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The art of face-saving and culture-changing: sculpting Chinese football's past, present and future

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Abstract

Clubs, fans, and civic authorities are increasingly celebrating modern sporting heroes through sculpture. As befits a sport with global reach and popularity, football players are the most frequently depicted athletes. While sports statues are typically employed to celebrate success and tradition, the world's football statuary is unusual in that it reaches beyond successful nations, clubs and subjects. It therefore offers the opportunity to see how these statues are used where achievement is at best relative, and where football culture is still at a developmental stage.

In this paper we consider the football statues of China, whose football team has dramatically underperformed relative to its population size and economic power. Although China lacks a participative grassroots football culture and has struggled to establish a credible domestic league, recent government intervention and investment has seen football's profile rise dramatically. China's many football statues are largely atypical in comparison to the rest of the world, including their depiction of anonymous figures rather than national or local heroes, the incorporation of tackling scenes in their designs, and their location at training camps. Through four specific examples and reference to a global database, we illustrate how these statues reflect the tensions and difficulties inherent in China's desire to integrate itself into global football, and achieve its stated goal of hosting and winning the FIFA World Cup - whilst simultaneously upholding national, cultural and political values such as the primacy of hard work and learning, and saving face in defeat.

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In his 1950 compendium, 'The Appreciation of Football', Percy Young mused on the great English footballers of the era, asking "Why do these men have no statues erected?" Young's call-to-arms was belatedly heeded. By August 2017 the world's football statuary numbered 563 full-body figurative statues or statue groups depicting players (467, 83%), managers (48, 9%) or, occasionally, chairmen, founders, referees, or fans.¹ 82% of these statues have been erected in the past 25 years. Seventy countries have so far embraced figurative football sculptures, though there has yet to be a statue featuring a professional female player, with just a handful of anonymous figures at United States colleges depicting women's football.²

Football statues represent the largest single-sport collection within the wider phenomenon of contemporary sports statues, which encompasses almost every athletic activity from speed skating to surfing.³ In their deeply traditional figurative form, these modern monuments to athletic achievement represent artistic revival rather than innovation, harking back to ancient Greek sculptures of Olympian heroes (Miller, 2004), and in smaller form, to the Mesoamerican ballgame of 1500BC (Mint Museum, 2011). The modern accumulation of sports statues has invigorated an already developing scholarly interest in sporting art (Guttmann, 2011). Academic studies on sports statues have focussed on established, traditional and successful national sporting cultures, such as US baseball or UK football (Stride, Wilson and Thomas, 2013); or on the representation of exceptional athletes with wider social relevance, such as war heroes (Smith, 2012), or barrier-breakers (Osmond, Phillips and O'Neill, 2006; Schultz, 2011). This research has identified numerous motivations for these monuments, including nostalgia and authenticity-centred marketing by sports organisations and cities (Stride, Thomas, Wilson and Pahigian, 2013), the creation of local and national identities through heritage (Bale, 1994), memorials to tragic early deaths (Stride, Thomas and Chamorro, 2017), and even reparations to formerly marginalised communities (Smith, 2009). Despite these contributions, there has not been an examination of international heterogeneity in the production, style and meanings of figurative sports sculptures.

The world's football statuary is unusual in reaching beyond successful nations, and internationally renowned clubs or athletes. Countries regarded as minnows on the pitch, such as India, Indonesia, and Venezuela, have erected multiple football statues (Stride, Thomas and Wilson, 2012). On a basic level, this ubiquity demonstrates football's worldwide reach and appeal, further suggesting that football sculpture is – at least in part – driven by a desire to reflect, celebrate and exploit the popularity of the sport regardless of success. Such a global distribution also offers the opportunity to investigate the designs, motivations for, and interpretations of football statues within developing soccer cultures, where past football success is at best relative, and where growing the sport is a work in progress.

This paper considers the football statuary of China, a nation that has underperformed in international competition despite its population size and investment in the sport. Generally, football statues are most often erected to evoke nostalgia, celebrate traditions, leverage a club's or town's heritage, or bask in past successes. Football's historic low status and fractured progress within China makes those motivations unlikely. However, notwithstanding an ongoing struggle to establish a competitive national team and reputable domestic league, China has over 30 football statues or statue groups.⁴

In this paper we utilise a unique database of the world's football statues developed by the first author and colleagues (Stride, Thomas and Wilson, 2012), to illustrate how China's football statues are atypical in subject choice, design aesthetics, locations, motivations and messages. Using four specific statues as examples, we argue that these differences depict China's unique football culture, which combines ancient roots with interrupted development, rapid recent change, and the overarching control of a one-party state. We also consider how China's football statuary reflects current challenges in Chinese football, including integration with a global, largely alien sporting community; championing national strength despite sporting weakness; and embracing an international sporting culture whose philosophy and behaviours run counter to national traditions.

Chinese football past: pre-history, birth-pains and stagnation

Despite being a relatively late starter in international football, China was recently acknowledged by football's world governing body FIFA as the birthplace of the earliest form of football (Goldblatt, 2007, 5; Connor, 2015). *Cuju*, which literally means "kick ball", was a ball game that largely eschewed ball handling in favour of kicking, and featured opposing

teams and goals. Cuju was popularised in the Han dynasty from 200BC as a form of military training, and remained part of Chinese culture for the next 1800 years (Timm, 2015).

Written records and sculptural artefacts indicate that cuju was played by men and women,(Williams, 2007),and supported by successive Han emperors (Timm, 2015). Rules and equipment evolved, with the original feather-stuffed leather ball replaced by an inflated ball, changing configurations and positioning of goals, nets and pitch boundaries, and an imperative to keep the ball in the air. Ball juggling was considered an essential skill ('Sports and Games of Old China', nd; Cui, 2016). Cuju grew throughout the Tang dynasty (618-907), becoming a non-contact sport, with teams aiming to kick the ball through a small hole in a centrally located goal-net. Popularity peaked in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), with the establishment of cuju leagues, professional players and a transfer market (Barr, 2009).

Cuju's social status declined over the following centuries. The Qing dynasty, which began in 1644, preferred individual sports, fearing subversive elements within team sports. The resulting nation-wide ban on cuju, with resistance punishable by cutting off a player's feet, unsurprisingly heralded the sport's demise, some years before the arrival of modern football. Given this lack of a direct lineage, cuju is best classified as one of a number of unconnected football-like sports played by ancient civilisations from around the world, that form football's pre-history (Goldblatt, 2007, 5-6). FIFA's support for China's claims as the ultimate birthplace of football can be better analysed in the context of FIFA's internal politics – specifically generating support for Sepp Blatter's continued presidency and FIFA's attempts to build relationships with the Chinese government, and hence the burgeoning Chinese TV and media market (Connor, 2015).

Modern football spread to mainland China in the late 19th century (Hong and Mangan, 2003, 47), via foreign workers and Christian missionaries, of whom 3000 were in China by 1900. By 1907 English expatriates in Shanghai had created a league, and along the eastern coast similar enterprises sprang up amongst immigrants from other established football-playing nations. Native adoption led inexorably to a Chinese football association and national team, formed in 1924 and affiliated to FIFA in 1931, marking China as a slow but not irretrievably late starter (Jones, 2004, 54; Simons, 2008, 144-145).

In fact, China achieved a measure of international success from the mid-1930s to the late 1940s, including Olympic qualification in 1936 and 1948. The nation's football development, however, was severely hampered by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1946) and the resumption of the Chinese Civil War that resulted in the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a one party communist state, in 1949. FIFA formerly recognised the PRC in 1958, when China debuted in the Asian qualifying competition of the FIFA World Cup, but the following year China withdrew from international competition in response to FIFA's further acknowledgement of the independence of Chinese Taipei. As a result, China's involvement in international football from 1959 to 1980 consisted mainly of friendlies with sympathetic political regimes. Beyond this 'two-China' issue, China's involvement in international competition was limited by the internal purges and breakdown in society that marked Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. It was not until 1982 that the nation once again took part in World Cup qualifiers (Jones, 1999, 186; Goldblatt, 2007, 540-541).

The Cultural Revolution also dealt a heavy blow to China's internal sports development, as sports institutions were broken up and leading athletes and coaches were sent to the gulag (Goldblatt, 2007, 541). As a result, domestic football suffered a similarly stunted and intermittent development to that of the national team. Although China's social upheaval and vast size had prevented the organic development of a national competition before the PRC was established, a state-orchestrated Chinese football league emerged in the 1950s. Membership was restricted to government organisations such as the railways, navy and trade unions (Goldblatt, 2007, 540). The league was halted in 1966 by the Cultural Revolution, and only re-established in 1973 (Goldblatt, 541). Factory clubs were allowed to join from the early 1980s, bringing greater competition and funds, but a fully professional national competition, the Jia-A League, did not begin until 1994. Chinese domestic football mirrored the national economy in transitioning rapidly from almost complete state-sponsorship and central planning to a more diverse market-oriented system, with commercially-sponsored teams, transfer fees, and even a handful of overseas players (Jones, 1999, 186, 193).

Though late by western standards, the development of a Chinese national professional league came less than a decade after similar developments in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), and Japan (Moffett, 2002). Given China's booming economy and accompanying rise to global superpower status – and its population's growing enthusiasm for watching televised

football, particularly the proliferating coverage of European leagues – there was hope, even anticipation that football would become a source of national pride. The exploits of China’s national women’s football team, the ‘Iron Roses’, who were FIFA Women’s World Cup runners-up in 1999 and perennial Asian champions in the 1990s (Hong and Mangan, 2003), further raised expectations.

Instead, China’s men’s team has struggled, and been comfortably outperformed by its similarly late-developing East Asian neighbours South Korea and Japan, for the past two decades.⁵ China’s only qualification for the men’s FIFA World Cup finals tournament came in 2002, but it lost all three games. Since then it has lurched between brief flickers of promise and abject failure, including humiliating defeats to Thailand and United States Major League Soccer (MLS) club Real Salt Lake (Minter, 2013), and even dropping out of the top 100 of the FIFA World Rankings in 2013. As of August 2017 it languishes in 77th place, sandwiched between Sierra Leone and Qatar (‘FIFA World Ranking’, 2017).

In ‘Bamboo Goalposts’, Rowan Simons’ examination of contemporary Chinese football, Simons argues that China’s failure in football results from the lack of grassroots-level participation that sustains traditional football nations. Despite its vast population, very few Chinese citizens actually play football. The absence of the informal football activity is partly due to lack of places to play. Even by 1998, Beijing had only 30 football pitches for its 12 million inhabitants, mostly owned by universities (Simons, 2008, 202). Amateur football has also been suppressed by laws requiring state approval for gatherings of 10 or more people (Simons, 2008, 17).

However, rather than encouraging all of its citizens to kick a ball about for fun, developing public football facilities, and generally stimulating wider interest and involvement in the game, the Chinese government has focused on achieving international success as quickly as possible. To do this it has applied the top-down sports development model implemented successfully for Olympic sports, devoting its resources to identifying and hothousing elite talent at a very young age. Coaching has often been outsourced to foreign coaches hired from whichever nations were successful in world football at that time, as opposed to the more sustainable model of China developing its own coaches (Simons, 2008). Furthermore, after an encouraging start to the professional era, even China’s domestic football has offered little to inspire would-be young footballers to take up the game (Simons, 2008, 179, 223). Despite

a 2004 rebranding and reformation of the Jia-A League to become the Chinese Super League, the competition was increasingly beset by corruption involving gambling and match-fixing (Goldblatt, 2007, 849; 'Why China Fails at Football', 2011).

By the late-2000s, China's national football team and league were considered a source of shame ('Why China Fails at Football', 2011; Minter, 2013). Failures in football were not only a symbol of wider, seemingly intractable societal problems with corruption, but one so blatant and shameful that it could be publicly mocked without fear of reprisal, in a society where criticism of state institutions is typically unspoken. This stagnation in Chinese football occurred despite government efforts to actively develop football and utilise it as a tool in building national pride and asserting global superpower status. Football's increasing commercialisation and hegemonic status amongst world sports throughout the 1990s and 2000s had coincided with China's extraordinary economic development. The transition to free-market capitalism had proved more successful for the wider economy than for football – by 2003 China had become the world's second largest economy (and is forecast to overtake the United States by the late 2020s; Maddison, 2007). The international recognition and respect gained from hosting the 2008 Beijing Olympics has set the tone for China's continuing plays in international soft power politics and sports-related diplomacy. Beyond the Olympics, only the football World Cup offers similar levels of global exposure and prestige.

Chinese football present and future: tensions, ambitions... and statues

No doubt stung by Chinese football's failure to progress, former president Hu Jintao (2002-2013) and most notably current incumbent Xi Jinping, a keen football fan, eventually brought new impetus to China's football project. In 2009, when serving as Vice-President, Xi initiated an anti-corruption campaign that spanned the Chinese government and its agencies. Though not solely nor explicitly targeted at football, the campaign began with football because, as sport sociologist Xu Guoqi puts it, it was a 'safe' target: "...everyone knows [sports] officials are corrupt...everyone hates them" (Xu Guoqi, 2008; Xu Guoqi, 2015). Football was an ideal arena for testing the public's – and the government's – reaction to an anti-corruption campaign. If the campaign had begun with the Party, that would have signalled "a problem with the Party" (Xu, 2015). Though beginning with the arrests of 16 low-level football administrators, by 2012 five top officials of the Chinese Football Association had been jailed

for between 10 and 12 years, and a number of players were handed lesser custodial sentences (Watts, 2009; 'Why China Fails at Football', 2011; Beam, 2012).

Having cleaned up domestic football, in 2015 the Chinese government set out a blueprint for developing the sport, including the intent to bid for the World Cup ('China sets goal', 2015). This was followed 12 months later by a strategy to become a "world football superpower" by 2050, with plans to get "50 million children and adults playing the game... [and] at least 20,000 football training centres and 70,000 pitches in place by 2020" ('China aims to become football superpower', 2016). As a result, football has been widely introduced as part of the school curriculum from an early age. Although the Chinese authorities had issued many previous blueprints for football success, the grassroots flavour of this most recent policy suggests a break from top-down and top-only strategies.

Since this overt presidential intervention, China's domestic football league has also received rapid and substantial investment, both from government and especially, private enterprises and entrepreneurs, who see such munificence as a way of garnering favour with the ruling party and its football-loving president. Newly-aggrandised Chinese Super League clubs have even begun to compete for the world's best players alongside the richest western clubs, paying salaries reported to exceed £500,000 per week.⁶ Domestic attendances have grown considerably: in 2016 the Chinese Super League average of over 24,000 per match made it the sixth best supported football league in the world. Despite this domestic growth the Chinese football authorities – no doubt prompted by the government – have primarily focussed on the national team's success, restricting the use of overseas players in an attempt to encourage home-grown talent ('Chinese Super League', 2017). As well as extravagantly funding domestic teams, billionaire businessmen have created football training academies and purchased stakes in overseas clubs, notably in England and Italy.⁷

However, in its rapid and seemingly wholehearted embrace of the global game China faces twin conundrums. First, China's greater engagement in world football needs to be matched with a measure of success, or at least respectability, for the national team – and by dint of association, the nation itself and its leaders – to avoid continued loss of 'face'. Although a universal concern, saving face is particularly salient in Chinese culture, referring to being able to present oneself in a positive light whatever the truth of the matter (Lin, 1939; Bond, 1991; Faure and Fang 2008). As Li and Wang (2010) note, "The importance of shame in

Chinese culture is associated with the dominant social and moral thought of Confucianism”, including the importance of one’s ties to family and society: “when people fail, they do not simply lose their own face, but they shame all those around them”. Others’ perception of an act is therefore more crucial than whether that act is good per se. Shame has primacy over guilt in this way: how one is viewed by others is more important than how one views oneself (Wilson, 1981). Furthermore, face operates as a group concept as well as a personal one (Li and Wang, 2010). Since seizing power in 1949, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has often invoked the idea of a past era or ‘century of humiliation’ – China’s perceived previous failures and subjugation by other nations prior to the revolution – to place itself as China’s liberating leader (Kaufman, 2010). Football represents an awkward last remnant of this national humiliation.

Even if China does get its footballing act together, football and face-saving are not long-term bedfellows. China is unlikely to ever be viewed as the definitive world football leader in the same way it has swept the Olympic medal table in many individual sports. Football’s international hierarchies are built on traditions of sustained success as much as on contemporary performance. Moreover, football is a national obsession in many countries, making any World Cup extremely competitive. Football is also a relatively unpredictable game, with the weaker team often able to scrape a draw or victory due to the difficulty in scoring a goal compared to, say, a basket in basketball. If and when China becomes a football giant, a potentially shameful giant-killing still awaits someday, somewhere.

The second conundrum is that, whilst China has adopted much of the free-market capitalism that underpins world football’s transfer system and general business ethos, football has several other globally ubiquitous cultural tenets and characteristics that run counter to China’s political strictures and national philosophies. The size of crowds that professional football matches attract, in a relatively spontaneous way, might be considered a threat to state control. Over and above the large numbers, the passions aroused at a football match, and particularly the occasional outbreaks of hooliganism, are unsettling to a government that fears and penalizes citizens who openly challenge authority and conventional behaviour (Jones, 2004, 63). Nevertheless, for international credibility China needs a well-attended and enthusiastically-supported domestic league.

Furthermore, the commonplace glamour, adoration and exaltation of footballing heroes around the world – and the material and celebrity cultures encircling them – runs contrary to traditional Chinese patterns of rational influence from educators and intellectuals (Tan Hua, 2004, 98). Engagement with world football potentially endangers values and behaviours previously protected by China's relative isolationism. Also, based upon the Confucian hierarchical ethics that heavily influence the order of Chinese society, lower-ranked members of a team or collective must wait for clear instructions from their seniors before acting (Goldblatt, 2007, 589). Chinese athletes have found Olympic success in individual sports with strong hierarchies and authoritative coaching, where repetitive training and mastery of specific, repeatable techniques are emphasised. The open game of football, however, also requires instinctive, proactive, and imaginative behaviours, which are rarely acquired via formalised coaching routines and hard work (Jones, 2004, 63). These abilities develop from the daily informal street or park games of football played by youngsters around the world – but not in China. It is also arguable that they require, or are at least strongly correlated with the type of free thinking incompatible with both China's traditional ethics and present government system.

As China has increasingly embraced football, it has also appropriated the modern fashion for commemorating the game through sculpture. This is an easier fit to Chinese cultural norms than many other aspects of global football culture, given China's long history of, and modern proclivity for, erecting figurative public art. In 1999 art historian John T. Young estimated that over 10,000 such artworks had been installed since the Cultural Revolution, the vast majority after 1980 (JT Young, 1999, x). Traditional figurative portraiture, usually depicting political leaders, heroes, artists and poets has typically prevailed over abstract designs (JT Young, 1999, 6).

Before the 1980s the state organised and funded large groups of sculptors, enabling the quick and easy collaborative creation of giant statues and statue groups (JT Young, 1999, 22-24). Sculpture for political propaganda purposes dominated, with many heroic war memorials and statues of Mao unveiled. Although the government still exerts a veto over content and message, the variety of subjects depicted and images created has increased dramatically as China has opened up. As in the west, funding for China's public artworks now comes not only from government but from public donations and construction budgets, with

commissioning and siting administered by local government arts committees (JT Young, 1999, 39). As much as contemporary sculptures promote political ideas, they are also ostensibly erected to enhance civic identity, celebrate the hosting of regional or national events, and provide a visual point of reference in China's rapidly expanding utilitarian urban landscapes.

The national popularity and ubiquity of public sculpture – and the availability of funding and organisational infrastructure to support it – is one reason why China has accumulated football sculptures. Yet, given China's lack of engrained participatory football culture at the grassroots level and its underachievement at the international level, it is puzzling that the sport has been a subject choice for public art to the extent that China now boasts more football statues or statue groups (37) than all but the United Kingdom and Brazil (see figure 1, below). Furthermore, other nations with similar numbers (e.g., Argentina, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain) are established giants of the world game, previous FIFA World Cup winners or runners-up with historically well-supported club teams and domestic competitions.

Chinese Football Statues: anonymity and design

The most obvious explanation for the proliferation of Chinese football statues is hinted at by their relative recency (almost all have been installed since 2000), the anonymity of the subjects, and the accompanying abundance of anonymous statues depicting other sports. These statues are most likely part of wider government-promoted attempts to popularise sport, and the game of football in particular amongst Chinese citizens (Bo Qian, 2017). This general promotion of sport through sculpture is likely to have been inspired by the run up to, and subsequently a desire to celebrate the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Indeed, several of the football statues erected in this period are just one element of a multi-sport tableau.⁸ With China's subsequent attempts to boost the state profile of football, football has become a natural choice for single-sport athletic sculptures.

<Figure 1 here>

As Figure 1 indicates, China's football statuary has a disproportionate number of anonymous subjects. Globally, such non-subject-specific monuments comprise 33% of all football statues. This percentage rises to 84% in China. Furthermore, of China's six statues or statue groups that portray specific footballers, the three single-subject examples all honour the same player – Li Huitang (Lee Wai Tong). Li starred for the national team in the 1930s. Though Li was an active player many decades before national television coverage of, or even the existence of a national league, he is probably the only world-class footballer produced by China and certainly the most revered (Xu Guoqi, 2009; Potts Harmer, 2015). Hence the anonymity of Chinese football statue 'subjects' other than Li may not just reflect state aims to popularise a sport as opposed to venerate an individual – but also suggest an absence of star players worth honouring by a single-subject statue, as is common in the west. This, in turn, would partly be due to the relatively brief history of China's professional clubs and the disrupted development of Chinese football as a whole. It may also express a wider national cultural norm of collectivism in which the individual is subservient to the team or even the game itself.

The use of anonymous figures instead of specific subjects also gives a statue an ambiguity of interpretation that enhances the relative importance of the design. Statues of anonymous players are depictions of the game, not of an individual. They are not only a promotion of football but also tell us how those who commissioned and funded the statue – which, in the vast majority of cases in China, is national or local government authorities – themselves see, or want the public to see football. As such, the very distinctive design aesthetic of China's football statuary is as critical as its frequent subject anonymity. Across the global statuary, footballers are most often depicted in action, i.e., playing football (65%), followed by posed designs, e.g., standing with a ball under their arm (24%) and by celebratory portrayals (11%), often lifting a trophy. Though all but four of China's footballer statues and statue groups are action poses, of these, over half (56%) show players tackling or contesting the ball, a very rare composition elsewhere in the world (only 10% of action designs outside of China portray tackling).

A typical Chinese statue of anonymous footballers tackling can be found in the Lvshunkou district of Dalian, a port city in Liaoning province (Figure 2). Originally erected in the centre of Dalian in the early 2000s, it was moved to this waterfront site after the original location was redeveloped. The two monumental figures, cast at approximately two and half times life-

size, dominate both their low, triangular plinth and the harbour-front plaza in which the statue is sited. One player strides forward purposefully with a ball at his feet: the other player is at full stretch, tackling from behind, with his leading leg finishing adjacent to both the ball and his opponent's shin, suggesting he has managed to toe-poke the ball away and will bring his rival down in the process. The sheer size of the figures radiates power, strength and aggression, enhanced by the physical interaction between the players, and especially by their muscular detail and contorted facial expressions. This is football portrayed as a battle.

<Figure 2 here>

Dalian was the home of China's most successful football club of the professional era. Dalian Wanda FC – later renamed as Dalian Shide due to a change in sponsor – triumphed in the inaugural 1994 season of the professional Chinese Jia-A league, and went on to win a further seven Jia-A and Super League titles. Dalian also has a deep involvement in Chinese football history: Wanda was a transmutation from Dalian Shipyards (1955-1982) and semi-professional Dalian FC (1982-1992), who played in the previous state-orchestrated national leagues. In 1988, Dalian FC had been the first Chinese team to announce themselves as a 'football club', that is, a private entity as opposed to a government-sanctioned and organised sports team (Simons, 2008, 177). Hence Dalian is a natural location for a statue promoting football through public art, but there is neither plinth nor plaque inscription to explain the statue's provenance, or celebrate Dalian's football history.

In fact, as with the anonymity of subjects, the portrayal of players tackling as opposed to individual figures demonstrating skills, is a national phenomenon. It may partly be attributed to nation-wide mimicking and contagion. However China's geographical size and the number of different tackling designs, some of which feature more than two players competing for the ball, suggest that further explanation is required.⁹ One argument is that, given the lack of participation, the Dalian statue and others like it are attempting to explain football at the most basic level to the populace, i.e., by portraying football as a contact ball game played between two teams. This would require multiple players, and the most frequent interaction between opposing players is in competing for the ball. The popularity of televised football in China, however, makes such naivety unlikely.

A second argument, with perhaps more credence, is that the absence of tackling statues elsewhere in the world is in part due to economic factors. An image of tackling requires multiple figures, and hence costs more to sculpt and cast. These designs are practical in China due to the surfeit of government-funded sculptors and access to relatively cheap raw materials. Moreover, subject-specific statues are more common outside of China. The star players honoured are rarely lauded for their great tackling: fans typically want to be reminded of an iconic goal celebration, or skills such as shooting, dribbling or passing, so a single figure is all that is required.

Third, along with subject anonymity and the depiction of players tackling, 72% of China's footballer statues show more than one player, compared to less than 20% of those in other nations. Just as with the choice of subject anonymity, choosing to use multiple players in a statue portrays football as less about individuals and individual skills, and more about the team and its teamwork, the game and the contest. Design options become more limited if a realistic match scene is to be portrayed, and two players tackling is the most obvious option.

Fourth, depicting tackling might be an attempt to promote football by association with sports and traditions that are already embedded in Chinese culture. Martial arts, such as Kung Fu, are an integral element of both traditional and 20th-century Chinese popular culture. The majority of Chinese football statues with a tackling scene composition show the challenging player making a straight-legged lunge, not entirely dissimilar to a kung fu kick. Linking football to martial arts by portraying football's combative dimension and similar movement elements would be a potential way to engage viewers with little prior knowledge or interest, and boost football's recognition and acceptance as a sport for which China has natural affinity.

However, the most likely explanation for China's surfeit of tussles for the ball cast in bronze is the deliberate portrayal of football as a metaphor for, or reflection of political and cultural motifs. In an attempt to boost football's public appeal – and maintain their status as a state-favoured artist by adding a sympathetic political dimension to the image – Chinese artists have deliberately chosen to portray football as combat, a battle, a great struggle for victory, and its players as selfless warriors. It is an unlikely coincidence that the only other nation with multiple football statues portraying anonymous players contesting the ball is Russia – where we have identified five such monuments, most dating from the Soviet Union era of a

one-party communist state.¹⁰ These statues reflect the instrumental role of sport in pre- and post- World War II Soviet society: after being frowned upon in the immediate post-revolution era, sports clubs and activities were soon encouraged, in an effort to enhance fitness for work and military strength (Zilberman, 1982; Alexandrova, 2014). This made participation in sport akin to a civic duty as much as a leisure activity. Thus Soviet images of football often feature football's most combative, physical element, i.e., tackling – in the process portraying strength and discipline in battle as core qualities of sport, and drawing a parallel between the struggle for communism against enemy forces.

We argue that modern Chinese sculptors, having been influenced by the same recurring themes of conflict and struggle in wider post-revolutionary Chinese politics, art and culture, have chosen to represent football in a similar way to their Soviet predecessors. Furthermore, the government still exerts control over the subjects and themes of public art, albeit less so than its complete control prior to 1979 (Young, 1999, 24). Therefore it is unsurprising that much of China's public sculpture is in a propagandist vein promoting the longstanding and ongoing CCP narrative of the 'great struggle': through the 1949 revolution and subsequent hard work and courage, China has finally thrown off the yoke of foreign invaders, and ended the 'century of humiliation'. Such art often features noble characters, typically workers or military figures striving for their country, with clear political undertones about national service (Young, 1999, 21, 24; Ma, 2016). A recurring example is the depiction of a semi-mythical figure, Lei Feng, who was held up by the CCP as the ideal worker in Communist China, and is typically portrayed as a selfless citizen heroically exceeding his work quotas and generally going beyond the call of duty for the nation (Osnos, 2013). For a footballer, tackling is a relatively selfless action, putting one's body on the line as a duty to the team, as opposed to displaying the individual skills that most often gain adulation from the crowd. This ambiguous yet heroic depiction of footballers and football is consistent with a narrative of collective struggle and eventual triumph, but also one in which self-sacrifice and the primacy of team victory supersede personal pleasure. This is football as work, not leisure.

China's football statues differ from those elsewhere in their designs but not in their absence of female subjects, whether considering specific players or anonymous figures.¹¹ Considering China is unusual in the chasm of achievement between its men's and women's teams, it might have been expected that it would celebrate its female football heritage, unlike other nations. Their absence may partly be a question of timing: the majority of China's football

statues have appeared over the past two decades, in which the Iron Roses have fallen back in the world standings. Ironically it is China's push for success in the men's game that has negatively impacted its women's team. State encouragement for the men's national team and club game has prompted huge investment from commercial sources, whereas the women's game remains reliant on state support. This same state support gave it a relative advantage in the 1980s and 1990s, but whilst women's football has advanced elsewhere in the world due to both government funding and business sponsorship, in China this funding is now flowing entirely into the men's game (Hong and Mangen, 2006).

Chinese football statues: triumph, failure, and political expediency

These resources have, as yet, yielded just one FIFA World Cup finals appearance for China's men's team. Their decisive qualifying group victory, which confirmed their qualification for the 2002 finals, came against Oman in October 2001, in a match played at the Wulihe Stadium in Shenyang. Following this victory the Shenyang Green Island Hotel and Resort, which hosted the squad training camps during the qualifying campaign, commissioned a 44-strong statue group. The statues depicted the players in training, alongside the manager, coaches and officials that made up the national team entourage. This statue group (Figure 3 below), designed by Lin Xu and Zhang Feng but sculpted by forty artists given the short time frame for production, was unveiled in May 2002 at the grounds of the Green Island Resort, prior to the team departing to the finals ('Chinese football players unveiled their bronze statues', 2002; 'Green Island Sculpture Group', 2011). Team statues are an admittedly rare subgenre, but this statue group is the largest such football monument in the world, featuring twice as many figures as its nearest challenger.¹²

Not content with this display of largesse, China's collective excitement at qualification resulted in the creation of a further monument. An immense 30 tonne statue, standing over 15 metres tall (Figure 4 below), comprised a giant steel 'victory V' placed on a bronze football, itself on a large black plinth inscribed with the results from the qualifying campaign. The V featured a fibreglass relief of 11 players (designed to be portrayals of typical footballers as opposed to specific players) and the manager Bora Milutinović. The V was the brainchild of Shenyang football fans association leader Sun Changlong, funded by the Shenyang Municipal Government and Sun himself, and sculpted by Guo Zhaoyang. It was first unveiled outside Wulihe Stadium in May 2002 (Chen, 2007; Yao, 2012; 'Wulihe V-type Monument', 2013).

<Figure 3, Figure 4 here>

China's first World Cup Final appearance, however, was a substantial blow to national pride. China lost all three games without scoring a single goal. The loss of face was exacerbated by regional rivals and joint tournament hosts Japan and South Korea winning through to the last-16 and the semi-final respectively, and naturally provoked a negative reaction back in China. The reputations of several 2002 World Cup squad players and officials suffered further when they were implicated in the football corruption investigations of 2009-2012. These included Nan Yong, an administrator who had progressed to become director of the Chinese Football Association, who was jailed for ten-and-a-half years. Goalkeeper Jiang Jin and midfielder Qi Hong were each given five-and-a-half year sentences ('China football ex-chiefs', 2012; 'Former soccer head', 2012).

As the team fell from national grace, their statues were largely forgotten and neglected. When Wulihe Stadium was slated for demolition in 2007, there was little consideration given to the giant V (Chen, 2007). Sun Changlong negotiated its rapid dismantling and removal to storage in a local factory warehouse just days before the stadium was razed to the ground, to be later replaced by a shopping mall. Rumours abounded that the sculpture had been destroyed in the demolition and even that Sun had perished in trying to save his beloved sculpture and the stadium (Yao, 2012; 'Wulihe V-type Monument', 2013).

The team group statues remained at Green Island, but the Chinese national team no longer used the facility. Later Shenyang University purchased the site. The statues were retained by the university, albeit with their context removed, and without any promotion of their existence. They were partially rehabilitated in 2011, as part of a 10th anniversary commemoration of World Cup qualification primarily organised by Chinese Super League clubs and the media. The figures were cleaned up, and were visited by Bora Milutinović and members of the 2001-2002 squad. Despite Milutinović's pleas for its restoration as a representation of a glorious success, the giant V remained in storage ('The fate of athlete sculpture', 2012; 'National football to commemorate', 2011; 'Green Island Sculpture Group', 2011).

However, in June 2012, the Liaoning region was awarded the right to host the following year's Chinese National Games, with Shenyang to stage many of the events. With the Shenyang Municipal Authority eager to celebrate their role in China's sporting history, the

giant V was restored, pieced back together, and erected at the front of the park facing Shenyang City Library (Yao, 2012; ‘Ten strong commemorative sculpture’, 2012; ‘Wulihe V-type Monument’, 2013). The team group statues were moved from the university and installed in front of the giant V, with the original designers brought in to rearrange the training camp scene into one where the manager was more prominent. Surprisingly only 32 of the 44 statues were re-erected: the players, the manager, and the coaches. Statues of the team officials, many of whom were involved in the match-fixing scandal, were not installed (‘Top 10 V-shaped sculpture back’, 2012; Yao, 2012). A further set of anonymous figures were placed on the hillside behind the V, and a plaque was installed adjacent to the training scene, giving a brief, prosaic outline of the statue group’s history in both Mandarin Chinese and English, unsurprisingly sidestepping the team’s performance in the finals tournament.

The story of the 2002 World Cup statue group and the giant V reflects the changing place of football within Chinese culture over the past 15 years. Whilst the sculpting of a team group rather than a single player supports collectivism, the effort of erecting a statue of any sort just for qualification alone marks this as a key point in Chinese football history and betrays the lack of previous success. Likewise, whilst the very size and scale of these monuments matches Chinese tastes in public art, and indicates the availability and affordability of the materials, it also suggests a certain naivety about the global game. This is manifest both in the grandiose celebration of an achievement that football superpowers would consider a minimum expectation, and in raising expectations that the Chinese players would be able to continue their all-conquering form at the finals tournament.

The statues’ subsequent abandonment is a metaphor for Chinese football’s lost decade, as the raised expectations of 2002 turned into an overwhelming disappointment. Compared to China’s booming economy and successful hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games, football’s failures were a national embarrassment and best kept hidden to avoid loss of face. From the failure to qualify for the 2006 and 2010 World Cup finals to widespread corruption within domestic football, the sport was unable to display the successful image required by an emerging global superpower. Even on the 10th anniversary of qualification, it was primarily the media and the ex-manager cheerleading past achievements, while football and state authorities remained silent.

Likewise the statue group's (and the giant V's) rehabilitation in 2012, albeit by city rather than national authorities, coincided with the state-sanctioned push to improve Chinese football. Whilst the aim of this process is future success, it is harder to hide Chinese football's past considering the game's increasing profile and establishment in the national psyche. Despite China's attempts to bury its football failures, this push for success inadvertently emphasizes it; if it was already as successful as it wished to be, such state-sponsored largesse would not be so necessary.

The re-emergence of these statues, which can be read as totems of at least relative success (as China's first and only World Cup qualification) as well as failure (the humbling at the final's themselves), might be seen as China tiptoeing towards reconciling the need for saving face with the twin realities of its low standing in world football, and the capricious balance between footballing triumph and disaster. For some fans, the confidence of future progress may allow the 2002 qualification to be celebrated as a national high point – and for Shenyang a source of local pride, just five years after the stadium where qualification was achieved was swept away without a backwards glance. These statues might, therefore, illustrate the balance between local and national face saving: at present, whilst the 2002 World Cup is a memory China wishes to forget, it is a source of pride in Shenyang.

A further interpretation considers how the positive media coverage around the 10th anniversary of qualification event may have led to the resurrection of the monuments. Through demonstrating to the local authorities how, after a decade had passed, the joy of qualification overshadowed failure (at the World Cup itself), Shenyang might begin to embrace a collective nostalgia for the 2002 squad. However, nostalgia, a longing for a better past, is partly stimulated by present failure – making it a moot point whether any positive feeling towards these figures from 2002, at least nationally, would survive a contemporary Chinese football success.

The removal of certain figures from this statue group after its relocation is an indication of how China has begun to absorb some elements of global football culture - specifically the erosion of collectivism in favour of populist hierarchies. The original casting and erection of team officials and backroom staff alongside players suggested equality and teamwork, as well as a state that cherishes administrators as party comrades. The decision to then remove non-players who were guilty of corruption but retain similarly indicted footballers further exalts

the relative status of players. This reflects acquiescence to the hegemonic role-status dynamics of global football culture, where individual players and the occasional team manager are deified far above other roles within domestic or national football.

However, the design and arrangement of the statue group to depict a training scene, a unique composition across the world's football statues, illustrates China's distinctive belief that progression in sport – including football – can be achieved purely through organised, formal practice, coaching, and national strengths of dedicated learning and hard work, as opposed to frequent casual, informal play and instinctive skills. The contrast with the only other national team group statue not sculpted in a team photo style - that of the Netherlands, sited at the Netherlands Football Association headquarters in Zeist - provides a stark illustration of how China's football culture differs from that which pervades much of the rest of the world. The Netherlands players are sculpted performing the individual attributes for which they are famed, such as a dramatic save, an overhead kick, or in the case of Johann Cruyff, directing the pattern of play with an imperious arm gesture.¹³ Coaches and commentators have suggested that the absence of players with imaginative flair and an instinctive appreciation of tactics is a major reason for China's failure to progress to the higher echelons of world football, and is partly attributable to the lack of any 'street football' culture within the nation's youth (Sevastopulo, 2014; Stayton, 2016).

Chinese football statues: training minds and bodies for future glory

As well as impacting design, China's focus on training explains why the location of its football statues differs from the wider world's football statuary. The comparative absence of statues from club stadia in China (just 8% of footballer statues) compared to the rest of the world (44%) is perhaps unsurprising given the combination of the typical drivers of stadia-sited sports statues, namely nostalgia- and authenticity-based exploitation of heritage.

Chinese professional clubs lack a lengthy heritage of great players and triumphant moments to recreate in bronze. The municipal ownership of many stadia also limits clubs in stamping their mark upon the concourses and surroundings. China compensates for this shortfall with a disproportionate presence of football statues at both sports schools and state and private training facilities (17%, compared to just 3% across the rest of the world).

Examples of such statues can be found at the Evergrande Football School in Qingyuan, 75 miles north of the city of Guangzhou, whose Chinese Super League team is also sponsored by

the Evergrande Real Estate Group. Run in partnership with Real Madrid, who supply the coaching staff, the school is probably the world's largest such venture. The campus contains 50 pitches, and at present hosts approximately 2500 mostly-fee-paying pupils, providing them with both an academic and footballing education (Sudworth, 2014; Stallard, 2016; 'President Xi's great Chinese soccer dream', 2017).

On the school's opening in 2012, several statues were installed in the palatial grounds. Their presence amongst fountains and manicured lawns only adds to the hyper-reality of a complex designed to resemble an ancient English public school or country house (Simons, 2017). Three of these statues depict anonymous players, including the ubiquitous tackling design, though with players seemingly of European rather than Chinese descent. However, two further statues are of particular interest. Both were produced by Saishang Design Group of Hubei, who specialise in film-sets and model-making as well as sculpture ('Humanities Sculpture Series', 2012). One portrays two legends of the global game with strong links to the World Cup (Figure 5): England captain Bobby Moore lifted the trophy in 1966; Brazil's Pelé, widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time, won the World Cup in 1958 and 1970, and was part of the winning 1962 squad (but didn't appear in the final). Pelé is depicted hoisting the trophy aloft. Moore is posed, with foot on ball. Both figures are attempted copies of existing statues: specifically the Bobby Moore monument, sculpted by Philip Jackson and sited at Wembley Stadium, and the Pelé statue by Lucy Viana, unveiled in Pelé's home town of Três Corações in 1971.¹⁴ A fourth Evergrande Football School statue, also produced by Saishang, was prominently sited outside the school gates, and depicted the FIFA World Cup trophy, surmounted by figures of three anonymous players (figure 6). This statue was removed in 2016, apparently on FIFA's request, probably due to copyright issues (Sabrié, 2016).

<Figure 5, Figure 6 here>

The number of statues at training facilities and sports schools can be explained prosaically by the popularity of public art in China, but also by the nation's continued adherence to elitist sports development. This approach is modelled on that of the former Soviet Union and its communist satellite states (and latterly China itself) in achieving Olympic glory. Whilst soccer schools and academies exist in many countries, they typically represent the top of a pyramid of youthful footballing endeavour. In China, with minimal informal or formal junior

club football, and a wider push for football to be included in regular school curriculums only just beginning, ventures such as the Evergrande School are currently the principal tool in producing young footballers.

The designs of the Evergrande statues reveal the primary motive behind the school's existence. As privately-funded art on private land, the Evergrande statues must be considered in a different light to public installations, such as those in Dalian and Shenyang. Superficially, these statues might be viewed as an attempt to inspire the children attending the school. However, perhaps more than this, they will reflect the image that Evergrande wants to project of their school (and by extension themselves as a business). Erecting a huge sculpted World Cup trophy and a statue of winning captains is an overt message that the school will produce winners, and indeed that Evergrande is a winner. This is despite the school having no track record of producing world class footballers to date. President Xi's stated aim to both host and win the World Cup has galvanised Chinese businesses to very publically and visibly invest in football, garnering government favour and smoothing their interactions with China's internal bureaucracy. By featuring the FIFA World Cup trophy in two statues, Evergrande is also explicitly supporting the president's aims.

These statues also betray the elite-focused approach that has historically blighted China's football development. National ambition to reach the ultimate prize has overshadowed and dwarfed the enjoyment of playing the game, and is presented as the reason both for the school's existence, and to play football at all. Yet not everyone can win, and if winning is the primary reason to participate, inevitable defeat will demoralise and discourage young footballers. Building football schools, even as big as Evergrande, is an extremely expensive way of barely scratching the surface of China's potential junior football participation; the expansion of informal, public facilities and coaching systems aimed at access and involvement for the many, would be more likely to breed potential star players (Simons, 2017).

Finally, while the presence Moore and Pelé statues speaks of Evergrande's ambition, it also echoes a lack of self-confidence derived from the absence of a Chinese footballer within living memory to portray as an inspiration to the school's pupils – and reflects China's impatience to solve this problem. This impatience is manifest in the reflexive yet superficial copying of contemporary success from abroad, an instinct prevalent at Evergrande, across

Chinese football and society more generally. Just as the Chinese FA has variously, over the years, employed Brazilian, Hungarian and German coaches to train their young players, Evergrande School employs a coaching team from Real Madrid, currently the world's most successful club football team. The school is built to resemble a palace from another continent. So it is befitting that, rather than offering a home-grown inspiration or perspective, its statues are copies of other statues, featuring other countries' players. Chinese industry has long been renowned for its ability to replicate and reverse-engineer products developed in the west, and produce them more cheaply. This process has fuelled China's rapid economic gains but has hampered their ability to develop the next version, or at least diminished any motivation to do so (Guy, 2005; Stevenson-Yang and DeWoskin, 2016). Applying this approach to football, however, will be unlikely to result in China developing their own natural style of play that will match national attributes. The successful football nations have all evolved traditions regarding styles and tactics, that have been influenced by cultural characteristics and playing conditions. It could be argued that, for China to achieve sustained football success, it needs its own unique football culture, not a facsimile from abroad.

Chinese football statues: kickabout diplomacy and saving face

In August 2016, city officials from Rio and Beijing unveiled a statue on the fringes of the Olympic Park in Rio de Janeiro ('Chinese Sculpture', 2016). Sculpted by Huang Jian, entitled CMB Football Friendship, and presented as a gift from Beijing to their twin city of Rio, the statue (figures 7, 8) depicts Han dynasty emperor Wudi (漢武帝), dressed in full imperial robes, kicking a ball. The ball is notably different from a modern football, its rough nature rather closer to the imperfect, sewn seams that were used to construct the hull of a cuju ball (Figure 8). Alongside Han Wudi is Pelé, who is aiming a kick at the ball but, to his evident amusement given his wide sculpted grin, has been beaten to a touch by the emperor. The statue departs slightly from the traditional, realist figurative portrayal adhered to by almost all sculptors of football statues. Instead it includes a motion blur effect, popularised by American sports sculpture firm Studio Amrany in their depictions of basketball and baseball stars, to enhance the sense of movement and action.¹⁵ The Chinese press reported the unveiling as "expressing the Chinese people's good wishes for the Olympic Games in Rio, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the twinning of the cities of Beijing and Rio, carrying forward the spirit of the Olympic Games, the inheritance of sports, enhancing Sino-Brazilian friendship and promoting world peace" ('Chinese Sculpture', 2016).

<Figures 7, 8 here>

The two figures, which are sculpted at approximately one-and-a-half times life-size, are set on a low metal plinth that has been allowed to accumulate a rust finish. A wide plaque is affixed to the front of the plinth. The plaque inscription is provided in Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, and English, and reads as follows:

China-Brazil Friendship Soccer Match. By Huang Jian from China. 2016. The sculpture “China-Brazil Friendship Soccer Match” is presented by Beijing Municipal Government to the city of Rio de Janeiro as an official gift to extend the sincerest blessings to the Rio Olympic Games and to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Beijing and Rio. The Sculpture, created by Ms. Huang Jian, a world renowned sculptress depicts two prominent figures from the two countries – China’s “Soccer Emperor” and “Pioneer of the Silk Road” Emperor Hanwu and Brazil’s “King of Football” Pelé, who have travelled over 2.000 years through time and space to the Olympic Park in Rio and played a friendship soccer match. Hopefully this sculpture will help promote the long-lasting friendship between the two countries.

As the inscription and press reports suggest, this statue is as much a monument to the diplomatic value of sporting relations as it is to the combatants depicted. Post-revolution China has a long history of sporting diplomacy, though its early football-centred forays were more about strengthening ties with political bed-fellows in Eastern Europe than extending its global reach. In the early 1960s, despite having withdrawn from FIFA, and hence competitive international matches, the Chinese national team played hundreds of friendlies with the communist states of Eastern Europe and Soviet-sponsored or sympathetic regimes in Asia and Africa (Simons, 2008, 212). However, as Chairman Mao’s Cultural Revolution began to fade and China looked to reintegrate with the rest of the world, sport became an important conduit for re-establishing diplomatic ties and trade relationships with the previously demonised capitalist and democratic west. The most famous example in Mao’s era was early 1970s ‘ping-pong diplomacy’ through table-tennis encounters between China and the USA (Griffin, 2015), but similar relationship building was conducted through football. In 1977, the first western club invited to China was the star-studded New York Cosmos team featuring Pelé and Franz Beckenbauer. The Cosmos’ two encounters with the Chinese national team ended with – as Rowan Simons notes – a pair of ‘perfectly diplomatic’ results: a 1-1 draw followed by a 2-1 win for the hosts. Further match-ups with English club sides and a series of

relationship-building tours in the USA and the UK occurred at the turn of the decade (Simons, 2008, 216).

As China's economic stock rose inexorably, the balance of power in these diplomatic relations changed. Seeking contacts, influence and a 'foot in the door' is no longer such an imperative for China. As an established global superpower it has become more the master of its own economic destiny than the servant of western whims, and can make trade deals on its own terms. Instead China focuses on the importance of soft power, the public relations and sense of acceptance and recognition as a world leader that is important to its image of itself and in the wider world. In this sense football still presents opportunities, but is also an end in itself. The ultimate glory surely lies in hosting – and winning – a World Cup. It is no longer just the taking part in order to build relationships that matters – but the winning (or at least being spared the humiliation of frequent defeat). The current failure of the national team undermines China's status, making football an awkward, potentially shameful diplomatic pitch to play on.

The "CMB Football Friendship" statue further highlights China's rewriting and subjugation of its traditional sporting heritage to position itself as a relevant nation in world football, suggesting it is only worthy of consideration as a forerunner to football rather than on its own merits. First, the statue inscription does not distinguish between cuju and modern football. It describes Han Wu, a keen player/sponsor of the game whose dynasty founded cuju, as the 'soccer emperor' without any mention of cuju. Likewise the Chinese media describes this statue as celebrating the 'inheritance' of football, by Brazil, from China.

Second, matching Pelé with an ancient figure who is largely unknown outside of China, and with very little supporting context provided by the inscription, again highlights the lack of truly great Chinese footballers to stand alongside Pelé. The inclusion of references to 'the Silk Road' is a compensatory reference to China's historic business and trading prowess, rather than football capability. Ultimately, in creating a football themed statue, China – despite its economic might – chooses to meet Brazil at a cultural reference that is very much Brazil's, not China's. This indicates a lack of self-confidence in Chinese football, or at least in how it is perceived in the west – and a certain creativity in presenting a gift that promotes Chinese football and culture by depicting the impossible – China winning a footballing tussle with Brazil.

Conclusion

As Kurt Savage notes, monuments such as statues speak as much to the values, attitudes and beliefs of those who produce them, as they do of the subjects depicted (Savage, 1994).

Societies rarely erect images of unknown or unpopular figures or practices. The existence of so many football statues within China, almost all dated post-2000, is in part due to a continuing fashion for figurative public art, but also a desire of local government arts committees to dovetail with the increased national promotion and public interest in football over this period.

China's use of football statues, and the statues themselves are as distinctive as China's undeveloped yet hyper-accelerated football culture. Whether the styling and placement of these statues can be considered in any way strategic is debateable. The interpretations around design and location support this claim, but, rather like China's attempts at improving the nation's football performance, they also sit alongside a number of inherent contradictions and tensions. Ultimately China's football statues seek to inspire progress, whether through portraying perceived national attributes of hard work and commitment to training, the strength and power needed to achieve an anticipated future triumph, or the trophy that the nation craves. However the statues' subject anonymity or use of foreign stars, associated propaganda regarding China's past football influence, and the statues' own tangled back stories reveal a lack of tangible success or confidence, and the inherent problems in reconciling this lack of success with China's desire for preserving face. China's football statues and its football culture embody the tension between the need to avoid perceived sporting humiliation in the present with the longer-term reforms needed to build a sustainable football base; and between saving face locally whilst losing it nationally, as seen in Shenyang.

The consequences of a face-first approach are also borne out by the statue designs, which foreground hard work in the pursuit of victory to the complete exclusion of playing football for fun: whether in the determined expressions of the anonymous players, the victory V of the Shenyang World Cup sculpture, the images of the FIFA World Cup itself at Evergrande School, or the depiction of the 2002 World Cup squad in training. In one respect this makes China's football statues more honest than those found elsewhere in the world. Fans may take

pleasure from the moments of skill and improvisation, but ultimately they would prefer to see their team 'win ugly' than lose flamboyantly.

However, China's rigid focus on victory both stifles grassroots development and is an awkward perspective to maintain in a nation where football success has yet to be achieved. Collectively, these statues reflect the juxtaposition of this underachievement with the urgent need to be seen to succeed in world football, or at least be relevant in it. Whereas the global football statuary is typically one of self-confidence, with careful reading China's ultimately displays a lack of confidence. Statues are associated with permanence, but whether the football statues that have taken root in China over the past two decades mark a permanent change in China's relationship with football remains to be seen.

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Notes

¹ For the purposes of this paper, statues are defined as three-dimensional full-body figurative monuments, with the figures being both at least half-life-size and permanent installations (as opposed to waxworks and museum models). Statue groups feature multiple such figures arranged in close proximity, almost always constructed and unveiled together, presented as a single exhibit, e.g., with a single plaque or inscription, and with the figures typically but not always interacting.

² Between January 2013 and March 2014, the first author and a colleague constructed a database of existing statues of football players, managers, and chairmen as part of a wider project into commemoration in sport, which they have continued to maintain and update. Data and images were obtained through a literature, archival and online search, and via interviews with sculptors and project organisers. Variables collected included the precise location, date of unveiling, design type (broadly classified as 'action', 'posed' or 'triumph'), the full plaque or plinth inscription, and the identity of the statue project promoters and funders, as well as further demographic and performance information on the subjects depicted. As of August 2017 the project had catalogued 292 in situ statues or statue groups of specific football players, depicting 493 distinct players. In addition 48 statues depicting managers, 19 statues depicting chairmen/founders/executives, 14 statues depicting other people connected and being celebrated for their connection to football, and 190 statues depicting anonymous players or fans have been identified. Note that as well as statue groups by definition featuring more than one subject, some subjects have been honoured on multiple occasions. The database is complete and accurate to the best of our knowledge. Since April 2014 the primary elements of the database (the statue location, sculptor, unveiling date, inscription and photos of the statue showing the design) have been publically available through the project website at <http://www.sportingstatues.com> (Stride, Thomas and Wilson, 2012)

³ For some examples, see the project website <http://www.sportingstatues.com>, which gives details of many less popular UK sports that have had statues erected in their participants' honour, including lawn bowls, water polo and wheelchair basketball.

⁴ For a full listing see the sporting statues world football database (Stride, Thomas and Wilson, 2012).

⁵ The South Korea-Japan jointly-hosted 2002 FIFA World Cup, which saw the hosts progress to the semi-finals and the last 16 respectively. Both nations have qualified for all subsequent World Cups, and both progressed beyond the group stages again in 2010. Japan have won the Asian Cup tournament four times since 1992; South Korea have failed to reach the semi-finals only once in the last 5 tournaments.

⁶ In December 2016, Chinese clubs Shanghai SIPG and Shanghai Shenhua were reported to be paying the two highest salaries in world football ("The highest paid footballers", 2016). In January 2017 Shanghai SIPG signed Oscar from Chelsea FC for 60 million pounds, the latest in a series of multi-million pound investments (Bloomfield, 2017; Price, 2017).

⁷ Between 2015 and 2017, West Bromwich Albion, Birmingham City, Aston Villa and Wolverhampton Wanderers, four Midlands-based football clubs in the English Premier League and Championship (the top two tiers of English professional football) were purchased by Chinese owners or consortia. In addition, Chinese investors have purchased stakes in European heavyweights such as Manchester City FC, and both Milan clubs (AC and Internazionale).

⁸ Examples of Chinese football statues that are just one element in an arrangement of different sports sculptures can be found in Olympic Avenue Park, Hebei (see the sporting statues database, http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_20.htm); and Xinghai Square, Dalian (http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_204.htm).

⁹ Examples of Chinese-sited statues of anonymous footballers tackling, with a variety of different designs include those in Hebei (see the sporting statues database, http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_23.htm); Tianjin (http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_13.htm); Tongzou Olympic Park in Beijing (http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_26.htm); and Dalian North Station Square (http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_23.htm).

¹⁰ Examples of Russian-sited statues of anonymous footballers tackling can be found in Krasnodar Krai (see the sporting statues database http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_189.htm); Zarechny (http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_169.htm); the Tretykov Gallery, Moscow (http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_91.htm and O'Mahony, 2017); and most notably the St Petersburg Blockade Match Monument (http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Anonymous_94.htm).

¹¹ The Chinese National Football Museum features statues of members of the Chinese Women's national team, but given their location and material these would be more correctly described as museum models that are semi-permanent exhibits, as opposed to permanent public statues.

¹² Further full team statues celebrate the 1964 BSG Chemie Leipzig team (at BSG Chemie Leipzig in Leipzig, Germany: see the sporting statues database. http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_BSGLeipzig_1.htm); the 2002 Turkey World Cup team (in Istanbul: see the sporting statues database http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_TurkeyWC2002.htm), the 2002 South Korea World Cup team (at Gyeonggi: see the sporting statues database http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_SouthKorea_WC2002.htm), and the Ararat Yerevan team (at Hrazdan Stadium, Yerevan: see the sporting statues database http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_AraratYerevan.htm).

¹³ See http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Cruyff_Johan_1.htm;
http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_VanBasten_Marco.htm;
http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_VanDerSar_Edwin.htm.

¹⁴ To view the original Moore statue at Wembley Stadium, UK, see the sporting statues database; http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Moore_Bobby_1.htm. To view the Pelé statue in Três Corações, Brazil, see sporting statues database; http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Pele_2.htm. A second cast of the Pelé statue was unveiled in 1971 in Salvador, Brazil; http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STFB_Pele_1.htm.

¹⁵ Notable examples of this stylistic subgenre of sports statues include that of basketball legend Michael Jordan, sited in Chicago, and most notably those of three Washington baseball heroes, Walter Johnson, Josh Gibson and Frank Howard, at Nationals Park, Washington DC (see, for example, the sporting statues database http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues/STUS_Howard_Frank.htm).