



## **Improving Intercultural Communication in Chinese Football Clubs: Reconceptualizing the Meaning of Cultural Hybridization, Glocalization, and Expatriating Football Players' Cultural Transition in China**

Yanying Chen

*Faculty of Sports and Exercise Science, Universiti Malaya  
College of Journalism and Communications, Shanghai Jian Qiao University*

Nor Eeza Zainal Abidin

*Faculty of Sports and Exercise Science, Universiti Malaya*

Mohd Salleh Aman

*Faculty of Sports and Exercise Science, Universiti Malaya*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

*The Chinese Football Reform and Development Program aims to increase the international competitiveness of men's national teams through cultural communication with Western countries. However, difficulties in developing such communication have come to light. This study uses semistructured interviews with 20 participants to explore ways to improve intercultural communication and expatriate football players' adaptation in China. The findings suggest that Chinese football clubs should provide instruction on Chinese language and culture, organize sports cultural exchange activities and psychological construction programs, and establish service systems for accompanying family members. This work challenges glocalization theory by highlighting the rejection of cultural homogenization and the uniqueness of local sports culture.*

**Keywords:** Intercultural communication, hybridization, glocalization, cultural transition, rejection of cultural homogenization

---

## INTRODUCTION

In the Chinese Football Reform and Development Program, the Chinese Communist Party aimed to “increase significantly the international competitiveness of the men's national team to reach the highest ranks globally through cultural communication with Western countries” (Chinese Football Association, 2016; Wilson, 2016). The best method to connect Chinese and Western football cultures is via “glocalized” communication. Maintaining local culture and following globalization is important. They emphasize integrating Western football culture with Chinese football and globalization to create a self-developed form of Chinese football that has developed national potential (Pachura, 2011; C. Wang, 2017). After 2017, the Chinese Football Association restricted international football players to three and required one local player under 23 years of age to participate from the beginning (Zhang, 2020). Chinese football teams focused on high-quality, locally connected foreign players after these new restrictions barred them from bringing in too many.

Although Chinese football clubs prioritize high-quality foreign players, Chinese players' low quality and ability and cultural hybridization practices limit their performance and relationships with foreign players (L. Lin, X. Y. Zhang & Q. Xu, 2019). Fewer than 15% of professional Chinese footballers have attended universities (Sullivan, 2022). Inadequate education may impair their eyesight, tactical awareness, and nonsport skills, such as intercultural communication. There is less understanding of Western football players' strategies and less collaboration between Chinese and expatriate footballers. Only 20% of Chinese sports school curricula are knowledge-based. It hinders cross-cultural communication and humanistic and sociological knowledge of sports (Tan, G. X., 2017). Chinese footballers struggle to predict opponents' strategies in Continental and World Football events because of a lack of football intelligence training. Thus, the constraints of cross-cultural knowledge and cultural hybridization practices resulting in Chinese football stagnation urge researchers to develop improvement methods.

Football is becoming more popular internationally, and many foreign players are signing with Chinese clubs; however, little is known about the challenges of cross-cultural communication and cultural differences. Many studies have examined cross-cultural interactions, but little is known about hybrid glocalization in China or high-performance sports such as football. This lack of awareness prevents Chinese football teams from developing intercultural competence and teamwork strategies. This study examines how intercultural competence, professional football, and higher education interact to help us understand how to integrate into Chinese football culture. The data will aid football clubs with targeted interventions and help colleges strengthen their intercultural education programs for prospective sportsmen. This research suggests ways to increase cultural communication between Chinese and Western football players in Chinese clubs or national teams. The paper answers the following research questions:

1. How does Western football culture hybridize with Chinese football culture during the glocalization process?

2. How can difficulties in intercultural communication and cultural distance between Chinese and expatriate Western football players in clubs or national teams be resolved?
3. How can Chinese football players achieve better performance in daily intercultural communication?
4. How can Chinese football clubs support expatriate football players in adapting to Chinese society?

This study recommends improving intercultural communication and minimizing the cultural distance between Chinese and expatriate Western football players in clubs. In the context of the glocalization of Western football culture in China, it is possible to suggest a paradigm for the construction of cultural diversity/hybridization in Chinese football clubs. Based on these findings, this study makes theoretical contributions to extending the meaning of cultural hybridization, glocalization, and the cultural transition model.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Glocalization theory*

Globalization has constructed uniformity to conform to the trend of globalization and demonstrate similar cultural phenomena (Roudometof, 2014). Jensen (2020) argued that the concept of “globalization” was explained as a Western-centric cultural form before the 1970s; however, starting in the 1970s and continuing with the rise of “global history” as a counterweight, increasing focus shifted to underrepresented groups and non-Western civilizations, such as those in Asia and Africa (Giulianotto, 2009; Lyu & Yusoff, 2024). Globalization gradually combined universality and the elimination of national borders to ensure the transnational flow of culture, arts, and sports in the 21st century, but scholars began to notice growing particularities, local diversity, and ethnic identity (Friedmann, 2005).

Roudometof (2014) noted that “glocalization”—the hybridization of globalized cultural forms and local culture—is the opposite of globalization. Short (2001, p. 18) defines glocalization as globalization that emphasizes “nationalism, community consciousness, and the self-conscious construction of ethnic identity.” It values hybrid forms, cross-societal emulation, and cross-cultural diversity (Short, 2001).

### *Glocalization and cultural hybridization in football*

Glocalization theory in sports studies complements “cultural homogenization”, which makes countries distinctive (Dong, Jinxia & Mangan, 2001; Yu, 2006). Sports culture globalization relativizes all particularisms, forcing exponents of specific beliefs or identities to confront and respond to other particularistic ideas, identities, and social processes across the universal domain, but local culture is not completely disowned (Yaro & Smith, 2024). Russell & Boromisza-Habashi (2020) suggested that glocalization may maintain key elements of local culture while facing the worldwide diffusion of popular culture, such as Western football, rather than learning globalized culture without

adapting to local social and cultural contexts to avoid disowning local culture and retaining its uniqueness.

Glocalization also involves redefining global sports culture to meet local citizens' needs, beliefs, and customs while rejecting "cultural homogenization" (Robertson, 1994). Universalism (globalization) and particularism (glocalization or localization) may form a global nexus despite their categorical antinomies. The "particularization of universalism," such as glocalization, emphasizes "sociopolitical concreteness" in some locations (Roudometof, 2005). This creates global political links to benefit individual nations' social and political systems (Robertson, 1994).

### ***Hybrid approach***

Hybrid glocalization, also known as cultural hybridization during glocalization, involves blending globalized and local football cultures to create unique cultural practices, institutions, and meanings (Robertson, 1994). Glocalization is a new cultural hybrid and alteration of norms and practices to fit local mindsets in the context of globalized cultural forms penetrating an area (Kraidy, 2005). Cultural hybridization entails the "fuzziness of boundaries" and neutralizes distinctions (Kraidy, 2005; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004a). Although globalized and local cultural forms will be gone, hybrid glocalization creates something new while retaining certain local cultural traits. Communication and sociological academics have predicted cultural heterogeneity and localized disparities during hybrid glocalization owing to the local indigenization of different cultural practices and social phenomena.

### ***Hybrid glocalization and Western football players' cultural transition in Chinese football clubs***

The entrance of international football players with European training expertise in Chinese football clubs may foster cultural hybridization between Chinese and foreign football players. Hybrid glocalization refers to international football players growing with Chinese local football players and the integration of globalized culture and foreign footballers into Chinese society.

Chinese sports scholar C. Wang (2017) stated that the hybrid glocalization of Western football culture may improve all levels of Chinese Football Association Super League play. According to C. Wang (2017), Western football players can teach Chinese players advanced Western football cultural values and high-level offensive and defensive abilities. It is also important to encourage Chinese footballers to compete with Western players at local clubs. Y. Wang (2018) advised Western players to obtain social and cultural assistance and participate in China's culturally diverse society.

---

***Problems and resolution***

“Cultural hybridization” between Western sportsmen and China causes poor acculturation, loneliness, and avarice rather than a desire to help Chinese football teams (C. Wang, 2017; Chen & Yang, 2021). Thus, we use theoretical and practical approaches to find hybrid glocalization solutions, particularly for international athletes' self-confidence and for communicating with Western Chinese football players (Chen & Yang, 2021).

Cultural transition is an important factor for expatriate football players to adjust to the local environment, including playing style, team interactions, and coach-athlete relationships, which may cause problems in their personal lives. Ryba's cultural transition strategy helps players avoid cultural adjustment issues by rebuilding sociocultural notions in China and professional flexibility (Ryba, Stambulova, & Roinkainen, 2016).

Western football players in Chinese football clubs undergo pretransition, acute cultural adaptation, and sociocultural adaptation (Ryba et al., 2016). The three-stage cultural transition model (Ryba et al., 2016) (Figure 1) was utilized to document immigrant athletes' acculturation. They have also examined Western football players' selection and psychological mobility before integrating them into local Chinese clubs, building belongingness in China, and establishing equilibrium with Chinese society (Chen & Yang, 2021). After finding ways to improve Western-Chinese football player relations, the cultural transition model (Ryba et al., 2016) will be recreated from talks about football players' adaptation to Chinese teams.

***Intercultural communication and cultural distance***

Cultural transition models to help expatriate footballers adjust to Chinese culture involve improved intercultural communication in football teams with varied socioeconomic or ethnic origins (Ryba et al., 2016; Chen & Yang, 2021).

Intercultural communication helps individuals from various cultures interact in the setting of cultural hybridization and globalized culture. Intercultural communication is the capacity to communicate across cultures and groups (Lauring, 2011). According to Lauring (2011), the word describes how individuals from diverse religious, socioeconomic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds behave, interact, and see the world. Instead of assimilation, it promotes biculturalism/multiculturalism via cultural adaptability. Chinese football players' understanding of Western football terminology and cultural symbols, coaching, and oral communication with expatriate football players may increase due to hybrid glocalization, reducing the cultural distance between players from different social or ethnic backgrounds.

A wider cultural gap between team members makes it harder for them to understand one another's cultures and environments, increasing conflict risk (Morry, 2005). Successful teams understand themselves in interpersonal, especially multicultural, connections. Mondialogo's 2005 interview revealed that high cultural distance hurts sports teams and sportsmen. Thus, team members

from multiple cultures must develop intercultural communication skills (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study examined sports fans' discussions of cultural hybridization (relevant to the sociological criterion of “cultural receptivity and rituals” in Robertson's framework of hybrid glocalization), but few studies offer suggestions for improving cultural hybridization in Chinese football clubs based on interculturalization. Participant observation illuminated cultural hybridization in clubs and its effects on cross-cultural conversation. We examined the language of online forums, notably those on Weibo and Tieba, two popular Chinese sports platforms, to better understand their culture. These forums revealed popular opinions on cultural hybridization. The interviewees' ideas for strengthening intercultural communication and minimizing cultural gaps in clubs or national teams were examined via semistructured interviews. Unstructured interviews allowed participants to express free-flowing opinions (Gundogan & Sonntag, 2018). Semistructured interviews encourage participants to answer structured interview questions on the basis of their management, translation, or other experiences in improving intercultural communication, as well as to offer extended ideas for cultural diversity/hybridization in local Chinese football clubs. By methodically locating, evaluating, and interpreting patterns within the data, thematic analysis helped to draw strong conclusions, ensuring the trustworthiness and validity of the results.

These interviews retrieved detailed information on the experiences, opinions, and recommendations of the participants by integrating structured questions with free-form prompts. The results of this study were greatly enhanced by this qualitative technique, which provided a more in-depth comprehension of the intricacies of intercultural communication and cultural hybridization in football.

### ***Settings***

The semistructured interviews each lasted 30–45 minutes. The site of each interview was a meeting room with a password known only to the interviewees and researcher, and the room was less than 2 km from the interviewees' workplace or home. From April through June 2024, researchers used a semistructured interview format and conducted sessions that lasted 30–45 minutes. The participants' residences or places of employment were not more than 2 km away from the private meeting rooms where the interviews took place. To be as flexible as possible with the participants' schedules, most interviews took place in the afternoon or between 6:00 and 8:00 on weekdays. The interviews were conducted over two months, and the researcher decided on the time to hold each according to the interviewees' preferences (e.g., not during their working hours). Most interviews were conducted between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays or during a weekend afternoon or evening.

To protect the interviewees' identities and follow research ethics guidelines, the researcher saved the interview records with the participants' agreement. The interviewees' names have been anonymized as letter-based IDs (e.g., A, B, C, etc.) or other salutations. Because the interviewees did not allow the researcher to record their statements, the researcher wrote all the important content. Sometimes, there was insufficient time to note all the details, so key points were recorded for data analysis. Ethics approval was obtained from the University Malaya Research Ethics Committee (reference number UM.TNC2/UMREC\_2050).

The interview questions were as follows:

1. How can local Chinese football players enhance their intercultural communication skills?
2. Talk about your favorite Western football players in the Super League of the Chinese Football Association. In addition, we discuss the necessary qualities of Western football players, who can contribute to Chinese football clubs.
3. Can you tell me the successful aspects of cooperation between Chinese and Western football players?
4. How can Chinese football clubs prepare for the pretransition phase before Western football players engage with the team?
5. How can Western football players become more familiar with Chinese society?

### ***Participants***

Tri-step interview selection. Twenty people had semistructured interviews. Chinese football club employees detailed their employment and intercultural exchanges.

The founders of one of Eastern China's sports research organizations referred the researcher to sports academics interested in being interviewed for this study. The researcher might select participants who studied Chinese football culture and education. Two interviewees are key actors in Chinese football teams' intercultural communication challenges and solutions. Journal pieces were published by two interviewees. One respondent designed an intercultural communication curriculum for Chinese football teams during her three years as a language instructor. Five sports academics (Table 1) interviewed have enhanced the Chinese football curriculum and intercultural communication. The development of cultural hybridization (connections and intercultural contact between Chinese and Western football players) required academic commentary.

Second, the researcher questioned Chinese football club football and fitness instructors, who noted intercultural communication issues (Table 2). Five responders had different views on reducing cultural barriers between Chinese and expatriate football players during fitness or scoring training. Two interviewees helped football players overcome international communication challenges by organizing companion activities for scoring and game terminology. Three interviewees created fitness and intercultural communication

programs. Thus, their experience in upgrading their curriculum (fitness education and intercultural communication) and intercultural activities with Chinese football teams was useful for gathering their opinions on resolving cultural distance challenges.

Third, the researcher questioned 10 Chinese and Western football fans with over ten years of experience (Table 3). They lack academic sports qualifications and full-time Chinese football experience. Five sports bloggers analyzed cultural hybridization and reduction. Two responders hosted multicultural gatherings, while others played amateur football. The latter visited professional football team friends or investigated different perspectives on improving intercultural communication in Chinese football clubs. Ten sports fans were asked to discuss increasing intercultural communication and reducing Western football players' unfamiliarity with local Chinese culture on the basis of their volunteer experiences arranging intercultural events and being sports bloggers.

### ***Data analysis***

After the data were collected, the qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically. Braun and Clarke (2006) demonstrate how thematic analysis may find, analyze, and report qualitative data themes and interpret the study subject. All the interviews note that topics are utilized to answer research questions and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research employed Braun and Clark's six-step thematic analysis framework: (a) familiarize oneself with the data; (b) develop initial codes; (c) search for themes; (d) evaluate themes; (e) identify topic names; and (f) compile the report.

The research assistant was asked to utilize NVivo transcribing software to convert the interview recordings into text. To answer the study questions, the researcher had to comprehend what the respondents were saying and which claims were common (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lawless & Y. W. Chen, 2019).

The second stage involves constructing initial codes, which describe the data segments and provide meaning relevant to the study purpose and queries. Initial codes focused on reducing the cultural gap between Western and Chinese football players and improving intercultural communication and cultural hybridization in Chinese football teams. The first code was derived from these interview notes:

It is vitally important to cooperate with professors from English departments at universities, especially those with the experience of a visiting scholar. They can share overseas experiences with Chinese football players and design practical curricula for enhancing their oral English skills. The sessions of oral English training can include daily conversations in football clubs and sports terminologies, especially football skills. (highlight codes including “develop cooperation with professors from English departments in universities,” “enhance oral English skills,” “share overseas experience,” “English rain,” “daily conversions in football clubs,” “sports terminologies,” etc.)

Various codes drawn from interview data in the second step were gathered into groups of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lawless & Y. W. Chen, 2019).

The third step was to develop themes consisting of various codes explaining similar meanings. As illustrated by Lawless and Y. W. Chen (2019), codes with similar meanings were organized into broader themes that addressed the research questions. An example of organizing codes with similar meanings into themes is shown in Table 4.

Step 3 identified seven preliminary themes/subthemes to address the research objective. These could be divided into two parts to answer the research questions, including approaches for enhancing local Chinese football players' intercultural communication skills and improving expatriate football players' adaptation to Chinese society. Themes/subthemes identified in Step 3 are as follows:

**Part 1. Approaches for enhancing local Chinese football players' intercultural communication skills.**

Theme 1: To experience blended learning (online and offline) of shooting skills instructed by European football clubs.

Theme 2: Improving Chinese football players' oral English and sports-related daily communication.

Theme 3: Improving Chinese football players' understanding of Western football culture through online learning of the sociology of sports and sports management.

**Part 2. The improvement of expatriate football players' adaptation in Chinese society**

Theme 4: Improving the selection criteria for hiring expatriate football players on the basis of similar political systems and salary requirements.

Theme 5: To construct belongingness among expatriate football players.

Subtheme 1: Learning about the cultural meanings of Chinese symbols.

Subtheme 2: To develop psychological construction activities, including sports cultural exchange activities, the cultivation of patriotism, and training sessions to avoid cultural conflicts.

Subtheme 3: To set up a service system for accompanying family members.

After these seven preliminary themes were identified, in Step 4, the researcher reviewed all the themes and confirmed that the codes drawn from the interview data could support the themes and that all the themes were in proper form. There was no overlapping content between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bree & Gallagher, 2016; Lawless & Y. W. Chen, 2019). Eventually, all the themes/subthemes could be finalized, and the researcher summarized the necessary codes or interview answers belonging to different themes and drew conclusions about how to improve strategies of hybrid globalization practice in Chinese football clubs.

A methodical way to find and understand patterns in the qualitative data was thematic analysis. The themes that illuminated the intricacies of cross-cultural communication and cultural hybridization in Chinese football were

identified via a careful examination of interview transcripts and internet forum conversations. Rigid coding and categorization helped clarify and identify these themes, which in turn informed the creation of tactics to optimize glocalization and intercultural encounters. The study results were guaranteed to be trustworthy and reliable by this analytical approach.

## RESULTS

### ***Chinese football players: Taking the initiative to enhance intercultural communication through the online learning of sports sociology and scoring skills***

As previously mentioned, half of Western football players' goals in the Chinese Football Association Super League come from their offense. The scoring of Western footballers is hindered by Chinese players' dribbling. According to an interviewee who played for a prominent UK football team and now founded and coaches a Chinese club, Chinese players must increase their scoring.

The Chinese quarantine legislation made it impossible to form football squads to practice in Western clubs during the COVID-19 epidemic. According to Sun (2022), who studies digital technologies in sports education:

To minimize the negative influence of COVID-19 on football communication, football clubs in China can use blended learning styles (online-merge-offline classes, simplified to OMO classes) to immerse Chinese athletes in Western environments. Football clubs and absorbing the instruction of Western coaches. Specifically, club managers are advised to establish close connections with European football clubs, such as Juventus and FC Barcelona. The training sessions for heading, dribbling, and shooting designed by top European football clubs can be shared with Chinese teams through online platforms, including Zoom and Google Meet. Managers can also invite Western football coaches to China as teaching assistants to help Chinese football players understand scoring skills and to provide immediate feedback on their shooting movements. If some Chinese football players have a good command of their football skills, they can be invited to adjust the curriculum design for football clubs in their cities.

Furthermore, Chinese football players' weaknesses in intercultural communication, including oral English and the understanding of Western football culture, must be improved. In terms of making progress in public speaking and daily communication in English, as suggested by Football coach Liu from a top university in China (2022):

It is vitally important to cooperate with professors from English departments at universities, especially those with the experience of visiting scholars. They can share overseas experience with Chinese football players and design practical curricula to enhance their oral English skills. The sessions of oral English training can include daily conversations in football clubs and sport terminologies, especially football skills.

More importantly, providing online courses on the sociology of sports and sports management designed by universities in European and American

countries is important for Chinese football clubs. As stated by one interviewee, Lee—a translator for a Chinese football club who contributes to the construction of cultural diversity on the team:

The lack of education on globalized football culture (from European and South American countries) in China results in Chinese football players' difficulties in understanding Western football culture and developing intercultural communication with Western athletes and coaches.

Another interviewee, Wu (2022), whose PhD research focuses on sports education, stated that:

Professional football players in China do not know football spirit in Western countries such as Germany, the UK, and Italy; the culture of football clubs in these countries; and the connections between football, society, and individuals. They always feel curious about why Western football players can create wonderful shooting moments. Sometimes they highly appreciate that Asian football players trained in Western countries can create successful shooting or secondary attacks for Western football players, such as Japanese football players Takehiro Tomiyasu from the Arsenal Football Club.

These issues are connected with the problems of cultural distance in China and globalized football culture identified by Morry (2005) and Wu (2022):

Undergraduate and postgraduate courses designed by the Department of Sport Science at Loughborough University, the University of Chester, and New York University can help Chinese players construct insightful understandings of Western football culture and gradually eliminate cultural distance to achieve mutual understanding while developing intercultural communication with their Western counterparts.

The sport and social sciences at Loughborough University's BSc (Honors) sport management programme is the best sport-related subject, according to respondent Wu's understanding of European and American colleges. It can help football players understand social science theories and current debates about sports, coaching, and pedagogy in Western countries, such as mega-event conflicts and cooperation, European sociocultural contexts, and national football teams.

Chinese football players must also consider issues of Contemporary Sport and Exercise and the Sociology of Sport Policy and Development at the University of Chester MSc degree in the Sociology of Sport and Exercise (Wu, 2022). Athletes learn about race, gender, class, age, disability in Western nations, violence and peace in Western sports, and Western sports and nationalism in Issues of Contemporary Sport and Exercise. Players learn how to update international sports policy, eliminate inequality, preserve social inclusion, and integrate sports and social development in the Sociology of Sports Policy and Development. The Institute for Global Sport at New York University's Sociology of Sport course may help Chinese football players think critically about Western football culture and other sports challenges. The curriculum employs sociological theories to explore sports country development and helps students understand their own intercultural communication experiences in sports (Wu, 2022).

Therefore, to achieve “fuzziness of boundaries” and eliminate cultural distance (Kraidy, 2005; Morry, 2005), knowledge of globalized football culture should be provided for local Chinese football players to overcome the difficulties of intercultural communication (Lee, 2022; Sun, 2022). Conversely, in previous sports studies, glocalization theory has been defined as a necessary counterpart to processes of “cultural homogenization” and contributing to nations’ uniqueness (Ronkainen, Khomutova & Ryba, 2019). Hybrid glocalization should emphasize the local indigenization of cultural practices and social phenomena (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007; Ritzer, 2003). The findings emphasized the systematic learning of Western football culture, including sports issues, sports policies and social development for Chinese football players. This finding indicates that the systematic learning of globalized football culture possibly homogenizes Chinese football players’ understanding, which contrasts with previous arguments of Robertson’s hybrid glocalization (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007; Ritzer, 2003).

***For Western football players in Chinese football clubs: Improving the selection criteria and constructing belongingness among expatriate footballers***

Western football players are unfamiliar with Chinese football culture; therefore, they cannot appreciate Chinese athletes' physical, tactical, and linguistic shortcomings, as shown by Chinese football teams. The loneliness and disagreements of Western footballers with family members abroad prevent them from concentrating on professional growth in China. Cultural distance causes these problems in Chinese social and cultural situations (Morry, 2005; Roudometof, 2014).

Hybrid glocalization has encouraged scholars to find ways to integrate globalized components into local surroundings to lessen cultural distance (Morry, 2005; Roudometof, 2014). The cultural transition model (Ryba et al., 2016) shows that expatriate football players must adapt to new social and cultural contexts during three phases (pretransition, acute cultural adaptation, and sociocultural adaptation) after joining a Chinese football club. Solution suggestions for each step are as follows.

***Pretransition phase: Improving the selection criteria for expatriates to engage in local environments and activate psychological mobility***

The relocation of Western footballers to China began with hybrid glocalization. Ryba et al. (2016) reported that Western athletes psychologically detach themselves from their country and explore their prospective teams, coaches, club culture, and Chinese football club socioculture. This may indicate mental flexibility or adaptability.

Roudometof (2019) and Xinhua Net (2020) advise footballers who visit China to adapt to the local culture. Football knowledge is cultural and may not transfer to other cultures (Sullivan, Ross & Wu, 2023). Thus, a process and criteria for selecting expatriate players with similar cultural traditions and social and economic identities in China are crucial (Tan et al., 2016). This may

improve Western football players' psychological mobility and help them prosper in their new environment.

Optimizing selection criteria and combining global culture with hybrid glocalization works best. Lee, a PhD Fellow exploring cross-border connections and sports cultural exchange between China and CEE, commended the hybrid glocalization of CEE football culture in China. Lee helped build cultural diversity/hybridization in Chinese football teams. As interpreted by Lee (2022):

We cannot reject bringing in Western football players to local Chinese football clubs, especially from strong football nations such as the UK, Italy, Germany, Argentina, etc. However, some Western football players who once played for top clubs, such as Manchester United and Real Madrid, require an extremely high annual salary of more than 20 million euros. Too great a desire for a high salary results in their lack of concentration on the Chinese football club's development. For example, Carlos Tevez from Argentina receives an annual salary of over 40 million RMB from a Chinese football club, but he spent most of his time traveling with his family in different Chinese cities, even telling lies claiming that he was injured.

Interviewee Lee (2022) considered several drawbacks of bringing in Western football players who once played in English, Italian, German, or Spanish professional football leagues. He stated that:

When their desire to gain hundreds of millions of RMB in an annual salary became the greatest motivation for them to play for a Chinese football club, they had difficulty creating scoring opportunities, concentrating on intercultural communication, and learning about local Chinese culture to reduce cultural distance.

It was suggested that teams encourage more expatriate football players with moderate salary expectations, but only from Central and Eastern Europe, to promote cultural hybridization between Western and local Chinese football culture.

Central and Eastern European footballers have lower salary requirements (approximately 3 million to 10 million RMB), which can relieve the economic burden of hiring Chinese football clubs. There are two reasons why they are more likely to become the spiritual core of Chinese teams. As illustrated by interviewee Lee (2022):

First, during the time of the planned economy (October 1949--Dec 1956), frequent football-related communication between China and Central and Eastern European countries, especially Hungary, supported the development of Chinese football. Moreover, there are similarities in the social and political systems of Serbia, Hungary and other nations that emphasize the central role of authority in distributing resources and deciding social development policies. This could make it easier for expatriate football players from Central and Eastern Europe to engage in Chinese football clubs.

After the 1980s, these European countries began to deconstruct their highly centralized governments and carried out pluralistic democratic reforms to raise their citizens' awareness of democratic politics (Wang, 2013). Simultaneously, football clubs in Central and Eastern Europe learned from other football clubs to

accelerate the degree of marketization in professional football leagues in the UK, Spain, and Germany. As illustrated by interviewee Lee (2022):

The transformation of the development of football clubs in Central and Eastern Europe combined the necessary elements of marketization, such as fan-based sponsorship of clubs and enterprise investment with a governmental central management system (Figure 2).

Central and Eastern European expatriate players understood Chinese football's top-down management approach. Most accepted Chinese culture without criticizing its social and political systems.

Chinese teams recruit expatriate players from Central and Eastern Europe for government policy support. Chinese politicians, media, and most international experts believe that 16+ 1 platforms may assist these nations in fostering common interests and partnerships (Yu, 2006; Russell & Boromisza-Habashi, 2020). The China-CEEC 16+1 platform promotes commercial, technological, and cultural cooperation. Since April 2012, China-CEEC Cooperation has included business, trade, culture, education, youth exchange, agriculture, tourism, science and technology, health, think-tank exchange, and subnational cooperation. The CEE joined the BRI after President Xi's OBOR plan. Xi considered developing China-Central and Eastern European relations crucial to sports cooperation and intercultural communication (Dong X., Jinxia & Mangan, 2001; Yaro & Smith, 2024). More importantly, Chinese foreign specialists claim that China-CEE cooperation is uncontrolled. Instead, "pragmatic institutionalism" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004) has helped countries create cultural interchange and sports communication on the basis of willingness, openness, and flexibility in their sports sectors. The Deputy Consul of Serbia in Shanghai, Sasa Jeremic, suggested that China-CEEC Cooperation establish flexible policies to deploy Central and Eastern European coaches to Chinese football clubs. Allowing more Central and Eastern European footballers to join Chinese clubs may establish a multicultural training environment and teach Chinese players Serbian, Hungarian, and other regional styles.

Expatriating players from Central and Eastern Europe have hybridized Western football culture in China, and Lee (2022) suggested that they may all become their clubs' spiritual centers.

More Central and Eastern European expatriates should participate in Chinese football via hybrid glocalization. Because their domestic pay demands fit China's economy, the government promotes sports communication, and Chinese athletes understand Chinese culture and politics better than Western players do. New football players may build links with existing expatriate sportsmen, such as Nemanja Čović, D. Denić, Aleksandar Andrejević, Rade Dugalić, Marko Šarić, and Nemanja Vidic, to foster belonging and psychological mobility in China.

***Acute cultural adaptation phase: Fit into the local Chinese cultural environment and construct belongingness***

The second step of cultural transfer, acute cultural adaptation, helps expatriate footballers integrate into Chinese culture and feel at home. According to experts

studying sports management in diverse sociocultural settings, building belonging among expatriate players from Central and Eastern Europe might reduce the cultural gap by familiarizing them with local Chinese culture. Chinese language and cultural classes, psychological development, and family support services are needed to better expatriate footballers' lives in Chinese clubs. These methods are detailed in Table 5.

The first step in constructing expatriate athletes' belongingness is to design a training course on language and local Chinese culture. As suggested by university sports coach Yang (2022):

We can share the culture of the Winter Olympic Games with expatriate football players who have come to China for the first time. Online tours of Chinese stadiums used for the Winter Olympic games and introductions of Chinese cultural symbols are highly important for instructing Western football players to learn about Chinese culture. For example, the mascot Bing Dwen Dwen for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games can be defined as a cultural symbol of traditional Chinese culture. The design of the panda, which has a white appearance covered by ice, symbolizes the spirit of the Winter Olympic Games, such as purity and strength. It also connects with the image of the national treasure panda, including honesty, loveliness, persistence, etc. If we can instruct expatriate football players to describe the cultural meaning of Bing Dwen Dwen, they will have a good command of many adjectives commonly used in our daily lives.

Chinese football clubs help Western footballers learn Chinese language and culture, the respondents said. More importantly, mega-events such as the Winter Olympics may be the greatest way to learn about Chinese culture. Players are immersed in their preferred sport. Given the cultural significance of clothes, mascots, stadium design, and rituals, most expatriate sportsmen in clubs feel more comfortable engaging with Chinese people in arts and culture (Yang, 2022).

According to Giulianotti & Robertson (2007), the Chinese language and culture teaching may help expatriate football players understand cultural concepts and change their attitudes, feelings, and actions. Second, acute cultural adaptation requires constant psychological effort to adjust to local culture and society. Reconstructing expatriate football players' knowledge of local Chinese cultural symbols can help them self-transform and connect with local players (Ryba et al., 2016).

Psychological and achievement development builds expatriate footballers' sense of belonging. As interviewee Yan, who spent half a year at a football club to enhance government-supported training programs, showed, Chinese towns could conduct annual exhibits, intercultural communication and business cooperation conferences, and sports cultural exchanges. Yan suggested that Chinese football teams invite CEE players to boat races and friends (Yan, 2022). Foreign footballers may share their culture with Chinese players, boosting their pride and drive to propagate it. Footballers may easily adapt to local society by participating in sports and cultural exchanges. In addition to cultural exchange activities, respondent Yan (2022) stated that psychological building may be

separated into two sessions: patriotic development and cultural conflict avoidance and emotion regulation during contests. In terms of the former, interviewee Yan, who conducted doctoral research on sports management and once translated it for a Chinese football club (2022), stated:

I believe that organizing only sociable or entertainment activities, such as birthday parties and singing contests, cannot support expatriate football players in adapting to local Chinese society and constructing belongingness. We need to cultivate their sense of love for our country and their commitment to a city to which they make contributions. According to legislation on the daily management of foreign football players gaining Chinese nationality, they are required to attend training on patriotism and the history of the Communist Party, which can help them understand how governmental-oriented management of Chinese football clubs operates. Foreign football players who gain Chinese nationality should also learn to sing the national anthem and know about the cultural meaning of the national flag.

In addition to cultivating Western football players' sense of patriotism, the interviewees suggested developing training sessions on Chinese Confucianism culture and etiquette to help players avoid conflicts and learn to control their emotions (L. P. Ma & Y. Zhang, 2006; L. Lin, et al., 2019; Yan, 2022). As explained by interviewee Yan (2022),

More training courses are necessary for Western football players to understand local Chinese culture, such as Confucianism, without aggression and attention to civilization etiquette. The knowledge of Confucianism can help Western football players shape their good moral character with harmony, peace, and benevolence. They respect Chinese football players and hold of themselves while faced with conflicts during competitions

The last method of constructing expatriate football players' belongings is to establish a service system for accompanying family members. Specifically, every Chinese football club should recruit full-time professional psychological consultants or social workers who are responsible for caring for accompanying family members. As suggested by interviewee Yan (2022), they could develop plans for travel and social activities to help family members learn about well-known places of interest in China and to better adapt to multicultural communities. Meanwhile, psychological consultants could provide immediate guidance while accompanying family members who face difficulties in making friends with their Chinese neighbors. This could help determine the reasons for the resulting cultural distance and provide these families with options for socializing in Chinese society to eliminate cultural distance.

### ***Sociocultural adaptation phase: Establishing equilibrium between the self and society***

The last phase of the cultural transition refers to long-term cultural adaptation. As implied by Wang (2013), Western football players must overcome difficulties of cultural adaptability, including language, cultural recognition, psychological construction, and loneliness. They must become better adjusted to the new environment in Chinese football clubs (Gundogan & Sonntag, 2018).

As suggested by one interviewee, who is a sports journalist, if possible, Chinese football clubs should encourage Western football players who are better adapted to local society to assist coaches in designing an instruction plan and to support the reconstruction of Chinese football clubs and the cultivation of teenage Chinese football players.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study explored ways to improve intercultural communication and eliminate cultural distance between Chinese and expatriate players in Chinese football clubs in the context of the globalization of Western football culture in China. The limitations of cultural hybridization practices in Chinese football clubs have resulted from low educational levels and difficulties in intercultural communication among Chinese football players.

### ***Cultural education for Chinese football players***

Data collected from semistructured interviews revealed that the self-improvement of local Chinese athletes can be achieved through providing education on globalized football culture. Knowledge of the sociology of sport and global communication are important parts of a program designed to promote sociopolitical and sociocultural changes among athletes (Ronkainen, Khomutova & Ryba, 2019). As stated in a previous study, systematic learning of the sociology of sport and global communication also helps transcend the negative images of athletes as uneducated or ignorant, but they can do better in intercultural communication if the athletes have appropriate educational opportunities (Tan et al., 2016). It is important for Chinese football players to experience immersive learning in the sociology of sports courses developed by European and South American universities. It is possible to eliminate Chinese athletes' unfamiliarity with globalized football culture and achieve "fuzziness of boundaries" to develop intercultural communication with expatriate football players from Western countries (Kraidy, 2005; Morry, 2005).

### ***Cultural transition of foreign football players***

This research also emphasizes Western expatriate football players' adaptability in China and supports Ryba et al.'s (2016) cultural transition model to address the limits of cultural hybridization.

According to the interviewees, Chinese football clubs should acquire Western football players from Central and Eastern Europe, who share football culture and social systems with China, during the pretransition era. To build international ties, Chinese football clubs might follow the government's strategy of selecting Central and Eastern European players.

Two key factors may help Chinese football teams employ more Central and Eastern European players who understand Chinese football's economics and management structure. Football players on Chinese teams might be satisfied with their average income. The ERI Salary Expert Database reports that

Hungarian footballers earn approximately 500,000 Forint (100,000 RMB). According to Xinhua Net, local and foreign players in the second-tier China League are limited to three million yuan (458,700 US dollars) and 1.5 million euros (1.8 million US dollars) annually. In contrast, football players from Central and Eastern European countries such as Hungary have experienced management systems that define governmental football associations as the main regulators of national football development, including pitch construction and stable financial strategies (Roudometof, 2005). In China, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) and the General Administration of Sport of China manage football growth.

The interviewees' arguments for choosing expatriate football players appear inadequate in terms of critical views on prospective techniques to enhance their adaptation to China and intercultural communication in the pretransition period. Central and Eastern European expatriate football players with comparable social systems in China may not fully understand Chinese culture or want to adapt. In addition to introducing football players from similar social systems and recognizing top-down management in Chinese football clubs, further research can test the efficacy of this improvement approach and create a standard for testing football players' desire to adapt to Chinese society and salary expectations (Connell, 2018). Noncentral and Eastern European football players with great drive and reasonable financial expectations may adapt well to Chinese culture and be recruited by Chinese football clubs. This approach is similar to hybrid glocalization, which involves choosing Western football cultural components to blend with Chinese local culture. Further studies measuring football players' motivation to adapt to Chinese society and wage expectations have referred to globalized Western football culture to fit Chinese football development. It may assist in choosing better Central and Eastern European footballers and not overlooking other options.

When Western expatriate football players approach the second stage of cultural transition (acute cultural adaptation), Chinese football clubs must help them adjust to their new employment and culture (Ryba et al., 2016). Chinese football teams should integrate expatriate players into Chinese culture in four ways: (a) helping them learn about the Chinese language and culture by understanding the cultural meanings of symbols in sporting events; (b) using government support for sporting cultural exchange activities; (c) psychological construction, including cultivating patriotism and offering cultural conflict prevention training; and (d) establishing family service systems. Finally, Western football players who transcend language, cultural recognition, psychological construction, and loneliness may balance themselves with society. Figure 3 uses Ryba et al.'s (2016) cultural transition model.

To overcome intercultural communication issues and cultural hybridization limitations, the “fuzziness of boundaries” can eliminate the cultural distance between Western and local Chinese football cultures. The globalization of Western football culture is taught to local Chinese football players to help them communicate. It shows how Western and Chinese football establish homogeneity (Roudometof, 2014). Before the 1970s, “globalization” was a Western-centric sports culture (Robertson, 1994; Roudometof, 2014). After the

1970s, marginalized voices and non-Western cultures such as Asian and African societies were highlighted, along with increased particularity, local variety, and ethnic identity in globalization. Glocalization describes the blending of global and local cultures (Roudometof, 2014). The importance of “sociopolitical concreteness” in glocalization theory is linked to selecting expatriate football players from social and political systems such as China and supporting players who understand local Chinese culture and ideologies. The synthesis of globalized and local football culture to create unique, hybrid cultural practices, institutions, and meanings can lead to the local indigenization of disparate sports cultural practices and social phenomena (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007; Ritzer, 2003).

Globalized football culture may homogenize Chinese football culture during the hybrid glocalization of Western football culture in China (Robertson, 1994; Roudometof, 2014). Like the Chinese football-regulating body, Chinese football clubs should help expatriate players grasp Chinese social settings and sustain the local indigenization of sports culture traditions. Chinese football clubs may strengthen intercultural communication by maintaining local indigenization of sports cultural activities and cultural homogenization and uniformity between globalized and local football culture. This may challenge glocalization theory, which highlights the “particularization of universalism” and the rejection of “cultural homogenization” (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007).

### ***Implications and limitations: Further research and practice***

This study can stimulate the establishment of a curriculum for conducting psychological constructions and improving cross-cultural competence among expatriate athletes. Furthermore, experimental research should be designed to test the efficiency of adaptation of the cultural transition model for improving intercultural communication in Chinese football clubs and identify whether the adapted model is required for improvement. However, other underresearched studies related to the glocalization of Western football culture in China, such as sending young football players at an early age to go global and reconstructing cultivation patterns through glocalization with European football clubs, are important for further research.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that cultural adaptation and intercultural communication in Chinese football teams are challenging and that a sophisticated framework is needed to improve accessibility between local Chinese and expatriate players. This study shows how globalization and localization interact in Chinese football. The research analyses hybridization to show how Western football culture has adapted to local culture. To understand all the moving elements, glocalization proved invaluable. This research proposes cultural integration, selective enrollment, and adequate support mechanisms to improve accommodation and balanced person–world interactions. Focusing on culture, psychology, and social

integration, this concept may help expatriate players adapt and improve football's cultural soup bowl. Therefore, the author calls for further research and application in this field to improve translation and practice to preserve the roots of local culture and the complexity and uniqueness of Chinese football clubs and fans while introducing American football culture to China, thereby glocalizing Western football culture.

### **Conflict of interest**

*The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest.*

### **Author Contributions**

*The first author is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Sports and Exercise Science, University of Malaya. This paper is drawn from parts of the PhD thesis. The first author is responsible for the research design, semistructured interviews, data analysis and writing. The second and third authors are responsible for supervising the PhD research project and guiding the first author on how to edit the paper.*

### **Acknowledgments**

*We would like to thank supervisors Dr. Nor Eeza Zainal Abidin and Prof. Mohd Salleh Aman for their guidance through each stage of the process.*

## **REFERENCES**

- Robertson, R. (1994). Globalization or glocalisation?. *Journal of international communication, 1*(1), 33-52.
- Russell, V., & Boromisza-Habashi, D. (2020). The global circulation of discursive resources and the lived experience of globalization. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 44*(2), 101-119.
- Friedmann, J. (2005). Globalization and the emerging culture of planning. *Progress in Planning, 64*(3), 183-234.
- Jensen, K. B. (2020). The cultural contexts of media and communication. *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research, 213-231.*
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.
- Bree, R. & Gallagher, G. (2016). Using Microsoft Excel to code and thematically analyze qualitative data: a simple, cost-effective approach. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J), 8*(2), 28111-28114.
- Chen, C. Y., & Yang, H. C. (2021). Subjective consciousness, two-way interaction and discourse construction: Foreign experience and enlightenment of the acculturation of transnational athletes [Zhuti zijue,

- shuangxiang hudong ji huayu jiangou: Kuaguo liudong yundongyuan shiying de yuwai jingyan ji qishi]. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 42(3), 95-105.
- Chinese Football Association. (2016). *The medium and long-term development plan of Chinese football (2016-2050)*. Retrieved from [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-04/11/content\\_5062954.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-04/11/content_5062954.htm)
- Connell, J. (2018). Globalization, soft power, and the rise of football in China. *Geographical Research*, 56(1), 5-15.
- Dong, J. X., Jinxia, D., & Mangan, J. A. (2001). Football in the new China: Political statement, entrepreneurial enticement and patriotic passion. *Soccer and Society*, 2(3), 79-100.
- Giulianotti, R., & Robertson, R. (2004). The globalization of football: A study in the glocalization of the "serious life". *The British Journal of Sociology*, 55(4), 545-568.
- Giulianotti, R., & Robertson, R. (2007). Forms of glocalization: Globalization and the migration strategies of Scottish football fans in North America. *Sociology*, 41(1), 133-152.
- Giulianotti, R., & Robertson, R. (2007). Recovering the social: Globalization, football and transnationalism. *Global Networks*, 7(2), 166-186.
- Giulianotto, R., (2009). *History: The global sport and the making of globalization*. Retrieved from [https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/26779\\_book\\_item\\_26779.pdf](https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/26779_book_item_26779.pdf)
- Gundogan, I., & Sonntag, A. (2018). Chinese football in the era of Xi Jinping: What do supporters think?. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 47(1), 103-141.
- Kraidy, M. M. (2005). *Hybridity, or the cultural logic of globalization*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Lauring, J. (2011). Intercultural organizational communication: The social organizing of interaction in international encounters. *Journal of Business Communication*, 48(3), 231-255.
- Lawless, B., & Chen, Y. W. (2019). Developing a method of critical thematic analysis for qualitative communication inquiry. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 30(1), 92-106.
- Lin, L., Zhang, X. Y., & Xu, Q. (2019). Professional reform and the introduction of foreign coaches in Chinese football since 1992: Progress or stagnation?. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 36(9-10), 892-909.
- Lyu, P., & Yusoff, S. (2024). Acculturation experiences of international students from Sao Tome and Principe in China: A phenomenological study. *Journal of International Students*, 14(1).
- Ma, L. P. & Zhang, Y. (2006). The national spirit of modern football and lack of Chinese football culture [Xiandai zuqiu de minzu jingshen yu zhongguo zuqiu de wenhua qieshi]. *Journal of Physical Education*, 13(6), 31.
- Pachura, P. (2011). Sport in Asia: Globalization, glocalization, Asianization. In P. Horton (Ed.), *New Knowledge in a New Era of Globalization* (pp.

- 119-146). Croatia: InTech Europe.
- Ritzer, G. (2003). Rethinking globalization: Glocalization/Grobalization and something/nothing. *Sociological Theory*, 21(3), 193-209.
- Robertson, R., & White, K.E. (2005). Globalization: Sociology and cross-disciplinarity. In C. Calhoun, C. Rojek, & B. S. Turner (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Sociology* (pp. 345-366). New York, NY: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Ronkainen, N. J., Khomutova, A., & Ryba, T. V. (2019). If my family is okay, I'm okay: Exploring relational processes of cultural transition. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17(5), 493-508.
- Roudometof, V. (2005). Transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and glocalization. *Current Sociology*, 53(1), 113-135.
- Roudometof, V. (2014). Nationalism, globalization and glocalization. *Thesis Eleven*, 122(1), 18-33.
- Roudometof, V. (2019). Recovering the local: From glocalization to localization. *Current Sociology*, 67(6), 801-817.
- Ryba, T. V., Stambulova, N. B., & Ronkainen, N. J. (2016). The work of cultural transition: An emerging model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(427), 427.
- Short, J. R. (2001). *Global dimensions: Space, place and the contemporary world*. London, UK: Reaktion Books.
- Sullivan, J. (2022). *China soccer observatory: China's football dream*. Retrieved from <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/asiaresearch/projects/cso/index.aspx>
- Sullivan, J., Ross, T., & Wu, C. (2023). Representing the nation: Exploring attitudes toward naturalized foreign football players in China. *Soccer & Society*, 24(5), 593-606.
- Tan, G. X. (2017). When will China win the World Cup? A study of China's youth football development. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 34(17-18), 1883-1897.
- Tan, T., Huang, H. C., Bairner, A., & Chen, Y. W. (2016). Xi Jinping's World Cup dreams: From a major sports country to a world sports power. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 33(12), 1449-1465.
- Wang, C. (2017). The development of the Chinese football industry: From the perspective of bringing in international football talent and improving the system of the professional league [Zhongguo zuqiu chanye fazhan: Guoji rencai yinjin, liansai zhiyehua jiaodu]. *The Journal of Shandong Agriculture and Engineering University*, 34(12), 69-70.
- Wang, Y. (2018). The studies of bringing in foreign players by high salary in Chinese football clubs [Zhongchao julebu gaoxin yinjin waiji qiuyuan yanjiu]. *Journal of Beijing Sport University*, 41(5), 46-51.
- Wang, Z. X. (2013). The comparative studies of Chinese, Japanese and Korean professional football players being cultivated abroad [Hanguo, Riben, Zhongguo zuqiu zhiyehua fazhan de bijiao yanjiu]. *Sports Culture Guide*, 11, 66-69.
- Wilson, C. (2016). Read Chinese football's 50-point reform plan in full—Exclusive translation. Retrieved from:

- <https://wildeastfootball.net/2016/02/read-chinese-footballs-50-point-reform-plan-in-full-exclusive-translation/>
- Xinhua Net. (2020). (Sports Focus) Chinese professional football leagues to implement strictest ever salary cap next season. Retrieved from: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-12/14/c\\_139588536.htm#:~:text=The%20average%20annual%20salary%20of,majority%20of%20them%20facing%20losses](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-12/14/c_139588536.htm#:~:text=The%20average%20annual%20salary%20of,majority%20of%20them%20facing%20losses)
- Yaro, I. F., & Smith, J. M. (2024). Black African students in predominantly white US higher education institutions: Drivers influencing their identification and commitment. *Journal of International Students, 14(3)*, 21-41.
- Yu, D. (2006). Analysis and research on the cultural quality of young football players [Qianxi qingshaonian zuqiu yundongyuan wenhua suzhi de fenxi yu yanjiu]. *Shandong Sports Science & Technology, 28(1)*, 74-76.
- Zhang, J. (2020). Problems and prospects: A study on the development history of the Chinese football industry. *The International Journal of the History of Sport, 37(1)*, 102-123.
- 

*Author bios*

---

**Yanying Chen** is the PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Sports and Exercise Science, Universiti Malaya and Lecturer in the College of Journalism and Communications in Shanghai Jian Qiao University in China. Her research areas contain intercultural communication and education, sociology of sport, sport and communication, cross-cultural psychology. Email: Linda931230@126.com

**Nor Eeza Zainal Abidin** is the Senior Lectuer in Faculty of Sports and Exercise Science, Universiti Malaya. Her research interests are related to sociology of sports, management and sustainability. She is currently involved in research related to sports facilities including accessibility for persons with disabilities, social challenges of physical fitness for autistic swimmers, and female sport students as future leaders. Email: eezazainal@um.edu.my

**Mohd Salleh Aman** is the Honorary Professor in Faculty of Sports and Exercise Science, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 50088. Email: amanms@um.edu.my

---

APPENDIX

Figure 1. Cultural Transition Model (Ryba et al., 2016)



Figure 2. The Management System of Football Clubs in China and Central Eastern European Countries

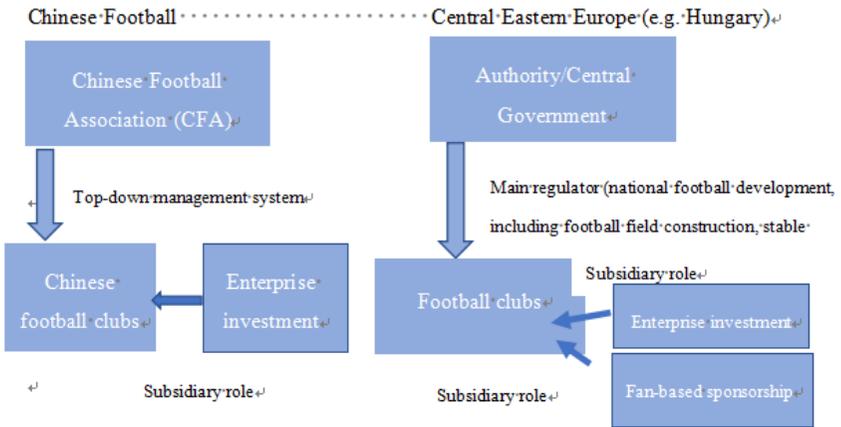
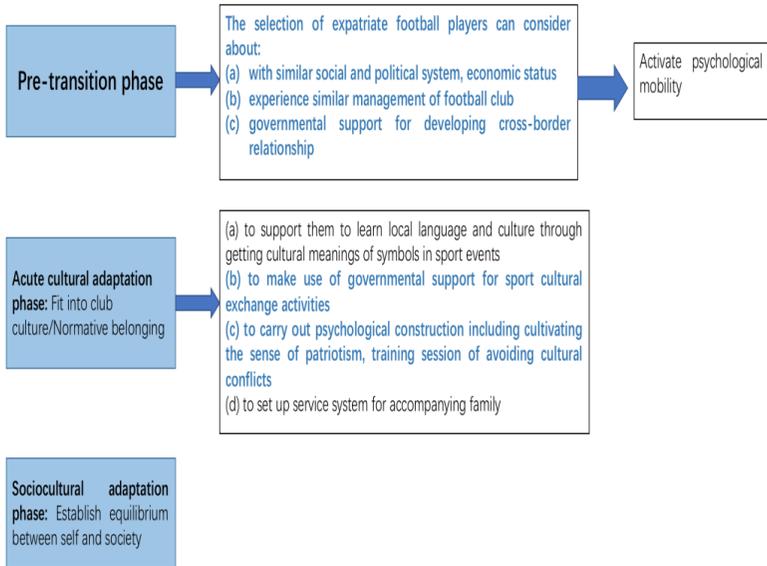


Figure 3. Adapted from Ryba's Cultural Transition Model (2016)



**Table 1. The List of Interviewees Defined as “Sport Scholars”**

<b>Name (Anonymous, Use Alphabet to Take Place)</b>	<b>Academic Background and/or Occupation</b>	<b>Knowledge/Contribution to Intercultural Communication in Chinese Football Industry</b>
A	PhD Candidate in Sport Education; Founder of sport research community;	He is one of coinvestigators participating in three research projects related to intercultural communication in a Chinese local football club.
B	PhD Candidate in Sport Management; Have three years experience of as being translator at Chinese football clubs;	She has been the language instructor in Chinese football club in the past three years and trying to build up a curriculum system for improving intercultural communication.
C	Lecturer in football education at university	He has published two papers in Chinese core journals studying the problems of cooperation and communication between Chinese and foreign football players in football clubs and resolutions.
D	PhD Candidate in Sport Psychology	She has get the funding from Provincial Department of Education to do research on reasons why intercultural communication in Chinese football clubs have difficulties in order to determine potential resolutions.
E	Lecturer in football and fitness training at university	E is one of coauthors with interviewee C who has published two papers in Chinese core journals studying the problems of cooperation and communication between Chinese and foreign football players in football clubs and resolutions.

**Table 2. The List of Interviewees Defined as “Football and Fitness Coaches”**

<b>Name (Anonymous, Use Alphabet to Take Place)</b>	<b>Academic Background and/or Occupation</b>	<b>Knowledge/Contribution to Intercultural Communication in Chinese Football Industry</b>
F	Football coach and founder of football club; Have the experience of playing for youth team of a UK top football club;	He has ten-year experience of instructing both Chinese and Western football players. He has tried to eliminate cultural distance between Chinese and expatriate football players, by the way of partner exercise of scoring skills and oral expression of football-related words.
G	Undergraduate degree in Coaching; Fitness coach/manager in football club;	He has ten-year experience of being a fitness instructor and manager in Chinese football clubs. He also has the experience of being an academic visiting scholar at a UK university and guiding Chinese football players to better adapt to Western football clubs. He has an in-depth understanding of Chinese football players’ difficulties in communicating with football coaches or their teammates from Western countries. To resolve these problems, he has built up a curriculum system combining fitness teaching with the practice of intercultural communication.
H	Undergraduate degree in Sport Education; PE teacher in secondary	He was a part-time fitness coach in a professional football club. He clearly

<b>Name (Anonymous, Use Alphabet to Take Place)</b>	<b>Academic Background and/or Occupation</b>	<b>Knowledge/Contribution to Intercultural Communication in Chinese Football Industry</b>
	school (football, fitness and track & field);	knows about the phenomenon of cultural distance between Chinese and expatriate football players in clubs. To eliminate cultural distance, he tried to organize intercultural activities.
I	The assistant fitness coach in a football club	I was the assistant for interviewee G several years ago. He clearly knows about the phenomenon of cultural distance between Chinese and expatriate football players in clubs. He assisted interviewee G in building up a curriculum system combining fitness teaching with the practice of intercultural communication.
J	The assistant fitness coach in a football club	J is the assistant for interviewee G now. He clearly knows about the phenomenon of cultural distance between Chinese and expatriate football players in clubs. Now he is assisting interviewee G in applying a curriculum system combining fitness teaching with the improvement of intercultural communication into practice and continuously making improvements to curriculum quality.

**Table 3. The List of Interviewees Defined as “Football Fans”**

<b>Name (Anonymous, Use Alphabet to Take Place)</b>	<b>Academic Background and/or Occupation</b>	<b>Knowledge/Contribution to Intercultural Communication in Chinese Football Industry</b>
K	PhD Candidate in international studies Have the experience as being translator for a Chinese football club	He has been an organizer of intercultural activities several times while being a translator in football clubs in his hometown. He makes great contributions to supporting expatriate football players to adapt to Chinese society. Thus, he can share an in-depth understanding of improving intercultural communication and hybrid cultural practice in Chinese football clubs.
L	PhD Candidate in Cultural Studies Have the experience of being sport blogger on Sina Weibo	He has set up owned media on Sina Weibo platform and his sharing of Chinese and Western football culture has attracted more than 50,000 fans. Among his social media posts and comments, we can determine amounts of interesting points of improving intercultural communication and hybrid cultural practice in Chinese football clubs.
M	Doctor of philosophy in information system	He has been the principal investigator of research project. It was designed to investigate diverse perspectives of improving intercultural communication in Chinese football clubs shown by social media posts on Sina Weibo, through conducting K-mean clustering algorithm. Apart from conducting related research, he also forms own unique opinions for providing suggestions for improving intercultural communication.
N	Undergraduate degree in	He has set up owned media on Sina Weibo platform. Among his social

Name (Anonymous, Use Alphabet to Take Place)	Academic Background and/or Occupation	Knowledge/Contribution to Intercultural Communication in Chinese Football Industry
	engineering Have the experience of being sport blogger on Sina Weibo	media posts and comments, we can determine amounts of interesting points of improving intercultural communication and hybrid cultural practice in Chinese football clubs.
O	Undergraduate degree in journalism Have the experience of being sport blogger on Sina Weibo	As a sport blogger authenticated by Sina Weibo, his social media posts mainly record stories of expatriate football players' adaptation to Chinese society. He often develops interviews with Chinese football clubs and listens about their difficulties of integrating into Chinese society. He has been a volunteer for intercultural activities to help expatriate football players construct an understanding of Chinese society.
P	Master of business management Have the experience of being sport blogger on Sina Weibo	He has set up owned media on Sina Weibo platform. Among his social media posts and comments, we can determine amounts of interesting points of improving intercultural communication and hybrid cultural practice in Chinese football clubs.
Q	Undergraduate degree in Asian Studies and Music Have the experience of playing for a provincial-level amateur football club	He has the experience of being trained in professional football clubs and knowing about the problems and improvement way of intercultural communication in Chinese football clubs. Now as a member of amateur football clubs, he always has opportunities to attend friendly games with professional football clubs and witnessed how football players try to overcome difficulties of cultural

Name (Anonymous, Use Alphabet to Take Place)	Academic Background and/or Occupation	Knowledge/Contribution to Intercultural Communication in Chinese Football Industry
		distance during competitions. He can interpret his opinions of eliminating cultural distance in football clubs, based on what he has witnessed during friendly games.
R	PhD Candidate in management Have the experience of being a football journalist and being sport blogger on Sina Weibo	He has set up owned media on Sina Weibo platform. Among his social media posts and comments, we can determine amounts of interesting points of improving intercultural communication and hybrid cultural practice in Chinese football clubs.
S	PhD Candidate in English Education Have the experience of being a volunteer for intercultural activities in a football club	He has been a volunteer for intercultural activities to help expatriate football players construct an understanding of Chinese society. Based on his research experience during doctoral studies, he can express how to support expatriate football players to adapt better to Chinese society through learning language and culture and other efficient ways.
T	Doctor of philosophy in information technology The captain of provincial-level of amateur football team	Now as the captain in amateur football clubs, he always has opportunities to attend friendly games with professional football clubs. He can interpret his opinions of eliminating cultural distance in football clubs based on what he has witnessed during friendly games.

**Table 4. Examples of Themes and Codes Drawn from Interview Data**

<b>Interview Data</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<p>It is vitally important to develop cooperation with professors from English Department in universities, especially someone having the experience of visiting scholar. They can share overseas experience with Chinese football players and design practical curriculum for enhancing their oral English skills. The sessions of oral English training can include daily conversations in football clubs and sport terminologies, especially football skills.</p>	<p>‘Develop cooperation with professors from English Department in universities’                      ‘Enhance oral English skills’ ‘Share overseas experience’                      ‘English training’                      ‘Daily conversions in football clubs’                      ‘Sport terminologies’</p>	<p>To improve Chinese football players’ oral English and sport-related daily communication.</p>
<p>Similar social political system emphasizing the central role of authority to distribute resources and decide social development and its transformation can also activate expatriate football players from Central Eastern Europe to engage in Chinese football clubs easier.</p>	<p>‘Similar social and political system’                      ‘The central role of authority’                      ‘Activate expatriate football players easier’</p>	
<p>Expatriate football players from Central Eastern Europe can easily understand the rationale of governmental central management (top-down management system) for Chinese football. Most of them are willing to adapt to Chinese football environment without any resistance to social and political system.</p>	<p>‘Understand the rationale of governmental central management’                      ‘Top-down management system’                      ‘Without any resistance to social and political system’</p>	<p>To improve the selection criteria of expatriate football players, based on social political system</p>

**Table 5. Four Ways for Constructing Belonging**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Detailed Content</b>	<b>Effect (according to the Situation in Football Club Ranked in Top 5 in China until September 2022)</b>
Design course of Chinese language and culture	To learn about cultural meaning of Chinese symbols in mega-events e.g. Winter Olympic Game	After learning cultural meaning of Chinese symbols, 80% of expatriate football players were willing to witness sport competitions with Chinese football players and participate in gathering in Chinese traditional festivals.
Psychological construction: Construct their sense of achievement and develop a psychological consulting programme	To develop sport and cultural activities;	At least 50% of expatriate football players were willing to participate in sport cultural exchange activities monthly. Tabloid sport activities for socializing made them dare to communicate with local football players.
	To carry out psychological construction, including cultivation of a sense of patriotism, training sessions of avoiding cultural conflicts;	Psychological training sessions made at least 80% of expatriate football players keep calm and learn to negotiate while faced with cultural conflicts.
Set up a service system for accompanying family members	To develop a plan of traveling and sociable activities and provide immediate guidance, while having feeling of loneliness and difficulties of cultural adaptability	At least 80% of expatriate football players have submitted the plan to let family members stay in China in the coming one year. Some family members staying in China have better experience of football clubs' service and plan to accompany football players for a long time to provide greater support.

