Confucian wisdom from sage of Swabia

Founder of Putzmeister tapped into ancient philosophy to build world-class business

By VINCENT FAN
vincentfan@chinadailyuk.com.cn

Wide-eyed students flocked around Karl Schlecht as he prepared to tuck into spring rolls and steamed buns after speaking at the opening of Tubingen University's China Center in Germany.

The food went untouched until the 83-year-old happened upon his son’s presence, posing for pictures with his wellwishers.

“I love Chinese food,” he says as he eventually heads for the buffet, which had been laid out for the 200 or so people invited to the event.

Spotted sported a bright-red tie, white shirt and double-breasted navy-blue suit, and wearing thin-rimmed glasses as he dismissed the students’ favorite grandpa than sage of Swabia, while Sany, the founder of Sany, a backyard soldering stick maker turned billionnaire entrepreneur.

Chinese entrepreneurs have exactly the same mentality, hopes and ambitions as us in the West. When you are successful at home, you want to go abroad to grow your business,” Schlecht says, punching the air with his fist.

If your eyes are wide open, you can learn a lot from others, including the Chinese. They are ambitious, innovative, smart and hardworking. In addition to his charitable causes, Schlecht now serves as an adviser to Sany’s chairman, once China’s richest man.

One of the first tips the German offered to Putzmeister’s new owner came from an unexpected source: Confucius. Years before the Sany deal, Schlecht, a self-taught philosopher, became fascinated with Confucianism, especially the notion of “Confucian entrepreneurship,” which calls for applying ancient Chinese wisdom to business practice.

According to the German businessman, Confucianism underlines essential elements of true entrepreneurship: trust, honesty, tolerance, love and responsibility. These are values he describes as the nuts and bolts of a global ethic for success, which he has championed.

After the takeover, Schlecht persuaded Liang to become a joint patron of the World Ethics Institute at Peking University. A few years earlier, Schlecht had financed a similar institution at Tubingen.

He now devotes most of his time to his charitable foundation, KSG, which has a long list of projects, including clean energy research and good leadership.

Schlecht says the China Center at Tubingen, which is 30 minutes’ drive from where he assembled his first mortar machine, was founded with an ideal: to make students aware of each other’s history and of the forces that propelled China to become the world’s second-largest economy within a generation.

And it seems age cannot slow him down. He usually rises the first morning with a 200-meter swim and then a workout on a rowing machine. Evenings find him helping his wife, Brigitte, make his favorite Swabian noodles or pizza before he retreats to his home office to “fantasize” about new projects.

A voracious reader, he goes to bed with a book. He was once offered to Putzmeister’s new owner as will others competing in a sport they dominate not only snooker, but also other sports within 10 to 15 years.

“Do I want to see the top 16 players all Chinese players? The system is there, if they are good enough, to do exactly that,” he says.

Jason Ferguson, chairman of the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association, says snooker was already huge in China.

“They’ve got 1,500 snooker clubs in Shanghai alone, as well as 1,200 in Beijing. These are huge numbers. In participation it is big, but in media and television it’s also very big.”

In addition to Ding, players such as Zhou Yuelong, Yan Bingtao and Zhao Xintong are likely to become a lot more familiar over the next decade, as will others competing in a sport that attracts 100 million TV viewers at home.

During this year’s final it was announced that the World Snooker Championship will stay in Sheffield until at least 2027. However, other major events will be held in China.

Ding, whose record at the World Championship was poor before this year, says: “Five years ago I reached the semi-finals, and this year I made it one step further. So maybe next time I’ll win. The experience is massive for my career. If I can stay playing like that then I will win more tournaments.”

“Some people in China will be disappointed, but I’m not disappointed in getting to the final,” he adds.

Seven-time world champion Stephen Hendry applauded Ding, saying he is at a different level from most others. “It’s been tough for him at times. Maybe he got bored at moments, but he looks as if he’s past that.”

By HECTOR NUNNS
For China Daily

China is set to play a dominant role in world snooker, the sport’s top officials have said after Ding Junhui recorded the best performance by an Asian player at a world title event.

The 29-year-old, who moved to the UK at age 15 to pursue his snooker dream, narrowly missed out on unseating Mark Selby from his world No 1 spot in a gripping final of the World Championship at Sheffield’s Crucible Theatre.

It was another landmark in a career in which Ding has served as China’s standard-bearer in a sport that has undergone a rapid growth of interest and participation. He has inspired a new wave of young players who aim to match his career haul of 11 ranking titles. Barry Hearn, the chairman of World Snooker, says the Chinese government is pouring investment into sport, which will help the country dominate not only snooker, but also other sports within 10 to 15 years.

“Do I want to see the top 16 players all Chinese players? The system is there, if they are good enough, to do exactly that,” he says.

Jason Ferguson, chairman of the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association, says snooker was already huge in China.

“They’ve got 1,500 snooker clubs in Shanghai alone, as well as 1,200 in Beijing. These are huge numbers. In participation it is big, but in media and television it’s also very big.”

In addition to Ding, players such as Zhou Yuelong, Yan Bingtao and Zhao Xintong are likely to become a lot more familiar over the next decade, as will others competing in a sport that attracts 100 million TV viewers at home.

During this year’s final it was announced that the World Snooker Championship will stay in Sheffield until at least 2027. However, other major events will be held in China.

Ding, whose record at the World Championship was poor before this year, says: “Five years ago I reached the semi-finals, and this year I made it one step further. So maybe next time I’ll win. The experience is massive for my career. If I can stay playing like that then I will win more tournaments.”

“Some people in China will be disappointed, but I’m not disappointed in getting to the final,” he adds.

Seven-time world champion Stephen Hendry applauded Ding, saying he is at a different level from most others. “It’s been tough for him at times. Maybe he got bored at moments, but he looks as if he’s past that.”