



Study on the Cooperative and Win-Win Relationship between the Introduction of African Football Players in Chinese Professional Football League

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Abstract

The introduction of African players by Chinese professional football league not only promotes the development of Chinese professional football league, but also enriches the career of African players. The two sides have a win-win relationship of cooperation. This paper adopts the method of literature, mathematical statistics and historical research to sort out the African players introduced by the Chinese football league since its professionalization and study its win-win cooperation relationship. The results: Between 2004 and 2020, 135 players from 28 African countries were recruited to the Chinese Football Association Super League, with the most being 28 from Nigeria. The introduction of African players improves the overall strength of the Chinese Football Association Super League, expands the influence of the Chinese Football Association Super League, and improves the flexibility of professional football clubs in capital allocation. The Chinese Professional Football League provides a job platform for African players and a step for their career development. The introduction of African players by the Chinese Professional Football League has promoted the cultural exchanges and people-to-people bonds between China and Africa, and become a bridge for the future development of China-Africa bilateral cooperation.

Subject Areas

Sports Science

Keywords

Chinese Professional Football League, African Football, African Football Players, Win-Win Cooperation, Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges

1. Introduction

Football is the number one sport in the world and has played a significant role in promoting people-to-people and cultural exchanges among countries around the world. Football is an important way for China to carry out diversified and all-round cooperation and exchanges with the rest of the world, Xi said. Although Africa is home to the largest number of developing countries, the African people love football and have produced stars with great influence in the world football arena. As early as the stage of professionalization of Chinese football league, African foreign aid appeared in Chinese football matches and played a positive role in improving the level of Chinese football league [1]. Since the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2018, Sports exchanges between China and Africa have stepped into the new concept of “China-Africa community with a shared future” [2]. This paper combing the Chinese football league phased characteristics of the introduction of foreign aid, analyzes China’s football league introduction of African foreign aid win-win cooperation mechanism, aims to provide reference to promote the development of the central African football cooperation, to implement the “area” and China-Africa cooperation BBS “eight big actions” in the sports and cultural exchanges task has a realistic significance.

2. Overview of African Football Development in Recent Years

2.1. African Football Development Level

The level of football development in African countries is in the middle of all continents. According to the rankings compiled by The International Football Federation (HEREINAFTER referred to as “FIFA”) from 2011 to 2020, the number of African men’s and women’s national teams in the top 50 of FIFA has remained relatively stable over the past decade, and the development level of African men’s and women’s football is quite different. In recent ten years, the development level of African men’s national football team is lower than that of Europe and America, but higher than that of Asia and Oceania. There are two obvious changes in the number in 2014 and 2018, which are largely related to the performance of African countries in the two World Cups at that time. There is still a lot of room for improvement in Women’s football in Africa (see **Table 1**). According to the author’s statistics from the FIFA official website, among the top ten African men’s soccer teams, the international ranking is basically between 20 and 60. Cote d’Ivoire was the strongest National team in Africa in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2015. Since 2016, Senegal has rapidly improved its football development level and become the no.1 national team in Africa. The national teams of Ghana, Cameroon, Tunisia and Nigeria have been firmly established in Africa’s top 10 for the past decade. The best African team has ever achieved in a World Cup is the quarter-finals, with Cameroon finishing seventh in Italy in 1990 and Senegal finishing seventh in Japan and South Korea in 2002.

Table 1. The number of countries in the FIFA top 50 by each continent from 2011 to 2020.

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
male	European	27	26	26	30	29	28	29	31	26	28
	Americas	12	12	13	9	12	11	11	11	12	11
	Africa	7	8	9	11	8	7	8	5	6	7
	Asia	4	4	2	0	1	4	2	3	4	4
	Oceania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
female	European	27	27	27	26	26	27	26	26	28	28
	Americas	10	9	7	11	9	7	9	9	9	10
	Africa	2	2	4	2	3	4	3	4	2	1
	Asia	10	10	11	9	10	10	11	9	10	9
	Oceania	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2

Data sources: FIFA's world rankings (<https://www.fifa.com/fifa-world-ranking/>).

The African cup of nations is the continent highest specifications of the national team, the earliest African cup of nations aren't held fixed year, the first African cup of nations in 1957 only to Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia three teams to participate in, begin from 1968, the African cup of nations of Africa's regulations will be held every two years, teams also increases with the gradual emancipation of African countries, From eight teams at that time, to 24 teams for the 32nd Africa Cup in 2019, the Africa Cup is expanding its influence in the world [3].

Table 2 shows the number of winners and runners-up of each country since the Africa Cup of Nations was held. As can be seen from **Table 2**, since the 1957 African Cup of Nations, a total of 14 teams have reached the top of Africa. The following characteristics can be found from the 14 countries: 1) There are many coastal countries: among the 14 countries mentioned above, only 3 countries are located in the inland area of Africa, and the other 11 countries are adjacent to the sea or ocean. 2) The regional distribution is relatively even: among the 14 countries mentioned above, there are 2 east African countries, 3 West African countries, 2 South African countries, 4 North African countries and 3 Central African countries.

According to the ranking of FIFA and the relevant data of Africa Cup, there is no obvious difference in the level of African men's football teams, and the fierce competition within the continent motivates the development of African national football teams to a certain extent. African teams have beaten the world's best on the international stage, with Cameroon beating Diego Maradona's defending champion Argentina 1-0 in the opening game of the 1990 World Cup in Italy. Senegal made its World Cup debut in 2002 by beating defending champion France 1-0 in the first round and going all the way to the quarterfinals. African national football team's brilliant performance in the international arena makes it become a new force that can't be ignored by the world's top football teams.

Table 2. Number of winners and runners-up in the Africa cup of nations.

countries	champion	First runner-up	Whether it is a coastal state	area
Egypt	7	2	Yes.	North Africa
Cameroon	5	2	Yes.	The central African
Ghana	4	5	Yes.	In west Africa
Nigeria	3	4	Yes.	In west Africa
The ivory coast	2	2	Yes.	In west Africa
Algeria	2	1	Yes.	North Africa
Congo (DRC)	2	0	no	The central African
Sudan	1	2	Yes.	In East Africa
In Zambia,	1	2	no	South Africa
Ethiopia	1	2	no	In East Africa
South Africa	1	2	Yes.	South Africa
Tunisia	1	1	Yes.	North Africa
Morocco	1	1	Yes.	North Africa
Congo Brazzaville	1	0	Yes.	The central African

Data sources: African football association's website (<https://www.cafonline.com/>).

2.2. Advantages and Limitations for the Development of African Players

African players are born with superior physical conditions. Look from the geographical environment, most of Africa is located in the tropical and subtropical regions, with "tropical continent" said, the average temperature up to around 25°C, the coldest in more than 8°C, the hottest of 40°C above, poor natural conditions of the whole continent [4], the bad natural environment has created high temperature resistance of African players take part in football sports ability and physical ability. The body features in its short trunk, long limbs, high center of gravity, is conducive to fast and flexible movement; hip upturned, with high explosive force conducive to sprint; foot arch high, ankle bone, the longest second toe, thick and meaty feet, landing buffer effect is good. In highly confrontational football matches, these innate physical advantages guarantee African players to get twice the result with half the effort [5]. African players have strong sense of rhythm and come from the cultural heritage of African dance. Unique dance rhythm is the basic feature of African dance. The skills and rhythm of football are based on the dance of this nation. In football matches, the passing and coordination need a flowing rhythm, the dribbling breakthrough also needs a changeable rhythm, and different game rhythm should be adopted at different moments when the score changes [6]. The African players' control of tempo was crucial in deciding the outcome of the match.

The economic level of African countries is backward, and the government and society have less investment in football, which is not conducive to the construction of infrastructure and the improvement of the level of football fields. The number of football fields is small, and children who love football often play on the road and street, which inhibits the enthusiasm of African teenagers to participate in football. On the other hand, economic backwardness makes domestic leagues unable to hire high-level coaches and high-level foreign players, which restricts the development of domestic leagues. Low wages, professional players for the sake of their own interests and to increase the chances of conflict, affect the team's cohesion and combat effectiveness, low wages and outstanding players to go abroad to seek development in Africa, players erosion in severe cases, lead to African countries less attractive football league, attention decreases in [7]. Without strong economic backing, African football is struggling to develop.

3. The Phased Characteristics of Chinese Super League's Introduction of African Players

3.1. Evolution of CSL Foreign Aid Policy

The development of Chinese professional football League started late. From the first National League A and League A and League B to the present league of Chinese Super League and League A, the policies on the introduction of foreign aid are also in constant reform and change to adapt to the development characteristics of Chinese professional football league in different periods. Since the professionalization began in 1994, there have been foreign players coming to China Professional Football League. Although many teams did not use foreign players at that time, their policies were consistent. From 1994 to 2000 each team was allowed to register three foreign players at the same time and play three foreign players. In 2001, the number of foreign players allowed to register at the same time was relaxed. When four players were allowed to register at the same time in a season, three players were still allowed to play. However, from this season, foreign players cannot include goalkeepers, and this policy has been continued since then. From 2004 to 2006, the foreign aid policy began to tighten again. In these three years, there were 2 players registered for 3 players, and in 2007 and 2008, there were 3 players registered for 4 players. The foreign aid policy from 2009 to 2016 was a relatively stable period. With more Chinese Super League teams participating in the Asian Champions League, the FOOTBALL Association adjusted its foreign aid policy and "Asian foreign aid" joined it. For each of these eight seasons, the registration scheme is 4 + 1, which means 4 non-Asian players and 1 Asian player can be registered in the same period, while the playing scheme is 3 + 1, which means 3 non-Asian players and 1 Asian player can be registered. In order to give more opportunities to young Chinese players, the number of foreign players (including Asian ones) will be limited to three players from 2017, and the number of registered players will remain unchanged. The 2018 season began to cancel the Asian and foreign players, foreign players in

the same period to register 5 players and 3 players. The rules of the 2018 season are directly related to the number of U23 players, with a maximum of three foreign players and no more than the number of U23 players. In the 2019 season, we continue to use the registered 6 players and 3 players, but after the summer of the 2019 season, we made another adjustment, changing the “cumulative 3 players” to “no more than 3 foreign players can play at the same time”. In the 2020 season, due to the impact of COVID-19, some foreign players stayed overseas and could not return to China, resulting in an unequal number of foreign players for different teams in the Chinese Super League. In this regard, the Chinese Football Association has implemented a “balanced foreign aid protection policy”, that is, if one of the teams has no foreign aid, after the team applies to the Football Association, the other team can only play two foreign aid; If one team has only one foreign player, the other team can only have three. In other cases, the regulations of 5 applicants and 4 starters will continue to be implemented. In the 2021 season, the “balanced protection policy for foreign players” will be cancelled, and “Four foreign players, five foreign players, six foreign players and seven foreign players” will be implemented, *i.e.*, the maximum number of foreign players in each club is 6, the maximum number of foreign players in each round is 5, the maximum number of foreign players in each match is 4, and the total number of foreign players in the whole year is 7. Counting the 27 years of The Chinese Professional Football League, the foreign aid policy has been adjusted 12 times [8]. (Table 3) The evolution table of foreign aid policies of China Professional Football League in 1994-2021 is prepared according to each important time node (only the foreign aid policies of League A and Chinese Super League are counted here).

Table 3. Evolution of foreign player policy of Chinese professional football league in 1994-2021 season.

season	The number of registered	The number of people on the list of 18	The number of play
1994-2000	3	3	3
2001-2003 ⁽¹⁾	4	4	3
2004-2006	3	3	2
2007-2008	4	4	3
2009-2016 ⁽²⁾	4 + ①	4 + ①	3 + ①
2017	5	5	3
2018 ⁽³⁾	4	4	3
2019	4	4	3
2020 ⁽⁴⁾	6	5	4
2021	6	5	4

Remarks: 1) Can not introduce goalkeeper foreign aid and still use; 2) ① Asian foreign aid; 3) The number of foreign players should not exceed the number of U23 players; 4) Implementation of the “balanced foreign aid protection Clause”. Data source: The author collated according to network data.

3.2. Number of African Players Introduced by CSL

As the number of registered foreign players in each season is limited according to the regulations of the Football Association, in order to ensure the competitiveness of the league, the number of foreign players in the Chinese Super League is basically 91 - 109 in each season from 2009 to 2017 [9], and 75 in the 2018 season, which is directly related to the reduction of the number of registered foreign players by the Football Association (see **Table 4**). In the past two years, the number of foreign aid has been rising, and the direct reason is that the football Association has relaxed the number of foreign aid registration again. From the data of different continents, since the 2009 season, the number of foreign aid from America has always been in the leading position in the CSL, with Brazil accounting for more than two-thirds of them, followed by European foreign aid. The difference from America lies in that European foreign aid sources are more complex and there is no fixed national export source. The number of foreign aid from Asia and Oceania (af C of Australia) is significantly affected by the “4 + 1” policy. The number of foreign aid from Asia and Oceania introduced before 2009 is relatively small. Thanks to the “4 + 1” policy, the number of foreign aid from Asia and Oceania increased significantly during the 2009-2017 season. The number of both dropped after the “4 + 1” policy was removed for the 2018 season. The number of African foreign aid introduced by Chinese Super League has been in a relatively stable state for more than ten years, which is in the middle position among the five continents.

3.3. Regional Distribution of African Players Introduced by CSL

From 2004 to 2020, a total of 135 players from 28 African countries came to THE Chinese Super League (see **Table 5**). From the point of view of regional distribution, Nigeria, Senegal, ivory coast, with 80 players represented by the west African region, Africa’s most populous nation, known as the “eagle” Africa Nigeria is the main source of output, a total of 28 Nigerian players from different countries around the world league came to the China football association super league to continue their career, become the most favored object of Chinese Super League clubs. West Africa is the region where Chinese Super League (CSL)

Table 4. Number of foreign players in each continent of CSL in 2009-2020 season.

regional	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
The americas	37	45	49	40	37	36	38	35	28	33	32	36
The European	17	24	15	26	15	20	23	16	20	20	22	25
Asia	17	19	19	12	18	22	18	19	20	6	12	13
Africa	13	14	9	13	14	9	19	19	19	16	16	15
Oceania	7	7	10	7	11	6	4	9	5	0	0	1
A total of	91	109	102	98	95	95	102	98	92	75	82	90

Data sources: The German market website (<https://www.transfermarkt.co/chinese-super-league/gastarbeiter/wettbewerb/CSL>).

Table 5. Countries and quantity of African players introduced by CSL in 2004-2020 season.

area	Countries n=28	A total of n = 135
In East Africa	Kenya (2); Uganda (1)	3
South Africa	Zambia (6); Angola (3); Mozambique (2); Zimbabwe (1); South Africa (1)	13
North Africa	Tunisia (4); Morocco (4); Egypt (3); Algeria (1)	12
The central African	Cameroon (17); Congo (DRC) (8); Congo Brazzaville (1); Gabon (1)	27
In west Africa	Nigeria (28); Senegal (11); Cote d'Ivoire (11); Ghana (10); Mali (6); Sierra Leone (4); Togo (2); Gambia (2); Cape Verde (2); Burkina Faso (1); Guinea (1); Guinea-bissau (1); Niger (1)	80

Data Source: Wikipedia, list of foreign Chinese football association super league players.

imports the most African foreign aid. Based on the above analysis of FIFA national team rankings and winners of Africa Cup of Nations, it can be roughly considered that West Africa is the region with the highest football level in Africa. With the west is related to the natural environment of the worst parts of Africa, the area near the equator, perennial drought, poor living conditions, strong solar radiation, the Sahara desert in this area has produced African unique racial superiority, their blood vessels in the body is brawny, blood acid concentration is very high, the number of red blood cells master rich, is currently 70% of people with type O blood, lung capacity is big, Less oxygen consumption is conducive to physical exertion [5].

4. African Players Promote the Development of China's Professional Football League

4.1. Improving the Overall Strength of the Team

As the traditional football powers in East Asia, China, Japan and South Korea have their own characteristics on the road of football development. On the international stage, China fared slightly worse against South Korea and Japan, and is also at a disadvantage in FIFA's national team rankings. Back to Asia, the Asian champions league, which is the Chinese super league club and club's performance more obvious gap in Korea and Japan, even the Chinese super league team guangzhou heng brigade won the 2013 and 2015, two years of the Asian champions league, Shanghai harbor, Beijing guoan, the Chinese super league teams such as mount tai in shandong also doing well in the Asian champions league action. The fundamental reason for the different performances of national teams and clubs in China, Korea and Japan lies in the presence of foreign players. Led by Guangzhou Evergrande in 2010, the Chinese Super League (CSL) launched the "Jinyuan Offensive", and the CSL has become an "arms race" for all clubs. The influx of a large amount of funds has attracted a large number of world top stars, and the transfer and salary records of CSL have been set up [10]. It makes up for the weakness of Chinese super League teams and Korean and Japanese teams in the Asian Champions League.

The addition of foreign players enriches the team's personnel allocation,

makes up for the shortcomings of the team's front line or defense line, enriches the selection of coaches' personnel combination and makes up for the team's front line or defense line in a short period of time. The stable position of foreign players makes more domestic players have greater employment pressure and a sense of crisis. At the same time, it also breaks the old idea of "iron rice bowl" and strengthens healthy competition [11]. In terms of position, most foreign players in the league are middle and front field players. Most Chinese professional football clubs attach great importance to the improvement of offensive ability brought by foreign players [12], and the efficiency of foreign players is directly reflected in the number of goals scored. In 1994, there was only one foreign player in the top ten scorer list of Chinese Super League, six in the first year of 2004, and nine in the 2020 season. The status of foreign players in the offensive line of Chinese Super League is becoming more and more important. Relying on their excellent physical condition, African players in The Chinese professional football field show the attacking desire and efficiency is also remarkable, among them kwame Ayu from Ghana, who won the season's top scorer at the end of 2003 and the first year of 2004, becoming A powerful weapon in the offensive line of Shenyang Jinde. In recent years, in the Chinese Professional Football League, Ghana's Achimpeng, Congo's Bakumbo, Cameroon's Basogo, Sierra Leone's Buya Toure, these foreign players have become indispensable main players in the tactical system of each team. The participation of African players has enriched the tactical choices and arrangements of the team, and indirectly improved the competitive level of domestic players, thus improving the overall strength of the team [13].

4.2. Expanding the Influence of the Competition

The arrival of good African players in the Chinese professional Football League has not only increased the strength of the teams, but also enhanced the influence of the game. From a domestic point of view, the participation of excellent African football players has brought a profusion of African football culture to Chinese professional football matches and added a different color. The arrival of high technical level players, skilled and difficult football technical movements improve the game to watch the desire to stimulate the audience to go to the scene. Ivory Coast football flag Didier Drogba has won numerous awards including African Footballer of the Year, French Footballer of the Year, Golden Boot of Premier League, Golden Boot of Ligue 1, and Golden Boot of Europa League. He is one of the most influential foreign players in the history of Chinese Super League. Drogba moved to Shanghai Shenhua of the Chinese Super League after helping Chelsea win their first Champions League title in 2012. According to the official website of the transfer market, in the first 17 rounds of the 2012 season, Shanghai Shenhua saw a total of 313,023 spectators, with an average attendance of 18,413 per round. Drogba made his CSL debut as a substitute in the 18th round of the season (July 22). In 10 matches between the 18th and 27th rounds for Shanghai Shenhua, the total attendance was 230,566, with an

average attendance of 230,57 per round. Since Drogba joined Shanghai, the average attendance has increased by 4645. There are many factors influencing attendance, but there is no denying that Drogba's star power is a big factor in the increase in attendance. **Figure 1** shows the attendance figures of Chinese Super League Shanghai Shenhua in each round of the 2012 season. The dark part shows the attendance figures of Drogba's games.

In addition to the domestic audience attendance rate, the participation of outstanding African players has also enhanced the influence of The Chinese professional football League in the world. African big foreign aid to attract the attention of the foreign media, baba, didier drogba joined in succession, ole newspaper, the global sports, Europe, the United States ESPN sports media reports on their substantial [14], make Chinese football professional league in the world's attention and exposure have been substantially improve, With the continuous expansion of CSL's international influence, Chinese Professional Football League has gradually been in line with the world's high-level league, and more and more high-level players have come to China, thus forming a virtuous circle and improving the internationalization level of Chinese professional football League.

4.3. Improving the Flexibility of Club Fund Allocation

Professional football leagues in European developed countries are established on the basis of a complete market economy system. The development of capitalist market economy has been more than 100 years, the development of market economy has been quite perfect, and professional football clubs have been quite mature as joint-stock companies [15]. Started relatively late compared to the Chinese professional football, low degree of marketization, commercialization of

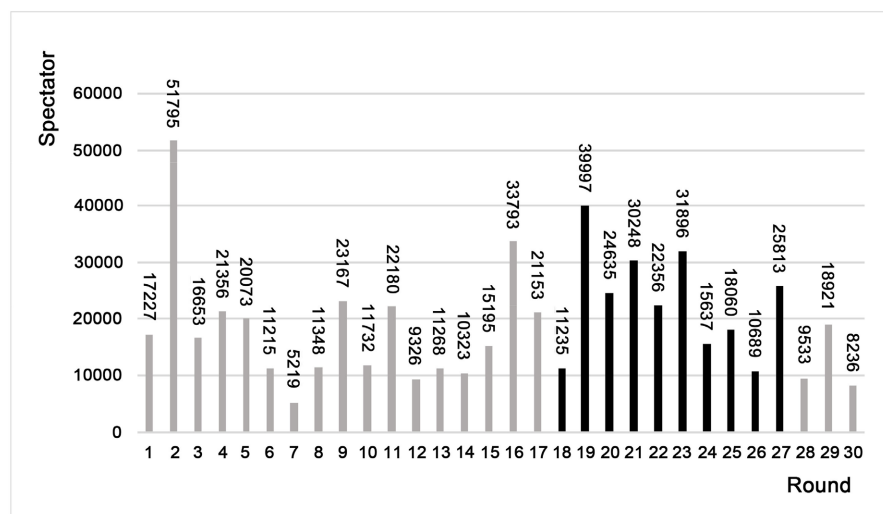


Figure 1. The number of spectators in each round of CSL matches of Shanghai Shenhua in 2012 season. Data source: Germany transfer market official website Shanghai Shenhua column

(https://www.transfermarkt.co/shanghai-shenhua/spielplan/verein/3183/plus/0?saizon_id=2011).

professional football, so much so that in the management of the professional football clubs in China at present stage and development, mainly relying on the parent company of sponsorship and commitment to sustain the club's operations, and the club by buying and selling players such as low profit ability of self hematopoietic. The annual income and transfer fee of foreign players account for 20% - 50% of the team's expenditure, and 3 - 4 foreign players account for nearly half of the club's expenditure [11]. The huge expenditure makes the club deeply dependent on the financial resources of the parent company, so the "cost performance" of foreign players becomes particularly important. African players are "better value for money" in terms of transfer fees and salaries compared to European and American players, but their on-field performance compares favorably with that of other high-paid foreign players. In the 2017 season, Yanbian Fude bought Steve from Gambia for 800,000 euros. He scored 18 goals and 2 assists in 28 rounds of matches, ranking fifth on the scorer's list. Steve's efficiency is comparable to that of foreign players who spent 2 million to 4 million euros in the previous season. It is worth mentioning that Steve was born in 1994 and was only 23 years old when he was introduced. It is still early stage of his career for a professional athlete, which further proves his high value for price performance. With the reduction of expenditure on foreign players, clubs have more choices in importing excellent coaches and domestic players, which improves the flexibility of club capital allocation.

5. The Chinese Professional Football League Has Become a Platform for the Development of African Players

5.1. CSL Provides an Employment Platform for African Players

For most professional players, their career choice is in order to earn more money to meet their own economic necessity [16], for top technical level is not African players, the high level league doesn't back on its feet, the Chinese football league signings in the huge capital investment, the African players in China to find his own place. IFFHS (International Federation of Football History and Statistics) calculated the total ranking of the annual points of the major leagues from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2020 based on the records of the champions League in each continent, the number of foreign aid and the ratings of the leagues abroad [17]. The Chinese Super League ranks 43rd in the world. The CSL's total spending on imports is 1.98 billion euros, ranking 6th in the world. Excluding transfer revenue (570 million euros), the CSL's net investment in the past 10 years is 1.4091 billion euros (11 billion yuan), ranking second in the world after the Premier League. It is not uncommon for a professional player to support 20 - 30 people in Africa's vast and poor landscape, and the high wages have increased the appeal of the Chinese Super League to African players. Nigerian media have taken a look at the country's richest players and ranked the top 10. In the list, the top three players are Chinese super do foreign aid, they respectively are mikel (23 billion Nigerian naira), martins harlow 14 billion Nigerian naira () and Iraq

(12 billion Nigerian naira), according to statistics, the three players in the total assets of 49 billion Nigerian naira, or about 925 million RMB [18]. The Chinese Super League, with its strong financial backing, provides a top-tier employment platform for African players who are not at the top level of competition.

5.2. Chinese Super League (CSL) Provides a Step for the Career Development of African Players

African players have to go through a series of championship matches at different levels and economic levels before they can enter financially rich leagues or professional clubs [19]. Only a small number of Indigenous African players go directly to the member clubs of the top national leagues, while the rest have a transitional stage, either playing in intermediate countries as a career springboard, or joining lower-level clubs in the countries where the world's top football leagues are located [20]. In recent years, the Chinese Super League (CSL) has developed rapidly. Once regarded as a "retirement home", the LEAGUE has become a "springboard" for many stars, and the CSL has become a "star training camp". Many young foreign players are also willing to come to China to seek the challenge of being recognized by the national team or entering a higher league. Cameroon striker John Mari, who scored 24 goals for Meizhou Hakka in the 2018 season, was awarded the golden boot for that season. In the first half of the 2019 season, he scored 12 goals for Meizhou Hakka, and joined Shenzhen Kaisa in the summer transfer window, thus moving from The Chinese League to the Chinese Super League, and he is also shenzhen Kaisa's hope of avoiding relegation. Thanks to his experience playing in China, he was selected to the African national team for the first time in that year, and he will make his first international appearance for Cameroon, an old African powerhouse [21]. Nigerian striker Iharo has played for Changchun Yatai and Shanghai Shenhua in the Chinese Super League and was the top scorer at the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations. Iharo joined Manchester United on loan on 1 February 2020. Iharo is willing to take a pay cut to join Manchester United. Iharo's salary at Shenhua is 10.4 million euros a year, while his loan at United until the end of the 2019-20 season will earn him a total of less than 3 million euros. For Iharo's personal career, making money in the Chinese Super League or playing for a big Club in Europe is a good choice.

On May 28, 2019, Li Ke, a naturalized player of Beijing Guoan Club, was selected into the national Football Team list, becoming the first naturalized international player in the history of Chinese football, which means that Chinese football officially opens the "naturalized era" [22]. The arrival of naturalized foreign players can promote the overall level of Chinese players and enhance the international competitiveness of the national team. African sports talents are abundant in Africa, and African athletes or athletes of African descent are the main body of sports immigrants in the world. With the rapid growth of China's economic power, which has become the second largest economy in the world, the rising incomes of elite athletes in China and the potential for further growth have attracted African sports talents. China and African countries are both de-

veloping countries. From South-South cooperation, China-Africa Cooperation Forum to the Belt and Road Construction, China-Africa exchange and cooperation mechanism has been constantly improved, win-win cooperation, and the will to jointly build a common destiny of China and Africa is firm as a rock, which has consolidated the political foundation for China to naturalize African sports talents [23]. African players in conditions under the premise of comply with the rules are rules, can undertake international competitions on behalf of the Chinese national soccer team, help to expand its influence in China and even in the world, and then either as NaYuan in the domestic league or business, brands, as well as the personal development are to play an active role.

6. Promoting People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges between China and Africa

The “People-to-people Exchange Action” is one of the eight initiatives for China-Africa cooperation announced by President Xi Jinping at the 2018 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Its purpose is to seek broader consensus on development through enhanced people-to-people exchanges and build an even closer China-Africa community with a shared future in the new era [24]. Sports is one of the signs of human civilization and progress, and a world language that reflects peace, friendship and communication [25]. However, soccer, the biggest sport in the world, has been showing signs of disharmony recently, with racial discrimination both on and off the pitch causing concern. During a French league match, visiting fans hurled bananas at Cameroon goalkeeper David N’kono and shouted insults such as “Monkey out”. In Italy, the premier league in the world, racial discrimination is getting worse. During the match between Lazio and Parma, lazio fans unfurled racist banners in the stands, insinuating parma’s black players, including Lilian Thuram and Emmanuel lasisi. These acts of racial discrimination against blacks on the football field caused great damage to the self-esteem of several players [26].

In conducting cultural and people-to-people exchanges, China and Africa should respect and learn from each other. As the late South African President Nelson Mandela said, “Respecting each other’s diversity and finding common values is the cornerstone of human interaction.” Chinese citizens hold a respectful attitude towards African players, which not only enables African players to spare no effort to play in China’s professional football field, but also enables them to get along well with The Chinese people. The most famous example is Zola Kinyambi, a foreign aid from the Democratic Congo. He came to China in 1997, joined the Yanbian Aodong team, in China’s football is ten years, played A, A, B, also experienced A, after the twists and turns, back to Yanbian. Zola has put his home in Yanbian, two children are also studying in the local, after retirement, Zola is still living in Yanbian, proficient in foreign languages Zola starts team translation in Yanbian, in addition to translation, Zola can also take to the streets to buy food shopping, and even can chat with local residents in Korean. The China expert once wanted to naturalize his two sons in China, but

had to give up after learning that China has no dual citizenship policy [27]. Gianfranco zola as professional athletes through soccer and Chinese citizens to know Africa and friendly relations, is built on the basis of mutual respect, this relationship to enhance the bilateral mutual understanding between the people and promote the the hearts and minds, and created an opportunity for the development of China-Africa cooperation, adhesive of the football become strengthen the relationship between Chinese and African peoples.

7. Conclusion

It is a general trend of the development of professional football in the world to introduce excellent foreign players to play in domestic leagues. Since the professionalization of Football in China, the policies on the introduction of foreign players have been constantly reformed and changed to adapt to the development characteristics of professional football leagues in different periods. Under the guarantee of China's rapid economic development, a large amount of money has been invested in China's professional football league. The salary level of players in the league has been rising and once reached the top in the world, which has become an important factor to attract African players to play in Chinese teams. The harsh natural environment and profound dance culture have created the innate competitive advantages of African football players, and the high price of sex is favored by Chinese football clubs. The introduction of African foreign players into the Chinese Professional Football League not only promotes the development of the Chinese Professional football league, but also becomes a career development platform for African players. The continuous improvement of China-Africa exchange and cooperation mechanisms, such as South-South cooperation, China-Africa Cooperation Forum and the Belt and Road Initiative, has created opportunities for the further development of China-Africa football cooperation. Both sides should continue to give full play to their respective advantages and deepen the win-win cooperation between China and Africa.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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