

《Nation tops world in soccer investments》

Chinese investors have spent 2.15 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) on soccer clubs, making them the world's biggest buyer of teams.

Acquisitions of major stakes in clubs between 2014 and 2016, including Inter Milan in Italy, Reading in the United Kingdom, Slavia Prague in the Czech Republic, and Lyon in France, meant Chinese investors spent seven times more than entities from the United States, the next largest spender.

Research by London-based merger and acquisition specialist Thinking-linking looked at investments by groups from 41 countries. The total spent by Chinese investors was larger than the combined sums of the next 40 countries.

The surge in investment followed President Xi Jinping's campaign to make China a major player in world soccer.

During his meeting with FIFA President Gianni Infantino in Beijing on Wednesday, Xi stressed that gradually improving the level of Chinese soccer matters a lot for the country's overall development.

In 2016, the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, announced the nation's plan to become a world soccer superpower by 2050. In March, the Chinese Football Association unveiled a series of short-term goals, including raising China's world ranking to at least 70th, cultivating a million youth players, introducing soccer training at 20,000 schools and building 60,000 new pitches by 2020.

China ranks 82nd, and its national team has only a thin, theoretical chance to qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia after disappointment at the Asian qualification tournament.

After China, the US spent 313 million euros on clubs including Mallorca in Spain. Singaporean investors spent 256 million euros on clubs including Spain's Valencia team. Iranian investors spent 253 million euros on clubs including Everton in the UK. British investors spent 182 million euros on clubs like Melbourne City in Australia.

Mark Dixon of Thinking-linking said no country had ever gone from not investing at all to the largest investor in such a short time. China invested nothing in foreign clubs in 2014, 555 million euros in 2015, and 1.6 billion euros in 2016.

The heavy spending of Chinese clubs on foreign players and coaches has also made international headlines. Sixteen top-league clubs splashed out about \$410 million signing foreigners during the 2016-17 winter transfer window, becoming the biggest spender among the world's major leagues.

To curb overspending, the CFA has imposed a new rule that starting from the summer transfer window, any club that is losing money has to pay an extra sum to a youth development fund equivalent to the transfer fee paid for any new foreign player.