

**FOOTBALL CULTURE AND THE POLITICS OF LOCALISM:  
A CASE STUDY OF CHONBURI FOOTBALL CLUB**

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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บทคัดย่อและแฟ้มข้อมูลฉบับเต็มของวิทยานิพนธ์ตั้งแต่ปีการศึกษา 2554 ที่ให้บริการในคลังปัญญาจุฬาฯ (CUIR)  
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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต  
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| Field of Study | International Development Studies                                                           |
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Accepted by the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University in  
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ชั้นชนก ศิริวัฒน์ : ฟุตบอลและการเมืองเชิงวัฒนธรรมของท้องถิ่นนิยม: กรณีศึกษาสโมสรฟุตบอลชลบุรี  
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สาขาวิชา การพัฒนาระหว่างประเทศ ..... ลายมือชื่อนิสิต.....

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งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ ได้ทำการศึกษาวิเคราะห์ว่าสโมสรฟุตบอลชลบุรี ถึงรูปแบบการมีส่วนร่วมของประชาชนในท้องถิ่นต่อสโมสร โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อแสวงหาคำตอบเกี่ยวกับวิธีการของสโมสรในการสร้างความสัมพันธ์รูปแบบการดำเนินการ และลักษณะการเพิ่มขึ้นของผู้สนับสนุน หรือแฟนคลับของสโมสร ซึ่งผลของการดำเนินการของสโมสรดังกล่าว อาจจะไม่มรูปแบบเฉพาะ หรือผูกพันกับสภาพภูมิศาสตร์ของจังหวัดชลบุรี

เป็นที่ทราบกันว่าฟุตบอลเป็นกีฬาที่เป็นวิถีชีวิต และจัดเป็นกิจกรรมที่เป็นวัฒนธรรมพื้นฐานที่อยู่กับการดำรงชีวิตของประชาชน งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ได้เสนอข้อคิดเห็นเกี่ยวกับอัตลักษณ์และวิธีการผ่านกระบวนการขับเคลื่อนอันทรงพลังของกีฬา และการวางแผนงานโครงการที่ซับซ้อน ซึ่งเป็นปรากฏการณ์ทางสังคมอีกประการหนึ่งที่น่าสนใจ โดยวิธีการศึกษาวิจัยในครั้งนี้ ได้ใช้การรวบรวมข้อมูลในเชิงผสมผสานทั้งจากการสัมภาษณ์ การวิเคราะห์ประเด็นเนื้อหาสาระ ซึ่งโดยส่วนใหญ่จะมาจากผู้สนับสนุนหรือแฟนคลับในท้องถิ่น

ผลการศึกษาวิจัยได้สรุปเป็นข้อเสนอแนะว่า การเกิดขึ้นของสโมสรฟุตบอลชลบุรีที่ปรากฏให้เห็นในปัจจุบัน ได้มาจากความสัมพันธ์ใน 3 ช่องทาง ระหว่างปัจเจกบุคคล จังหวัด และสโมสร ซึ่งทั้งสามส่วนได้มีส่วนเสริมสร้างซึ่งกันและกัน และสุดท้ายสิ่งที่เกิดขึ้นได้แปรเปลี่ยนเป็นกระแสสังคม วัฒนธรรม เศรษฐกิจและการเมือง การเกิดขึ้นของกระแสดังกล่าว ได้ก่อให้เกิดกิจกรรมการรวมกลุ่มประจำสัปดาห์ของปัจเจกบุคคลเพื่อทำกิจกรรมร่วมกันถึง 6 – 7 พันคน จากสาขาอาชีพที่หลากหลายในท้องถิ่น และได้สร้างความภาคภูมิใจในกิจกรรมที่ตนเองมีส่วนร่วมอย่างไม่เคยมีมาก่อน ซึ่งการที่กิจกรรมกลุ่มขึ้นมาอย่างเป็นระบบดังกล่าว กลไกในการขับเคลื่อนสำคัญ คือ สโมสร องค์กรบริหารส่วนจังหวัด และชมรมลลามาซด

งานวิจัยได้พบว่า การเป็นสมาชิกและการใช้รูปแบบของสโมสรชลบุรีหรือ CFC ได้เป็นสายใยสำคัญที่ก่อให้เกิดแฟนคลับที่ยึดถือ “ความรู้สึกร่วมกันของเรา” และความรู้สึกการเป็นเจ้าของร่วมกันทั้งในด้านส่วนบุคคลและสาธารณชน

การศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้ สามารถสรุปได้เป็นประเด็นดังนี้

1. ฟุตบอลได้ก่อให้เกิดกิจกรรม ที่นำมาซึ่งอารมณ์ความรู้สึกร่วมกันของสมาชิกในสังคม
2. กิจกรรมการเล่นกีฬาฟุตบอล หรือกิจกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้องกับฟุตบอลได้ก่อให้เกิดหรือสนับสนุนกระบวนการทางสังคม เป็นสื่อกลางในการถ่ายทอดความเชื่อและกฎระเบียบ
3. กิจกรรมฟุตบอลผ่านกระบวนการรวมกลุ่มผ่านปัจเจกบุคคล กลุ่มบุคคล และชุมชน ได้ก่อให้เกิดการทำหน้าที่ช่วยเหลือร่วมกันอย่างบูรณาการ และได้สร้างความรู้สึกร่วมกันในการรวมตัว ความภาคภูมิใจร่วมกัน และความรู้สึกการเป็นเจ้าของสโมสรร่วมกัน
4. ฟุตบอลได้ทำหน้าที่เชื่อมกับการเมือง ทั้งในด้านการดึงผู้มีอำนาจทางการเมืองเข้ามาสนับสนุนในฐานะแฟนคลับ และทั้งด้านการใช้ฟุตบอลเป็นฐานทางการเมืองผ่านแฟนคลับ
5. สุดท้าย ฟุตบอลยังเป็นเครื่องมือที่นำไปสู่วัตถุประสงค์อื่น ๆ นอกเหนือจากกีฬาผ่านเครือข่ายของแฟนคลับ เช่น โครงการก่อสร้างโครงสร้างพื้นฐานให้กับชุมชน

สาขาวิชา การพัฒนาต่างประเทศ..... ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....

ปีการศึกษา 2555..... ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปริกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก.....

# # 5481109924 : MAJOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES  
KEYWORDS : FOOTBALL / POLITICS / CHONBURI / IDENTITY / LOCALISM

CHUENCHANOK SIRIWAT: FOOTBALL CULTURE AND THE  
POLITICS OF LOCALISM: A CASE STUDY OF CHONBURI FOOTBALL  
CLUB ADVISOR : JAKKRIT SANGKHAMANEE, Ph.D.,104 pp.

This thesis examined how Chonburi Football Club (CFC) is able to ignite forms of localism to emerge. As part of the objectives, it explored the means in which forms of association to the Club create, shape, and reinforce identities of supporters, whom may not be specifically from or tied to the geographic space of Chonburi. As it is in everyday life that football culture is primarily perpetuated, expressed and experienced, this thesis presents a qualitative view on how contemporary identities are created through the powerful vehicle of sport and outlines the implications it has as a social phenomena. Qualitative approaches were used to gather data from semi-structured ethnographic interviews and content analysis was applied further understand the means in which a sense of localism is created.

Results from the thesis suggests that there is a three-way relationship between the ‘individual, province, and club’ in which enables interactions to occur in aspects of social, cultural, economical and political dimensions. Through the activity of football, it has enabled up to six to seven thousand individuals from various backgrounds to gather on a weekly basis, creating and heightening a sense of pride like never before. If viewed as a social system, the Football Club, Provincial Administration Organization and the Chalarn Chon Community are agents, relying on one another to maintain and reproduce the structure of the community.

Research findings suggests that membership and identification with CFC has served as a fountain, providing a source of ‘we-feelings’ and a solid sense of belonging in both the private and public spheres. In short, the following conclusions to be made:

1. Football serves a socio-emotional function;
2. Football and football-related activities encourage a process of socialization to take place. It is a tool in the transmission of beliefs and norms;
3. Through the use of football, it has served as an integrative function in aiding the integration of individuals, groups and communities together and heightening a sense of unity, pride and belonging;
4. Football has served political function(s) for those in power as the fan clubs provide as political bases for those in power;
5. And lastly, it has served other non-sport purposes such as facilitating community projects through the networks of fan clubs.

Field of Study : International Development Studies Student’s Signature .....

Academic Year : 2012 ..... Advisor’s Signature .....

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I love football. I hate football too, sometimes – but never for long enough to dent that complicated passion. And as a supporter myself, thanks to all the football fans out there who have inspired me in the past – you know who you are. And for the people who will inspire me in the future – I can't wait to see who you'll be. But in both cases: Thank you!

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

AFC : Asian Football Confederation  
CFC : Chonburi Football Club  
CCC: Chalarn Chon Community  
PAO : Provincial Administration Organization  
TAO: Tambon Administration Organization

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

A few months ago I was speaking to an old friend about the fortunes of the Thai national team, after showing a rather surprising performance against the Australian national team for the 2014 World Cup qualifications. In a mere thirty minutes, we covered a number of issues: the Thai Prime Minister, the Occupy Wall Street Movement, and the future of the Thailand's lese majeste law, etc. Then we started talking about football – two hours later, we were still at the same topic. We had discussed a range of issues, the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, fan cultures in England, corrupt football associations in Southeast Asia, influential politicians involved in sports, the quasi-issues regarding the broadcasting of the EURO 2012, and many emotional issues such as the most beautiful goals and biggest upsets. Amongst other socio-political issues that societies face, football headlines may seem less serious, in comparison to other issues such as armed conflicts or natural disasters. Yet when examined carefully, football is a significant aspect of social culture in various places around the world (apart from the United States). It exhibits politics of its own, shaped by its own governing body. Beneath the result of the game, there are complex issues that are inextricably linked to other social, political, economic and cultural aspects of our world today. Football is undisputedly the world's most popular game. And simply put, football is one of the favorite sports of all Thais.

Apart from football being part of social culture, it also plays an important role in the political culture and politics of a community or country. In Thailand, football has been supported by politicians for various ends. However, this issue has not received much academic attention, therefore this thesis strives for a deeper understanding of how a sporting club such as Chonburi Football Club is able to ignite forms of localism to emerge. It explores the means in which forms of association to the Club create, shape, and reinforce identities of supporters, whom may not be specifically tied to the geographic space.

It is in everyday life that football culture is primarily perpetuated, expressed and experienced. This is not saying that the excitement experienced during the matchdays and the performances of the football team do not matter. However, although the results are important, it is not the primary aspect of football culture that affects individuals' notions of self-identity, belonging and interpersonal relations. Yet all of these aspects are initiated, reinforced and challenged through the internalization and contestation within activities that occur in the daily practices of life. It occurs through the ritualization and activities organized by the fans. As a result, the research will explore whether these social identities have implications for other social and cultural activities that occur amongst the particular group.

The passion for football in Thailand is undeniable. Up to 44 million Thais watched the one-month long 2006 World Cup broadcasted from Germany (Manager Newspaper, 2549). Out of a population of 66 million people, this is rather remarkable. According to Starcom Mediavest Group, the figures increased by 26.6% from the previous World Cup held in 2002 (Manager Newspaper, 2549). Back in 2002 when the World Cup was co-hosted in Japan and South Korea, there were a total of 1.5 billion viewers worldwide in the last thirty days of the tournament, with Thailand, South Korea, and China contributing to the most viewers (Browning, 2010). This reflects the amount of interest Thais have in watching football, particularly the FIFA World Cup or even the top football leagues such as the English Premier League or the Bundesliga of Germany. When it comes to the significance of football on people's lives in Thailand, it maybe most vividly summed up by Stanley Rouse, the former English Football Association Secretary and FIFA President, in 1952:

“If this can be termed the century of the common man, then soccer, of all sports, is surely his game... In a world haunted by the hydrogen and napalm bomb, the football field is a place where sanity and hope are still left unmolested” (Kuhn, 2011, p. 51).

The story of football development in Thailand is different to that of other European countries, whereby football has always been tied to support by fans from different local areas. For instance, Manchester United Football Club was formed in 1878, albeit under a very different name –Newton Heath LYR (Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway) (Manchester United, 2012). It was established as an activity for the workers

in the railway yard at Newton Heath to indulge in their own passion for football, without realizing the impact they were about to have several hundred years later on the national and global level. Since the fan base constitute as a vital part of a club's success, the identification between clubs and fans becomes extremely crucial. On the other hand, in Thailand, football never became officially linked with local areas or provinces until Chonburi became the first province to do so in the year 2007, after winning the Thailand Premier League. The gradual emergence of provincial teams in the Thailand Premier League only began when the Provincial League was merged with the Thai League, resulting in the present day Thailand Premier League. Therefore, it is arguable that localism has never entirely been associated with football fans and clubs but only slowly began when the structure of the league changed.

Localism or the kind of relationship that started to emerge more clearly after 2007 refers to the feelings of attachment and identification between an individual with a particular place. Decision-making processes involving economic, political and socio-cultural aspects therefore often have roots that trace back to the importance of localism (Pattana Kittiasa, 2546, p. 105). More importantly, it is through the local individuals that forms of identity are shaped in various ways. Kittiasa (2546) argues that localism is an "academic as well as a sociocultural construct" that is reflected in several forms, such as through belief systems, identity representations, local wisdom and local knowledge. The growing sentiments and support by locals for their provincial football team also provides another interesting example of how football is used as part of an identification and allegiance to a particular province. Football, even at the local provincial level is a microcosm of broader economic, cultural, and political trends with a range of stakeholders involved from locals, government officials to influential transnational corporations.

Chonburi Football Club (hereafter CFC) was the first-ever provincial football club to win the Thailand Premier League (TPL) in 2007. This marked a new chapter in Thai history as in the previous years, no provincial club has ever won the highest football cup at the national level. The fans of CFC were the first group to gather, express, and identify themselves as avid supporters. It was a new phenomenon in the world of Thai football, as the club and supporters capitalized on their identifications with

“Chonburi” as a province, which made them different to other major clubs which were sponsored by private corporations or state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

Since winning the most prestigious title in 2007, CFC has become an integral part of local provincial uniqueness. This has led to the construction of a distinctive identity, which allows locals to believe that they are ‘something different’ from the rest of Thai football fans. For other clubs that are sponsored by private companies and SOEs, this particular ‘pride’ and connection with the local area is not as evident. But with CFC, fans do not only identify themselves with the players and the club but more with the shared understanding that this club belongs to the people of Chonburi. The Club also utilizes this provincial aspect for marketing purposes to further connect with their fans. Thus, this particular sense of identity is often contrasted with other clubs’ identities. A feeling of attachment to the province becomes ignited through the vehicle of football. Chonburi is no longer just a place of birth, or a province they work in, but Chonburi is part of their identity. Alongside this, another common example of the way the fans portray themselves is that they are not hired to cheer and support the Club but they support the Club simply because it is the pride of their own province.



**Figure 1:** Chonburi fans supporting their team. (Note: the text on the red poster says "Not Hired to Cheer") Source: Nutthapol U-Bolphan, March 2012



**Figure 2:** Emotional fans at the games cheering for “Chalarm Chon” or translated as “Chonburi Sharks” Source: Nutthapol U-Bolphan, March 2012

In the past years, with the ever-growing popularity amongst local Thais for the TPL, various stakeholders have seen the importance in investing in sports as a means to justify a diverse array of other political, economic, and social agendas.



The development and administration of the CFC has been directly linked to the initiatives of Mr Wittaya Kunpluem, current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Provincial Administration Organization of Chonburi (P.A.O). At the local level, the basic structure of the Thai government is separated into the P.A.O, the municipality, and the Tambon Administrative Organization (T.A.O.), with each kind of local government having its own local association (Chardchawarn, 2010, p. 36). Being the CEO of the P.A.O of Chonburi province, a home to approximately 1.3 million people, Mr Wittaya Kunpluem, son of the renowned local politician known as “Kamnan Poh” is an influential politician. The Kunpluem family is one of the most powerful families in Chonburi province. Alongside officially serving as the CEO of the P.A.O, Mr Wittaya also serves as the Chairman of CFC.

In 2009, the combined efforts of local politicians, the P.A.O, Municipality, T.A.O, and City of Pattaya demanding the government and parliament to amend the legislation to allow executives in local government positions to run for office for longer than two continuous terms proved successful. As a result, popularly elected local politicians are able to hold positions as executives “without term limits” (Supasawad Chardchawarn, 2553, p. 37). Despite criticisms of individuals dominating and monopolizing power in local authorities, local politicians are heavily investing in local politics as a fundamental ground base for securing power and popularity to lay firm foundations for other political activities. Mr Wittaya is linked to official party politics under the name of “Pak Palang Chon”, a party founded in 2011 by his very own mother. Pak Palang Chon campaigned for six seats in the 2011 national elections, and won all six seats. Despite being a rather small coalition party to Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra’s administration, Pak Palang Chon were given one ministerial position quota. As ministers do not have to be electorally elected, Mr Wittaya was one of the speculated candidates to serve as the Minister of Tourism and Sports position. Yet, by accepting the ministerial position, Mr Wittaya would have to resign from being the CEO of the PAO of Chonburi. After weeks of speculation, in the end, it was Mrs Sukkamol Kunpluem, Mr Wittaya’s sister-in-law who became the Minister of Culture. Mrs Sukkamol is married to the former Minister of Tourism and Sport, Mr Sontaya Kunpluem, who is the brother of Mr Wittaya. Alongside top-ministerial involvement in Thai politics, the party itself also sponsors representatives at the municipal level. Therefore, the link to the CEO’s direct involvement in the popular

sport of football may partially constitute as a strategy in strengthening and maintaining political and social legitimacy at the grass-root level.

### **1.1.1 The Political Economy of Thai Football**

Each and every fiscal year, the government allocates the biggest proportion of its sports fund to sponsor football. In 2009, it allocated 210 million Baht to sponsor the Thai Premier League (Matichon, 2009). Alongside the government's financial support, the private sector has shown continuous interest in becoming the official partner and sponsor of the Football Association of Thailand. The footballing industry is definitely a lucrative industry. 16 years ago when the League was first established, a foreign alcohol corporation funded the league with financial support of approximately 75 million baht (Pattanamongkol, 2011, p. 145). In the present day, a local sports drink company known as "Sponsor" has solely sponsored the league with up to 70 million baht per season. Alongside the influx of interests from the corporate side, the state under the Sports Authority of Thailand (Ministry of Tourism and Sports) allocates up to 100 million baht for operation costs, as well as providing the Champion with 10 million baht as prize money for the TPL.

Alongside sponsorship money, the money circulated within different clubs has grown remarkably. In 2011, when CFC were visitors to Buriram PEA (As of the year 2012, the club is known as Buriram United) at the I-Mobile Stadium in Buriram, the money generated from ticket sales alone valued up to 1.83 million baht, with up to 23,712 spectators attending the big match (Pattanamongkol, 2011, p. 144).

At the club level, in the past four years there has been a dramatic increase in sponsorship of teams competing in the TPL as well as the spectators attending the games. For example, in the 2011 TPL season, the television coverage of every match of the TPL constituted as a major incentive for large and medium sized companies to financially support the clubs as an indirect way to further publicize their businesses.

In 2010, the conservative estimates of the Thai Premier League was worth up to 600 million baht, yet in 2012, it has been estimated to reach over 1 billion baht (Pattanamongkol, 2011, p. 144). As the popularity for the League increases, the

commercialization of sports has dramatically amplified. The footballing industry in Thailand depends on a systematic combination of ticket sales, concessions, official sponsorships, and the sale of media broadcasting rights. Despite uncommonly spoken of, the involvement of politicians in lucrative sporting industries such as football in Thailand has also been linked to political motives. The local political culture in the present day has transformed from the past. It is now common to see village heads or community leaders as leaders of a sub-set of Chonburi Football fan club. For instance the Chonburi fans under the name of “Chalarm<sup>1</sup> Bowin” or “Chalarm Ban Bueng” represent the devoted fans from those constituencies. During the elections of 2011, political activities were arranged amongst the fans, with Mr Wittaya the CEO of the Club clearly stating his support for the Pak Palang Chon Party.

### **1.1.2 Positioning Sports in the Development Discourse**

In our world today, it is impossible to fully understand contemporary society and culture without acknowledging the place and role of sport. The significant role of sports is both an international and local phenomenon, it is important for politicians and world leaders to be associated and interested in sports; it contributes to the economy, it serves as an agent of the consumerist world, and without doubt plays an important role in the television and media industries. We live in a world in which some of the richest millionaires and poorest people identify themselves with forms of sport in some way. Almost every government around the world commits financial and public resources to sporting infrastructure because of sport’s perceived benefits to improving health, education, preventing crime and promoting employment. Debates on identity, national traditions, business monopolization and globalization are all included within the contemporary world of sport. Sport matters to people. It has the ability to attract, mobilize and inspire. According to the United Nations, sport offers important principles as outlined in the Charter of the United Nations. The organization itself employs the use of sport as a tool for various of its grassroots projects in emergency humanitarian relief situations or in long term development projects at both local, regional and global scales (UNOSDP, 2012). More importantly,

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<sup>1</sup> Chalarm (ฉลาม) means shark in Thai language. The media often refers to Chonburi Football Club in short as “Chalarm Chon” (ฉลามชลบุรี), or translated as Chonburi Sharks.

as sport plays a significant role in promoting social integration and economic development, its scope and use in understanding society and culture today is wide-ranging and no longer serves as a peripheral subject of interest to other field of studies.

Similarly, the football industry in Thailand encompasses various social, economic, political and cultural spheres. The sense of belonging and security offered in sport in comparison to other aspects of contemporary life makes it an interesting area of research. Sport offers geographically dispersed communities and individuals to connect and form social phenomenon(s). With this particular case of Chonburi, it continues to serve as another array of characteristic that people may draw upon to (collectively and individually) express themselves. This research into sport is not solely to develop the sport itself, but also to analyze and attempt to contribute to wider social changes in the world in which we live in.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The main question this thesis strives to answer is:

How has football culture created localism and in which ways has localism influenced the way local politics operate in Chonburi? In order to answer this main guiding question, the following four sub-questions will also be addressed in separate chapters.

1. How is football situated in the political culture of Chonburi?
2. How has local identity and a sense of belonging been constructed and shaped through football?
3. How do locals perceive football in relation to their everyday cultural politics?
4. How has Chonburi Football Club created forms of localism to emerge, and in which ways has football served as a site for ritualized identification with the Club and province, despite the supporters' geographic locality?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to understand how the channels in which identification to Chonburi Football Club is created and reinforced by supporters. In doing so, it intends to explore the socio-cultural events that have been constructed via

the vehicle of football to understand the means in which supporters' identities are created and maintained despite not always being geographically from Chonburi province.

#### **1.4 Definition of Terminologies and Key Concepts**

1. **“Localism”** in this context refers to physical and mental identifications of individuals with the province of Chonburi. Thus forms of localism is now ‘reinvented’ or ‘reimagined’ through consumptive patterns of contemporary culture.
2. **“Sporting Sub-culture”** or a sub-cultural analysis refers to the place of sport within any segment of the population that makes it distinguishable from the wider society by its own cultural pattern (Jarvie, 2006, p.5). In general sub-cultures provide people with the freedom and choice to express and act on their opinions and beliefs. Jarvie (2006) describes it as the system of beliefs, values and norms that are shared or practiced by a group of people within a particular culture – sporting or otherwise.
3. **“Identity”** in this regard is defined as a person’s conception and expression of their individuality. It is achieved through the a construction and selection of a set of common symbols, taxonomy, activities and traditions which are constantly reproduced and given meaning and value to those who pledge their allegiance to the group. Thus, identity is fluid, and is normally constructed as being both relational and contextual. Football identities are performed so as to be appropriate to the given situations, for example, in the pub/café after a game, before being altered in accordance with what are known expectations of how to behave back at the family home. It creates a sense of “we-ness” amongst members or fellow supporters. Football, as an experience of a collective allegiance to the Club as a symbolic representation of individuality, forms a vital role in the expression of a “liquid” self as its presence emerges in some situations and diminishes at other times (Stone, 2007, p.179).

4. **“Social Identity”** as derived from Henri Tajfel’s (1978) theory in this case refers to “an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Therefore, social identity is also based on comparing the social status of one’s own group “to that of other relevant groups” whereby the “sense of belonging” that comes with group membership is a product of “internalizing and locating oneself...within a system of social categorization” (Hoover, 2005, p. 56).

### **1.5 Conceptual Framework**

My conceptual framework can be viewed and categorized into two main parts, with the main focus on issues regarding “localism”, “identity” and “socio-political tools”. The first part as seen in **Figure 3** is led by the Provincial Administrative Organization’s role and involvement in the provincial football team. Their involvements can be viewed in terms of the “physical arrangements” they provide and the “meaning construction” that happens at different levels.

The “physical arrangements” in this case refers to the institutional structure of the organization itself that is directly involved in local politics, the infrastructure it provides for football or Club-related activities, as well as the yearly financial budget in sponsoring the management of the Club. As for the “meaning construction”, this aspect ties closely with the construction of identity. At the provincial level, the football team has been constructed to resemble sources of local pride. Different methods to promote a sense of “shared fate” and “shared consciousness” has been employed in order to create value and incite feelings of belonging. Nevertheless at the regional level, the way the P.A.O. has constructed the meaning of CFC has been to dub Chonburi as the leading province in football development, and the ultimate home to football in the Eastern region of Thailand. When it comes to the regional level, CFC is renowned as a success but does not forget to recognize the other two clubs Pattaya United and Sriracha FC, whom are both owned and managed by Mr Wittaya Kunpluem’s relatives. The identity issue here is that there are more than one team from Chonburi, but there is only one team that has ever gone as far as winning the national premier league title. When it comes to a Chonburi team playing against each

other (i.e. CFC versus Pattaya United), the feelings of “us versus them” is less noticeable, in comparison to when, say, CFC plays against Buriram United. This is perhaps unsurprising, however, it reflects that identity construction may differ according to who it is compared with and in which context it is used. When local teams play against each other, the mood and theme of the match is more or less like a “brotherly game” as opposed to mere oppositions that must be thrashed in any way possible!

When it comes to the national level or when CFC is playing in an international tournament, the feelings associated with the Club are related to feelings of “national pride”. In addition, at the national level, CFC is regarded as the prime example of the development of local fan bases. Being one of the first professional team to have a full-fledged system in managing its fans as well as a professional boarding school/academy for the youth squad, CFC is still known as a great example in the development of professional football in Thailand.

Moreover, this reflects that the issue of identity plays out differently at varying levels, depending on whom it is being compared to. However, all this is further reflected in football being used as a social tool in creating social and cultural events. These events that occur are not simply restricted to the football stadium and the grounds around it, yet they are seen in normal daily-life activities as fans gather to celebrate religious festivals, birthdays, merit-making, as well as a casual get-togethers. The feelings of a common shared identity as well as other feelings of friendship and connection are constructed and maintained through these unofficial channels where fans meet. Football has undeniably allowed locals with the same passion to meet and celebrate through victories, losses and draws, but beyond the results of the game, the social phenomena that occurs and the way it plays out makes football an interesting tool for social transactions. Sport can easily mask other social, economic and political issues that may be scrutinized if politicians were to invest in other areas such as mining, dam construction and entertainment complexes. On the contrary, when politicians are involved in developing sports (i.e. football), it seems slightly more optimistic and less doubtful. More importantly, by being heavily involved in developing football, it is also another vehicle in gaining and maintaining political support and allegiance. And on the conceptual framework diagram, this is where the interest of fans merges with

the interests of local authorities to form a sense of sharedness and a common social identity that is further reflected in the form of “localism”.

On the other hand, local fans also play an equally important role in the development and construction of a shared, social identity. Through their “physical engagement”, fans interact and reinforce their support for the team. In combination with “meaning perception”, or how they view themselves, fans express their attachments to the Club, province and perhaps, political leader through the medium of sport. Thus, when both “physical engagement” and “meaning perception” occurs, the Chonburi Football Fans are constantly constructing and maintaining their forms of local identity.

In my view, it is seen that sport is not just a form of physical pursuit or an activity that simply makes one healthy. It is quite the opposite. Sport from a sociological viewpoint can serve as a legitimate mirror in reflecting social, economic, and political realities that may be masked under the notion of “sport”. Sport is a powerful tool that is used to include and exclude groups of people. Likewise, the expression of identity as well as the impacts that CFC has on social, cultural and political realms will further be explored and unveiled in this thesis.



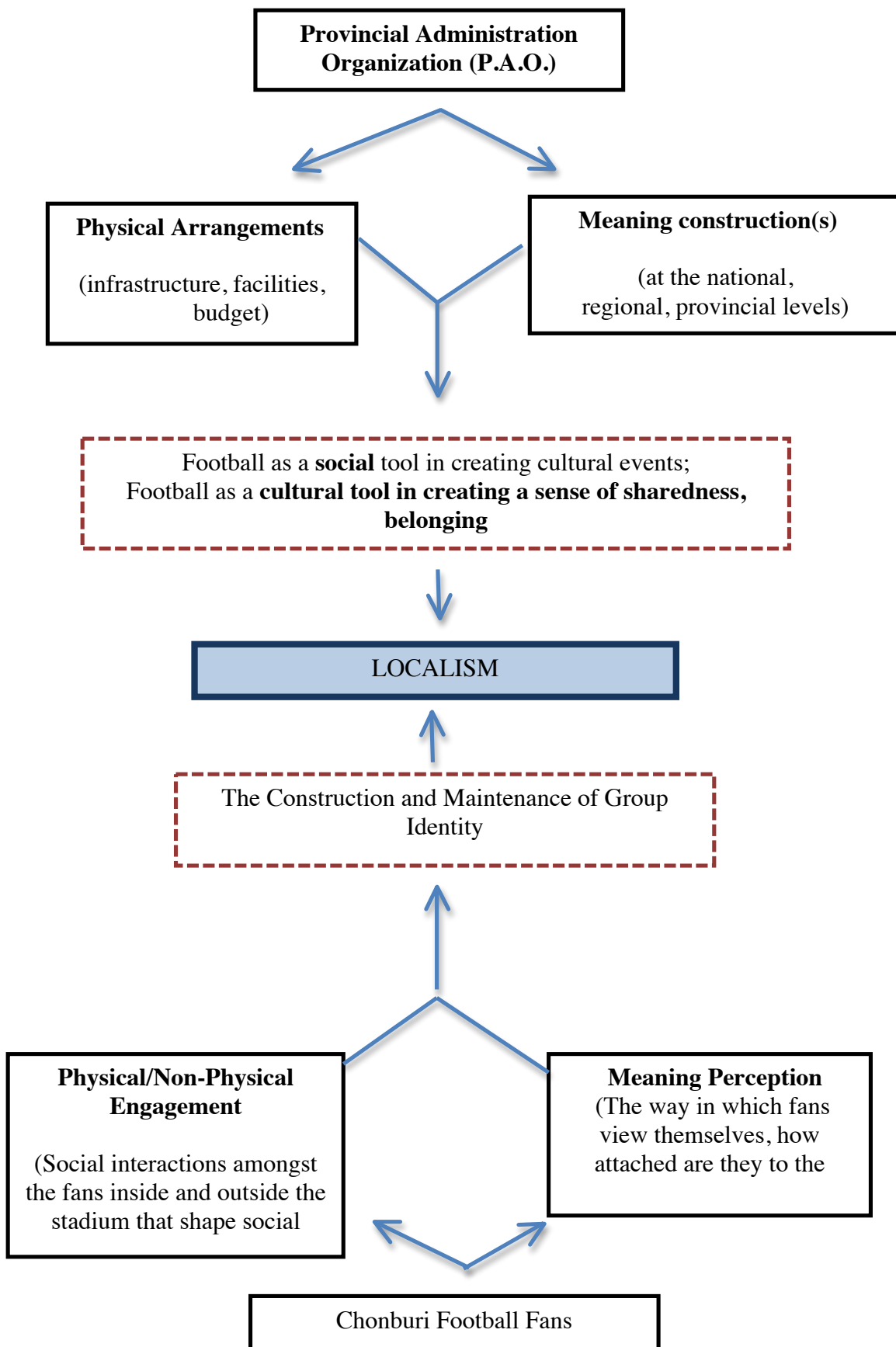


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

## 1.6 Methodology

In order to understand the relationship between localism and identity, qualitative research will be conducted.

Nevertheless, the majority of the research will be based on qualitative methods of data collection. In investigating human behavior, and how such behavior is related to the attitudes of the particular groups under investigation, an ethnographic approach will be useful in better explaining the cultural patterns of the group. Throughout the entire research, approximately 5-6 in-depth, ethnographic studies will be conducted. Open-ended questions, in-depth interviews and a mixture of observational methods will be applied to gain a holistic perspective rather than focusing on individual aspects. With hopes of gaining better understandings of the perspectives of the particular group studied, the ethnographic approach will be applicable as it focuses on the *emic* perspective, which takes the viewpoint of the people being studied, rather than the *etic*, which is the researcher's own perspective. The respondents will be based on purposive sampling method.

### 1.6.1 Research Tools

The following research methods will be chosen based on which method will provide valid and reliable data to investigate the research problem:

- **Observation:** Observing the group provided me with a wealth of information, especially if the group is observed in their natural environment. This was heavily used in the early stages to get a useful idea of the group and its activities. In total, sixteen games were attended throughout the entire research process, and part of the field research was conducted abroad in Singapore. The list of games can be seen in the Appendix.
- **Participant Observation:** This will be used extensively throughout the entire research as much of the fieldwork will involve participant observation within

different environments, such as at the games, during away games, at fan gatherings, and so forth.

- **Semi- structured interviews:** Both methods will be used. The structured interviews will help collect pre-determined data, while the new and important data will be further collected through the use of the unstructured interviews. (See Appendix D for a list of interviewees)
  
- **Life histories:** This constitutes as an essential part of the data collection, in order to get the informant to narrate his/her experiences to me, as a researcher. This method was used with the key ethnographic interviewees which included:
  - 1) **Kimhun-** A former Technical school graduate, who has been living in Chonburi (relatively close to the Stadium) and has been a supporter for years. In his teens and among the other members of the group, Kimhun is known for his big collection of jerseys which dates back for seasons.
  - 2) **Ae-** Kimhun's mother whom started watching football after her son introduced her to the game.
  - 3) **Dale-** An English native who is a fan of Chonburi Football Club since he moved to Thailand. He works at an international school in Chonburi province, but also runs a website broadcasting the news of Chonburi Football Club in English.
  - 4) **Lek-** A devoted fan who lives in Ban-Bueng area of Chonburi. Has been a supporter since the team played in the Thai league.
  - 5) A key respondent who wishes to be unnamed as she gave some interesting insights into the role of politicians back in her own home (Nakhonratchasima) and the ways in which they tried to use football to serve political purposes.
  - 6) **Chart-** a factory worker employed in a Japanese corporation who has been a supporter of Chonburi Football Club over the years after moving to the province for work opportunities. He leads the Chalarm Tup Lhlekk subgroup.
  
- **Content Analysis:** The use of content analysis will further enhance the understanding of the group as part of this ethnographic approach. I will undertake a content analysis of the documents, texts, songs, and any other important texts produced or used by the groups that relate to their identity with the Club itself and ultimately to the province.

### **1.6.2 Sample Size**

As for the respondents, a major share of this research will rely on the information collected from the ethnographic interviews. In addition, as the research adopts multiple research tools, data triangulation will take place in order to maximize the validity of the information collected.

### **1.6.3 Accounting for Outsiders**

In order to ensure that this thesis is as adequately represented, interviews were also conducted among other individuals who lived in Amphoe Muang Chonburi. These were the outsiders, as they are not the main target group of this thesis. It provided valuable insight as some claimed they simply had no interest in football, while some felt indifferent. Yet a majority of the outsiders did not state their dislike for the team, but rather did not like the politician involved.

### **1.6.4 Gaining Entry**

With my own background as a reporter in sport, field research on Chonburi is not new. Having conducted several interviews in the past with some of the fan club groups, as well as personally knowing officials in the Club, making appointments for interviews would not be problematic. In terms of the field research, I believe that this is an advantage as I am well acquainted to the field.

Additionally, to facilitate the research process, I have some background knowledge of the 'gatekeepers', a group of individuals trusted by group members, who can introduce me to other members. These 'gatekeepers' are involved in establishing the fan clubs and have a lot of experience beyond the events held on a typical match day. However, they have been actively involved in arranging activities outside the stadium as a way to further promote their group and support for the Club. From preliminary research, some of the activities were done during the national festivals (such as Thai New Year Songkran, Loy Krathong, etc.) or prior to national and local political elections.

### **1.6.5 Research Limitations**

Due to time constraints, it would be best to focus on one particular province instead of undergoing an extensive comparative study on Chonburi and other provinces. It is an interesting area of research to see whether there is a connection between issues of identity and local provinces. Being based in a province was crucial for the Club and serves as a distinctive feature of the Club. It kick-started the idea of establishing a fan base that represented the local community. Prior to this, this has never happened before as a majority of the clubs were dominated by SOEs or large banking institutions. The fact that a provincial-based team was able to win the Championship in 2007, kicked start and inspired many provinces to follow suit. This led to the recent initiatives in developing “Buriram United”, “Chiang Rai United”, or even “Pattani FC”.

The second issue that could cause some limitations would be gender-based issues, particularly during the fieldwork stages. Although the Club has a relatively high amount of female supporters and fan club leaders, gender-issues would not be neglected, as the majority of the fans are male. However, as a female researcher, I do not personally view it as a disadvantage, but careful planning and decision-making must be made throughout the entire process, especially as I will have to travel and spend time during the fieldwork stages with the particular group of interest.

### **1.6.6 Ethical Considerations**

This research requires collecting information directly from participants from the field. Therefore, it is very important that the individuals and respondents participating and selected in this study are treated with respect and sensitivity. With emphasis on values, ethics and honesty, and all of the information collected is purposefully used only for this research. In addition, to respect the rights of the respondents, all subjects of the research will be given the chance to become acquainted about the research prior to their participation. They will be informed about the nature of the research and the use of the data collected from them. Moreover, I will also ensure that all participants voluntarily consent to participate in the interviews. Unless they would like to be

named, all respondents providing information on a questionnaire, or responding to an in-depth interview, will not be required to disclose their names or personal contact information. Sensitivity and respect of the respondents' rights will be of utmost priority.

### **1.7 Research Scope**

As it is a case study, the primary focus will be on CFC. However, as insights from experts are also crucial to unveiling certain aspects of this issue, those interviewees are not limited to experts in the local provincial area. Likewise, devoted fans from outside Chonburi province will also not be neglected. More specifically a large supporter group known as the "Bangkok Sharks" or *Chalarm Krung* group also play an important role in the success of the Club, therefore they will be treated with equal importance. Ethnographic interviews will be made with members of this subgroup in order to understand the incentives and reasons for their attachment to Chonburi FC despite residing or working in Chonburi province itself.

### **1.8 Significance of Research**

Sports, particularly football is an activity and an object of interest that is socially constructed. It is defined and given meaning, therefore it would be interesting to understand the value of being involved in football and unveil the political or apolitical incentives attached to the game. Perhaps it is no longer just about the game but a systematic production of culture that provides its devout followers with various forms of identities and identifications. The significance of the research is summarized as follows:

1. Creates a deeper understanding of the role of football in everyday life as another form of social identity;
2. Enables a critical study into the meanings and identifications with the Club through the socio-cultural activities organized by the social group;
3. To provide as a useful platform for the betterment of the football industry in Thailand, specifically in terms of understanding the culture, nature, and values of football fans.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will be divided into five sections. The first will introduce the origins of the sociology of sport, followed by a discussion on “social identity” and “cultural politics” in general. Thirdly, it will introduce the concept of “localism” in the framework of Thailand and specifically discuss the local use of football in the Thai context. Moreover, to compare the football discourse at the local and national levels, the fourth section will outline the use of football at the national level, as a tool to unite and ignite nationalistic feelings. Finally a summary of the section will outline the knowledge gap in the current literature.

#### **2.2 Origins of the Sociology of Sport**

In the past, rigorous physical activities were associated with the challenge of survival and the expression of religious beliefs (Coakley, 2003, p. 63). Up until the mid-1800s and early 1900s, the gradual changes and strengthening of labor unions and economic expansion led to the “creation of new ideas about the consequences of sport participation and new opportunities for involvement” (Coakley, 2003, p. 93). The economic expansions as well as technical innovations that served as drivers of the Industrial Revolution were “instrumental in stimulating a transformation in social conditions” that ultimately gave rise to modern sport (Sage, 2010, p. 6). In the United States, the needs of an emerging economy emphasizing mass production and mass consumption finally led to the initiation of organized competitive sports.

In addition, Joseph Maguire (1990), a British sport sociologist argued that the pivotal point for organized sports was the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was during this particular time that conditions became favorable for organized sports to become a popular activity for citizens. As part of this gradual growth of organized sport, Maguire identifies this phase, which comprised of the “establishment of international

sports organizations, the growth of competition between national teams, the worldwide acceptance of rules governing specific sport forms and the establishment of global competitions such as the Olympic Games” (Maguire, 1990, p. 82). Moreover, it was only until the 1920s when there was a growing trend toward organizing sports in formal and “official” ways. Studying historical periods through the lens of sports is therefore beneficial in unveiling the importance of cultural ideologies and government policies when it comes to understanding the role of sport and the power relations of that particular society. Likewise, as social constructions, sports are associated with perceptions of identity and sense of belonging. As a result, a case-study research into the sociology of sport in Thailand helps to recognize sports as social constructions created by people for particular purposes.

Up until the last five decades, the academic and theoretical treatment of sport has given minimal reference to the way in which sports is socially constructed. It looked more at the scientific and physical aspects of sport, but occasionally analyzed it from a sociological viewpoint. Hargreaves (1982) argued that this gradually changed with the increase in funding for sports-related activities by the private and public sectors, which served as an important turning point in increasing academic attention towards understanding the sociology of sport. In line with this, Stevenson and Nixon (1972) proposed five important functions of modern sport as:

1. Serving a socio-emotional function;
2. Socialization tool in the transmission of cultural beliefs and norms;
3. An integrative function, with sport aiding the integration of individuals, groups and communities;
4. A political function, whereby sport serves ideological need; and
5. A social mobility function, with sport acting as a source of upward, social mobility.

As for this particular research, a final analysis will also be made to examine which functions corresponds to the power and craze Chonburi Football Club has on its local fans.



### 2.3 Social Identity and Cultural Politics Through Sports

“Identity continues to be the problem it was throughout modernity... Far from identity disappearing in contemporary society, it is rather reconstructed and redefined” (Douglas Kellner as cited in Hall and Du Gay, 1996, p. 18).

Much like how cultures are constructed socially by the attitudes and behaviors of their past and present inhabitants, in a similar way, individual and group identities are constantly “under construction” and “renovation”. To understand the idea of group identities in sport, it is useful to begin with an explanation of Henri Tajfel’s theory of social identity. According to Tajfel, social identity is a person’s sense of who they are based on their group memberships. These groups could include for instance, social class, family, and football team (McLeod, 2008). Through association with these groups, it provides an important source of pride and self-esteem. As a result, groups give individuals a sense of social identity or a sense of belonging in the world. Tajfel (1970) described social identity as:

“that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Hoover, 2005, p.18).

For some, being part of a social group in support of a particular sports team is more symbolic than the mere results of the game, as fans “rather identify with a team and the meanings incorporated in football teams often express sociologically relevant distinctions” (Hadas, 2000, p. 43). This makes it easy for a mass sport such as football to become a “confrontation of the social meanings which they carry and of the social groups they appear to belong to” as people “become directly involved in a symbolic fight for possession of a collective space” (Hadas, 2000, p. 43).

Moreover, fans are able to construct a sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers to the body, time, social life all of which enable these individuals to place themselves in an imaginative cultural and social phenomena. The idea of a shared sense of belonging is constantly reinforced in everyday life and in the cyber world (i.e. through online blogs, websites, Facebook). On a weekly basis, it becomes part of

the culture to travel to the sports stadium and support their favorite team. From a sociological point of view, the football stadium is therefore a “constructed space of social interaction in which team identity is constantly redefined and reinforced” (Hadas, 2000, p. 44). And indeed, perhaps this explains why sports sociologists such as Hadas (2000) argued that the mass appeal of football has enabled it to become so powerful. He described it as an “intricate field of forces involving politicians, sports leaders, sports journalists, journalists, patrons, fans, and course players” (Hadas, 2000). This too, corresponds with the phenomenon that occurred with the specific case of CFC, whereby a cluster of various elements of identity, knowledge, connectivity, attitude and pride are collectively embedded through the vehicle of football.

In discussing the issues concerning new identities, Jonathan Friedman (1996) argued that after the mid-1970s, there has been an increase in “cultural politics” with a shift from “politics based on ideals of universal progress and development – either within the capitalist-industrialist order, or beyond it” to some “politics of cultural identity whether gender, local, or ethnic” (Friedman, 1996, p. 234). The formation of a cultural identity sees a weakening of national identities based on simple notions of territorially defined boundaries to new identities based on features such as language, local community, and other culturally concrete forms.

In this sense, culturally concrete forms may also include a shared passion and love for sports and leisure activities. Thus, cultural politics is all encompassing in nature and captures the realms of social, culture, economic, history and politics of a particular group that looks far beyond official parliamentary politics. It encapsulates the way of life and the activities that occur in the every day. And it is through these cultural politics that also shape fans experiences within football and gives meaning to their identity and sense of belonging. Correspondingly, Reid and Jarvie (2000) argue that sport is able to help different ethnic groups and nationalities “develop a sense of cultural identity”, underlying a broader agreement that sport in a positive way helps with recognition and representation (Jarvie, 2006, p. 71). Above all it also serves several functions as outlined above, particularly as an integrative tool of socialization in the transmission of culture and a sense of belonging amongst its community members, of which will be elaborated in the section below.

## **2.4 Localism and Football in Thailand**

A vast majority of the literature on localism in the context of Thailand mainly focuses on the issue of political decentralization. Limited accounts of academic research into the areas of sports and politics are available. However, Arjin Thongyukong's (2010) thesis titled "'Fans': Cultural practices of Thailand's domestic football club" presents a valuable insight into the growth of the Thai-league and the ways in which fans are not simply spectators but they are also agents who play an extremely important role in constructing new forms of football culture in Thailand. By examining the top three clubs (Chonburi FC, Muangthong Nongjorg United FC, and Thai Port FC) the thesis suggested that fans are not passive, however they are actively engaging in their own communities as agents in constructing and shaping their own fan cultures. If compared to consumers, it would be unfair to claim that they are victims of the cultural industry, as in their own ways, they exhibit an ability to shape and re-create their own identities and not be passive victims of a culture industry imposed upon them.

Kulwich Samdaengdech (2008) analyzed in his recent qualitative research on football and identity in Thailand titled "Media Usage for Identity Construction and Maintenance of Chonburi Football Club's Fans" that Chonburi football fans constantly utilize various types of media to maintain their identity. His interesting study revealed that Chonburi football fans had 'liquid identities' that changed and altered according to different times and context. As part of this media approach to studying fandom, he explained that Chonburi football fans were extremely active in maintaining and reinventing their identities through fan club activities arranged by the group themselves. The eagerness and will to arrange activities amongst the fans as a way to reinforce their shared identity corresponds to Saichol Panyachit's (2010) study titled "Football Fanclub in the Modern Thai Society: A Case Study of Muangthong Nongjorg United Football Club", whereby social and cultural activities such as annual merit-making, cheering development courses, and sub-group activities were regularly organized. Additionally, the activities and participation amongst locals created social spaces and expanded networks of social relations, which eventually facilitated the construction of the group's identity. Panyachit (2010) also recognized that fans of Muangthong Nongjorg

United Football Club initially gathered as a result of their mutual passion to watch international football matches. And after following Thai football for a while, the sense of 'localism' seemed particularly appealing. Therefore this led to the fan club activities of Muangthong Nongjorg United Football Club.

On the other hand, Samdaengdech's (2008) study on Chonburi revealed that most fans identified themselves through their common territorial background, such as being from Chonburi province. This binding factor was the main reason that prompted fans to gather and support the team, as opposed to their passion to watch international football. More importantly, by drawing from the same cultural and geographical background, it also served as a driving force in pushing locals to further promote their proud identity as fans of Chonburi Football Club.

In addition, Nutsuphong Suksote's (2005) study entitled "Communication and the Construction of Football Fan Culture in Thai Society" highlights the important role of media in constructing the identity of Thai football fans. Suksote (2005) divided his study into two main parts, by considering the use of a variety of media in a natural (everyday life) context and in special contexts (such as on big matches of the English Premier League, on matchdays, etc). The results of his research suggest that in both contexts, the use of media plays a significant role in maintaining and strengthening a football club's identity.

Nevertheless, throughout the literature review, a majority of the texts written about football and politics tends to focus on experiences at the national level, as opposed to the local level. Although it is the intention of this thesis to focus on the local level, the upcoming section will discuss the issues of football and identity at the national level.

## **2.5 Football as a Discourse of Identity and the Nation**

As one of the pioneers in the study of the sociology of sport, Houlihan (1997) argues in *Sport, National Identity and Public Policy* (1997) that there is a strategic use of sport by the government as a means to help manage identity. He claims that sport can assist in building national unity, and can be used to "aid the state to achieve its objectives of legitimacy, territorial integrity, and citizen commitment" (Houlihan,

1997, p. 113). States around the world have been interested in the capacity of sport to promote a “sense of national identity”, especially as there is an increasing awareness and suspicion amongst policymakers of cultural globalization (Houlihan, 1997, p. 113). Alongside increasing awareness, in general, football tends to confirm the ‘modern nation state model’, whereby football tournaments involving national teams draw the largest television audiences. Under this particular mindset, Scambler (2005) similarly argues that “sport can be best understood as a symbolic representation of community and personal identity” (Scambler, 2005, p. 142). Therefore, in the production and maintenance of these identities, the media plays an important role in dramatizing the events. At times this is achieved by creating a sense of “‘shared fate’ across the imagined communities that comprise the nation”, which may include “large diasporic groups” that live “beyond territorial boundaries” (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009, p. 102).

Likewise, Hannerz (1990) similarly argued that sport “provides a number of emotionally charged occasions for citizens to be made aware of and express their common identity within the nation” (Hannerz, 1990, p. 121). The opportunity to gather and participate at the national level carries an emotional appeal of “sustaining the ‘imagined community’ of the nation” (Hannerz, 1990, p. 121). As part of a larger campaign to increase nationalism, the combination of public expenditures and state policies reflect the important role of sports in the cultural identity of several industrialized states. Studies from various regions, particularly Europe and Latin America portray common themes of sport as a vehicle for social, cultural and political representations. For instance, Bradley (2003)’s *Images of Scottishness and Otherness in International Football* well illustrates the ability for football to be used as a “medium for expressing one’s political, nationalist, and religious allegiances through the team supported”. In addition, by investigating the specific case of football in Scotland, he argued that football “heightened awareness of being Scottish and offer[ed] substance to the idea of the imagined community” (Bradley, 2003). Similarly, with the case of Mexico sport always emphasized “on belonging or being alike, not on separation or distinctiveness” (Arbena, 1991, p. 362).

Since before the Second World War, political leaders have utilized football as a diplomatic tool. Italy’s Mussolini, Germany’s Hitler and Spain’s Franco are amongst

leaders who do not come from football backgrounds nor are they fanatics, yet they all understand the immense power and influence of football as a legitimate diplomatic tool amidst a time of great uncertainty in international relations. The next section will illustrate the historical uses of football by leaders of various political regimes, with specific reference to the historical period leading up to World War II.

## **2.6 Football: a uniting or dividing tool?**

In addition, according to the literature review, an on-going debate amongst academics is the criticism that football ignites and amplifies nationalistic and sectarian feelings as opposed to its virtues as a uniting tool. This is relatively hard to deny, looking back at the historical records of football-related violence. To provide just a few examples: in 1950, the Uruguay players were attacked after beating host Brazil for another World Cup victory; in 1970, the renowned “Football War” between Honduras and El Salvador, which left 6,000 people dead and 12,000 wounded; in 2003, the borders of Senegal and Gambia were temporarily closed due to tensions after a football match; and in 2009, the World Cup qualifiers between Egypt and Algeria were plagued by widespread hostilities (Kuhn, 2011, p. 60). Football in particular has been exemplified as a global sport utilized by various stakeholders as a means to pursue various ends.

Amongst academics there have been increasing interest in investigating the issues relating to “the nation” and “national identity”. In a critical analysis of the media’s role in portraying and expressing ideas about national identity, Bishop and Jaworski (2003) examined the media reports of an international football match between Germany and England at the Euro 2000. The authors suggested that the press reports during and after the football games included various reproductions of national stereotypes, which frequently depicted a sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ through the metaphoric use of military-related terms, military imageries and war-related vocabulary. Bishop and Jaworski (2003) claimed that various articles depicted the nation [England] as an “imagined community” that has been “imagined through its past and history of war with Germany” (Bishop and Jaworski, 2003). The interesting relationship between football, nationalism, and politics has an extremely noteworthy experience for the case of several Latin American countries.

For most of these Latin American countries, football is unambiguously considered as the national sport. At the national level, football “helped to build national solidarity, but also disclosed forms of fissure and fragmentation” (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009, p. 17). Therefore in a bid to explore the regional uniqueness of football and politics in Latin America, Bar-On (1997) investigated the Latin American utilization of football as a vehicle of national identity as well as the manipulation of football by the region’s political actors, namely by politicians, military juntas, and authoritarian regimes. As a region plagued by an overwhelming public attitude for football, there is “rarely a person who is not inundated daily by the mass media and street chatter about intra-city derby clashes between bitter rivals” as well as discussing the “fortunes of the national team” (Bar-On, 1997, p. 4). Military juntas and totalitarian regimes specifically “engaged football’s populist appeal”, especially with the development of mass production and consumption of radio, football played a crucial role in the “nation-building process” (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009, p. 16). This is especially true among the political elites, whereby football has been used as a vehicle to “build the nation from within and gain it legitimacy and respect” (Arbena, 1992, p. 146). This corresponds to the constant hosting of the FIFA World Cup, such as; Brazil in 1950, Chile in 1962, Mexico in 1970 and 1986, and Argentina in 1978. By 2014, Brazil will once again host the FIFA World Cup.

## **2.7 Local Endeavors into Football: The Use of Football in the Thai Context**

Alongside the involvement of politicians and national elites in the promotion of football at the national level, local elites also endeavor to tap into football’s popular appeal. The game provides an arena to display of a broad range of power-relations.

The intricate link between football and politics in Thailand is nothing new. The variety of sports played by political leaders or military leaders have always reflected the ability of sports to connote different sentiments. More evidently in the past, military leaders and influential politicians would gather and discuss issues over round of golf. The exclusiveness and the fact that golf is an elite sport had its own symbolic connotations. Yet more recently, football has been proactively used as a sport played by politicians of various backgrounds. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2012, a day-long event

was held whereby three friendly football matches were organized in a bid to strengthen the relationship between current cabinet members and banned politicians. Symbolically, a mass sport such as football was chosen as opposed to the exclusive game of golf, tennis, or equestrian.

At the national policy level, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra also endorses various football-related campaigns under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports as well as directly under the Prime Minister's Office, such as the Prime Minister's Cup (Figure 4). Some of these campaigns are targeted towards the southern region of Thailand, whereby football has been used as a peace-building mechanism as well as to fight against the issue of drugs amongst the youth. Yet the story at the local, provincial level is not entirely different. Football continues to be the favorite sport among local politicians or those vying for political positions.



**Figure 4:** The Prime Minister in an advertisement campaign to promote the PM Cup and (directly above) Source: Sport Inter, May 2012

## 2.8 Summary

From the literature reviewed, the majority of studies exploring the sports and identity nexus in Thailand are still relatively limited, particularly as the systematic and professional organization of football league only began less than a decade ago. Abroad, most of the literature in this field focuses on football as a nationalist tool or as a diplomatic tool between countries. A constant similarity between the research



works from domestic and foreign academicians suggest that football as a mass sport is of interest to many stakeholders, particularly to politicians. As this thesis will illustrate in the proceeding chapters, football in Thailand is beyond a social activity or a social phenomenon. It is a contemporary means in constructing identity among its supporters. It is a mechanism to ignite stronger feelings of local pride. And above all, it has vested itself as a tool in gaining popularity and acceptance in Thailand's official electoral politics. The success and reasons behind the use of sport for a variety of shared functions will be further explored and explained in the proceeding chapters.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **FOOTBALL IN THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF CHONBURI**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

During the fieldwork period, a majority of the interviews were conducted at venues that were related to the Club. For instance, interviews were conducted in places such as the Sharks Café and Restaurant, the Chonburi Stadium and the Official Club Stores. Although the selection of these venues could have been a result of mere coincidence, it also reflects another important point in elucidating that many of the places which were easily recognized by these group of interviewees when the appointments were being scheduled were places which related to the Club. In addition, as the Club is situated in the city center of Chonburi province, it has also served as a central meeting district whereby Club-related activities organized by the supporters were mainly situated. The following section will provide an overview on Chonburi province, on the Club as a whole and outline the important areas of the research site, it will also address how football has been situated in the political culture of Chonburi.

#### **3.2 Chonburi**

Chonburi is a province in the Eastern part of Thailand, which is lucrative as a tourism hub and as an economic earner. In the late 1970s, the government launched the Eastern Seaboard Scheme to build new port facilities in Chonburi and Rayong, in a bid to further “develop a complex of chemical industries fuelled by natural gas from the Gulf of Thailand” (Phongpaichit & Baker 1995, p. 145). In addition, due to the US-funded roads and the boom in cash crops, the pace of economic growth in many provincial centers throughout the country enabled business opportunities in real estate, construction, tourism and urban development to occur. Chonburi province was among one of the new provincial centers that rose rapidly. As a province known for its “high number of gangsters and mafic members”, Somchai Khunpluem (popularly known as Kamnan Poh), a former fisherman who later made his fortune in real estate

and entertainment businesses played a significant role in local politics (Nation Multimedia 2007). He is also the father of Mr Wittaya Kunpluem, the Club's Chairman.



**Figure 5:** Mr Wittaya Kunpluem posing with the fans at the stadium before a match played at the Chonburi Stadium.



**Figure 6:** Mr Wittaya Kunpluem signing autographs at a Meet and Greet activity hosted by the Club to thank its supporters. Source: Nutthapol U-Bolphan, March 2012

Until the present day, the Kunpluem clan is still influential in the realms of local politics<sup>2</sup>. Coincided with his dual role as the Chairman of CFC, Mr Wittaya Kunpluem's political capacity as the CEO of the Provincial Administration Organization has also seamlessly benefited from the Club's fruitful success.

In addition, the province of Chonburi has up to 3 different teams competing in the different leagues. CFC and Pattaya United are playing in the top tier league known as the Thailand Premier League, while Sriracha Suzuki FC were relegated last year (2011 Season) and currently play in the Division 1 League. To illustrate the influence of the Kunpluem family on local politics, it is remarkably clear that the family places a lot of importance on the role of sport as all three brothers are presidents of the province's football clubs. The eldest brother, Mr Sontaya Kunpluem, heads the Srirachai Suzuki FC, Mr Wittaya Kunpluem with CFC and the youngest brother Mr Ittipol Kunpluem whom also serves a political role as the Mayor of Pattaya City serves as the President of Pattaya United FC. As will be explored further in this thesis, despite having three separate teams, CFC has always been the most successful team. The identity issues amongst fans of different teams will also be illustrated within the findings of this thesis, to demonstrate how identities are shaped dependent on who it is viewed against. As will be shown, the tensions between the supporters of these three teams are in essence very different to the type of tension evident when CFC is compared to Buriram PEA FC.

### **3.3 Mapping the Research Site**

The area of Chonburi province covers 4,363.0 km<sup>2</sup> square kilometers, however the actual scope of the research site primarily covers the city of Chonburi or known as *amphoe muang*. In the city area where the research was undertaken reflects an important fact as the football stadium acts very much as a central area of the City, allowing fans and locals in general to easily commute to the venue as a way to encourage more supporters on a matchday. On a day or weekend where no game is being played at the stadium, locals use the surrounding area of the stadium as a public

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<sup>2</sup> Mr Wittaya Kunpluem was re-elected as the CEO of the Provincial Administration Organization on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2012.

park, whereby anyone is entitled to use the facilities around the stadium.

Interestingly, not only is the stadium a central venue where locals meet, the surrounding areas of the stadium also reflects another interesting side of the political economy of football in Chonburi. When mapped out, it is evident that many businesses around the stadium grounds are related to the Club itself. The structure and the way the city is zoned around the area looks as if it was intentionally planned to cater to the needs of the fans of Chonburi FC. There are a variety of businesses such as hair salons, restaurants, pubs, business centers, and clothes stores all related to the Club. For some of the stores, members of CFC are also eligible of receiving additional discounts. By doing so, these entrepreneurs have stated that it helps create a feeling of doing business in a family-like manner, a marketing technique in which the entrepreneurs find useful in reaching out to their potential customers.

After several interviews with the owners of these businesses, they share a similar viewpoint in claiming that they owe a lot to the Club, as without the Club, they would lose an extremely large amount of their customers. Nevertheless, these stores, however, do not receive any particular funding or support from the Club itself but chose to present their own businesses to relate to the Club on their own will. On a matchday, particularly for restaurants and pubs, those areas are turned into mini fan zones for fans and families who do not have the opportunity to go to the stadium. During the day, these businesses receive customers who are fans of the Club, as some fans choose to spend their time around the stadium grounds before the match kicks off in the evening. Therefore, it can be said that the businesses around the stadium are hangout places for fans.



**Figures 7, 8, and 9 (above):** Restaurants around the stadium have utilized their businesses in connection with an identity of the Club. Source: Chuenchanok Siriwat, July 2012.

This mini-city surrounding the stadium of CFC reflects the extent to which locals connect to the Club, and more importantly highlights the impact in which the Club has on everyday life- whether viewed from an economic or a socio-cultural lens. The images above illustrate the variety of businesses that are established around the stadium, creating a mini-city within the City of Chonburi inspired and driven by the local football club. Additionally, alongside the physical infrastructure, another way to

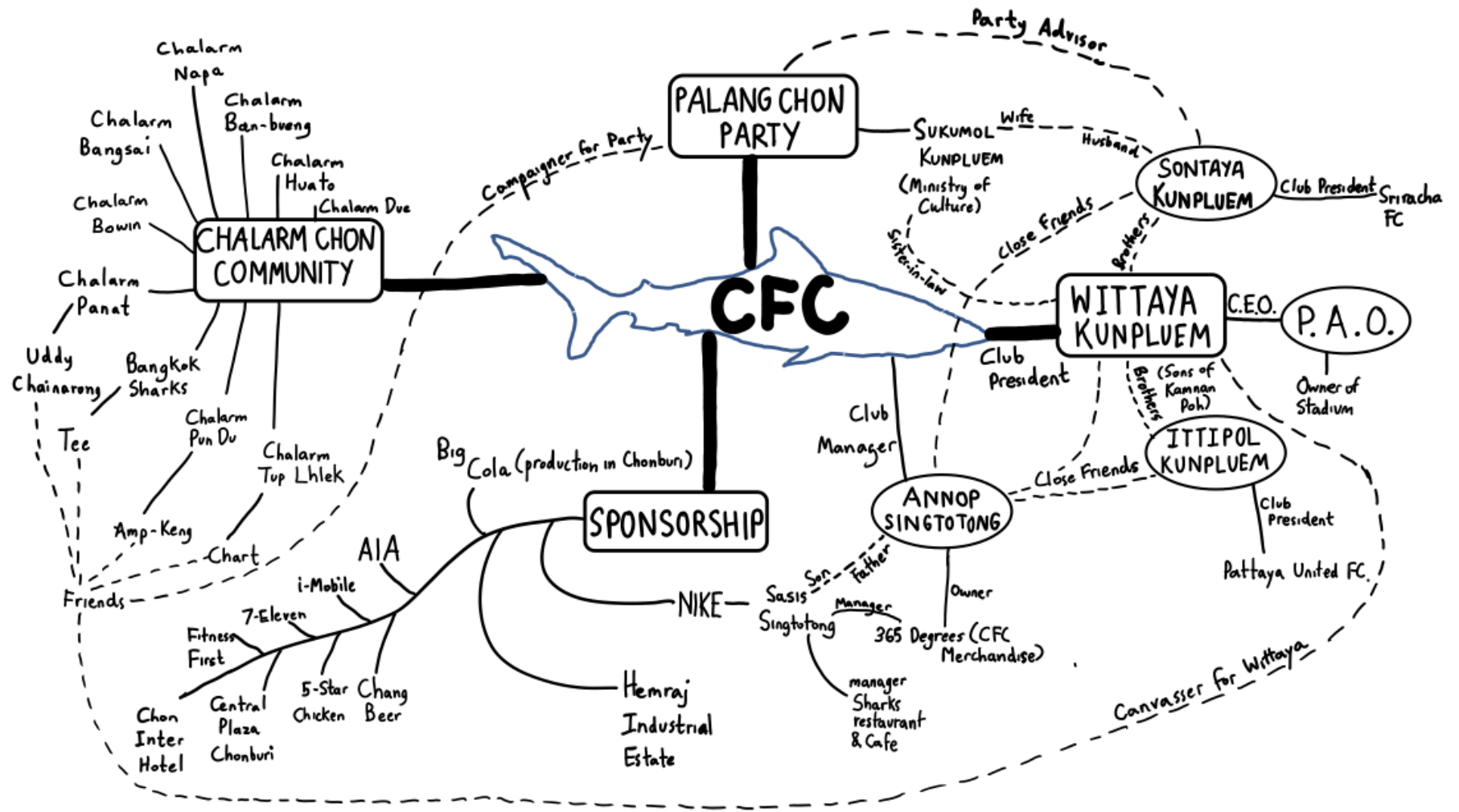
understand the research site is to examine the main actors involved, in which the next section will outline in detail.

### **3.4 Mapping Out Who's Who**

In order to better understand the way in which local politics plays a role in the football culture of Chonburi, I will begin by mapping out the 'who's who' and the roles in which they play in the political economy of Chonburi's football culture. Firstly, CFC can be regarded as a core element in which local politicians, businesses, as well as communities (including its subgroups) have been linked.

Local politics is clearly linked to CFC mainly through the dual role of Mr Wittaya Kunpluem as the President of the Club as well as his political role as the CEO of the Provincial Administration Organization. As seen from the map (See next page), his involvement is central to the existence of the Club as a vast majority of the Club's funding is received from the Provincial Administration Organization. Being involved with the Club in his capacity as the President has also benefited his popularity as a "politician with sportsmanship", as he is able to use the space to constantly be in the public eye on matchdays and during their trips abroad. This 'space' also applies to the media space in which he gets from the publicity that the Club receives. During the election times, the stadium is used as a large collective space for campaigning.

Linked very closely to Mr Wittaya himself are his brothers, Mr Sontaya Kunpluem whom is the former Minister of Tourism and Sport and Mr Ittipol Kunpluem, the current mayor of Pattaya City. Both of these brothers also own and manage football teams. Mr Sontaya, as seen on the map, heads Sriracha Football Club, whereas Mr Ittipol overlooks Pattaya United Football Club. It is rare to find one single province that houses up to three large football Clubs, however, in Chonburi this has been part of the dream to make Chonburi the center for Thailand's football excellence. Regardless of not being the capital city, this very fact has been appreciated by the Asian Football Confederation as they established an official office in Chonburi province as a way to further promote the game of football to the grass-root level.





As politicians, it can be said that the Kunpluem brothers play a very strong role in connecting to the sponsors and potential investors. With their own social reputation, it is relatively easy to find sponsors, both locally and nationally. Corporations and companies that engage in businesses in Chonburi also constitute as important sponsors of the team. An example is seen with the Hemraj Industrial Estate in Chonburi. They have been the main sponsor of CFC for three consecutive seasons. With sponsoring budgets of up to at least 75 million baht, a lot of this cash that flows into the management of the Club becomes rather dubious. Some critics have claimed that by sponsoring football teams, it has created more loop holes for money laundering and illegal procedures to occur without much public scrutiny. Perhaps it can also be used as a way to finance election campaigns or as way to receive the ‘green light’ in engaging in certain businesses that involve the decisions of the influential politicians. With the Kunpluem brothers sharing the same group of friends, it can be seen that the patterns for sponsors that have signed contracts with CFC or even Pattaya United FC are very similar.

Another significant figure in this intricate link between stakeholders is Mr Annop Singtotong, a former classmate of the Kunpluem brothers who attended Assumption Sriracha Highschool together. With their status as very close friends, Mr Annop is appointed as the General Manager of CFC – a man with the ability to make final decisions. Being an individual who has been involved in the development of football in Chonburi for over three decades, he plays a central role in managing the Club as well interacting with the Chalarm Chon Community members. The media has given him the nickname of “The Saint” and has always been active in linking the Club with the supporters. As he is a public figure, his acquaintances with the sub-fan groups have also enabled him to become the main canvasser for the Wittaya. Bridging between his role with the Club as well as his close friendship with the Kunpluem family, he has always played a significant role in publicizing the deeds of the family. Additionally, he has been given the trust to manage and outsource many of the Club’s related businesses, such as the Sharks Café and Restaurant and the official Club clothing store.

Mr Annop’s son named Mr Sasis Singtotong (situated below him on the map) is also another important figure in understanding the political economy behind CFC. He

basically works as an executive of Nike (Thailand) and through his father received the opportunity to manage the Sharks Café and Restaurant as well as the 365 Degree brand (the company that received the monopoly to sell the Club related merchandises alongside with Nike). He has been influential in drawing Nike to sponsor CFC.

Moreover, another important aspect in understanding the football culture in Chonburi is to examine the roles and responsibilities of the sub fan club groups. These groups subsume under the larger umbrella of “Chalarm Chon Community”, however, they are mainly divided according to the districts that they represent or by the individuals that lead the sub-group. For instance, as seen on the left side of the map, the groups that have been explored and studied from the field research included sub fan club groups that always came to the games and voluntarily participated in the activities organized amongst other group members. For instance, one of the interviewees for this research is P’ Chart, whom is the main leader of the Chalarm Tup Lhlekk group. P’ Chart’s popularity as an entertainer at the games has also enabled him to become very connected to other members of CCC. He was very active during the entire campaigning process for Mr Wittaya and to the present day, still decorates his own cheering props with stickers which affiliate with Palang Chon party. His “Chalarm Tup Lek” group does not represent any particular district in Chonburi but rather, as the name suggest reflects the characteristic of the group members whom like to drink alcohol and enjoy their time as they meet and engage in activities. On the other hand, the Chalarm Due (ฉลามดี๋ ) group consists of mainly many young boys. As the Thai name suggests, this group of ‘naughty’ sharks are always gathering and meeting up to play football for fun and would be the group that always hangs out together at the stadium on matchdays.

Another interesting group is the Bangkok Sharks – a group in which I got to spend some time with during the field research period. This group comprises of various members who are employed in different fields of work, primarily in Bangkok. Tee, as one of the leaders is a devoted member of the CCC despite the fact that he lives and works in Salaya, Nakhon Prathom. He works as an I.T. technician for Mahidol University International College and choses to spend his weekends in Chonburi to support the team. On weekdays, despite the fact that he works in a completely different province, he spends it on the online world by actively running a website in

which members of the Bangkok Sharks or also known as the “Chalarm Krung” (ฉลามกรุง) can communicate and express themselves. The online world has become an interesting platform in providing a virtual space that facilitates social interactions to occur amongst the members of the communities despite their geographic locality.

As seen from map, political canvassers such as Uddy, Tee, Amp-Keng and Chart are just a few examples of the individuals in which serve dual roles as fan club leaders as well as canvassers who play an important part in further reiterating the connection between the politician and the Club. When the Provincial Administration Organization organizes activities and events, these leading members are actively broadcasting it amongst their own subgroups. In their own ways and through their own roles, the relationship between key stakeholders such as the Club, politician and groups are maintained. It can be said that other political canvassers also work alongside with these sub-fan club group canvassers, however, given the acquaintance of the sub fan club group leaders with the other fans, their roles have been given much acceptance.

Although only a few groups could be studied throughout the field research process, it illustrates that the football culture in Chonburi is surely not value-free. It very much serves as a tool to satisfy political agendas. It also reflects the role that electoral politics plays in the local football culture. As a result, Chonburi’s football culture is very much intricately intertwined with local politics. To some, this may not be extremely evident or “out- in –your-face” as the connection between the politician and the team has been achieved so seamlessly, to the extent that it becomes rather hard to differentiate. The Kunpluem family’s involvement in football for over ten to fifteen years has in a way, also assisted this process. It becomes challenging to unravel whether football is the “input” or whether or not it is the “output” so to speak, because the ways in which activities and interactions amongst the group have merged football into the everyday life of the CCC members. In short, it can be said that football culture is a complex web that is very much linked to realms of leisure, entertainment, religion, and politics

## CHAPTER IV

### FOOTBALL AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF LOCAL IDENTITY

#### 4.1 Introduction

Since winning the most prestigious title in 2007, CFC has become an integral part of local provincial uniqueness, constructing a distinctive identity, which allows locals to believe that they are ‘something different’ from the rest of Thai football fans. Emerging from the data is evidence of what Stevenson and Nixon (1972) describe as an “integrative function” whereby sport is used as a “socialization tool” in aiding the integration of individuals and a community (Scambler 2005, p. 144). A close interpretation of the data suggests that the repetitive themes of identity and belonging, a sense of “we-ness”, local pride, and everyday socio-cultural routine are recurring issues addressed by the interviewees.

As intended in the research question, this following chapter aims to address the role of CFC in creating forms of identification with the Club and province, despite the supporters’ geographic locality. It will answer the ways in which local identity and a sense of belonging has been constructed and shaped through football.

#### 4.2 Creating the ‘We-feelings’

Much like how cultures are constructed socially by the attitudes and behaviors of their past and present inhabitants, in a similar way, individual and group identities are constantly “under construction” and “renovation”. For some, being part of a social group in support of a particular sports team is more symbolic than the mere results of the game, as fans “rather identify with a team and the meanings incorporated in football teams often express sociologically relevant distinctions” (Hadas 2000, p.43).

Moreover, fans are able to construct a sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers to the body, time, and social life, all of which enable these individuals to place themselves in an imagined cultural and social phenomena. The idea of a shared sense of belonging is constantly reinforced in everyday life and in the cyber world

(i.e. through online blogs, websites, Facebook). A 22-year old informant stated that:

“CFC has succeeded in creating a sense of belonging for its fans from their use of social network... always informing us about the feelings of the individual players, coach, manager, staffs... when we enter the stadium in Chonburi, the blue flyers, and jingles on the loudspeaker, as well as the wave of people wearing the jerseys and scarfs... it all assists in creating the welcoming ambience of togetherness... Every single time I arrive in the stadium, I am constantly reminded that THIS IS CHONBURI, and ultimately that WE ARE CHONBURI... satta fa nam-ngern<sup>3</sup>” [Nan, personal communication, 2012]

On a weekly basis, it becomes part of the local culture to travel to the sports stadium and watch their favorite team play. From a sociological point of view, the football stadium is therefore a “constructed space of social interaction in which team identity is constantly redefined and reinforced” (Hadas 2000, p. 44). And rightfully so. Perhaps to add to Hadas (2000), it is not only a venue for the identity of a team to be redefined and reinforced, but also a venue for this same process to occur for its devout supporters. For the case of Chonburi, field research suggests that new social medias (such as Facebook, Twitter, Webpages, as well as Community Radio known as Sharks Radio) have also been aggressively used to create and reinforce this common identity. Technology, therefore, has played a very prominent role in creating forms of identity and belonging as well as to publicly broadcast those messages.

After moving to Thailand in 1997, British native Dale started supporting Chonburi since the 2002 and has been an avid fan ever since. He recalls:

“We created our own sense of belonging at the beginning... it was so easy to have access to the players and the management... that felt as if we were all part of the Club. As the Club has grown... we have an official website, Sharks TV, Shark Radio, the Shark Café and the club shops...All these things continue to be very successful and the club should take a lot of credit for this”

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<sup>3</sup> In Thai language, the terms “satta” (ศรัทธา) translates to faith, and “nam-ngern” (น้ำเงิน) translates to blue. Therefore, it is a symbolic way of expressing one’s faith and support for the Blues (i.e. Chonburi FC)

“...We were certainly the first fans to attach ourselves to our local provincial side with such enthusiasm. I think it helps that Chonburi is also the name of the province. We get fans from all over and that certainly helps our local identity...”

Football, therefore could be viewed as a form of largely non-verbal theatre, whereby the ‘we-feelings’ aroused through the vehicle of football has become important at the individual, local, national and international levels. Of course, depending on how highly sport in general is valued in a given society or group, in the case of Chonburi it has enabled a space to occur in which fans can construct identities. As Fiske (1991) captures, “release is not just pleasurable in itself, it also produces spaces in which fans can construct identities and relationships which enable them to know themselves differently from the way they are known by the monitoring order” (Fiske, 1991). For the case of Chonburi, it produces both space for identities to be constructed which may not be arguably different to the “monitoring order”, as field research suggests that there is a relatively synergetic relationship between the top-down authorities (i.e. PAO) and the supporters (i.e. the public). Perhaps, it would be more suitable to claim that in the contemporary society of Chonburi, football has created an enclave where people are able to experience a relatively high degree of autonomy as far as their behaviors, identities, and identifications are concerned.

Indeed, this explains why sports sociologists such as Hadas (2000) argued that the mass appeal of football has enabled it to become so powerful. He describes it as an “intricate field of forces involving politicians, sports leaders, sports journalists, journalists, patrons, fans, and course players”. Correspondingly, Molina (2007) depicts the powerful sociological tool of football in Spain by attributing the football stadium with various symbolic meanings for the fans and citizens in general. The stadium, comparable to Hadas (2000), is a “temple of celebration where many fans have the best afternoons of their lives witnessing victories of their team in the football league” (2007, p. 174). This too, resembles with the phenomenon that occurred with the specific case of CFC, whereby a cluster of various elements of identity, knowledge, connectivity, political attitude and pride are collectively embedded through the vehicle of football. A descriptive in-depth interview with one of the interviewees illustrates a feeling that reflects the impact football has on his way of

life:

“... You know, some of the games can be very violent. Not amongst the players or anything but amongst the crazy fans. We have some crazy fans. The oppositions have some pretty crazy and violent fans too. And in the past three years, I’ve come across many situations whereby I ask myself, what the hell am I doing here? Why am I risking my life sitting at the stands and watching the games when I know that some dangerous incident could occur at any time... Well I guess I never gave myself long enough to answer why because even after knowing how violent it could be, the next time I come to question it, I find myself sitting at the stadium in the exact same place. [smiles] Its funny but you know it’s like something is always calling me to be there. On weeks when I really cant go, I feel as if I did something wrong. ...I feel helpless even though all I ever do is cheer until I run out of voice...”

I found his words very interesting and wanted to find out more about his own life and what inspired him to devote so much time to watch the games. He described it by telling me that:

“I work at a Japanese factory in Amata, their old stadium [CFC] was much closer to my workplace but since they moved to the new stadium owned by the *or bor jor* [Provincial Administration Organization] I’ve hardly ever missed a match. My work is stressful, tedious, and we all have to be in fixed uniforms with strict rules on what can or cannot be done. So on a Saturday or Sunday, coming out to the game is like being free from the seriousness and stress of everyday life. I get to wear my jersey... this year’s jersey is so expensive because Nike designed it. I get to do what I love. My 7-year-old son paints my cheeks with blue and dark blue stripes. I drink beer before the game and just have such a great time. Although I get very angry when they lose, I know its not the end of the world... when they lose I feel like I have to come support the next game. *Chalarm* Chon are the best but just pray it doesn’t rain. *Chalarm* [sharks] hate the rain...”

When questioned how the factory uniforms were different to the football jerseys, he laughed and said:

“Completely different. This jersey has a life, but that gray uniform is a lifeless machine”

The interviewee made a very captivating comparison that vividly expressed why he felt so passionate to the game and the Club. Likewise for CFC, the idea of creating a sense of belonging and local identity is emotionally strong. The supporters of the Club constantly reinforce the three-way relationship between the ‘individual –province – Club’. This reinforcement is done during match days and in their normal daily life in both the public and private spheres. At a basic level, their identities are primarily shaped by how they view themselves, in comparison to other teams:

“I think our history sets us apart from most of the clubs in the Thai leagues... We were the trail blazers in so many ways – including the fan base – and it is satisfying to know that whatever happens in the future, no-one can ever take this away from us... We are very loyal...”  
(Dale, personal communication, 2012)

As illustrated in the quote above, identities are also shaped and reinforced by having a shared sense of history. The supporters share a number of identification elements that are well connected to the football club and the province. As one devoted supporter of CFC explains:

“... It’s not surprising to travel throughout Thailand and feel ‘at home’ even when you are completely outside Chonburi. It’s a feeling that is hard to describe when I run into someone wearing a Chonburi jersey, or when I’m driving in Bangkok and see a Chonburi sticker on a stranger’s bumper... I was born in Chonburi and for me, we are different because we’re not driven by bringing expensive superstars that stay for just a few months and leave...who wants that? Money can’t buy what we have. We are different because the Club gives youth



players the opportunity to prove themselves, many of which studied in Assumption Sriracha... They are locals... our people gets a chance” (Lek Ban-Bueng, personal communication, 2012)

“I was with the team before we won the Thai Premier League trophy until we won the title. After that its been a few years and I’m still here every weekend supporting my team. Its been three years that I have not missed one single home game. We’ve been through so much, sometimes it brings me so much happiness... sometimes so much frustration and hatred [against the oppositions] but then again I’m still here. They do their job. I do my job. We do it for our love in football and for the pride of our province...” (Tee, personal communication, 2012)

From the interviews, it is extremely clear that the fans view the Club as an entity that is shared amongst the supporters. There is a very clear sense of responsibility instilled in their mindsets about their own roles and duty vis-à-vis the Club. Although he did not state it bluntly that there is a shared history between his experiences and the Club, his answer allows readers to understand that his own story reflects a long journey with the Club and has a profound commitment with the team. For an individual to not miss a single home game within the time span of three long years is something beyond average.

During the interview, Tee was very proud to tell me how he felt, and often times had so much to say about his views on how the Football Association of Thailand should improve their management of the league and the standards of the referees. As part of the long conversations, Tee also made it clear that he could not imagine himself supporting another Club. Without knowing, he started discussing about Mr Wittaya Kunpluem’s recent election result in which he said was a “thrash” and a “slap in the face for the Democrat candidate”. I questioned him further about whether or not things would change if Mr Wittaya did not win the elections and no longer served as the CEO of the PAO, he interestingly replied by confidently saying that

“There is no rule that says he can no longer do football if he is not the CEO of the PAO. What do you think? You may think I’m old-minded

but I am sure its his own method to still have a public role after he steps down from his current position. I think it's a secure place”

Interestingly, as evident in the conversations above, the informant automatically used the term *puak rao* (we) when asked about her own interests in supporting the Club. From a theoretical perspective, as Tajfel (1978) defines, group identities are predominantly based on “comparing one’s own group to that of other relevant groups”. This sense of belonging that comes with group identity is a result of internalizing or “locating oneself... within a system of social categorization” (Turner 1982, p. 17-18 in Hoover 2005, p. 57). In this sense, through the association with the Club, football fostered forms of cultural identity to emerge, particularly linking it with local pride:

**Interviewer:** “If I asked you to describe your identity in as few words as possible, how would you describe it?”

**Informant 1:** “We are Chonburi... Sata Fa Nam-ngern” [Koong, 2012]

**Informant 2:** “For me... I was born with “luad nam kem”... Chonburi is my life” [Tong, 2012]

**Informant 3:** “Hmm, lets say I’m the 12<sup>th</sup> player” [Korn, 2012]

What these quotes indicate is the symbolic connection to Chonburi province that ignites a common sense of belonging amongst the supporters. The nexus of “individual- province – Club” is further reinforced through the symbolic connotations of color and geographic features of the province, which magnifies this local identification. The term “*sata*” means faith and “*Fa, Nam-ngern*” translates into English as the colors of blue and dark blue. As a result, the image and marketing of the Club to constantly emphasize blue color is an interesting approach in psychologically heightening the supporter’s association with the club and the province. In addition, the second informant answered in a much more descriptive and symbolic manner, by describing that he was born with ‘salt water blood’. Geographically, this is understandable as Chonburi province is a coastal province, therefore naturally having access to salt water. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the informant chose to associate his very own identity (a concept that humans construct)

with a biological feature such as ‘blood’- an organic feature which humans have no control over.

In addition, whilst discussing about how football has shaped identity, an interviewee discussed about how much CFC meant to him. He said that in the past few years, he has become so involved in supporting the province’s football team. More importantly, as a native of Chonburi, the Club has enabled him to carry much pride and prestige when he discusses with others about football. He went further to say that he has always watched English football and dreamt for something half as exciting to happen at his own hometown. Happily describing his love for the game, he said that CFC has enabled this dream to come true and has served as a magnet in drawing people together. He describes that the stadium is an atmosphere filled with a variety of people from all backgrounds. “There are engineers, fishermen, chefs, bus drivers, students, you name it... they are all there for one reason. They are for their Club, a source of pride for them”. The football stadium to him is a mixture of people from all walks of life. Nevertheless without doubt, the success of the Club also determines the amount of supporters, however, for most of the supporters interviewed throughout the research process, it was clear that they had high expectations for their team but also understood very clearly that the end result of any match could be a draw, a victory or a loss.

In describing in more detail about how much football has been part of his own personal life, the interviewee whom preferred to be unnamed showed me a tattoo he has, which he views is a big part of his identity. The enormous tattoo on his back is a picture of a man playing football, which he proudly claims is well representative of how much the game means to him as a supporter.



**Figure 10:** According to a supporter, the image above is another symbolic way in which the interviewee describes how much football means to him.

Similarly, another sub-group leader of CFC, whom is always there at the games has an enormous tattoo of the CFC logo on his back. He claims that mentally he feels attached to the Club and the very fact that it represents his province, and had no doubts about getting it permanently inked onto his body. As the CFC logo is now physically a part of him, he views that there is no need for a jersey as “Chonburi is in my blood, and in my skin”.



**Figure 11:** A proud supporter showing his tattoo, as he describes his connection to the Club as a relationship that is ‘skin-deep’. Source: Chuenchanok Siriwat, August 2012

As a result of data collected through content analysis, it is also evidently clear that identity construction and marketing techniques were employed to heighten the sense of belonging amongst the supporters (See Appendix A for examples). For instance, the carefully selected terms to ignite a sense of belonging were repetitively used throughout the entire stadium, and even in the main city centers. The means in which these were done varied, however despite the differences in the means of communication, there was a similarity in the message that was delivered. This was, the mere fact that the Club belonged to the people of Chonburi, and that with joint interest, “our Club” was battling against “the others”. For instance, the huge billboard inside the stadium (See Figure 12) carries a message that reflects ‘common pride’. This is another good example of how to arouse a feeling of mutual or common ownership.



**Figure 12:** The large advertising billboard within the stadium, with a message saying “The pride of all Chonburi people”. Source: Chuenchanok Siriwat, June 2012

Meaning construction as seen with CFC and its fans are also evident through the chants and songs that are sung at the games by the fans. The lyrics, when analyzed in detailed reflect an enormous attempt to create a feeling of ‘us’ and a feeling of common ownership. For instance, one of the songs that is sung is called “*Luad Nam-Ngern*”<sup>4</sup> or translated as “Blue Blood”, where part of the lyrics includes passages such as:

<sup>4</sup> The song “*Luad Nam-Ngern*” is translated to Thai as เลือดน้ำเงิน

“... Gathering all our strength towards success,  
 Bringing out the blue blood within ourselves...  
 We breathe in CFC, breathe out CFC...”

There is a long list of other songs<sup>5</sup> that the fans sing as a way to show their continuous support to the Club. A song that well illustrates the attempt to create a shared sense of belonging is evident in the lyrics of “*Rao me rao*” song or “We have each other”. A part of the lyrics translates into:

“We’re always confident in you,  
 Always here to give you support...  
 No matter how hard the road ahead is...  
 Never fear as we will always have each other...  
 We will always have each other... Forever and always...  
 Chonburi FC... Chonburi FC  
 Together always...”

Alongside the careful use of words, the lyrics of the chants and Club songs also reflect an effort to use colors as a way to symbolize the connection with the province, and with the ocean. The common phrase said at all games includes: “This is Chonburi... We are Chonburi... Rao Kue Chonburi... Satta fa nam- ngeru”. The use of colors “fan nam-ngeru” to metaphorically symbolize a feature of the Province has also seamlessly created the connection with the province. Other phrases such as “the power of the Blues” have also been repetitively used as a way to celebrate the unison and the combined powers of the fans and players in defeating the opposition.

### **4.3 A Shared Provincial Identity Beyond Provincial Borders**

Over the years, with the Club’s popularity and success, various sub-groups have emerged. With the majority of the sub-groups based in Chonburi and some in Bangkok, it has enabled the locals to interact on match days and in their daily life.

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<sup>5</sup> For a list of the Club’s songs, popular chants and Thai lyrics see Appendix II.

More importantly, field research suggests that one of the factors that has enabled these sub-groups to interact and maintain close relationship is through the online world. Club web-boards and Facebook groups have enabled groups to communicate, exchange thoughts, and more importantly connect to one another on a daily basis. The online world, therefore, acts like a magnet connecting the Club to the supporters and vice-versa.

In Chonburi itself, there are a variety of sub-groups that gather and travel together to cheer for the Club as they play at home and on away games. Some of these groups include:

- Chalarm Bowin
- Chalarm Ban-Bueng
- Chalarm Bang-Sai
- Chalarm Panat
- Chalarm Napa
- Chalarm Sriracha
- Chalarm Tu Llheh
- Chalarm Hua To
- Chalarm Pun Du
- Chalarm Due

On the other hand, an interesting phenomenon is the strong emergence of CFC fans outside the geographic borders of Chonburi. An example is a subgroup known as the “Bangkok Sharks”, which comprises a large supportive group of individuals who live in Bangkok but support CFC. During the match days, members of this group would gather and travel together to watch the games both in Bangkok, in other provinces and abroad.

The Football Club therefore can be perceived as socially, culturally and morally related to the identity of Chonburi football fans whether they are based inside the geographic boundaries of Chonburi or elsewhere. During big victories, especially against other prominent clubs (at both national and international levels) the Club are images of life for many people, as well as for the province itself. In this sense, football is a phenomenon that exhibits both a symbolic meaning and forms everyday

reality. Football identity therefore represents a significant aspect of life for many people, an aspect of the research that will be explored in the next chapter.

Fans form what they call a Chalarm Chon community, merging all the sub-groups into one as they support the team against the opposition. The community that is established is interesting in its own way as it no longer confines to a specific border or boundary but are formed initially through the basis of individual love and passion for the Club. The community, comprising of several smaller sub-groups some inside Chonburi province, some based in Bangkok therefore constantly meet to arrange activities and expose themselves as fans of the Club. In the words of Andrew Clark (2007), this well explains the idea of how “communities can exist without a territorial base (geographic), and territories can exist without any communal ties or cohesion” (2007, p. 6). This is evidently true for the case of CFC fans, as some of the fans are not even originally from Chonburi province, however, their attachments to the province and to the Club derive from the fact that Chonburi province is able to provide them with a sense of belonging. As one interviewee, whom requests to be unnamed vividly describes:

“...The reason that drew me to cheer for CFC is because it can provide me with a feeling that my home province [Nakhonratchasima] cannot provide. Here in Chonburi, I feel like we all have a share. Its our team. But there even in my own home, I just feel like the rich businessmen and influential politicians are trying to jump on the band-wagon...”

“...On a trip back home one time, I was offered 200 Baht cash plus free transportation to go support the local team play against another big Thai Premier League Club. They said the money was from a *phu-yai jaidee*... I almost didn't believe my ears... It reminded me so much of the election time. Well since they offered, I decided to go with my son to check it out. What can I say? It was my first time and last time. Not only did they play badly, it also shows the intention of the Club owners. Supporters are not stupid, you can pay them but that does not guarantee they will return or cheer for you whole-heartedly...”



During field research, she invited me over to her own house and cooked several meals. In her early 50's, she talked for hours about why she enjoys going to the games and interestingly shared her own views about how she thinks politics can pollute sport. She said, "there is no need to pay me 200 Baht to go watch a game, when "I am more than happy to pay 170 Baht for a ticket in Chonburi and a few extra hundreds on gas". The conversations between us were rather entertaining, as most of the time she seemed to have enjoyed talking about herself and her only son. She said, her son was the one who introduced her to watch football and support CFC. A few years ago, he went to watch the games with his colleagues and wanted her to experience the atmosphere. She admitted that she never had any interest in watching football before, but as she went, she started to understand the rules and had a great time singing-along with the crowd. Now, three years after her first game, she said she has missed less than ten games played at home. She proudly said:

“...because of responsibilities at work, sometimes my son cannot make it to every game. But that is not a problem as I have my own group of friends and we go no matter what”

She speaks of her group of friends with much fondness, expressing her views about how she has met so many new people by going out to the games and participating in the activities organized by the fan clubs. Her son constantly uses the Club's Web-board as a way to keep himself updated about the whereabouts of the other fan club members, and more importantly, as a way to book his transportation for matches played outside Chonburi.

As part of the field research, I was able to travel with the team abroad on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2012 when the team travelled to play in the knock-out stages of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Cup match against Home United FC from Singapore, approximately 80 fans travelled to support the team at their own expense. The atmosphere was extremely exciting, as the supporters were in a new environment. They were proud to identify themselves as fans of the Club, and adorned themselves with jerseys, scarfs, tattoos, and accessories to identify themselves as fans and more importantly, to differentiate themselves from others.



**Figure 13:** German fans amongst 80 others travelled to Singapore to support CFC during its international encounter against Home United in Singapore.  
Source: Chuenchanok Siriwat, May 2012

Travelling with the team abroad alongside the fans made it very clear about the ways in which fans interacted with one another, especially in an environment in which they were not acquainted to. Coincided with the close-distance to Thailand and the availability of several low-cost airlines to choose from, many fans followed to support the team during this match abroad. After speaking to many of the fans, they shared a similar viewpoint that this match meant a lot to them because it reflects the Club's ability to participate in a regional competition. To the fans, playing at the international level was another step in allowing the name of CFC to resonate throughout Asia.

The trip abroad, also made it clear about how identities differed according to who the significant 'other' was. For instance, within the province, CFC is the known as the province's top team in comparison to other clubs like Pattaya United or Sriracha FC. When these teams play derby matches against one another, the sense of 'us' versus 'them' becomes less obvious than when Chonburi played a team from another province. The tension between the fans and the expression of their identities differed. Yet amongst the players, whether CFC was battling a team within the province or from elsewhere, there was no mercy. However, when it comes to national level, Chonburi is regarded as the giants from the Eastern region, and one of the leading teams of Thailand. At the national level, CFC has also been dubbed as a prime role model for football development with its forefront establishment of a youth football academy in Sriracha, Chonburi. In addition, at the international level when Chonburi

represented Thailand in its encounter against Singapore, the identities of the fan was exemplified as the pride of Thailand instead of solely being on Chonburi province.

While in Singapore, it was extremely clear that the fans were very illustrative of their identities and often wanted to dress or behave in a way to ensure that their identities were distinct from others. Jerseys, caps, and t-shirts of CFC were worn on the flights from Bangkok to Singapore as the fans travelled in groups. Fans interviewed during the trip stated that:

“... when we are playing away, its important to be louder, bolder, and more aggressive. It is an important time to dress up and represent our Club. When we are away in another country, its our job to show them who we are...” (Lek, personal communication, 2012)

“... I like playing away because we get to bring the name of Chonburi to the international stage. Let it be known that Chonburi is not just famous for the Walking Street in Pattaya. We don't just have sex, sun and sea but we have one of the best football teams in Thailand, and a future of Asia...” (Lek, personal communication, 2012)

#### **4.4 Summary**

It is evident throughout the interviews with key respondents and from the content analysis that football is more than just a weekly activity whereby people with the same passion meet on a weekend to watch a game of football. However, when it comes to this particular case study, it reflects that there is a deeper connection or relationship between three parties, including the individual (which are the fans), the Club (CFC) and the province (through the Provincial Administration Organization). An important element to this is that identity is borderless, and it is not only confined to those living in Chonburi province. The sub-groups that have emerged well illustrate the extent to which this identity is formed and reiterated in different situations or in different locations (i.e. in Singapore). The three-way relationship relies on one another, but primarily links back to the Club whereby a vast majority of meaning is constructed and it is a site whereby identities are shaped.

In short, football has come to be an important part of contemporary culture in Chonburi. Football, as a sport has become an important aspect in the identification of individuals with the collectivities to which they belong. More importantly, football plays a significant role in the “formation and expression of their [the locals] ‘we-feelings’” (Dunning, 1999, p. 6). Likewise, local pride has been a product of the success of the Club in reaching out to the fans, as well as a product of the local politician who publicly uses the Club as a way to publicize himself and increase his legitimacy.

To conclude, the following points can be made about the ways in which CFC served as a site for identification with the Club and province (despite the supporters’ geographic locality):

1. Through the establishment of the Chalarm Chon Community (CCC), whereby members of this given community engage in activities to reinforce their identities and most importantly, as a way to create a sense of belonging amongst the community’s members.
2. Through the social media tools, which have enabled community members to actively, engage in an online world. As a way to exchange thoughts as well as update community members with the latest news, social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Websites or personal blogs have been used as an important means to socially interact, without having to live in Chonburi province. For instance, CFC is the number one Club in Thailand that has the most followers on its Facebook page, with over 50,000 followers.
3. The underlying concept of CFC as a team owned not only by the Club officials but by all the people assists in the creation of a “we-feeling”, this is symbolic in terms of creating a sense of shared fate and history.
4. Marketing strategies have also played a significant role in creating identifications with the Club and province. For instance, the emphasis on “blues” as a color and as a connotation of the ocean heightens the identity of the group. The Sharks TV, Sharks Radio, Matchdays newsletters, products as well as the Sharks Café and

Restaurants are examples of everyday life activities that help reiterate the importance of the Club. Constant reification and reinforcement of these material identifications also play an influential role in producing meaning.

5. The political role of local politicians and the political party of Palang Chon has evidently played a part in the identification process through its direct support and establishment of CFC. As a result, a large number of fans identify closely with the politician himself, thus creating another means of political allegiance.

Football therefore, can be regarded as a window in providing a better understanding of locals' perspectives on contemporary socio-cultural, economic and political issues, and more importantly serves as another venue in understanding Thai culture through the lens of sport.

## CHAPTER V

### LOCALS' PERCEPTION ON FOOTBALL

#### 5.1 Introduction

Forms of localism and identification with “Chonburi” province has dramatically increased as a result of the popularity of Chonburi Football Club through the creation of a shared sense of belonging and identity. The activities that occur beyond the results of the football game are reflective of the cultural political events that exist as another contemporary social phenomena.

The popularity of Chonburi Football Club has been a marker in ‘reinventing’ and ‘reimagining’ both the physical and mental identifications of individuals with the province. In other words, from the spread of the popularity of CFC emerged a form ‘localism’ that is reflective of consumptive patterns of contemporary culture.

From the newly defined forms of localism, springs identifiable processes through which meanings are negotiated and social relations, which occur beyond the realms of official party politics, known as ‘cultural politics’. It emphasizes the idea that relations are unstatic amongst different groups. Culture is political, and the use of culture in the political sense can be operationalized at a national, local, or comparative level. Through the use of cultural-political lenses, one can see culture as “something added to other more substantive domains but as an arena where social, economic, and political values as well as meanings are being created and contested” (Armitage, Bishop, & Kellner, n.d.). This chapter will address the different ways in which locals’ perceive football in relation to their everyday culture.

#### 5.2 Football as a Part of Everyday culture

Today, whilst its supporters need not be restricted to the same geographical area, it remains the club’s main priority to associate itself with a locality, a shared history, and a common sense of belonging. More importantly, it has also lead policymakers to

recognize the potential effectiveness of football for doing the work of community development – either as a tool for community service or as a tool to engage in other wider governmental programs. For instance, there have been instances whereby the leaders of fan club groups work together with the Provincial Administration Organization (PAO) to disseminate information and safety kits to reduce the spread of Dengue fever in local municipalities. It proved to be an effective way to distribute information as in some instances the fan club leaders were also leading figures in the local communities. The program has continued for the past two years and serves as one of the many joint community programs between fan club leaders and the governmental officials.

For the case of CFC, activities that occur as part of the everyday life varies from age range. Data collected from the fieldwork period suggests that younger children (mainly boys) also take part in their own football tournaments, playing in the name of CFC. The team travels around to play against other teams, and parents are truly supportive of this, as they believe it is a great way for their children to spend their spare time. Below (Figure 14) is an image of a youth team, voluntarily formed amongst themselves as a way to show their pride and connection with Chonburi province, despite receiving any official budget or assistance from the Club. The Club has its own separate Chonburi Academy, an institution whereby talented youth receives training, however, there are also other groups of children who enjoy playing football and have the same desire to represent CFC.



**Figure 14:** Young fans voluntarily gather to form a team, and participate in matches on their free time. Source: Khanisorn Phantumwadee, July 2012

Often times when parents bring their children to the games, there are activities organized by the Club as a way to allow the young fans to gather and to get to know each other. On a match day, an array of competition is held at the stadium to increase youth participation. The diversity amongst the fans as well as the atmosphere around the stadium on match days are extremely dynamic and colorful as people of all ages come out with a joint hope of supporting their local club.



**Figure 15 and 16:** Young fans and families at the game enjoying the activities and fun as a way to spend their normal weekend. Source: CFC, 2011





Alongside activities that are arranged among the youth, merit-making (Figures 17 and 18) activities are also an important aspect of the supporters' daily routine. Some of these activities are arranged to coincide with matches that are played in other provinces throughout the country.

It is through these non-formal gatherings that supporters of CFC feel acquainted and close-knitted. And through these activities their sense of belonging and a feeling of being part of a community are shaped:

“...I don't think we can build a close family if we see each other just once a week. That's the reason why activities must also be arranged beyond matchdays. This is when we can truly get to know each other, and I think so far we've done great. What else can we ask for? Travelling together to a game to support our beloved team, organizing all the transportation, visiting temples and eating delicious food...” (Kimhun, personal communication, 2012)

The activities that take part in the everyday are reflective of the importance and priority given to their identity as a supporter of CFC.



**Figure 17:** Fans travelled to support the Club in Nakhonsithammarat province in June 2012 and organized merit-making activities as part of the trip. Source: CFC, June 2012



**Figure 18:** Fans travel around the country in support of the team. In this picture Kimhun organized a trip to the famous Wat Rong Kun in Chiang Rai. Source: Kimhun, August 2012

In addition, the virtual online world also provides a great opportunity for supporters to reinforce their identities. An example is Dale, who created [www.clubwebsite.co.uk/chonburifc](http://www.clubwebsite.co.uk/chonburifc), an English language website dedicated solely to the Club, with an intention to further publicize the Club at a wider level. He personally views that:

“...the Club also taps into the local pride of the fans. Chonburi FC isn’t just a football club but the flagship for the city and, in some cases, the whole province. Just count the number of car stickers you see on an average day driving around the province.”

For Dale, the website has played a significant role on his daily life, and this is just one of the many examples in which the Club has impacted an individual’s daily life beyond mixed spells of excitement and disappointments of the games. As identities are a process in-the-making, channels to reinforce and reify those elements that constitute a fan of CFC has to be constantly brought to life. Ways to reconnect to one another has also relied on the use of technology as a way to disseminate news, and more importantly, as a way for the community and its shareholders to connect. Although they do not speak English or may not be fluent in Thai, it was evident that

the language of football, as cliché as it may sound, allows differences to be less obvious. Yet on the contrary, the shared passion, identity and profound amount of local pride in Chonburi as expressed by the supporters has enabled the game of football to be something beyond an average game of football.

“...a lot of my friends are people I’ve met through the football. There was a small group of us who used to go to all the games before the recent boom and we forged friendships then that are still strong today. I’ve been invited to weddings, birthdays and other get-togethers...(Dale, personal communication, 2012)

Likewise, Kimhun whom originally comes from the northeastern part of Thailand said that his family has relocated to Chonburi, and CFC has been an important part of their everyday life. His mother Ae organizes several activities amongst the fans, and more specifically cooks for the fans who meets every week. Originally a dressmaker, Ae no longer works fulltime but has opted to devote her time in arranging activities for the fans. Every weekend when CFC plays at their home stadium, she always arrives a few hours early before the game to meet up with her friends and fellow fans. On matches that are played outside Chonburi, her family drives with their private car in a motorcade alongside with several other fans to watch the game live at the sidelines. She recalls her experiences by telling me that:

“...CFC has provided me with so many opportunities to meet people I’ve never thought of meeting. I’ve made so many friends and I am glad my son has introduced me to this as now we can always do activities together. He has his own friends, some older, some younger, and I’ve got mine... we always find time to meet each other. Recently, my son got ordained, more CFC fans were there in comparison to our own relatives. It is a special relationship... we are a big family and always help each other. I cook for them for all occasions... ordaining ceremony, weddings, funerals, birthdays. Got to thank football for allowing our community to meet” (Ae, personal communication, 2012)



**Figure 19:** Kimhun and his mother Ae at the Ampawa floating market, as they travelled to support the team whom played against Samutsongkram FC. Source: Kimhun, August 2012



**Figure 20:** Kimhun's family on his ordination day, still donning his CFC clothing! Source: Kimhun, April 2012

It is clear that football serves as a site for ritualized identification with not only the Club, but with the province of Chonburi. It would be interesting to see whether or not this kind of localism and a clear expression of local pride will be different or not if the name of the Club was not the name of the province. Were it to change to a private corporation based in Chonburi, would this three-way relationship between the “Individual-Club- Province” be the same? Perhaps this question is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it was evident throughout the research that football has opened

windows for many social and cultural activities to take place amongst its supporters. And in many cases, friendship and the exchange of culture and lifestyle can also be seen:

“My wife too has made lots of friends from going to the match. We usually travel to away games on the Fan Club Bus so we see the same faces each time. The social side is a huge part of the Chonburi experience and one of the reasons I’m unhappy with the club for banning drinks & food inside the stadium<sup>6</sup>. Sharing our provisions used to be such fun and engendered a real sense of togetherness” (Dale, personal communication, 2012)

Alongside serving as a social space for an exchange of culture, it was evident from the field research that football was no longer confined to a certain social class or to men, but instead women also played an equally important role in the existence of football culture in Chonburi. Women often served as leaders of the sub-groups of Chonburi fans and continue to play a crucial role in the organization of activities for the community members. More importantly, women played a strong role in arranging transportation to away games and dealt heavily with other logistical issues.

On many occasions at both home and away games, it was interesting to note that women supporters of CFC were rather more open to expressing how they feel at the games. Whether it was conveyed through the form of yelling at the players, staff or opposition, it was relatively clear that the women supporters were more outspoken in comparison to their male counterparts. As women gain more power and influence in sports such as football, a possible outcome of this will be the possibilities for new norms and social structures to emerge.

More importantly, many of these women supporters are the same individuals who are actively involved in community projects, which are related to local municipal politics. As members of local women’s clubs or even community volunteer groups, their constant ability to meet other members living in near-by areas have made it much easier for community-projects to take place. For instance, the publicity and

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<sup>6</sup> The ban was promulgated after angry fans of both the home side and the visiting team started throwing bottles and cups into the stadium as a way to express their dissatisfaction with the referees during a game played in Chonburi last season. It has been implemented ever since.

distribution of Anti-Dengue Fever kits were effectively done via women leaders of the sub-fan club groups, as often times they were well known and respected by fellow community members.

During the election times, these women were also active in Khun Wittaya's electoral campaign, often times working closely with village heads and other community leaders in campaigning for Khun Wittaya. Women supporters, therefore inhibits roles beyond general supporters, and often times assisted in bridging aspects of every day culture together (i.e. community work and sports). More importantly, it also reflects the extent to which culture has changed, with sports being a relatively open field for both men and women to participate in. It also suggests that women are currently making strides in aspects of everyday life whereby in the past women have had to struggle to secure a foothold in the world of sport. This implies that, over time, in conjunction with the slowly changing balance of power between the sexes – a community's multi-faceted engagement in football should not be overlooked as a window to understanding the way of life for any given community and the social relations that exist beyond a game's final whistle.

Additionally, a close study of the supporters show that the fans are not just local Thais, but more importantly, there is a fair share of foreigners who support CFC. For instance, a group of German supporters rather impressed me with their knowledge of the team, and the way in which they merge so well with the other Thai fans. An opportunity to travel to Singapore on an away match, allowed me to understand more about the motives of their fandom, and in a way understand the extent to which the Club has impacted Thais and foreigners. Surely, the footballing culture in all parts of the world are remarkably different in their own ways, and the German fans who live in Chonburi were not hesitant to teach Thai supporters the fan culture and the way supporters cheer back at home in Dortmund, Germany (See Figure 21). Perhaps, this is another example in which illustrates the borderless nature in which sport brings to a community, who may not even share the traditional similarities of ethnicity nor language, but have been able to surpass the differences by building upon their common passion in which constitute their own cultural identity and pride.



**Figure 21:** Tobi, a German fan drumming away as he shows a local Thai CFC fan the way in which fans cheer at home in Dortmund, Germany.

### 5.3 A Spring of Life to Chart's Factory Life: (ชาติ ฉลามตับเหล็ก)

The result of a football match is highly unpredictable. The players that are chosen as the starting line-up are also unpredictable. Yet, what I witnessed as something rather predictable was a man who was standing amongst the crowd behind the goal lifting up two big blue hands that sparked with flashing lights. It was the same pair of hands that I witnessed on several occasions when Chonburi visited other stadiums. And after seeing this same pair of hands flashing behind the goals after eight games, I promised myself to find out who this person is.

Returning to Bangkok, I did some preliminary research about this mysterious figure whom always seemed to have this large eye-catching prop while he cheered enthusiastically for the team. After talks with fellow interviewees and other fans of CFC, it was extremely clear that he is not just a normal supporter, but is a highly respected man who they referred to with much delight as “P’Chart Chalarm Tup Lhek”.

With this clue in mind, I set out to wait for him before one of the matches played at Chonburi Stadium. As soon as I saw a man approaching the stadium entrance, I introduced myself and we started talking. After the game, I had met him alongside

with another group of interviewees at the Sharks Café and Restaurant, a local meeting spot nearby. A few encounters and long conversations allowed me to understand a few things beyond what I could ever imagine, and provided me with a useful insight to better understand his motivations, perspectives, and most of all why he claims football is more than just a game.

As a devoted fan who has been supporting CFC over the years, he said his own identity and persona of being a diehard Chonburi Fan has taken the lead role. Over the years, this role is significantly different to the Chart that works the usual 9-5 at the local Japanese factory in Chonburi. Throughout our several talks, Chart made it very clear that the atmosphere at his workplace is very different to what he experiences at the stadium on the weekends, or when his group of friends travel to other provinces to support the Club.

Not only does he watch the team play, he has a dual role as an entertainer for the other supporters, often bringing a lot of laughter and joy to the crowd as they become very into the results of the game. The fans who sit behind the goal are known to be relatively hard-core, especially his own group whom would normally stand as opposed to sit still and watch. The group of supporters where he is based in would normally stand, jump and sing along the entire game, which is very different to the supporters on the other side of the stadium who would rather sit and quietly watch the game. He claims that if this is a “theatre, there must be life. And for those who want that excitement, behind the goal is where you should be”.



**Figure 22 and 23:** Chart Chalarm Tup Lhek at the stadium with his trademark hands! Source: Source: Nuttapol U-Bolphan, June 2012



Chart said that it has been more or less a normal weekly routine for him to meet with his own close group of friends every week to support the team, whether they play at home or away. Amongst his group of close-friends, he identifies them as avid supporters who will always support the Club through good times and bad times. He claims that throughout the years, he has been travelling around the country in support of the Sharks, and has been one of the main organizers in arranging transportation and recreational activities for the supporters to different provinces throughout Thailand.



**Figure 24 and 25:** Chart Chalerm Tup Lhek and his friends at an away game in Bangkok and in Buriram province. Source: Nuttapol U-Bolphan, June 2012

In describing how he became acquainted and attached to the Club, he said that:

“I lived here for twenty years. It is not where I was born but definitely a place I now call home... I feel it is important to participate, as this team is our team. It represents us...”

“I have so much attachment to this province because if you love something, you want it to succeed... like your own family... you want your family to be happy... to live together in harmony. I feel the same for Chonburi FC, I’m so proud of it because at least now people nationwide has heard of us... they know about Chonburi FC. They know that we are a top team in Thailand and that is something which makes me so proud to talk about or to show others that where I live, I am part of this history”



**Figure 26:** Chart and his friends in tears after the team defeated Buriram United 4-3 in Buriram’s Thunder Castle Stadium in June 2012. It was the first time in history CFC ever defeated Buriram United at its home stadium. Source: Nuttapol U-Bolphan, June 2012

In referring to what he means when he talks about being “part of this history”, Chart recalls by saying that this Club was the first provincial Club in Thailand’s history to ever win the most prestigious trophy (Thailand Premier League) and this means a lot to him as person living in Chonburi because it shows that “Chonburi can compete with teams from Bangkok despite being backed up by large companies, the armed force or even state enterprises”. According to Chart, a sense of local pride or a feeling of great attachment to a province cannot be virtually created and endorsed by the authorities but must be felt by those involved for it to be sustainable. He views that the authorities have an important role in facilitating the sense of belonging amongst the locals but that could only be done to a certain level. On the other hand, he views that by allowing locals to psychologically and physically feel like they are involved in something that represents them, it is much more meaningful.

“...Big provinces like Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen or Nakhonsrithammarat may host several key events every year but I don’t think that the sense of pride in hosting those activities are felt by all locals. Yes, you can be proud of hosting the Rajapruek flower event but it is not something you would go to every week. It is not something you could cry happy or sad tears for. But with football, it has helped put Chonburi on the map again at the national and international level, and that is why I’m so proud to say that my province has something valuable to offer... not just our own fans

and community but we have something to offer to proudly represent Thailand”

“I don’t know how to describe it but after our team defeated Buriram United FC at their home stadium, it was the best feeling ever... I don’t normally cry but after that game, I cried because it is something we have all been waiting for. Defeating them at our home stadium is good but defeating them at their own stadium in front of their die-hard fans is just magnificent. It’s a story that can be told for years. It was the best match ever...”

According to Chart, another main reason why he feels so attached to CFC and the province itself is through the activities he and his close group of friends organized. Over the years, an important component of his role as a supporter is to arrange trips for other supporters to travel alongside the Club to various provinces to support the team. Although the main reason is to go watch the team play, another side of this typical routine is to arrange visits to temples. When asked why this is so, he explained cleverly that he strictly believes that if merit-making activities were done together as a group, then perhaps in the next life they will always remain attached to one another as a family. To him, this is the main reason why religious-related activities are consistently organized. Chart admitted that there were several occasions whereby he found himself asking sacred deities for blessings for his beloved team. He said shyly that, he is not the only one who depends on sacred deities when the team is not performing their best!

On a deeper level, it could be viewed that the systematic organization of these religious-related activities whether through the form of visiting temples nationwide or the annual *kratin* festival has assisted the supporters to feel as if they are together as one (See Appendix A for examples). To them, it seems as if joint efforts in this lifetime will be reimbursed to them as a group in the next life.



**Figure 27, 28 and 29:** Chart, alongside with many other fans together at a temples and monumental sites around the country. Source: Nuttapol U-Bolphan, June and September 2012

Alongside religious- related activities organized by Chart, he claims that every occasion is a great opportunity to allow members of the Chalarm Chon Community to gather and do good deeds for the community. For the Mother’s Day on August 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, a special event was also arranged as a way for members of the Community, or what he refers to members of the “Shark family” to give back to community they live in.

Among various activities that were arranged amongst the fans, August the 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 also coincided with a match day. Therefore, many fans were able to bring their families to watch the game at the stadium. As part of the several events held to entertain the fans on a national holiday, Chart assisted in the organization of a blood donation event. Not only did this event serve its own purpose, it was also very symbolic as it reflected that the members of the Community, despite where they are from or what occupation they are involved in are happy to donate their own blood for others who are in need. The ability to provide blood to one another also connotes a

higher level of relationship amongst those in the Chalarm Chon Community. In some cases, the beneficiaries of this blood donation event are the CFC supporters themselves or their friends and family members, while the remainder is made available to the wider public. Events such as these heighten the sense of belonging amongst the locals, and physically and psychologically make them feel as if they are a big family. To many supporters, this is another reason why they feel proud of their province Chonburi and of being an avid supporter of CFC because to them, the people of Chonburi “never leaves any one behind through dire times”.



**Figure 30:** Chart donating his blood as part of the activities organized by the supporters of CFC on Mother’s Day. Source: Chart, August 12 2012

Chart also discussed about how he views football is related to notions of localism, by stating that after the football club has played in the country’s highest league, it has created “something that has allowed locals to jointly celebrate”. He claims that in Chonburi province before the football club became this successful, “there were no such activity or event which brought thousands of people together during weekends or weekdays”. At an average game this season, approximately close to 7000 fans attend a home game, which is a relatively large amount. To him, this is so spectacular as it is not a “phenomenon that occurs once or twice a year, but it is something which consistently takes place every week”.

“I think much of this has something to do with clever local politicians like *Nai*<sup>7</sup> Wittaya Kunpluem who is able to use this [football] to capture the hearts and soul of the mass. We, as supporters will vote for him and for sure every politician wants to be involved in sport. Khun Wittaya’s opposition or any opposition would find it hard to compete with a politician who has the influence over such a powerful sport”

“... If you ask why football is able to change various aspects of life here in Chonburi, you have to understand that all this has a political agenda ... but for me that is fine as long as it is for the good of the Club and our province”



**Figure 31:** Chart getting an autograph of Mr Wittaya Kunpluem, the CEO of the Provincial Administration Organization and the President of CFC. Source: Chart, 2012

In discussing with other members of the Chalarn Chon Community on how much of their identities are based on what the authorities wish it to be, as opposed to the identity they construct themselves, other members explained that:

“It is undeniable that local politics plays a role in CFC. But I am surprised and happy that it is not extremely “out in your face”. We all know who the big boss (*nai*) is... In our Club there is still a clear line between football

<sup>7</sup> *Nai* (นาย) in Thai language is used in front of a person’s name, and it refers to a ‘boss’ or ‘leader’

and politics, unlike other clubs. I think its more elegant” (Seksan, personal communication, 2012).

“I think the local politicians know football is such a powerful sport, and they want to exert their influence by being part of it. But for local authorities in Chonburi... I don’t think they have a fixed identity they want us to adopt... I think it came as a result of the team’s success and a combination of good marketing techniques... *Nai* [Wittaya] has done so much. I’m so happy he is not like “*Ai Hoi*<sup>8</sup> *Newin*” who has to be in the limelight at all times. My *Nai* is different. For the past month, I’ve been helping him campaign for the upcoming re-elections. I know he will win for sure. 200%... you mark my words” (Yai, personal communication, 2012).

Likewise, many of the fans were also very much involved in the campaigning process for Mr Wittaya Kunpluem’s latest election, in which he won another term in office as the CEO of the Provincial Administration Organization. Chart views that the friendliness of local politicians, the down-to-earth nature of the authorities and the way in which they make locals feel as if they are “valuable” and “meaningful” to Chonburi province makes them feel as if the Chalarn Chon Community is one big family. During the election process, his famous big blue hands were also used as a prop for the elections as a way to publicize the Palang Chon Party, in which is led by the Kunpluem family.



**Figure 32:** Chart’s famous blue hands were used at the games as a way to publicly show his political allegiances. Source: Chart, June 2012

<sup>8</sup> Hoi (ห้อย), is a derogative term in Thai language which is used to illustrate Mr Newin Chidchob’s big lips.

With the province's access to the ocean, Chonburi houses several industrial estates zones with its close proximity to the Laemchabang Sea Port. Whether through mere coincidence or due to any particular reason, a majority of the fans of CFC are employed at the industrial estates, such as Amata. Several of those interviewed for this thesis were factory workers just like Chart. They were employed at various Japanese corporations, engaging in heavy machinery work or in charged of responsibilities along the production line. Many of the interviewees did not know each other from work but became close friends from belonging to the Chalarn Chon Community.

From a socio-cultural perspective, there is an interesting aspect to this as it reflects that football or the activities that relate to the Chalarn Chon Community provides an outlet for people engaged in this occupation to enjoy themselves. As one interviewee states,

“...Working at factory directly forces you to join unions. We join unions for different reasons... some of which are social... economical... But for the Chalarn Chon Community, it was the easiest, purest... and the best group I've joined”

More importantly, like the work of Chart, the nature of factory life is often very rigid whereby the roles and responsibilities are clearly known. Therefore the lifestyles of the factory workers follows a specific routine, as summarized by one interviewee in re-calling that:

“My life and my daily routines are almost exactly the same every single day. But when I'm cheering for CFC whether at the home stadium or away, I feel like it is an escape from the inflexible daily lifestyle that I have”

“If you compare my life to different colors... I would say that the weekdays are equivalent to gray color.... But during the weekends, it's a blast of color. A mixture of colors and emotions... Sometimes blue, sometimes red, sometimes a mix and match of shades... But what makes it different is the fact that there is life, there is color...”



Simply said, the nature of a factory worker's life encompasses a lifestyle that is rather monotonous. Yet, the exposure to football as an activity in the everyday life of the factory workers provides various exciting opportunities for them to spend their valuable free time. A lifestyle that is extremely organized and predictable becomes steered towards an array of social activities that are rather unpredictable. From the excitement of the games to the random results of the games, the footballing culture of Chonburi has enabled those engaged in this occupation to explore a different facet of life in which they can individually express themselves through their identification with the Club and province. And to the interviewees, 'football and all the Chalarn Chon Community activities' has injected life, into a factory life.

In short, it can be said that the emergence of the football club in Chonburi province has paved way for new activities and social relations to occur amongst those living in Chonburi. Socially, it has enabled locals to feel as if there is a platform for community-related activities to take place and culturally, it has encouraged locals to engage in various types of religious activities as a way to connect to one another. The phenomenon of football has opened a new chapter in Chonburi whereby feelings of attachment to the province has been engraved into the minds of the locals through the use of sport.

#### **5.4 Summary**

From viewing the role of CFC through the cultural-political lens, it is possible to see how the meaning of identity for each individual is being contested and re-constructed. One is not simply an individual from Chonburi, or a factory worker living in Chonburi but with one 'love and passion' in common, all these fans come together in unity despite their differences. Hence, the notion of 'identity' changes as the development of CFC brings forth a varied dimension in terms of what individuals can identify themselves with.

The ways in which cultural activities and social interactions turns into politics is through the direct and indirect involvement of political agencies as well as politicians in the game of football. With politicians from other provinces being involved in

managing football clubs, it stresses the concept of identification such as the notion of ‘we-ness’ or the us and them dichotomy. At the individual level, the identities of people who are involved in politics also changes. For instance village heads nowadays serve dual role as leaders of fan club groups. Loyalty and allegiances to the politician do not change, but the forms of identification have relied more upon the vehicle of football.

Before spending a lot of time in the field, one would not imagine the amount of devotion and seriousness CFC is to the lives of many fans. After travelling with the fans on an Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Cup match abroad as CFC played Singapore’s Home United Football Club in the knock-out stages, the picture became much more clear. Back in Thailand, the social, cultural and way of life in the province reflected an extremely interesting amount of passion for the team which were the ultimate source of local pride. Nevertheless when this mind-boggling experience of representing a province and a nation was combined, the phenomenon experienced abroad was unimaginable. This led me to further question the impact the Club and province has played on its supporters regardless of where they were geographically. I must admit, I was left at awe as this particular time when I found myself amongst almost a hundred other fans in the middle of Bishan Street in the small island of Singapore, jumping and yelling their lungs out in unison after the 90-minute victory CFC. They happily sang:

*“Tee nee tee nai? Chonburi!  
 Puak Rao Kue Krai? Chonburi!  
 This is Chonburi... We are Chonburi... Rao Kue Chonburi...  
 Satta Fa Nam-ngern<sup>9</sup>”*

For a second it felt as if the whole situation took place at Chonburi Stadium, but before I realized, an announcement was made on the subway that the train was currently approaching the famous Orchard Station.

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<sup>9</sup> Translates to English as: “Where is this place? Chonburi!, Who are we? Chonburi!, This is Chonburi... We are Chonburi... We all are Chonburi... Faith in the Blues”

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This thesis titled, “Football and the Cultural Politics of Localism: A Case study of Chonburi Football Club” has the objective to understand the channels in which identification to Chonburi Football Club has been created and reinforced by supporters. In doing so, explored the socio-cultural events that have been constructed via the vehicle of football to understand the means in which supporters’ identities are created and maintained despite not always being geographically from Chonburi province.

The following chapter will begin by answering the research questions, and additionally, a revised version of the conceptual framework will also be illustrated. And lastly, a conclusion will be made by addressing the use of sports as a platform to allow the emergence of localism and the re-definition of identities.

#### **6.2 How has CFC created forms of localism to emerge?**

The motivation of this research was to understand the means in which forms of association to CFC create, shape and reinforces the identities of supporters, whom may not be specifically tied to the geographic boundaries of Chonburi province. As an exploration into another social phenomenon in Thailand, contemporary football culture in Thailand reflects a fact that sports is no longer confined to just recreational purposes, however, it has been used both openly as well as subtly to deliver messages or as a tool by those in power. Throughout the research, it was evidently clear that football culture in Thailand is an all-encompassing field relating to all facets of contemporary culture, lifestyle, politics and economy.

Before the emergence and the success of CFC, there had not been any activity in which allowed locals and those of other provinces to experience a sense of pride and superiority for Chonburi province. It was clear from the research that football was the activity in which bridged people of all walks together in support of an entity that

represented Chonburi province. Little in the province's history had there been any activity that drew crowds of up to six to seven thousand people on a constant basis. The self-motivated fans who support the team not just in their home games but on away trips (both domestic and abroad) has opened a new chapter in the province's history in terms of successfully creating their own source of pride.

Forms of localism have emerged via the vehicle of football. Much of the activities that reinforce and heighten the sense of pride in the province have been exemplified through the activities that occur in the every day. The forms of localism that have emerged are not just limited to days when matches are played at the Chonburi Stadium, but instead has seamlessly occurred in the private spheres of the fans. An array of activities is organized amongst the fans between the various sub-groups as a way to heighten a sense of belonging amongst one another. The channels and activities in which forms of attachment to the province has been instilled into the minds of the fans differ according to age range. For instance, amongst the younger children, an actual mini-football league has been organized by the parents as a way to encourage the youth to play in the name of the Club against the teams from other provinces. A sense of pride in being part of the CFC team is experienced amongst the youth despite the fact that the teams may not be the 'official' team financially supported by CFC. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the youth are able to dress like their role models and play in the name of Chonburi is extremely valuable in implanting a sense of pride in their own province.

In addition, amongst the adults, it was evidently clear that there was a systematic organization of activities and events that are constantly arranged as a way to create a sense of belonging amongst the members of the Chalarn Chon Community. This particular Community does not possess any physical boundaries or geographical borders, yet it constitutes as a significant part of the fan's understanding of their own identity. For instance, it provides an opportunity for individuals to be taken out of their factory roles to inhabit a role as an important fan club leader. To them, being part of this Community as well as being accepted as a member of the Community has profound importance, as it signifies that they are respected and acknowledged. Members often want to lead the sub-groups of the fans clubs or volunteer to organize

activities as a way to become active members and have prominent roles within the communities in which they are part of.

Moreover, as the Community often associates itself with those in influential positions of power (i.e. local politicians, powerful families), any relation to the Community also implies safety and security. To the majority of fans, being in close proximity to those in power may also be desired for. It could be viewed that the association to the Chalarm Chon Community through the forms of activities and annual events organized is therefore another symbolic way of showing allegiance to a specific political side, simply because much to do with the Community is directly involved with the Mr Wittaya Kunpluem, the former Member of Parliament for Chonburi and serving CEO of the Provincial Administration Organization. Likewise, in the quest to maintain legitimacy, politicians use sports to boost their acceptance. As Antonio Gramsci predicted, if political officials support the sports that people value and enjoy, they can “increase their legitimacy as leaders” (Coakley, 2007, 454).

In contemporary Thailand, it is evident that football is not only an end in itself, but dually serves as a means to justify various ends, whether it is for popularity, passion, or as a way to create legitimacy and public acceptance. The recent wave of politicians in Thailand who were banned from any involvement in politics, therefore found the involvement in football as a useful means in remaining in the public eye, by turning towards the development of their own provincial Clubs based in the politicians’ given constituency. The surge of politicians’ involvement in sport is nothing new, however, it has directly impacted the lifestyle and culture of its supporters, especially with the case of Chonburi. Whether for political means or as a way to engage in community-related activities, football has allowed locals to cherish their own successes, and more importantly paved way for its supporters to feel as if they would like to broadcast and further publicize about the province of Chonburi.

In addition, the symbolic associations with its own geography as a coastal province and the emphasis in using blue color has opened doors to a new chapter in which pride in the province has been utilized. Highlighting the features that make the province different from others, and constantly reinforcing them through communal activities and marketing techniques has successfully heightened a sense of pride in the

province. Alongside, the re-emphasis on the feelings of “us” and “togetherness” has played a significant role in allowing the supporters, whether based in Chonburi or in Bangkok to feel as if this team belongs to them. The concept that the team is an entity equally shared and owned by its supporters makes it seem as if there is a shared fate, and a shared history to what they are involving themselves with. The creation of a “we-feeling” has fundamentally assisted Chonburi as a provincial-based Club to be different from other clubs that are sponsored by corporations or a State-Owned Enterprises.

By promoting supporters of the Club to become active and involved in the activities organized by the fans and the Club, a sense of belonging is felt amongst the Club’s supporters. All this connection and networking has been assisted through the use of technology. The Club’s Facebook page, web-boards and websites are key sites paving way for a ritualized identification to the Club. Additionally, it creates a platform that encourages a three-way channel for shareholders to interact. As a result, there is an increase in local pride, which correspondingly has three-fold benefits. Firstly, it becomes beneficial for the Club as it ensures support from the fans, secondly, it creates an endless amount of outlets for social, cultural and economical activities to occur, and thirdly, it is favorable for the politicians as involvement in sport generally comes with a good image.

### **6.3 Identifications with the Club and Province**

At first, it seemed as if sports and recreational activities were part of every given society, primarily situated in the private sphere. However, being involved in a different environment made it evidently clear that sports, particularly football, is a powerful field in which involves a variety of actors. The mere results of the game are one side of the equation, yet what constitutes an important part of the equation is the involvement of diehard fans and supporters. Without them, the existence of football could perhaps be remarkably diminished. By identifying the use of football through the emphasis of the fans, it opens several doors to understanding the ways in which that particular community or society views social relations, politics, and provides a useful insight into the general way of life.

The football stadium in Chonburi could be considered as a center of activity for the community, whereby the Club does not only represent the province but is a product that is co-owned by all. As many community-related activities are arranged at the actual stadium, it has morphed into a central grounds in which members of the Chalarm Chon Community gather and meet one another. It is therefore a shared venue, whereby the supporter's shared fate can be physically put into reality. As Hadas (2000) states, a football stadium is a source of combined emotions whereby some fans "have the best afternoon of their lives witnessing victories of their team" or perhaps, also the most miserable days when their team does not perform as well (2007, p. 174). For the case of Chonburi, football has constructed "we-feelings", creating an enclave where people are able to experience a relatively high degree of autonomy as far as their behaviors, identities, and identifications are concerned.

#### **6.4 Conceptual Framework**

When the segments of this research were merged together, it became evidently clear that the conceptual framework that guided this thesis entailed a reciprocal relationship. There are various stakeholders in this field, an angle that may not be entirely imaginable had this research not been conducted. The diagram below (Figure 33) illustrates a more detailed and refined version of the original conceptual framework.

It is seen from the research that through the vehicle of football, it has formed a group identity. This particular identity encompasses individuals from all backgrounds—regardless of where they are originally from. Localism can be seen as a core element that is useful for both the P.A.O. as well as the CFC Community members. Localism can be regarded as a magnet, drawing the two important aspects together, while at the same time both the P.A.O. and the CFC Community members create and ignite their own forms of localism.

Both the P.A.O. and the CFC Community members benefit from this reciprocal relationship, not for mainstream political reasons alone but for other reasons such as promoting friendship, doing community work, as well as providing a source of emotional and psychological satisfaction for the community members.

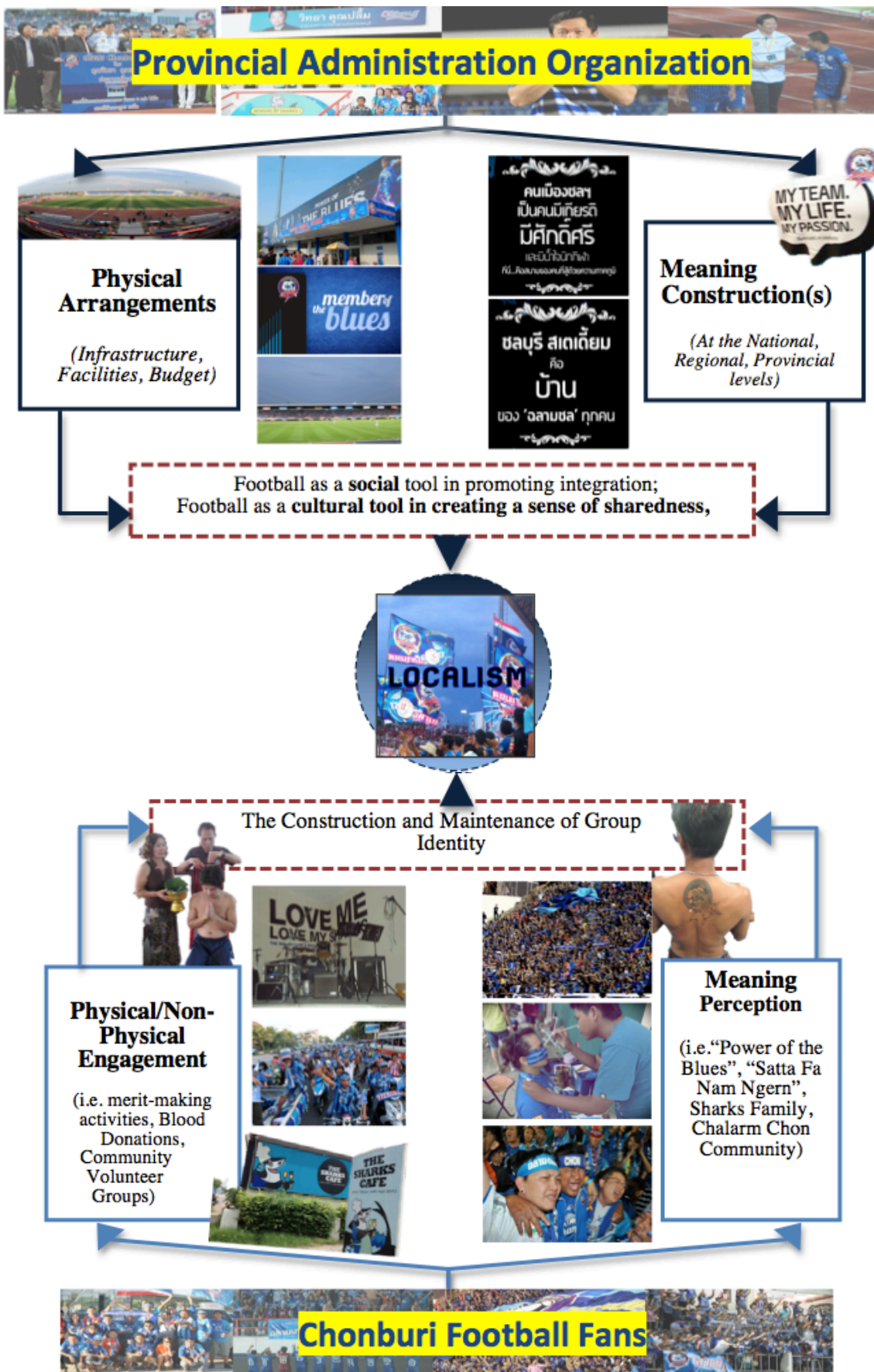


Figure 33: Adapted Conceptual Framework



This relationship can also be analyzed through the cultural industry lens. For instance, one can view the members of the CCC as consumers of the cultural industry, which in this case, suggests that CFC is in a 'culture industry' of its own. By looking into the roles of the members as consumers of the cultural industry, one can investigate into the relationship between the agents that are the producers and the consumers of that specific cultural industry. In the present day industrial society, culture is a powerful tool of public control. However as discussed earlier, culture is always under contestation and reinterpretation of its meaning from not only one individual to another but more significantly, one group to another. The construction of the CCC culture and forms of identifications can be seen as a reciprocal result of both top down and bottom up management on both counterparts of the 'agent' being the administration and 'consumers' being the members themselves. As a result of this, it is evident that the interaction of both the club and the community members has directly assisted in creating a 'local' sense of identity of those in support of CFC.

One may question the autonomy of the members of CCC in creating their own sense of local identity due to the fact that within this culture industry sphere, culture is viewed as a means of 'control' of the public within industrial as examined by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Thongyukong, 2010, p.18). According to the critical theory, culture is not a product of the public themselves but on the other hand, the public becomes the consumer of the culture that is produced in forms of 'entertainment' by the agents, whom are the predominant investors. Hence, in this case, Adorno and Horkheimer (as cited in Thongyukong, 2010) assert that culture is not different from any other industrial products. However, after the field research was conducted, the view of the culture industry by Adorno and Horkheimer is, however, believed to not be in accordance with the relationship between the CFC and its members of CCC in their formation of local identities.

The members of the CCC have played a predominant role in 'reinterpreting' the various concepts of identification guided by the administration. This is evident through the various lyrics that have emerged in the supporters' songs, with the concept of 'fah' 'nam ngern' symbols being directed from the Club, all in which have been thematically utilized and reconstructed through various means by the consumers.

On the other hand, the fact that the members of the CCC meets regularly on days which are not matchdays to participate in various activities; activities which differ from youths to adults, and to a certain extent, activities which differ from males to females, also evidently reflects that the members of CCC are not merely consumers of the identifications of 'culture' that has been guided from the 'producers/investors' but are continuously being reconstructed and reinterpreted by the consumers themselves. Through the various creations of sub-groups such as Chalarm Tup Llheh, Chalarm Hua To, Chalarm Ban-Bueng or Chalarm Panat, it is clear that the means of identification of what it means to be a member of the CCC, differs from one group to another, but are bounded by their passion of their CFC. The formation of sub-groups have allowed us to see the ways in which these consumers are not a 'collective' group of consumers adhering to the meaning of 'identifications' forged or imposed by the 'producers' (the club) but have shown the autonomy and ability to reinterpret the meaning of being a member of the CCC in their own ways.

Additionally, the role of the media and platforms of social networks used by the administrative body of the CFC and the members of the CCC, are useful in the ways in which forms of identifications and meaning of culture within the community members are being contested. The consumers, in this sense, are not merely consumers with 'false consciousness' or consumers with 'one-dimensional thoughts' but are consumers which are given several platforms (Facebook, Webpage, Blog, Twitter etc.) to criticize, comment on and reflect on the management of CFC as well as a platform to frequently organize activities that promote the local sense of identity of the Chonburi fans. As it is reflected, these consumers are not passive consumers but on the other hand, are conscious and active consumers which believes that they have an important role as 'members' of the CCC to affect the actions of the administrative body of the CFC through their criticisms as well as the ability to re-create and re-interpret their own meanings of what it means to be a member of the CCC.

Moreover, there is a dual interaction between the CFC administrative body as the 'producer' and the members of the CCC as the 'consumers' in forming their interpretations of identity and the Chonburi culture. The consumers as the members of the CCC, do not merely consume what is provided vis-à-vis the symbols, physical

infrastructures of the Club (as seen in the revised conceptual framework Figure 33) but creates their own meaning constructions that is guided from public in their understanding of ‘their’ relation to the Club itself. They do not merely attend the games as passive consumers but often play an important role in contesting and critically commenting through the social media platforms issues contending from the management of the Club to choices of the first eleven players for each match.

As what the conceptual framework suggests, there is a dual interaction between the P.A.O. and the CCC members. A central element which fuels this interaction is through the core element of localism and a sense of local pride that created a synergy between both the “producers” (P.A.O.) and the “consumers” (CCC). This particular interaction that is both top-down and bottom-up reflects the ability for CCC members to exert a level of autonomy in constructing and shaping their own identities. With this ability to not always passively accept what the “producers” impose on them, it provides the “consumers” with the ability to become active agents in the culture industry in which they have created. More importantly, it also reflects that football is intertwined into the culture of Chonburi as the CCC members are active agents in continuously re-inventing their local identity.

## **6.5 Sports and Society**

When it comes to development, the issue concerning identity has long been an interesting subject of discussion. Identity is political in that it can be constructed around many different ideas of what is important in a group or a particular community. Thus, this thesis research into a community of devout supporters of a football Club in Thailand has clearly suggested that social acceptance and the desire to ‘belong’ to a social group is evermore present. For most of the interviewees, the ability to be part of the Chalerm Chon Community is more symbolic than just the results of the game. In short, through identification with CFC, people can express their identification with the province it represents or perhaps with a particular subgroup in which they feel belonged to. In the context of a growing interpersonal modern industrial society, there is even reason to believe that, membership or identification with a sports team such as CFC has provided people with an important identity-prop. It continues to serve as a fountain, providing a legitimate source of ‘we-

feelings' and a solid sense of belonging. Through the football Club, it is allowed a larger collection of people to "express collective sentiments about themselves" (Allison, 2000, 2004; Maguire, 1999). When CFC plays in the national league or in the regional levels, supporters share a sense of "we-ness", regardless of race, religion, place of birth, language, education or income. This emotional sense of "we-ness" and unity is connected with their feelings of attachment to the province and the Club's shared history. Identification to a provincial football team has ignited unity and created a space for identities to be constructed in what would be an isolated existence within what Riesman (1953) called the "lonely crowd". The research provided an interesting insight to the fact that many of the supporters are engaged in occupations that revolve around the industrial estates, and their support for the provincial team is regarded as an outlet and an escape from their mundane factory life. Weekends therefore provide both an emotional and a physical escape from the tedious lifestyles at work, whereby individuality can be expressed. As a result, CFC has played a significant role in increasing social inclusion.

Since the end of the Cold War, with the introduction of new innovative technologies, rapid social change has increasingly become a global and not just a national phenomenon. An important aspect of this change has enabled newer forms of social integration to occur. In this context, allegiances and associations to a sports team such as CFC has provided a practical anchor in an increasingly uncertain world. To concretize this with a few examples, the former Soviet Union may have collapsed; Syria may still be entangled in a civil war; Myanmar is still emerging from under but, in the midst of all these situations, Moscow Dynamo, Belgrade United, Juventus, Real Madrid, Al Shorta, and Yangon United, continue to live on.

By its very nature, the community activities organized by the various sub fan club groups has reflected that football is a powerful field. It plays a significant role as an integrative function with its ability to aid the integration of individuals, groups and communities together. Football today provides a context in countries all over the world where people can meet and bond. In Durkheim's (1976) analysis of cults and religions, the extent that sports fans 'worship' or 'celebrate' the collectivities to which they belong can be argued as possessing a form of religious characteristic. It may be said that the growing importance of sport in modern societies has come to perform

some functions performed by religion. Perhaps in an increasingly secular and scientific world, the physical and psychological excitements and communal experiences offered through football deliver socio-cultural needs that are rarely met elsewhere.

Additionally, the function of CFC with its ability to intricately link economics, social, political, and cultural aspects of a community together has also supported Stevenson and Nixon (1972) theory of the five important functions of modern sport. These include:

1. Football serves a socio-emotional function;
2. Football and football-related activities encourage a process of socialization to take place. It is a tool in the transmission of beliefs and norms;
3. Through the use of football, it has served as an integrative function in aiding the integration of individuals, groups and communities together and heightening a sense of unity, pride and belonging;
4. Football has served political function(s) for those in power as the fan clubs provide as political bases for those in power;
5. And lastly, it has served other non-sport purposes such as facilitating community projects through the networks of fan clubs.

Perhaps in the near future, it would be interesting to study how clear the fifth function will be. It could be that as the Club becomes more successful, more businesses, corporations or individuals would become interested in the economical aspects of the Club. Or as the Club becomes more well-known, it may also attract more individuals to the field and serve as another means in increasing an individual's popularity.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the future of sports cannot be completely separated from general social, cultural and political factors. Sport can no longer be viewed simply as a leisure or recreational activity that is separate from other spheres of life, if my argument so far has any substance, football appears to be an equally powerful tool in strengthening social ties and networks amongst individuals that do not need to be confined to a specific geographical boundary. Football has also played a considerable importance in the identity formation of individuals and communities.

For the case of Thailand, it also paints a clear picture that contemporary football is linked to spheres of economic, culture, and politics. It reflects that local government involvement in sports is also highly motivated by concerns to promote and express particular forms of identity. CFC reaffirms community identity among local citizens, and games are often social occasions at which people constantly renew and maintain social networks. In this view, football in Chonburi are *invented traditions* that people use as a way to reaffirm social relationships. At the same time, football has helped different groups “develop a sense of cultural identity”, and it is through these activities that gives meaning to their identity and heightens a sense of belonging (Jarvie, 2006, p. 71).

Most importantly, it is with great hope that this thesis has contributed in a way or another to the academic literature on the sociology of sport in contemporary Thailand. As reiterated in the literature review (chapter 2), much information and literature is available on the history of sports, global sports and sport policies, however, more literature and research on sports and construction of local identity should be done as an alternative in understanding culture and society. Especially in Thailand whereby the professional league has just begun in less than a few years, this thesis investigating the specific case of CFC has provided an interesting insight into the field of sport, culture and society. I have suggested that as a socio-cultural phenomenon, football is a mirror of society and may very well be just as complex as any other social phenomenon. Regardless, this mirror is reflective of the impact in which football has played on the mass. It reveals that forms of association to the Club has created, shaped and reinforced a strong identification to Chonburi as a province. Through this tool, it has ignited a sense of pride in the local province as never occurred before. Through the various connections, whether symbolically, politically, economically and socially, it indicates that football is no longer confined to the private sphere, but instead, it is in everyday life that football culture is primarily perpetuated, expressed and experienced. There are adequate reasons for believing that sport is more than a ‘hobby’, ‘pastime’, or a ‘recreational activity’. According to Dunning (1999), along with “religion and war, sport represents one of the most successful means of collective mobilization humans have so far devised” (1999, p. 221). Through mass sports such as football, it has promoted communal activities to

occur. It has created a sense of belonging and ignited pride in a province, from forces that may not even be related to the geographical borders of Chonburi.

Over time, these constructed cultural activities have also allowed social interactions to take place, thereby creating an unstatic relationship amongst individuals. It reflects that culture is political, involving an intricate link of power relations amongst the interest of certain groups. As it is shown, the football culture in Chonburi is well connected to other economic, social, and political spheres. Not only is it a space for social interaction but it is also a space whereby political ideologies and allegiances exhibit themselves. The football culture has united the locals to feel like they belong to the same community. It has given the CCC members pride in the province and the incentive to want to further broadcast their own identity to others. From the research, it also suggests that the CCC members are not passive individuals whom have no ability to create and reinforce their identities. On the reverse, this thesis suggests that as a matter of fact, the members of the CCC are actively interacting with the “producers” in producing and perceiving the meanings that are created. Beyond serving the needs of representing an identity, football culture and the localism that has emerged through the interaction of the “producers” and “consumers” has also influenced the way in which local mainstream politics operates. It facilitates the interaction between local politicians and potential voters. CFC can be compared to a magnet that brings together the needs of the politicians and voters. Indeed, viewed from this perspective, there are solid grounds for believing that football is one of the key sites in constructing and reinforcing identities in contemporary societies. Even more so, football culture can be regarded as a complex negotiation between local politics and meaning constructions of local identity.

## **6.6 Suggestions for Future Research**

To extend this research, it would be interesting to expand it by conducting more in-depth research into the means in which local politicians use football clubs for their own political purposes. Perhaps, a comparison could be made between provinces that have politicians involved in managing and owning football clubs. It would be interesting to compare whether the incentives and means in maintaining allegiances with the politician are similar or not.

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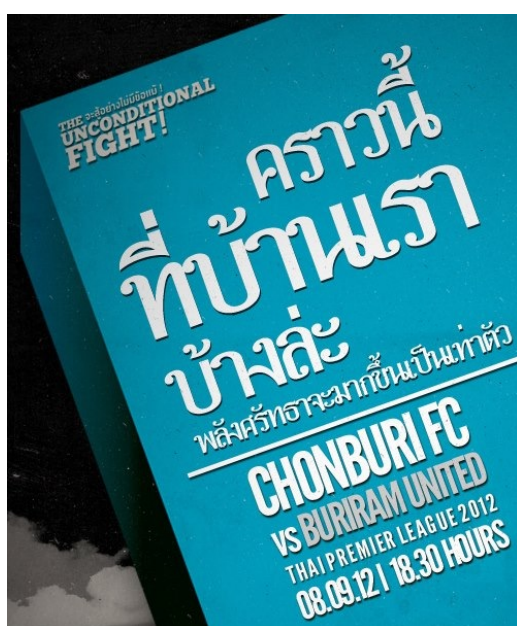
## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

Below are a few examples of the marketing techniques and the ways in which meanings are produced by the Club. These banners were shared across Facebook pages as well as throughout main areas of the city, prior to the big match between Chonburi FC and Muangthong United on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, 2012.



Below is an example of the banners and advertisements produced by the Club, and distributed before the match between Buriram United on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2012.



Below is an example of the activities that are organized in order to create a sense of belonging and unity for the Chalarn Chon Community. It is an advertisement for community members to participate in a merit making activity organized by both the Provincial Administration Organization and the Club. Through the common sphere of religion, it has provided community members to engage in a mutual activity to strengthen their sense of “we-ness”.

**ตักบาตรพระ:**  
๑๑๑ รุป  
ณ สนาม ชลบุรี สเตเดียม

**วันอาทิตย์ที่ 16 กันยายน 2555**  
เวลา 6:30 น.- 7:30 น.

สงฆ์บุญพิเศษ "อาหารแห้ง" ใกล้มหาวิทยาลัย ชลบุรี สเตเดียม  
(วัดเจ็บบึงหลวง อ.เมือง จ.ชลบุรี โทร. 323 3111 ใน 3 จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้)

องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัดชลบุรี ร่วมกับ  
สโมสรชลบุรี เอฟซี และ สมาคมฟุตบอลจังหวัดชลบุรี  
ขอเรียนเชิญทุกท่านร่วมเป็นเจ้าภาพโครงการ

|                                         |                                          |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1. เจ้าภาพทั่วไป                        | - ร่วมบุญตามวัดต่างๆ                     |
| 2. เจ้าภาพทองยก นอกลูก: 1,000 บาท       | - ได้รับบัตรพร้อมอาหารสนามกีฬา 1 ที่     |
| 3. เจ้าภาพฟุตบอลสนาม นอกลูก: 3,000 บาท  | - ได้รับบัตรพร้อมอาหารสนามกีฬากลาง 1 ที่ |
| 4. เจ้าภาพตัดต้นกัณฑ์ นอกลูก: 5,000 บาท | - ได้รับบัตรพร้อมอาหารสนามกีฬาใหญ่ 1 ที่ |

ตักบาตรพระ: 111 รุป ณ สนาม ชลบุรี สเตเดียม  
วันอาทิตย์ที่ 16 กันยายน 2555  
เวลา 6:30 น. - 7:30 น.  
สถานที่: สนามกีฬาชลบุรี สเตเดียม  
ติดต่อ: ฝ่ายประชาสัมพันธ์ โทร. 083-2244715

Below are examples of how supporters or those in the Chalarn Chon Community responds to the meanings that are constructed to create a sense of belonging and pride in the province. Source: CFC, September 2012



**APPENDIX B**

Chonburi Football Club song list:

- We are Chonburi
- Go The Sharks Go!
- Blue Blood (เลือดน้ำเงิน)
- Born to Be Champions (เกิดมาเพื่อเป็นแชมป์)
- Born for you (เกิดมาเพื่อเธอ)
- Player Number 12 (ผู้เล่นคนที่ 12)
- Muang Chon (เมืองชลฯ)
- Sending our Support (ส่งใจไปเชียร์)

## APPENDIX C

Examples of Semi-structure questions:

- 1) In which ways do you think Chonburi FC has created or ignited a sense of 'local pride'?
- 2) How do you describe your relationship with the Club and province?
- 3) How are you different from the rest of Thai football fans?
- 4) How would you describe the importance of technology in developing or maintaining the identity of a Chonburi FC fan?
- 5) In the past, football fans used to mainly identify themselves as a fan simply because they are from that particular place.
- 6) What are your views on how these forms of attachment or identities are created?
- 7) Fans come from all over the country, some from outside of Thailand, so what are your views on the identities of CFC fans that live elsewhere?
- 8) Lastly, can you describe how CFC has impacted your everyday life?
- 9) Are there any socio-cultural- recreational activities alongside going to the games you take part in?
- 10) What or how do you feel about the role of politicians and their involvement in sport in general?
- 11) If politicians are no longer in positions of
- 12) In which ways do you agree with this?
- 13) What are your views on politicians and their role in football within the boundaries of Chonburi FC?

## APPENDIX D

| No. of Interview | Interviewee     | Location             | Research Method(s) Used                |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1                | Dale            | Chonburi             | Semi-structured                        |
| 2                | Interviewee 1   | Chonburi             | Semi-structured                        |
| 3                | Lek- Ban Bueng  | Chonburi             | Semi-structured                        |
| 4                | Tee Wilas       | Chonburi             | Semi-structured and structured         |
| 5                | Koong           | Chonburi and Bangkok | Semi-structured and structured         |
| 6                | Tong            | Chonburi             | Semi-structured and structured         |
| 7                | Korn            | Chonburi             | Semi-structured and structured         |
| 8                | Interviewee 2   | Chonburi             | Semi-structured, in-depth              |
| 9                | Lek             | Chonburi             | Semi-structured                        |
| 10               | Kimhun          | Chonburi and Bangkok | Semi-structured, in-depth              |
| 11               | Ae              | Chonburi             | Semi-structured, in-depth              |
| 12               | Interviewee 3   | Chonburi             | Semi-structured                        |
| 13               | Interviewee 4   | Chonburi             | Semi-structured                        |
| 14               | Chart           | Chonburi, Bangkok    | In-depth semi-structured, Unstructured |
| 15               | Seksan Angthong | Bangkok              | Semi-structured                        |
| 16               | Yai             | Chonburi             | Semi-structured                        |



## APPENDIX E

|    | DATE              | MATCH                            | VENUE                       |
|----|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1  | 13 JUNE 2012      | CFC VS CHIANG RAI UNITED         | CHONBURI STADIUM            |
| 2  | 24 JUNE 2012      | BURIRAM VS CFC                   | I-MOBILE STADIUM, BURIRAM   |
| 3  | 7 JULY 2012       | TTM CHIANG MAI VS CFC            | 700 YEARS CHIANGMAI STADIUM |
| 4  | 11 JULY 2012      | PETCHABURI VS CHONBURI           | PETCHABURI                  |
| 5  | 14 JULY 2012      | CFC VS SAMUTSONGKRAM             | CHONBURI STADIUM            |
| 6  | 18 JULY 2012      | CFC VS CHAINAT                   | CHONBURI STADIUM            |
| 7  | 21 JULY 2012      | BEC TERO VS CFC                  | TEPHASADIN                  |
| 8  | 25 JULY 2012      | CFC VS BEC TERO                  | CHONBURI STADIUM            |
| 9  | 28 JULY 2012      | SAMUTSONGKRAM                    | SAMUTSONGKRAM               |
| 10 | 8 AUG 2012        | CFC VS. CHIANG RAI UNITED        | UNITED STADIUM              |
| 11 | 12 AUG 2012       | CFC VS. POLICE UNITED            | CHONBURI STADIUM            |
| 12 | 18 AUGUST 2012    | CFC VS. PATTAYA UNITED           | PATTAYA STADIUM             |
| 13 | 22 AUG 2012       | CFC VS. CUSTOMS UNITED FC        | CUSTOMS                     |
| 14 | 26 AUGUST 2012    | CFC VS. SCG MUANGTHONG UNITED FC | CHONBURI STADIUM            |
| 15 | 8 SEPTEMBER 2012  | CFC VS. BURIRAM UNITED           | CHONBURI STADIUM            |
| 16 | 11 SEPTEMBER 2012 | CFC VS. BANGKOK GLASS            | RANGSIT KLONG 3             |

### APPENDIX F

The following pictures are illustrative of the activities that occur in Chonburi amongst the Chalarm Chon Community Members.

Sub –fan club groups – The Bangkok Sharks and Chalarm Bang Sai



Below: Members of the Chalarm Chon Community before, during and after the games on match days:



## VITAE

Before embarking on her Masters degree in International Development Studies at Chulalongkorn University, Chuenchanok Siriwat completed a bachelor degree in Social Sciences with first class honors from Mahidol University in 2011. Majoring in Southeast Asian Studies, she became more interested in the role of local politics in shaping societies and cultures.

At the age of 16 years old, she began hosting her first news show on television, which was a weekly round-up show on sports. Until the present day, she is currently a freelance news reporter and hosts both news and talk shows on MCOT (Channel 9) and Newsline (National Broadcasting Television).

This thesis was inspired by her personal interest in football and the way it has directly and indirectly shaped local politics in contemporary Thailand.