

The Development of Cultural Hybridization in Chinese Professional Football Clubs and Problems of Cultural Hybridization Between Chinese Local and Western Football Players

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Abstract

The Director of the Ministry of Physical Education and Sports contended that the integration of Western football players could enhance the overall quality of competition in the Chinese Football Association Super League. This initiative reflects the ongoing globalisation of Western football culture in China. The Director emphasised the necessity of providing social and cultural support for Western football players and fostering their engagement in a culturally inclusive environment within China. A document analysis methodology was employed to examine the evolving policies regarding the introduction of Western football players in China. Additionally, participant observation was utilised to investigate challenges arising from cultural hybridisation between Chinese and Western football players within Chinese football clubs. These challenges include issues related to intercultural communication, the alienation of expatriate players within local Chinese society, limited understanding among Chinese players regarding secondary attacks, and difficulties in collaborative play with Western strikers. The findings underscore the need for further research into strategies to enhance the cross-cultural competence of Chinese football players and address the challenges associated with cultural hybridisation in Chinese football clubs.

Keywords: Globalization, Cultural Hybridization, Intercultural Communication, Alienation in Local Society, Cross-Cultural Competence.

Introduction

In the context of the globalisation of Western football culture in China, it is crucial to foster the development of home-grown football talent by establishing connections with successful football nations in Western countries. Such initiatives can enhance Chinese football players' scoring abilities and their understanding of Western football ethos (Gündoğan and Sonntag, 2019). A key priority for the advancement of the Chinese football industry is to "improve football players' physical and mental health and contribute to realising the Chinese Dream through the rejuvenation of the nation, while enhancing national cohesion and pride, in response to the fervent hope and expectation of the Chinese people by revitalising and developing football," as outlined in The Medium and Long-Term Development Plan of Chinese Football (2016–2050) (CFA, 2016).

Moreover, the development of Chinese football must align with the discourse of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". This approach underscores the importance of integrating elements such as foreign football players, coaches, scoring techniques, and football values, while ensuring their consistency with China's

unique social and economic developmental context. As a result, prioritising the strengthening of the Chinese national football team in alignment with the discourse of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and fostering domestic football talent through the adoption of lessons from Western football will become a primary focus. Key contemporary issues and challenges within the Chinese football industry, including the recruitment of European football players by Chinese football clubs, will be examined in the subsequent section.

Regarding the recruitment of football players from Western countries for Chinese football clubs, Wang (2017), the Director of the Ministry of Physical Education and Sports, argued that this initiative could elevate the overall standard of competition in the Chinese Football Association Super League. According to Wang (2017), Western football players can help Chinese players acquire advanced football cultural values as well as high-level attacking and defensive skills. Additionally, such exchanges are significant in fostering a sense of competitiveness among Chinese players when collaborating with their Western counterparts in local clubs.

Wang (2018) further emphasised the importance of providing social and cultural support to Western

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football players, enabling them to engage in a culturally inclusive environment in China. However, several challenges associated with the integration of Western players must be addressed. The process of 'cultural hybridisation' between Western and Chinese football players introduces issues such as limited acculturation, a perception of Western players prioritising monetary gain over genuine contributions to local clubs, and ensuing problems such as mismanagement and financial losses for clubs (Chen & Yang, 2021; Wang, 2017).

Literature

In the context of 'cultural hybridisation' within a globalised cultural framework infiltrating specific regions, globalisation represents a process of creating a new cultural hybrid and transforming norms and practices to align with local mindsets (Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2013). Cultural hybridisation plays a critical role in neutralising differences and embracing the 'fuzziness of boundaries' (Canagarajah & Ashraf, 2013). While the distinctions between globalised and local cultural forms may diminish, hybrid globalisation produces something novel while retaining identifiable elements of the original local cultural inputs. Scholars in communication and sociology have argued that cultural heterogeneity and localised variations are inevitable during hybrid globalisation due to the indigenisation of diverse cultural practices and social phenomena (Magu, 2015). It is therefore crucial to explore whether 'cultural hybridisation' neutralises differences or leads to the heterogeneity of local culture in the context of global diffusion.

In the framework of cultural hybridisation and the influx of globalised culture into specific regions, intercultural communication plays a pivotal role in fostering connections among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Intercultural communication refers to an individual's ability to engage in interpersonal interactions across varied cultures and groups characterised by different social or ethnic contexts. As noted by Luring (2011), the term encompasses understanding how individuals from diverse religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds act, communicate, and perceive the world. It emphasises mutual adaptation among cultures, leading to biculturalism or multiculturalism, rather than complete assimilation.

High cultural distance within teams is defined as an inability to share cultural beliefs with one's surroundings, thereby increasing the likelihood of conflicts. Leidner and Kayworth (2006) identified that the most successful teams are those with a strong understanding of interpersonal and intercultural relationships. High cultural distance negatively impacts the success of sports teams and the development of athletes. Thus, cultivating intercultural communication skills among athletes with diverse

cultural backgrounds within the same team is essential for fostering team cohesion and individual growth.

Methods

Document Analysis

Document analysis is defined as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents and policies. This method provides context, generates research questions, supplements other data, tracks changes over time, and corroborates findings from other sources (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2021). The process of document analysis begins with skimming the document to gain an overview. Next, the researcher identifies relevant categories for analysis within the document set. The final step involves interpreting the content of the documents. To test the validity of document analysis, the researcher employed an 'investigator triangulation' approach by involving multiple participants in analysing three policies.

Before the analysis, the researcher conducted training sessions to familiarise the participants with the research objectives and to guide them on identifying key points in the policies. After the analysis, the consistency of the participants' results was assessed, revealing a consistency degree exceeding 75%. This high consistency indicates that the participants' analyses were largely aligned, thereby ensuring the validity of the document analysis through the 'investigator triangulation' approach. The sample for document analysis comprises the changing policies on recruiting foreign football players for Chinese local clubs since 1994, as proposed by the Chinese Football Association (2016). This analysis highlights policy support for introducing foreign players and their potential contributions to enhancing cultural hybridisation among Chinese football players. It further informs studies on addressing cultural communication challenges between Chinese and Western players within the context of hybrid globalisation.

Participant Observation

Sample of Participant Observation: One Chinese Football Club, Men's National Football Team

Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a non-probability method where researchers use their judgment to select subjects for observation. This approach involves identifying research subjects that best represent the characteristics of others within the same category (Cooper, Lewis, & Urquhart, 2004). In this study, the first subject for physical participant observation was Team Two of a leading Chinese Super League football club and its U23 team (players aged 18–23). This club, noted for its excellence, won the championship

consecutively in 2020, 2021, and 2022 in the Chinese Football Association Super League. The U23 football team of this top Chinese Super League club has won national football championships more than 20 times and consists of players aged 18–23. In terms of cultural hybridisation, this team is a pioneer among Chinese local clubs in introducing Western players, encouraging them to naturalise and gain Chinese nationality. The team has also developed cooperative relationships with several European clubs in Italy, the Netherlands, the UK, and others. Given its strong performance in the Chinese Super League and its advanced development system, selecting this team and its U23 squad for physical participant observation was significant.

Data Collection

Physical participant observation was conducted to examine cultural hybridisation within a Chinese local football club, focusing on the daily communication and collaboration between Chinese football players and players from Western countries during competitions. The objective was to explore both the successful aspects and the current challenges of cultural hybridisation, particularly in terms of intercultural communication and the instruction of scoring skills. The researcher employed a mobile phone or camera to record interactions between Western and Chinese football players, capturing discussions about the distinct characteristics of Western football clubs, football ethos, and other related topics. Additionally, instances where Western players instructed their Chinese counterparts in mastering defensive and shooting techniques were also documented.

Validity

'Investigator triangulation' was employed to assess the validity of participant observation. Prior to the observation, the researcher provided training sessions for the three additional observers to familiarise them with the key aspects to be recorded during visits to football clubs. Subsequently, the researcher arranged for the three observers to attend three separate visits to football clubs and observe competitions involving the Chinese national football team. The final step involved comparing the video clips saved on their devices to assess consistency. The consistency rate exceeded 75%, indicating a high degree of agreement among the participants. This result confirms that the 'investigator triangulation' approach ensures the validity of the participant observation findings.

Data Analysis

NVivo (QSR International Version) was utilised to analyse the data collected through physical participant observation. According to the official NVivo QSR International website, this software is designed for analysing various data types, including interviews, surveys, field notes, web pages, audio-visual material, and journal articles. The data from the participant observation included audio-visual recordings and texts generated

through communication between Western and Chinese football players. The data analysis process involved importing all materials into NVivo. The researcher then selected key moments for further analysis and recorded the time duration of these moments. The next step was to transcribe the audio of the interactions between the players into text. Finally, the researcher conducted a search for key terms such as cooperation, intercultural communication, tactical terms, and football players' cultural literacy within the NVivo data, in order to address the research objectives.

Findings

Results of Policy Analysis: The Significance of Encouraging More Western Football Players to Play for Chinese Football Clubs

With the increasing hybridisation of Western and Chinese football cultures, more foreign football players, professionally trained in Western clubs, have been introduced to China. This form of hybrid globalisation has the potential to enhance the overall level of competition in the Chinese Football Association Super League (Robertson & White, 2005; Wang, 2017). This section will explore the social recognition of Western football athletes playing for Chinese football clubs by analysing current policies on recruiting foreign players and examining how sports fans perceive these athletes in the Chinese football context.

Policy of Bringing in Western Football Players to China

When analysing policies related to the recruitment of Western football players for Chinese football clubs, it is evident that an increasing number of players, previously trained in Western football clubs, have been introduced to play for Chinese teams. From 1994 to 2002, during the early years of the professionalisation of the Chinese Football League, policies allowed each Chinese football club to recruit three foreign players, all of whom could register for competitions. Subsequently, in order to foster cultural hybridisation within the Chinese football industry and to facilitate the adoption of advanced Western football culture, the Chinese Football Association (2016) decided to increase the number of foreign football players permitted to play for each Chinese club.

Until 2020, each Chinese football club was allowed to register six foreign players, with five eligible to play in competitions (one as a substitute and four as starters). Due to COVID-19, a new regulation was introduced requiring teams to balance the number of foreign players participating in matches. In 2021, this restriction was lifted to attract more foreign players, especially those trained in Western countries (CFA, 2016). As noted by Ye and Jarvie (2024), the coach of the Chinese National Football Team, there is also a push for more Western players to gain Chinese citizenship and become "naturalised players." Each club can only

have one naturalised player (CFA, 2016), though increasing this number would allow more foreign players from Western countries to join Chinese football

clubs. From a governance perspective, the CFA (2016) aims to strengthen Chinese football by supporting the inclusion of more Western players (Wang, 2018).

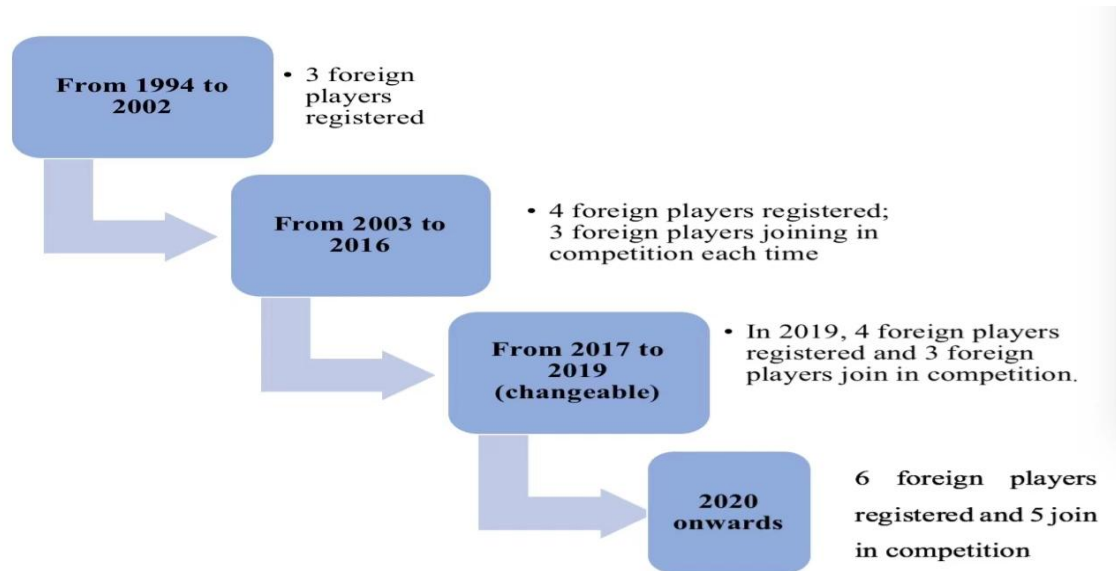


Figure 1: The Changing Policy of Bringing in Foreign Players to Chinese Football Clubs.

The social Recognition of Western Football Players in China

From the perspective of sports fans' recognition of Western football players in Chinese clubs, both discussions in the Football zone and semi-structured interviews highlighted the importance of recruiting Western players to enhance Chinese football. On one hand, Western players can more easily communicate with foreign coaches invited into the Chinese football industry, helping them better understand team tactics and contribute to victories for Chinese clubs. As noted by Robertson, Back and Bartlett (2016), this collaboration fosters stronger performance and tactical understanding within the team.

"Advanced football scoring skills and team tactics originated from the Western Professional Football League. While listening to the instruction of Western coaches, western football players can rapidly grasp the important points and apply them in fierce competition to get victory for Chinese football clubs (Robertson et al., 2016)."

Considering the advantages of verbal communication and the understanding of Western football culture, it is crucial to attract more Western football players to Chinese football clubs to improve the shooting success rate of these teams. On the other hand, Sun and Shan (2021) emphasised the importance of fostering competitive awareness in Chinese players by encouraging the involvement of more Western football players in Chinese football clubs. He stated that:

"More excellent Western football players engaging in Chinese football clubs can help local football players build up a sense of crisis and competitive awareness. They will begin to worry that their important position in

the football team may be taken place by a Western football player, so they will endeavour to enhance their scoring skills. While excellent naturalized player Alan joined in Beijing Guoan F.C., Alan and another foreign striker Bakambu have better performances scoring the goal, so Chinese local players Yuning Zhang and Ziming Wang become the (Sun & Shan, 2021) substitutes. If these two Chinese local players want to have more performance opportunities in this football team, they need to enhance their offense and dribbling ability to be able to compete with foreign strikers."

Chinese players are often relegated to substitutes due to their relatively lower aggressiveness compared to Western strikers and their lower shooting success rate. To demonstrate a higher level of play, Western strikers temporarily become the primary force in Chinese football teams, striving for victory. Meanwhile, Chinese players should focus on enhancing their offensive and dribbling skills, while building confidence to compete with Western players in their teams, in order to avoid being marginalised within Chinese football clubs.

From the governance perspective of Chinese football clubs, the CFA (2016) aims to provide policy support for the engagement of Western football players, thereby strengthening Chinese football by integrating more Western talent (Wang, 2018). It is crucial to recognise the significant role Western football players play in Chinese clubs. Specifically, their ability to communicate effectively with foreign coaches and understand team tactics enhances the chances of victory for Chinese football clubs. Chinese local players should focus on improving their offensive and dribbling skills, building confidence to compete with Western players, and avoiding marginalisation within the football industry.

From the viewpoint of cultural hybridisation in the

context of globalisation, globalised football culture could potentially replace local football culture, resulting in competition between globalised and local players during hybrid globalisation. If local football culture is to be preserved, Chinese local players must increase their competitive awareness. Otherwise, the influx of more Western players into local clubs may threaten the existence of Chinese players and marginalise local football culture in the Chinese football industry. Thus, cultural hybridisation is vital for neutralising differences and fostering cooperative and competitive relationships between Chinese and European players within Chinese football clubs.

Results of Participant Observation

Successful Aspects of the Hybrid Practice of Chinese Football

In terms of successful aspects of hybrid practice, it is important to recognise that outstanding Western football players or naturalised players developed in Western professional leagues have become core leaders in Chinese local football clubs, contributing significantly to the improvement of local players' offensive, defensive, and dribbling abilities. Firstly, the recruitment of Western football players plays a pivotal role in helping Chinese local players achieve greater success in scoring and compensating for weaknesses such as heading and long-range shots. For instance, a Western football player, recognised as one of the top scorers in the Chinese Professional League in 2021, has frequently assisted local players in enhancing their heading skills. He believes that a proficient header needs to continually improve in two key areas: jumping higher and remaining in the air for extended periods. In his spare time, he encouraged his Chinese teammates to practise bouncing techniques through exercises such as deep squats, horizontal jumps, and bow steps. These exercises aim to strengthen the thigh and waist muscles of Chinese players. Additionally, he focused on instructing Chinese midfielders to anticipate the ball's movement and determine the direction of passes before the Western striker enters the shooting circle. In addition to learning heading and long-range scoring techniques from Western football players, Chinese football clubs consistently ranked among the top five have sought to attract Western players with strong leadership qualities. On one hand, Western football players with high-level leadership skills can effectively manage conflicts during football matches. For example, the top scorer of the 2021 season, who played as a striker for Shandong Taishan, exemplifies exceptional leadership in the Chinese Professional League. When his teammates face misjudgements during the game or conflicts with referees, he confidently engages with the referees, helping them decide whether a yellow card should be issued. When his teammates become frustrated after being penalised for a foul or

disqualified, he proactively works with the coach to adjust team strategies and maintains the team's morale, ensuring all players remain passionate and focused on the game.

On the other hand, Western football players with strong leadership qualities can greatly appreciate Chinese local culture and actively assist other Western football players in integrating into Chinese society. For example, Ai Kesen, who grew up in Brazil and became a naturalised player for the Chinese national football team, not only scores and assists teammates during the Qatar World Cup qualifiers but also adapts well to Chinese society. He frequently expresses his pride in holding Chinese nationality and arranges for several Western football players to attend the National Day parade each year. Additionally, Ai Kesen encourages Western football athletes playing for Chinese clubs to immerse themselves in Chinese culture through bilingual seminars, bilingual television programmes, and other cultural activities.

Therefore, with regard to successful hybrid practices within the top five Chinese football clubs or the Chinese national team, it is crucial to recruit Western football players with strong leadership qualities, who can also assist Chinese local football players in enhancing their scoring abilities (Wang, 2017). The contribution of Western football players in improving the scoring skills of Chinese players, while simultaneously striving for integration into Chinese society, exemplifies the neutralisation of differences between globalised and local football cultures within the context of hybrid globalisation (Robertson & White, 2005; Roudometof, 2019).

Problems of the Hybrid Practice of Chinese Football

Cultural hybridisation between football players from Western countries and Chinese local players presents a series of challenges, including difficulties in acculturation and a perceived focus on financial gain rather than contributing to the development of Chinese football clubs. These issues can lead to mismanagement and financial losses for the clubs (Chen & Yang, 2021; Wang, 2017). Participant observation at Shandong Taishan Football Club has helped identify three primary issues related to cultural hybridisation within Chinese football clubs. The most evident issue, as observed during the 2021/22 season of the Chinese Football Association Super League, is that 50% of goals scored by Western football players primarily rely on their offensive abilities. Chinese football players often struggle with slower running speeds, leading to missed opportunities to pass the ball to their Western counterparts in time to secure a goal. Additionally, the dribbling skills of Chinese players are insufficient to effectively transition the ball from the backcourt to the penalty area, causing them to miss chances for secondary attacks and close-range shots by Western players. The second issue lies in the challenges of oral and intercultural communication, which result in Western football players' tactics not being fully

understood by their Chinese counterparts. Sociocultural adaptation, a key aspect of cultural transition, involves the integration and long-term adjustment of Western players to Chinese football clubs. This process requires Western football players to acclimatise to their new environment, overcoming challenges such as language barriers and a limited understanding of Chinese culture and society (Chen & Yang, 2021; Ryba, Stambulova, & Ronkainen, 2016).

According to feedback from Western football players in Chinese clubs, one difficulty arises in instructing Chinese players to maintain the correct pace when passing the ball to the penalty area and supporting them in scoring without being tackled by opponents. The main obstacle to this issue is that the Western player had not had the opportunity to learn Mandarin, the native language spoken by Chinese football players, prior to joining the club. Furthermore, Chinese football players struggle to articulate the technical challenges of scoring, dribbling, and defending in English. Consequently, language barriers hinder the development of Western players and obstruct their ability to become the tactical focal point of the team, limiting their ability to inspire Chinese players to engage effectively in secondary attacks and backcourt defence.

Moreover, it is important to recognise the barriers to intercultural communication in the second problem. In the context of hybrid globalization and cultural hybridization, intercultural communication within Chinese football clubs is a crucial factor influencing success rates. It centres on the recognition and mutual respect between Chinese local and Western football players, despite their cultural differences. A reduction in these communication barriers is associated with higher success rates for football clubs (Chen & Yang, 2021; Lauring, 2011). Effective intercultural communication fosters better understanding, collaboration, and tactical coordination, which are essential for optimising team performance. Nevertheless, one Western football player noted the challenges in achieving mutual adaptation between Chinese and Western football players in Chinese football clubs. This difficulty arises not only from the limited ability of Chinese football players to express football terminology in English fluently but also from their lack of familiarity with Western football principles, tactical styles from various clubs and national teams, and the importance of shifting their perception of Western football culture (Andrews, 2013). As a result, Chinese football players struggle to absorb instructions and guidance from their Western counterparts effectively. According to Liang (2014), a situation he experienced with Chinese football players

exemplifies a low degree of mutual adaptation and cultural hybridization, stemming from the limited understanding of football culture in Western countries. After completing regular training, Liang organised an activity for Chinese football players to watch the 1/8 knockout stage of the 2021 European Cup between England and Germany. This event aimed to expose Chinese players to different Western football cultures and help them identify which shooting techniques might be suitable for their own play.

English football is characterised by long passes, a direct and physical style, and a focus on strong confrontations, which appeals to a particular group of fans, though it can lead to fouls and injuries, especially for players lacking physical conditioning. In contrast, German football is known for its discipline, power, efficiency, and less direct approach (Maderer, Holtbrügge, & Schuster, 2014). However, Chinese football players were more focused on cheering and celebrating goals rather than engaging with Liang's analysis of the shooting process. They paid little attention to the deeper explanations of Western football culture and tactics, illustrating a gap in their understanding and the challenges of intercultural communication in this hybridization process.

As Orejan (2011) suggests, football culture education in China often emphasises the use of long passes and sprints to score, overlooking the intricate and aesthetically pleasing scoring techniques developed by various Western national teams. This lack of emphasis on the distinct characteristics of different Western football styles results in a reduced interest among Chinese football players in appreciating the diverse shooting techniques employed by players from different cultural backgrounds. This phenomenon can be understood as a cultural distance between Chinese and Western football players within clubs, which can hinder effective intercultural communication and mutual understanding during interactions. To overcome language barriers and foster efficient intercultural communication within Chinese football clubs, it is crucial to promote mutual adaptation between Chinese and Western football cultures, leading to a form of biculturalism or multiculturalism. Rather than allowing Chinese football culture to be entirely assimilated into Western football culture, this approach encourages an empathic understanding across cultures. Such an understanding would facilitate the development of a shared comprehension of football culture, principles, scoring techniques, and tactics among both Chinese and Western players in clubs (Lauring, 2011). The problems related to language barriers and intercultural communication are shown in Figure 2.

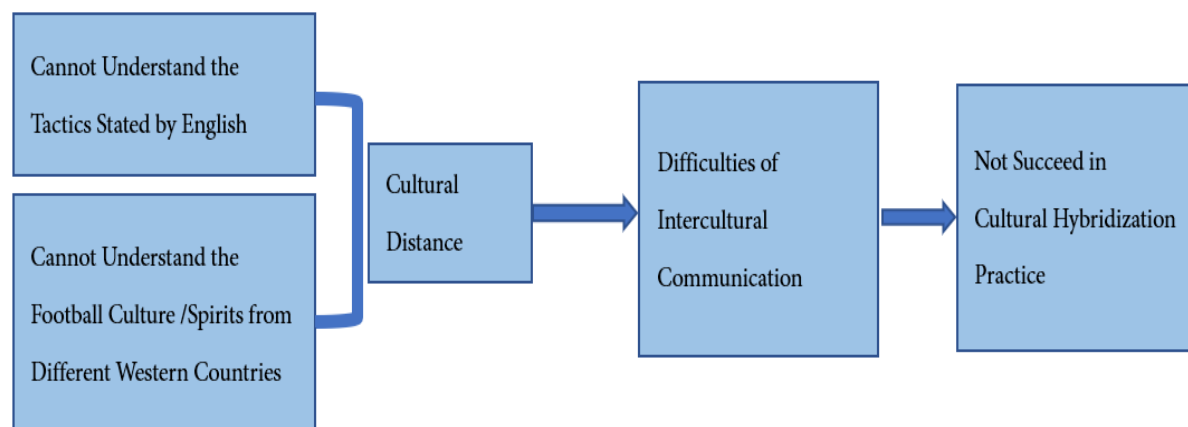


Figure 2: The Reasons Resulting in Difficulties of Intercultural Communication and Cultural Hybridization (Lauring, 2011).

The issues related to language barriers and intercultural communication are compounded by Western football players' strong desire for high salaries and frequent conflicts with their families living abroad. This often leads to a lack of focus on contributing to scoring or imparting knowledge of Western football culture to Chinese players. In some cases, players have even quit regular training for extended periods, such as more than two months, to return to their home countries to resolve family conflicts. Upon returning, they had to assist their families in settling in China before resuming their careers. Most weekends were then spent accompanying their families on trips around Chinese cities to avoid feelings of loneliness. Sociological studies suggest that disharmony in family relationships negatively affects the career development of football players in foreign countries (Ryba et al., 2016), particularly hindering their commitment to continuing their careers in China. Zhang (2020) further asserts that individuals with reliable family support are better able to cope with challenges while playing abroad, managing their work-life insecurities and fostering a harmonious family environment.

Discussion

Based on the successful aspects and challenges of cultural hybridisation practice identified above, it can be concluded that Western football players with leadership qualities can effectively teach Chinese football players advanced skills such as heading and scoring from a distance. The success of integrating globalised football culture lies in its ability to neutralise the disparities in football skills between Chinese and Western players, gradually reducing the cultural divide. This process enables Chinese players to better understand Western football, thereby increasing the extent of hybrid globalisation within China's football industry (Roudometof, 2014).

However, the current issues surrounding cultural hybridisation practice can be summarised in three key

aspects. Firstly, Chinese football players often rely on Western football players to complete scoring opportunities and lack awareness of secondary attack strategies. While globalised football culture is gradually assimilated during hybrid globalisation, it is crucial to focus on the self-development of local football culture. Secondly, difficulties in intercultural communication between Chinese and Western football players result in a limited degree of cultural hybridisation within Chinese football clubs, particularly in terms of empathic understanding of different football spirits, scoring skills, and tactics (Lauring, 2011). This highlights the challenge of quickly homogenising local football culture with globalised football culture, due to the cultural distance (Cave, 2004) and Chinese players' unfamiliarity with Western football culture. Lastly, Western football players often struggle to achieve a work-life balance, as they are affected by feelings of loneliness and conflicts with family members living abroad. This underscores the importance of integrating globalised elements into the local environment and enhancing cultural subjectivity, which can help prevent alienation and promote a more harmonious environment for both Western players and their families (Ryba et al., 2016). This study underscores the importance of introducing Western football players to the development of Chinese football. It also addresses several challenges associated with cultural hybridisation within Chinese football clubs, including difficulties in intercultural communication, the alienation of expatriate football players within Chinese society, and Chinese football players' limited awareness of secondary attacks and other forms of cooperation with Western strikers. The study contributes to an understanding of the role of cultural hybridisation in the context of the globalisation of Western football culture and its potential to reshape Chinese football. However, while it identifies the key problems of cultural hybridisation in Chinese football clubs, it does not propose solutions. Consequently, this study paves the way for further

research on strategies to enhance the cross-cultural competence of Chinese football players and address the challenges posed by cultural hybridisation within Chinese football clubs.

Conclusion

Integrating Western football culture into China presents both exciting opportunities and notable challenges. This study demonstrates that the inclusion of Western players and coaches has significantly enhanced the skills and strategic understanding of Chinese football players. By learning from these experienced professionals, local players have improved their heading and long-distance scoring abilities, which has, in turn, elevated the overall competitiveness of Chinese football clubs. However, the process is not without its difficulties. A major issue is that Chinese players often depend too heavily on their Western counterparts to score, indicating a need for greater independence and confidence on the field. Language barriers and differing football philosophies can hinder effective communication and integration of Western strategies. Additionally, personal and family issues, such as isolation and work-life balance, can affect Western players' performance and commitment. Providing better support for these players and their families is crucial for their adjustment. Fostering collaboration between Chinese and Western football cultures is essential, and addressing these challenges will enable Chinese football to fully benefit from cultural hybridisation, enhancing both individual player development and the national team.

Implications

The integration of Western football culture in China has far-reaching implications beyond just improving on-

field performance. Adopting advanced Western training methods and tactics enhances Chinese players' competitiveness in scoring, defence, and overall gameplay. This, in turn, boosts individual performance and leads to greater success for both Chinese football clubs and the national team. Cultural exchange between Western and Chinese football professionals also fosters a more diversified and inclusive culture in China. Western players and coaches bring valuable perspectives that help Chinese players develop a broader understanding of different football philosophies. This exposure can create innovative playing styles by blending the best of both cultures. Furthermore, improving intercultural communication and breaking down language barriers can foster better teamwork, reduce conflict, and improve the clubhouse atmosphere. This calls for targeted language training and cultural education to ensure effective communication and cohesion within teams.

Western football stars can serve as role models for Chinese fans, potentially sparking domestic investments not only in football but across other sports. Their influence could also foster a sense of internationalism among Chinese football fans, broadening their cultural horizons. From a policy standpoint, the CFA should refine regulations and enhance support measures for integrating Western players. Key areas include providing a strong support system for expatriate players and their families to adjust to life in China, with a focus on work-life balance and cultural adaptation. Additionally, efforts should be made to retain top talent to maximise their contributions to Chinese football.

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