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Abstract

This article is about the development of baseball in Taiwan, and how it has been connected with Taiwan's entangled history of Japanese colonization, the Chinese Nationalist's authoritarian rule, the ethnically stratified social structure, and the emergence of the Taiwanese identity. Baseball was foreign to Taiwan when it was first introduced to the island. The sport then crossed the ethnic and class boundary between the Japanese colonizer and the Taiwanese islander in the 1920s, later the Taiwanese natives and the Chinese mainlanders in the 1970s, and in turn became a symbol of Taiwanese nationalism. This article argues that baseball does not circulate a fixed meaning as it travels to different places. The story of Taiwanese baseball indicates the interpenetration of colonialism, class, ethnicity, and nationalism.

Keywords

national identity, Taiwan, globalization, baseball

Introduction

This article is about how baseball's development in Taiwan relates to the emergence of the Taiwanese identity. Taiwan's baseball has revealed similar features to those of West Indian cricket as described by C. L. R. James (1963):

I haven't the slightest doubt that the clash of race, caste and class did not retard but stimulated West Indian cricket. . . . The class and racial rivalries were too intense. They could be fought out without violence or much lost except pride

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and honour. Thus the cricket field was a stage on which selected individuals played representative roles which were charged with social significance. (p. 72)

In Taiwan's case, colonialism, class, ethnicity, and nationalism have all energized Taiwanese baseball. Baseball in colonial Taiwan indicated the distinction between the ruler and the ruled: the Japanese colonizer and the colonized islanders. It then became an expression of colonial nostalgia while Taiwan was under the Chinese Nationalist's (Kuo-Ming-Tung, also known as the KMT) authoritarian rule. In the 1970s, Taiwan's victories in Little League Baseball were constructed as national glories while the country encountered political hardships—Taiwan's membership in the United Nations was replaced by its rival, the People's Republic of China (PRC). From the 1990s onwards, the formation of Taiwan's professional baseball leagues signified a strong quest for an indigenous identity as the Taiwanese.

The baseball field has therefore figured as a stage on which batters, pitchers, and basemen played as the islanders, the aborigines, or the natives for spectators and now for all of their people. The islanders under the Japanese rule could not fight back with military force, nor could they run away, but they played baseball with their own interpretations of what it meant to do so. The natives could not get away from the KMT's repression, so they played baseball to demonstrate their identity, which was something the mainlanders, who followed the KMT to Taiwan after 1947, could not understand. Nowadays, baseball is embraced by all. The development of baseball in Taiwan can be read as an indicator of the progress of a Taiwanese identity in the past century. Baseball is one thing shared by different generations of Taiwanese people. It is also proudly welcomed the Taiwanese in particular because it is one of the few spheres that Taiwan can be recognized without any concern about China.

The story of Taiwanese baseball has a rich implication that goes well beyond the island. The world today has been characterized by many as a globalised arena in which people and products frequently cross national boundaries and in which time and space are highly compressed. While many have objected that globalization is actually Americanization (e.g., Billig, 1995; Ritzer, 1998), indicating a capitalism driven, Western material culture dominating and eliminating local differences, the case of baseball in Taiwan has shown that embracing foreign cultures does not necessarily turn recipients into the cultural victims of a Western invasion; rather, it could be an eager and positive experience. In fact, the development of baseball has interwoven with Taiwan's history, which made the game symbolically significant, as it presents a shared national identity.

In the following pages, I shall elaborate on the trajectory of baseball in Taiwan: how it came to the island in its former colonizer's attempt to discipline local residents and, after 100 years, how it has been transformed to become a national symbol of Taiwan. By showing how baseball, as a foreign import to Taiwan, can pick up different meanings and integrate with the emergence of a new national identity, I will argue that globalization need not contribute to a homogenizing world; neither do recipients of foreign cultures necessarily fall in to the category of victims of cultural invasion. Global flows and local cultures may keep incorporating and enriching each other.

Research Methods

This article rests on two qualitative research approaches. First, archival data are used to describe the history of Taiwanese baseball from the late 19th century to present. Second, I organized focus-groups interviews in Taipei in 2006 to investigate how baseball might be appreciated differently by people of different social backgrounds. Members were divided according to their age and ethnic origins to investigate ethnic distinctions and generational transformation.

In the KMT's attempt to counterattack the PRC, martial law had been enforced for nearly four decades, from 1949 to 1987. Major ethnic clashes in Taiwan have happened between the natives and the mainlanders. To know how people of different ethnic origins and generations perceived baseball, and, considering that mixed-ethnicity discussions would have probably produced unwanted silence because many in Taiwan are averse to confrontations and arguments, I divided informants in terms of ethnicity and age—specifically people who grew up under martial law (older than 40) and the post-martial law generation (younger than 25). I also concentrated on middle-class people who live in urban areas, so the heterogeneity in regional and educational differences can be minimized. In total, six focus-group discussions were held, involving six middle-aged natives, six middle-aged mainlanders, six young natives, and five young mainlanders. Members were encouraged to share their own experience of watching and playing baseball and what the sport meant to them. Conversations in focus groups were held mainly in Mandarin and translated into English by myself.

The Journey to the Far East, 1800s

Although there is little doubt about that baseball's country of origin is the United States, there have been disputes over who its father should be. Some said that baseball was invented by West Point cadet Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown in 1839; some believed that it was first played by Alexander Cartwright and his Knickerbocker Club in 1850s (Ivor-Campbell, 2002). It is now more commonly acknowledged that baseball was derived from the game of rounders in England (Block, 2005). Baseball became widely played across the United States during the American Civil War. The first professional team was founded in 1868 and, a few years later, the National League was formed in 1876. By the 1870s, newspapers in the United States had called baseball as the national game (Ivor-Campbell, 2002).

While Western imperialism expanded, the 19th century was the Dark Age of Asian countries. Both China and Japan were forced to sign unequal, from their points of view, treaties with the Western powers. Japan agreed in the 1850s to open six coastal ports for preferential trade and granted U.S. citizens and Europeans who lived in those ports complete extraterritorial authority in all criminal and civil matters (Roden, 1980). Baseball was brought to Japan by U.S. soldiers and teachers. They regarded baseball as a symbol of extraterritorial privilege and unique cultural identity, and also an indicator of U.S. influence.

Team sports like baseball or football at that time were totally new to East Asian countries, but they were soon picked up in the wave of Westernization. Japan's Meiji Restoration, which began in 1860s, was a project to transform Japan from a feudal society into an industrial country. From that date onwards, the Japanese, keen to adopt Western institutions and ideas, sent students to the West to absorb Western values. In Britain, public schools have been important institutions in disciplining and civilizing people on behalf of the state. Hargreaves (1986) stressed that traditional sports like rugby and European football have been used to inculcate specific values, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and so on. In a similar move, the Ministry of Education of Japan decided in 1878 to establish a special Gymnastics Institute to train physical education instructors for young pupils. Physical training was then promoted in the Japanese state school system to achieve the Meiji Restoration's purpose, *fukoku kyohei*—improving national wealth and military strength. By the 1890s, the U.S. sport of baseball had been systematically introduced to Japanese students. "The interlocking of body, mind, and nation was made explicit in official sanctioned slogans and physical education songs that called upon the young to exercise faithfully every day for the sake of the country" (Roden, 1980, p. 516).

About this time, a surge in nationalistic sentiment among intellectuals encouraged the Japanese to outplay the Westerners' games. In 1896, a team of U.S. citizens from the Yokohama Country and Athletic Club was defeated by the Tokyo First High School, an elite prep school for students aged 18 to 22 (Whiting, 2006). The event was reported by Japan Weekly Mail and turned the baseball heroes into national heroes. By the end of the 19th century, baseball had become a popular sport in Japan. The Japanese believed that baseball nourished traditional virtues of loyalty, honor, and courage and therefore symbolized the new *bushido* or *samurai*, the Japanese value of the warriors (Roden, 1980). They gave baseball a Japanese name: *ya-kyu* (i.e., field ball). While the Americans in Yokohama played baseball to be more American in the 1890s, the Japanese turned to baseball in an effort to "reify traditional values and to establish a new basis for national pride" (Roden, 1980, p. 520).

Baseball in Taiwan, 1895-1945

"The quest for the national dignity" (Roden, 1980) made the Japanese determined to outplay and win at "Western games"—not only sports but also colonialism. To control the Korean Peninsula, Japan started and won the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894. As a result of this defeat, China agreed the independence of Korea and ceded Liaodong Peninsula, Formosa (Taiwan), and the Pescadores Islands (today as Taiwan's Penghu County) to Japan in 1895. Baseball thus came to Taiwan with the Japanese occupiers. The circulation of baseball followed a similar trajectory as it had done in Japan. At first, baseball was only played by Japanese residents in Taiwan to alleviate their homesickness. The Japanese did not regard the locals as capable of playing such a manly and intellectual game as baseball. Playing baseball was a marker of status and one that showed that the Japanese were the rulers of the island.

In the first decade of domination, Japan encountered moments of violent resistance and enforced strict suppression in response. Japan's ruling policy changed after Den Kenjiro came to office as the 8th governor-general of Taiwan in 1919. He proposed a policy of *doka* (i.e., assimilation), where the Formosa islanders would be governed as the Japanese, at least nominally. At this time, baseball was taken as a means of assimilation and discipline. State schools began to systematically introduce baseball to their non-Japanese pupils. Prior to this point, the game was not introduced to the natives, although Japanese high schools, post office workers, and soldiers had set up baseball teams and competed regularly with one another (see Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Morris, 2004; Yu & Gordon, 2006). People in Taiwan thought baseball weird and stupid when they first saw bat-waving and circle-running players on the fields. They also felt suspicious that the Japanese promoted physical training to recruit the natives into the military force. However, because playing baseball itself was a fun experience, the suspicion did not last long.

In colonial Taiwan, the Japanese colonizer called people in Taiwan the islanders, in contrast with the Japanese mainlanders. The islanders were subdivided into the Han people (the Chinese descendants) and the aborigines. The former included two subgroups who spoke different dialects: Holo (from Fukien) and Hakka (from Guan-Dong) (Wang, 2005), whereas the latter were divided into two groups depending on their relationship to Han culture under Japanese colonization: *raw* (or wild) indicated aboriginal tribes, who had adopted few Han customs and were often called barbarians, living in high mountains, on Taiwan's eastern plain, and on islands off Taiwan's southeastern coast; *cooked* (or civilized) meant those who lived in Taiwan's western plain and had adopted much of Han culture, including languages (Brown, 2004). The first all-islander baseball team Noko (literally mountain people with high ability; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003) was formed in 1921 in Hualian, eastern Taiwan. All Noko team members were Ami indigenous kids. Hualian Governor Saburo Eguchi explained why he helped found the team and why Japan was so enthusiastic about promoting baseball (cited in Tseng, 2003; Yu & Gordon, 2006):

Teaching the raw barbarians to play baseball is amazing. . . . Although they were born with violent blood, we can correct their nature and teach them the true spirits of sports. In addition, this will demonstrate our efforts in civilising these raw barbarians (p. 28).

Soon after the team was formed, the Noko team toured around the island and later were invited to mainland Japan. The athletes' excellence impressed all spectators in Japan and stimulated waves of baseball match fever in Taiwan. Later, the successes of the baseball team of Jiayi Agricultural and Forestry Institute (abbreviated KANO in Japanese) generated further pride and excitement for Taiwan. KANO was special for its tri-racial composition with Japanese, Han, and aborigine players. In 1931, KANO beat all teams in Taiwan and was runner-up in Japan's National High School Baseball Tournament. The performance of KANO made all residents of Taiwan crazy for baseball. One popular newspaper of the day reported on the fanaticism:

On the 20th, the entire Jiayi City, around 60,000 citizens, were very confident about the game KANO against Oruga Kougyo. . . . When the victory came out through the radio . . . , the entire city indulged in absolute joy. Some fans even drove cars or rode bicycles around spreading this exciting news. (Taiwan Hsin-Shen Newspaper, cited in Yu & Gordon, 2006) (p. 28).

By the 1930s, baseball was commonly played by Taiwanese students and middle-class employees.

When Taiwan was loosely governed by the Qing Empire, people in Taiwan did not think of themselves as a unified group (Brown, 2004; Chang, 2000). Feuding based on ethnicity, lineage, and places of origin erupted frequently with alliances crossing and recrossing these identities as circumstances varied (Brown, 2004). The Japanese came along with modern military force, followed by severe suppression and surveillance through educational, police, health, legal, and administrative systems. With only a few exceptions, the islanders went to a different primary school system from the Japanese and had limited opportunities in higher education. The Japanese dominated the management levels in enterprises and local institutions and always got much higher pay than the islanders, even when they were in the same positions. The Japanese colonizer considered that the islanders were uncivilized and not capable of enjoying the democratic rights of their own people. The colonial rule therefore forged the distinction between the ruling and the ruled class—in the case between the Japanese and everyone else.

As de Certeau (1984) has argued, power is never one dimensional, fixed, or rigid. When the Spanish colonizers imposed their culture on the indigenous Indians, the Indians had no choice but to accept. However, the Indians

often made of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept. They were other within the very colonisation that outwardly assimilated them; their use of the dominant social order deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge; they escape it without leaving it. (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiii)

Similarly, the Americans could not control how the Japanese thought of baseball, neither could the Japanese simply impose their concept of baseball on Taiwan. By introducing baseball to the colonies, the Japanese expected that the islanders would assimilate Japanese virtues of “unquestioning obedience to the state” (Roden, 1980, p. 516). To their surprise, baseball actually strengthened the islanders’ self-confidence and collective identity. The KANO baseball team was seen by the Japanese as an example that “both Han and aborigine Taiwanese were willing and able to take part alongside their rulers in the rituals of the Japanese state” (Morris, 2004, p. 6). However, the Taiwanese players might have thought quite differently. Playing baseball was fun, but the islanders also played baseball to prove that they were no worse than the

Japanese, or even better than them, when the rules were fair. Throughout the Japanese rule, the island's intellectuals never stopped demanding equal rights including that of setting up their own assembly when under the Japanese rule.

Sport From the Grassroots, 1945-1960s

Following Japan's surrender in World War II in 1945, the KMT's troop took over Taiwan from the Allies. The Chinese named their 8-year battle, from Japan's domination of Manchuria in 1931 to the end of World War II, the War of Resistance Against Japan. Given their entangled histories from the late 19th century, the Japanese were undoubtedly evil invaders to the Chinese. Ironically, in the KMT's desperate attempt to erase Japanese influences on Taiwan, the class structure left by the Japanese was reproduced—Around 1.5 millions of Chinese mainlanders who followed the KMT to Taiwan during 1947-1957 replaced the Japanese as the new ruling class (Greenhalgh, 1984; Wang, 1999), whereas the native residents were still the ruled class.

Soon after World War II, the KMT-led Republic of China (ROC) fled away from Chinese mainland to Taiwan in 1949 as a result of its defeat by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), later the founding party of the PRC, in the Chinese Civil War. With the support of the United States, the ROC claimed to be the sole legitimate regime ruling whole of China, although it only governed Taiwan after 1949. In its plan of counterattacking mainland China, the KMT enforced martial law for nearly four decades and maintained a large military establishment and a national-level government that included representatives of mainland provinces, which had to be elected by the mainlanders. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the mainlanders constituted 12% of the population but made up 90% of the defense sector, 80% of members of the not properly functioning parliament, and 50% of positions in provincial government and state schools (see Gates, 1979, 1981; Greenhalgh, 1984; Wang, 1999; Wu, 1997). The mainlanders, representing the orthodox Chinese culture from the mainland, dominated the public sector and middle-class professions, whereas the natives were commonly part of under or working class (Gates, 1981). The two groups were differentiated by their socioeconomic status, educational level, familial networks, religious beliefs and practices, and family income (for detailed statistical data, see Greenhalgh, 1984). In the new regime's overwhelming re-Sinicization project, baseball was no longer encouraged by the state due to its connection with the Japanese. Yu and Gordon (2006) described baseball in postwar Taiwan as "passion without state support." Although many of the natives were enthusiastic about baseball, there was no sufficient funding for planning games and purchasing new equipment without government support. The Japanese stigma that baseball carried in the late 1940s was so potent that most KMT-fearing school administrators were not willing to accept the presence of a baseball team on their campuses (Su, 1996, cited in Morris, 2000).

The saying "the natives played baseball while the mainlanders played basketball" indicated the ethnic division in sports during the 1940s-1950s (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003, p. 74). Because the mainlanders controlled the political and economic resources,

basketball obtained full support from the state. The government committed itself to infrastructures for basketball and granted basketball teams abundant financial assistance. On the contrary, baseball players could only use facilities left by the Japanese, and organizations that held international baseball competitions needed to raise their own funding (Tsai, 2005). However, the love for baseball did not fade away, despite the lack of support from the state.

Under the KMT's authoritarian rule, local cultures were repressed and many native intellectuals who had openly criticized the government were jailed or secretly murdered during the period of White Terror, from 1949 to the lifting of martial law in 1987. In this context, playing baseball became a less dangerous alternative to express colonial nostalgia shared by the native Han and indigenous people. The jargon and slang of baseball were mixed with Japanese and Taiwanese languages. Because proper baseball equipment was too expensive, rubber-made softballs were used in competitions, even in international games. These less powerful and inexpensive rubber balls made it possible for ordinary people to play baseball in many places. Therefore, even though material conditions were tough, baseball teams were formed on a local basis and supported by communities, factories, and small-sized companies. While baseball in colonial Taiwan was promoted by the state and played by students or members of the middle class, baseball in postwar Taiwan was absolutely a grassroots sport that became a popular leisure pursuit of the natives.

The natives were proud of playing baseball, which was something that the mainlanders could not understand. In postwar Taiwan, Japanese and Taiwanese languages were banned in public places and many occasions. While watching baseball, the natives could get together, exchange opinions, use their familiar languages, and demonstrate their sense of group identity as the Taiwanese. By this time, the name *Taiwanese* only referred to the natives, whereas the mainlanders considered themselves Chinese. Baseball in Mandarin Chinese is *bang-ciol* (bat ball), but the natives always call baseball *yah-guy*, literally baseball's Japanese name in Taiwanese pronunciation. After the regime's transition, baseball was one of the few things that was shared by the natives of different generations in postwar Taiwan.

The Imagined Community, 1970s-1980s

Baseball's popularity in the United States was another reason why baseball was sustained after the war. The KMT regime desperately needed U.S. support in its continuous war against the PRC. Baseball was considered helpful in diplomacy, especially in the relationship with the United States (see Tsai, 2005). In 1951, the first baseball team representing the ROC was set up in Taiwan and organized a trip to Manila for a series of games versus Filipino teams. The Philippines, although established as an independent country in 1946, remained dependant on the United States in the 1950s. Morris (2004) wrote that the young team from Taiwan made an even deeper impression when they volunteered to give blood to U.S. soldiers recuperating in Manila hospitals from injuries sustained in Korean War battles. It had been believed that after the Korean

War the United States decided to lean toward Taiwan to secure a wall blocking the Communist powers. During the 1950s, the United States became a major supporter of Taiwan's baseball. Officials of the USAID in Taiwan and U.S. soldiers often invited Taiwanese baseball teams to play with them.

The diplomatic and political role of baseball became even more important in the 1970s. Taiwan's place in the United Nations was replaced by the PRC in 1971. Being hit by this and other frustrations, the KMT regime needed to boost nationalistic sentiment and secure its legitimacy in Taiwan. The skills and qualities of Taiwan's youth baseball teams came at just the right time. The victories of Red Leaf over Japanese teams were a starting point for Taiwan's little league baseball fever. The story began in August 1968, with two great victories by the Red Leaf (Hong-ye) Elementary School team over a visiting team from Wakayama, Japan. This Red Leaf team was made up of the Bu-nun Aborigine youth from eastern Taiwan. They represented their tiny Tai-Dung County school of just 100 students and earned the right to play with Wakayama after winning the islandwide Students Cup Championship (Morris, 2004). The team were too poor to buy new equipment, so the kids practiced by hitting stones with wooden sticks and running in bare feet. The tournaments were broadcast live for the first time on TV, which was TTV, the first TV company in Taiwan and owned by the government. Their victory was considered impossible, but the surprising triumph inspired the passion for baseball all over Taiwan.

Two years after Red Leaf's legendary victories, the Golden Dragon baseball team won the 23rd Little League World Championship, the first gold medal that Taiwan got in an international competition. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Taiwan won 45 titles in the Little League, the Senior League, and the Senior Little League World Cup Championships (Tseng, 2003). All the tournaments were broadcast live. Baseball fans sat up to follow the contests held in the United States on TV at midnight. After the young baseballers returned home with their medals, they were regarded as national heroes and welcomed by crowds of thousands. Chiang Kai-Shek, the KMT's longtime leader, and his wife would meet them in person and have photographs taken together with the team. The KMT, which had neglected baseball for three decades, suddenly became an enthusiastic promoter of the sport. Little League Baseball, an organization founded in the United States, expected participating teams to be community based or from the same schools, whereas Taiwanese teams were usually composed of excellent players from across the island—a strategy that had been criticized for its nationalistic approach (Little League Series, 1974, cited in Sundeen, 2001). The KMT's intention was to foster a Chinese nationalistic sentiment; nevertheless, it actually "reinforced a new Taiwanese identity" (Sundeen, 2001).

During the 1970s, TVs became popular in Taiwan. With the arrival of TV, baseball tournaments were not only discussed in every family but were also recorded, reproduced, and repeatedly broadcast to remind people of these historic moments. Sociological research on sport has stressed the relationship between sport, media coverage, and nationalism. Billig (1995) pointed out that modern sport has a social and political significance, extending through the media beyond the player and the

spectator. For example, in the United Kingdom, the sports pages of newspapers reproduce a typically British focus, inviting readers to celebrate “our” victories and to salute “our” heroes on the very rare occasions “when British athletes win in the annual tennis tournament at Wimbledon” (p. 121). These celebrations are objectified in that the event is simply defined as being memorable, as if being memorable were an unquestionable characteristic. The particular collective memory of an occasion—“our memory”—is therefore elided with an implied universal memory (p. 120). Recollection of sports events is now increasingly accomplished via a collective television memory, capable of calling up every moment in a game and recalling each mythical sporting milestone by an instant replay (Horak & Marschik, 1995, cited in Horak & Spitaler, 2003). Collective memory is an important precondition for the symbolic emergence of a nation.

The involvement of media sports in the building of a national identity is on an everyday and procedural level . . . and through those extraordinary moments of success and failure that any given sport space produces from time to time and that become a part of the collective national memory. (Horak & Spitaler, 2003) (p. 1514)

The significant events of sport together with media commentaries on them are crucial for “the symbolic process of nation-making through sport and the key mythologizing role of the media” (Rowe, McKay, & Miller, 1998, p. 120).

With the help of TV broadcasting, baseball penetrated into families of different ethnic origins and, through the love for baseball, people in the society began to form an imagined community (Anderson, 1991). In the focus groups, my middle-aged informants, both the mainlanders and the natives in their 40s, vividly described how they experienced the nationwide baseball fever in the 1970s. Huei (45, female, mainland) said that her family owned the only TV on the street, so “more than 40 people would gather in our living room every time when baseball contests were on.” Wei (44, female, mainland) had little interest in sports, but she remembered that her mother always prepared some snacks, such as chicken craws, for guests coming to her house watching baseball games at night, again, “because not every family had a TV.” Agricultural societies in Asia were close knit in that farming depends on mutual help. Before TVs became popular in Taiwan, villagers often gathered in certain spots to share work and listen to the radio. With this tradition, it was natural for the natives to watch baseball together when only a few people had a TV. Many of the mainlanders lived in *juanchun*, state-built military dependants’ communities, and this physical proximity generated close relationships and shared experience. Ethnic segregation was only just beginning to dissolve in the 1970s, so although the natives and the mainlanders would be unlikely to watch baseball together back then, they shared a common interest in baseball.

Prior to the 1970s, baseball’s popularity in Taiwan was limited to the natives. My informants’ experience showed that achievements in the Little League enabled

baseball to cross the ethnic boundary once again. Informant Chang (43, male, native) remembered that he used to “pick up some empty forage bags which were left by neighbors after feeding pigs, made them into gloves and started to catch balls,” until his father gave him “the best gift ever”—a real baseball glove. Both Guang and Jiang were servicemen from mainlanders’ families. They started to play baseball in the late 1970s, for they were inspired by the baseball fanaticism brought on by the youth baseball teams. Jiang often played in schools and Guang played with mates in the juanchun he lived. Females were excited about baseball too. Liang (44, female, mainlander) remembered she used to sit up late in order to watch baseball. “I really loved those games because we won every time.” Here *we* indicated the national teams, though the players were mostly natives. While Taiwan was experiencing severe frustrations, and became a pariah of international communities, success on the baseball fields comforted Taiwanese people and provided a powerful sense of achievement.

Bi-sia, a middle-aged native woman, recalled excitedly in the focus group:

We used to stay up watching baseball, the games in Williamsport . . . [All: Yes. That’s right.] You know what? When I studied in Miami, I went to Lauderdale—the baseball field I saw on TV broadcast—and took pictures. That day our national team happened to have a game there. [Q: So you all have this experience?] Yes. We all did so while in high school and college.

While Bi-sia was talking, other members in the group became passionate too. They described how neighbors would set off fireworks while watching the contests and “cried together when our team lost” (Shu, 45, native). The youngsters did not experience the baseball fever in the 1970s, but they learnt from their parents, teachers and textbooks. Jia-De, a 19-year-old student from a mainlander’s family, said in a focus group with other mainlanders of his age: “My mum said she was crazy for Red Leaf baseball team. They used to watch baseball all night.” Pu (19, male, mainlander) in the same group echoed what he heard from his school teachers:

They said that was the coolest thing at the time. You would notice that every family turned their light on watching baseball. Once there was a hit or a home run, you would hear shouting or hailing spreading all over the alley. Was it truly like that?

The conversations above show that the passion for baseball has been shared by both genders. Moreover, the sport has not only crossed the ethnic boundary but also has been transmitted to the younger generation. The baseball fever in the 1970s has become a collective memory of Taiwanese society. The historic moments, such as the young athletes of Red Leaf’s run toward home base to score or Taiwan’s national teams receiving gold medals, have been repeatedly broadcast on countless occasions to remind people of the glorious age and of how Taiwan has struggled through the economic and political hardships of the 1970s.

Professional Baseball Leagues, 1990s-now

After its solid supporter, the United States, recognized the PRC in 1978, the KMT totally lost its role in representing China. The quest for further localization forced the KMT to give up its unrealistic dream of returning to mainland China. In 1987, the year that martial law was ended, some activists began to plan a Taiwanese professional baseball league. The first professional baseball league was created and named as the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) in 1990. The CPBL kicked off with Brother Elephants and President Lions playing in front of a sold-out crowd of 16,000 in Taipei (see Yu & Gordon, 2006).

Morris (2000) believed that the formation of Taiwan's own professional league signified the emergence of two movements—"the search for a uniquely Taiwanese identity, and the search for Taiwanese inclusion in the new globalised world order". The CPBL successfully attracted an audience in the early 1990s and with this support began to expand its influence. Many foreign players who joined Taiwan's professional leagues were from the rosters of Double-A Minor League teams in the United States. Each foreign player was given a Chinese name so that fans could feel more familiar with them. The recruitment of foreign players showed Taiwan's potential to provide a stage on which baseballers from different places could show off their talents. In addition, foreign players were the critical "other" in baseball teams. Formerly, baseball players' ethnicities used to be frequently noted in the media, e.g., Kuo Yuan-Ji was an aborigine, Lin Hua-wei was a mainlander. Since foreign players joined Taiwan's professional baseball league, the only distinctions that mattered were between *bentu* (the locals) and *yang-jian* (the Western players). All the native athletes, no matter whether they were aborigines, mainlanders, or natives, were classified as Taiwanese.

In 1996, an outbreak of gambling and match-fixing scandals in the CPBL disappointed its fans. A new professional league Taiwan Major League (TML) was formed in the same year, attempting to attract baseball fans who felt upset about the CPBL. The name of the new league also signified the transformation of Taiwan in the 1990s. Lee Tung-Hui, though as a member of the KMT, became the first Taiwan-born president elected directly by voters in 1996. It was the first time that people in Taiwan were called "the boss of the country." In this cultural and political climate, the TML identified teams in the dialects of Taiwan's indigenous tribes, connected each team to a county-based community, and chose the 28th of February to begin the annual baseball season. The date has been symbolically significant in Taiwan's history because the major ethnic clashes between the mainlanders and the natives happened on the 28th of February 1947. The 2/28 incident evolved into islandwide riots and ended by the KMT's military suppression, followed by severe speech controls involving the KMT's elimination of political dissidents. All the details of TML's launch were designed to echo the strong quest for a Taiwanese identity. The two leagues later merged in 2003 for financial reasons. By November 2008, there were four professional baseball teams in the league.

Informant Pu said that he was not a fan of baseball himself but many of his friends were. He said in the discussion:

They often go to Tian-Mu Stadium to watch games, a huge group of them together. . . . They say “this is Taiwan, this is our game, this is why it is interesting. You watch a lot of American baseball games, so what? It is true that they are very skilful. But there is no fun there. You don’t feel involved.”

As a lifelong supporter of baseball, Chang said that he would sometimes take a *bian-dang* (lunch box), some peanuts, bottles of beer, and go to the field to watch baseball by himself. His purpose was to appreciate the beauty of the game. During the interview, he talked about how he cared about baseball and often watched baseball with his two sons. He wished that Taiwan’s professional baseball system could be further consolidated and could become outstanding, “like Japan and the US.”

The name *bian-dang* that Chang mentioned is not actually Chinese but a Taiwanese pronunciation of Japanese words *bento* and then put into Chinese words. *Bian-dang* is a single-portion, takeaway meal first sold in train stations for busy travelers and now a convenient choice for lunch. This reference to *bian-dang* reminded me of the experience of watching baseball with my late father. When a game was on, food vendors and stalls would usually gather outside the stadium, as if celebrating a local festival. Baseball fields in Taiwan provide a unique product—betel nuts. Middle-aged, working-class, native Taiwanese men, such as my father, would go to baseball with their most casual look: underwear-like white shirts, shorts, sandals, and very often chewing betel nut. This is exactly what a *Taiker* style looks like. *Taiker*, literally tasteless Taiwanese country pumpkins, was a name the mainlanders used to tease the natives’ style during 1950s–1960s.

The baseball field could be one of the few public places where the natives felt most at home under the KMT’s rule. For thousand years, Taiwan’s aborigines have seen betel nuts as distinguished materials. Betel nut chewing was adopted by Han people in Taiwan and became a symbol of masculinity among the middle-aged, male, working-class Taiwanese. Baseball, betel nut, and *bian-dang* together were ways of demonstrating Taiwan’s multioriginated, cosmopolitan culture. The KMT’s promotion of baseball as a national sport satirically made the nation’s identity turn toward the natives’ side, and as described above the development of the professional baseball league has further strengthened a Taiwanese identity.

Baseball as the National Symbol, the 21st Century

After nearly a century’s development, baseball has now been regarded as Taiwan’s national sport. When the Central Bank issued a new version of New Taiwan Dollar bills in 2000, the image of a youth baseball team replaced the portrait of the late President Chiang Kai-Shek on NT\$500 notes. Politicians frequently use sporting metaphors. Chen Shui-bian, the first president from an opposition and also a proindependence

party, liked to watch baseball games and often used baseball metaphors in speech. He often attended the CPBL baseball games and referred baseball to “a Taiwanese spirit” on many occasions. In the 2000 New Year address, he talked about the Red Leaf team (Office of the President, ROC, 2000):

In this black-and-white photograph, there was a barefoot aboriginal boy at bat. His face showed full concentration, as he focused all of his energy on his responsibility. Meanwhile, his teammates stood by on the sidelines anxiously watching and giving encouragement. Such a beautiful moment perfectly captures 20th century Taiwan and is a memory that I will never forget. . . . The 21st century will undoubtedly throw us several good pitches, as well as one or two dusters. Regardless of what is thrown to us, however, we must stand firm and concentrate all of our strength and willpower for our best swing.

Without national support and widespread popularity, images of baseball would not be printed on bank notes and used as metaphors in politicians’ speeches. The enthusiasm and confidence in baseball diminished due to the CBPL scandals in the late 1990s but later revived as Taiwan hosted the 34th World Baseball Cup in 2001. As Lin (2003) observed at the final game of Taiwan against Japan on November 18, 2001, more than 10,000 fans chanted “Hurrah! Hurrah! Taiwan No.1! Taiwan No.1! Hurrah!” and waved thousands of Taiwan’s national flags throughout the game. When the team bus left the stadium, the players were welcomed by firecrackers along the road as if they were national heroes back in the 1970s. Lin quoted from a Korean reporter’s comment that “for Taiwan, hosting the 34th Baseball World Cup is to demonstrate its existence in the international communities. For Taiwan, baseball is politics” (*Korean Daily Sports*, 2002, cited in Lin, 2003, p. 208). Indeed, Taiwan’s national name Republic of China had been wiped off in international communities since the 1970s. The name was forbidden in the Olympics and on many other sporting occasions. If it was not because of the PRC’s inability in baseball, Taiwan could have lost the opportunity of hosting the World Baseball Classic.

During the tournaments of the 2004 Asian Baseball Championship, baseball fans were excited too. Many of my informants were at high school when the contests were held: “Teachers also cared about the games very much, so we closed all windows and listened to real-time broadcast on radio secretly in class” (Hsin-Yu, 19, female, native); “I stayed home to watch Taiwan to Korea and sent text messages to tell my friends at school any latest progress of the game” (Pu). University students demonstrated greater enthusiasm when the games were on:

It seemed that the whole university was empty because everyone was watching the game. When our team won, some rode motorcycles and waved the national flag along the road to celebrate. And they ate Japanese noodles and Korean pickles to symbolize beating the Japanese and the Korean. (Melody, 23, female, native)

Nowadays baseball is no longer a game limited to any particular ethnic group; it is deeply rooted in Taiwan and has become a sport of the nation. Baseball players recruited by American and Japanese professional teams are regarded as national heroes who make Taiwan known to the world. I know many Taiwanese overseas students who follow Taiwan's baseball news every day. Jasmine, a Taiwanese student in Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, often sat up till midnight to watch Taiwan's pitcher Wang Chien-Ming's performance in the New York Yankees through Major League Baseball's Web site. Watching the 2006 FIFA World Cup at bars with friends also reminded her of Taiwan's baseball and the old days when her whole family went to watch baseball games. She told me that she wished it was Taiwan's baseball on the big screens so that she could proudly explain every detail to her British friends. Baseball fans in Taiwan thought of athletes like Wang who were recruited to the United States or Japan professional baseball leagues as national heroes. Once Jasmine said to me,

I am very proud of him [i.e., Wang Chien-Ming]. He is from Tai-nan [her home town] too. . . . I feel very close to him. Maybe my friend's friend is his friend. I really care about his performance. American Major League Baseball is a stage of many ethnicities and a greater world. . . . I really feel that he represents Taiwan. Every time when he pitches, many Taiwanese students would bring our national flags and banners with slogans to the field. That is really touching.

These athletes in international teams are thought to be representing Taiwan. Chen Jin-Fong was the first baseball athlete who joined Major League Baseball in the United States. MasterCard in Taiwan invited him to film an advert—"Standing on the stage of the world with the Taiwanese passion, priceless." The slogan shows the reason why these athletes were respected by fans. Residents on the island disagree with each other on many issues, such as Taiwan's political status and so on, but at least they would agree that watching baseball is a happy thing to do.

Conclusion

In this article, I have written about how the development of baseball in Taiwan is related to the emergence of the Taiwanese identity. Baseball was introduced to Taiwan by the island's former Japanese colonizer, with an attempt to discipline and assimilate local people but became a common reference for the colonized groups. In postwar Taiwan, while the mainlanders became the new elite of the island, baseball, despite its being discouraged by the KMT authority, turned to be a sport from the grassroots arousing the collective memory of the colonial rule shared by the natives. Baseball was later used to boost the Chinese nationalistic pride while the KMT regime confronted serious frustrations in the 1970s but unexpectedly forged the Taiwanese identity, as the sport once again crossed the ethnic boundary between the natives and the mainlanders attributed to an imagined community.

As I have stressed, the case of baseball in Taiwan illustrates a complicated interpenetration of colonialism, class, ethnicity, and nationalism. The meaning of baseball in Taiwan is therefore unique. Baseball in Taiwan is a good example in showing that some practices introduced from abroad are actively sought out and welcomed, indeed loved by members of the host population and are culturally enriching. All global flows do not fit into the category of oppressive imperialist imposition, in which the host culture figures as passive recipient or victim. A globalised world is not necessarily a homogenizing world or a world where all existing orders are being replaced. In fact, people often appropriate and domesticate foreign imports to fit their needs.

The story of baseball in Taiwan demonstrates how a foreign sport can take on different meanings when it circulates into different places. The spreading popularity of baseball does not represent a circulation of a fixed message from its country of origin, the United States, to the rest areas, such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. New meanings and experiences of baseball are created along with local traditions and social structures. There is British cricket, Indian cricket, West Indian cricket, and South African cricket, just as there is American baseball, South American baseball, Japanese baseball, and Taiwanese baseball. Each of them is different. Thus, I can say the journey of baseball has not ended yet, neither has the Taiwanese identity. Together they will keep changing, evolving, and reflecting each other.

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Bio

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