

“People-to-People Connectivity through Sports: A Study of China-Pakistan Relations under China’s Sports Policy Innovation

By

Li Xiaohui

PhD Scholar, Department of History and Pakistan,
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Prof. Dr. Mahboob Hussain

Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Abstract

This article examines the evolving role of sports as a key instrument of people-to-people connectivity within the broader framework of China’s sports policy innovation and the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic partnership. It analyzes China’s shift from infrastructure-centered sports development to international cooperation, highlighting how sports have become an effective medium of soft power and cultural diplomacy. The study explores policies supporting bilateral sports collaboration, talent development mechanisms, Confucius Institutes’ role in promoting traditional martial arts, and case studies including Pakistan’s participation in the 2025 Asian Winter Games. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the article evaluates current exchange mechanisms, educational cooperation, and media dissemination, offering policy recommendations for institutionalizing sports collaboration under the Belt and Road Initiative. The findings demonstrate that sports exchanges not only strengthen mutual understanding but also provide sustainable frameworks for enhancing cultural identity and diplomatic engagement between China and Pakistan.

Key Words

China-Pakistan relations, sports diplomacy, Belt and Road Initiative, people-to-people connectivity, sports policy innovation, educational cooperation

Introduction

With the sustained enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and steady economic growth, sports, as a vital component of national public goods and soft power, are evolving into a significant platform for cultural diplomacy and international cooperation. According to a survey data, the sports participation rate in China reached 49.6% in 2024, marking an 18.7 percentage-point increase from

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2018¹. In 2023 the total output of the sports industry reached 3.6741 trillion yuan, with an added value of 1.4915 trillion-yuan, accounting for 1.15% of the country's GDP². These figures demonstrate China's remarkable achievements in both mass sports participation and the systematic advancement of sports industrialization. Against this backdrop, China's sports policies have gradually shifted from infrastructure development to industrial growth, from competitive success to international collaboration, reflecting a multidimensional development approach centered on public welfare, industrial guidance, and global expansion. Sports are no longer merely competitive activities but have become a crucial medium for cultural dissemination, technological cooperation, education, and public diplomacy. Under the guidance of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, sports have been incorporated into national strategic planning as a novel form of cross-border cultural communication and people-to-people connectivity. As an all-weather strategic cooperative partner of China, Pakistan has engaged in deep collaboration with China in economic, security, and educational domains, with sports emerging as a new highlight in bilateral cooperation. In 2024, China and Pakistan signed their first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Sports Cooperation, outlining joint efforts in competitive training, sports education, and youth exchange programs. As a key component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), sports cooperation contributes to fostering mutual understanding and identity between the two nations.

Building on the foregoing, this study is framed by a set of interlinked research questions that seek to capture both policy dynamics and practical outcomes of China–Pakistan sports cooperation. Primarily, it asks how China's recent sports policy innovations have shaped the practice and scope of sports diplomacy and people-to-people connectivity within the China–Pakistan partnership. It also examines the specific contributions of sports education, talent cultivation programs, and cultural exchanges to the deepening of bilateral ties under the Belt and Road

¹ National Bureau of Statistics, *Time Spent on Online Activities and Fitness Grows Among Chinese Residents*, English News Service, October 31, 2024.

² National Bureau of Statistics and General Administration of Sport of China, *Announcement on the Total Scale and Value-Added Data of China's Sports Industry in 2023*, December 31, 2024.

framework. Further, the research investigates the principal mechanisms that sustain current cooperation—alongside the principal challenges and emergent opportunities—particularly in the domains of event exchanges, youth programs, and media communication. Finally, the study considers how institutional arrangements and educational pathways can be optimized to promote more sustainable and mutually beneficial sports collaboration in the future.

This study also examines China-Pakistan sports and people-to-people exchange within the framework of China’s sports policy innovation, carrying multiple significant implications: 1. It enriches soft power theory and research on sports public diplomacy, positioning sports as a critical dimension of national cultural dissemination and enhancing the understanding of sports as a soft power vehicle. 2. It provides a model for sports cooperation mechanisms under the BRI framework, offering valuable policy insights. 3. By leveraging the deepening China-Pakistan relationship, it explores sports as a nexus for cultural and educational collaboration, contributing positively to Eurasian people-to-people connectivity.

1. Innovation and External Expansion of China’s Sports Policies

1.1 National Strategic Dimensions of Sports Policy Innovation

Since the enactment of the Sports Law of China (2009), the government has explicitly promoted a people-centered approach to sports development³, emphasizing the coordinated advancement of mass fitness and competitive sports. The Healthy China 2030 initiative further integrated national fitness into the state strategy⁴, setting clear objectives for infrastructure, health education, and public space allocation. By the end of 2023, China had constructed approximately 4,592,700 sports venues, covering a total area of 407.1 million square meters, with a per capita sports area of 2.89 square meters, surpassing the 14th Five-Year Plan

³ Law of the People’s Republic of China on Physical Culture and Sports, as amended 2009, Art. 2; and General Administration of Sport of China (and authors), “Chinese Path to Sports Modernization: Fitness-for-All,” *Sustainability* 15, no. 5 (2023): 4203.

⁴ National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China, *Healthy China 2030: A Vision for Health and Wellness* (Beijing: National Health Commission, 2016), 12-13

People-to-People ... target of 2.6 square meters⁵. Public sports events attracted 718,300 participants across 246,000 competitions, benefiting around 400 million people. Additionally, 3.2 million social sports instructors and 65,900 registered sports organizations were established, achieving a service coverage rate of 2.28 per 1,000 people. These statistics demonstrate how policy adjustments have facilitated a shift from "accessible venues and organizations" to "sustained participation and tangible benefits, ensuring the institutional implementation of the national fitness strategy. At the policy level, China has adopted a categorized approach to key sports initiatives, such as the "Southward Expansion, Westward Extension, and Eastward Advancement" strategy for winter sports and the "Olympic Breakthrough Project" for summer sports, driving overall competitive sports advancement. At the 9th Asian Winter Games (2025), the Chinese delegation secured 85 medals, topping both the gold and overall medal tallies, showcasing the synergistic effects of systematic policy design and high-performance training mechanisms. China's sports policies are transitioning from domestically oriented to internationally collaborative, encouraging deeper engagement with global sports organizations to enhance participation in international rule-making and standard-setting. The "Going Global" strategy for sports has become a key platform for cultural exchange and diplomatic practice, particularly evident in co-hosting major international events and international sports aid programs.

1.2 External Expansion of Sports Policies and Synergies with China-Pakistan Cooperation

This study focuses on the development mechanisms and diplomatic functions of China-Pakistan sports and people-to-people exchange under the framework of sports policy innovation, exploring how policy innovations can facilitate bilateral sports collaboration to enhance national image-building, people-to-people connectivity, and regional security cooperation. As all-weather strategic partners, China and Pakistan have intensified sports interactions in recent years. The Ministry

⁵ General Administration of Sport of China, "2023 Nationwide Sports-Venue Statistics: 4,592,700 Venues, 4.071 billion m², 2.89 m² per Capita," *People's Daily Online*, March 29, 2024.

of Sports of Pakistan and the General Administration of Sport of China signed an MOU on Sports Cooperation, formalizing an exchange mechanism. This agreement, part of Pakistan's Sports Cooperation Agreement List, delineates cooperation areas such as youth exchange, sports education, and competitive training. A joint statement by the foreign ministries of both nations reaffirmed commitments to strengthening exchanges in culture, education, sports, and media, including inter-organizational competitions, mutual visits, joint training, and media collaboration. China's support for Pakistan in sports scholarship programs, coach training initiatives, and infrastructure development has further solidified long-term bilateral cooperation. Amid an increasingly complex global sports landscape, China continues to refine its international sports strategy, particularly in fostering localized and cooperative approaches with strategic partners in South Asia and the Middle East. Since the launch of the BRI, China's sports authorities have facilitated multilateral agreements and international cooperation mechanisms, contributing to cross-cultural communication, collaborative governance, and mutual trust⁶. These policy innovations reflect a multidimensional transition—from domestic construction to international outreach, from resource allocation to institutional alignment—laying a systematic foundation for analyzing and optimizing the China-Pakistan cooperation framework.

2 Foundations of Sports Cooperation Under the China-Pakistan "Ironclad" Relationship

2.1 Policy Support for Sports Cooperation in the Evolution of China-Pakistan Relations

As early as 1965, the Cultural Agreement signed between China and Pakistan proposed to promote personnel exchanges and deepen bilateral friendship. Subsequent documents, including the Joint Declaration on the Direction of Bilateral Cooperation (2003), the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of Cultural Centers (2010), and other related agreements, emphasized strengthening

⁶ Li Xiaohui and Mahboob Hussain, "Sino-Pakistani Sports and Cultural Cooperation under the 'Belt and Road' Initiative: Soft Connections and a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," *Annals of Human and Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2025): 731–742.

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educational collaboration to enhance mutual understanding between the two nations. With the deepening of bilateral cooperation, China-Pakistan educational exchanges have yielded significant achievements, playing a crucial role in consolidating friendship and fostering shared development. Since 2013, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has entered its second decade, facilitating extensive collaboration in energy, infrastructure, industrial cooperation, trade, the development of Gwadar Port, education, training, and cultural exchanges. The bilateral relationship has been elevated to an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, with cooperation expanding across multiple domains, embodying the friendship that is "higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the Arabian Sea." These developments have laid a solid foundation for educational cooperation between the two countries. Exchanges and collaboration in education are not only integral to CPEC but also an inevitable choice for promoting mutual development.

2.2 Policies for Cultivating Pakistani Sports Talents

Pakistan faces challenges such as insufficient basic education, weak educational infrastructure, low rural enrollment and academic performance, and structural imbalances in government education expenditure. China has been hosting Pakistani students since 1964. In 2005, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Pakistani Government Scholarship Program for Postgraduate Studies in China, signed between the China Scholarship Council (CSC) and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, established government scholarships for Pakistani students. Both the Chinese government and universities have continuously expanded scholarship quotas and diversified funding types, attracting an increasing number of Pakistani students to pursue advanced studies in China. Since the launch of CPEC, China-Pakistan educational cooperation has significantly alleviated structural imbalances in Pakistan's education system and enhanced its human capital. By the 2014–2015 fiscal year, Pakistan's literacy rate had risen to 60%, with a more balanced gender enrollment ratio. In recent years, the number of Pakistani students in China has steadily increased, fostering youth exchanges and cultivating a large pool of interdisciplinary talents. According to official data from China's Ministry of Education, Pakistani students in China numbered 13,360 in 2014 and rose to 28,023 by 2018, making Pakistan the third-largest source of international

students⁷. By 2025, the figure exceeded 28,000, with 7,034 recipients of government scholarships⁸. While most students pursued majors such as Chinese language, engineering, medicine, and economics, only 0.93% were enrolled in education-related fields, with merely 467 specializing in sports (2010 data). Although the proportion of sports students remains low, international sports education exchanges are gradually gaining traction.

Chinese sports universities have expanded scholarship coverage for students from developing countries, promoting study-abroad programs to support outstanding international sports talents. Specifically, China has deepened the cultivation of Pakistani sports talents through multiple channels: 1. Targeted Training Programs – Prestigious institutions such as Beijing Sport University and Shanghai University of Sport have launched specialized master’s programs for Pakistani students, covering sports training, sports management, and sports rehabilitation, with curricula tailored to Pakistan’s developmental needs. 2. Short-Term Training and Exchange Programs – The General Administration of Sport of China and the Ministry of Education regularly organize workshops and exchange programs for Pakistani coaches, referees, and sports administrators, sharing expertise in competitive sports training systems, event management, and anti-doping measures. 3. Infrastructure Aid and Technical Support – China has assisted in upgrading sports facilities in Pakistan (e.g., the Lahore Sports Center renovation project) while dispatching expert teams to provide on-site training, enhancing scientific training methodologies, and operational management capabilities. These initiatives have effectively strengthened Pakistan’s sports talent pool, contributing to the advancement of competitive sports and sustainable sports industry development. According to CSC data, although sports-related disciplines remain less popular than engineering or medicine among Pakistani students in China, the proportion has shown steady growth, reaching approximately 4.5% in the 2022–2023 academic year—a positive shift driven by policy incentives. Some returning graduates, such as athletics coach Muhammad Qasim and badminton player Sana Mirza, who received systematic training in China, have become key figures in promoting sports development and

⁷ Over 28,000 Pakistanis Studying in China,” *The Express Tribune*, April 14, 2019.

⁸ China Becomes Top Education Destination for Pakistanis as US Tightens Visa Policies,” *Pakistan Today*, April 15, 2025.

People-to-People ... bilateral exchanges, demonstrating the long-term impact of talent cultivation policies. This multi-tiered system, spanning basic education to high-level professional training, is gradually building a diverse talent pipeline for China-Pakistan sports cooperation.

2.3 Policy Synergy Under the All-Weather Strategic Partnership

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Universities Consortium (CPEC-UC), established in 2017 integrates resources from educational and research institutions in both countries to facilitate joint research projects, talent exchanges, and policy coordination. While its primary focus remains energy and infrastructure, the consortium's framework can extend to sports research, sports culture dissemination, and sports management, broadening the scope of cooperation. Private enterprises have also contributed to supporting Pakistani students. For instance, the Road and Bridge Corporation and Pakistan's HEC launched the "Hundred Talents Scholarship Program" funding outstanding graduates, officials, and technicians to study in China, alleviating financial burdens and cultivating professionals for CPEC. Many beneficiaries have since returned to Pakistan, actively contributing to national development. In August 2017, leading business schools from both nations formed the CPEC Business Schools Alliance, which later expanded into the CPEC Universities Consortium⁹. The HEC of Pakistan introduced funding programs to support academic collaboration, enabling joint research to address challenges in CPEC implementation. Studies conducted by the consortium in energy, infrastructure, and industrial cooperation have facilitated enterprise partnerships, playing a vital role in advancing CPEC's objectives.

3 Current Status and Case Studies of Sports-Related People-to-People Exchanges Between China and Pakistan

⁹ CPEC Consortium of Business Schools launched," The News International, August 31, 2017.

3.1 Sports Event Cooperation and Exchange Practices

The official national language of Pakistan is Urdu. Many Chinese universities have established Urdu language programs, and with the deepening of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) construction, interactions between the peoples of China and Pakistan have become increasingly frequent¹⁰. As a bridge for communication, language education has received significant attention from both governments. Currently, an increasing number of Chinese universities offer Urdu programs, including Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Shanghai International Studies University, Xi'an International Studies University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Xinjiang Normal University, and Tarim University. These institutions have cultivated a large number of talents for China-Pakistan cultural exchanges, playing a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations. Pakistan has established five Confucius Institutes, including the Confucius Institute at the University of Islamabad, the Confucius Institute at the University of Punjab, the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi, the Confucius Institute at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad, and the Confucius Institute at the University of Sargodha¹¹. These institutes provide Chinese language education and actively organize cultural activities, serving as platforms for China-Pakistan cultural exchanges. Both countries have also established research centers to promote academic collaboration. As of 2022, 15 Chinese universities have set up Pakistan-related research centers, including Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Sichuan University, China University of Geosciences (Wuhan), Kashgar University, Hongde College of Inner Mongolia Normal University, Hebei Normal University, South China University of Technology, Jiangsu Normal University, China West Normal University, Beijing Technology and Business University, Yunnan Minzu University, Jiangxi University of Science and Technology, and the South and

¹⁰ *Pak-China Joint Action Plan 2025-2029*, "Gwadar Pro, September 13, 2025.

¹¹ Bushra Hanif, "Current Scenario and Perspective of Teaching Chinese at Confucius Institutes in Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 11, no. 02 (2023).

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Southeast Asia Institute (Kunming)¹². These institutions conduct extensive research on Pakistan. Similarly, Pakistani universities and research institutions have established China-focused research centers, such as the Center of Excellence at Government College University (GCU, Lahore), the Research Center at the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, the Pakistan-China Institute, the Research Center at COMSATS University Islamabad, the Pakistan Research Center at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), the Research Center at the University of Peshawar, the Learning and Research Center at the University of Balochistan, and the Pakistan Institute at the University of Sargodha. These centers conduct research on CPEC development, China-Pakistan relations, culture, and Chinese language studies. Through academic research, seminars, training programs, and cultural exchange activities, these research centers strengthen cultural ties between China and Pakistan, contributing to the advancement of CPEC.

3.2 Case Study

Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sports cooperation between China and Pakistan has intensified. A notable recent example is the 2025 Asian Winter Games, held in Harbin from February 7 to 14. The event brought together 1,222 athletes from 34 countries/regions, featuring 11 major sports and 64 events, serving as a key platform for regional sports exchanges.

The Pakistani delegation consisted of two athletes: alpine skier Muhammad Karim (a three-time Winter Olympian and flag-bearer at the opening ceremony) and cross-country skier Muhammad Shabbir, accompanied by four officials. Although no medals were won, the delegation expressed satisfaction with the event's facilities and organization, expressing hopes for enhanced training cooperation in the future.

A heartwarming interaction occurred between the delegation and local Harbin elementary school students, who presented artwork featuring the flags of China and Pakistan, doves of peace, and snow-capped mountains, symbolizing bilateral

¹² Jun Tang, Yan Wang, and Xue Jiang, "A Survey Study of the Pakistan Study Centers of Chinese Universities under the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative," *Journal of Social Sciences and Economics* 3, no. 1 (2023): 20–37.

friendship and shared aspirations. This initiative stemmed from a school-organized BRI-themed cultural program.

Delegation leader Air Commodore Ashar Jamil added, “These drawings reflect the close ties between our nations... I am overwhelmed by this gesture... Pakistan loves China.”¹³

4 Analysis of China-Pakistan Sports Education Cooperation and Media Dissemination Mechanisms

4.1 China-Pakistan Interactions in Sports Education Cooperation

Education serves as a cornerstone for national rejuvenation and development. The educational collaboration between China and Pakistan holds profound significance in building a shared future for both nations. Given their geographical proximity, cultural similarities, and deep-rooted friendship, the two countries have maintained close cultural exchanges and extensive cooperation in education since establishing diplomatic relations. The strong governmental support for China-Pakistan educational collaboration has fostered a favorable policy environment, while the demand for multidisciplinary talent under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative has provided sustained momentum for this partnership. According to the latest data, Pakistan's population reached approximately 241.49 million by May 2023, ranking fifth globally, with nearly half comprising young individuals¹⁴. This sizable young workforce has attracted numerous foreign enterprises to Pakistan, increasing the demand for vocational and technical training. However, Pakistan faces challenges such as limited educational resources and an underdeveloped vocational training system. To address these gaps, the Tianjin Modern Vocational Technical College and the Punjab Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority jointly established the Luban Workshop in 2018. This initiative leverages Chinese educational resources to cultivate technical professionals in Pakistan while facilitating the adoption of Chinese educational models and equipment, thereby enhancing Pakistan's vocational training standards.

¹³ *Pakistan CDM Receives Surprise Gift from Harbin Schoolchildren,* Olympic Council of Asia, February 11, 2025.

¹⁴ Pakistan now the world's 5th most populous nation,” *DAWN*, December 1, 2025.

Furthermore, China and Pakistan co-founded the Tianjin Punjab Technical University in 2018¹⁵, offering undergraduate programs in mechanical engineering, automotive engineering, electrical engineering, and Chinese language (led by Tianjin University of Technology and Education), fashion design (Tianjin Polytechnic University), and architecture (Tianjin Chengjian University) for local students in Lahore. In 2023, the two nations collaborated to establish the Pakistan-China Vocational and Technical College, aiming to train professionals in port management, supply chain logistics, and maritime operations. Preliminary agreements were also reached on resource-sharing, student exchanges, and faculty training, promoting sustainable development in vocational education and elevating Pakistan's technical workforce. Additionally, a joint faculty training program was launched, enabling Pakistani educators to acquire advanced technical knowledge, management expertise, and insights into global trends through academic exchanges, thereby improving teaching quality and knowledge retention.

4.2 Interviews with Pakistani Students and Their Educational Experiences

Some Pakistani students in China reportedly participate in cultural and social activities on campus — including sports and volunteer events — which have been described as a way to foster intercultural understanding and integration¹⁶. Pakistani students have been involved in a variety of events, including volunteering for large international sporting events such as the 2025 Asian Winter Games, which symbolize the enduring friendship and cooperation between China and Pakistan. Such experiences not only enhance their personal growth but also underscore the importance of sports education in strengthening bilateral ties.

Media coverage of Pakistani students' experiences in China helps amplify public awareness of China-Pakistan educational achievements. Many Pakistani students are increasingly integrating into Chinese campus life, using language proficiency and sports-based cultural exchanges as key tools for fostering cross-cultural understanding. Participation in sports activities, such as campus football leagues,

¹⁵ *The Express Tribune*, “CM Inaugurates First-Ever Technical Varsity in Lahore,” March 24, 2018.

¹⁶ *China Is Now a Popular Destination for Pakistani Overseas Students*, “People’s Daily Online, May 26, 2018,

provides an opportunity to build friendships with Chinese peers, creating a dynamic platform for cultural exchange and collaboration.

Such experiences are frequently recognized for their role in enhancing cultural adaptability. According to the *Annual Report on International Students in China*, a significant percentage of Pakistani students attributed their enhanced cultural integration to socialization through sports. These embodied cultural exchanges, particularly those involving teamwork and sports activities, contribute to strengthening the relationship between China and Pakistan, turning sports facilities into key venues for bilateral camaraderie and collaboration.

4.3 Participation in Confucius Institutes and Traditional Martial Arts Programs

Pakistan currently hosts five Confucius Institutes¹⁷ which extend beyond language instruction to organize cultural festivals, martial arts workshops, and calligraphy activities, providing platforms for traditional sports education (e.g., Tai Chi, Wushu). These programs have gained popularity among Pakistani students, deepening their appreciation for Chinese physical culture.

In sports education collaboration, Confucius Institutes and martial arts curricula play a pivotal role. Partnerships with institutions like the Sindh Technical and Vocational Education Council have advanced student exchanges, corporate training for Belt and Road enterprises, and joint resource development. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in vocational education cover agriculture, AI, biomedicine, and civil engineering, fostering both sports and cultural integration. Martial arts programs go beyond foundational training by hosting annual cultural festivals and masterclasses. Collaborative efforts have also led to the development of bilingual digital resources, such as platforms that offer remote learning modules on martial arts techniques and their cultural context. Under supplementary agreements signed in 2023, martial arts were integrated into vocational curricula (e.g., fitness modules at Karachi Technical College) to enhance physical conditioning and intercultural adaptability.

¹⁷ Khuzaima Rehman, "China's Sharp Power: The Confucius Institutes in Pakistan," *Modern Diplomacy*, June 20, 2022.

5 Optimization and Prospects of China-Pakistan Sports Cultural Exchange Mechanisms

5.1 Institutionalized Cooperation Framework

To deepen sports education collaboration between China and Pakistan, the establishment of joint training centers and a Youth Sports Development Fund is proposed. The joint training centers would serve as platforms for professional development, facilitating experience-sharing and technical exchanges among sports educators. The Youth Sports Development Fund would support youth exchanges and talent cultivation in sports. Leveraging the infrastructure development model of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a China-Pakistan Winter Sports Joint Training Center could be established at winter sports bases. This center would provide systematic training for Pakistani athletes and coaches through specialized agreements enabling facility-sharing and technical integration. A "China-Pakistan Youth Sports Development Fund" could be established to support talent development, joint training camps, coach exchanges, and academic seminars. This fund would institutionalize financial support for bilateral sports exchanges, enhancing the sustainability and scalability of cooperation.

5.2 Multidimensional Cultural Exchange Pathways

Platform-based engagement is critical for deepening exchanges. Hosting events like the Beijing Olympics, Nanjing Youth Olympics, Hangzhou Asian Games, and world championships has not only showcased competitive achievements but also disseminated organizational standards, event culture, and institutional expertise. Emerging platforms such as the Arab Youth Sports Festival and Silk Road Sports Education Cooperation Week provide sustainable channels for cultural interaction.

Beyond competitions and education, media initiatives—including co-produced documentaries, films, and TV series—can enrich exchange formats. For instance, documentaries featuring Pakistani athletes like Karim, Shabbir, and Jamil could highlight their training and cultural experiences. These could be jointly produced with Pakistani media and broadcast via Confucius Institutes, university networks,

and public platforms to amplify sports diplomacy and cultural outreach. Traditional sports festivals (e.g., cricket, tai chi, martial arts, winter sports) and youth cultural events should be encouraged to foster grassroots connections.

5.3 Promotion Under the Belt and Road Initiative

The modular frameworks of joint training centers, youth funds, documentaries, and festivals are highly replicable and could serve as regional models for Belt and Road countries. Football tournaments like the "Belt and Road Cup" have already spurred cultural and sports collaboration. Pakistan's role as a major sports equipment manufacturer (e.g., \$10.7 million in basketballs, footballs, and volleyballs imported by China in 2024, a 6.68% year-on-year increase) opens opportunities for industrial cooperation¹⁸. The "Belt and Road Sports Tourism Development Initiative" promotes integrated sports-tourism-culture models, such as winter sports camps and training-themed tourism routes, creating a new cooperation paradigm.

6 Conclusions and Suggestions

6.1 Conclusions

This study demonstrates that sports have become an increasingly important vehicle of people-to-people connectivity within the evolving framework of China's sports policy innovation and the China–Pakistan all-weather strategic partnership. China's shift toward a people-centered, internationally oriented sports governance model—supported by national fitness strategies, talent-training mechanisms, and cross-border cooperation platforms—provides a strong institutional foundation for bilateral collaboration.

Against this backdrop, China–Pakistan sports exchanges have expanded from traditional cultural interactions to systematic cooperation encompassing sports education, training programs, winter sports development, and Confucius Institute–based martial arts promotion. The 2025 Harbin Asian Winter Games further

¹⁸ Pakistan's sports goods exports to China register increase in 2024," *The Nation*, January 1, 2025.

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illustrated how sports events can function as catalysts for interpersonal communication, symbolic diplomacy, and long-term institutional cooperation. Pakistani students and athletes in China increasingly act as cultural intermediaries, while media coverage amplifies the social resonance of these exchanges.

Overall, a multidimensional cooperation network—spanning policy coordination, talent development, educational collaboration, and media dissemination—has gradually taken shape. This network enhances mutual understanding, strengthens cultural identity, and enriches sports diplomacy research by demonstrating how sports can effectively bridge national narratives under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The China–Pakistan case thus offers a replicable model for cultivating sustainable people-to-people connectivity through sports.

6.2 Recommendations

- **Strengthen Institutional Coordination Mechanisms**
Establish a *China–Pakistan Sports Cooperation Council* jointly managed by national sports authorities. Its mandate should include planning bilateral exchange programs, coordinating joint training camps, overseeing youth exchanges, and monitoring implementation through five-year strategic plans. Clear performance indicators—such as the number of trained athletes, bilateral events organized, and media outputs produced—will ensure accountability and measurable outcomes.
- **Deepen Talent Development and Training Pathways**
Expand scholarship coverage for sports-related disciplines, including sports education, sports management, rehabilitation, and communication. Joint-degree programs between Chinese and Pakistani universities—especially within the CPEC University Consortium—should be promoted. A *China–Pakistan Youth Sports Development Fund* can support long- and short-term training programs, enabling Pakistani athletes and coaches to access China’s advanced facilities in Harbin, Yabuli, and other training hubs.
- **Enhance Local Capacity Building in Pakistan**
Following the model of Luban Workshops, establish specialized sports-technical training centers in Pakistan to build local capacity in coaching, facility maintenance, fitness instruction, and event management. These centers should

integrate Chinese expertise with Pakistan's local needs, ensuring sustainable skill transfer.

- **Expand Cultural and Media-Based Sports Diplomacy**
Co-produce documentaries, feature stories, and multimedia content highlighting sports exchanges, inspirational athletes (e.g., Karim, Shabbir), and student ambassadors. Dissemination through mainstream media, digital platforms, Confucius Institutes, and universities can broaden public participation and strengthen social recognition of bilateral sports cooperation.
- **Promote Integrated BRI-Based Exchange Platforms**
Utilize major events—such as the Hangzhou Asian Games, Silk Road Sports Education Cooperation Week, and youth sports festivals—to deepen cross-cultural interactions. Joint sports festivals combining cricket, martial arts, winter sports, and youth cultural events can foster grassroots engagement and community-level bonds.
- **Build a Replicable Regional Model**
The China–Pakistan experience—characterized by policy alignment, education-driven collaboration, and media-supported soft-power expansion—should be developed into a standardized cooperation framework for other BRI countries. Such a model could promote shared development by integrating competitive sports, cultural exchange, and industrial cooperation (e.g., Pakistan's sports-equipment manufacturing).

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