

# Revolutionary of School Youth Soccer Management Development in Chinese Education System – A Scoping Review

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## Abstract

In the past few decades, Chinese soccer has experienced a tortuous and long way for a struggle to rise up. It finally reached a conclusion that school youth soccer is the only way to solve the problem. Many scholars have studied the history and development of Chinese youth soccer reserve talent training. However, there are few studies focusing on school youth soccer. It can be said that the development level of the youth soccer is the key indicator for measuring the national soccer level. Before the instigation of the school youth soccer program, the Chinese youth soccer population has been up and down for various reasons, from the highest 650,000 in 1995 dropped sharply down to 50,000 in 2005. While since the launching of the school youth soccer plan, the numbers of young soccer participants have seen sharply growing, which greatly promotes the soccer sport in China. This paper explores the key drivers behind school youth soccer management development, as well as the problems it is currently facing. It concludes that factors which have resulted in the rebound of Chinese youth soccer revolve around government management, policy support, coach education programs, increased opportunities for clubs, leagues, and schools, and, collaboration with stakeholders within and outside soccer foundation cities. By following these principles, it will be possible to for the Chinese soccer to continuously advance.

**Key words:** Soccer, school youth, management development, key drivers

## Introduction

Prior to setting up school youth soccer, Chinese soccer ranked at third-class level in Asia. Data show that between 1990 and 1995, the Chinese youth soccer population was the highest ever in history, at 650,000, but from 1995 to 2000 it fell to 610,000 and from 2000 to 2005 it further dropped to 180,000. By 2005 there were only 50,000 young soccer players registered with the Chinese Soccer Association. However, since the school

youth soccer planning was instigated, the numbers of young soccer participants have seen sharply growing. As of 2018, there were 20,210 soccer approved foundation schools in China (including 10,019 elementary schools, 7,107 junior high schools, and 3,084 high schools), 102 soccer experiment prefectures, and 12 experiment districts. In 2018, 254 universities recruited high-level soccer players as talent students.

### School Youth Soccer Stage

School youth soccer stage as a concept is a public policy formulated by the Chinese government.<sup>1</sup> To some extent, the school youth soccer is a practice activity that is directed by public policies formulated by relevant Chinese government departments.<sup>2</sup> The General Administration of Sport of China and the Ministry of Education jointly launched a school youth soccer development program across the country. All students who participated in soccer activities in primary school, middle school and high school were involved. As such, the activity was designated as youth soccer activity, led by the school.

There are three reasons why a school youth soccer development model should be established. The first is the shortage in quantity of youth participants and youth soccer teams. There have been many studies comparing the training of Chinese youth soccer players with other high-level soccer countries in Asia and the world. Taking Japan for example, it was found that there is still a big gap between China and Japan in the development of youth soccer activities.<sup>3</sup> The gap is mainly reflected in the fact that the number of teams and players in Japanese school soccer is much higher than that of China, despite that the total population ratio is inversed.<sup>4</sup> The second reason supporting school training is the insufficiency of cultural knowledge found amongst youth soccer players. The vast majority of student-athletes are still in the education stage of receiving knowledge. Whereas the Chinese professional clubs, professional soccer schools, and amateur sports schools seem unable to meet the requirement of basic education, mostly because the teaching skills of their teachers are poorer than those of ordinary schools. Zhong Jie pointed out that

while China Super League professional club echelon reserve talents have plenty of time for soccer training and utilizing excellent coach resources, as well as more abundant funds, clearer training objectives, higher occupational risks, greater opportunities for entry, better logistics support, more complete echelon formation, and a higher level of special ability for students, there still persists a weaker cultural education.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the soccer talent training in the absence of cultural education is something that prevents most parents to allow their children to participate in the sport. This is neither conducive to the overall development of young players nor is it conducive to the sustainable development of Chinese soccer. While the school youth soccer development models aim to build soccer training systems that underpin school soccer education as the core of physical education.<sup>6</sup> Chinese administration vigorously develops and cultivates physical education teachers and social soccer enthusiasts to become basic soccer coaches and allows them to enter schools in order to improve the teaching quality of youth soccer. Ordinary schools and social sports organizations are encouraged to participate in competitions to improve the communication and abilities of young soccer players through involvement in the youth soccer league. Since students do not need to leave their family homes, schools, or teachers, their physical and mental health along with their cultural knowledge accumulation and their control of behavioral ethics can be guaranteed. The third reason to encourage school soccer, is the gradual decline seen in the Chinese youth health situation. The 2005 Chinese Student Physical Health Survey revealed that students were continuing to decline in vital capacity and physical fitness, and that in fact, the proportion of obese and overweight

students had grown rapidly. The speed and strength of Chinese students has also declined for 10 consecutive years, and endurance quality has been on a downward trend for 20 consecutive years. Indeed, the proportion of obese and overweight students has grown rapidly, and the number of obese boys in the city accounts for 24% of the total number of adolescents.<sup>7</sup> This data has aroused widespread concern about students from all walks of life regarding their physical fitness, and has also become an important reason for the Central Committee of the State Council of China youthsoccer project. The country hopes to improve youth physical fitness by approaching it through soccer. Simultaneously, one of the additional the advantage of such a project is that can also be an important means of promoting the development of Chinese youth soccer talents.

Finally, in accordance with the guiding intention of two documents issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "Opinions on Strengthening Youth Sports and Strengthening Youth Physical Fitness" and "Decisions on the Development of Sunshine Sports for Millions of Students", the Ministry of Education and the General Administration of Sports jointly launched a "CampusSoccer Activities"plan.<sup>8</sup> The Chinese government established the "National Leading Group for YouthSoccer Work", promulgated specific

implementation plans, and allocated special support funds for this purpose. The implementation plan clearly stipulates that: 1) all youth soccerschools should increase the proportion of soccer teaching in school physical education, 2) approved foundation school students should have no less than two hours of soccer activities per week, 3) approved foundation schools should have more than half of their students participating in soccer series activities, 4) approved foundation schools must organize soccer matches within the school and establish a school soccer team to participate in the national league. At this time, China established a four-stage league system for primary school, middle school, high school and university. From 2007 to 2014, the layout of China's youthsoccer projects involved 49 nationalsoccerapproved foundation cities, 68 provincial-level basic soccer approved foundation cities, 3 soccerpilot counties and 10 provincial-level soccer units. The number of schools that launched soccer leagues in China reached 5,084, comprising 99 universities, 406 high schools, 1,497 junior high schools, and 3,082 primary schools. There were 8,849 boys and 1,911 girls participating in soccer in primary schools, making a total of 10,760. A total of 52,680 boys and girls participated in soccer activities in junior high schools. The total number of high school and university participants reached 2,700,504.

**Table 1: 2007-2014 School YouthSoccerParticipant Numbers**

Participants	Primary school	Middle school	High school	University
Schools	3,082	1,479	406	99
People	107,660	52,680	2,700,504	

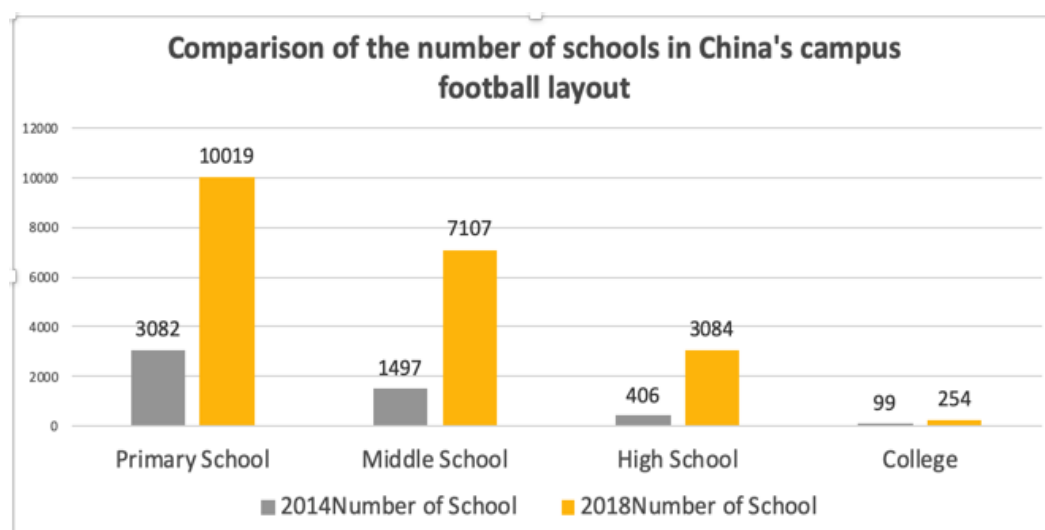
In these seven years, China named more than 5,000 youthsoccerapproved foundation

schools. However, due to the blurring of the division of labor between the education sports departments, and the divergence of parents and headmasters' perceptions of soccer development, the actual development of Chinese youth soccer projects and the implementation efforts of various provinces resulted in decreasing the overall effect. In general, during this period the Chinese government mostly just explored and experimented with the school development concept of youth soccer.

On January 22, 2014, the 10th China Soccer Association Congress closed. Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong met with the new Executive Committee of the Chinese Soccer Association and made clear that the management of campus soccer should be reformed.<sup>9</sup> Starting from the end of 2014, the Ministry of Education was officially appointed as the general headquarters for promoting youth soccer. After President Xi Jinping gave important instructions on the reformation and development of Chinese soccer, the government successively issued documents such as the "Overall Plan for the Reform of Chinese Soccer", with the aim of further promoting the development of youth soccer.<sup>10</sup> From 2014 to 2018, the

development concept of Chinese youth soccer talents and the quality of training teachers has significantly improved. With continuous improvement of the school tournament system, school Chinese soccer talent cultivation has entered a new historical stage. As of 2018, there were 20,210 soccer approved foundation schools in China (10,019 elementary schools, 7,107 junior high schools, and 3,084 high schools), 102 youth soccer experiment prefectures, and 12 youth soccer experiment districts. Additionally, in 2018, 254 universities recruited high-level soccer players. The Soccer Office of the Ministry of Education of China, together with FIFA and the Chinese Soccer Association, jointly promotes women's soccer, and conducts women's soccer training and competitions in schools.<sup>11</sup>

It can be seen from Table 2 that there are many more schools in China's campus soccer layout in 2018 than there were in 2014. The number of primary schools is three times greater than in 2014 and the number of junior high schools is five times greater than 2014. There are more than seven times the number of high schools than 2014 and universities increased from 99 in 2014 to 254.



**Figure 3: 2014 and 2018 School Soccer Participant Numbers**

### **School Youth Soccer Competition Organization System**

There are three levels in the current leading organization of youthsoccer competitions in China, consisting of:

#### **(a) National Youth Soccer Leadership Group**

The national youth soccer leadership group is composed of relevant leaders and personnel from the State Sports General Administration and the Ministry of Education. Their specific responsibilities are to deploy national youth soccer steadily, while guiding and coordinating, and, to regularly check the progress of youth soccer in various cities, and report the national youth major events to the General Administration of Sports and the Ministry of

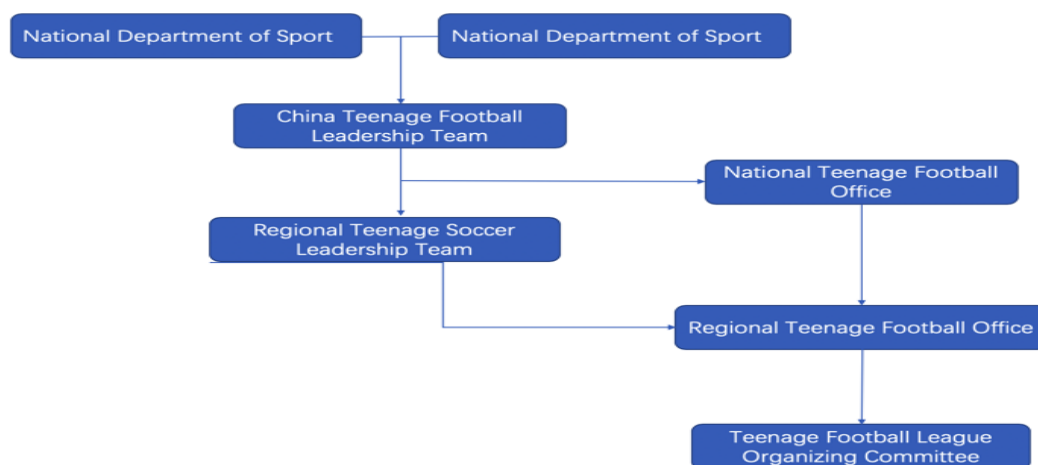
Education in a timely manner.

#### **(b) Local Youth Soccer Leadership Group**

The local soccer leadership group is mainly composed of the relevant leaders of the local sports bureaus and education bureaus. They are specifically responsible for the daily work of local youth soccer activities.

#### **(c) The Youth Soccer League Organizing Committee**

The Youth Soccer League Organizing Committee is mainly composed of competition experts from the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Chinese Soccer Association. They are specifically responsible for the organization and supervision of various youth competitions.



**Figure 4: China Grassroots and Teenage SoccerCompetition Organization**

China has built a complete level 4 soccer competition system. Various approved foundation schools organize intra-school class leagues, and on this basis, select and form male and female soccer teams for each school. School soccer leagues are organized between school soccer teams, including elementary school, junior high school, high school and university. Based on the

intercollegiate league, the best lineup for each age group in each region is selected. These best lineup players form a regional soccer team to participate in the training and competition of the national youth soccer summer camp. The National Youth Soccer Summer Camp selects the best national team of all age groups for campus soccer.



**Figure 5: China Grassroots and Teenage Soccer Competition Organization**

Based on research data and results of field investigations, this study observes that the Chinese youth soccer competition system mainly has the following functions:

- (1) Educational function. To temper the quality of student behavior and to cultivate the spirit of unity and cooperation amongst young people.
- (2) Culture function. To enrich campus cultural life, popularize soccer and soccer culture, and, to win honors for the school and expand its influence, while promoting exchange of young students between schools, or internationally, to enhance friendship.
- (3) Entertainment and fitness functions. To allow young students fully enjoy the happiness brought by soccer by participating in soccer games and competitions and to promote the healthy development of young students' physical and psychological qualities.

- (4) Competitive function. To develop the soccer level and ability of young students and to improve the scientific training level of school soccer, while promoting healthy and vigorous development of school sports.

According to the China Youth Soccer Training Guidance, during the period from 2015 to 2018 around 5,347,000 people participated in the soccer primary soccer league, 2,767,300 in the junior high school soccer league, 1,653,500 in the high school soccer league, and 279,000 in the college soccer league, making a total of 10,040,800 people. From 2016 to 2018, a total of 828 youth soccer players were selected for the best team in the national campus soccer summer camp. Over 130 of them entered domestic professional soccer clubs, and more than 30 went to well-known foreign soccer clubs for further education.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 2: 2015-2018 Participants in School Youth Soccer Competitions**

Group	Primary	Middle	High	University	Total
Number	5,347,000	2,761,300	1,653,500	279,000	10,040,800

### School Youth Soccer Coach Education

The teaching quality level of coaches is a key factor affecting the development of young soccer players. Good coaches can enable them to acquire skills, tactics, physical fitness, a good mentality and soccer awareness, better and faster.<sup>13</sup> According to Xin.Z, FIFA's soccer coach training system is divided into four levels, professional level (PRO), A level, B level and C level. Classes D and E are unique to the Chinese Soccer Association.<sup>14</sup> Soccer coaches with different levels of coach certification can instruct different levels of soccer teams according to the certificate level. Holders of E-level certificates can engage in coaching youthsoccer teams, D-level can coach youth soccer training, C-level can coach amateur soccer teams, B-level can coach second-tier teams of professional clubs, and A-level can coach professional clubs. Professional-level certificate holders are the only coaches who may coach teams in the top leagues. Since 2010, the Chinese Soccer Association stipulates that the Super League head coach and the coaching team must all hold Professional certificates. From 2017, according to Asian Soccer Confederation regulations, the Asian Champions League coach must hold the certificate. According to statistics, as of 2017, the Chinese Soccer Association had a total of 27,745 D-level coaches, 9,983 C-level coaches, 2,027 B-level, 899 A-level coaches, and 142 professional-level coaches, a total of 40,796.<sup>15</sup> In 2005, China Soccer Association launched a professional coach training class, followed in 2006 by a professional coach training course. In the same year a four-level

coach training system was established that included professional coach training, A-level (advanced) coach training, B-level (intermediate) coach training, and C-level (junior) coach training. In order to further strengthen and popularize youthsoccer, the Chinese Soccer Association added D-level coach training and youthsoccer coach training in 2009. The main objective of D-level coach training is to target school soccer coaches and school physical education teachers.<sup>16</sup>

There are many weaknesses and problems in the Chinese Soccer Association coach training system.<sup>17</sup> To begin with, there are few training managers for national soccer coaches. Then, because the Chinese Soccer Association supervision and management of the training classes for coaches at all levels is inadequate, many training classes are not strictly evaluated. Anecdotal evidence from a coach who participated in the China Soccer Association suggests that as long as a coach participating in training paid their training fee, they will definitely pass the assessment.<sup>18</sup> Further, most China Soccer Association lecturers are between 35-49 years of age. The ability, experience and prestige of this group of trainer lecturers is simply insufficient. Finally, aligned with the unseasoned nature of the coaches, since there is no mature or standardized operating mechanism behind the soccer industry market, many people with soccer coach certificates do not engage in coaching. All of these problems have led to lowering the skills and quality levels of Chinese coaches, and the current state is far from meeting the

development needs of Chinese soccer reserve talents.

At present, in order to expand the number of excellent soccer coaches, improve their utilization rate and quality of training, the Chinese Ministry of Education has promoted a youth soccer coaching training system focused around school soccer. This system has the potential to expand the soccer coach base and utilize them more efficiently. Since schools have a huge group of physical education teachers, these can immediately go to work once they have received formal, high-quality soccer teaching training, to serve youth soccer development. According to 2018 China campus soccer development report the total number of physical education teachers in primary and secondary schools in 2015 was 565,638, and the total number in 2016 was 585,348, including 15,594 with a professional soccer background. From 2015 to 2017, China trained a total of 230,000 soccer teachers and coaches through the establishing of soccer teacher National education and soccer coach National education. The Chinese government sent over 1,500 school coaches to France and the United Kingdom for three months of professional soccer coach training. During this period, senior soccer coach lecturers from France and the United Kingdom helped Chinese youth soccer coaches to take on board new soccer teaching concepts in order to broaden their outlook. After training, 540 Chinese youth coaches achieved Soccer Coach Level Certification issued by the Soccer Association of England.<sup>19</sup> The China Youth Soccer Office has adopted the "send out, please come in" training development strategy, involving sending its own coaches out while inviting foreign coaches in. Further, it has discussed cooperation with the sports departments and soccer associations in Spain,

France, Germany, Italy, Argentina, Brazil and other countries. This cooperation has opened up training channels for Chinese soccer coaches to learn advanced soccer concepts. At the same time, the youth soccer department also hired more than 500 high-level foreign soccer coaches to teach in China, helping youth and soccer coaches to improve their professionalism.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of policy support, the Chinese government has established a management system for soccer coaches. The system stipulates that retired athletes, excellent soccer coaches who are not teachers, and private personnel with soccer expertise can enter the school system as soccer coaches for teaching soccer.<sup>21</sup> This system enriches access to soccer knowledge for young people and promotes employment opportunities for retired athletes and private individuals who are soccer lovers.

In 2018, the Chinese Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Chinese Soccer Association, held 102 AFC D-Class coach training courses, training a total of 2,448 D-level coaches. Of these, 420 coaches were sent to France and the United Kingdom for professional training in March, and 59 achieved L3 soccer coach certification issued by the English Soccer Association.<sup>22</sup>

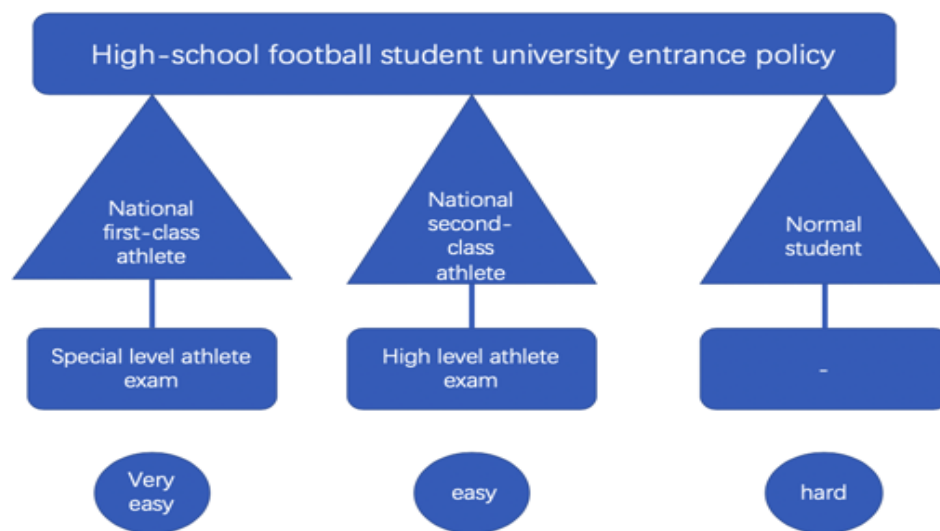
### **School Youth Soccer Training System**

In order to explore a Chinese characteristics-based talent training model for the youth, the Ministry of Education gradually shifted the initial goal of youth soccer development aimed at popularizing the soccer population, to improving the athletic competitive ability of athletes who participated in it. The Ministry of Education promoted a training mode that



combined sports and education, known as the "Starry Sky" training camp. Since students in the compulsory education stage cannot opt out of the school system, yet are still in a critical period of soccer skill development, the Chinese Ministry of Education requires that schools' sports departments invest in high-quality coach resources. The Ministry of Education selects a coach with AFC B-level or above as the head coach for each "Starry Sky" training camp. These senior soccer coaches have the responsibility to lead the soccer teachers and coaches in the region to prepare lessons together and

formulate soccer teaching, training and competition plans for the various schools. At the same time, weekends are used to conduct campus soccer competitions, professionally train good players with soccer potential, and improve competitive level. After completing their compulsory education, those players can choose to participate in professional soccer teams or go to college according to their wishes. By 2018, the Chinese Youth Soccer "Starry Sky" training camp had been opened in 47 cities and the planned goal was to establish at least 135 camps by 2025.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 6: High-School Soccer Student University Entrance Policy**

#### **Central Government's School Youth Soccer Management Development Financial Support**

From 2014 to 2017, the Chinese central government invested a total of 648 million yuan in a youth soccer development support fund dominated by campus soccer. Financial funding, as well as sports lottery and social funds invested by this country totaled 19,603 billion yuan.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the Chinese Ministry of Education mobilized the support of social forces through multiple channels. In 2014, a special fund for youth campus soccer was established at the China Education

Development Foundation. A total of 14.3 million yuan in cash and 15,016-million-yuan worth of materials was raised. These funds were mainly used to build the necessary hardware and software for the development of Chinese youth soccer.<sup>25</sup> The central finance and Ministry of Education funds were mostly used to hold national youth soccer leagues, youth soccer summer camps, coach training, coach output, and the training and output of youth soccer coaches. Funds invested by provinces are planned by the provincial education departments and sports bureaus. For the

purpose of completing activities assigned by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the central government encourages provinces to develop school youth soccer development plans based on local circumstances. In 2016, according to statistics, 38,944 blocks of special soccer schools were built and renovated in China and school sports stadium area reached 1,404 billion square meters. In 2017, China's youth soccer work conference planned to invest 39 billion yuan in planning and constructing 328 million square meters of school sports venues. These funds and construction of additional fields will greatly ease the limitations on activities of campus soccer foundation schools.<sup>26</sup>

### **Problem Analysis of the Current Management Development Obstacles Affecting Youth Soccer**

Over the past few years, the results of school youth soccer activities in China have shown progress. However, during the course of the activities, they have still faced many difficulties. The following is a further discussion and analysis of the major existing problems.

### **Obstacles of the Examination-Oriented Education System**

The original exam-oriented education involved rote-learning, or cramming, and was promulgated by Kelof, an educator in the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> This educational philosophy requires students to memorize textbook knowledge, and not to ignore its principles and applications. The intended purpose of all this type of learning is solely for taking exams, and the consequence is that it often leads to stunting student creativity.

Obstacles to the development of China's youth soccer due to exam-oriented education are currently the most prominent issues.

Theoretical exploration and reformation practices of "quality education" have prevailed in China for over 20 years. But, despite the "Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development program" clearly stating that the strategic themes of educational reform and development are philosophically person-centered rather than exam-oriented, and aimed at promoting educational quality,<sup>28</sup> the actual position is that "quality education" has failed to achieve results. The beginning education stage is exam-oriented, and as grades increase, the appearance of exam-oriented education becomes more and more evident. Its disadvantages also become more obvious, as it tends to seriously hinder healthy growth of youngsters' bodies and minds, as well as stunting their initiative. These shortcomings are evidenced by the following. First, National Student Physical Health Standard Data Management Center reveals that the physical health of young students has been continuously declining since 1985.<sup>29</sup> Second, when he visited Qian Xuesen, a famous Chinese scientist, in 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao was asked why Chinese schools were unable to cultivate outstanding talent. This question, known as "Qian Xuesen's Question" became a crucial issue in the development of Chinese education.<sup>30</sup> The above problems are caused both by internal problems in the educational system and social reasons outside it. The traditional, now outdated concept of schooling with an education system based solely on academic qualifications, along with college entrance examination systems that only select the elite, are the pillars that underpin the current exam-oriented system.

Under the consolidated structure of the college entrance examination system,

teachers, parents and children have focused their attention solely on studying for college entrance examination subjects. However, any other educational content whatsoever, or subjects unrelated to college entrance examinations have been ignored completely. Naturally, soccer is one of these 'other' subjects. The college entrance examination system creates a big split between schools, teachers and parents, and any chance of them understanding and recognizing soccer as an option for participation. This is one of the important reasons why although there are currently more than 310,000 schools in China, only just over 6,000 of them are involved in soccer training. On September 4, 2014, the "State Council's Implementation Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Examination Enrollment System" was officially released. The principles and goals of reforming the enrollment system were to promote healthy growth of students, reverse the tendency of exam-oriented education, and instead to promote high quality education. The main tasks and measures were set out, and the format and content of examinations were reformed accordingly. It is possible that this reformation will contribute to solving the shortcomings of exam-oriented education, and will narrow the split between schools, teachers and parents' understanding of youthsoccer, while at the same time providing a good opportunity for the development of basic soccer. However, it remains to be seen how effective that may be, and it will take some time for it to prove itself.

### **The Soccer Support System is Unsound**

The support system for youthsoccer is the foundation for sustainable development of youthsoccer.<sup>31</sup> This support system not only includes the guarantee of factors such as human, financial, material, and venues

necessary for the development of soccer activities, but also includes technical support required for its development. In addition, atmosphere creation, instructor treatment and income, student or team-member safety and development, and a variety of other software guarantees and policies and regulations need also to be considered. The stability of the current youthsoccer system in China is still very unsound. Although the Communist Party of China (CCP) requires that local government departments strengthen organization and leadership of youthsoccer by supplying required funds and venues, meeting requirements for establishing designated schools, training teachers, designating rewards and evaluation protocols, managing admission policy for soccer specialty students, and creating a sustainable soccer culture atmosphere, in practical terms, none of these requirements appear to be specifically implemented with any degree of visible success, and youthsoccer remains in a fragile state, with doubts as to the security of its future.

To begin with, the mechanism for regular capital investment is inadequate and the supply of funds is insufficient. In the initial stages of schoolsoccer development, the main source of funding was the State Sports General Administration's annual allocation of 40 million yuan from the sports lottery public welfare fund.<sup>32</sup> But it also needed local government to develop market resources through various channels and to sponsor enterprises and social groups. Since 2013, the State General Administration of Sport has increased annual funding for schoolsoccer to 56 million yuan.<sup>33</sup> At the National School Sports Work Symposium held on July 28, 2014, Minister of Education Yuan Guiren clearly proposed a plan to develop and implement long-term

schoolsoccer development, but it took three years to expand numbers of soccerapproved foundation schools from just over 5,000 to more than 20,000.<sup>34</sup> If it continues to develop at this pace, it will face great difficulties in terms of funds alone, because the current development of schoolsoccercurrently depends on limited financial allocations. Despite central government requiring local government departments to provide financial support, due to various constraints, and the fact that many cities are located in economically underdeveloped areas, most localities have insufficient funds to actually implement any such plans.

A further issue is overall insecurity, which involvespooryouthsoccer coach treatment and income protection, lack of safety and weak development of participating students, along with several other issues. The Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Program clearly states that teaching hours of those who participate in the training of soccer instructors will be counted as teachers' continuing professional education hours on a pro-rata basis. It can be used as one of the important conditions for evaluating professional titles. The workloads of teacher who organize extracurricular soccer activities, training, and competitions should be calculated and given corresponding subsidies. However, in practice, 64.5% of schools have so far failed to do so.<sup>35</sup> A number of instructors who had led team participation in the national campus soccer summer camp in Qingdao, Shandong, in June 2019 were surveyed. It emerged that these instructors used a lot of their personal time and energy in organizing extracurricular soccer activities, training and competitions. While all of them were full of admiration and

high expectation for the youthsoccer plan, the subsidies paid to them by their schools did not in any way connect proportionally to their actual commitment and workload.

Lastly, the major concern of parents was that their children while participating in soccershould also participate in personal and educational development. Due to past influences of Chinese soccer, and changes in family structures, most parents now have no expectation that their children would ever follow the path of professional soccer development into the future after leaving school.<sup>36</sup> In general, they just hope that their children will get some physical exercise, perhaps learn soccer as a skill, perhaps get extra points for exams, or simply end up going on to a better middle school or university. However, although the channel for cultivating soccer specialty students has been well established, the available quota is still very limited and competition pressure to qualify is intense.

### **Paucity of Soccer Professional and Technical Personnel**

Persons identifying as soccer professionals and technical personnel should only do so when they have specialized soccer-related knowledge and skills and have received more education and training specifically in that field. Former AFC Secretary-General Verapan<sup>37</sup> pointed out bluntly that "The most lacking in all aspects of Chinese soccer are professional coaches and management talents". At present, some soccer managers in China are not sufficiently knowledgeable and professional and lack comprehensive and systematic study of soccer-related theories. They cannot formulate reasonable policy measures and systems and are thus unable to comply with the laws of soccer development.<sup>38</sup> As leading figures who are

widely popularized as role models in youthsoccer, the numbers of instructors are far too few and those who do exist are barely competent. Weidong, Zhilin, and Zhongming found in a survey of 33 youthsoccer layout cities, that there were 1,487 school soccer instructors in 33 foundation school cities, including 106 retired soccer players, 511 sports special soccer graduates and 720 non-soccer graduates, as well as 150 other undefined instructors. These personnel accounted for 7.1%, 34.4%, 48.4% and 10.1% respectively, of the total number of coaches. Among these school soccer instructors, 54.4% of them do not have soccer coach grade certificates, and the percentages holding A, B, C, or D grade certificates are 0.79%, 3.91%, 17.5, and 23.4% respectively.<sup>39</sup> Shortage of properly qualified school soccer instructors will most likely directly lead to deficiencies in education management, training methods and training concepts of youthsoccer players. Developing youthsoccer is not only anticipated to expand the soccer population and train young soccer reserve talents, but it is also expected to allow young people to build up their physical fitness through the medium of soccer, while cultivating their personalities and social skills.<sup>40</sup> Under the current youth soccer training conditions, it is almost impossible to carry out training that is suitable for the stages of physical and mental growth of youngsters. Many youth coaches devise their training plans and content based solely on instinct and their limited experience, often resulting in an inadequate degree of scientific training without any systematic or comprehensive background. Over time, youthsoccer training has strayed far from its stated intention of cultivating and educating youngsters in the field of youth soccer and in building their character.

#### **Youth Soccer Lacks a Cultural**

#### **Atmosphere**

Culture in a broad sense refers to the sum of material and spiritual wealth created by human beings in the course of social development.<sup>41</sup> As for cultural hierarchy, some scholars separate culture into material culture and spiritual culture, while some others divide it into material culture, institutional culture and spiritual culture.<sup>42</sup> Then there are also those scholars who believe that culture can be broken down into material culture, institutional culture, spiritual culture, and behavioral culture.<sup>43</sup> The author believes that youthsoccer culture involves material culture, institutional culture, spiritual culture, and behavioral culture that is intrinsically related to youthsoccer. Material culture accounts for the tangible and includes soccer-specific funds, soccer field facilities and soccer teachers, and these form the physical basis of soccer culture. System culture is mainly reflected by policies, regulations and organizational management around youth soccerdevelopment, and these underpin the development of youthsoccer. Spiritual culture is evidenced in the sense that youthsoccer aims to provide schools, instructors and students with role models and behavior exemplars so as promote the image of the school and demonstrate self-worth. Behavioral culture is shown in the value orientation and outward behavior seen in soccer activities and competitions; these form the core development principles. All of these are built into the aims of youth soccer development. If the current situation of youth soccer development is judged by the foregoing description, it is still extraordinarily lacking by widely varying degrees on all four levels of material, institutional, spiritual and behavioral culture. Lack of material culture is manifested in insufficient development funds, low rates of

support funds placement, low levels of soccer pitch standardization, and the overall poor quality of teachers. Lack of institutional culture is manifested in insufficient implementation of relevant policies, and the evident chaotic organization of management. Lack of spiritual culture is manifested in insufficient publicity about youth soccer and insufficient external publicity. Lack of behavioral culture is manifested in the general misaligned emphasis within the training of youth soccer teams, and the minimal proportion of school-based soccer courses.

### **Deficiency of Playing Fields**

Soccer fields as a resource are an important prerequisite for developing school soccer and improving the level of competition.<sup>44</sup> They are also part of the necessary hardware conditions the government needs for establishing and improving public sports service systems. Results of the sixth national census of sports venues show that there are 1,694,000 sports venues of various types in the country, with an average per capita sports area of 1.46 m<sup>2</sup>. The education system owns 38.98% of the total number of venues. Basketball courts, national fitness trails, table tennis courts, small sports courts and table tennis areas account for 75.99% of the total number of venues.<sup>45</sup> In comparison, the proportion of soccer pitches is very low.

Although the number of soccer fields in the current youth soccer foundation schools can just about meet after-school training and competition needs, they do not as yet have the ability to hold a wide range of soccer activities. In terms of the quality of soccer pitches, artificial turf pitches and soil pitches account for 78.6%. Some schools with better financial circumstances have natural turf pitches, but they account for only 7.4%,

while another 14.0% of schools have undefined other types of grounds.<sup>46</sup> Having insufficient numbers of soccer venues severely restricts the popularity of soccer activities on campus. The quality of some school venues is sub-standard, and potentially likely to lead to injuries. The whole intention of campus soccer in the first place was to improve youth physical fitness and clearly, sports-related injuries are too high a price to pay.

### **Conclusion**

The school youth soccer development model has become the main method of cultivating Chinese youth soccer talent. For a long time, considerable exploration and effort has been invested in attempting to increase the amount of youth participation in soccer activities, as a result the quantity of young soccer players has risen noticeably. Not only that, but under the framework of focusing on quality education, students have learnt to attach importance to cultural and ethical education. Because of the healthy training environment provided by schools nowadays, parents are less likely to worry that their children could be easily injured during soccer training. As well as this, the advanced soccer specialty student enrollment policy opens very useful college entry channels for students, result in many more parents and children taking an interest in soccer. In addition, since competitions and the entire coach training system has become so sophisticated, national youth soccer activities and the scale of training has expanded increasingly.

However, from the point of view of materialist dialectics, the growth of new things is unlikely to be straightforward and smooth sailing. On the contrary, its growth and development generally have to go

through a difficult and tortuous process.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the path of development of new things can be fraught with difficulties. The historical outdated exam-oriented education system, along with the paucity of funds and pitches, combined with the shortage of professional soccer personnel, are all still major stumbling blocks affecting the development of Chinese youth soccer. With proper aims and decent leadership, relevant Chinese departments should adjust the current youth soccer system and increase the flexibility of its regime. When planning to increase social funding, the government is obligated to encourage investment in socially beneficial organizations. It should never be forgotten that a solid soccer faculty is the most crucial factor in youth soccer development. Only by ensuring this, can China soccer maintain its forward progress.

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