

# [***After fallout in China, Messi insists politics had nothing to do with missing game in Hong Kong***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BC9-R151-DYMD-630H-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

HONG KONG — Lionel Messi made another conciliatory gesture to fans in Hong Kong and mainland China on Monday by releasing a video on social media to explain why he didn't play in an exhibition match this month, and insisted that there were no political reasons behind his decision.

Messi disappointed [*fans in Hong Kong*](https://apnews.com/article/messi-inter-miami-absent-hong-kong-9d8d2e99d46069e1d469dd7338b240d6) and the city's government after he remained on the bench during a match between Inter Miami and a local team on Feb. 4. Messi and Inter Miami said he had a groin injury, but the grievances have spread to mainland China after he [*played for 30 minutes*](https://apnews.com/article/messi-inter-miami-japan-tokyo-e799b96f389e78213617562849ba4ec7) in Tokyo against Vissel Kobe days later.

After the Tokyo game, China’s state-run newspaper, the Global Times, even published an editorial highlighting a “theory” without evidence that suggested Messi's actions had “political motives" and that “external forces" wished to embarrass Hong Kong.

As criticism ramped up on Chinese social media, the sports bureau in [*Hangzhou canceled next month's friendly*](https://apnews.com/article/hong-kong-messi-refund-angry-fans-184a2aa2a138ab2896230041aa862dd6) between Nigeria and World Cup champion Argentina, captained by Messi, in China for “the reasons known to all."

In a two-minute video posted on Chinese social media platform Weibo on Monday, Messi said he wanted to set the record straight.

“I've heard people say that I didn't want to play (in Hong Kong) for political reasons and many other reasons that are totally untrue,” Messi said in Spanish in a video with Chinese and English subtitles. “Had that been the case, I wouldn't have even traveled to Japan or visited China as many times as I have.”

Messi said he didn't play because he had an inflamed adductor that had become worse after playing another friendly in Saudi Arabia.

A day before the Hong Kong match, Messi said, he also tried to play in front of the fans that came to watch Inter Miami's training session.

“I did all I could,” he said. “But I really couldn't play. I felt discomfort and there was a risk it'd get worse.”

He said he played in Japan because his condition had improved by then.

The Argentina star said he has had “a very close and special relationship with China.”

Near the end of his video, he said he “always had and continue to have special affection for" fans in China, and said he hopes to see them again soon.

It was unclear whether Messi' latest attempt to address [*the PR disaster*](https://apnews.com/article/lionel-messi-inter-miami-asia-hong-kong-7eb6f85e01e9f4c5ac338f2994b8bd89) would help him return to the China market anytime soon. Apart from the game in Hangzhou, World Cup champion Argentina had also lined up another friendly against recently crowned African champion Ivory Coast in Beijing next month.

But following the recent fallout, the Beijing Football Association said the city had no plans to organize matches involving Messi.

The organizer of the Hong Kong game, Tatler Asia, earlier this month apologized to those who were disappointed by Messi’s absence and offered a 50% refund to those who purchased game tickets from the official channels.

Tickets for the game cost up to 4,880 Hong Kong dollars ($624) each.

In its statement, Tatler Asia said it would refund 56 million Hong Kong dollars ($7.2 million) in total, resulting in a loss of 43 million Hong Kong dollars ($5.5 million). Before the refund, its net income stood at 13 million Hong Kong dollars ($1.7 million), the organizer said.

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