

CHINA'S SOFT POWER: THE MAKING OF FOOTBALL SUPERPOWER

'SOFT POWER' CINA : MENUJU KEKUATAN ADIDAYA DALAM SEPAKBOLA

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Abstract – A significant economic rise provides an opportunity for China to expand its influence globally, especially in sectors where China does not have strong influences. One of them is football. The average achievement of its National football has pushed the government to implement soft power strategy to improve the quality and the competitiveness of its national football. This strategy is carried out with a strong synergy between the government and private sector businesses nationwide. This paper will analyze how China's soft power strategy implemented in order to advance its national football and their national pride globally.

Keywords : China, soft power, economy, football, investment

Abstrak – Kebangkitan ekonomi Cina memberikan peluang untuk memperluas pengaruh secara global, terutama pada sektor-sektor dimana Tiongkok tidak memiliki pengaruh yang cukup kuat. Salah satunya adalah sepakbola. Prestasi sepakbola nasional yang biasa-biasa saja membuat pemerintah menerapkan strategi soft power untuk mendorong perbaikan kualitas dan persaingan sepakbola nasional. Strategi ini dilakukan dengan sinergi yang kuat antara pemerintah dengan sektor bisnis swasta nasional. Makalah ini akan menganalisis bagaimana strategi soft power tersebut diimplementasikan demi kemajuan sepakbola nasional dan kehormatan bangsa di mata dunia.

Kata kunci : Cina, soft power, ekonomi, sepakbola, investasi

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Introduction

In recent decades, China's economy experienced significant progress. Economic reforms that began in the late 1970s has made the People's Republic of China (PRC) emerged as a major player in the global economic constellation.² The IMF estimates that China will be the largest economic power in the world before the end of the decade.³ This economic revival presents both opportunities and challenges in all aspects, and one of them is in the football.

Li, Macintosh and Bravo said that sport in China is heavily influenced by the government. This foundation can be seen by the formation of their sporting national body, The State General Administration of Sport, to ensure control of the operational branches of the sport in China. It starts from the planning stage to the execution of policy and laws that support the development of the sports industry.⁴

Sports in general, is a thing to be proud by the PRC. After successful national sports reform, China has always been in the top four in Summer Olympic competition since 1990. At the 2008

Olympics in Beijing, China secured number one spot with 48 gold medals. But unfortunately this does not apply to their national football. China football national team had only one winless participation in the 2002 World Cup, had never been Asian Cup champions and currently ranked at 82, or one rank above the Faroe Islands, in the FIFA world rankings.

Aware of its national football achievement, the government is trying to reform their national football. In the initial phase, the government formed a professional competition, Jia-A League in 1994, but it did not go very well. The scandal of illegal gambling, match fixing and bribery occurred in the journey of Jia-A league competition.

Ten years later, the national football body, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) gave birth to Chinese Super League (CSL) to replace the Jia-A League, which was attended by 16 participants of professional football club. The objective of establishing CSL is to improve quality and create a high level of competition; introduce modern managerial concepts; enforce the minimum standards of professionalism; encourage the inflow of foreign coaches and players of high quality; and gradually establish a system of European football for the registration and transfer of players.⁵

In general, there is a gap between the China's sports achievements with the achievements of its football. For

² Thomas G. Rawski, "The Rise of China's Economy", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, Vol.16, No.06, June 2011, pp. 1-6.

³ Mark Harrison and Debin Ma, "Soaring Dragon, Stumbling Bear: China's Rise in a Comparative Context", *The CAGE-Chatham House Series*, No.6, March 2013, pp.2-12.

⁴ Ming Li, Eric Macintosh and Gonzalo Bravo, "Sport in China heavily Influenced by the Government", *Human Kinetic*, 2012, <http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts/sport-in-china-heavily-influenced-by-government>, accessed on Thursday, January 12, 2017.

⁵ Severine Bardon, "The Economics of Sport in China: A Maturing Sector", *China Perspectives* No.1, 2008, pp. 40-46.

the Chinese government, football achievements becomes a priority for the revival of the nation on the world stage. This article will discuss how China's strategy using soft power to support their ambitions of becoming a superpower in the world of football, where business, politics and sports intersect.

Why football?

Football as a peoplesport can be a bridge to expand China's influence while strengthening their economies, because football nowadays has turned into a profitable industry. Football is a market which is unusual because of the intensity of customer' loyalty, in this case the fans or supporters, to create a brand of football into a market that is very special. Grant argued that partisanship and loyalty of supporters to a club make their fans willing to do anything, from purchasing expensive match tickets and club's merchandises, watch the game at a non flexible time, and buying overpriced food or drinks that are sold in the stadium.⁶Therefore, football supporters have become the subject of increasingly commercialised and commodified nature of professional football.⁷

In order to obtain sustainable development through sport, football clubs should be seen as an economic

⁶ Wyn Grant, "An Analytical Framework for a Political Economy of Football", *British Politics*, No.2, 2007, pp. 69-90.

⁷ David Kennedy and Peter Kennedy, "Towards a Marxist political economy of football supporters", *Capital & Class* No.34, 2, 2010. pp.181-182.

factor, like a company, because of its importance lies in how football clubs can contribute to ensure economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity. Transition from production-based economy to a service based economy and consumption provide power to obtain sustainable development through football.⁸

Football industry also allows massive investment in terms of ownership of the club and football infrastructure development. The industry also involves large amounts of money circulating in the form of broadcasting rights, advertising and sponsorship. Not only from an economic standpoint, football is also a platform that is able to provide wider access to spread its influence on the global level through events and competitions like the World Cup, the Olympics, the European Cup, Champions League, and many more.

It is noteworthy that in recent years, European football clubs are already seeing Asia as a new lucrative market. Clubs such as Juventus, AC Milan, Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich has shifted its target to 'colonialize' new markets in Asia. Some of the club, comes and visit Asian countries for their pre-season tour. Four episode of Italian League Super Cup match between Italian league winner and Italian cup winner was held in China. Three times

⁸ Vlad Rosca, "Sustainable Development of a city using a Football Club", *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, No.7, August, 2010, pp.61-68.

at the Beijing National Stadium, and one time at The Shanghai Stadium. A proof that football has evolved in such a way and become an important tool in the process of globalization.

A recent study by CSIS notes that by 2030 Asia will be home to more than half the world's middle-class consumers, and account for more than 40 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP). The region's aggregate weight in the global economy continues to increase. China is now the world's second largest economy by nominal GDP, and largest by purchasing power parity. Average annual per capita disposable income in 2014 was around \$3,000.⁹ Asian emerging economies, especially in China provides opportunity and challenges for China to bring forward their national football ambition.

Football clubs nowadays are becoming part of a larger and more integrated global strategy and becoming an instrument of economic globalization.¹⁰ China of course saw this opportunity. They see football as an area that can and should be exploited as the extension of their national interest, both from the economic and political aspects. It is quite natural because football has become an industry and market that is very special.

⁹ George Abonyi, "An Alternative Perspective on Asian Emerging Economies", CogitASIA, CSIS, March 1, 2017.

¹⁰ Osvaldo Croci and Julian Ammirante, "Soccer in the Age of Globalization", *Peace Review*, 11, 4, December 1999, pp.500-502.

China's Soft Power in Football

As an emerging force, of course China wants to get all the attention and more authority in the global system. To achieve that, China is applying their soft power to other countries, especially western and African countries. Joseph Nye said that the Soft power is the attractive power. Soft power is more than just the influence, coercion or the ability to move people through argument.¹¹ Furthermore, soft power can be defined as the ability to get what it wants through an attraction, rather than coercion or payment.¹²

According to Zhou, China's strategy emphasizes soft power, because they see this strategy is a weak point for their superpower bitter rivals in global politics, the United States. Since the Iraq war began in 2003, the United States has suffered a serious setback in terms of soft power. For China, the drive to go forward with the use of soft power is not just a desire to promote a particular brand or their political philosophy, but more to rebuild national credibility. China's soft power has arrived in the world in the form of scholarships for foreign students to study in China, helping many countries financially, as well as playing an important role in many international organizations.¹³

¹¹ Sheng Ding, "Soft Power and The Rise of China: An Assessment of China's Soft Power in Its Modernization Process", A Dissertation submitted to Graduate School-Newark Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2006, pp.41-45.

¹² Jinghao Zhou, "Does China's Rise Threaten The United States?", *Asian Perspectives*, Vol.32, No.3, 2008, pp.171-182.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.180.

Picture 1. Money spent during Winter Transfer Window 2016.

Chinese Soccer Clubs Flex Their Financial Muscle

Winter transfer market expenditure in selected leagues in 2016*



Source: Statista, 2016.

One area that has not been used by China in terms of soft power is football. Football as one of the most popular sports in the world, is an opportunity to apply soft power to the western and African countries, especially Europe that are way more advanced from them in football world.

In recent years, China's applying a great soft power maneuver in the form of an international player transfers and heavy investment in European big football clubs. The strategy of recruiting international foreign players to strengthen the club is a common thing in the world of football, as professional leagues around the world does the exact same thing.

However, football public across the globe was taken by surprise when the

local clubs of a league in Asia whose age is relatively new and inexperienced, signed the big names players in world football at a fantastic and tend to be unreasonable price. CSL managed to force the world to recognizes China's financial clout and ambition to become a major force in world football.

The lack of resources in high quality local players, makes the world-class star transfer a very reasonable thing. By bringing in world class players, the CSL has ensure the progress at the level of competition and professionalism in their national football. Nonetheless, many observers and football critics condemned the steps taken by the Chinese clubs. CSL has spent hundreds of millions dollars just to bring world-class players to compete in China.

Table 1. Top 20 Footballers With Highest Salary in 2016-17 Season.

No.	Player Name	Club	Weekly Salary
1.	Carlos Tevez	Shanghai Shenhua FC	£ 615.000
2.	Oscar	Shanghai SIPG	£ 400.000
3.	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid	£ 365.000
4.	Gareth Bale	Real Madrid	£ 350.000
5.	Lionel Messi	FC Barcelona	£ 336.000
6.	Hulk	Shanghai SIPG	£ 320.000
7.	Paul Pogba	Manchester United	£ 290.000
8.	Graziano Pelle	Shandong Luneng FC	£ 290.000
9.	Neymar	FC Barcelona	£ 275.000
10.	Wayne Rooney	Manchester United	£ 260.000
11.	Robin van Persie	Fenerbahce	£ 240.000
12.	Yaya Toure	Manchester City	£ 230.000
13.	Sergio Aguero	Manchester City	£ 230.000
14.	Luis Suarez	FC Barcelona	£ 230.000
15.	Asamoah Gyan	Shanghai SIPG	£ 227.000
16.	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Manchester United	£ 220.000
17.	Ezequiel Lavezzi	Herbei Fortune FC	£ 220.000
18.	David Silva	Manchester City	£ 210.000
19.	David De Gea	Manchester United	£ 200.000
20.	Bastian Schweinsteiger	Manchester United	£ 200.000

Source: Mirror Football, 2017.

In terms of expenditure, CSL is the league who has spent the most for recruiting football players in the world last year (see picture 1).¹⁴ In all, CSL has spent \$336.55 million to bring top quality players to China during the winter transfer window 2016, compared to \$271.42 million for the English Premier League. While English Premier League has always been the epicenter of its financial power,

¹⁴ Niall McCarthy, "Chinese Soccer Clubs Flex Their Financial Muscle", Statista The Statistic Portal, Feb 19, 2016, <https://www.statista.com/chart/4383/chinese-soccer-clubs-flex-their-financial-muscle/> accessed on March 23, 2017.

now that the Chinese football transfer activity has surpassed them and also their counterpart in the top five European league such as Italy, Germany, Spain and France.

High profile players has been involved in this Chinese football transfer vaganza. Three international players from Brazil; Oscar, Hulk and Alex Teixeira have put themselves on the list of world's most expensive transfers when they joined the China's local clubs. While Argentina striker Carlos Tevez signed up as a player

with the highest salary in the world after joining the club Shanghai Shenhua in the month of December 2016 (see table 1).¹⁵

Table 1 showed us that Chinese Super League latest acquisitions are on the top of the list of world highest paid football players. Those written in bold are the players from Chinese Super League. The CSL contributed six players with the recent signings Carlos Tevez and Oscar on the top of the list, surpassing super star players such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. Other famous names such as Graziano Pelle (Italy), Hulk (Brazil), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Argentina) and Asamoah Gyan (Ghana) are on the list from CSL. While Shanghai SIPG joins FC Barcelona and Manchester City in contributing three players, only Manchester United has more players (four) on the list. This high paying football players trend in CSL will potentially continue in the future. At the moment, there are 501 players in Chinese Super League, where 16,6% of them are foreign players. (83 players).

The world-class players recruitment is not the only human resource that is imported by China. World-class managers also brought in to create a more interesting and qualified CSL. Luiz Felipe Scolari (Guangzhou Evergrande), Manuel Pellegrini (Hebei China Fortune), Sven Goran Eriksson (Shanghai SIPG), Fabio Cannavaro (Tianjin Quanjian FC) and Felix

Magath (Shandong Luneng) are some of the world-class managers with a series of national and international titles. Then in the top of the chain, Marcello Lippi, the former manager of the world champion from Italy, appointed as the Chinese national team manager.

Human resource recruitment strategy of international football is one of the ways to enhance the capabilities and the professionalism of the Chinese football. Another action that is actively pursued by the Chinese is through investment in Europeans big football clubs.

Two clubs from the city of Milan in Italy, Internazionale and AC Milan have been acquired by the China's giant company. Suning Holding Group became the majority shareholder of Internazionale, while Changxing Group holds 99.93% of AC Milan shares. In addition, China Media Capital, a consortium of Chinese companies has already purchased the stock of English giant club Manchester City owned by Abu Dhabi United Group for 265 million pounds, equivalent to 13% ownership.

List of the clubs which was acquired by Chinese companies did not stop there. Granada, Espanyol and Atletico Madrid (Spain), Nice and Lyon (France), Aston Villa, Wolverhampton Wanderers and West Bromwich Albion (England), ADO the Hague (Netherlands) and Slavia Prague (Czech Republic) has seen their shares purchased or have been controlled entirely by Chinese investors. (See Picture

¹⁵ Aaron Flanagan, "The world's highest paid footballers – Who Wayne Rooney could surpass if he secures move to China", Mirror Football, 21 February 2017. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/worlds-highest-paid-footballers-cristiano-9511170>, accessed on 23rd of March 2017.

Picture 2. China's investment to the European Football Clubs since 2015.



Source: Bloomberg, 2016.

2)¹⁶. Until 2016, more than 2 billion dollars disbursed for investment in European clubs with the largest expenditure is to acquire Italian club AC Milan. This list certainly has the potential to be longer in the years ahead.

Two examples to implement soft power in the world of football are by recruiting world-class human resources and massive investment in International big clubs. The world class football players transferred to China is one of the reason to develop young Chinese players. Shanghai SIPG Chairman, Chen Xuyuan, spoke about the importance of developing

young Chinese players at the club, mentioning that the likes of international players like Oscar and Hulk were brought to China to help achieve that goal. Since SIPG (Shanghai International Port Group), the largest port management in China, completed its takeover of the club in 2014, investment in foreign players has rocketed. In the 2014/15 season, the club spent £5.95 million on overseas players; the following season, that rose to £23.38 million; and in the lead up to the new season, the sum was almost five times higher, at £113.38 million. On top of that, the club has set up 31 academies across China aimed at advancing the level of

¹⁶ See Annex 1.

domestic footballers. The most promising young products from those academies are invited to the center in Shanghai when they turn 13.¹⁷

By investing in European football clubs, there is a great opportunity for Chinese local clubs to learn, and for local young talents to be trained in Europe, which overall will improve the quality of Chinese football. For example, Spain's club Espanyol with their new Chinese owner, just recently announced Xu Xu, their first ever Chinese national midfielder signing. While Jiansu Suning, the club that has the same owner of Internazionale Milan, sent their Australian defender Trent Sainsbury on loan to Internazionale.

Now the Chinese Football has began to received tremendous exposure of the international media because of their action in the transfer market and also the European stock exchanges.

In order to understand the engagement of China's local clubs and investors, one must also see the important role of government in the process. In April 2016, the Chinese government has launched an ambitious blueprint to create 50 million children and adults playing football at the end of the decade. Including plans to have at least 20,000 training centers and 70,000 football fields in 2020.¹⁸

¹⁷ Tom Roddy, "The Hard Cash and Soft Power Driving China's Footballing Ambitions", *Newsweek Sport* 17th March 2017. Accessed on 23rd March 2017.

¹⁸ Charlie Campbell, "China Wants to become A Soccer Super power in 2050", *Time Magazine*, April 12, 2016, <http://time.com/4290251/china-soccer-superpower-2050-football-fifa-world-cup/>,

In their Five Year Plan number 13 policy, the government aimed to create sporting industry worth of 3.000 billion yuan, which can contribute to about 1 percent of the national gross domestic product by 2020, compared with 0.7 percent in 2015. The five-year plan encourage local governments to form the sports industry investment fund, by using the private sector and cash society, and also to broaden their sporting interests through a public-private partnership project financed.¹⁹

From abroad, the visit of the President Xi Jinping, who was also a football fan, to the headquarters of Manchester City in England while on state visit last year, constitutes a strong evidence of the state presence that will make the Chinese investors more confident in the support of the state policy towards their investment in the world of football.

The synergies between giant corporations and Chinese state policy are well intertwined. Because for China's companies, they feel that it is wise to be publicly visible supporting state policy. Buying a football club is not going to yield immediate revenue on investments, but has many indirect benefits such as access to foreign markets, business opportunities, and strengthen the

accessed on Wednesday, January 11, 2017.

¹⁹ Summer Zhen, "Corporate Investment flooding into China's sport sector", *South China Morning Post*, September 7, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/business/article/2017193/investment-flooding-chinas-sports-sector>, accessed on Thursday, January 12, 2017.

company's image.²⁰

Chairman of Dalian Wanda, the one who acquired Spanish club, Atletico Madrid, Wang Jianlin, said that Dalian Wanda will continue to focus on the purchase of sports companies so that China could have a greater voice in the international sporting stage. In January 2016, Wanda acquired Swiss sports marketing company, Infront Sports & Media, which also holds a media cooperation in several sports at the Winter Olympics. Wang said that the purchases could be a beginning that can help China to host international sporting events.²¹

Influence is one of the most desired thing by China. With the strategy of soft power, China will have a strong influence in the decision making on the world of football. Given how strong the influence of Europe in football, then it certainly will affect the global football as well.

Simon Chadwick, a professor of international football industry and expert on geo-politics of sport in Asia, said that China's soft power in football has an impact for dozens of countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean through what is referred to as 'stadium diplomacy'. In 2007, for example, Costa Rica cut ties with Taiwan and recognize the rival, China. The following year, the Chinese workers build a new national

²⁰ Liu Sha, "Why Chinese Companies are Investing in Football Clubs Overseas", *CKGSB Knowledge*, September, 26, 2016, <http://knowledge.ckgsb.edu.cn/2016/09/26/sports/chinese-companies-investing-football-clubs/>, accessed on Thursday, January 12, 2017.

²¹ Loc.Cit.

stadium with 35,000 seat in the capital of San Jose, at an estimated cost of 100 million dollars. In 2010, when Angola hosted The African Cup Nations (ACN), China built and financed four new stadiums for them. Until this day, Angola is China's second largest source of oil.²²

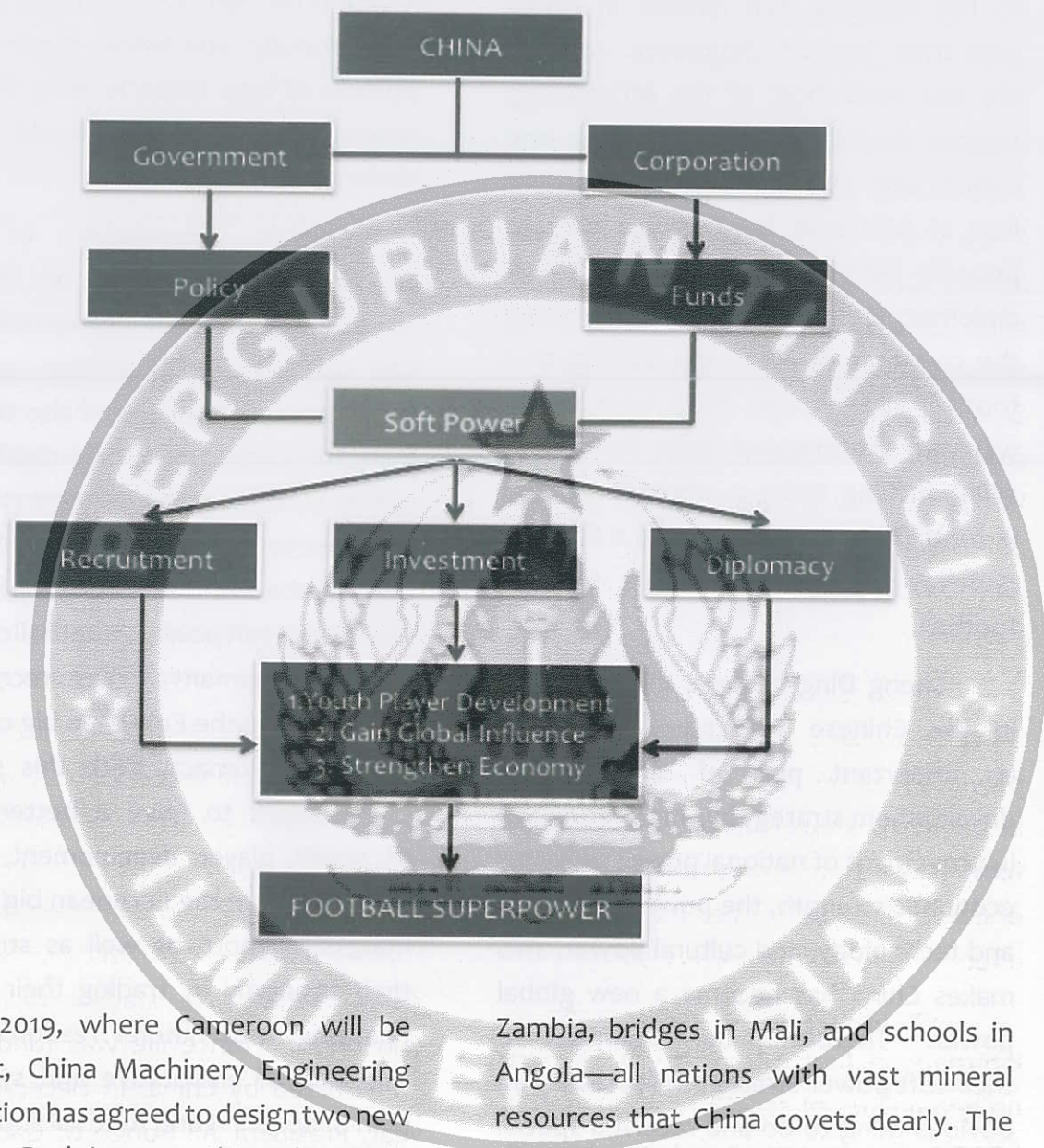
Another example, 15 months after the purchase of 13% ownership of Manchester City from Abu Dhabi United Group to a consortium of Chinese Investor, Abu Dhabi issuing oil and gas exploration rights to China Energy Company Limited. The first time a Chinese company had gained equity rights in Abu Dhabi oil and gas. This also means China will have bigger involvement in determining the price of such resources.²³

Football, in terms of soft power, has been frequently used by China that it is now commonplace. Take a look at the ACN held in Gabon this year. Apart from the African players participating in the CSL, one of Gabon's two stadium in Libreville and one in Franceville was funded and constructed by China. In December last year, President Ali Bongo of Gabon and Xi Jinping of China met one another in Beijing, marked by China's announcement that Gabon is to become a comprehensive partner (raised from its current status as a bilateral partner). Chadwick added that Football nicely joins the dots in a Gabonese/Chinese relationship that already sees the African nation sending 14,2 per cent of all its exports to its East Asian partner. Looking ahead to the next

²² Campbell, *op.cit.*

²³ Roddy, *loc.cit.*

Picture 3. How China use soft power to become world football superpower



ACN in 2019, where Cameroon will be the host, China Machinery Engineering Corporation has agreed to design two new stadiums. Back in 2009, China also made soft loans of US\$40 million to Cameroon enabling the country to construct the Limbe and Bafoussam Stadium which will also be used in 2019.²⁴

Beijing has been creating infrastructure projects for decades throughout Africa including railroads in

²⁴ Simon Chadwick, “How China is fuelling the African Cup of Nations: Stadium Diplomacy reigns down in Africa”, Asia & The Pacific Policy Society. <https://www.policyforum.net/china-fuelling-african-cup-nations/> accessed on Monday, February 6, 2017.

Zambia, bridges in Mali, and schools in Angola—all nations with vast mineral resources that China covets dearly. The selection of recipients for Chinese aid in the form of stadiums in Africa and Latin America is far from random. While stadiums are only a small component of China’s greater foreign aid policy, the massive, modern structures stand, even to the most marginal members of society, as a tangible reminder of Chinese assistance.²⁵

²⁵ Rachel Will, “China’s Stadium Diplomacy”, World Policy Journal, The World Policy Institute. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/summer2012/chinas-stadium-diplomacy>, accessed on Monday, February 6, 2017.

China has accelerate soft power to the resource rich nations in Africa with their Stadium Diplomacy. At least the last three host of the African Cup Nations Angola, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon; and also Cameroon, the future host of ACN 2019, has received stadium projects from China. Football stadium diplomacy is a crucial aspect in examining the country's effort in the making of a football superpower. From here, China will gain international trust from their allies, making them a strategic partner in football, as well as opening a flawless pathway of a bigger role in the world of football.

Sheng Ding believes that progress in the Chinese soft power becomes an important part of the national development strategy by emphasizing the improvement of national power including economic strength, the power of science and technology, and cultural power. This makes China has become a new global power.²⁶ Therefore, the expansion of their soft power strategy in football is an obvious thing to do and received special attention by the government and also the world.

Although there are growing concern about how far the international football players and coaches can carry the national Chinese football forward, we still need to appreciate and praised the country for the persistence to promote and improve their national football. The planning and the execution of their national sport policy is a signal that sport, especially football

²⁶ Ding, *op.cit*, pp.232-233

can be a way to gain a national pride and honor in the future, if managed properly and carefully. See below picture 3, the scheme of how China is using their soft power to become the world football super power in the future.

China's framework of using its soft power is based on the good synergy between the government and the corporations. Together, with the necessary sport policy and also the funds from the corporation, they create a soft power strategy that elaborate the needs to improve their national football and become the world's football superpower. The China's soft power in football consist of world class human resources recruitment, investment in the European big clubs and stadium diplomacy. With this strategy, China hopes to have a better system of youth player development, gaining influence from the European big decision makers in sport, as well as strengthen their economy by trading their stadium financing with natural resources. With this kind of elaborative and systematic plan of action, world football superpower is not just a dream for China.

Lesson for Indonesia

Football is a game that is enjoyed by everybody, everywhere, anytime and anyhow. We can see how the foreign football broadcasts in Indonesia is able to attract the Indonesians. European clubs Indonesian fan base has been flourishing in Indonesia and is still growing. The support from Indonesian for foreign football clubs

flowing through social medias and club attributes which voluntarily purchased by Indonesian football fans such as scarf, jersey, hats, bags etc. Football broadcast that began at dawn is not an obstacle, Indonesian football fans happily staying awake just to watch their favourite clubmatch. Most of the times, the rivalry that took place between two clubs, such as Real Madrid and Barcelona in Spain, also affecting the supporters in Indonesia.

From the local scene, the fanatic supporters of local club is still showing its existence by continuing to flood the stadium when their beloved team play. From yells and chants of supporters, banners of support until stadium choreography, constantly adorn the local club matches. Fierce rivalry between supporters such as Persija Jakarta and Persib Bandung is still a headline for national sport news when the two teams meet.

Although there were time when Indonesian football was punished by the highest governing body of world football, FIFA, because of the government intervention on May, 2015, which led to the suspension of Indonesian football club and national team in the international competition, the Indonesian football public can still maintain their enthusiasm when local clubs compete in a national event such as the Presidents Cup.

Let's take a look at how people from all accross the country willing to come to the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium or Pakansari Stadium when the Indonesian

national team playing in the regional level, either in the friendly exhibition or official match. They were willing to queue for hours or even days, just to get the tickets to the stadium and support the national team. They do not care that the ticket has been monopolized by brokers and re-sell it at a definetely higher prices. All of this happens because two solid reasons, the love for soccer and the love for the nation.

Now look at the achievement of Indonesian football in International competition. The last time Indonesian national team won a trophy is back in 2013, when the U-19 national team led by Indra Sjafri won the AFF cup 2013, which is the first title in 22 years. One year after the under 19 glory, the senior national team cannot even qualified to the next round of the AFF 2014. In the club level, the biggest achievement is in the semifinals of AFC Cup 2014 where Persipura Jayapura was beaten by Kuwait club, Al-Qadsia, with the aggregate of 10-2.

One achievement that is worth noting is, the achievement by the Indonesian Youth team. Last year, Indonesian u-15 team were crowned as the champion of Gothia Cup 2016 in Sweden. Gothia Cup is the world's largest and most international youth football tournament where each year, around 1600 teams from 80 nations take part and they play 4500 games on 110 fields. The achievement of the youth product of Indonesian football is still promising but they must maintain their ambition, skill and attitude.

So the main question is how come one of the most populated nations in the world, where its citizen is crazy about football and everything related to football, does not perform at the international level? This particular question is the same exact question when we see what happens to the Chinese national football before the fundamental changes they made in the last few years.

What China did to improve the quality of their football is something that can be learned. So why not learn from the Chinese? Although Indonesian economic strength is not as strong as China, still there are several points that can be taken from the Chinese football improvement.

By improving the quality of national football through soft power strategy, China is attempting to boost national pride as well as expanding its influence in the international community. China's Soft Power Strategy definitely related to their economic revival. In the absence of significant economic progress, China may not be able to launch their strategy of soft power in the form of massive international players recruitment, investment in Europe's major clubs and the development of football infrastructure. But soft power strategy will also not be possible without the strong commitment and careful planning by the Chinese government. Therefore, soft power is a tool, where commitment and strong planning is a framework.

Indonesia certainly can draw lessons from what has been done by China,

eventhough Indonesia has not had the economic strength like China have now. Indonesia requires a good framework for improving the quality of national football, to be able to perform in the international arena. As described in the previous paragraph, the framework includes two main points which is a strong commitment and careful planning.

The first point relates to the motivation of the national football stakeholders, which in this case, by the national football authorities PSSI and also the Ministry of Youth and Sports. China has successfully remodel their national football competition format, Ji-A League, from a competition which was corrupted by illegal gambings, bribery and match fixing, into a clean and high quality competition filled by world-class players. Not only remodel the competition format, China also rid the corrupt and unproductive human resources. Indonesian football clubs certainly can recruit world-class players in the future if we provide a clean and high quality competition.

The second point is to create a careful planning, a roadmap to get the desired results. In the case of China, Five Year Plan number 13 is a foundation for the Chinese national football towards a more professional and more competitive football scene. An ambitious blueprint where football development related to infrastructure and human resources become the main focus of national football reform with the goal of becoming a world champion in 2050.

Having such a great and careful planning, China not only know what to do, but also able to attract a wide range of local investors to support their programs. This paper strongly advice that Indonesia should have the same blueprint as a football policy reference, where national football stakeholders in collaboration with academics exercise to achieve a common goal in improving the national football. If the Indonesian Ministry of Defence has a defense white paper which is the formulation of the statement and defense policy as a whole, then Indonesia must create a national football white paper.

Conclusion

China's soft power strategy in football this decade focuses on three important components: (1). HR recruitment of world-class football players and managers, and (2). Heavy investment in European big football clubs. (3). Stadium Diplomacy, where China fund and construct new Stadiums for their potential economic partners in Africa and Latin America. With this strategy, China aim to achieve some results that have been implemented: (1). Improving the quality and competitiveness of the national football (2). Gain influence in international football; and (3). Strengthen their economies by expanding markets and opportunities, in the football business.

China's rise has caused a change in the international system. Its economic power contributed to strengthening

its role globally.²⁷ In the geopolitics perspective, China remains a relatively small power compared to Europe in the world of football at the moment. But remember, China's soft power has allowed the restructuring of geopolitical alliances in ways that will help the rise of China as a global power.²⁸ Thus, changes in the geopolitical map of the world of football is a possible thing. Construction of the alliance with Europe, Africa and Latin America through football clubs and stadium diplomacy has put China as a potential superpower in football in the future. This is consistent with their target to become world champion in 2050. Last but not least, China will play a greater role in the stage of international football that certainly will have impacts on their international economy and politics.

²⁷ Alexandra Dan, "European Union, United States of America and Popular Republic of China: The Impact of the National Power among the Trilateral Cooperation", *European and Euro-Atlantic Integration*, 2016.

²⁸ Ding, *op.cit.*, pp.234.

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