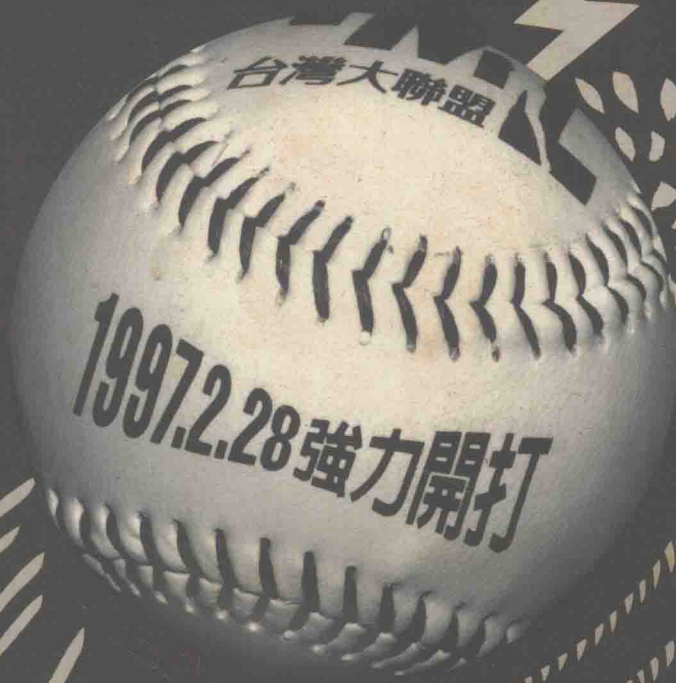


COLONIAL PROJECT, NATIONAL GAME



A History of Baseball in Taiwan

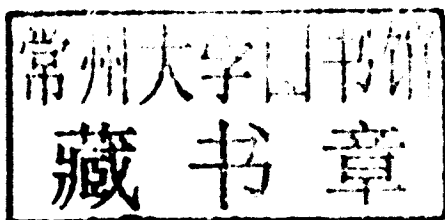
Andrew D. Morris



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Colonial Project, National Game

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For my left-handed Aaron

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In 2004 I took my then four-year-old daughter Shaina to a Uni-President Lions professional baseball game in Taizhong. Although she only lasted for about two in-

nings in the heat and noise, she told me that with the pounding of the fan-club drummers in the next section she could “feel her heart beating.” Is it too melodramatic to say that Shaina, my son Aaron, and my wife Ricky are the ones who allow me to feel my heart beating every day I am with them? I owe them every thanks and gratitude for all the happiness and fulfillment with which they have blessed me.



Taiwan

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Introduction

In March 2009, Taiwan's national baseball team faced its bitter rival, the Chinese national team, in the Asia Round of the World Baseball Classic at the Tokyo Dome. Baseball, an integral part of Taiwanese culture for more than a century, is still relatively unpopular and unknown in the People's Republic of China (PRC). But that did not stop the PRC team, managed by American Terry Collins, from defeating Taiwan (the Republic of China, or ROC) by a decisive score of 4–1, the second straight Chinese upset of Taiwan.

Coach Ye Zhixian made a public apology to the people of Taiwan upon his team's return home, but that was hardly sufficient, considering the tremendous national humiliation the loss to China represented. Reporters and television commentators commiserated that “the national game's honor is no more” and that “baseball in this country is dead!” Others pondered, “Where has Taiwan baseball's dignity gone?” “Can baseball be saved?” One miserable fan wrote, “Taiwan has nothing left anymore. We might as well disband the Taiwanese team and let China be our national team. They're going to unify us anyways.” Another newspaper editorialist asked simply, “What is there now that Taiwan could still beat China at?”¹

This event, and the palpable anguish that surrounded it in Taiwan, summoned several trends and relationships from the complicated twentieth century, which saw baseball become the all-but-official national game of the island. A Meiji-era import to Japan, baseball was quickly, strategically, and thoroughly distributed throughout the growing empire. For a short time, baseball was the exclusive province of Japanese bankers, engineers, other colonists and their sons, but before long the game became part of the national culture propagated by the Japanese government, media, corporations, educational apparatus, and military. Baseball was the sport of the

Japanese empire, and during Japan's colonization of Taiwan it became an expression of the Japanese spirit that all in Taiwan would be expected to learn and live.

The ROC's takeover of Taiwan following World War II had implications for this Japanese game, but its usefulness in training and exhibiting skills of teamwork and discipline appealed to the Chinese regime, which had already sponsored modern sports for two decades on the mainland. Before long, in ROC-ruled Taiwan, baseball became part of the national culture propagated by the *Chinese* government, media, corporations, educational apparatus, and military, now almost seamlessly becoming an expression of the Chinese spirit that all in Taiwan would be expected to learn and live. The 2000 election of Chen Shui-bian, the first president of the ROC in Taiwan who was not a member of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT, Guomindang), signified for many the completion of a democratic Taiwanese recovery of their island after four centuries of Dutch, Spanish, Manchu, Japanese, and Chinese colonial rule. And just one week after this election, Chen explicitly identified baseball as part of the national culture propagated by the *Taiwanese* government,² an expression of the Taiwanese spirit that all on this "Beautiful Island" would finally be free to learn and live.

The preoccupation with baseball as a Taiwanese "national game" is somewhat precious, given its organic connections to Japanese and American cultures and its late adoption by the Chinese Nationalist one-party state. But it is an understandable preoccupation nonetheless. Baseball has served for almost a century as a useful device and meaningful artifact of Taiwanese society and culture even though, in the end, its significance is much more about *global* processes of colonialism, imperialism, the cold war, and capitalism than about limited notions of a Taiwanese nation. The game in Taiwan today is still experienced as a reminder of the profound influence of Japanese and American culture, and indeed, of transnational capitalism on Taiwan. But "global game" has little resonance to the Taiwanese populist politician (not least because baseball trails soccer and basketball as truly global games); only an ideology of baseball as a Taiwanese "national game" seems a useful answer to the blustery nationalism that often emanates from the PRC, some ninety miles away. The fear and isolation that China's rise has created in early twenty-first-century Taiwan have led people there to celebrate fervently and enthusiastically their uniqueness, linguistic and otherwise, vis-à-vis the "Chinese mainland," often via once-Japanese cultural artifacts like baseball.

It is striking that baseball, an element of the decidedly exploitative half-century of Japanese rule on the island, can now be experienced so thoroughly as simply "Taiwanese." Indeed, the game introduced by the Japanese colonial regime has never thoroughly shed its Japanese heritage. From the name of the game—many still use the Taiwanese name "*ia-kiu*" (from the Japanese *yakyū*) as opposed to the Mandarin "*bangqiu*"—to the Taiwanese-Japanese-English playground calls of "*sutoraiku*"

(strike) and “*a-u-to*” (out), baseball’s Japanese “origins” are still an important part of Taiwanese heritage, both historically and ideologically.

The conditions just outlined make the history of Taiwanese baseball unique in the sporting world. Some models of colonial sport, such as that portrayed in the film *Trobriand Cricket*, in which natives on that New Guinea island transform cricket into a magical, mocking send-up of the colonial game,³ are clearly not useful in analyzing this history in Taiwan. The colonial era of Japanese rule hardly provided the space for second-class imperial subjects in Taiwan to alter greatly the basic ideologies attached to the game, or to create a Taiwanese equivalent of Ireland’s “Gaelic games” meant to stand alone from and opposed to British culture. Since World War II, the global relevance of modern sporting ideology has made it impractical or even impossible to imagine wholesale transformations of this universalized model.⁴

Other models of colonial culture and sport are more helpful. Bernard Cohn’s description of “investigative modalities” present in all modern forms of colonialism is useful in understanding how the Japanese sought to “classify, categorize, and bound” the social and cultural world of Taiwan in order to better control and exploit it.⁵ As chapter 1 will show, the desire of the Japanese to get their hands on the natural resources of Taiwan’s “savage lands”—the mountains of the island’s central and eastern regions—was directly entwined with their exhaustive research there, and ultimately with their plan to civilize the regions’ Austronesian Aborigine inhabitants through baseball. Leo Ching’s work, especially his groundbreaking 2001 book *Becoming “Japanese,”*⁶ is of the highest importance on this topic. His explanations of the intersections of colonial culture and the official Japanese rhetoric of assimilation and imperial subject-making have inspired much of my work, although I do propose in chapter 2 ways that baseball works even better than colonial-era drama or film to illustrate how Taiwan’s colonization was experienced by Taiwanese and Japanese subjects alike.

The Japanese project to create an island of imperial subjects should also be framed in terms of Homi Bhabha’s notions of “colonial mimicry,” which Bhabha describes as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. . . . In order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”⁷ Baseball became a crucial site for the production of civilized Taiwanese subjects at the same time that the excellence of the Taiwanese in the game was used to call attention to the Japanese colonial regime’s success in transforming a once-savage and backward populace. The history of the game of cricket provides a useful backdrop here as well. C. L. R. James documented early and famously how in the British West Indies, the inspired performances of standout black cricketers won West Indians a respect from the colonizing population that was hard to achieve otherwise.⁸ As in cricket, the baseball triumph of two generations of Taiwanese baseball players and teams did much to

convince Japanese people of the worthiness of their cosubjects from this far-off island, even if distinctions were maintained between those who had been born with a Japanese spirit and those who merely had mastered it through study and practice.

Following James, the British imperial model of sportsmanship and the construction of a standard athletic masculinity, as described by Patrick McDevitt,⁹ provide one of the best models of baseball's colonial functions in Taiwan. However, the British pattern fails to account for one special facet of Japanese colonialism, especially in Taiwan. While a British ideal of sport, progress, and masculinity was applied to their colonial subjects, sports could also be used to expose a moral—if not biological—gap between them and their lessers. Japanese characterizations—still justified by many today—of their more righteous and race-appropriate brand of “Asia for the Asians” colonialism are surely odious for their historical obscuration. Still, by the 1920s these ideologies of Japanese colonial rule meant by definition that baseball could *not* be used to define or prove such important racial or moral distinctions between Japanese and Taiwanese. Indeed, it was often the case that the opposite was true; in chapter 2 I discuss the history of Taiwan's famed “triracial” Kanō baseball team, admired in Japan for their ability to inspire the public with the hope that the achievements of a “new untouched race” of Taiwanese Aborigines could revive a cynical and jaded modern Japan.¹⁰

Taiwan's experiences after its transfer to Nationalist Chinese rule in 1945 make this history even more unique. Most historians studying Chinese Taiwan in the decades that followed—with the distinct exception of George Kerr and his landmark *Formosa Betrayed*—concentrated on the cold war diplomatic and military ties between the ROC government and the United States. Recently, however, more historians have tried to understand the social and cultural implications of this experience, which was much less the “Retrocession” of KMT ideology—a long-heralded and historically just “return” of Taiwan to Chinese rule—than a contingent and hurried big-power transfer of a small peripheral island from one fading empire to another.

Steven Phillips's book *Between Assimilation and Independence* provides an excellent study of this truly liminal and unpredictable moment in Taiwan's history.¹¹ The KMT's understanding of these events as a victorious takeover of an island of six million shameless and degraded “collaborators” did not just represent an ideology. It had a real impact on the life chances of Taiwanese people, who had become quite used to the modern ways of the Japanese empire.

The topic of baseball in Taiwan has been studied most recently by Junwei Yu, a professor of recreation and sport management in Taiwan. His 2007 book *Playing In Isolation* offers the first book-length English-language history of the topic.¹² Yu attempts to cover the entire twentieth century, although the work is not truly comprehensive; the book's main contribution comes with Yu's attention to the history of the Little League Baseball program that brought so much attention and scrutiny to

Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s. Yu is a true muckraker, and his connections within Taiwan's baseball world are valuable. His explanation of the historical basis behind several youth baseball scandals is useful in helping us to understand the pressures on Taiwan's baseball-playing youth to bring glory and prestige to the reeling, near-pariah state of the Chiang-era Republic of China in Taiwan. However, this work pays much less attention to the crucial and lasting influences of Japanese colonial rule on the game and on Taiwanese society as a whole. The work's greatest flaw is revealed in its title—Yu takes the relationship between baseball and the diplomatic isolation that the ROC suffered in the 1970s and '80s to stand for the entire century. In fact, my work shows that the modern history of Taiwan and its national game are actually defined by the precise *opposite* of “isolation.” The history of this island is one of a fascinating, complex, and conscious *engagement* with the powerful peoples and technologies that have defined Taiwan so, a true embeddedness in the flows of culture that have transformed totally Taiwanese life again and again in the last 110 years.

In order to best address this history, I use throughout this book ideas of “glocalization”—a recent scholarly term used to describe the local implementation of globalized forms, or, in the words of Roland Robertson, “the simultaneity—the co-presence—of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies” that appear so often in, and complicate our understanding of, these forms.¹³ This dual nature of globalization often escapes analyses that can tend to focus on one-sided models of cultural contact, like the famed notion of “Cocacolonization,” which describes a simple imprint of American ways on vulnerable Others.¹⁴ It does not roll off the tongue, but I have found this fittingly playful formulation of “glocalization” to be very appropriate in describing modern Taiwanese culture and its formation at the hands of the complex historical legacies just described. And this is without even mentioning the remarkable and striking quality of contemporary Taiwanese culture's self-conscious, ideological combination of the global and the local, the cosmopolitan and the provincial, the international and the Taiwanese—the game of baseball is a perfect example of all of this.

A local television commercial for Kentucky Fried Chicken that aired to great public pleasure in the summer of 2004 can actually help explain this “playful” tension and hybridity. The advertisement featured a Taiwanese tour guide haplessly attempting to impress a group of PRC Chinese tourists with the sights of the island. After Sun Moon Lake and Jade Mountain fail to stir these boastful and condescending mainlanders, the resourceful tour guide decides to feed them “Taiwanese” Kentucky Fried Chicken—strips of meat that are even spicier than Sichuan's famed cuisine. Finally the guide wins respect for the island, confirmed when the loudest mouth of the bunch (a dead ringer for former president Jiang Zemin) proclaims in caricatured PRC Mandarin, “Now we must not look down on Taiwan.” When the innovative recipes of Chicken Capital U.S.A. can so easily serve the purposes of breakthrough “state-to-state” diplomacy between Taiwan and China, we know that