

SPORTS

SOCCER

Solving the naturalization conundrum

With Team China’s squad featuring two foreign-born stars, new CFA proposals look to strike right balance on imports

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Ever since Brazil-born Ai Kesen’s groundbreaking debut in the red of Team China, debate has raged on the issue of naturalized players in Chinese soccer.

The Guangzhou Evergrande forward, aka Elkeson, became the first player without Chinese heritage to play for the national team in a September World Cup qualifier in the Maldives. He joined England-born Li Ke, who has a mother of Chinese origin, as the squad’s second naturalized player.

The question of just how far the Chinese Football Association might take their naturalization policy has inevitably arisen, with some fans even concerned that homegrown players could one day be in the minority in the domestic game.

According to Beijing Youth Daily, the CFA and representatives of the 16 Chinese Super League clubs met in Shanghai on Monday to address potential rule changes on naturalized players, with a number of eye-catching proposals emerging from the summit that could be enforced next season.

Perhaps the most significant proposal of all is that naturalized players with Chinese ancestry will be classified as homegrown and, as such, will be subject to the same rules, including the salary cap, that domestic players must adhere to.

It is reported that the CFA wants to permit each CSL club to register a maximum of two naturalized players without Chinese heritage, but with only one allowed on the pitch at the same time.

This season, clubs have been permitted four foreigners in match-day squads, with three allowed on the



Ai Kesen (right) and Li Ke this year became Team China’s first ever naturalized players. Brazil-born Ai Kesen’s selection garnered extra attention given he has no Chinese heritage, with the CFA now looking to limit clubs to two such players per squad. XINHUA

pitch simultaneously.

Current CSL leader Evergrande, which is expected to wrap up a record-extending eighth domestic title on Sunday, would appear to have the most to lose from the would-be policy.

Evergrande striker Ai Kesen has reportedly been assisting the club in efforts to persuade more players to

join its naturalized ranks, meaning some could be facing up to loan spells elsewhere.

“Right now only Guangzhou Evergrande and Shandong Luneng have naturalized players without Chinese heritage, and under the new policy, it seems that Evergrande can only keep Ai Kesen and Ricardo Goulart,” soccer reporter Zhao Yu wrote on

social media.

“In the future, it will be much harder for new naturalized players without Chinese heritage to enter Chinese professional leagues.”

While Ai Kesen has helped level up standards at Evergrande and the national team, splashing out on foreigners not as feasible for clubs with lesser financial resources.

That has led to fears that unregulated naturalization could widen the gap between the haves and have-nots as powerhouses like Evergrande could choose to inject more foreign talent into their squads, thereby extending their trophy collections and growing their coffers.

Striking the right balance between upping playing standards

and giving young homegrown talent enough minutes on the pitch is also a concern.

Salary cap

Monday’s meeting in Shanghai also discussed implementing a stricter salary cap.

Last Wednesday, a CFA statement demanded that all clubs delay the signing of new contracts for domestic players in its top three tiers. The CFA said the move was in the interests of all professional clubs and the healthy development of Chinese soccer.

Beijing Youth Daily reported that CSL players’ salaries will remain capped at 10 million yuan (\$1.4 million), but it’s expected that efforts will be increased to clamp down on clubs that try to exploit loopholes in the rules. Caps of 6 million yuan and 3 million yuan will apply to second- and third-tier teams, respectively.

It is also proposed that any player earning the uppermost level of the cap — 10 million yuan — will require the club’s permission if he wants to transfer teams.

Moreover, each club will be permitted one so-called “Super Foreign Player”, whose transfer fee should not exceed 25 million euros (\$28 million), with no limits on his salary.

This proposal, however, did not go down well with a number of clubs, who argued that the “super” player’s unlimited salary may breach existing rules on investment and could potentially be damaging to a squad’s overall cohesion.

A final round of talks is scheduled for early December when the CFA will hope to iron out these details.

Ultimately, the CFA hopes any rule changes are fair and to the benefit of the Chinese game, particularly youth development.

By LIANG KAIYAN
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Nearly 2,000 works of 55 photographers from all over the world are being shown at a photographic festival in Jimei district of Xiamen, East China’s Fujian province.

Bringing opportunities for participants to have more exchanges in the photographic field, the Jimei and Arles International Photo Festival opened last week and will run until Jan 5, 2020.

The international event will hold 30 exhibitions showcasing works from countries and regions including France, Greece, Italy and India.

Among them, eight exhibitions will show works from French photo festival Rencontres d’Arles, organizers said.

One of the exhibitions casts an eye on local Chinese lifestyles, with French photographer Guy le Querrec displaying his photos of life in Chinese cities including Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing, Jiangsu province back in the 1980s. The exhibition is curated by Shang Lu.

Le Querrec said in his eyes, residents always look like dancers in his photos.

He also visited Hui’an county in Quanzhou city, Fujian province, where he took photos of the locals in the 1980s.

The photos are not just a great memory, but also provide a great contrast to modern China.

He Dongning, head of Jimei district, said the district is ramping up efforts to promote its high-quality development and is striving to build itself into the most beautiful district in the island city of Xiamen.

“The cultural creativity and tourism industry is one of the six major industrial clusters that we have focused on,” He said.

“Constantly holding such high-level cultural activities is of great significance in promoting Jimei’s cultural development, energizing the city’s creativity and better satisfying people’s spiritual life,” the official said.

During the event, organizers have held competitions and handed out prizes for talented photographers and photographic visionaries, aiming to encourage more creativity in the photographic field.

Among them an artistic body of



From left: An instructor introduces the photographs to visitors from China and abroad. Artists and winners at the awarding ceremony for women photographers during the event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Photography festival puts Jimei district in global focus



The Jimei and Arles International Photo Festival in Xiamen, Fujian province, showcases 30 exhibitions demonstrating works from countries and regions including France, Greece, Italy and India.

work called *Chi Ren Shuo Meng*, or *Pie in the Sky*, won a prize for its photographic vision.

The work was created by Chinese photographer Yi Lian and it was

inspired by dreams. Since 2010, Yi said he has recorded his thoughts and dreams on video, and the images have close connections between himself and his hometown.

To participate in the competition, Yi said he had spent more than half a year arranging the images he took.

Film director Gu Changwei, a judge of the competition, thought

highly of Yi’s work. It is a work that obviously has taken a long time to accomplish, Gu said.

Luo Yang, won the female photographer prize for her work *Youth*.

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He Dongning, head of Jimei district

Luo said she had studied female growth with her camera for the past 10 years. Her previous works followed the changes in society and generations of young people, according to Luo.

Mei Ting, a Chinese actress, attended the award ceremony, and said works of female photographers feature gentle and touch, yet which is “very powerful”.

Young photographers should keep their passion for their career and maintain an original and creative mindset during creation, Mei said.

Rencontres d’Arles is an annual French photography festival founded in 1970, which has a global reputation as a springboard for photographic and contemporary creative talents.

Since 2015, Jimei district photography festival has been held in conjunction with the Renctres d’Arles festival in France, which has attracted more than 230,000 people to attend.

Rong Rong, co-promoter of the festival, said photography has flourished in Jimei district.

“This event stimulates the cultural ecosystem of Jimei, and helps us to connect the world with open eyes,” Rong said.

Photography can connect cultures around the world and help to build an active dialogue with neighbors such as Japan, Indonesia and South Korea, he said.

“We hope this event will continue to take root here to bring surprises for everyone and to inject more cultural elements into the marvelous city,” he said.