

1 **Chinese football fandom and civic identities: a study of the fans of**  
2 **Shanghai Shenhua and Beijing Guoan**

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# 1 **Chinese football fandom and civic identities: a study of the fans of** 2 **Shanghai Shenhua and Beijing Guoan**

3 This article aims to understand how the relationship between Chinese football  
4 fans and their clubs has contributed to the local symbolic status of clubs. More  
5 specifically, the article focuses on the cases of the Greenland Shenhua Football  
6 Club (Shanghai) and the Sinobo Guoan Football Club (Beijing). By using  
7 semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the article reveals that a  
8 club's ability to be successful, the length of interaction between fans and clubs,  
9 and fans' own civic identities are key factors for the development of fan  
10 loyalty. Moreover, fans' influence on clubs' operations and their behaviour at  
11 matches, even of a more extreme type, have contributed to the clubs becoming  
12 symbols of their respective cities. This article demonstrates a mode of football  
13 fandom development which has not been influenced to the same extent as in  
14 Europe and South America by family inheritance.

15 Keywords: China; football, fandom, Beijing, Shanghai

16 (Word count: 8,694)

## 17 **Introduction**

18 In most European and South American countries where professional football clubs  
19 and football fandom have a long history, factors that bring people together such as  
20 religion, political beliefs and social class have been significant in the development of  
21 teams and their followers, leading to many examples of largely symbolic conflict.  
22 Football fans have deep connections to their local football clubs not least because, for  
23 many of them, their forebears have been founders, sponsors, administrators, coaches,

1 players, and supporters of these clubs (Dunning, Murphy, and Williams 2014;  
2 Giulianotti 1999; 2002; Taylor 1971). As a consequence, many clubs can still be  
3 considered as local symbols for local people even in an era when global processes  
4 have greatly affected football's traditional landscape (Holt 1989; Mason [1989] 2011;  
5 Russell 1997).

6         However, during the history of Chinese football fandom, there was no such  
7 close connection with local football teams. Before 1994, there were no home-and-  
8 away fixtures in domestic football. Regional football teams played games in major  
9 cities only for the purpose of aiding the selection of players for the national team  
10 (Fan, Wang, and Tan 2001; Li 2014; Ying 2019; Zhang 2015). As a result, there were  
11 few opportunities for fans to interact with their local football teams. Even when  
12 professional football clubs were first established in China in 1994, most were  
13 organised by local sports bureaus and state enterprises (Amara et al. 2005; He, Zheng,  
14 and Zhang 1998; Jones 2004; Li 2014; Tan 2004), meaning that it was still unlikely  
15 that fans would feel the same strong connections to these clubs as European and South  
16 American fans had developed much earlier.

17         Furthermore, it was often difficult for these local clubs to survive. From 1994  
18 to 2019, nine Chinese football clubs which once played in the top league have totally  
19 disappeared (The Chinese Football Institution, 2020), a situation that can best be  
20 understood by reference to the operation of the Chinese professional league. Because  
21 of a close relationship between the Chinese Football Association (CFA) and the

1 Chinese government, the broadcasting rights for the professional leagues are sold  
2 cheaply to the national public broadcasters, limiting the main income of clubs to  
3 sponsorships and naming rights (Amara et al. 2005; Jones 2004; Han 1998; Ying  
4 2019). Therefore, it is often necessary for clubs has to move from one location to  
5 another solely for the purpose of attracting greater investment. If a club is unable to  
6 find a better market, the likelihood of it being capable of attracting loyal fans in the  
7 new location is very low.

8         Yet over time Chinese fans have begun to acquire an emotional attachment to  
9 their local clubs which by extension is linked to a reciprocated attachment to their  
10 cities and regions. On the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Shanghai Shenhua  
11 Football Club, the Oriental Pearl Tower on Shanghai's Bund was illuminated in the  
12 main colours of the club and displayed the text 'happy birthday' on a giant LED  
13 screen (Qiu 2017). The relationship between the city, the football club and its fans  
14 was literally on display. This study addresses the research question — how has the  
15 development of football fandom helped Chinese football clubs to become symbols of  
16 their respective cities? The paper draws upon urban sociology, the geographical study  
17 of sport and the sociology of football fandom. It demonstrates the development of  
18 fandom for Chinese football clubs and seeks to understand the fans as a social power  
19 affecting their cities' development by contributing to their clubs' symbolic status. The  
20 paper is interpretivist, and a comparative case study approach was employed to guide  
21 the study.

## 1 **Urban development and social life**

2 Cities were a feature of all the great ancient civilisations, including those of China.  
3 Relatively small by some modern standards, they nevertheless facilitated a far more  
4 diverse range of activities than was possible in other forms of human settlement  
5 (Bairner 2007).

6 The origins of urban sociology can be traced back to the work of the Chicago  
7 School in the 1920s and 1930s who sought to reveal and rethink the social issues  
8 caused by urban life (Short 1971). The rise of industrialism created major centres  
9 which increasingly attracted people from other places and countries. Consequently, all  
10 modern industrial societies became heavily urbanized, and since the second half of the  
11 twentieth century, this global process has also become an increasing element in social  
12 transformation. What is undeniable, however, is that cities are unequal and divided  
13 social spaces that have continued throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first  
14 centuries to be the objects of sociological analysis and research (Bairner, 2007).

15 Louis Wirth (1938) introduced the idea of urbanism as a way of life. By  
16 pointing out the characteristics of urban life, such as weak social bonds, a more  
17 frenetic pace of life, and the centrality of competition rather than cooperation, he  
18 greatly influenced subsequent studies of cities to focus on the interaction between  
19 urban residents and their cities (Reiss 1964).

20 Scholars of the new urban sociology think highly of the contribution of human  
21 activities to urban developments (Firey 1945; Zukin 1980). They believe that a city's

1 development is largely influenced by its residents' socio-cultural interactions. When  
2 considering the reasons for human settlement. Doxiadis (1970, 394) claims that one of  
3 the important principles is:

4 ...optimization of the quality of man's relationship with his environment, which  
5 consists of nature, society, shells (buildings and houses of all sorts), and  
6 networks (ranging from roads to telecommunications). This is the principle that  
7 leads to order, physiological and aesthetic, and that influences architecture and,  
8 in many respects, art.

9 This enhances the desire of people to find a place in which to settle down, to  
10 seek resources for living and opportunities to interact with other human beings. This  
11 idea echoes Orum and Chen's (2003) views on the process of urbanization which  
12 argue that, before the emergence of its economic function, the city's main function  
13 was to satisfy people's needs for life. In other words, its residents and their needs are  
14 major factors influencing urban development. A city plays the role of being 'a centre  
15 of meaning' for its residents, reflecting and informing their collective identities (Tuan  
16 1977, 173). Based on the above, people are the main force behind the development of  
17 their cities, and their collective identities are essential to that development.

18 People have been a critical factor in the development of the Chinese city.  
19 Similar to the development of most cities in the world, the Chinese city satisfies  
20 people's desire to 'gather and keep things to sustain life', to 'protect the body from  
21 danger', and to 'articulate moral and aesthetic judgements on things' (Li 2014, xvii).  
22 More importantly, using the definition of human beings in Chinese philosophy is a

1 'thing of a billion things' - an enormously complex amalgamation, Li (2014, xv)  
2 implies that the city evolves to match people's ever-changing practices. For more than  
3 100 years, Chinese cities have accommodated many features of Western urbanisation.  
4 According to the extent of people's engagement with Western culture from the age of  
5 colonialism to the globalisation era, the cultures and lifestyles of two worlds  
6 amalgamate in the city (Wu 2006). As we shall argue, this explains why football fans  
7 and their performance of fandom are so important to Chinese urban life.

#### 8 **Football clubs, place and civic belonging**

9 Whatever their level of attainment, football clubs matter to their fans and one of the  
10 crucial reasons is that they *represent* cities, town and regions. In this respect, Bale's  
11 pioneering studies (1993a; 1993b; 2000) demonstrated how football clubs engage  
12 with the local.

13 Stadiums were initially constructed in cities to accommodate urban dwellers'  
14 need for competitive entertainment and, because of their role in satisfying economic  
15 and cultural needs, stadiums have become urban landmarks (Ahlfeldt and Maennig,  
16 2010) to 'mirror those of the cities' (Bale 1993b, 124-125). In other words, a stadium  
17 can be identified as a symbol of a place and can help people to form an impression of  
18 that place.

19 Moreover, Bale (2000, 92) also suggested that participating in seasonal games  
20 is helpful for securing football clubs' symbolic status:

1           Almost all clubs...are named after places and consequently they are announced  
2           each week of the football season as their performances are broadcast to the  
3           nation and beyond.

4           Seasonal games become contests between places by allowing football clubs to  
5           be recognised as local representatives. Meanwhile, the media has worked effectively  
6           to cultivate a club's local identity by reporting on these league games (Haynes 1995;  
7           Hornmoen 2012; Maguire 2011). All these factors help to establish the local  
8           connections of football clubs. In other words, football provides 'a potent medium for  
9           collective identification with a place' (Bale 1993a, 56).

10           As a result, an "us" against "them" mentality' is produced by football (Bale  
11           1993a, 30), which also emphasises the clubs' spatial significance. According to Shobe  
12           (2008, 330), this is the result of the players in opposing teams standing for different  
13           communities, thereby making the 'amorphous notions of "community"' seem 'more  
14           tangible'. That is, football facilitates people's identification with their communities  
15           and exaggerates rivalries with other communities. Thus, football games enhance the  
16           importance of the local football club to their locations by embracing conflicts between  
17           people from different social communities (Elias 1978).

18           Local authorities are likely to accept the football clubs as local symbols.  
19           Playing games with the name of its home location in international and domestic  
20           leagues offers free advertising for that home location which is introduced to people  
21           who 'would otherwise never hear its name mentioned' (Bale 1993a, 56). This may



1 match local leaders' interest in civic boosterism so that they welcome 'the elevation  
2 of their local football clubs to Football League status' (Bale 2000, 92).

3           Gómez-Bantel (2016, 692) suggests that a football club is more able to  
4 continue playing the role of 'cultural representative of a community' than other  
5 institutions. It engages with its community identity and is recognised as a local  
6 symbol because it can 'acknowledge and cultivate its identity as a cultural good'  
7 (692). But this criterion may not be easily attained by a club with a relatively short  
8 history. Without a long-term presence in a particular location, a club is less likely to  
9 be a medium for local people to recognise their communal identity (Holt 1989; Mason  
10 [1989] 2011; Russell 1997). Acquiring historical accumulation is a principal condition  
11 for the club to be recognised as an element in local 'social memories' that connect  
12 fans' emotions to a 'collective experience of living in a place' (Hague and Mercer  
13 1998, 106; Bairner 2014). A club needs time to construct a historical affinity with its  
14 home region if it is to become a local symbol.

15           Local Chinese football teams have been playing since 1951 (Dong and  
16 Mangan 2001), two years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China  
17 (PRC). However, memories of those teams could not be developed by residents  
18 because of their lack of interaction with them. From the 1950s to the 1990s, the  
19 Danwei (or work unit) system which was the 'source of employment and material  
20 support for the majority of urban residents' (Bray 2005:5), strictly administered  
21 people's interactions with social organisations, thereby erecting the main barrier

1 standing in the way of fans engaging with their local teams. Secondly, domestic  
2 games were not played on a home-and-away basis but always in major cities (Fan,  
3 Wang, and Tan 2001; Li 2014; Ying 2019; Zhang 2015), resulting in the difficulty for  
4 fans to access stadiums. Thirdly, it was not until the beginning of the professional  
5 league that the main national broadcaster, China Central Television (CCTV), started  
6 to publicise domestic games (Yan 2006), the result being that there was limited  
7 opportunity for fans to watch their local teams even on TV.

8         Although TV broadcasting and home fixtures in the professional league gave  
9 fans more opportunities to interact with their local clubs, financial challenges were a  
10 barrier to clubs being identified with specific places. Before the State Council of the  
11 PRC (2015) initiated reforms to support the development of Chinese football in 2015,  
12 the CFA was based in the General Administration of Sport of China, so that domestic  
13 football administered by the CFA was ultimately run by the government (Zheng  
14 2001). At the same time, the CCTV dominated the negotiations on the broadcasting  
15 rights of league games because it was a governmental enterprise as well as the  
16 primary national public broadcaster of sports programmes. As a result, broadcasting  
17 rights for the professional leagues between 1994 and 2014 were sold cheaply (Teng  
18 and Hu 2017; Wu and Fang 2005; Zou and Zhang 2018). Meanwhile, local sports  
19 bureaus dominated teams by controlling players as well as coaches and allowing state  
20 enterprises conducted by the government to cover teams' expenses (Amara et al.  
21 2005; He, Zheng, and Zhang 1998; Jones 2004; Li 2014). The lack of football fans'

1 participation in organising local teams made their initial affinity with these teams  
2 relatively weak which meant an increased risk of clubs facing financial challenges.  
3 Without attracting fans, the clubs could lack revenues of from ticket sales and  
4 sponsorship, limiting their main income to owner investment and player transfers  
5 (Amara et al. 2005; Jones 2004; Han 1998; Ying 2019). Satisfying fans' needs,  
6 therefore, was the way for a club to survive in the same location long enough to  
7 develop a local connection. Otherwise, clubs often had to move to attract new owners  
8 if they were to survive.

### 9 **Football fandom as a collective identity.**

10 According to MacClancy (1996, 3), 'sport may not be just a marker of one's already  
11 established social identity but a means by which to create a new social identity for  
12 oneself as well'. In the football world, Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* (1992) displays  
13 how football fans form their connection to the club they support and highlights how  
14 fandom can be a basis upon which they develop a strong 'visceral senses of collective  
15 identity' (Shobe 2008, 330).

16 In general, many fans appear to possess a sense of idolatry, with fandom being  
17 defined as 'a response to the star system' (Jenson 1992, 10). In the present era, sports  
18 fans are regarded as the product of that 'emerging neo-liberal political philosophy  
19 [which] began to influence and infiltrate sports institutions and fandom culture in the  
20 1980s' (Dixon 2016, 439). However, unlike those people who simply respond to the  
21 modern celebrity system (Jenson 1992), 'football fans like to see themselves as active

1 participants in the drama of elite-level performances' (Hognestad 2012, 25), assuming  
2 leading roles in the processes of the construction and reconstruction in the character  
3 of fandom communities.

4         However, this phenomenon might only have been relevant to football fans  
5 who are usually identified as 'traditional' or 'genuine'. Those fans report a strong  
6 emotional association with the clubs they support, and they are bonded with each  
7 other by group loyalties (Boyle and Haynes 2000; Clarke 1978; Nash 2000). Their  
8 attitudes towards their local football clubs can be explained by Taylor's understanding  
9 of 'participatory democracy' (1971), whereby local football clubs have a historical  
10 affinity with local fans. Furthermore, fans' close connections to their football clubs is  
11 passed on to the next generation in the form of family inheritance, so that fans over  
12 generations tend to treat their clubs as their own property and, therefore, have a right  
13 to participate in their development (Brown 2008; Williams 2012).

14         By contrast, so-called 'new fans' do not have this historical accumulation and  
15 perhaps do not engage with conventional loyalty and stable emotional attachment to  
16 clubs exhibited by 'traditional fans'; their interest in their teams is more likely to  
17 depend on their experience of victories, interactions with star players, and other  
18 enjoyable factors (Dixon 2012). In fact, because of the rapid development of the  
19 sports market, fans are nowadays treated as consumers to be entertained by the  
20 commercial sports industry (Rein, Kotler, and Shields 2006), which suggests that  
21 current fans are consuming a modified fandom experience, and it is hard for them to

1 gain access to the fandom identified with a deeper sense of community and tradition  
2 (Redhead 2004).

3 Based on the above considerations, understanding the differences between  
4 different forms of fandom is a crucial aspect of fandom research (Dixon 2016). Mehus  
5 (2010, 897) proposes that ‘good supporters are often contrasted with bad consumers’,  
6 or specifically, referring to perceptions of fans who express their attitudes towards  
7 their teams and perform differently because they have had a different experience of  
8 becoming football fans.

9 However, when describing spectatorship at team sports in industrialised-urban  
10 societies, Goldlust (1987, ix) takes a different view:

11 Spectatorship at team sports emerged as an important focus for communal  
12 identity and group sociability. Popular sporting competitions developed local  
13 institutionalised support and provided an element of inter-generational, sub-  
14 cultural continuity. Thus, particular sporting clubs and competitions operated as  
15 important carriers of communal identity and came to symbolise various forms of  
16 group solidarity and cohesion.

17 This implies that once fandom for a particular sporting club, especially a team  
18 sports club, is securely established, the club can offer its fans a stable identity which  
19 can be passed on to the next generation and help to maintain a unique sub-culture.  
20 More specifically, anyone who is identified as a fan of the club can engage with its  
21 collective identity. Therefore, many elite-level spectator sports were considered ‘a  
22 communal resource rather than a form of commercialised recreation’ (ibid), and new

1 fans will ultimately involve themselves with ‘the norms of a particular habitus’ as  
2 conventional and loyal (Crawford 2004, 46).

3 Crawford (2003, 230-233) believes that the process of an individual’s fandom  
4 is fluid like career progression; the fan moves from being a member of the ‘General  
5 public’ (the level at which s/he has no serious interest in the club) to the ‘Apparatus’  
6 (the stage at which the fan is fully-developed with good knowledge about the club and  
7 even the possibility to obtain income from his/her fan identity). This indicates that a  
8 fan’s relationship with a club is developed across time and space.

9 Scholars (Dixon 2012; Holt 1995; Robson 2000) suggest that traditional fans  
10 act as mentors leading new fans to engage with their fan habitus. In this way,  
11 conventional tradition and loyalty can be passed to the next generation, and more and  
12 more fans become ‘traditional’ and therefore viewed by some as ‘irrational and yet  
13 predictable beings in the sense that they blindly follow group conventions’ (Dixon  
14 2016, 440). However, in a study of fans of Manchester Storm ice hockey team,  
15 Crawford (2003, 228-229) suggests that two factors, fans’ ‘social interaction’ with  
16 other fans and their accumulated ‘experience’ during the games can also lead them to  
17 acquire more knowledge about their club. Therefore, their experience of simply  
18 ‘being there’, together with the social interactions that involves, further facilitates  
19 loyalty.

20 Most Chinese football fans’ limited affinity with teams indicated that they  
21 were only consumers of football entertainment initially. In addition to watching

1 games in the stadium, free TV broadcasting became the main vehicle for Chinese fans  
2 to enjoy games from the beginning of the football league (Yan 2006). In this respect  
3 Song and Lu (1997) point out three different types of football audience. The first  
4 group consists of people concerned with the results of football games mainly for  
5 social purposes. It is rare for them to watch games in the stadium or even entire games  
6 on TV. The second group of people usually watch games on television and sometimes  
7 go to stadiums. The third group regularly watches games in the stadium. For them,  
8 watching highly-competitive football games is not only recreational but also part of  
9 their lifestyle. The distinction between 'traditional' and 'new' fans is less important in  
10 the study of the development of Chinese football fandom. Instead, employing  
11 Crawford's 'supporter career' (2003) is an appropriate way to explore the fluid pattern  
12 of the fandom from consumers to passionate fans.

### 13 **The lack of research on the relationship between Chinese football fans and** 14 **their clubs**

15 Football is always a critical terrain for sociological inquiry to explore a  
16 particular Asian society because it is performed differently according to 'its  
17 associated conditions and different periods' in Asian culture (Cho 2013, 579). With  
18 the rise of China's economic and sporting success, the study of football in China is  
19 growing. However, most of the research has focused on the political and economic  
20 significance of football, especially after 2015 when the sport was entitled as a central  
21 element in a national strategy to deliver soft power (Junio and Rodrigues 2017; Peng,

1 Skinner and Houlihan 2019). However, fandom research remains relatively marginal.  
2 Even among the small number of existing works, most of the focus is on the economic  
3 and political implications of spectatorship without noting the changed relationship  
4 between fans and clubs. Therefore, relatively little is known about the development of  
5 fandom for Chinese football clubs and its significance to urban communities.

6 This paper attempts to fill this knowledge gap by offering an account of how  
7 Chinese football fandom influences urban development. The remainder of the paper is  
8 organised as follows. First, we describe the research process and justify why we chose  
9 the research sample, namely fans of Shanghai Shenhua Football Club and Beijing  
10 Guoan Football Club. Second, in the findings and discussion session, we use the  
11 voices of fans to highlight the factors that influence the development of fandom for  
12 Chinese teams. Subsequently, we explore the ways in which the fans contribute to  
13 their clubs' symbolic local status. Finally, we offer our concluding thoughts.

#### 14 **Case studies: the fans of Beijing Guoan Club and Shanghai Shenhua Club**

15 The case study is a typical qualitative research approach to understand a social  
16 phenomenon by studying cases of it (Schwandt 1997; Sparkes and Smith 2014; Stake  
17 2005; Thomas 2017). By using case studies, researchers can obtain 'unexpected  
18 occurrences, unique and innovative interventions, unusual circumstances, or typical  
19 experiences' thorough research so that an enriched knowledge about the broader  
20 research objectives can be acquired (Giges and Van Raalte 2012, 483). Flyvbjerg  
21 (2006, 219) suggests that a scientific discipline is 'ineffective' without a large number



1 of ‘thoroughly executed case studies’.

2 As opposed to merely examining the case itself, the case is required to  
3 generate in-depth explorations or theoretical insights to explicate the issues of the  
4 wider community (Stake 2005; Wieviorka 1992). For this reason, the case selection  
5 obeys particular conditions. According to Schwandt (1997), which case is selected is  
6 strongly linked to issues of specificity and typicality. In other words, the details  
7 obtained from the restricted sample(s) can typically produce useful generalisations  
8 about its broader population.

9 The current study focuses on the fans of the Shanghai Greenland Shenhua  
10 Football Club (the Shenhua Club) and the Beijing Sinobo Guoan Football Club (the  
11 Guoan Club). The Shenhua Club was established in 1993 by the Shanghai Sports  
12 Bureau and Shanghai Shenhua Electrical Appliance Company. It entered the Jia-A  
13 League (the former name of the Chinese Super League) in 1995 and won the Chinese  
14 FA Cup in 1998, 2017 and 2019. The Guoan Club was formed in 1992 by Beijing  
15 Sports Bureau and China International Trust Investment Corporation Guoan Group. It  
16 won the Chinese Super League title in 2009 and the Chinese FA Cup in 1996, 1997,  
17 2003 and 2018 (The Chinese Football Institution, 2020). Fans of those two clubs  
18 share three features which make them suitable for the present case study approach.  
19 First, people in Beijing and Shanghai initially engaged with football in the same era  
20 when the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) introduced football to China  
21 in the 1890s (Fan 2013; Jin 2012; Shen et al. 1995). Both cities’ football fans are,

1 therefore, deeply bonded to the history of the Chinese people's interaction with  
2 football. Second, when the Jia-A League was established in 1994, the Guoan and  
3 Shenhua clubs were founder members (Jin 2012; Li 2014). Since then, the  
4 development of these fans' interaction with their clubs reflects the process of the  
5 fandom for all Chinese football clubs. Third, since 1994, neither of those two clubs  
6 has changed its name or home city, although they both changed ownership a number  
7 of times (the Chinese Football Institution, 2020). As a consequence, they are very  
8 clearly associated with their home cities

9         However, the study of the fans of these two clubs does not involve a simple  
10 comparison. Instead of comparative studies, Thomas (2017, 160) suggests a 'nested  
11 study' which can obtain integral information to form a broader picture. In other  
12 words, further knowledge of a wider theme can be explored by combining findings  
13 from two different samples. When they are pieced together, a clear relationship  
14 between Chinese football clubs, their fans and the cities and regions in which they are  
15 based can be understood. Thus, this study applied purposive sampling to select  
16 participants whose 'specific characteristics' of a particular 'subculture or community'  
17 could offer rich information (Sparkes and Smith 2014, p. 70). All that was needed of  
18 the participants was that they self-identified as fans of either of those football clubs,  
19 and they had regular experience of attending games and taking part in activities  
20 organised by fan groups for some years. By using the clubs' official social media  
21 platforms, Weibo and WeChat, 18 participants (9 from each club) were recruited.

1 Table: The participants

Participant No.	Supporting Club	Ages	Sex	Length of active fandom
1	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	32	Male	17
2	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	20	Female	3
3	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	45	Male	20
4	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	47	Male	25
5	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	31	Male	17
6	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	54	Male	25
7	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	35	Female	20
8	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	28	Female	9
9	Shanghai Shenhua Football Club	24	Male	5
10	Beijing Guoan Football Club	56	Male	25
11	Beijing Guoan Football Club	44	Male	22
12	Beijing Guoan Football Club	29	Female	8
13	Beijing Guoan Football Club	22	Male	3
14	Beijing Guoan Football Club	49	Male	25
15	Beijing Guoan Football Club	30	Male	4
16	Beijing Guoan Football Club	37	Male	21
17	Beijing Guoan Football Club	20	Male	4
18	Beijing Guoan Football Club	22	Female	6

2 To address the research aim, the data that was required consisted of the fans’  
3 memories of their interaction with their football clubs and their cities, hence the use of  
4 semi-structured interviews (Holloway 1997; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; Robson  
5 1993; Sparkes and Smith 2014; Thomas 2017). The interviews had the advantage of  
6 structuring ‘a list of issues’ and allowing the ‘freedom to follow up points’ and were  
7 conducted in September 2019 (Thomas 2017, 206). All the interviews were conducted  
8 in Chinese whereas the analysis was in English. Telephone interviews were used to  
9 complete the data collection for convenience, flexibility and time-efficiency (Hanna  
10 2012; Sparkes and Smith 2014). The length of the interviews varied from 45 to 70  
11 minutes.

1           Afterwards, thematic analysis that could help the researchers to identify and  
2 report patterns within the data, using coded themes, was applied (Braun and Clarke  
3 2006; Daly, Kellehear, and Gliksman 1997; Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012;  
4 Sparkes and Smith 2014). By following the requirements of ‘theoretical’ thematic  
5 analysis, a coding map was employed to address two specific research questions for  
6 completing research aim (Braun and Clarke 2006, 84). Therefore, based on the  
7 questions - how did Chinese football fans develop fandom for their local football  
8 clubs? and how did their fandom contribute to the clubs becoming local symbols? -  
9 the coded themes were generated and provide the structure for the discussion that  
10 follows.

## 11 **The development of football fandom in China**

### 12 *The importance of success*

13 Sponsored by Marlboro, the first game in the Chinese professional football league  
14 took place in Chengdu, where ‘about 40,000 spectators blocked streets near Chengdu  
15 Sports Centre’ (Guo, Zhang, and Guo 2017, 79). The huge number of fans might  
16 suggest that support for local football clubs in China was substantial from the outset.  
17 However, when he recalled his motivation for watching league games, Participant\_14  
18 (Guoan) who has been a supporter since the beginning of the league, denied the  
19 existence of any affinity with the club:

1 'Initially, like many other people, that I came to watch games of Guoan Football  
2 Club at the stadium was for fun. In the 1990s, we had watched many clubs'  
3 games from other countries, such as Italy's Serie A, so we really expected to  
4 enjoy live football.'

5 The fans' attitudes reveal two basic facts: the lack of opportunities to interact  
6 with their local teams before 1994 (Fan et al. 2001; Li 2014; Tan 2004; Ying 2019;  
7 Zhang 2015); and the absence of a strong affiliation with these local clubs (Amara et  
8 al. 2005; He, Zheng, and Zhang 1998; Jones 2004; Li 2014). Therefore, while Chinese  
9 fans exhibited passion when supporting their national teams, the initial fandom  
10 associated with their local football clubs was mainly developed solely for the sake of  
11 entertainment and was therefore very different from European and South American  
12 fandom with its idea of 'participatory democracy' (Taylor 1971). At the outset, all  
13 Chinese football club fans resembled 'new fans' (Dixon 2012).

14 Because the original intention of watching local clubs' games was to have fun,  
15 Participant\_4 (Shenhua), another fan with 25 years' experience of watching games,  
16 suggested that Chinese fandom was initially weak.

17 'In fact, in the first year of watching the game of the Shenhua Football Club, I  
18 think most people were looking for something new and interesting, they did not  
19 really support this team. We were happy to watch the league game in Shanghai.  
20 However, as this team failed more and more times, especially the game that the  
21 team lost 1-6 to the Guangzhou Apollo Football Club, you could find that a large  
22 number of fans disappeared from the stadium.'

1 High-quality entertainment was necessary to attract the fans. Thereafter, clubs  
2 would be required to satisfy their fans' desire for success (Han 1998). It is customary  
3 to see more fans in the stadium when their team's performance is good. For example,  
4 Shenhua's third place in the 1994 Jia-A League season led to a doubling of the  
5 average attendance in the following season (He and Li 1996). Success itself was  
6 entertaining and the basis upon which Chinese football clubs could attract and retain  
7 fans. On the other hand, if a team lost its competitive advantage, the club might have  
8 to move to another to seek for a new market (Han 1998; Ying 2019).

9 ***Time: an important factor leading to Chinese football fans' loyalty***

10 While attracting local fans' interest, a club's strong competitive capability alone  
11 cannot develop Chinese football fans' loyalty to their clubs. Time may be the crucial  
12 factor:

13 'Well, I don't know other people's criteria, but for more than 20 years, I've been  
14 watching football and supporting this team. You might say that you love this  
15 team much more than I do, but you can't say that my loyalty to this team is less  
16 than yours, it's impossible.' (Participant\_11, Guoan).

17 Before telling their own stories, fans often prefer to demonstrate their loyalty  
18 by indicating how long they have supported their club. This idea resonates with  
19 Crawford's description of the career of a sports fan (2003; 2004). Chinese fans'  
20 devotion to their football clubs increases over time as the fans experience emotional

1 highs and lows. Time helps them to develop a deeper affinity with and attachment to  
2 their clubs.

3         Alongside the time factor, Chinese football fans' loyalty is influenced by their  
4 social interactions, including friendships, shared experiences, or even  
5 intergenerational connections while attending games. For example, watching games  
6 weekly allowed Participant\_15 (Guoan) who is migrant from another Chinese city and  
7 was addicted to the 'atmosphere in the stadium' to meet his partner, which helped him  
8 to develop loyalty to the club: 'Although it is not romantic, watching games gave us  
9 an exciting date once a week. Gradually, we found the team had become an integral  
10 part of our life'. Participant\_1(Shenhua) suggested that his loyalty to the Shenhua  
11 Club was because it gave him an enduring and happy memory of his father:

12         'As a young boy, I had no idea what players were doing at that moment, so my  
13 father had to answer my questions while yelling and cheering with the people  
14 around us. That was so fun! I never saw my dad could be so crazy, even though I  
15 clearly knew he had no idea about the team as well.'

16         In this respect, cherished social interactions in the stadium give fans a special  
17 association with their football clubs (Bairner 2014).

18         Chinese football fans loyalty to their clubs was also enhanced after witnessing  
19 key moments in the history of those clubs. For example, Participant\_8 (Shenhua) feels  
20 proud to be have 'a blue blood man' identity (藍血人, the way of describing a loyal

1 fan of the Shenhua Club) because she watched Shenhua during its most difficult  
2 times:

3 'In the 2013 CSL season... without outstanding players and main coach, we all  
4 feel into despair, and at that time, we heard that the club might move to Yunnan  
5 province... But our players turned over that unfavorable situation again and  
6 again. They showed the Shanghai spirit, so our fans determined to stand with our  
7 players. We kept roaring and cheering until voice hoarse.'

8 Since that moment, the fan found that she loved this team so deeply and would  
9 never regard its games simply as entertainment. In her case, 'the Shanghai spirit' was  
10 about 'being able to confront difficulties', and this was what she had learned from the  
11 Shenhua Club during that era and what had encouraged her to devote herself to the  
12 club. Therefore, shared experience with their clubs can facilitate the strengthening of  
13 fandom (Crawford 2003).

#### 14 ***Civic identity: the original purpose of supporting a local football team***

15 Because regional sports bureaus mainly initiated the professionalization of local  
16 football teams, the names of clubs captured the name of cities and regions (Li 2014),  
17 thereby stimulating local people's interest. Having grown up in the *hutongs* (the old  
18 Beijing neighbourhoods), Participant\_10 (Guoan) is proud of his identity as a Beijing  
19 native, and he highlights the influence of his place attachment on his support for the  
20 Guoan Club: 'In fact, we bought the tickets to watch games in the stadium to cheer for  
21 our Beijing. This is a Beijing team, so we must support it'. Thus, Chinese football



1 fans' support of their local football clubs coincided with their desire to support their  
2 cities and regions. Fans treat the clubs as local representatives for the simple reason  
3 that the clubs are named after the cities and regions where they are located (Bale  
4 2000). By engaging with the local, these clubs are carriers of 'communal identity' and  
5 help to ensure civic or regional 'cohesion' (Goldlust 1987, ix).

6         In addition, residents with a solid civic identity develop loyal fandom for their  
7 local football clubs. In the 1994 Jia-A season, although the Beijing Guoan Football  
8 Club's performance was not good (ranked 8 out of 12), crowds were still big (Jin,  
9 2012). Participant\_10 (Guoan) suggested that the enthusiasm of Beijing fans was  
10 connected to their 'Beijing culture': 'If it is a Beijing team, we shall support it. It's  
11 our culture'. According to Participant\_18 (Guoan) who also identified the 'Beijing  
12 culture' as the factor leading her to support the Guoan Club, that culture is the  
13 collective consciousness of Beijing people which guides them not only to live in the  
14 city but to love it: 'If something belongs to Beijing, it is the best and ours.  
15 Consequently, we shall love and protect it from anyone who tries to damage it'. This  
16 indicates that Beijing people have a strong and even exaggerated sense of civic  
17 identity, which is a crucial factor strengthening their support for the Guoan Club. In  
18 this way, fans with a solid civic identity acquire the loyalty to their football club, if  
19 they treat that club as part of their local community (Bale 1993a; Elias 1978; Shobe  
20 2008).

1           However, not all local football clubs have been considered qualified to  
2 represent fans' cities or regions. For example, fans of the Shenhua Club do not  
3 consider the SIPG (Shanghai International Porte Group) Football Club, another  
4 professional football clubs in Shanghai, as a local representative:

5           ‘We will never admit the Shanghai SIPG Football Club as a Shanghai team. This  
6 club was in the Chongming Island which was a part of Jiangsu province...In  
7 addition, the SIPG Group is a state enterprise, and the reason for it to have the  
8 club's ownership is for its political benefit, so how dare they claim the SIPG  
9 Football Club can represent Shanghai?’ (Participant\_7, Shenhua).

10           This attitude is an echo of Gómez-Bantel's idea (2016); the SIPG Club cannot  
11 be a Shanghai local representative because it was not recognised as a cultural unit.  
12 The SIPG Club was developed by the Shanghai government to win the title of the  
13 CSL league: ‘They [the Shanghai government] expect to have a team to compete  
14 against the Guangdong Evergrande Football Club because it would be linked with  
15 their political achievement... Consequently, they asked the SIPG group to invest in  
16 the team’ (Participant\_7, Shenhua). It was suggested that its status as a cultural good  
17 would only be accepted once the SIPG club engaged fully with the identity of  
18 Shanghai people.

19           This case also demonstrates that Chinese football fans prefer to seek a  
20 historical connection to decide whether a local football club can represent their city.  
21 This criterion tends to be prevalent in regions which have two or more professional  
22 clubs at the same level. For example, people in Beijing, Shandong, Shanghai and

1 Guangdong have to deal with this issue at present. Because the SIPG Football Club  
2 started playing league games after 2005, in some Shanghai fans' eyes, it lacks a strong  
3 historic affinity with the city (Gómez-Bantel 2016; Holt 1989; Mason [1989] 2011;  
4 Russell 1997). Meanwhile, the club's previous location that was recognised as being  
5 outside of Shanghai also prevented local fans associating the local community with  
6 the club. Hence, the length of a club's local interaction with a particular location is  
7 important for Chinese football fans to recognise the local connection of a club (Bale  
8 1993a; 2000; Gómez-Bantel 2016; Holt 1989; Mason [1989] 2011; Russell 1997).

#### 9 **Fans' contribution to the club's symbolic status**

##### 10 *Fans' influence on clubs' operations*

11 Although there are many ways to identify a Chinese football club as a local brand,  
12 popular recognition is ultimately the decisive condition for a local club to be regarded  
13 as a symbol of its community. Recalling his 25 years' fan experience, Participant\_6  
14 (Shenhua) suggested that the contest between fans and the owner of the team over the  
15 club's name was the most representative example of the fans' contributing to their  
16 team's local status.

17 'The owner of this club has been changed several times. We all worry that the  
18 name Shenhua will disappear one day all the time and try to resist it, especially  
19 in 2007 when the club was merged with Shanghai United Football Club because  
20 this was the first time for the team to be owned by a private enterprise. It may  
21 change the name concerning its interest. Luckily, the name was retained because

1 the government highlighted its ‘cultural contribution’ to the city, which is a good  
2 response to our passion.’

3 This may resonate with Bale’s view (2000) that city leaders welcome their  
4 local football clubs in the consideration of their contribution to the city’s reputation.  
5 Consequently, the Shenhua Club is seen to play an important role as a representative  
6 of Shanghai. Alongside the government’s position, the main force behind retaining  
7 the club’s name was its loyal fans (Dixon 2016; 2012). Often a loyal fan describes  
8 his/her club in terms of faith: ‘I’ve seen so many moments of this team. I know how  
9 hard this team play and the spirit of never-give-up, so it is worth pursuing and  
10 respecting for my whole life’ (Participant\_10, Guoan). Fans’ loyalty makes their clubs  
11 sacred, so they devote themselves to the club as the ‘active participants’ interfering in  
12 the operation of the team and enhancing its importance to their community  
13 (Hognestad 2012, 25).

14 In 2014. After having the owners of Shenhua, the Greenland Group, changed  
15 the club’s name to the Shanghai Greenland Football Club, which frustrated  
16 longstanding fans, in whose opinion Shenhua’ was more than the name of a football  
17 club but also an urban cultural symbol:

18 ‘We prefer to explain “Shenhua” as one full bloom flower of Shanghai (In  
19 Chinese, Shen [申] is another name of Shanghai and hua [花] means flower).  
20 More than 20 years, we’ve changed so many owners, and no one can change the  
21 name “Shenhua” to any other name. Keeping “Shenhua” is keeping the tradition  
22 of this team and the culture of Shanghai.’ (Participant\_9, Shenhua).

1           As the discussion above, changing the club's name was unacceptable to the  
2 fans, and six major supporter organisations jointly issued a statement challenging the  
3 legitimacy of Greenland Group (Guo 2014). In the end, the Greenland Group restored  
4 the 'Shenhua' and the CFA also determined that the name must be kept (Tang, Zhang  
5 and Huang 2018). In this instance, fans' loyalty to their football club led to a form of  
6 'participatory democracy' which encouraged them to demand the right to join their  
7 club's management structure (Brown 2008; Taylor 1971; Williams 2012). This  
8 highlights Crawford's idea of the supporter path (2003; 2004) with Chinese football  
9 fans become the hard-core advocates of participation in their clubs' development. The  
10 Shenhua fans argued that the club's name had civic significance. Therefore, they  
11 sought to secure the club's symbolic status by exerting pressure on the club's  
12 operations even though the name Shenhua referred to the Shanghai Shenhua Electrical  
13 Appliance Company that established the club in 1993 (Li 2014).

#### 14 ***Performing fandom***

15 Another activity that contributes to the symbolic importance of Chinese local football  
16 clubs is the performance of fans in the stadium in the stadium. For anyone who  
17 attends a game for the first time, the way that fans cheer, chant and wave flags creates  
18 an impressive scenario, which offers a new image of the city. Participant\_12 (Guoan),  
19 originally from Chongqing, is a fan of Guoan Club, and suggested that watching  
20 games at the stadium increased her knowledge of Beijing: 'I have been so many  
21 places of Beijing, so I thought I knew the city. However, until I came to the stadium

1 and watched a Guoan game, I realised that I actually did not understand Beijing too  
2 much'. Her opinion indicates that the fans' well-choreographed behaviour is an  
3 important element of the city.

4         The way that fans' support their club around the stadium is linked to their  
5 cities and regions, further highlighting the club's symbolic significance. In the first  
6 round of the 2018 CFA Cup final, fans of the Green Hurricane Cheerleading Fan Club  
7 displayed a giant Tifo with '2018 Champions, Beijing' consisting of 50,000 pieces of  
8 coloured paper (Participant\_10, Guoan). In this case, the Guoan Club bore the name  
9 of the city as its representative. The Beijing fans were not only for supporting their  
10 club but also celebrating their region (Bale 1993a). Beijing fans' way to cheer up  
11 could be identified as a channel to observe the image of their city. As regards the club  
12 being the centre of the fandom identity, the link between the local club and its  
13 location is built up by fans' stadium behaviour, thereby securing the club's civic  
14 importance.

15         In addition, stadiums themselves can also contribute to local football clubs'  
16 symbolic status. According to Participant\_3 (Shenhua), a senior member of the Blue  
17 Devils Fan Club, the north stand of the Hongkou Stadium becomes the 'Holy Land'  
18 for his supporter club to support the Shenhua Club because of their long-time regular  
19 activity in this stand. Moreover, the atmosphere created by the fan club is a unique  
20 'landscape' of the city for 'tourists to enjoy'. The stadium is the city's landmark  
21 venue (Ahlfeldt and Maennig 2010; Bale 1993b) and is also identified as a sacred

1 place for fans to worship their club. Consequently, it is the channel to link the club  
2 and the city.

3 Organising fan members to perform in particular ways by following orders has  
4 inevitably been a long-term process, and fan-run supporters' organisations are the  
5 primary vehicle. The Blue Devil Fan Club in Shanghai was the earliest Chinese  
6 football supporter organisation, formed between 1999 and 2000 (Hu et al. 2005).  
7 Participant\_3 (Shenhua) recounted that Xu Feng was the leader of this fan club, and  
8 he built up the Blue Devil Fan Club as the 'first one' with unified chants and  
9 behaviour:

10 'We have a specific ceremony to welcome our players and then thank them at the  
11 beginning and the end of the game by standing and swinging our scarves bearing  
12 the club's colours and logo. During the game we also need to stand from  
13 beginning to end with clapping hands and waving flags along with  
14 accompanying drumbeats. And of course, sing our team songs we have written.'

15 As a result, fans from other places could not defeat Shanghai fans a cheering  
16 which made the Shanghai fans proud. The establishment of the Blue Devils Fan Club  
17 with well-organised stadium cheering can again be understood by reference to  
18 Crawford's idea of supporter progression (2003). In the process of growing fandom,  
19 some fans can play leading roles in the fandom community to generate the communal  
20 culture, which has gradually become a tradition for Chinese football club supporters.

21 However, all of ways for Chinese fans to cheer in the stadium imitate the  
22 behaviour of fans from other nations. Participant\_3 (Shenhua ) suggests that their

1 behaviour mainly imitated that of the Red Devils Fan Club from South Korea which  
2 had put on an exemplary display at a game between China and Korea in 1999. The  
3 importance of foreign influence was the result of the Chinese professional football  
4 league being established relatively late compared with overseas football leagues.

### 5 *Extreme fandom*

6 Although fans' apparently irrational behaviour is usually considered as negative  
7 (Dunning et al. 2014; Jenson 1992; Taylor 1971), more extreme expressions of  
8 fandom can also effectively advertise local football clubs as local symbols. As an  
9 element of civic culture, 'Beijing-style swearing' is one particular way for Beijing  
10 fans to cheer for the Guoan Club in the stadium:

11 'The atmosphere caused by Beijing-style swearing was too passionate and  
12 offensive, so it led to much criticism us ... but for now, when people speak about  
13 Beijing, the Guoan Club and us are usually mentioned, even though we are  
14 usually full of bad words.' (Participant\_16, Guoan).

15 Because games in China are contests between different locations, fans'  
16 extreme behaviour is usually related to their rivalry with other regional communities  
17 (Bale 1993a; 2000; Shobe 2008). In this atmosphere, local fans emphasise the  
18 connection between their local football clubs and their places. In response, their rival  
19 communities also identify their behaviour as part of the football club and linked to  
20 their cities and regions. As a result, clubs' local symbolic status is further developed.



1           However, if extreme fandom is such that it potentially damages the image of  
2 the fans' cities, local governments have to draw attention to this, partly in recognition  
3 of the club's and their fans' regional influence. On 17th July 2016, Shenhua's main  
4 striker Demba Ba suffered a potentially career-ending leg break caused by an  
5 opposing player Xiang Sun. All the Shenhua fans in the stadium were provoked:

6           ‘We cursed Sun all the time [in the stadium] and intended to stop his team coach  
7 for his apology [after the game]. One group of Shenhua fans came to the  
8 restaurant of Sun's wife the day after the game. They sit all seats to stop the  
9 restaurant open and placed Sun's edited funeral portrait on every table.’  
10 (Participant\_5, Shenhua).

11           The main reason for Shenhua fans to stop attacking Sun was the Shanghai  
12 Deputy Mayor's visit to Ba:

13           ‘I never saw any Shanghai official visiting an injured athlete, especially who was  
14 a foreign player and could not play for our national team... We should have  
15 attacked [Sun] more, but we also cared about Ba. As the government was  
16 standing by our side, the justice would be brought to us.’ (Participant\_5,  
17 Shenhua).

18           Shenhua Club fans are becoming more powerful because of their increasing  
19 number but their extreme behaviour can have a negative influence on Shanghai. For  
20 example, their attack on Sun and his supporters had caused the police to intervene  
21 (Participant\_5, Shenhua), which could have turned their city into one that was  
22 associated with high-risk tension. Thus, fans can also adversely affect a city's image.

1 (Orum and Chen 2003; De Certeau 1984; Tuan 1977; Firey 1945; Zukin 1980).  
2 Therefore, in the process of making fans behave better, local governments have to be  
3 able to compromise with the fans' needs, which further highlights the influence of  
4 football clubs on their cities. Besides considering its contribution to advertising the  
5 region (Bale 1993a; 2000), the local government also projects a local football club as  
6 its local symbol by seeking to reduce its fans' extreme behaviour.

## 7 **Conclusion**

8 The development of Chinese football fandom offers a relatively primitive sample,  
9 which allows research on the progression of supporters' attitudes towards their  
10 football clubs without the influence of family inheritance (Brown 2008; Williams  
11 2012). For example, the first European football clubs were established in the 19th  
12 century (Wain, 2004), so it is difficult to research the progression of the original  
13 fandom.

14 This article highlights some important features of the development of Chinese  
15 football fandom. First, most fans were not directly involved with their football clubs  
16 when league games began in 1994, so it was impossible for Taylor's 'participatory  
17 democracy' (1971) to influence the development of their fandom. Compared with the  
18 development of most European and South American fandom which involved an  
19 emotional attachment to their clubs, Chinese football fans tended to be a group of  
20 people who simply consumed the experience of being fans at that time. Hence, they  
21 were not 'active participants' in their football clubs (Hognestad 2012).

1           Secondly, this article demonstrates that some Chinese football fans have  
2 gradually acquired a strong sense of loyalty and have played a leading role in forming  
3 a fan culture. This resonates with Crawford's idea of 'supporter career' (2003; 2004)  
4 indicating that fandom for Chinese football clubs gradually developed from an  
5 interest to a profession over time. This also meant that a closer connection between  
6 fans and their football clubs has emerged and this could now be passed on to the next  
7 generation in the form of a family inheritance. Hence, a typology of Chinese football  
8 fans will be necessary to study their fandom in future.

9           Thirdly, local football clubs and their fans both contribute to the development  
10 of Chinese football fandom. A certain time period is necessary for supporter  
11 progression to evolve, through social interactions and experiences while attending  
12 matches. Clubs' competitive capability provided a basis to attract larger audiences and  
13 satisfy their desire for success. Meanwhile, by bearing the names of home cities and  
14 regions, clubs became local representatives, encouraging fans to celebrate their  
15 communal identity. In turn, some local fans who show strong emotional attachment to  
16 the local are more likely to devote themselves to their local football clubs.

17           Lastly, we have examined three different perspectives on how fandom helps  
18 Chinese football clubs to be presented as city symbols: fans' influence on clubs'  
19 operating systems, their ways of performing in the stadium and their extreme forms of  
20 behaviour. All of these fans' behaviours prove that people have considerable power to  
21 affect the development of their cities and regions by giving their football clubs local

1 significance (De Certeau 1984; Firey 1945; Orum and Chen 2003; Tuan 1977; Zukin  
2 1980). With the increasing number of members, fans have become an urban power  
3 that cannot be ignored. Because all of their behaviours are associated with local  
4 football clubs, they have made a considerable contribution to their football clubs,  
5 through their influence on urban development, and in the case of Guoan and Shenhua  
6 fans, on their cities.

7         The findings of the study which focuses on fans of Guoan Football Club and  
8 Shenhua Football Club reflect a more general experience in other parts of China.  
9 However, further research is needed to understand fully how football fandom  
10 influences Chinese people's social life and the image of particular cities and regions.  
11 Although it is not a direct factor in the development of the fandom and the symbolic  
12 significance of local football clubs according to informants, Chinese government  
13 influence is an undeniable influence insofar as it creates the wider context. The ways  
14 in which Chinese people interact with football, including spectatorship and game-  
15 playing, highlight the government's influence. How this affects the development of  
16 fandom is a valuable research theme for futures studies of Chinese football. The paper  
17 also reveals that Chinese fans' stadium performances are influenced by foreign fans.  
18 Therefore, an investigation of the influence of Chinese fans' relatively early foreign  
19 league game-watching experience on the development of the fandom for their local  
20 football club would also be worthy of greater attention.

1           For now, however, it is sufficient to conclude that from slow and unpromising  
2 beginnings, football fandom in China has grown immeasurably. This paper reveals  
3 that a major element of that fandom is the affinity that fans share between their  
4 football teams and their cities. As a result, the football clubs themselves acquire  
5 iconic status as symbols of their respective cities, the image of which is also  
6 enhanced. In this way, football fandom provides impressive evidence of the extent to  
7 which it is people who make cities.

#### 8   **Disclosure statement**

9   No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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