

Restoring 'the Football Kingdom of the Far East': The limited potential of video games for the development and promotion of Hong Kong soccer

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Abstract

Soccer videogames have become one of the most popular genres of computer videogames. Part of their appeal is that they enable gamers to virtually participate in, and gain detailed knowledge about, leagues and clubs in nations from all over the globe. In this chapter we argue that there is currently a gap in understanding regarding the potential of soccer videogames for enhancing the promotion of less well-known leagues and clubs on the global stage. We begin to address this conceptual gap through a case study on the development of soccer in Hong Kong under British rule pre-1997 and Chinese rule post 1997 in which we explore the possibilities and limitations of using one of the most popular soccer videogames, *FIFA* (EA Sports), to help develop and promote Hong Kong soccer. In order to achieve this, we draw upon the Eliasian or figurational concept of 'diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties' to suggest that soccer videogames could simultaneously help *and* hinder the development and promotion of Hong Kong soccer. We conclude by arguing that further research is required in order to more fully assess the potential of soccer videogames for the promotion of Hong Kong soccer and other less well-known leagues and clubs on the global stage.

Introduction

According to Crawford (2015), sport-themed videogames are one of the best-selling genres of videogame. Soccer-related videogames have become one of the very most popular across the globe (Markovits and Green, 2017). For example, even in the USA, where soccer is not as popular as in other parts of the globe such as Europe and South America, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA, 2017, p.12) reported that the soccer videogame *FIFA '17* was in the top ten best-selling videogames of 2016. Part of the appeal of soccer-themed videogames is that they enable gamers to virtually participate in and gain detailed knowledge about leagues and clubs in nations from all over the globe. Recent literature exists on both the influence of videogames on personal behaviour (Adachi and Willoughby, 2012;

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Engelhardt and Mazurek, 2013) and the gameplay experience offered by soccer videogames specifically (Conway, 2010; Crawford, 2006), yet there is little literature on the potential of soccer videogames for the development and promotion of less-well known clubs and leagues to the rest of the world. In this chapter we begin to address this conceptual gap through a case study on the development of soccer in Hong Kong (HK) in which we explore the possibilities and limitations of using one of the most popular soccer videogames, *FIFA* (EA Sports), to help develop and promote HK soccer. In order to achieve this, we draw upon the Eliasian or figurational concept of 'diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties' (Elias, 1939/2000, p.382), to suggest that soccer videogames could simultaneously help *and* hinder the development and promotion of HK soccer.

Diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties

Drawing upon Robertson's (1992; 1995) original theoretical contributions to understanding cultural globalization, Giulianotti & Robertson (2009, p.38) explain that the homogenization-heterogenization debate is at the crux of understanding the impact of globalisation:

Homogenization arguments generally posit that globalization is marked by growing cultural convergence at the transnational level. Conversely, heterogenization arguments contend that global processes maintain or facilitate cultural diversity or divergence.

From the homogenization perspective, globalization is viewed as a kind of monoculture using neo-Marxist terms such as Westernization, Americanization, globalization or cultural imperialism (cf. Giulianotti & Robertson 2009, pp.38-39). Proponents of this view regard globalization as a one-way process whereby dominant national cultures, and/or transnational corporations (TNCs) usually emanating from 'core' states, have effectively forced less powerful 'peripheral' states to reproduce their products or practices sometimes at the expense of their own 'national' traditions (cf. Wallerstein, 1974).

In the following section of this chapter we argue that the homogenisation perspective does not effectively explain the process that has led to HK's currently strong global economic position. Moreover, in the section following that, we highlight

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that when it comes to the introduction and early development of soccer in HK, the homogenisation argument fails to explain the positive reaction of HK people to the sport and the fact that locals created their own clubs, which quickly overtook those of British expatriates (Lee, 2015). We attempt to demonstrate that whilst HK soccer enjoyed success under British rule in the mid to late Twentieth Century, this was arguably due (at least in part) to the influence of British and European players.

Alternatively, from the heterogenization perspective, globalization is viewed as providing opportunities for interaction between different cultures throughout the world, leading to the creation of new or hybrid cultures, products, practices or even identities. This has certainly been the case in HK where one can easily see how the global migration of individuals has led to the hybridization or creolization of cultural identities. Bhabha (1990 cited in Smith 1998, p.203) states that the

great influx of ex-colonials, immigrants ... and asylum seekers has eroded the bases of traditional narratives and images of a homogenous national identity, revealing their fragmented and hybrid character. Today, every collective cultural identity has become plural.

We attempt to show how this side of the globalisation debate can clearly be observed in the development of soccer in HK, which involved both British and local influences, and we argue that this certainly explains the desire of the HK Football Association (HKFA) and newly established HK Premier League (HKPL) to restore HK's footballing success of bygone years.

Whilst not dismissing either the homogenisation or heterogenisation perspective entirely, the Eliasian or figurational approach to the study of society offers a resolution to the seemingly 'non-resolvable debate concerning whether globalization leads to homogeneity or heterogeneity' (Maguire 1999, p.5). 'Diminishing Contrasts, Increasing Varieties' is a sociological concept originally coined by the Twentieth Century social theorist Norbert Elias (1939/2000, p.382) in his magnum opus *The Civilizing Process*. The concept was later applied and extended to theorizing the globalization of modern sport by the figurational sociologist Joseph Maguire (1999) in his seminal text *Global Sport*. In the following sentence, Maguire (1999, p.51 *emphasis added*) concisely explains that the process

of globalization involves *both* homogenization and heterogenization occurring *at the same time*:

The dynamics of global interchange are characterized *both* by tendencies towards a diminishing of contrasts, emulation, equalization and imitation, but *also* by tendencies towards increasing varieties, differentiation, individuality and distinction.

Thus, instead of being regarded as distinct aspects of globalisation, homogeneity and heterogeneity (sameness and difference) are an example of what Elias termed a double-bind in that they can occur simultaneously. Therefore, Maguire (2000) argues that homogeneity and heterogeneity would be best conceptualized as being related to one another along a continuum that is in constant flux.

It is this more complex conceptualization of globalisation which we argue best explains the potential of soccer videogames for the promotion of HK soccer. The global reach of soccer videogames means they can diminish contrasts between different national soccer leagues and clubs whilst simultaneously privileging some leagues and clubs over others. We argue that even though there is an unequal power balance between dominant leagues and clubs and their less powerful counterparts on the global stage, soccer videogames also have the potential to enhance the global renown of even the least well-known leagues and clubs.

In what follows we begin by briefly outlining the recent history of HK before discussing the development of soccer therein under British rule 1842-1997 and under Chinese rule post-1997. We then discuss current issues facing the development of soccer in HK, including the implementation of a recent soccer-related policy and barriers to its success. We then consider the potential of soccer videogames for assisting in the development and promotion of HK soccer. It is concluded that the potential of soccer videogames to develop and promote HK soccer is limited by the power of the most popular European leagues and clubs, especially the English Premier League (EPL), but also by lack of united support from the HK Government, Football Association and media.

A brief introduction to Hong Kong

Hong Kong was once a cluster of remote fishing villages off the south coast of mainland China, under Chinese jurisdiction. It is now a globally-renowned cosmopolitan city with an estimated population of 7.3 million, according to the government's Census and Statistics Department (CSD, 2017). The First Anglo-Chinese War (known as the 'Opium War') from 1839 to 1842, resulted in China losing control of HK and the city coming under British colonial rule. According to the figurational approach, globalisation is based upon a two-way process involving the commingling of two or more different cultures, rather than being solely based on the cultural domination of one. Maguire (2000, p.363) states the following regarding the figurational approach to globalisation:

The figurational approach rejects the idea that the spread or diffusion of styles of behaviour depends solely on the activities of established groups. A two-way process of cultural interaction crosses the semi-permeable barriers that established groups – both within Western societies, and between them and non-Western societies – deployed to maintain their distinctiveness, power and prestige. The more they became interconnected with outsider groups, the more they depended on them for social tasks. In so doing, the contrasts between established and outsiders diminished. The power ratio between these groups moved in an equalizing direction. Concomitantly, new styles of conduct emerged.

This approach thus helps explain how from 1842 HK developed into a significant trading port and helped fuel the British Industrial Revolution (Tsang, 2004). This commingling of cultures opened HK up to a number of Western influences setting it apart from the rest of China. In his study on HK's sporting mega-event policy, Bridge (2013) noted the complexity surrounding the dual nationality of British and Chinese in HK. Since 1949, the British colonial authorities deliberately attempted to de-nationalise local people in HK through socialisation into a 'British' (white, middle-class) way of life which was often at odds with Chinese culture. For example, this British cultural imperialism heavily influenced the education system in HK making it more British than Chinese (Tsang, 2004). Thus Hong Kong was completely developed and re-created under British colonialism.

It was not until 1960 that the British colonial authorities became more responsive to the needs of HK people (McDonogh and Wong, 2005). For instance,

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private employers began to offer slightly more equitable wages and more humane working conditions helping HK's economy to rise to contend with other major cities across the globe (McDonogh and Wong, 2005). The handover of HK from Britain to the People's Republic of China in 1997 marked a new phase in HK's history (Lee, 2005). HK is now managed by its own independent governing authority, 'Hong Kong Special Administrative Region' (HKSAR). This means that HK operates under the hybridised policy of 'one country, two systems' (Chu, 2012), as a city belonging to China but with its own independent government (HKSAR, 2010). Both British and Chinese governments set up Hong Kong Basic Law from 1997 replacing the Letters Patent and the Royal instructions comprised to concern HK's future (Hoe, 2007).

In 2008, HK was named 'Asia's World City' by *Time* magazine and was considered to be one of the three most globally connected cities, alongside London and New York, that together drive the global economy (Elliott, 2008). HK is now a multicultural city with a hybrid culture (Kraidy, 2005). Whilst it is a city whose identity was impacted mainly by Chinese and British cultural influences in the past, there are now a growing number of other cross-cultural exchanges occurring which mean that cultural boundaries are now almost impossible to identify. This makes HK a good example of the simultaneous character of contemporary globalisation; a place where it is impossible to see either homogenisation or heterogenisation holding more prominence than the other. HK is a place of both diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties.

The growth of soccer in Hong Kong

The way in which soccer has developed within HK has parallels with the 'global sportization' of soccer as well as other sports in other non-Western nations (see Maguire, 2000, p.366). Soccer was originally introduced in HK from the mid-nineteenth century by members of the British armed forces and other immigrants, including bankers and traders (Lee, 2015). The first soccer club in HK, 'Hong Kong Football Club' (HKFC), was founded in 1886 by Sir James Haldane Stewart Lockhart (HKFC, 2017). Originally, HKFC was established solely for British expatriates as a private club for leisure and recreation that also included other sports clubs for hockey and rugby union (HKFC, 2017). Thus it is apparent that these British expatriates were, in figurational terms, 'acting as a form of established group on a world level.... Their tastes and conduct, including their sports, formed part of this' acting as 'signs

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of distinction, prestige and power' over HK locals who were at this stage considered outsiders in all areas of social life by this established group (Maguire, 2000, p. 362). Yet, it was not long before processes of commingling between British and Chinese cultures advanced and these initially unequal power relations began to equalise, later leading to the creation of new patterns of conduct.

In the case of soccer, the reaction of the outsiders (HK locals) was to 'emulate the established group' (the British colonials) rather than to 'resist and react with hostility' (Maguire, 2005, p.10). The first club for locals, 'Chinese Football Team', was founded by a group of Chinese students in 1904 but their name was changed in 1908 to 'South China Athletic Association' (SCAAFC, 2017). The soccer league in Hong Kong was founded in 1909 making it the oldest league in Asia and HKFA was also the first football association in Asia, founded in 1914 (HKFC, 2017). This is then an example of one of the ways in which contrasts between the British and the HK locals began to diminish.

Before the Second World War, HKFC and SCA AFC were the best clubs in HK, representing both British and Chinese cultures respectively, and they enjoyed a healthy rivalry. After the Second World War Chinese clubs began to dominate expatriate clubs and after 1947 no expatriate club ever won the major competitions in HK soccer (The Challenge Shield and the League) again (Lee, 2015). It is here where it is perhaps most visible to see evidence of 'both a decrease in contrasts but also an increase in varieties' (Maguire, 2000, p.366) within the development of soccer in HK. Between 1950 and 1980 there were more soccer clubs established by both the British and the Chinese and this was said to be the 'golden age' of HK soccer, once known as 'the Football Kingdom of the Far East' (Lee, 2015, p.25). A key driver for this expansion was the legalisation of professionalism by the HKFA for the 1968-9 season, making HK the first to do so in Asia (Lee, 2015). Although HKFC also had its own stadium and training facilities that were on a par with those of their rivals, the club strictly retained its amateur ethos. Following professionalisation, SCA AFC quickly became the best soccer club in HK as well as one of the best in Asia and remained so until the 1980s.

During this era teams in HK had created many quality local players for the HK national team that had dominated soccer in East Asia and beaten other nations, including both China and Japan. The HK national team also contained players of a high standard from Britain who were able to represent HK when they had been

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naturalised residents for several years, thus strengthening the team. This is a further example of the simultaneous diminishing of contrasts and increasing of varieties made possible through the global migration of individuals and groups across national borders (Maguire, 1999; 2000; 2005). However, from the 1980s HK soccer had stopped developing at the rate of other Asian nations and both the domestic club game and national team began to decline in standard. In order to provide a basis for our overall argument that football videogames have the potential to promote HK soccer, it is important to recognise the main problems HK soccer faces and to also appreciate the historical antecedents of them.

The problems faced by Hong Kong soccer

From the 1950s to the late '90s, soccer clubs in HK were able to sign players from Britain and Europe relatively easily. Players who emigrated to HK included some high-profile names, such as: George Best, Arie Haan, Bobby Moore, and Alan Ball. Although these players had all passed the peak of their careers when they signed for HK clubs, they were still able to raise the overall standard of HK soccer and had a huge influence on its promotion to the rest of the world through the media attention they could draw (Bartram, 2014).

However, in 1984, after both British and Chinese governments announced that HK would return to being under Chinese rule in 1997, the political decisions that were made had a significant influence on soccer in HK. The Chinese authorities encouraged soccer clubs in HK to stop importing British and European soccer stars in order to concentrate on the development of home-grown talent (Bartram, 2014). This is again reflective of the paradoxical nature of globalisation processes, that the habitus of individuals is still firmly rooted in the national - something that sport (especially soccer) often reinforces and maintains (see Gibbons, 2014). Unfortunately, the decision to reduce the immigration of British and European soccer players was the beginning of the rapid decline of HK soccer that was to follow. In 1997, Tung Chee Hwa (the first HKSAR Chief Executive) had emphasised that people in HK should come to understand and love China more (Bridge, 2013). Many British legacies began to slowly disappear under Tung's policies as people were encouraged to renew their passion for all things Chinese. According to Maguire (2000, p.367), 'sports...act as 'anchors of meaning' at a time when national cultures and identities are experiencing the effects of global time-space compression'.

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Soon, China, Japan and South Korea, and even nearby developing nations Vietnam and Thailand, began to overtake HK in their development of soccer. The governments of those nations implemented strategies that successfully improved the development of soccer (Duerden, 2017). For instance, Thailand and Vietnam built private training grounds for almost all of their top division soccer teams. However, soccer clubs in HK, whether they are professional or amateur, are still forced to share public facilities and have limited training time (Bartram, 2014). Added to these challenges, since 1997 the HK government has primarily been concerned with promoting and developing sports in which China has been successful, including badminton, gymnastics, and table tennis. This is despite soccer being the most popular and successful sport in HK (Alladin, 2017). Bridge (2013) also discussed the British colonial legacy that has maintained HK's international role as a commercial cosmopolitan city as typified through the aspiration to be Asia's world city. Since 1999, the HKSAR government has followed the concept of promoting itself as Asia's world city by creating a 'cultural hub' and expanding the local economy in commercial areas such as communications, financial services, trade, transportation and tourism (Bridge, 2013). However, the HKSAR government's official definition of a 'world city' did not specifically mention sport (HKSAR, 2010), and thus seemingly failed to realise the correlation between international sporting events and global prominence (Manzenreiter and Horne, 2004).

On two occasions during the colonial period, the British colonial authorities discouraged any attempts for HK to bid to host the Commonwealth Games (Lee, 2015). This means the HKSAR government have a lack of experience in hosting any international sporting events. It was not until 2009 that HK was to host their first international sporting event in the East Asian Games. Although the event lacked the engagement of many local spectators, the HK national team won the gold medal in men's soccer after defeating South and North Korea as well as beating Japan in the final by way of a dramatic penalty shootout (Bartram, 2014). This was a remarkable success in the history of HK soccer and sport in general since the handover of power back to China.

The 2009 East Asian Games and the success in the soccer competition provided a platform for national pride and prestige to local people in HK and brought people together to share in this national achievement. The team logo and the HK soccer team colours also helped develop a sense of national pride in HK to show the

tradition and culture of HK to other nations (Klein, 2002). The success of the national team in the 2009 East Asian Games and the impact on national unity this had on HK locals, forced the HKSAR government (via the HKFA) to set up a new strategy in 2011 to raise the standard of HK soccer named 'Project Phoenix' (Sallay, 2014). HKSAR's (2011) official announcement stated that the government will always remember that the national team showed perseverance and tenacity to win the gold medal in the 2009 East Asian Games. The HKSAR government invested \$60 million HK dollars (almost £4.64 million) between 2011 and 2014 (the latter being the centenary year of the HKFA) to support the HKFA to implement Project Phoenix to improve the standard of both professional and national teams; improving training for youth players; upgrading soccer facilities and establishing a soccer centre (Bartram, 2014).

In order to help raise the standard of both professional and national teams, the HKFA established a new professional soccer league separate from the Chinese Super League called the Hong Kong Premier League (HKPL), which had its opening season in 2014/15. Teams in the HKPL have since imported many soccer players from China to try to improve the standard of HK soccer but unfortunately some of these players have also been involved in corruption scandals, which have disappointed supporters in HK as it ruins the high reputation of HK soccer that was created between 1950 and 1980 (Kin-wa, 2016). In the past HK soccer consisted of four divisions, similar to the old English Football League system. In order to meet the criteria of the Asian Soccer Confederation, this was changed from 2014/15 to the HKPL followed by three divisions below it. This development is similar to that in Australia and Japan where an independent top division was created so that any promoted team from a lower division had to meet the criteria in order to register to the league. For instance, each team must have a soccer director to run all business of the club and there is a minimum wage in place to provide more protection to players in the league. A minimum wage was implemented because in the past there were only a few teams who performed as professional clubs and the others contained many part-time players, who had other full-time professions. This meant that many teams lacked funding to help improve from amateur to professional. Part of the expectations of Project Phoenix required each club to seek money from sponsorship in addition to the money they received from the HKFA (Sallay, 2014).

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The improvement of soccer facilities was another goal within Project Phoenix to make sure soccer pitches were sufficient for teams at both amateur and professional levels as well as developing grassroots pitches for public users. However, both the government and the HKFA are facing the natural disadvantage of HK, which is lack of land to develop soccer facilities while improving the local economy through the provision of more public rental housing and private mansions in order to solve the situation of tight housing supply. In 2009, a report stated that there were 305 soccer pitches in HK but 231 of these (75%) were hard courts that are not suitable for professional teams. There were only 74 soccer pitches (50 natural turf and 24 artificial turf) to be shared between the national team, the 50 professional clubs (including their reserves and youth teams), the amateur level clubs and public recreational users (Strategic Leisure, 2009). Thus the report clearly highlighted that the number of training grounds in HK is insufficient and significantly limits the development of soccer in the country.

Most clubs in HK (including those in the HKPL) do not have their own training facilities and they will have to share those public soccer pitches with other users. The time limit for booking the soccer pitch only allows for up to 90 minutes, which restricts the amount of time that can be spent learning skills and techniques that are essential for player development. Jose Molino, head coach of HKPL club Kitchee FC, publically expressed his displeasure about the lack of training time, privacy and protection for his team to complete certain strategies (Wave, 2014).

The HKPL is a new phase for HK soccer, however, since 2011, the government and the HKFA have failed in some areas causing many people in HK to start losing confidence in Project Phoenix (Sallay, 2014). Between 2011 and 2014 the goals of Project Phoenix were as follows: to construct a soccer-training centre for the national side and to develop 37 artificial soccer pitches; to have at least eight international friendly matches in one soccer season; to establish the HK Federation of Professional Footballers to protect coaches and players; and, to ensure HKPL clubs get priority to book the soccer pitches and are allowed longer periods of time for their training sessions. What actually happened was that the soccer-training centre and the Hong Kong Federation of Professional Footballers were still in the planning process up until 2014; the government only built 18 artificial soccer pitches between 2011 and 2014; there were only three international friendly matches

between January 2013 and January 2014; and, teams in the HKPL still only receive 90 minutes for their training sessions.

Added to this sluggish rate of development was declining attendance from spectators. In the 2008/09 season the average attendance was 1,128 per game, however, in 2013/14 the average attendance had dropped to only 998 per game (Apple, 2014). Such evidence suggests Project Phoenix was not suitable for the development of soccer in HK and highlights the government's lack of regulatory pressure on the HKFA to make sure they have met their goals. The government investment seems wasteful as there has been no significant improvement to suggest HK soccer will ever meet the criteria of The Asian Soccer Confederation.

Although the average attendance per game is still low and has regressed since 2011 (Alladin, 2017), Project Phoenix gave local people some hope that soccer in HK would improve as the government has finally taken action and showed some financial concern and backing for its development. There is still a long way to go before HK soccer could potentially regain the title of 'the Football Kingdom of the Far East' (Lee, 2015, p. 25).

Boyle and Haynes (2004) highlighted how the Internet and digital culture have provided new possibilities within soccer for interaction between individuals across the globe. Whilst the Internet diminishes contrasts between individuals and groups on a global scale, it simultaneously increases the variety of means through which specific social groups can promote themselves. In what follows we discuss the potential of soccer videogames for the development and promotion of HK soccer to the rest of the globe.

Soccer videogames

Alongside the motion picture industry, videogames are one of the most profitable entertainments in the world (Crawford, 2012; Sage, 2012). Videogames are the integration of computer and television technologies, which allow gamers to experience various reality activities through the virtual world (Dillon, 2011; Wolf, 2008). Sport-themed videogames are amongst the best-selling genres of videogame (Crawford, 2015). Soccer related videogames have become one of the very most popular because of the prominence of the sport on the world stage (Markovits and Green, 2017). Whilst there are a variety of soccer-themed videogames, two of the most famous and bestselling series include *FIFA* (EA Sports) and *Football Manager*

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(SI Games). Both games provide different gameplay experiences with mass appeal (Conway, 2010).

Football Manager is an intertextual game within which gamers are unable to control the action or movement of soccer players on the pitch, but instead control and manage teams and players through text and words (Corliss, 2010). *Football Manager* focuses on providing gamers the opportunity to manage and organise a club, backroom staff and players (Crawford, 2006). *FIFA* has a different appeal altogether as it provides an on-pitch match experience through the virtual world that allows gamers to control the actions of their players, facilitate team management using the manager mode, as well as modifying the circumstances, such as stadiums, supporters and live commentaries. *FIFA* also allows gamers to create, train and be part of a team to compete with and against representations of real players or other gamers through online gameplay (Conway, 2010). Both games provide different soccer experiences for gamers, either as representations of real players or even managers, which allow gamers to virtually experience different areas and positions in soccer.

There is lack of understanding of the influence of soccer videogames on the development of soccer in specific nations. This is something noted by Markovits and Green (2017) who suggest that *FIFA* has recently aided the popularization of soccer in the USA where the sport has traditionally had a relatively low cultural presence in relation to the more dominant trio of baseball, basketball and American football. Whilst these authors did not utilise the figurational concept of diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties, here we use it to suggest that the various problems that exist within the development of HK soccer (discussed above) could potentially be at least partially challenged through videogames like *FIFA*.

Soccer is now big business involving teams and supporters who travel the world, advertising, international mass media coverage and commercial products (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009). Gibbons (2014) has previously discussed how globalisation has brought about a number of what Elias (1978; 1939/2000) would have termed 'unintended consequences' leading to new varieties of soccer consumption. Whilst Gibbons' focus was specifically upon English football fandom, it is clear that the practices of fans of HK soccer have also been led to create new consumption practices, in this case via soccer videogames. Both *FIFA* and *Football Manager* contain soccer leagues, teams and players from across the world. This

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allows gamers in HK for instance, to experience European soccer through gameplay. This is to be expected considering the European leagues are the best in standard, most rigorously marketed on a global scale, and as such are most well-known worldwide. They are thus seemingly a good example of the homogenisation argument regarding the impacts of global cultural expansion in that they appear to flow one-way from traditionally dominant Western nations to non-Western ones. In the same way that British expatriates created football clubs in order to emphasise their dominance over HK locals, English and European leagues maintain global power over those that are less well-known and developing, such as the HKPL, keeping them as outsiders in global soccer.

However, according to Stein *et al.* (2012), sports videogames have huge potential to become an efficient promotional tool to introduce less well-known soccer leagues to people across the world. This means they can be used as local tools of equalisation or resistance to the established world order (Maguire, 2005). Capital flows and developments in labour markets are characterised by de-nationalisation, a process in which nations share their cultures with other nations and become interdependent (Peichi, 2008). *FIFA* enables soccer fans to compete with opponents from other areas of the world through online gameplay and provides a forum for gamers to communicate and interact with one another diminishing contrasts created by national borders even when fans actually live on opposite sides of the world. For instance, there are areas in the forum that allow gamers to download the latest version of the gameplay, including soccer leagues, teams and players. Gamers are also able to create their own soccer leagues, teams and players then upload these for others to download for their games. This has the potential to make the power balance shift from its currently unequal situation to one that is more equal via a process 'whereby local cultures adapt and redefine any global cultural product to suit their particular needs, beliefs and customs' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004, p. 546). Andrews and Ritzer (2007, p.137) add that,

The *local* has been so effected by the *global*, that it has become, at all intents and purposes, *glocal*.... Thus, the processual and empirical continuum through which we conceptualize globalization is bounded by...*glocalization* ('the interpretation of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas').

Maguire (2000, p.367) emphasizes the possibility for 'new varieties of sport subcultures to national cultures' as a result of the 'media-sport production complex'. Whilst he did not refer to the rise of digital culture specifically, it appears that gamers are experiencing another kind of unintended consequence of globalisation.

There is Facebook page (created in 2013) called 'FIFA HONG KONG PATCH' <https://tinyurl.com/yc6twtrg> that allows gamers to download versions of the HK soccer leagues, teams and players for the latest *FIFA* game. This download was created by a group of HK soccer fans via 'Creation Centre', an area within the *FIFA* download centre. The soccer fans who manage this Facebook page are passionate volunteers who believe this medium is an opportunity to introduce HK soccer to people in HK and those around the world (FHKP, 2013). By the end of 2014, the year the HKPL was created, the league had been downloaded 2892 times making it the 12th most downloaded soccer league on the global Creation Centre (EA Sports, 2014). Yet, despite what appears to be a high number of downloads, the game creators EA Sports did not include the HKPL in the marketed version of the game that year. The most recent version of the game, *FIFA '17*, boasts: 'Over 30 leagues and more than 650 playable teams from around the world' (EA Sports, 2016), yet neither the HKPL nor any of its clubs are anywhere to be found. Thus, whilst *FIFA* has potential to promote HK soccer to the rest of the world, this potential will never be realized unless the game creators include the HKPL in the game itself.

Whilst the recent investment to develop HK soccer through project Phoenix has had some success (Sallay, 2014), HK locals are heavily influenced by European soccer, particularly the English Premier League (EPL). According to Rookwood and Chan (2011, p.899), the rapid globalisation of the EPL has included 'the consumption of football from an extending network of international supporters, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region'. Some of the wealthiest clubs in the EPL have sought to capitalize on this growing supporter base through launching foreign websites and club shops in the Asia-Pacific region (see Manzenreiter and Horne, 2004). They have also set up coaching initiatives, some of which have been in HK, including Manchester United's 'international school' and Chelsea's 'soccer school' (Rookwood and Chan, 2011, p.899). Coupled with the dominance of EPL football on television and the Internet in HK (Rookwood and Chan, 2011), locals in HK have access to the highest standard of football, which has the potential at least to limit their interest in HK soccer. Attendances at HKPL matches are at an all-time low (Alladin, 2017), and

Commented [GT39]:

Commented [SL40]: A tiny url included here would help readers of the ebook to Jump straight to this.

Commented [GT41R40]: We have added one.

Commented [SL42]: How many times in 2017?

Commented [GT43R42]: We could not get hold of this information.

Commented [SL44]: You've not included enough supporting evidence to make this claim.

Commented [GT45R44]: We've toned this down by removing the word 'great'.

Commented [SL46]: Can you include more literature to support this point beyond one paper?

Commented [GT47R46]: We have added one.

this could be due to the high availability of European soccer. The dominance of European football in the *FIFA* videogame only adds to the potential for HK locals to disengage from their own HKPL. However, there is not enough empirical evidence to fully support the argument that this has actually happened. Further research is required into the relationship between declining fan attendance at HKPL matches and the dominance of European soccer on TV, the Internet and in videogames such as *FIFA*. The previously mentioned 'Hong Kong patch' could have provided a challenge to the fact that the HKPL has been seemingly overlooked by the creators of *FIFA*.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay the goal has been to apply the figurational concept of 'diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties' to help understand and interpret the potential of soccer videogames for the promotion of HK soccer to the rest of the world. In order to do this, it was important to consider how this approach applies to explaining the long-term development of soccer within HK.

Since the handover of power from Britain to China in 1997, HK soccer declined but had reached some peak levels in recent major Asian soccer competitions at both national and club levels, which provided encouragement and confidence to the HKSAR government, HKFA and those local soccer supporters who were keen to see HK soccer return to the so called 'golden age' enjoyed between the 1950s and 1980s so that HK can once again contend with its neighbours China, Japan and South Korea. This desire for national prestige is common amongst individuals and groups within contemporary society due to the paradoxical nature of globalisation processes as they involve both processes of homogenisation and heterogenisation.

The HKSAR government and the HKFA implemented Project Phoenix in an attempt to raise the standard of HK soccer to meet the criteria of the Asian Soccer Confederation. However, the government and the HKFA grappled with the dilemma of how to implement Project Phoenix, specifically how to develop soccer facilities whilst at the same time seeking to retain its cosmopolitan appeal, especially when cities in China and Singapore are increasingly seen as rival financial and trading centres (McDonagh and Wong, 2005).

Commented [SL48]: You don't have the empirical evidence to make this claim so consider tempering your claim. From your earlier argument 'modding' FIFA is a way to promote the league so a more nuanced argument is required here.

Commented [GT49R48]: We have tried to provide a more nuanced argument here.

Commented [SL50]: Once more in the section I don't see how you've used Elias or figurationalism to guide your analysis? The conceptual element must be a key element of all chapters in this edition given the collection is aiming to promote a more theatrically rigorous engagement with the current digital zeitgeist.

Commented [GT51R50]: We have made attempts to rectify this criticism.

Commented [SL52]: The conclusion needs to be rewritten so that it draws out the major arguments of the chapter and how videogames, explicitly, are impacting the current moment in terms of its material effects. Perhaps this section is moved earlier and used as the theoretical framework and you write another conclusion.

Commented [GT53R52]: We have attempted to do this.

The main restriction to the successful development of soccer in HK is the lack of land available for soccer pitches. The situation of a tight housing supply is the first priority for the government to solve which comes ahead of its development of soccer. This means that alternative means are required to help promote HK soccer, one of which could be soccer videogames, considering their popularity in HK and across the globe. Soccer videogames have some potential to promote HK soccer to both locals and other nations but this potential is limited. The creation of a download containing HK soccer leagues which was made available to *FIFA* video gamers initially received a positive response in downloads. However, the download number clearly did not meet the expectations of the makers of the game, EA Sports, enough to persuade them to consider adding the HKPL into the *FIFA* game. Thus it would appear that whilst possibilities for local emulation of and then resistance to global flows were possible in this case via the creation of new varieties of consumption practice (the HK football patch), these new varieties have not yet been assimilated into the practices of the established group (the creators of *FIFA*). Popular soccer videogames such as *FIFA* and *Football Manager* showcase many soccer leagues from across the globe. This means they have some potential to promote less well-known leagues and clubs on the local and global stage. Yet in the case of HK at least, it seems that the global dominance of the best English and European leagues and clubs is a significant barrier which prevents soccer videogames from really expanding the horizons of less well-known leagues and clubs.

In order for the development of soccer to be successful in HK, the HKSAR government, the HKFA, clubs and fans must unite to ensure the global mass media takes note of HK soccer. Much further research into the development and promotion of HK soccer, including the place soccer videogames play in this, is required in order to see HK reclaim its title as the 'Football Kingdom of the Far East' (Lee, 2015, p.25).

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