

Qualitative Analysis Of European Football Spirits Used For Reforming The Cultivation Concept Of Chinese Teenage Football Players

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Abstract. Accommodative glocalization indicates that, the practices, institutions and meanings of glocalized football culture have been pragmatically absorbed (Robertson, 2007). This study is designed to explore the elements of European football being accepted in China and examine how the cultivation concept for Chinese teenage football players has been reformed through learning from Europe in the context of accommodative glocalization. Ethnographic research (participation observation and semi-structured interview) revealed that, Chinese football clubs should avoid conflicts between Chinese local football players and foreign football players being professionally cultivated in Europe. It is of significance to cultivate Chinese teenage football players to learn about European football spirits (not yielding, being progressive and stay in good athletic condition, self-transcendence, collective cooperation), rather than simply pursuing good results in Chinese Super League and depending on European football players' contributions introduced by clubs. The processes of accommodative glocalization can help to reconsider the advantages and drawbacks of glocalized football culture

and reformulate the local football culture in China by absorbing the advantages of glocalized football culture.

Key words: Accommodative glocalization, European football spirits, Reform the cultivation concept, Absorb the advantages of glocalized football culture, Reformulate the local football culture

■ INTRODUCTION

Late at night in July 2021, I was invited to attend a fan gathering for viewing European Championship finals (England Versus Italy) in Ningbo, one of the most well-known coastal cities in China. Chinese sport fans were impressed by quick attack of two European football teams. And the quick attack can help to create shooting opportunities, rather than relying on individual ability of striker. All Chinese sport fans aware that European football team's high level of performance never fails regardless of collective consciousness, which inspire football players to focus on both scoring goals and secondary attack. However, the performance of Chinese football players cannot make sport fans satisfy, because of the lack of collectiveness consciousness and football players with high-level offense ability. We have paid attention that Chinese national football team is struggling for entering the FIFA World Cup-Qatar 2022. Only Chinese football players Wu Lei being cultivated in European football clubs can make contributions for scoring goals, defense and creating shooting opportunities. Relying too much on Chinese football players being cultivated in Europe has resulted in the fact that Chinese national football team is very short of backup football talents (Tan, 2017). As argued by Tan (2017), the urgent thing for the reconstruction of Chinese football is to learn from Europe and reform the concept for cultivating home-grown teenage football talents in China and establish a feasible and sustainable football system.

However, little researchers used Robertson's framework glocalization of football culture (2007) to study how Chinese football industry learn from Europe to reform the concept for cultivating Chinese local teenage football players. My research is designed to fill in this research gap. This paper draws on the dissemination of European football spirits in China and reconstruction of cultivation concept for Chinese local teenage football players by using Robertson's framework glocalization of football culture (2007). Two research questions are shown as follows:

RQ1: What elements of European football spirits can be accepted in China?

RQ2: How can the concept for cultivating Chinese teenage football players be reformed, while learning from Europe?

My research will redefine Roberson's analytical framework based on current situation of the cultivation of home-grown teenage football players in China and develop further discussions about the theory of accommodative glocalization. In terms of practical implications, this study offers strategies for Chinese football industry to effectively make improvements of Chinese teenage football players' football spirits.

■ LITERATURE REVIEW

As indicated by Horton (2011), sport as global cultural product is no longer the preserve of occidental culture or dominated and organized by European or American nations. Glocalization refers to a new cultural hybrid of globalized popular culture such as European football culture hybridized with Chinese local football culture (Robertson, 2000; Kraidy, 2002). Glocalization indicates the localization of a theme or product that has been popularly welcomed all over the world and the studies of glocalization is going to explore the extent of glocalized culture being recognized and examined how globalized popular culture negotiated with local culture while it has been introduced in other countries (Appadurai, 1996; Robertson, 2001).

The analytical framework “typology of glocalization” developed by Robertson (2007) has been used for analyzing the glocalization of Scottish football culture in North America and studying the acceptance degree of Scottish football culture in North America and contested/negotiated relationship between glocalized Scottish football culture and local football culture. Part of framework shown as Figure one is used for my research, containing research background (Glocalization of European football culture in China), typology of glocalization (accommodative glocalization) and sociological criteria (Cultural receptivity, Rituals and Pattern of association) for studying the dissemination and acceptance level of glocalized football culture and negotiated relationship between glocalized football culture and Chinese local football culture while reconstructing Chinese local football culture. The meaning of accommodative glocalization and three sociological criteria in this framework has been redefined in Chinese context.

Table 1. Accommodative glocalization of European football culture in China (Robertson, 2007)

Cultural receptivity	Rituals	Pattern of Association
Identify the acceptance of glocalized football culture	Cross-cultural comparisons	Understand new relationship between glocalized football culture and Chinese local culture

Accommodation in Robertson’s analytical framework indicates that, the practices, institutions and meanings of glocalized football culture have been pragmatically absorbed, simultaneously key elements of local culture have been maintained (Robertson, 2007). Local and glocalized new culture like European football culture

are linked through practical comparisons. And the meanings of local culture may be reconstructed through cultural comparisons practice, so as to reconstruct relationship between glocalized football culture and local culture (Robertson &Giulianotti, 2007). The criterion *Cultural receptivity* in Robertson’s analytical framework refers to the acceptance degree of glocalizedculture. The criterion *Rituals* in Robertson’s analytical framework is used for studying the practices of cross-cultural comparisons, hybridizing glocalized football culture with local football culture and assimilating local football culture (Robertson, 2007). The criterion *Pattern of association* in Robertson’s analytical framework is used for measuring new relationship between glocalized football culture and local football culture and exploring how local football culture has been reconstructed by glocalization (White, 2005; Robertson, 2007).

In my research, *Accommodation* within the framework of “typology of glocalization” is going to study the acceptance level of European football spirits in China (the criterion *cultural receptivity*) and cross-cultural comparisons (the criterion *rituals*), through analyzing online discussion about football spirits of European football players especially their advantages over Chinese local football players. The criterion *Pattern of Association* for Accommodative glocalization is going to understand how Chinese local football benefits from European football to have improvements for the concept of cultivating home-grown teenage football players.

■ METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation is to do observation and textuyal analysis of sport fans’ discussion about European football spirits, comparisons of European and Chinese football players’ football spirits. Participant observation is going to record and understand all social media posts, video clips, comments, interactions in discussion zone *Football* and competition results of Chinese Football Association Super League

estimated by Sina Sport, during 1st March to 30th June 2020 in the season of 2019-2020 (approximately 2500 pieces of posts, comments, videos or conversation created by football fans) and half-year period from 12th Sep 2020 to 23rd May 2021 (approximately 5400 pieces of posts, comments, videos or conversation created by football fans). Half-year period from 12th Sep 2020 to 23rd May 2021 is 2020-2021 season of European Football League with 38 rounds of competitions among European leading football clubs (La Liga, English Premier League, Bundesliga, Serie A). During half-year period from 12th Sep 2020 to 23rd May 2021, sport fans are actively engaging in posting, commenting and creating video for topical issues and sharing own opinions of football players' scoring skills and behaviors. In spite of the outbreak of COVID-19 in the world in 2020, sport fans in discussion zone *Football* on Sina Weibo still enthusiastically engage in making commenting on topical issues in European Football League and Chinese Football Association Super League while competitions start. Thus, it is of significance to conduct participant observation during these two periods, because of time period matching with the schedule of Football League in both European countries and China and more heated discussions than the break time of football seasons.

Participant observation is aimed at gaining a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals (such as a religious, occupational, sub cultural group, or a particular community) and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their cultural environment (Machin, 2002). The key to participant observation indicates that researchers have to immerse themselves in a culture and in order to create "a comprehensive cultural map of the world" like those people who are being observed (Machin, 2002: 7). In order to ensure the neutrality and objectivity of observation results, researcher plays the role of "observer as participant" who mainly witnesses and engages in sport fans' discussions about the comparisons of European and Chinese football players' football spirits.

According to Howell's phrases (1972), the four stages for participant observation are establishing or getting to know the people and cultural phenomenon, immersing oneself in the field, recording data and observations, and consolidating the information gathered. As for the experience of participant observation, firstly, I as researcher for participant observation spent one-month on collecting information of schedule of football competition in 2019/2020 and 2020/21 season and knowing about football players joining in Football League for every football club. Also, before competitions in European and Chinese Football League starts, researcher searched for ongoing topical issues that are heatedly discussed by sport fans, in order to continually observe and collect data of these issues. When the competitions of 2020/21 season in European and Chinese Football League start, researcher played the role of "observer" in discussion zone and recorded daily topical issues and fan's discussions about football players' football spirits in real time. After completing observation and recording, researcher selected observation data that are issues discussed among sport fans reflecting the virtues or disadvantages of European football. Finally, the textual analysis of data being selected out is designed to explore the elements of European football spirits can be accepted in China which can help to reform the concept of cultivating home-grown teenage football players.

■ DATA ANALYSIS

Cultural receptivity and cross-cultural comparisons: in favor of football spirits (not yielding, being progressive, self-transcendence, collective cooperation) and abandon offensive behaviors

As interpreted by sport fans, European national football team like Portugal national team can achieve the highest honor of European champion not simply depending on

super star's performance. football spirits "not yielding" of Portugal national team are indispensable elements for Portugal national team to get this honor (the name of sport fans is anonymous and use letter A, B, C etc.):

(fans' discussion about issue in Excerpt 1 on 13rd March 2020)

A: In spite of injuring his knee, Ronaldo still insisted in running on the football field. We have experienced a feeling of never giving up.

B: Do you think injuries would negatively influence Ronaldo's future development? If Ronaldo will be absent for the game of Portugal national team or European football club signing contract with Ronaldo, will these teams have better performance?

C: Don't think so. Header! Side-way attack! His individual scoring performance and spirit of not yielding seem perfect not being inferior to football players aging around 20 years old.

D: Agree with you. Ronaldo would not fade out over 30 years old. His consciousness of attacking, defending and leadership would help Portugal national team and European football club to get the victory.

E: In the year of 2016, Ronaldo gained the honor of FIFA Ballon d'Or. His performance is highly recognized in the world.

F: This honor belongs to Ronaldo without any doubt. His professional spirit would positively influence his development after 30 years old. All the time he insists fitness training and maintaining healthy diet according to the plan designed by private fitness coach.

During the discussions about Ronaldo's football spirits, sport fans A and C think that football spirit of not yielding is the greatest motivation for insisting running on the football field. However, sport fan B were worried about the fact that Ronaldo's injury would impede his further development over 30 years old. Sport fan D, E and F hold opposite perspectives that European football players aging over 30 years old enter the

decline period of career development. As indicated by sport fan D and F, football players who would not enter decline period over 30 years old need to insist doing fitness and they should be able to become the leader of sport team and seek for tactics of attacking and defending for scoring the success. Similarly, People's Daily (2016) attached the importance of Ronaldo's football spirits of not yielding and insisting doing fitness to stay in peak physical condition over 30 years old. And it has been illustrated in coverage that Chinese football players should change the stereotyped opinion of over 30 years old equivalent to entering decline period of football career development. Thus, European football spirits of not yielding and being progressive while aging above 30 are widely recognized in China and help to substitute stereotyped opinions among Chinese teenage football players.

Furthermore, European football players' experience of overcoming physical obstacles to gain the victory are frequently mentioned in Chinese sport fans' discussions. Lionel Messi, Argentine professional footballer playing as a forward and captain for Spanish football club Barcelona. His story of getting rid of microplasia and becoming competitive in European Football League can inspire Chinese football players to aware the importance of "self-transcendence" and overcome physical weaknesses like slow movements and not able to break through and organizing fast break. Excerpt 2 post at June 2020 illustrates how Lionel Messi fight against with disease:

While Messi was 11 years old, he was diagnosed as a microplasia which impede the development of fetal bone. More terribly, monthly medical expenses reaching 900 USA Dollar made his family depress and could not make sure whether Messi could continue his football career. Owing to his deficit in height, the football club Atlético Newell's Old Boys in his city did not want to cultivate him anymore. Messi did not give up football training. His experience impressed the coach from Barcelona's youth team at that time. In spite that the height of Messi is only 1.4 metre at his 13 years old, he endeavored to do series of leg movements to avoid

the closure of bone epiphysis. While witnessing Messi gained the honor of FIFA Ballon d'Or for five times, can we remember the difficulties Messi met in the past? The courage for defeating microplasia needs to be remembered by everyone.

As mentioned by this sport fan, Messi can be defined as ‘super star’ deserve for Chinese football players to follow not only because of “gained the honor of FIFA Ballon d'Or for five times”, also owing to his persistence in “defeating microplasia”. Apart from mentioning the importance of self-transcendence in European football culture, among nearly 80 comments followed by this post, over half of comments were expressing their appreciation of Messi’s football spirits “not being afraid of disease impeding his football career”, especially two comments discussing the importance of Messi’s spirits for Chinese football players (the name of sport fans is anonymous and use letter A, B):

(fans’ discussion about Messi’s story in Excerpt 2)

A: So Chinese national team and Chinese football clubs need to enhance Chinese local football players’ ability of rapid movement on the football court and shoot with power and accuracy.

B: Hope that Messi’s story can encourage more young football players not care about physical quality inferior to European football players. Be more confident to do better in attacking and defending on the football court.

Sport fans A and B hold the perspective that Chinese local football players can learn the skills of rapid movement to make up for physical weaknesses. Messi’s experience can encourage Chinese local football players to set up confidence for enhancing strengths and competing with strong rivals. But, nearly 40% of comments were focusing on discussing whether Barcelona’s tremendous achievement depended on

Messi's competitive individual performance or overall strength of the team, shown as follows (the name of sport fans is anonymous and use letter C, D, E, F):

C: Barcelona depends too much on Messi!

D: It seems that they always expect Messi to handle the situation and get the score.

E: But you cannot ignore the teammates who make contribution for defending or dribbling into penalty box.

F: Sure. If no one pass the ball to Messi, Messi cannot go straight into penalty box and completed shooting successfully.

Sport fans C and D think that Messi's individual performance makes contribution for Barcelona's victory every time and they rely too much on 'super star', whereas sport fans E and F attach the importance of cooperation in European football team and deny that Barcelona can gain the victory without other teammates' awareness of defending and secondary attack. As indicated by Gong (2020), we should believe these European 'super star' take the role of leading the cooperation of the whole team as opposed to simply utilizing personal talents to score. As shown in Excerpt 3 post on 20th April 2021:

Gerard Pique as leader of Barcelona's defense line came back while competing with Athletic Bilbao, in spite that he has not recovered from knee injuries. The score result of Real Madrid CF versus Getafe CF was 2:2. It was possibly that Barcelona can get the champion of Copa del Rey if they could defeat Athletic Bilbao. As spiritual leader of the whole team, Gerard Pique encouraged teammates to build up confidence. As he said, "this season seems to be filled with difficulties for every football player. In our life, sometimes we may fall down, but we need to stand up and overcome difficulties. We should believe that our road for getting champion would begin at Copa del Rey. Next goal would be the champion of La Liga. If we can get these two champions, that would be a

fantastic season”. Gerard Pique was acted as leader of designing tactics for defending and tackling. He asked teammates Clément Lenglet and Óscar Mingueza to block the ball of opponent to enter penalty area. He was responsible for tackling the ball aggressively if there was any chance and passed the ball to striker Messi.

(fans’ discussions about Excerpt 4, the name of sport fans is anonymous and use letter J, K, L)

J: Clear design of the responsibilities of striker, central defender and full back for Barcelona. So that Messi can get the chance of scoring goals.

K: Gerard Pique makes every player perform their duties.

L: Chinese football players always dream of bringing in foreign players defined as ‘super star’ to get the victory for their football clubs, rather than enhancing the awareness of cooperation in football team. Sounds ridiculous. It is important to consider how the cooperative spirits can be established in Chinese football team.

As indicated in Excerpt 3, the function of Gerard Pique has been defined as tactics designer and spiritual leader for Barcelona, who is able to maximize the potentials of players in different position (striker, central defender, full back etc.) and enable the whole team to achieve success collectively rather than depending on striker’s ability to score goals (Gong, 2020). Sport J and K think that tactics designer and spiritual leader Gerard Pique plays important role for Barcelona’s victory. Owing to high appreciation of cooperative spirit in Barcelona football team, sport L suggest that depending on foreign players with strong ability to score the goal cannot be reasonable for Chinese football team. The perspective of sport L reflects the importance for Chinese teenage football players to learn about “collective cooperation” and cultivate core leadership for football team to maximize each player’s strength.

Apart from addressing the significance of European ‘super star’s football spirits of not yielding, self-transcendence and cooperation, too aggressive behaviors such as pushing over opposing player deliberately in penalty area cannot be accepted. As was shown in Excerpt 4 on 14th March 2021:

When Wu lei’s teammate was awarded a penalty after a sliding tackle, Wu Lei went on battling for the ball in penalty area. Opposing player Rodríguez kicked down Wu Lei and abuse his conduct. Then all teammates from opponent team Deportivo Mirandés stayed together to abuse Chinese football player Wu Lei, but no one stood out to help this Chinese football player while being offended in European countries.

(fans’ discussions about Excerpt 5, the name of sport fans is anonymous and use letter M, N, O)

M: Being kind not equivalent to be bullied in European countries. Offensive behaviors need to be eliminated Spanish Football League.

N: Leaving Spanish Football club will be the best choice for Wu Lei. Football players in Deportivo Mirandés do not want to waste any chance of scoring especially penalty kick resulted from opponent’s misconduct. In order to get the victory, they do not care attack opposing players.

O: Frequent conflicts cannot be allowed in football game, especially flagrant foul to struggle for more scoring chances.

Excerpt 4 demonstrates that opposing player physically offended Chinese football player Wu Lei and Chinese sport fans hold opposed perspectives for this offensive behavior. As is suggested by sport fans M, N and O, the behavior of offending opposing players resulted from aggression in European professional Football League need to be abandoned, so as to avoid conflicts in football game.

Based on Chinese sport fan's discussions in discussion zone on Sina Weibo, football spirits including not yielding, being progressive and stay in good athletic condition, self-transcendence, collective cooperation are of significance for Chinese teenage football players to learn. But, the offensive behaviors of European football players should be abandoned. During the accommodative glocalization, the advantages of glocalized football culture can be absorbed, but it does not mean that all the elements of glocalized football culture should be accepted among local sport fans, which can be seen as the rejection of cultural homogenization (Roudometof, 2014).

Pattern of Association: reserve essential elements of local football culture and benefit from glocalized football so as to make up weaknesses

While making European football culture accommodate to Chinese local football culture especially discussing the issue whether Chinese football industry needs to bring in more European players, retired Chinese football player Fan Zhiyi (1996), the first Chinese football player being awarded the honor of "Asian Footballer of the Year", stated that the football clubs in China should be the symbolization of every city. He also pointed out the importance of maintaining the harmony of football team while letting foreign players integrate in Chinese football clubs. Except that harmony among Chinese and European players in Chinese football industry should be maintained, it is suggested to strengthen the power of Chinese national football team and football clubs from different cities while learning from European football culture. Fan (1996) stated that it is necessary to build up Chinese local football players' core value and spirit of struggling for the victory for football clubs. As stated in "The Medium and Long-Term Development Plan of Chinese Football (2016-2050)" (National Development and Reform Commission, 2016), "in respond to fervent hope and expectation of the Chinese people by revitalizing and developing football, Chinese local football players should improve physical and mental health and

contribute to realizing the Chinese Dream through rejuvenation of the nation and enhancing national cohesion and pride.” Sonntag (2018) argued the importance of cultivating home-grown football talents through building up external communication with successful sport nation in Europe, so as to have improvements in their understandings of European football spirits.

Thus, maintaining harmony in Chinese football clubs and improving home-grown football talents’ physical and mental health and their understanding of football spirits in European football teams are important for Chinese football industry during the accommodative glocalization. During the accommodative glocalization, it is of significance to reserve essential elements of local football culture and cultivate more local football players to strengthen the power of local football, and also can benefit from glocalized football culture so as to make up the weaknesses of Chinese teenage football players and management system of local football clubs.

■ CONCLUSION

In conclusion, during the accommodative glocalization of European football culture in China, Chinese football clubs symbolizing the image of every city should avoid conflicts between Chinese local football players and foreign football players being professionally cultivated in Europe. In terms of reforming the concept of cultivating Chinese teenage football players, they need to aware that Chinese local football clubs cannot rely too much on European football players’ contributions to pursue good results in Chinese Super League and get more investment from enterprises. It is of significance to enrich Chinese teenage football player’s understanding of virtue of football spirits in European football teams such as not yielding, being progressive and stay in good athletic condition, self-transcendence, collective cooperation. It is essential to protect the particularity of local football culture and strengthen the power

of local football, so as to avoid unconditional acceptance of glocalized football culture and avoid cultural homogenization (Cave, 2004; Roudometof, 2014). The processes of accommodative glocalization especially the practice of cultural comparisons can help to reconsider the advantages and drawbacks of glocalized football culture and reformulate the local football culture in China by absorbing the advantages of glocalized football culture.

Finally, my conclusions bring up my attention to some of the limitations of this study and more possibilities of further research on glocalization of European football culture in China and reforming the concept of cultivating Chinese teenage football players. In terms of more discussions about Robertson's theory of glocalization (2007), further research can focus on studying other two typologies (hybrid glocalization and transformative glocalization) contained in Robertson's framework of glocalization (2007). It is possible to design the research on studying how hybridization of European and Chinese football culture help to cultivate home-grown teenage football players and how the development of Chinese local teenage football player is being transformed while being cultivated in European football teams. In addition, this paper lacks the qualitative studies of European football players' scoring skills, strategies in football game and the ways for building up stamina that can be learned by Chinese local teenage football players. Last but not least, this study has not paid attention on professional sport scholars' interpretations about reforming the concept of cultivating Chinese local teenage football players and further research can be designed to collect opinions of PE teacher or scholars researching on sport industry.

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