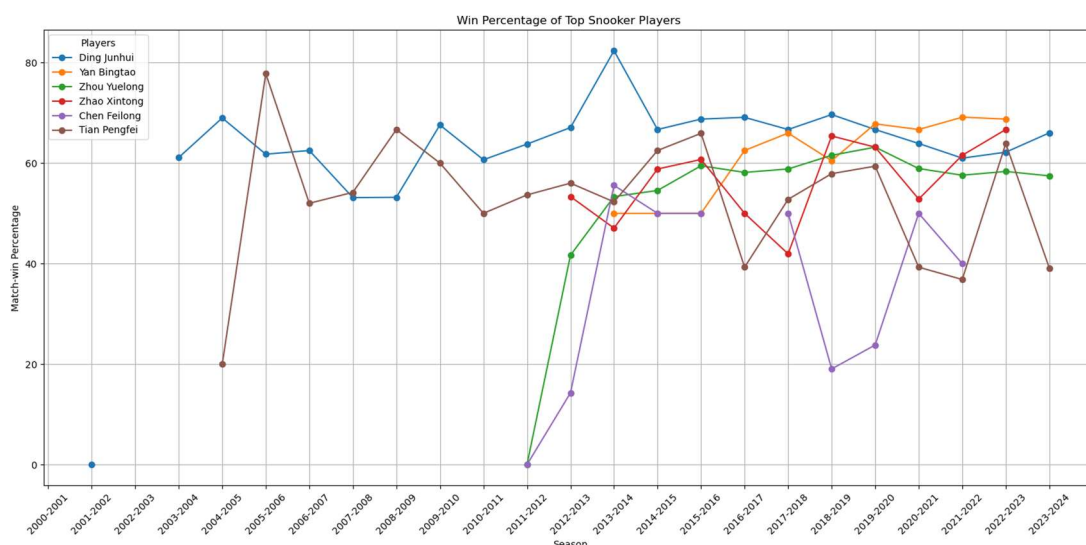
### 3. RESULT

#### 3.1. Comparing the Top Snooker Players in China and the World

First of all, is it possible that Snooker is like sprinting, where specific groups of people have an advantage because of genetics. By comparing the win rates of the top all-rounders in and out of Noe, this post argues that Snooker does not have an advantageous crowd.



**Fig. 5** Season Winning Percentage of some Top Non-Chinese Players



**Fig. 6** Season Winning Percentage of some Top Chinese Players

The graph (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6) shows that some of China's top players have shorter careers compared to their foreign counterparts. This has a lot to do with the late development of snooker in China and the ability of individuals. While overall Chinese players don't win as much as their Western counterparts, some of them have almost the same winning percentage as their European counterparts. This means that it must not be the talent that is the cause. The reason is that not enough players are being discovered, and a smaller player pool means that there are very few players who have talent and have discovered it. This problem will gradually be solved as snooker continues to become more popular. Even now, young snooker players such as Si Jiahui, Zhao Xintong and others have taken the lead of the younger generation of Chinese snooker

### **3.2. Youth Sports Training in China**

Youth sports training in China is characterized by a high degree of centralization and is tied to general education. With government support, many sports have a complete talent selection mechanism and training process. At the same time, there are sports schools to provide more professional guidance.

China recently employed a structured and training approach, providing the facilities, funding, and support systems for all players in the country. The research indicated that Chinese training centers often have more extensive resources and government support, which allows for more comprehensive training programs (Yang et al., 2024). The benefits and drawbacks of such centralized nature is well exemplified in two sports, basketball and table tennis.

#### **Basketball:**

Basketball has grown significantly in China. It has much larger and more sophisticated talent pools and initiatives such as the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) league. Also, its development is heavily influenced by government rather than local clubs. Basketball training is incorporated into the physical education curriculum in China at youth level, and players may be selected to join the youth teams of CBA or professional sports school (Chen, 2024). Since Yao Ming took over the CBA, there have been numerous reforms. However, the training system in China is highly centralized and need to concede to cultural education, which limited the flexibility of training and cause insufficient personal development (Shang & Yang, 2022). In contrast, American basketball system prioritizes individual skill training alongside tactical and physical conditioning from an early age (Chen, 2024). Thus Chinese players often lag behind their American counterparts in individual competencies (Shang & Yang, 2022).

One solution is integrating a similar model used in United States. Colleges can serve as venues for nurturing players and provide more personalized coaching such as physical conditioning and psychological preparation (Chen, 2024). In addition, China's selection process remains narrow and heavily relies on several main institutions, and that limits the pathway for talents entering the professional leagues (Bonal et al., 2020).

#### **Table Tennis:**

Table tennis has seen great success in China, and that success can be contributed to the youth training system in China. Chen et al. (2024) indicates that the systematic incorporation of table tennis into China's educational curriculum creates a pipeline for nurturing young talents. Their results also emphasize the individual technical training such as hitting movement, biomechanical efficiency, and precision ensure young players master the sport from early ages.

Liting et al. (2020) highlight that the integration of sport with national pride fosters an environment where table tennis becomes a source of national identity rather than a game. That partly explain why European players dominate Snooker: Snooker is also a national pride for them.

Since almost all sports in China are combined with education and are highly centralized, Snooker could likewise develop a similar approach to early screening and training during youth. And to sum

up, customized training is essential for both collective and individual sports. This type of training can be borrowed from European countries, which focus on motor control, cognitive training, and long hours of practice

### 3.3. Comparing Junior Competitions in China and Abroad

**Table 4.** Number of participants in some international tournaments that are exclusively open to youth

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
WSF Junior Championship			67	31	76
Asian Under-21 Championship				19	21
European Championships-Under 21	92	78	77	95	85
English Under-21 Championship	51		50	30	33

China also has domestic tournaments that are open to young players. The CBSA China Youth Snooker Series is one of those tournaments in China that is open to local youth (2023 CBSA China Snooker Junior Series “The Count” Cup Dongguan Open in Changping\_Guangdong Province\_Events\_Development, n.d.). The 2023 CBSA series in Changping featured 76 youth players, while the 2024 tournament featured 98 players(Snooker Junior Championship in Changping: Dongguan players won the national youth group, junior group champion, n.d.). Compared to the European Championships-Under 21, which was held in the UK in the same year, the number of people competing was not much different. There are no fewer Chinese players competing at the national level than there are in the UK. However, the vast majority of them are not able to participate in international professional tournaments. This is because, despite similar numbers, the players competing in the UK National Level Championships are selected locally. China, on the other hand, is not.

#### 3.3.1. Snooker Tournaments at the Local Level in UK

In addition to the national junior competitions, there are also several local competitions in the UK. These tournaments are organized by various clubs and provide a good supply of young players for snooker.

**Table 5.** Some local snooker events in England that are open to teenager(EPSB, 2024)

Name	Date	Institutions
Club 147 Junior National Singles	September 8	Club 147, Leicester
Regional Qualifiers for the English Amateur Championship	September 28	Northern Snooker Centre, Leeds (North) Landywood Snooker Club, Walsall (Midlands) Frames Sports Bar, Coulsdon (South)
Race to the Crucible Series – Event 2	September 27-29	The Crucible Club
Northern Snooker Centre Local Events	Ongoing throughout the year	Northern Snooker Centre
Frames Sports Bar Local Competitions	Ongoing throughout the year	Frames Sports Bar



The matches organized by these clubs don't receive the same social attention as major tournaments, but they provide a competitive platform for youth from all areas of the country. The same goes for table tennis and basketball in China, with local tournaments in every province, city, and even district. These tournaments provide a platform and at the same time screen talents for national level competitions.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Snooker in China has become so popular that more and more viewers are starting to watch snooker matches, and some of snooker's major tournaments are also held in China. However, despite the fact that snooker is starting to gain popularity in China, Few players play professionally at the international level, suggesting that the development of the professional field has been delayed. To rapidly increase the professionalization of snooker in China, training and number of local tournaments need to be improved. First, a complete education system can be established by imitating basketball and table tennis. That will bring a larger talents pool and provide an opportunity for teenagers to discover their talents. However, it is important to focus on customized training for individual players rather than generalized training for every one. For tournaments, clubs around the country need to start organizing local tournaments to screen talent for more advanced events. Also, there can be provincial and municipal tournaments to select players for national and international competitions.

Future research could focus on individual examples. Examine in detail how top Chinese players like Ding Junhui received their early training and discuss the possibility of replicating the training journeys of these players

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bonal, J., Jiménez, S. L., & Lorenzo, A. (2020). The talent development pathway for elite basketball players in China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(5110). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17015110>.
- [2] Chen, J. (2024). Comparative analysis of basketball training systems in China and the United States: Implications for enhancing player development and competitive levels. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 4(3), 350-358.
- [3] Chen, Y., Li, L., & Li, X. (2024). Correlation analysis of structural characteristics of table tennis players' hitting movements and hitting effects based on data analysis. *Entertainment Computing*, 48, 100610. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.entcom.2023.100610>.
- [4] EPSB. (2024, May 23). EPSB | English Partnership for Snooker and Billiards. <https://www.epsb.co.uk/>.
- [5] Haigh, P. (2023, August 18). World Snooker Tour announce fourth event in China for this season. *Metro*. <https://metro.co.uk/2023/08/18/world-snooker-tour-announce-fourth-event-in-china-for-this-season-19357922/>.
- [6] Liting, Y. (2020). Sports education and nationalism in China: the case of table tennis. In *The Education University of Hong Kong*. <https://www.lib.eduhk.hk/pure-data/pub/202200719.pdf>.
- [7] Pattinson, T., Pattinson, T., & Pattinson, T. (2020, May 18). How the very British game of snooker has taken China by storm. *Focus - China Britain Business Council*. <https://focus.cbbc.org/snooker-in-china/>.
- [8] Shang, J., & Yang, H. (2022). Research on the problems existing in the development mode and the countermeasures of Chinese basketball. *Highlights in Business, Economics and Management*, 4(2022), 103-108.
- [9] Shanghai Masters 2023: Snooker's welcome return to China as Ronnie O'Sullivan set for long-awaited title defence - Eurosport. (2023, September 10). Eurosport. [https://www.eurosport.com/snooker/shanghai-masters/2023-2024/shanghai-masters-2023-snooker-set-for-welcome-return-to-china-as-ronnie-o-sullivan-set-for-long-awai\\_sto9791205/story.shtml](https://www.eurosport.com/snooker/shanghai-masters/2023-2024/shanghai-masters-2023-snooker-set-for-welcome-return-to-china-as-ronnie-o-sullivan-set-for-long-awai_sto9791205/story.shtml).
- [10] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (1998, July 20). Billiards | Definition, Games, Rules, & Facts. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/billiards>.
- [11] Yang, N., Espeso, L., & Sualog, N. (2024). Implementation of Off-Campus youth sports training under the background of "Double Reduction" Policy. *JPAIR Multidisciplinary Research*, 55(1), 22-53. <https://doi.org/10.7719/jpair.v55i1.409>.
- [12] Chinese Billiards Association. (n.d.). <http://www.cbsa.org.cn/#/>.