



IMPLICATIONS OF THE BELT AND ROAD ACTION PROGRAM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPORTS TOURISM -- CHINA AND UZBEKISTAN

Qiao Jianguo

*PhD student of University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Uzbekistan
Jining Normal University*

ABSTRACT

China and Uzbekistan are both part of the ancient civilization of the Silk Road, and both countries have rich deposits in history, culture and sports tourism resources. In the new era, China and Uzbekistan are supposed to engage in constructive sports cultural exchanges and cooperation on the basis of the Belt and Road Initiative, exploring the potential of sports tourism cooperation and opening up new fields of economic cooperation actively. More significantly, China and Uzbekistan should take the development of sports tourism industry as a breakthrough to cultivate new points of growth in their own economies, thus enhancing the comprehensive level of sports cultural exchange and economic cooperation, and ultimately becoming the epitome of international cooperation in sports tourism for the countries along the Belt and Road. In this process, the exchanges and collisions of different cultures fully practiced, the theory of people-to-people and industry-to-industry sufficiently interpreted, the Belt and Road has provided a long-lasting driving force for the benefit of the people of all countries.

KEY WORDS: *Belt and Road; sports tourism industry; China; Uzbekistan; friendship cities*

INTRODUCTION

The Belt and Road Sports Tourism Development Action Program (hereinafter referred to as the “Program”) [1] points out that sports tourism is an emerging industrial form of in-depth integration of the sports industry and tourism industry. It is of great significance for exploiting the sports resources intensively, excavating the potential of the sports industry, and promoting long-term and sustainable development. Then, the integration of national fitness and health for all will be realized gradually. What’s more, a new impetus for sports economics will be fostered. Countries and regions along the Belt and Road have rich resources and great potential in sports tourism. At present, China is vigorously encouraging and supporting the tertiary industry represented by the sports industry, tourism industry and digital economy. Considering region and topography, different regions take appropriate measures to develop the sports industry and sports resources, to explore the potential and to promote the long-term and sustainable development of the sports industry. Thus the structure of economic development is optimized, and the new direction of China’s economic development is to cultivate a new impetus for economic development.

1. Connotation and international development of the Belt and Road Action Program for the Development of Sports Tourism

First of all, connotation of the Program

In the spirit of peaceful cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and appreciation, and mutual benefit and win-win situation, China combines the development of sports tourism with the overall strategy of the Belt and Road, and jointly creates sports tourism products with the characteristics of the Silk Road to improve the level of international sports tourism cooperation. This Program highlights the guiding role of the overall strategy of the Belt and Road, which plays a significant role in the consolidation, expansion and extension of the Silk Road Economic Belt, and furthermore, fully ensures the directionality of the Belt and Road international cooperation in sports tourism. The development results are tested through the action objectives to ensure that they develop in the right direction and promote the economic and cultural prosperity of all countries.

Sports tourism is a significant part of the Belt and Road. China and the countries along the route have jointly created sports tourism products with the characteristics of the Silk Road, highlighting the uniqueness and complementarity in the process of cooperation, so as to improve the level of international sports tourism cooperation. To create the Belt and Road international sports tourism belt, China and countries along the route jointly strengthen the interaction and supply of sports tourism.



Secondly, international development of the Program

China proposes to carry out sports tourism cooperation abroad with countries along the ancient Silk Road in Asia and Europe, which opens up to Africa, Latin America and other regions, forming an open and win-win model. Belt and Road is a long-term development for China to promote the Silk Road Economic Belt, widely carried out sports tourism cooperation to consolidate and develop the economic results. Meanwhile, the Belt and Road advocates an open, inclusive and win-win development model. Other countries are overwhelmed to integrate into the construction and cooperation of the Silk Road Economic Belt. As well as it opens up to the vast areas of Africa, Latin America and other regions, so as to consolidate and develop economic cooperation in a wide range of the world.

China advocates the active cultivation of the sports tourism market and the formation of a number of high-quality sports tourism events, special programs, competitive enterprises and well-known sports tourism places in the relevant regions of the Belt and Road. Through all-round exchanges and interactions in sports tourism, it will promote policy communication, industrial interoperability and people-to-people exchanges, making sports tourism a highlight of openness and cooperation within the Belt and Road regions.

The Program advocates the development of international sports events in the countries along the route and in the regions along the domestic route, including marathons, cycling, aquatic sports, outdoor challenges, rock-climbing, e-competition, ice and snow movement, automobile and motorcycle, air sports, and orienteering. They are extremely attractive to fitness groups, outdoor sports enthusiasts and young people, which effectively promotes friendly exchanges among people. The host country can display the images of the city and the country, enhancing the visibility, and promoting the economic development.

Moreover, the Program advocates to perform and promote ethnic sports tourism activities such as taijiquan, wushu, dragon dance, lion dance, dragon boat, archery, wrestling and equestrianism along the Belt and Road. This Program encourages sports tourism events with common ethnic characteristics, which cooperate with the countries along the routes. For example, most of the Central Asian countries are nomadic in history and have a natural connection with China in history and geography. There is a deep connection between the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Central Asia and China. Therefore, China and Central Asia countries should give full play to the geographical and ethnic advantages to carry out cooperation in a wide range. Traditional sports, such as archery, national wrestling, horse racing and wrestling, and girls-chasing games, which develop jointly with Central Asia, should be held regularly to promote sports cultural exchanges and cooperation with Central Asia [2].

The Belt and Road sports tourism industry can not only enhance the economic development level of the countries along the route but also effectively drive the sports industry, tourism industry and related industries in their own countries. It is of practical significance to promote mutual understanding among the people of the countries along the route, and improve the level of exchanges and cooperation in the humanities fields of the Belt and Road. Therefore, both China and Uzbekistan should seize the opportunities brought by the Belt and Road to actively expand in-depth exchanges in sports tourism and carry out in-depth communication and cooperation, so as to lay a foundation for the future development of the sports industry in both countries.

2. Uzbekistan and The Belt and Road Action Program for the Development of Sports Tourism

As Uzbekistan is an important country along the Silk Road, China has always attached great importance to the treaty of good neighborliness and friendship with Uzbekistan based on mutual respect, tolerance and win-win cooperation. The development of friendly relations between Uzbekistan and China, which will boost economic development in Uzbekistan, can serve as a good model for the development of the Silk Road Economic Belt, meanwhile, Uzbekistan's friendly cooperation with China is all-encompassing and multilayered. Sports, as a universal means of international exchange, can provide a solid basis for the further development of cultural and educational exchanges. China has made a significant contribution to the development of international sports, with its advantageous sports on the international sports stage and its excellent sports development base and training experience. Similarly, Uzbekistan, as a Central Asian sports powerhouse, has always attached great importance to the development of sports programs and status in the international arena. And, it has rich experience in the development of wrestling, gymnastics, football, etc. [3]. Therefore, extensive sports exchanges and cooperation between China and Uzbekistan can give full play to their respective advantages and draw on each other's strengths, which is of great significance in optimizing the structure of sports programs, enhancing the status of international sports, and promoting sports industry in the two countries.

China actively supports the mechanisms for international exchanges and cooperation in sports tourism in regions along the routes by making use of platforms such as sister cities. "Sister city" usually refers to a bilateral friendship and cooperative relationship between two cities in different countries, which is approved by the authorized professional



management agencies of the governments of both countries or by the national parliaments. In Western countries, it is generally called “Brother City”, “Sister City” or “Twin City” [4]. The sister-city relationship can enhance the friendship between the people of the two countries. The cities learn from each other’s experience in urban construction and development and carry out substantive exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, education, culture, sports, environmental protection and human resources, so as to promote economic and social prosperity and development of the cities. “Sister City” is the implementation and extension of friendly cooperation between countries, which can put the economic and trade, humanities and education agreements signed between countries into practice, and promote the friendly relations between the people of the two countries. The establishment of sister city is an important way for people-to-people and humanities exchanges and cooperation under the Belt and Road.

At present, there are many pairs of sister-cities between China and other countries along the Silk Road. For instance, China has established sister-city relationship with Uzbekistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and many other countries. On December 15th, 1994, the city of Tashkent, Uzbekistan, established sister-city relationship with Shanghai for the first time.

In September 2022, Chongqing and Tashkent Oblast, Uzbekistan signed an agreement on the establishment of f sister-city relationship. The two cities will further strengthen communication and cooperation in the fields of economy and trade, tourism, science and technology, culture, education, sports, health, etc., and endeavor to create new highlights of cooperation between China and Uzbekistan. [5]

In February 2023, Shaanxi Province and Syr Darya Oblast, Uzbekistan signed a memorandum on the development of friendly and cooperative relationship in Xi’an. China hoped to work with Syr Darya Oblast to earnestly implement the consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries. China also hoped to continuously deepen cooperation in agriculture, economy and trade, education and other fields, to further strengthen exchanges between local governments, and to contribute to the continued forward development of China-Uzbekistan relations. [6]

In May 2023, Sichuan Province and Samarkand Oblast signed a memorandum on friendly provincial and state relationship in Chengdu. China expresses its hope that the two sides would earnestly implement the consensus reached by the two leaders of state at the China-Central Asia Summit. The two sides should endeavor to strengthen the construction of sister cities and set up a multi-level platform for government exchanges and cooperation. Friendly relations with long-lasting vitality need to be sustained through the promotion of chartered tourism flights, two-way tourism cooperation, as well as tapping the potential for cooperation in the fields of education and scientific research. Uzbekistan expresses the hope for in-depth collaboration in the fields of green new energy, tourism, smart city construction, etc. Through the creation of industrial parks and other ways, Uzbekistan welcomes more Sichuan enterprises to Samarkand region to invest and achieve mutual benefit and win-win development, and the friendly relationship could constantly move to a new level. [7]

Compared with developed countries such as Europe, America, Japan and South Korea, the number of sister cities between China and other countries along the Belt and Road, is relatively small, indicating that the level of construction and cooperation of sister cities is still in the primary stage and that there is a huge space for development. The development and construction of sports tourism cities not only can show the national style and international image to the world but also convey the voice of peace and friendship. Meanwhile, the process can also push forward the construction, renovation and upgrading of the sports infrastructure of each country and city, to provide people with a good place of sports, so as to improve the quality of the overall health.

As one of the important measures for the sustainable development of sports tourism along the Belt and Road, the construction of sports tourism cities is related to the long-term development of sports tourism cooperation. Therefore, based on establishing the Silk Road Economic Belt, efforts should be made to strengthen the construction of sister cities along the Belt and Road. Sister city relationship with countries along the route are encouraged to be established to promote the construction of sports tourism nodes and to gradually build the mechanism of international exchanges and cooperation in sports tourism.

3. Implications of the Belt and Road Action Program for the Development of Sport Tourism

As an important initiative for the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative of people-to-people and industry-to-industry exchanges provides a direction for the exchanges in sports culture and international cooperation in sports tourism among countries along the Silk Road Economic Belt. Both important countries along the Silk Road, China and Uzbekistan should actively play their roles and take the Program as the focus of future international cooperation in sports tourism. Both should give full play to the leading, guiding and coordinating role, and provide guarantee for



the sports tourism cooperation between the two countries. It is of great importance to highlight the economic driving role of the sports tourism industry and achieve mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. Both should gradually strengthen the manufacturing and layout of sports tourism equipment, and promote the transformation and upgrading of the sports manufacturing industry. At last, the intellectual construction of sports tourism should be promoted, providing intellectual support for the development of sports tourism.

Firstly, play a leading role between the two countries to provide a solid guarantee for sports tourism cooperation

On the basis of policy support, the governments, sports organizations and industry associations of the two countries put forward specific support and incentive policies for the development of sports tourism. Then, the top priority is tournament support. In the process of sports tourism development, it is of significance to organize regular sports events, gradually form fixed competition sites centered on sports tourism cities, expand the scale of competitions and the amount of incentives to attract the world's top athletes to participate in the events, forming a good brand effect. At last, publicity support. Good and positive publicity effect can ensure the smooth progress of sports tourism construction.

Secondly, highlight the economic driving role of the sports tourism industry to achieve mutual benefits and win-win cooperation

To begin with, key sports tourism events are an important carrier for the development of sports tourism. The holding of sports tourism events can form a normalized and scaled effect, allowing the general public to gradually transition from understanding to familiarity, publicizing and shaping the image of sports tourism culture. Through the mass media, people can be fully aware of the special sports tourism culture of the countries along the route, and rapidly arouse awareness to extend the influence with key events.

Moreover, it is necessary to launch special and leisure sports tourism projects. The two countries could screen out the sports tourism projects with high safety, popularity and recognition, and combine the regional characteristics and culture, so as to attract the general public with the unique culture and characteristic. It is necessary to strengthen the attention of young groups to these projects, so as to provide a solid foundation for the development of the Belt and Road sports and cultural exchanges.

Above all, there is a need to strengthen the construction of key sports tourism nodes. China proposes to focus on the developing of 20 sports tourism cities in open border areas overlapping with the Belt and Road, and in the model areas for all-area tourism along the routes with a good foundation for sports tourism. Through policy support, tournament support and publicity support, etc., it will be cultivated into important nodes of the Belt and Road sports tourism belt, and the proportion of sports tourism bases in the sports industry bases will be increased. China and Uzbekistan give full play to the driving and radiating role of the important nodes, to actively create an all-area tourism demonstration zones, in which the countries and regions along the route will be able to benefit from the development of sports tourism. In this process, the important nodes can lead and drive the construction around the nodes, forming a demonstration effect and accelerating the comprehensive development of the sports tourism industry.

Thirdly, strengthen the sports tourism equipment manufacturing and layout, and promote the transformation and upgrading of the sports manufacturing industry

First of all, both China and Uzbekistan can formulate the pivotal development catalog of sports tourism equipment, focus on fostering multiple sports tourism equipment manufacturing bases in the countries and regions along the route, supporting qualified enterprises to build corresponding parks in the countries along the route, and reinforcing innovation and research and development. The formation and development of sports tourism industry cannot be separated from the research, development and manufacture of sports tourism equipment. Therefore, it's necessary to put forward the primary content for sports equipment, focusing on cultivating sports tourism equipment manufacturing bases, and constructing sports tourism equipment industrial parks in relevant countries and regions along the route. It can not only improve the participation and cooperation level of sports tourism in the countries along the route, provide a large number of jobs, and reduce the cost of production, price and transport, but also indirectly enhance the level of basic manufacturing industry, strengthen the industrial manufacturing capacity and optimize the industrial capacity structure. The innovation, research and development of sports tourism equipment need to be strengthened, which is related to the international status of a country in the field of sports manufacturing. For example, Nike, Adidas, Mizuno, Asics, Columbia, Pathfinder, Li-Ning and other world brands with the unique R&D systems in the field of professional sports, could be sought-after by sportspeople in various countries.

Secondly, various kinds of professional exhibitions of sports tourism equipment should be held, so as to enhance the influence of the China International Sporting Goods Fair. In the International Tourism Commodity Expo,



there should be a special zone for sports tourism equipment. Based on strengthening the innovation and R&D of sports tourism equipment, each country can research and develop sports tourism brand products with national characteristics according to their features. To establish brand reputation, highlighting the professionalism and strict quality control of products, the influence of the International Sporting Goods Exposition between China and the countries along the route by organizing professional exhibitions of sports tourism equipment will be improved. All countries usher the sports tourism equipment zone into the International Tourism Commodity Expo and gradually realize the in-depth integration of the sports and tourism industry.

In addition, during the process of promoting the standardized construction of sports tourism, all countries should summarize the successful experiences. What's more, it is indispensable to organize the formulation and implementation of sports tourism-related standards, so that they can be gradually promoted in the countries and regions along the route. The long-term development of the Belt and Road sports tourism industry needs to take into full consideration the actual situation and needs of each country. On the basis of these considerations, all countries should cement the construction of sports tourism standardization, summing up successful experiences and promising development patterns. By recommending them to the countries and regions along the routes, the sharing of information on sports tourism could be realized, so as to propel the construction, popularization and promotion of the sports tourism standards.

Fourthly, promote the “intellectual” construction of sports tourism and provide “intellectual” support for sports tourism development.

First of all, the cultivation of sports tourism professionals is an important part of international exchanges and cooperation in sports tourism of the Belt and Road, which is a significant guarantee for its long-term and sustainable development, and requires the in-depth participation of sports, physical education and tourism majors in higher education institutions of various countries. Thus sports tourism major is advocated to be set up in sports colleges and tourism colleges. These colleges should formulate training programs, ensure the quality of teaching and talent training, and clarify the training objectives as well as the direction of future employment. In China, for example, the General Administration of Sports of China and the China National Tourism Administration have taken the lead in jointly guiding relevant institutions of higher learning or scientific research institutes to construct sports tourism research bases, which provides an effective guarantee for the cultivation of sports tourism professionals.

Secondly, countries and regions along the route could form an interdisciplinary and specialized national sports tourism think tank and form a talent pool of sports tourism experts. The national sports tourism think tank can provide intellectual resources and relevant decision-making advice for international cooperation in sports tourism, as well as formulate relevant policies to promote international exchanges and cooperation. The countries and regions along the Belt and Road could establish the talent pool of sports tourism experts, hold regular forums on international exchanges and cooperation in sports tourism, and summarize the results of the forums to reports on time. The results of the forums will be submitted to the relevant organizations as one of the important sources of decision-making advice on the cooperation of sports tourism along the Belt and Road.

In addition, another way is to actively organize the preparation of a series of teaching materials covering sports tourism, which will be made available on time to institutions of higher education with sports tourism majors, so as to strengthen the cultivation and construction of professional talents. Extensive sports tourism business training should be carried out to improve the quality of sports tourism services. And, it is necessary to form a professional and scientific sports tourism statistical system gradually, to measure the size of the market accurately, to provide accurate data for the relevant departments, so that regular reports on the development of sports tourism will be published in conjunction with the statistical data.

Conclusion

At present, China is creating and driving the Belt and Road international sports tourism belt with the good image and reputation of domestic sports tourism. By combining the development of sports tourism with the Belt and Road strategy, China is taking multiple measures at home and abroad to share the fruits of development and to promote the economic development of sports tourism in the countries along the Belt and Road for the benefit of the people of the countries along the route. For China and Uzbekistan, while taking advantage of the Belt and Road international cooperation, both should strive to strengthen their own sports tourism construction. Combined with the actual situation of their own development, China and Uzbekistan should comprehensively enhance sports tourism service supply from the political, economic, cultural, educational and other aspects. Both could optimize the allocation of resources and take the initiative to explore their own resources, to create new brands, to form sports tourism with distinctive features



and to improve the level of sports tourism services, so that the sports tourism crowd could feel humane, professional and characteristic services, and truly achieve long-term and sustainable development.

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