

## Ping Pong Diplomacy...53 years later.



No official American delegation had set foot in the People's Republic of China for 20 years. By 1971 both nations were looking for a way to open conversation with one another. Some evidence exists that secret communications were taking place, but the breakthrough came through a random encounter between two ping-pong players.

The 1971 World Table Tennis Championships that year were in Nagoya, Japan. A 19-year-old "hippie" named Glenn Cowan was on a shuttle bus which just happened to be transporting red-shirted Chinese players. To this somewhat cloistered group of players a shaggy-haired American was a new paradigm. But, the #1 ranked player, Zhuang Zedong reached across the aisle and shook Cowan's hand. Through an interpreter they visited. Zedong, understanding the power of gifts, handed the younger Cowan a silk-screen picture of China's Huangshan mountains. The next day Cowan returned the kindness by handing Zhuang a simple t-shirt with a peace symbol and the title of the Beatle's famous song "Let it Be."

Pictures of the exchange were taken. When those were shown to Chairman Mao he was quoted as saying: "Zhuang Zedong is not just a good table tennis player, he's also a good diplomat as well." More shocking was Mao's invitation to the USA table tennis players to make an all-expense visit to

China. With permission from the embassy granted, the team went. President Nixon stated, “I had never expected the China initiative would come to fruition in the form of a ping-pong team.”



This is the story as most often told. When W4A is hosting Chinese teams in Southern California, we often take them to the Nixon Presidential Library where an entire section is given to this historic event. All guests are familiar with this event, so the story is told in both countries.

The 1971 chance encounter was followed by a formal 15 player tour in April 1971, traveling in Guangzhou, Beijing, and Shanghai. They met with Premier Zhou Enlai. When Cowen asked Premier Zhou what he thought of the hippie movement, the Premier paused for a moment, then responded, “Youth wants to seek the truth and out of this search, various forms of change are bound to come forth. When we were young it was the same.”

Also, Chairman Mao noted, **“The little ball moves the big ball.”**

The ripple effect of Ping Pong diplomacy is unquestioned. The Chinese sent their teams to play in 8 cities. In 1972, Richard Nixon visited China calling it “the week which changed the world.” Relationships began to normalize.

More than 50 years later...

**Amity Foundation and Word4Asia are co-chairing the International Table Tennis Philanthropic Tournament in Nanjing, China.**

**Dates: October 19-20, 2024**

**Location: Olympic Sports Centre Stadium, 222 Jiangdon, Middle Road, Nanjing**



The agreed upon goal is to promote international sports and cultural exchanges to enhance the friendship between people of different countries. This will be competitive, but the ultimate goal will be philanthropic. All financial gains will promote education, social welfare, public health, community development, environmental protection, disaster relief and other undertakings.

We will share more later but if you believe you can field a high-level team for exhibition matches, please contact us. Or if you just love ping-pong and would enjoy this unique opportunity to play in China, please let us know. We will send you a detailed explanation with rules and an application form.

In 1971 it was a chance meeting of two players on a shuttle bus. 53 years later it is **philanthropically minded organizations and friends** joining hands to bring understanding, love, and peace to our world.