New projectment economy and Chinese embedded globalization: insights from the Chinese football plan

Nova economia do projetamento e globalização instituída pela China: perspectivas do plano do futebol chinês

La nueva economia del proyectamiento e globalización instituida por China: perspectivas del plan de fútbol chino

Emanuel Leite Junior[1]
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ABSTRACT

After triumphing at the Olympic Games and fulfilling the objectives set out by the various sports policies to achieve Olympic glory, and now under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has set itself the goal of deepening the strengthening of its sports industry with the aim of transforming this sector of the economy into an even more relevant source in the processes of capital accumulation and the advancement of its productive forces. Aiming for the sports industry to account for around 5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2035, several projects have been put forward since 2014. First, there was the "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of the Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption" (国务院关于加快发展体育产业促进体育消费的若干意见), followed in 2015 and 2016 respectively by the "The Overall Reform Plan to Boost the Development of Football in China" (中国足球改革发展总体方案) and the "China's medium and long-term football development plan (2016-2050)"- (中国足球中长期发展规划 2016—2050年). This paper aims to demonstrate how the "Chinese Football Dream" represents the Chinese Dream and, therefore, serves as an instrument for the realization of two fundamental objectives for the Centenary of the People's Republic of China, namely, Common Prosperity and the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind. To this end, this work proposes to interpret the Football Plan from a synthesis between Chinese political economy and geopolitics, bringing perspectives on two intersecting political processes: the New Projectment Economy and the embedded Chinese globalization.

1. Emanuel Leite Junior é Pesquisador Associado da Faculdade Internacional de Futebol da Universidade Tongji, em Xangai (China). É doutor em Políticas Públicas pela Universidade de Aveiro (Portugal). Sua pesquisa concentra-se na economia política e nas implicações geopolíticas do futebol, com particular enfoque na China. Nos últimos anos, tem contribuído consistentemente para periódicos acadêmicos, incluindo Sport in Society; Sports, Business and Management; Movimento; Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte; e Turismo & Desenvolvimento. É coautor do livro "China, Football and Development: Socialism and Soft Power" (Routledge, ISBN 9781032511160). Também escreveu livros sobre a história do futebol na União Soviética e sobre os direitos de transmissão do futebol brasileiro. Orcid 0000-0002-1512-0019 emanuel.leite.junior@gmail.com

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RESUMO

Depois de triunfar nos Jogos Olímpicos e cumprir os objetivos traçados pelas diversas políticas do esporte para atingir a glória Olímpica e já sob a liderança de Xi Jinping, a China estabeleceu como meta aprofundar o fortalecimento de sua indústria esportiva com o objetivo de transformar este setor da economia em uma fonte ainda mais relevante nos processos de acumulação de capital e o avanço de suas forças produtivas. Visando a que a indústria esportiva represente cerca de 5% do Produto Interno Bruto (PIB) nacional em 2035, alguns projetos foram apresentados desde 2014. Primeiro, foram as "Opiniões sobre a aceleração do desenvolvimento da indústria desportiva e a promoção do consumo esportivo" (国务院关于加快发展体育产业促进体育消费的若干意见), seguido, em 2015 e 2016 respectivamente, do "Plano Geral de Reforma para Impulsionar o Desenvolvimento do Futebol na China" (中国足球改革发展总体方案) e do "Plano de desenvolvimento do futebol de médio e longo prazo da China (2016-2050)"- (中国足球中长期发展规划 2016—2050年). Este artigo propõe demonstrar de que forma o "Sonho do Futebol chinês" representa o Sonho Chinês e, portanto, serve como um instrumento para a realização de dois objetivos fundamentais para o Centenário da República Popular da China, a saber, a Prosperidade Comum e a Comunidade com Futuro Compartilhado para a Humanidade. Para isso, este trabalho propõe interpretar o Plano do Futebol a partir de uma síntese entre a economia política e a geopolítica chinesa, trazendo perspectivas acerca de dois processos políticos que se entrecruzam: a Nova Economia do Projetamento e a globalização instituída pela China.

Palavras-chave: China; Futebol; Sonho Chinês; Nova Economia do Projetamento; Globalização Instituída pela China

RESUMEN

Luego de triunfar en los Juegos Olímpicos y cumplir los objetivos marcados por las diversas políticas deportivas para alcanzar la gloria olímpica y ya bajo el liderazgo de Xi Jinping, China se propuso profundizar el fortalecimiento de su industria deportiva con el objetivo de transformar este sector de economía en una fuente aún más relevante en los procesos de acumulación de capital y el avance de sus fuerzas productivas. Con el objetivo de que la industria del deporte represente alrededor del 5% del Producto Interior Bruto (PIB) nacional en 2035, desde 2014 se han presentado algunos proyectos. En primer lugar, se trataba de las "Opiniones sobre la aceleración del desarrollo de la industria del deporte y la promoción del consumo deportivo". (国务院关于加快发展体育产业促进体育消费的若干意见), seguido, en 2015 y 2016 respectivamente, por el "Plan general de reforma para impulsar el desarrollo del fútbol en China" (中国足球改革发展总体方案) y "El medio de China" y Plan de Desarrollo del Fútbol a Largo Plazo (2016-2050)"- (中国足球中长期发展规划 2016—2050年). Este artículo se propone demostrar cómo el "Sueño del Fútbol Chino" representa el Sueño Chino y, por tanto, sirve como instrumento para el logro de dos objetivos fundamentales para el Centenario de la República Popular China, a saber, la Prosperidad Común y la Comunidad con un Pueblo Compartido. Futuro para la Humanidad. Para ello, este trabajo propone interpretar el Plan de Fútbol a partir de una síntesis entre la economía política y la geopolítica china, aportando perspectivas sobre dos procesos políticos que se cruzan: la Nueva Economía del Diseño y la globalización instituida por China.

Palabras clave: China; Fútbol; Sueño Chino; Nueva Economia del Proyectamiento; Globalización Instituída por China

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Chinese clubs shook the world of football with their signings, which reached 461.1 million euros, placing the Chinese Super League (CSL) at the top of the transfer list in the 2016 winter transfer window (January and February) and among the clubs that spent the most in both transfer windows that year. Obviously, this boom attracted the attention of not only the international press, but also academia. Several studies have sought to explain this phenomenon, in particular by analyzing Chinese sports policies, especially three fundamental documents for strengthening football in the country: "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of the Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption" (国务院关于加快发展体育产业促进体育消费的若干意见), from 2014, followed in 2015 and 2016 respectively by the "The Overall Reform Plan to Boost the Development of Football in China" (中国足球改革发展总体方案) and the "China's medium and long-term football development plan (2016-2050)"- (中国足球中长期发展规划 2016—2050年), from now on the Chinese Football Plan.

Among the first to address the issues related to Chinese football are Tan et al., who sought to explain the Chinese football dream and trying to understand the power relations and interactions between stakeholders in Chinese elite football (Tan et al., 2016). Yu et al. did something similar, examining how the state positioned football and its development as a significant cultural and historical event, but framing it in the context of what they called 'post-Socialist China' (Yu et al., 2017), a definition, as we will see later, with which we disagree. Peng et al. applied the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) when reflecting on the reforms in Chinese football since 2015 and explaining the combination of factors that provided that window of opportunity (Peng et al., 2019). Leite Junior and Rodrigues were the first to address the issue of national identity and soft power (Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2017), while Morales Ruvalcaba and Zhang, in a comparative analysis between China and Argentina, argued how football can contribute to national power (Morales Ruvalcaba & Zhang, 2018). More recently, Gündoğan presented his considerations from the perspective of 'top-level design' and under the theoretical framework of 'Political steering' (Gündoğan, 2024a, 2024b). Leite Junior and Rodrigues have extensive work on football in China, ranging from its innovative character and the role of the Chinese state in creative destruction (Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2019, 2024), to sports diplomacy, with a particular focus on China's relations with Portuguese-speaking countries (Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2021, 2024; Leite Junior et al., 2019), but also how football intertwines with the Belt and Road Initiative (Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2020). However, no work has ever gone in-depth into the reflection of how the Chinese Football Plan, while helping us to understand, is also a case study of how the New Projectment Economy (NPE) and Embedded Chinese Globalisation (ECG) manifest themselves in the real movement, as this paper aims to do.

Football is way more than simply the "*beautiful game*". Football is a cultural phenomenon, a business on a global scale with ramifications in various economic sectors and at the same time has political, political

economy and geopolitical dimensions. More than that, only a very limited number of sports attain the heights of genuine popular culture and reach well beyond the niche of their immediate producers and consumers, and in that sense football represent one of the very few languages that is understood on a global scale (Markovits & Rensmann, 2010). In that sense, Giulianotti and Robertson state that "sport, in particular football, constitutes one of the most dynamic and sociologically enlightening domains of globalization" and that being "the global game", football helps us to theoretically and empirically explore multidimensional and long-term processes of globalization (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004). That is why we concur with Hargreaves, for whom power is diffused and circulates throughout the social body and sport, football in particular, constitutes a fundamental component of power networks (Hargreaves, 1987).

Taking this into consideration, the theoretical framework and conceptual discussions of this paper reflect the methodological option for dialectical historical materialism, that is, Marxism as Science (Lukács, 1972). According to Lukács, "the materialist dialectic can understand universality in a continuous tension with singularity, in a continuous conversion to particularity and vice versa" (Lukács, 1978, p. 104). As Milton Santos taught us, 'the whole can only be known through knowledge of the parts and the parts can only be known through knowledge of the whole', however, as Santos stated, 'these two truths are, however, partial', because 'to reach the total truth, it is necessary to recognize the joint movement of the whole and the parts, through the process of totalization' (Santos, 2006, p. 77). In other words, we cannot look at the Chinese Football Plan individually, but rather as part of the universal, integrated into its totality, that is, into its social, political, economic and geopolitical context. In the Chinese Football Plan, we understand that it is an excellent analytical tool to understand, on the one hand, the economic and social formation of China and, on the other, the disruptive dynamics caused by the Chinese rise in the scenario of global geopolitics.

That is the reason why this paper proposes to demonstrate how the Chinese Football Dream is related to the Chinese Dream, that is, the realization of the development of football in China as an instrument for the concretization of Common Prosperity and Community with Shared Future for Mankind. Which consequently allows us to explore how the Football Plan helps us understand concepts such as the "Embedded Chinese Globalisation" – and how this practice effectively differs from that Western hegemon, representing an institutional and multidimensional historical construct, with not only different characteristics, but as an alternative to neoliberal globalization (Jabbour et al., 2021; Vadell et al., 2019) -, and also the emergence of a new economic-social formation in China, a higher stage of Chinese socialism, the "New Projectment Economy" (Gabriele & Jabbour, 2022; Jabbour & Dantas, 2021).

It is precisely the analysis of the role of the Football Plan in realizing the Chinese Dream and how the achievement of its objectives is directly related to Embedded Chinese Globalization (ECG) and the New Projectment Economy (NPE), which, in turn, intersect, that makes this work unique. Thus, this paper contributes, at the same time, to the

deepening of the reflection on football in China and to the theoretical discussion on ECG and NPE, taking Chinese football as a case study.

2 EMBEDDED CHINESE GLOBALIZATION, AN ALTERNATIVE TO NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM

To understand what ECG means, particularly as an alternative do neoliberal capitalism, we first need to have in mind what we comprehend as (capitalist) globalization. Academic production on globalization is wide and heterogeneous. However, there is a general understanding that globalization presupposes the idea of interconnectivity and interdependence. Giddens, for example, alludes to the concept of "living in one world", highlighting the growing interdependence between individuals, groups and nations, which, therefore, makes globalization a result of processes of globalization and internationalization (Giddens, 2009, p. 126). It was from the 1990s onwards that the term globalization came into fashion, becoming widely used in many debates in the world of politics, business and media (Giddens, 2009).

Also from the 1990s onwards, "globalization" came to be associated with the "world expansion of capitalism", representing a "new world order" (Chanda, 2007; Duffey, 2009). Castells understands that a new economy emerged on a global scale in the last quarter of the 20th century, looking at the transformations in the social organization of communication and information to explain that globalization is a network of production, culture and power, which is constantly being altered by technological advances, especially in information technologies (Castells, 2009). Harvey, on his turn, coined the term "time-space compression" to explain how the flow of capital, which moves faster and faster, is driven by increasingly accelerated economic activities (production, circulation and exchange), mainly due to advances in technology. communication and transport, leads to the breaking of spatial barriers and distances (Harvey, 1989, p. 199). Harvey also argues that the "deregulation of finance, which began in the late 1970s, accelerated after 1986, became unstoppable in the 1990s" (Harvey, 2011).

So, what became common sense as "globalization" basically is the globalization of neoliberal capitalism. With the neoliberalization of markets, finance became a relatively autonomous field of capitalist profitmaking with its own rules and internal life, causing the financial profit to have a predatory aspect setting it apart from profit in the sphere of production and this predatory dimension of finance has placed its mark on financialization (Lapavitsas, 2013, p. 799). As Dunford and Liu (2018) pointed out, the consequences of greater neoliberal interdependence and interconnectedness were mixed, because, according to them, countries such as China that made non-neoliberal choices gained, while those that implemented World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programs suffered: increasing class inequalities; increased concentration of income forming an smaller, restricted and even more isolated global elite; loss of purchasing power for wage earners in developed countries and, of course, impoverishment of the working classes

in less developed countries. Hence, there is scope to argue that neoliberal globalization is a manifestation of imperialism (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2000) or, as Harvey said, "new imperialism" (Harvey, 2003). Even the IMF recognized that the globalization of neoliberal capitalism has failed. In the study entitled "Neoliberalism: Oversold?" the IMF admits that instead of delivering growth, some neoliberal policies have increased inequality, in turn jeopardizing durable expansion (Ostry et al., 2016).

ECG, on the other hand, emerges with the Chinese presenting a different *modus operandi* to the world. China proposes to the international community a different global development model, that is why ECG can also be read as globalization with Chinese characteristics – a more inclusive and open mode, based on cooperation, exchange, and mutual gain (Dunford & Liu, 2018; Liu & Dunford, 2016). China invites the world to a peaceful, multipolar relationship that seeks to respect the models and stages of development of each nation, without imposing social, economic and political models as a counterpart, as the Western hegemon do when impose their neoliberal globalization. In other words, ECG, as a manifestation of globalization with Chinese characteristics, represents an alternative to the neoliberal globalization. So, we can argue that the Beijing Consensus poses as an alternative to the Washington Consensus (Mendes, 2010; Wang and Lu, 2008). ECG, therefore, is intrinsically related to the construction of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind".

That leads us to the concept of "embeddedness". Li Xing claims that the Chinese globalization is different from the one imposed by Western forces. Analyzing the transition from feudalism to capitalism, Li reflects on "the phenomenon of the disembedded transformation from a 'society with market' (pre-capitalist society) to a 'market society' (capitalist society)" (Li, 2016, p. 19), to introduce the notion of "embeddedness", implying that individuals and institutions are engaged in ongoing social relations. These relations, accordingly, cannot be understood as being independent from one another (Li, 2016). Li looks at a free-market economy as "an economic system directed, controlled, and regulated by the market mechanism alone, in which all values are economically based, and nothing exists outside the free market framework". As such, a free market-driven society is characterized by the "disembeddness" of market forces from a wider context of social relations, norms, and institutions. In Li's (2016, p. 20) line of though, the concept of "embeddedness" refers to "the extent to which economic rationality and practice is constrained by non-economic institutions", demonstrating that "socio-cultural and socio-political factors play a vital role in influencing economic activities and shaping distinctive institutional forms". In the same vein, Amin states that "the law of value not only dictates economic life under capitalism but all aspects of social life (this is what is meant by market alienation)" (Amin, 1996, p. 219). As we are going to see in the following section of this paper, this is the opposite of what happens in China, with the emergence of the New Projectment Economy.

At the foreign relations field, considering the need for its economic and social development, China focuses its geopolitical vision on an expansion of its relations that results in the promotion of a globalization

process different from that dominated by neoliberal capitalism. In this vision, there is no primacy of free markets and the financialization of the economic system to override national interests. What exists is the attempt to build up what Vadell et al. (2019, p. 49) call a "parallel institutional superstructure, mainly financial, through multilateral and plurilateral initiatives". Among these initiatives, the same authors highlight the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the New Development Bank (NBD), the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (ARC) and the Silk Road Fund (FRS). That is why they coin the expression 'embedded Chinese globalization' (Vadell et al., 2019), similarly to what Liu and Dunford (2016) classify as 'inclusive globalization', one based on interconnectivity, cooperation, exchange, win-win relationships, which have strong investments in infrastructures and a financial superstructure controlled by the States. The Belt and Road Initiative is probably the greatest example of the ECG and China's contribution to building a "Community with a shared future for mankind".

As we have already introduced, we consider that the ECG (Vadell et al., 2019) resonates the Chinese Dream, which, according to Xi Jinping himself, will only be fully achieved if "shared with the world" (Xi, 2014, p. 62). The Chinese leader developed Hu Jintao's idea of common destiny (The State Council The People's Republic Of China, 2011) and presented the idea of a 'community with a shared future for mankind' (Staiano, 2020; Vadell, 2021). Although mentioned in Xi's public speeches since 2013 (Xi, 2014), it gained international significance in 2015, when Xi, at the United Nations, first drawn the attention of the international community to the idea of building a community of shared future for mankind, arguing for the need to build up a new model of international relations with mutually beneficial cooperation (Xi, 2017). It is worth noticing that, in 2018, the idea was incorporated into the Constitutions of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Communist Party of Chine (CPC), together with the conception of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, both integrative parts of Xi's thought on 'socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era'. This proposition can be related to ancient Chinese core philosophical values, which, *per se*, underpin a pivotal difference between the ECG and the neoliberal globalization. That is because the idea of a 'Community of a shared future for mankind' finds roots in Confucianism and its advocacy for a prosperous society and great harmony (Hu et al., 2014). Besides that, one can also find these ideas in Marxism tradition. Analyzing the division of labor and its implications on the contradiction between the individual interest or individual family interest and the communal interest of all individuals, Marx and Engels refer to the socialization of labor: mutual relationship is more advantageous through socialization, in order to guarantee a common future (Marx & Engels, 1976).

Therefore, we follow the understanding of Vadell and Jabbour, who state that the ECG emerges as a historical negation of neoliberal globalization, and is also an expression of a new economic-social formation that emerges in China, the NEP, which we will discuss below (Vadell & Jabbour, 2023).

3 NEW PROJECTMENT ECONOMY, A HIGHER STAGE OF SOCIALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

China's economic, technological and social development stands as one of the most impressive transformations in modern history. At the same time the rise of China has caused a disruptive dynamic on the global geopolitical scene and has also shaken the Western hegemonic *status quo*. Many tried to label the Chinese socialist experience, with definitions ranging from 'free market economy' to a type of 'state capitalism', as Jabbour and Capovilla observe, something that encompasses schools of thought as distinct as neoclassical economists to Western Marxists (Jabbour & Capovilla, 2024), and there are others, as mentioned before, who refers to 'post-socialism' (Yu et al., 2017). We do not align with any of these interpretations. We follow Heilmann's understanding that China's development dynamics require the use of analytical perspectives that go beyond preconceived typologies (Heilmann, 2018). Gabriele and Schettino, when analyzing 'market socialism' in China, pointed out the need for a new typology, peculiar to the Chinese experience, since they identified the emergence of a Modern Mode of Production (Gabriele; Schettino, 2012). Jabbour went further and suggested that a new economic-social formation is emerging (Jabbour, 2019, p. 113), an idea Gabriele adhere to when writing on this topic together with Jabbour (Gabriele & Jabbour, 2022, p. 325).

Therefore, we adopt the view that socialism with Chinese characteristics represents a multifaceted social formation (Jabbour et al., 2021). This framework restructured development planning in terms of content, processes, and methods, integrating market coordination while maintaining overarching state control (Heilmann, 2018, p. 132). The Chinese government continues to pursue long-term political agendas aimed at anticipating, harnessing, and shaping national and global market trends (Heilmann, 2018, p. 131). And as Huang notes, it is important to observe how the term for 'planning' in Chinese has evolved in recent years. The original terms, *jihua* (计划) and *zhilingxing jihua* (指令性计划) or 'commandist planning', shifted to *zhidaoxing jihua* (指导性计划), meaning 'guidance planning'. More recently, the term *jihua* was abandoned entirely in favor of *guihua* (规划), as adopted by the National Development and Reform Commission (国家发展和改革委员会) (Huang, 2013, p. 576). Huang emphasizes the importance of this change when explaining that in Chinese the terms *jihua* and *guihua* have slightly different connotations: *guihua* gives the idea of something more comprehensive and longer term than *jihua*, thus highlighting that aspect of contemporary planning (Huang, 2013, p. 576).

Thus, we understand that the Chinese catching-up process built its own economic-social formation, based on its concrete reality, through the dialectical process called market socialism, which allowed the country, by adopting elements of the market economy, to undertake its impressive process of development and capital accumulation. In this way, our point of view aligns with Jabbour et al., who classify the PRC as a society led by a political force determined to advance towards socialism (Jabbour et al.,

2021). Here, planning is viewed as the deliberate human action for aiming to ensuring stability that makes sense in the form of an essential economic logic of market socialism (Jabbour, 2019, p. 112). We are thus witnessing an advanced phase of socialism with Chinese characteristics, that is, we are facing the emergence of a new economic-social formation, which Jabbour conceptualized as the New Projectment Economy (Gabriele & Jabbour, 2022, p. 325; Jabbour & Dantas, 2021; Jabbour et al., 2021).

In the intricate framework of the NPE, different modes of production coexist. This is a typical condition for a long process of transformation of the dominant mode of production, as happened, for example, during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, as we referred above. In fact, the coexistence of different modes of production in a transitional period is something found in Marxist literature. In instance, we first have in the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels establishing the basis for the conception of the transition from capitalism to communism. 'The proletariat will use its political supremacy to gradually wrest all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, that is, of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible' (Marx & Engels, 1976a). From this statement, three points stand out. Marx and Engels recognize that the transition will be 'gradual', but at the same time they emphasize the importance of the 'commanding heights of the economy', when they state that 'the proletariat will use its political supremacy to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State'. The third point has to do with the recognition of the coexistence of different modes of production in this period of transition. After all, in addition to being a change by degrees, they place the need to 'increase the total number of productive forces as rapidly as possible', which means that by then there will be at least more than one productive force.

In 1875, writing The Critique of the Gotha Program (1875), Marx refers once again to the transition to communism, in which he describes that communist society will inevitably be marked with the birthmarks of the old society (Marx & Engels, 1976b). The critical factor, therefore, is identifying which mode of production is dominant and which class and/or political force(s) has control over objectively strategic factors (Jabbour et al., 2021).

In China, as we know, the State holds the centrality of political and economic power, in a 'political-social composition centered on forces that advocate the socialist direction – notably the historical bloc formed by the Communist Party of China (CPC)' (Jabbour & Capovilla, 2024, p. 4). Jabbour and Capovilla also add that it is the constructive path of socialism that allows the emergence and development of concepts such as the New Projectment Economy, which creates the basis for transforming the fundamental development needs of society into technologies that conceive, design and implement strategic projects for the collective good, instead of serving capital or the market. In China, under the leadership of the Communist Party, addressing social demands consciously becomes a genuine tool for fostering social rationality (Jabbour & Capovilla, 2024).

It is the centrality of power in the State and the use of rationality to

produce common goods that differentiates socialism with Chinese characteristics, which advances in the form of an emerging new economic-social formation (New Projectment Economy), from a typically capitalist experience and, therefore, cannot be confused with the adoption of the 'unrestricted free market', 'state capitalism' or 'post-socialism'. In China, this is not the case, because the market does not control, direct, or regulate. The market, rather, is at the service of national development, under the political and economic power of the State. This is the reason why Li (2016) argues that China's unique 'embedded' process is realized and maintained through a dynamic state-market-society relationship. The centrality of power in using social rationality in the service of the development of productive forces aiming at the transformation of concrete reality, through planning and projectment, is precisely what characterizes the New Projectment Economy (Jabbour & Capovilla, 2024, p. 5).

4 THE CHINESE FOOTBALL PLAN

As we have already argued above, sport is not dissociated with the politics and geopolitics of a country. On the contrary, sports can be extremely useful civil society tools for a nation to seek legitimacy and recognition (Allison & Monnington, 2002), both internally and externally, as well as sports public policies can both promote social inclusion and the development of the sports industry – at the national and international levels. Therefore, elite sport and the sports industry have their historical evolution closely linked to globalization processes (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004, 2009; Markovits & Rensmann, 2010).

Football, as has been already stated, helps us to perceive the universal in particular, understanding that the universal is a fragment of an individual, which, in turn, is, in one way or another, universal. An example of this dialectic is found precisely in how football helps us to understand globalization. According to Giulianotti and Robertson "football at the same time reflects and contributes to the advancement of globalization processes in various ways". After all, "the genealogy of the game is closely linked to globalization processes", since the expansion of modern football, encoded in England, which is confused with the global influence of English commerce and, more recently, the cultural interpenetration by economic institutions and ideologies in football (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). This was how modern football entered China, through Hong Kong, which was colonized by the British Empire after the Opium War (1839-1842). So as happened in several parts of the world, British soldiers, traders, and missionaries played football and the local population began to take an interest, starting to play with foreigners. From Hong Kong, football reached Shanghai (in 1879), Beijing (in the late 19th century) and other Chinese cities.

However, football has always had great difficulty flourishing in China, for several reasons (Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2024). In the 1990s, the 14th CPC Congress in October 1992 established the socialist market economy system officially and Deng Xiaoping Theory on socialism with Chinese characteristics became the guiding theory. In line with

the economic reforms, and in order to modernize sports, the General Administration of Sport (GAS) restructured the elite sport system, driving the move towards the commercialization and professionalization of sport. Football has undergone a major transformation. Before 1992, there was no sports commercial activities in China, so Chinese sports industry really kicked off after the establishment of the socialist market economy (Zhan, 2016). Football was the pioneer of the reform in sport and Chinese Football Association (CFA) took the lead in the sports community 'self--managing' its own affairs (Hong & Zhouxiang, 2013). Despite this, football continued to fail to prosper as imagined with the projects implemented in the 1990s and early 2000s (Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2024).

So, in 2014, as mentioned in the introduction, the Chinese State Council issued a document to boost China's sports industry: "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption" (国务院关于加快发展体育产业促进体育消费的若干意见). This strategy is commonly deemed as the milestone marking the take-off of the Chinese sports industry (Liu, 2017). To meet that challenge, the Chinese government sees the development of football as the driving force behind this growth process. For this reason, "The Overall Reform Plan to Boost the Development of Football in China" (中国足球改革发展总体方案) was issued in 2015, a kind of preamble to the main document, from April 2016: "China's medium and long-term football development plan (2016-2050)"- (中国足球中长期发展规划 2016—2050年).

To talk about the Football Plan, we need to identify the public problem or problems that led the Chinese authorities to formulate strategic planning – public policies – aimed at the development of football industry and practice in the country. For instance, the poor performance of the Chinese football team should be addressed by the government to solve it (thus, this is seen as a problem). Comparing the performance of the Chinese football team with those of Japan and South Korea, for example, constitutes a problem. People will see a problem quite differently if it is put into one category rather than another. For instance, the categorization of the need for football development in China as an economic issue (it could play a significant role in the development of the whole sports industry) may influence the level of political interest and attract policy resources.

So, what were the problems that can be identified relating to Chinese football and the sports industry in China? The country aims to have one of the largest national sports economies in the world. The sports industry is expected to become one of the key industries in the national economy by 2035, representing a GDP share of 5%. In 2014, the year "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption" was published, it corresponded to 0.64% of GDP. Football, in addition to being identified alongside basketball and volleyball, as one of the three sports that should be developed as the starting point for the development of the sports industry, was placed as a priority, with the need to develop a medium-and long-term development plan due to lagging in development (State Council Of The People's Republic Of China, 2014).

To address these problems, in March 2015, the Chinese government initiated a programme for football reform, which was characterized by

a new public policy entitled "The Overall Plan for Chinese Football Reform and Development". As the Government outlined in the 50-point document: "Since Comrade Xi Jinping has become General Secretary in the 18th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, he has placed the development of football on the agenda in order to build China as a great sports nation" (State Council Of The People's Republic Of China, 2015). With this report, China recognized another problem: the need to develop football at all levels, not only elite level but also youth participation in football as a mid-term goal. In the following year, the Government issued "China's medium and long-term football development plan (2016-2050)". This document turned the issue into an even more important problem by placing the development of football as part of China's national strategy. The policy make it clear the role of football development to the sports industry in the country stating: "football has a leading role for China's sports development and reform" (State Council Of The People's Republic Of China, 2016). As Yu et al. put it, the new policy represents the update of substantial central planning and sizeable resources allocations (Yu et al., 2017, p. 3). The Football Plan also draws attention to the living standards of the people and to the crucial period of building comprehensively a society in which the material needs of most citizens are adequately met. While also connects the revitalization and development of football with the construction of a powerful sports nation, the promotion of social development and the realization of the Chinese Dream (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2016). Therefore, as we can see, the Football Plan serves as a tool for the fulfilment of one of the most important Chinese national strategies: the Chinese Dream.

5 THE FOOTBALL PLAN AND THE NPE

Chinese authorities want the country to consolidate itself as a powerful sports nation. Considering the success of the country's Olympic and Paralympic strategies, what is meant by "powerful sports nation" has two immediate meanings: success in sports of great international popularity, such as football, and the Chinese sports industry reaching the goal level of the largest market in the sector in the world. Without a doubt, these are audacious targets. Regarding sports industry indices, the objective is to reach 5 trillion Yuan by 2025 (about US$ 712 billion) and that by 2035 the sector will represent 5% of Chinese GDP. In 2022 it reached US$ 461.3 billion.

The Football Plan is a public policy under the tutelage of the State Council's Office of the Inter-Ministerial Joint Conference on Football Reform and Development, created solely for its execution. Which brings together, among others, 11 ministries, State Council commissions, local and regional government bodies and the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The various authorities specifically referenced in the Football Plan are:

Table 1. Chinese Authorities with responsibilities according to the Football

Chinese state institution	Organizational level
Inter-Ministerial Joint Conference on Football Reform & Development (足改部际联席会议办公室)	State Council Office
China Insurance Regulatory Commission (保监会)	State Council Commission
China Securities Regulation Commission (证监会)	State Council Commission
National Health and Family Planning Commission (卫生计生委)	State Council Commission
National Development and Reform Commission (国家发展改革委)	State Council Commission
Ministry of Civil Affairs (民政部)	Ministry
Ministry of Commerce (商务部)	Ministry
Ministry of Culture and Tourism (文化和旅游部)	Ministry
Ministry of Education (教育部)	Ministry
Ministry of Finance (财政部)	Ministry
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部)	Ministry
Ministry of Housing and Urban–Rural Development (住房城乡建设部)	Ministry
Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (力资源和社会保障部)	Ministry
Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (工业和信息化部)	Ministry
Ministry of Natural Resources (自然资源部)	Ministry
Ministry of Public Security (公安部)	Ministry
State Administration for Industry and Commerce (国家工商行政管理总局)	Government Agency
National Radio and Television Administration (国家广播电视总局)	Government Agency
State Taxation Administration (国家税务总局)	Government Agency
State General Administration of Sport (国家体育总局)	Government Agency
People's Bank of China (人民银行)	Central Bank
Local and Provincial Government (各级地方政府)	Provincial/Municipal Government
CPC Propaganda Department (中央宣传部)	Communist Party
Supreme People's Court (最高人民法院)	Judiciary
Supreme People's Procuratorate (最高人民检察院)	Judiciary

Source: Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2024.

Accordingly, to transform China into a future global football power, the original plan proposed three development stages, each one establishing goals to be fulfilled in 2020, 2030 and 2050, respectively: (1) By 2020: 20,000 specialized football schools, 70,000 football fields, 30 to 50 million primary and secondary school students practicing football. (2) By 2030: 50,000 specialized football schools, the Chinese Men team being one of the best in Asia, and the Women team established as "world-class". (3) Until 2050: the Men team in the top 20 of the FIFA ranking, established as a global football power.

As noted, the formulation involved a complex process, with several stages and the participation of several sectors, not restricted to the Government, including the participation of civil society (e.g. scholars). However, it is the Football Plan's implementation that demonstrates to

us how China's NPE, a complex political and economic system, operates: from Central Government to Provincial and Municipal Governments, as well as the interaction between State and Market. As the Football Plan states, the Chinese central government leads the "reform and innovative development" and is responsible for fully displaying that "football has a leading role for China's sports development and reform". However, the policy also highlights the role of provincial and municipal governments and the non-governmental partners. In other words, from the central leadership, which sets out the grand vision and establishes the targets, there is a necessary decentralization of competences, with the delegation of responsibilities, so that the policy is operationalized and implemented. This also allows the constant adaptation to change that may occur in the surrounding environment, justifying the continual adjustments during implementation (Heilmann, 2018, p. 4). This also highlights the observation we have already brought from Huang about the change of the term "planning" in Chinese, from *zhilingxing jihua* (指令性计划) or "commandist planning" to *zhidaoxing jihua* (指导性计划) or "guidance planning" (Huang, 2013, p. 576). This is because the centralization of decision-making is still in the hands of Central Government, but planning serves as a guide for other actors to implement it. In relation to the sphere of government power at the provincial or municipal level, we can find various football plans at the local and provincial levels. Provinces generally issue a medium-to long-term football development plan (足球中长期发展规划), while cities at the municipal, sub-provincial (prefecture), and county (sub-prefecture) levels issue a document called the Overall Program of Football Reform and Development (足球改革发展总体方案). An example of responsibility at the local level are the specialized football schools, which are closely linked to training academies that are typically attached to public primary and middle schools.

However, one of the most interesting aspects to observe in the implementation of the Football Plan is the active participation of State-Owned Enterprises (SOE), and private businesses. That is, how this project operates in market relations. If we look at the three main policies issued to develop the sports industry since the "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption" (2014), we will notice that all of them foresee an active participation of the private sector. In fact, both the policy from 2014 and the "The Overall Reform Plan to Boost the Development of Football in China" (2015) in their Guiding Ideology section state the influence and guidance of Deng Xiaoping Theory, while the Football Plan mentions the "Four Comprehensives"[2] and the necessary use of the reform and innovation as a driving force. We can also find the guidelines of market socialism in the basic/fundamental/development principles of the three policies under analysis. The "Opinions on Accelerating" and "The Overall Reform

2. The Four Comprehensives or the Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy is a list of political goals for China, put forward by Xi Jinping. Xi spoke of them for the first time in December 2014. The Four Comprehensives are: complete a moderately prosperous society; further reform; to advance the rule of law; strengthen the Party discipline (Xi, 2017, p. 22).

Plan" address more the issue. Both bring as guiding fundamentals "reform and innovation", "further simplify administration and decentralization", "strengthen market supervision", and "create a market environment with competitive and equal participation". At the market role, both consider the importance of improving "the market mechanism, actively cultivate multi-market entities, attract social capital participation". Furthermore, both reinforce the role of the State "on overall coordination, giving full play to the positive interaction between the sports industry and the industry, promoting the integration of the sports industry and other industries, and achieving the coordinated development of the sports industry and the economy and society". While in the Football Plan, we find the prerogatives of creating a development environment of equal participation and fair competition, in addition to the development of opening-up, increasing the level of domestic and foreign opening up.

The implementation of the Football Plan is a good example for us to observe how the NPE operates in a specific case. On the one hand, because it has been in part driven by private initiative. That is because many of the Chinese investments that have been made both in the national and international football markets have been through private companies. On the other hand, since 2017 we have seen the government supervising and the Chinese Football Association (CFA) intervening to ensure that the development of football and the football market in China takes place in a financially sustainable manner. In June 2017, for example, a fee of 100% on the value of international transfers above €5.9 million was implemented (rate reverted to finance training centers). This had a huge impact. In 2016, Chinese clubs broke the transfer record in Asian football history by spending €461.1 million. In 2017, the amount spent dropped to €239 million and in 2018 it went down to €175 million. In December 2020, the CFA tightened the belts on football clubs again. The regulation of wages and payrolls became stricter. A foreign player can only earn up to €3 million annually and a Chinese player up to €628 thousand. Club sheets cannot exceed €75 million, with only €10 million for foreigners. All these measures are unimaginable in the increasingly unequal European football, marked by the hyper-concentration of capital in the hands of a few clubs, from a few countries.

6 THE FOOTBALL PLAN AND THE ECG

Throughout the text, references were made to Chinese Dream, Shared Future and Common Prosperity. It was also mentioned that the development project for the Chinese sports industry, which has the Football Plan as its main implementation tool, is directly related to these concepts and the objectives of Chinese Government. The realization of the Chinese Dream ideal involves the realization of the advancement of Chinese society, which means achieving a Common Prosperity, which is, at the domestic level, full prosperity with a less unequal society, based on the redistribution of wealth. But externally, it is necessary to understand that China, from its dialectical formulation in which Confucianism and Marxism guide its actions, has as its goal a world in which prosperity is

common to all, that is, in which there is a 'Community of a shared future for mankind'. The Football Plan also connects the revitalization and development of football with the construction of a powerful sports nation, the promotion of social development and the realization of the Chinese Dream, as in its "Guiding Ideology" section football is identified as "an emerging and green industry" and that its development represents a new sector of economic growth, in addition to representing the Chinese Core Socialist Values. The Football Plan can contribute to achieving these targets, both in terms of the development of the national economy – generating wealth to be redistributed – and in the aspect of promoting external relations based on friendship, harmony, and the exchange of knowledge.

As an instrument for promoting cultural and diplomatic exchanges with other nations, the Football Plan explicitly demonstrates the Chinese authorities' perception of the importance of football as a tool to exert influence and attraction. For example, the Plan discusses the need to intensify international exchange, stating that football activities are "a fundamental part of sport diplomacy". It also draws attention to the need to strengthen "international cooperation and exchanges of talent in the football industry", adding that international football exchange channels should be expanded, encouraging all bodies to promote various forms of international activities and football specialists abroad for studies and training, in addition to encouraging the participation of representatives in international organizations. The Plan also refers to the importance of increasing openness ('opening up') and advantage ('win-win') in cooperation. Looking at the Football Plan, we realize how "exchange" and "cooperation" are paramount to the development of football and the Chinese sports industry. Both are keywords in the political discourses of the Belt and Road Initiative. After all, as have already been said, the BRI is one of the most ambitious geopolitical and economic projects in the world, a global integration plan, with China as the link of union and interconnectivity.

In recent years, we have seen Chinese diplomacy documents mention cooperation in the field of sport as an important part of exchanges and cooperation, particularly in Joint Statements between the PRC and other nations, like Joint Statements between the PRC and Brazil, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, for example. There are other examples of the geopolitical dimension of football and its correlation with the Belt and Road Initiative and the ECG. Such as the case of China Media Capital's investments in City Football Group, owned by Abu Dhabi United Group, an investment group that belongs to Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed bin Sultan bin Zayed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan (Sheik Mansour), a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family (CFG, which owns Manchester City and in 2019 bought Sichuan Jiuniu FC, then in the Chinese third tier and in 2023 gained access to the CSL and changed its city and name, leaving Chengdu for Shenzhen, becoming Shenzhen Peng City FC to play the CSL 2024). There is also the case of stadium diplomacy and the construction of two stadiums in Pakistan, in strategic cities for both the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the BRI maritime route, Quetta and Gwadar. In addition to several football exhibitions and tournaments promoted under the motto of the BRI (Leite Junior & Rodrigues, 2020).

7 CONCLUSION

This paper sought to bring a new analytical perspective to frame the fundamental role played by the Chinese State in the development of its football industry. Although the topic addressed is not new, the originality of this work lies in its theoretical framework, which reflects on the relationship between the Chinese Football Plan, the NPE and ECG.

As seen in this work, in relation to the ECG, football has demonstrated its effectiveness by becoming an instrument of sports diplomacy, building bridges and enabling the deepening of China's relations with several countries in the world: stadium diplomacy with Pakistan, tournaments under the BRI motto, in addition to cooperation and exchange with more developed countries in football – here somewhat similar to the Strategy for Olympic Glory. On the one hand, it is clear how the Football Plan is a case study for understanding NPE, such as, for example, centralized decentralization, in which much of the implementation is the responsibility of the private sector and provincial and municipal governments, but always under the centrality of State power (such as the examples of CFA interventions that aimed at greater financial control after criticism from government members).

There is also the role of the State as an inducer of creative destruction, the disruptive link capable of starting the process of creating a new cultural and consumer habit – the mass practice of football and the expansion and loyalty of a consumer market for this sport. And this is a huge challenge, since a tradition is not invented overnight and it is also necessary to consider that two or three generations of young people trained in football academies are needed for a reasonable number of high-level players to emerge, capable of raising the competitive level of the Chinese men's team. On the other hand, however, unlike what happened in the case of Olympic sports, where the Chinese project proved to be extremely successful, making China an Olympic superpower in less than 40 years, the development of football in the country still faces several obstacles. Cases of corruption and the bankruptcy of companies that own some clubs make even more complicated something that would already be difficult if all factors collaborated for less turbulent development. The government's fight against corruption in football, however, is exemplary. We must wait and see what effects will be like soon.

In conclusion, we believe that this work contributes both to the discussion on public policies for Chinese football and to the debate on socialism with Chinese characteristics, based on the analysis of two intertwined concepts, the New Projection Economy and the Embedded Chinese Globalization. Thus, this paper innovates not only by analyzing the Chinese Football Plan under innovative conceptual aspects, but also by adopting these concepts to football, in particular Chinese football, its challenges, its ambitions and its mission to realize the Football Dream as part of the realization of the Chinese Dream.

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