

The University Of Sheffield

How China's Football Statues Symbolise a Developing Football Culture



Dr Chris Stride
University of Sheffield

The University Of Sheffield

The Sporting Statues Project

'The monuments erected by a people... reveal who the people really are.'

Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation.*

Our aim is to examine sport history, social history and contemporary sporting, internal and national politics through the prism of sports statues

The University Of Sheffield

The Sporting Statues Project

Project progress

- ✦ Documenting statuary: www.sportingstatues.com
 - ✦ Providing context for case studies, a resource for further research collaborations and a site for disseminating research. World football statues database unveiled in April 2014, joining existing databases for UK sport, US baseball, world cricket.
- ✦ Developing theory around existence and form:
 - ✦ Seven papers, and two book chapters published, collectively assessing genre history, design, process, motivations and messages

The University Of Sheffield

The Sporting Statues Project

- ✦ 563 in situ football statues or statue groups
- ✦ Over 370 subject-specific statues
- ✦ 190 with anonymous subjects
- ✦ 450+ distinct players, managers, chairmen, etc. are depicted
- ✦ 85% of statues erected since 1990

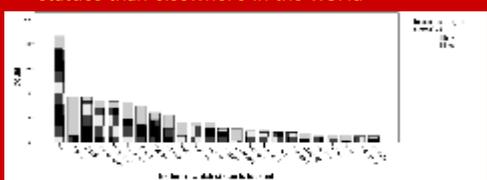


Further information on every statue at www.sportingstatues.com

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Abundance?

- ✦ More than you'd expect given lack of football success, and almost all erected post-2000
- ✦ Far higher percentage of anonymous subject statues than elsewhere in the world



The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Abundance?

- ✦ Often form part of multi-sport statue ensembles erected in lead up to 2008 Beijing Olympics



- ✦ Post 2008, statues of footballers have continued to be popular... why?

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Abundance?

- Post Olympics, the FIFA World Cup is the next big sporting prize
- Engaging in and succeeding in world football offers economic and soft diplomacy opportunities and a boost to global status

but... a problem...

- China isn't very good at football L

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Abundance?

- China has long history of footballing failure, since 1930s, initially due to internal conflict (e.g. Cultural Revolution)
- Since 1980s successive government blueprints have attempted to address the national team's failure, with minimal success (1 WC appearance)
- Corruption blighted domestic league football
- China's footballing performance seen as shameful, a last remnant of the 'century of humiliation'!
- Chronic lack of grassroots participation and little embedded football culture

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Abundance?

- So the unexpected frequency of football statues in China reflects not only popularity of public art in China – but also
 - the government's control of public art,
 - the government's desire to promote football,
 - the desire of artists to stay on the right side of the state

But why are China's football statues largely depicting anonymous subjects...

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Anonymity?

- National ethos of collectivism > individualism
- Lack of famous players from past to depict
- Lack of established club football teams

So anonymity partly reflects China's lack of success

However anonymous statues are useful if trying to decode a nation's football culture... anonymity of subject frees up the design, and means that the image depicted is about the sculptors and funder's view of football, not of an individual player...

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Tackling

- So how are Chinese football statues designed?
- Tackling!



The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues: Tackling

- So how are Chinese football statues designed?
- Tackling!
- Tackling!



The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues:Tackling

- So how are Chinese football statues designed?
- Tackling!
- Tackling!
- Tackling!
- Tackling is an unusual football statue design in the rest of the world - but accounts for a substantial majority of football statues in China



The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues:Tackling

- Possibly... cheap raw materials -> multi-player statue
- Possibly... link to popularity of martial arts
- Most likely... promotion of political philosophy
 - Much Chinese public art depicts CCP narrative of 'the great struggle': workers or soldiers triumphing over enemies/adversity through selfless hard work and dedication to the nation
 - Tackling is element of football that fits this theme



The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues:Tackling

- Only other nation with as many tackling designs is Russia: all sculpted in the Soviet Union era, in which a similar philosophy was promoted





The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues:Training

- China has a higher proportion of statues sited in training facilities than anywhere else in the world
- Evergrande Football School, Qingyuan: 2500 pupils taught by Real Madrid coaches, 50 football pitches, five statues, including...




The World Cup.... Tackling....

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues:Training

- and... Bobby Moore and Pelé?





Moore/Pelé, Evergrande Moore, Wembley Pelé, Salvador

The University Of Sheffield

China's football statues:Training

- China heavily influenced by Confucian philosophy
- Strong belief in the importance of respect for, and learning from elders, teachers
- Learning and copying > free-thinking
- China has tradition of elite-focused, intensive sports development: successful in Olympic sports
- China has tradition of importing coaches from other successful nations
- China has stated aim of hosting and winning World Cup in next few decades



China's football statues: Training

- ❖ Evergrande statues, and training/school statues generally reflect China's focus on intensive elite coaching, using foreign coaches from successful nations, with aim of winning the World Cup
- ❖ However... Chinese football held back by lack of free-thinking, imaginative, instinctive play, which is developed by playing football for fun at a younger age – funding greater grassroots participation would probably be more effective
- ❖ Statues brand Evergrande as winners; funding the school also 'buys' favour with government



China's football statues: Saving face

- ❖ China heavily influenced by Confucian philosophy
- ❖ Deep respect for family and elders leads to inflated sense of shame compared to western nations - can be personal and collective
- ❖ Hence need to 'save face' has primacy in many situations



China's football statues: Saving face

- ❖ China also has the world's largest football statue – and the largest team group statue in terms of numbers of figures...
- ❖ Both sited in Shenyang where, in 2001, China sealed qualification for their first World Cup Finals
- ❖ Statues reflected city's and nation's sense of pride, excitement – and anticipation of further success...



China's football statues: Saving face

- ❖ The Giant V, Wulihe Stadium, Shenyang



China's football statues: Saving face

- ❖ The 44 members of the 2002 World Cup Squad (players, coaches and Chinese FA officials)



China's football statues: Saving face

- ❖ China loses all three games at finals, and doesn't score a goal – a national humiliation
- ❖ Giant V is dismantled and removed when stadium demolished in 2007, and stored in warehouse



- ❖ Player statue group abandoned at former training camp site



China's football statues: Saving face

- ✦ In 2012 Shenyang is awarded hosting of National Games
- ✦ Relative face-saving for city (as site of training camp and stadium where WC qualification was achieved) trumps the national shame still felt for this squad
- ✦ Statues restored and re-erected in centre of city!
- ✦ China's need to save face makes it hard to embrace football, since it is starting from a lowly position – and even the best teams lose...



China's football statues: Kickabout diplomacy

- ✦ China need to save face on world football stage whilst it is improving to an acceptable standard
- ✦ Hence it has attempted to place itself as a world football power in terms of its heritage, by claiming to have invented the game
- ✦ Ancient Chinese ball game of cuju is one of a number of early football-type games around the world - but has no direct lineage to the modern game



China's football statues: Kickabout diplomacy

- ✦ China-Brazil Friendship statue, Rio de Janeiro
Pelé vs Emperor Han Wudi



China's football statues: Kickabout diplomacy

- ✦ Plaque describes Emperor Han Wudi as the 'Soccer Emperor' and places cuju as the first version of modern football!
- ✦ China using reflected glory of Pelé, but simultaneously exposing their lack of a world class player to place alongside him
- ✦ Statue also betrays China's lack of confidence, and football's global hegemony... China is denying the importance and authenticity of its own heritage by twisting it



China's football statues

- ✦ Designed narratives
 - ✦ Football as a metaphor for 'the great struggle': work hard and serve the nation
 - ✦ Past innovators, future champions
- ✦ Hidden narratives
 - ✦ Reliance on copying rather than developing own football culture
 - ✦ Reliance on elite-focused training as opposed to participation
 - ✦ Lack of tradition
 - ✦ Lack of Imagination and flair
 - ✦ Lack of self-confidence



Sporting Statues Project

info@sportingstatues.com

www.sportingstatues.com

@sportingstatues

Copies of talk and other sporting statues papers available from me at end of session