

Abstract

At first glance, baseball, current controversies in the US-Japan bilateral relationship, and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's recent increase in international diplomatic visits may appear to have little connection. Despite their disparate spheres of origin, however, these seemingly unrelated phenomena have deep interconnections.

Baseball has historically been known as “America's pastime.” While it was Americans who originally popularized the game, however, the sport has since spread and gained traction across the globe. Japan represents one such example of baseball adoption: the sport has become a staple of Japanese leisure culture since its introduction in the early 1870s. With its own professional baseball organization and an immensely popular high school competition, Japan has long been a state populated by baseball fanatics.

Since its inception, baseball in Japan has evolved and changed countless times. Many of the most significant changes have occurred in periods of considerable political development or transformation in the state. This project examines the links between identity, politics, and sports, drawing on theoretical concepts and historical events to explore the ways in which baseball and politics in Japan have influenced each other. The study also examines and ultimately dispels the myth of ‘samurai’ baseball, a widely disseminated interpretation of the Japanese version of the sport that perpetuates stereotypes about Japanese collectivism. Through this project, I also explore the actual differences between Japanese and American professional baseball and analyze the significance of these differences in the context of the bilateral relationship. Finally, drawing on recent trends and current events, I consider the perceived ‘crisis’ of Japanese baseball, the future of the sport in the Japanese state, and the impact a potential drop in popularity would have on the US-Japan partnership.

By analyzing Japanese language newspaper articles in conjunction with changes in institutional foreign player restrictions, I demonstrate the connection between baseball and politics in Japan. Through a consideration of recent events in Japanese politics, I also come to the conclusion that though Japanese baseball has not reached crisis level, it may soon be surpassed in popularity by soccer. This change could, in turn, signify a decline in the importance of the bilateral relationship between Japan and the United States.

**From Ichikō to Ma-Kun:
The Politics of Baseball in the US-Japan
Bilateral Relationship**

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Introduction: Becoming a (Japanese) Baseball Fan

Osaka's Kōshien on game day is a beautiful thing.

The stadium, top among Japan's most famous sporting arenas, is home to Japanese baseball's beloved Hanshin Tigers. I first visited Kōshien on an unbearably sticky day in late September. Even hours before the game, the stadium was swarming with fans decked out in endless variations of the Tigers signature pinstripe attire, all brandishing miniature bats to use during the game as cheering implements. Kōshien's unique and somewhat remote location necessitates travel by a special train, fostering an instant sense of that distinct camaraderie formed between fellow passengers on a *manin densha* (completely packed train, with no room for comfortable movement or personal space of any kind).

We had all breathed a sigh of relief as the train doors opened, though the respite was short-lived: Osaka's oppressive summer humidity is almost as stifling as the claustrophobic, vacuum-packed inside of an overcrowded subway car.

I had, with unfortunate naiveté and misplaced optimism, assumed that I would be able to buy a ticket to one of the last games of the season on the day of the game itself. When told that the game had sold out, I began the singularly difficult task of trying to buy scalped tickets in Japan. I approached fan after fan, each of whom looked at me with surprise and repeated: "It's sold out!" After wandering around the gates for thirty minutes, I finally found a man who promised to try to find me a ticket. "It might be a little expensive," he warned, looking apologetic.

"How much?" I asked. Recalling the exorbitantly priced tickets offered around Fenway Park, the home stadium of my favorite American baseball team, right before a sold out game, I braced myself.

The man consulted a friend, speaking hurriedly and in hushed tones. “¥2500,” he finally returned. I almost laughed out loud: the scalped ticket to a sold out game would cost me approximately \$25, a markup of no more than twenty percent at most. The relatively meager ticket price, however, was far from indicative of a lack of enthusiasm for the game: as I walked into the stadium, the air hummed with eager speculations and outbursts of anticipatory glee from the innumerable groups of fans.

My exposure to the Japanese version of America’s pastime had started many years earlier. As the daughter of a naval officer growing up in Tokyo, my weekends were punctuated by long walks to Meiji Jingu Stadium and hours watching batting practice. I cheered uncomprehendingly for the perpetual underdogs of Japan’s Central League, the Yakult Swallows, as I inhaled carefully packed cartons of edamame and *gyōza*. Baseball, for me, started in Japan: it was there that I discovered the meaning of terms like ‘foul ball’ and ‘stolen base’; it was there that I began to form a vague understanding of the slow-burning love that would develop into baseball mania.

Even after I became a true fan of American baseball, the Japanese counterpart lingered in my mind. As I began a more in-depth academic study of both Japanese culture and global politics, I wondered about the role of baseball in both of these arenas. Anyone who has spent a significant amount of time in Japan can attest that baseball is far more than a sport for the nation. From the immensely popular and prestigious high school tournaments to the highly developed world of Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB), baseball pervades daily life in Japan.

When I returned to Japan during my junior year of college, living with a host family outside Kyoto, baseball seeped into my daily discussions of Japanese politics, the US-Japan bilateral relationship, and the role of a globalizing Japan in an increasingly interconnected world. Baseball

soon became not only a way to connect across boundaries—to understand constructions of cultural identity—but also a means of recognizing political change in the Japanese nation.

In addition to serving as an excuse for me to delve further into the world of baseball, it is my hope that this paper illuminates the various roles the sport has played in influencing the world of politics throughout Japanese history and the significance of each of these roles to shaping the path of Japanese political development. I have paid particularly close attention to its importance to the US-Japan bilateral relationship; as a sport that was introduced to Japan by American citizens, baseball has unquestionably Western origins. These origins have alternately served as barriers to and support for baseball's success in Japan. Baseball has, by turns, brought the two states together and underscored their differences. In whichever role it has played, however, baseball has endured.

In organizing my discussion, I have divided the thesis into five thematic chapters. The first chapter lays the groundwork for the succeeding chapters: its focus is on constructions of identity, particularly as they relate to sports. I explore questions of how identity affects local, national, and international politics and the role that these conceptions of identity play in a state's political development. Drawing on established theories in sociological and political studies, this chapter considers what can be learned from a state through its leisure culture, the respective roles of the state and individuals in shaping sports and leisure activities, and the overarching purpose of leisure in a state. These theories and historical trends demonstrate the interconnectedness of identity, sports, and politics.

Building on the theory established in the previous chapter, the second chapter examines the concurrent political development of Japan as a state and the ideological development of Japanese baseball over time. This chapter explores the history of baseball in Japan, from its inception to modern day, and the roles the sport has served in Japanese politics. By analyzing the

changes in both baseball norms and policy throughout the history of modern Japan, this chapter evaluates baseball's role as a political tool and indicator at various points in Japan's development and modernization process. While the chapter includes a summary of previous scholarship on the pre- and immediately post-war history of the sport, it also contains original research on policy changes in recent decades and their political significance. The main focus of this latter section is changes in restrictions on the number of foreign players permitted to play on Japanese teams. My examination of these policies indicates that changes in these policies reflect shifts in Japanese popular attitudes towards the United States and its people.

The third chapter tackles the myth of "samurai baseball." The idea that Japanese baseball reflects a culture founded on a samurai ethos, an idea disseminated and perpetuated by author and journalist Robert Whiting, is inaccurate in many respects. By debunking and explaining actual and perceived differences between American and Japanese baseball styles, this chapter acknowledges the legitimate discrepancies between the systems while discouraging stereotypical or overly generalized interpretations of the cultural factors affecting these discrepancies. This chapter also explores the reasons that many Japanese fans contribute to or confirm stereotypical notions of Japanese sports and culture, particularly when discussing these topics with foreigners. The chapter reexamines the role that identity plays in various contexts, ranging from local to international.

In the fourth chapter, I address the alleged 'crisis' of Japanese baseball. Baseball in Japan has never been a profitable venture, but current trends, including NPB player defection to the American Major Leagues and a rise in the popularity of soccer in Japan, suggest that there may be more cause for concern now. I examine the validity of these claims and explore the political implications involved in such a decline. If current trends continue, I conclude, the future of NPB will become increasingly unstable.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, I focus on the future of Japanese baseball in the context of current events in Japanese politics. The current Shinzō Abe administration in particular has worked to create a more international, globally involved image of the state; given this new character for the state itself, I examine the effects of contemporary political decisions on both baseball and the US-Japan bilateral relationship. I also explore relevant economic and domestic factors that help explain recent trends. Based on these trends, I offer my predictions for the future of baseball in Japan: that, though recent trends may forecast a bleak future, baseball and the bilateral relationship are safe—for now.

In pursuing this research, I attempted to answer several overarching questions. One of my main goals was to dispel harmful and essentialist myths about Japanese society and culture as they appear in discourse on Japanese sports. I also sought to determine the significance of baseball in influencing and indicating the status of the US-Japan bilateral relationship, and to consider the future role of this relationship in a world with a shrinking emphasis on baseball. Finally, I endeavored to explain and explore the cross-cultural phenomenon that is baseball itself, a game beloved by millions in the United States, Japan, and beyond.

Chapter 1: Sport, Politics, and Identity

I. Framing the Discussion

In making a case for the importance of baseball to both Japan's political development and the US-Japan bilateral relationship, it is necessary to first examine the intersections between identity, leisure culture, and politics. The three concepts alternate between powerful relationships of dependency, synergy, and mutual benefit. A shared identity, for example, can serve as a stimulus for political movements or as the foundation for the formation of a new sports entity. Similarly, the political atmosphere of a nation can affect the identity development of its people and its overall leisure culture. While previous scholarship has focused heavily on the connections between politics and identity, the inclusion of leisure contributes an extra dimension; in Japan, for example, where scholars have concentrated on the significance of work culture, a closer look at leisure patterns could offer further insight into the realms of identity and politics. Whatever the relationship between these three, their interdependence is undeniable.

As I argue in later chapters, an examination of a state's leisure culture and sporting patterns can provide valuable insight into the political climate of the state. By exploring patterns of interconnection and dissecting the makeup of each larger factor, it is possible to gain insight into the role sports play in a society. Examining the construction of local, national, and international identity contributes to a richer understanding of both the purpose of leisure and the motivations behind political movements and decision-making. The timing of both shifts in leisure culture and new identity constructions, furthermore, can be revelatory; by looking at a combination of these factors, it is possible to determine which actors are gaining traction, which tensions and movements are picking up momentum, and in which directions the state may proceed as it develops.

I begin my discussion at the broadest level with an exploration of identity construction and its significance in both the world of politics and the realm of sports. I then examine the connection between leisure culture and political climate in the context of this identity formation. Finally, I consider the role of baseball specifically in both the Japanese and American contexts. By exploring the relationships between identity, politics, and sports individually, I demonstrate the interdependence of the three factors and lay the foundation for a more in-depth study of the politics of Japanese baseball.

II. Identity in Sports and Politics

Any discussion of either sporting culture or political climate would be incomplete without consideration of how identity construction plays into these realms. Both sports and politics have their foundations in the concept of a shared identity: a nation-state, for example, has its basis in the idea of a united identity based on factors like ideology, race, ethnicity, or religion; sports, similarly, rely on the presupposition that teams and their fans will bond over common heroes and common enemies. In either case, construction of a collective identity is a necessary condition. I first examine this identity formation in politics and then in sports.

A. The Politics of Identity

While globalization is contributing to an increased emphasis on transnational and multilateral organizations, the nation-state remains the fundamental unit of global politics. Identification with a particular nation-state, then, constitutes one particularly strong form of identity; indeed, the idea of a nation-state presupposes the “maximum number of relevant identities

[...] tied together in the concept of a self with permanence in time and space.”¹ Identity itself, however, goes far beyond simply sympathizing with one nation-state: nationality is merely one facet of a much more complex entity. Identity formation in a political context is characterized by a variety of defining features: among these are factors like class, gender, race, ethnicity, language, alterity, fluidity, constructedness, and multiplicity.² I briefly examine some of these factors and their relevance to local, national, and global politics.

i. Demographic Factors: The Primordialist and Constructivist Perspectives

One prevalent argument in international relations views ethnicity as both immutable and central to constructions of identity. The work of journalist and political scientist Harold Isaacs, for example, explores the idea that group identity is based in personal characteristics that shape their understanding of the world; group identity is, in this interpretation, assigned at birth, often through physical characteristics like perceived race.³ Under this argument, while ethnic identities can evolve over time, individuals cannot escape or change their assigned group identity.

The constructivist approach to ethnicity sees ethnic identification not assigned at birth, but constructed through a series of values or ideas created by ethnic or nationalist intellectuals.⁴ This argument recognizes the role of these intellectuals in contributing to the formation of ethnic group identification: the invention of a group history, for example, strengthens ethnic identification and contributes to unified political action. Both these constructivist and primordialist approaches,

¹Iver B. Neumann, “Deep Structure, Free-Floating Signifier, or Something in Between? Europe’s Alterity in Putin’s Russia,” in *Identity and Global Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*, eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 10.

²Patricia C. Goff and Kevin M. Dunn, “Introduction: In Defense of Identity,” in *Identity and Global Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*, eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 6.

³Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 23. See also Harold Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁴Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 23-24.

however, focus on a singular ethnic identity as the cornerstone of global politics; they fail to consider the other ways in which identity and nationhood can be constructed. While ethnicity has relevance to global identity constructions, it is not the only facet that merits attention. The next section explores the ways in which discussions of nationhood and nationalism have shaped identity construction.

ii. Nationalism and the Construction of Nations

Conceptions of the nation have taken countless forms in scholarship on international relations. The concepts of ‘state’ and ‘nation’ are separate and distinct, though they may coincide to form nation-states; at its core, however, a nation does not require a corresponding state to exist. Ernest Gellner posited the following two conditions for nationhood: members of a nation must share the same culture, where “culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating; and members of a nation must mutually recognize each other as belonging to the same nation.”⁵ Other scholars, like Benedict Anderson, have defined the nation differently; in Anderson’s conceptualization, the nation is an “imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁶ Print capitalism, in this interpretation, led to the imagination of these nations; as citizens read about their nations in newspapers and other print media, they mentally constructed shared communities. Still other scholars have critiqued this idea because of its failure to explain anticolonial nationalism. In this lattermost conceptualization, Anderson’s argument does not hold water because of its inability to recognize any type of imagined community that does not emerge from a Western background;

⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 7.

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

under Anderson's model, scholar Partha Chatterjee argues, the idea of identity construction as a response to a foreign Other cannot exist.⁷

This lattermost conception of nationhood suggests that identity constructions may be influenced by more than nationalist sentiment, no matter how that sentiment is cultivated. The following sections consider alternate factors that come into play in the formation of identity at every level.

iii. Alterity

Identity is often defined by an 'other.' Scholars have used the historical lack of development of a universal identity to illustrate a basic principle: defining what one is not becomes the easiest way to form conceptions of the self.⁸ This idea of alterity, which refers to this state of otherness, often comes into play in discussing the role of broader identification categories. Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* popularized the concept of larger, civilizational identities that transcended national boundaries. Huntington argued that these civilizational differences would increasingly mark the points of global conflict: states within Western civilization, for example, would be more likely to clash with members of Orthodox or Islamic civilizations than a fellow Western state.

The construction of this broader identity usually occurs when a group is faced with a common enemy, whether real or merely perceived. Russia under Putin has taken this approach; narratives of Westerners versus nationalists have proliferated in recent years.⁹ Political actors also invoked civilizational dialogue in the wake of 9/11. These types of dialogue create a sense of urgency and permanency, framing the conflict with the 'other' as "ongoing, long-standing, and at

⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5.

⁸Goff and Dunn, "Introduction," 4.

⁹ Neumann, "Deep Structure," 12.

a critical stage.”¹⁰ Both bin Laden and Western leaders drew on these civilizational identities to legitimize actions against their perceived enemy.

Even when the identity invoked is not civilizational, the same principles apply. Within a single state, for example, an oppositional construction of identity can be used to draw support for the passage of a law. Constructions of identity formed around divisive domestic issues in the United States illustrate this point: in Texas, where the percentage of citizens in favor of stricter gun control laws is ten percent less than the national average,¹¹ politicians invoke ideas of “gun culture” and repeated references to Texas sovereignty¹² to reinforce an ‘us versus them’ paradigm. Formation of a new identity, then, can be politically useful for actors in various contexts, from local to transnational. Creation of an ‘other’ helps cement these identity constructions and ensure their endurance.

iv. Fluidity

Some facets of identity are more immutable than others: scholars like Harold Isaacs have often portrayed ethnicity, for example, as fixed. Other studies suggest, however, that even the most seemingly unchangeable aspects of identity can evolve and develop over time. These changes are often responses to political events; after apartheid, for example, South African identities experienced significant transformation.¹³ Marcus Lee Hansen, furthermore, outlined a pattern of

¹⁰ Jacinta O’Hagan, “‘The Power and the Passion’: Civilizational Identity and Alterity in the Wake of September 11,” in *Identity and Global Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*, eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 32.

¹¹ The Texas Politics Project, “Gun Control Questions,” January/February 2013, accessed 1 April 2015. http://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/archive/html/poll/features/gun_control_feature/slide6.html.

¹² Wayne Slater, “Attorney General Greg Abbott Denounces Gun-Control Efforts in Speech to Texas State Rifle Association,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 23 February 2013, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/headlines/20130223-attorney-general-greg-abbott-denounces-gun-control-efforts-in-speech-to-texas-state-rifle-association1.ece>.

¹³ Jamie Frueh, “Studying Continuity and Change in South African Political Identity,” in *Identity and Global Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*, eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 63.

generational ethnic development to characterize the changes that ethnicity undergoes even within a matter of years. This model also led to further studies on the evolution of immigrant ethnic identity and the ways in which Dutch American celebrations of ethnic heritage, for example, have developed over time.¹⁴ Recognizing that a change in identity is possible and that the resulting changed identity is also not necessarily permanent, then, is critical in considering both historical and current constructions of identity in a state. These constructions are constantly evolving alongside the political developments in a state.

v. Constructedness

Identity is often discussed in terms of “being constructed,” but questions about the actors involved and the process of this construction often go unanswered. In many cases, the state implicates itself in the construction process. The reasons for creating a unified national identity are relatively clear, but states also occasionally involve themselves in the promotion of “conflicting strains of national identity” to combat a homogenizing Westernization.¹⁵ The recent increase in globalization, in addition, affects youth identity formation, which may pose a threat to traditional systems of state- and nation-building; states may introduce youth-targeting policies to combat this extranational influence. This process also extends to “substate” actors (those who are employed by the state but do not influence its policymaking directly; this group includes teachers and librarians) and non-state actors, especially NGO employees.¹⁶ These actors can also, of course, work against state initiatives or philosophies, but more often than not they cooperate with the state to encourage the building of new norms.

¹⁴ Michael Douma, “Tulip Time and the Invention of a New Dutch American Ethnic Identity,” *American Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014): 149-167.

¹⁵ Douglas W. Blum, “Agency, State-Society Relations, and the Construction of National Identity: Case Studies from the Transcaspian Region,” in *Identity and Global Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*, eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 150.

¹⁶ Blum, “Agency,” 153-55.

vi. Multiplicity

The idea that actors have many identities, some of which may conflict with one another or hold more weight in political decision-making, is prevalent in academia today. Feminist scholars in particular have focused on the importance of recognizing intersectionality in considerations of identity and oppression; black women, for example, face prejudice that is compounded by the combination of their race and gender.¹⁷ For many decades, scholars considered national identity to be of ultimate importance; other identities were secondary or irrelevant.¹⁸ Traditional thinkers associated with the realist school of thought like Thomas Hobbes and Niccolo Machiavelli, for example, perpetuated the idea that states inherently act only in their own interest, making states the dominant players on the global stage and devaluing the importance of other forms of identity.¹⁹ In recent years, however, international relations specialists have begun to recognize the relative importance of other identity factors. Scholars have begun to explore the ways in which multiple identities work with and against each other to influence political decision-making processes.²⁰

Exploration of these multiple identities helps to explain seemingly irrational actions on the part of actors: in the case of South Africa's interaction with Zimbabwe, for example, the former's material resources should theoretically mean that the state would exert more coercive control than it actually does over the latter.²¹ Instead, because of South African leaders' efforts to appeal to groups that identify as members of the 'landless poor' or African freedom fighters, the state's

¹⁷ See, for example, Tina Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House," and Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," in *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*, eds. Elizabeth Hackett and Sally Haslanger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 30-40 and 78-92.

¹⁸ Goff and Dunn, "Introduction," 7.

¹⁹ See, for example, Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan* (1651) and Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532).

²⁰ See, for example, Michael Hames-Garcia, *Identity Complex: Making the Case for Multiplicity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

²¹ J. Zoë Wilson and David Black, "Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity: Human Rights, Zimbabwe's 'Land Crisis' and South Africa's 'Quiet Diplomacy,'" in *Identity and Global Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*, eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 219.

actions towards Zimbabwe have been more muted.²² This softer course of action represents government efforts to support non-national or transnational identities. While this case merely serves as one example, the ways in which states and non-state actors work to accommodate multiple identities are varied. With the increasing number of possibilities for transnational communication, the construction of multiple identities now occurs on a daily basis. Loyalty to a nation-state, while still critical, is not the only factor of identity that plays into political decision-making.

Past theories of identity construction have focused on single facets of identity, such as class, ethnicity, or nationality. Especially in the interconnected, ever-evolving world of the present, however, identities are rarely singular or fixed. By considering the ways in which identities form and the various iterations they take, however, it is possible to better understand the role they play in influencing politics. In all its forms, identity still plays a critical role in influencing policy decisions at every level.

B. Identity in Sports

From a political standpoint, sports provide a critical and invaluable asset to regimes: the ability to strengthen conceptions of national identity. As in other realms, identity in sports is constructed in opposition to an ‘other.’ In this way, sports fans construct many identities and loyalties: a Hanshin Tigers fan, for example, may identify simultaneously as an Osaka supporter, a Tigers fan, a baseball lover, a Kansai devotee, and a Japanese sports loyalist. While these identities will differ in significance to the individual at any given point, their existence creates opportunities for strengthening identification to the state or a regional area. In the case of the Tigers fan, this strengthening of identification might occur through processes like coordinated cheering;

²² Wilson and Black, “Foreign Policy,” 218-19.

home games are punctuated by what William Kelly describes as “the frenzied chanting of fans, driven by the percussive beat of drums and thumping clackers, accompanied by blaring trumpets and huge flags.”²³ These acts of cheering also serve as methods of constructing and reinforcing the Hanshin Tigers fan identity and, in turn, Japanese nationalism.

International sports competition, in particular, represents an area in which political commentators and global media conflate nationality and sports support. In Japan, for example, this discursive conflation takes the form of rhetoric based on terms like ‘*wareware no kuni*’ (‘our country’) and ‘*wareware Nihonjin*’ (‘we Japanese’) to describe soccer playing style and match results.²⁴ In metonymic style, sports commentators will often replace the team with the state itself; articles may refer to ‘Japan’s’ prowess or ‘the United States’ perseverance. This rhetoric draws clear boundaries marking the ‘other’ and placing the in-group in opposition to it. At the same time, it allows for sports fans to take pride in their identities as both supporters of their specific teams and as part of the “national representation.”²⁵

Identity plays a significant role in both politics and sports. Identification with a specific group is necessary for maintenance of a nation-state and continuation of a sports team. Various actors attempt to influence, encourage, or deter this identity construction; the state, in particular, holds a stake in which identities are constructed and when this construction takes place. Sports, then, become an invaluable tool through which states can garner support and strengthen national identification. The next section explores this connection between sports and politics further.

²³ William W. Kelly, “Japan: The Hanshin Tigers & Japanese Professional Baseball,” in *Baseball without Borders: The International Pastime*, ed. George Gmelch (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 34.

²⁴ Satoshi Shimizu, “Football, Nationalism, and Celebrity Culture: Reflections on the Impact of Different Discourses on Japanese Identity since the 2002 World Cup,” in *Football Goes East: Business, Culture, and the People’s Game in China, Japan and South Korea*, eds. Wolfram Manzenreiter and John Horne (New York: Routledge, 2004), 182.

²⁵ Shimizu, “Football, Nationalism, and Celebrity Culture,” 188-91.

III. Leisure Culture through a Political Lens

Leisure culture has long held connections to the world of politics. When exploring the concepts of leisure and political climate, however, it is critical to distinguish ‘play’ from ‘sport.’ Play can refer to any activity undertaken “for fun, for fantasy, for excitement.”²⁶ Play can also take on more regimented and regulated forms; to qualify as sport, however, it must include institutionalized rules influenced by social and cultural forces.²⁷ This line is admittedly vague, but the distinction is significant in broader discussions of political trends. While sport may be influenced by politics and vice versa, for example, it is unlikely that small-scale, irregular, and largely individual acts of play would either change or be changed by public policy.

A. Political Influence on Sport

An exploration of the relationship between sports and politics necessitates an examination of the ways in which the two influence each other. In considering this relationship, I focus on the ways in which governments can shape leisure culture through public policy. This shaping, especially in the present era, represents government efforts to craft societies that both conform to international norms and simultaneously preserve cultural distinctiveness.²⁸

Governments can exert control over leisure in a multitude of ways. One significant example is that of time allotted to leisure: by introducing and institutionalizing the idea of a forty-hour (or less, in some cases) work week, for example, governments can ensure that their societies will have free time to use for participation in sport, play, and other voluntary activities. Any policies restricting, detailing, or structuring the work environment and the compensation associated with it, are, to some extent, leisure policies; changes in ‘leisure time and leisure money’ for skilled and

²⁶ Richard Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 20.

²⁷ Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development*, 21.

²⁸ David Leheny, *The Rules of Play: National Identity and the Shaping of Japanese Leisure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 17.

unionized workers in Industrial Revolution-era Britain, for example, marked the beginning of a development of leisure culture by providing higher wages and more free time.²⁹ Authoritarian states may institute policies of “compulsory leisure,” a seemingly paradoxical policy designed to regulate even this supposedly “free” time.³⁰ These policies are designed to blur the boundaries between public and private, turning formerly personal decisions into demonstrations of conformity to party ideals.³¹ Leisure policies, regardless of their strictness or rigidity, are ultimately created to introduce a measure of order into societies. They can also be used as a form of propaganda: governments may intervene in the realm of leisure to generate national pride or government loyalty. Government support of national participation in international events, such as the Olympics, exemplifies this trend.³² Other reasons for government interference in leisure policy include the desire to generate tax revenues, as in the case of Dutch government efforts to promote the spending of vacation monies within the geographical boundaries of the state;³³ attempts to promote conservation of natural resources, as exemplified by policies such as the creation of the US National Park Service with its stated aim of protecting parks like Yosemite; and appeals to increase support for welfare state policies.³⁴

Economics also play a critical role in considerations of government involvement in sport. Especially in an increasingly globalized international society, traditionally non-market spheres of life become more significant as they develop into possible profit-making ventures.³⁵ This transformation of non-market fields into markets involves four conditions: first, the goods or

²⁹ Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 141-151.

³⁰Leheny, *Rules of Play*, 25.

³¹ John Wilson, *Politics and Leisure* (Winchester: Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1988), 11.

³²Leheny, *Rules of Play*, 27.

³³ Hugo van der Poel, “Leisure Policy in the Netherlands,” in *Leisure Policies*, ed. Braham et. Al, 41-70.

³⁴Leheny, *Rules of Play*, 29-31.

³⁵ Wolfram Manzenreiter and John Horne, “Football, Culture, Globalisation: Why Football has been Going East,” in *Football Goes East: Business, Culture, and the People's Game in China, Japan, and South Korea*, eds. Wolfram Manzenreiter and John Horne (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

services must be sellable; second, there must be a consumer demand; third, the workforce must be ready and able to transform into a profit-producing enterprise; and fourth, the state must underwrite the risks of moving capital into the field.³⁶ The example of British television illustrates these points through its evolution: the phenomenon of a reproducible performance had to be transformed into a sellable good, then advertised and branded to appeal to certain audiences. The infrastructure of broadcasting, advertising, and sponsoring companies also had to be created, often with the help of state involvement.³⁷ Since sport has gradually come to meet these conditions, it has also become a sphere of influence for government intervention.

Many policies regulating leisure and sport represent a combination of all these factors. At any given time, for example, a change in sport policy can lead to an economic boost and a strengthening of national identity. Even when these reasons are not explicitly stated, the type of policies implemented usually offer clues into government goals. Sport has increasingly become a way for governments to achieve their objectives in structuring their societies.

B. Sport's Influence on Politics

Examining the effects of sport on politics and government policy is more difficult. While policy changes or government initiatives related to sport are easy to track, the influence of sport itself on the political realm is more subtle. Yet once a sport achieves high or even near-universal levels of popularity, it can serve as a stand-in for the state itself; the Tokyo governor commented on this phenomenon after the 2002 World Cup, stating that officials involved in international sporting events use the events “to take a measure of the other party’s stance.”³⁸ Some scholars have even asserted that “modern sport has become a surrogate for warfare, that, especially in

³⁶ Manzenreiter and Horne, “Football, Culture, Globalisation,” 9.

³⁷ Colin Leys, *Market-driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest* (New York: Verso, 2001), 95-99.

³⁸ Shimizu, “Football, Nationalism, and Celebrity Culture,” 188.

international competition, the teams and their players are the equivalent of armies.”³⁹ Sport, then, especially in recent decades, has become a symbol of states themselves: much as it does for individual citizens, it can serve as a way for states to play out, reenact, and mitigate tensions. Events in sports, moreover, can become politically significant; racist sentiments expressed during a soccer match, for example, quickly become political incidents requiring diplomatic resolutions. As I discuss in Chapter 4, this phenomenon occurred during a recent game at the stadium of the Urawa Reds, a professional Japanese soccer team.

While these effects are less overt than the policies implemented directly by governments, there are still many examples of sport’s influence on the political sector. These two realms intersect, connect, and play off each other on a consistent basis; examining their mutual relationship is both critical and useful when exploring patterns in either individual area. Understanding the ways in which they influence one another, moreover, is essential to forming a complete picture of the world of Japanese sports.

IV. Historical Significance of Baseball in Japanese and American Identities

Most Americans take for granted baseball’s status as a uniquely and solely American sport. In reality, however, Japanese identification with the game has been equally as strong throughout parts of its history. This section addresses conceptions of baseball in each state, especially as they relate to the construction of national identity.

Though baseball has its roots in “British antecedents,” its enduring and near-universal popularity in the United States has led some scholars to describe it as a “religion.”⁴⁰ Hyperbolic

³⁹Wilbur Zelinsky, *Nation Into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 65.

⁴⁰Zelinsky, *Nation Into State*, 110.

descriptions of its significance aside, baseball has undoubtedly served as a symbol of American values and nationalism throughout its history. Its use as an assimilation tool, for example, contributes to the idea that to play baseball is to be American; the sport itself serves as a microcosm of American ideals. This idea extends to the players themselves: one of the fastest ways for foreign-born individuals to become “American” is to join an MLB team. These foreigners, numbering in the hundreds as of 2014,⁴¹ are upheld as examples of the American success story.

Baseball, indeed, holds a mythological significance: its heroes are the modern American equivalents of Odysseus and Aeneas, and it maintains a “mythic association with the pastoral theme, the fabled Middle Landscape so central to the American Dream.”⁴² Figures like Ted Williams, for example, embody both baseball and the essential American spirit; he is consistently lauded not only as an exemplary ballplayer, but also as a war hero. In essence, then, baseball has been intimately tied to conceptions of American nationalism. The nationalism fostered through this conflation has been essential to American political action. National unity in the United States, as elsewhere, is critical to maximizing political efficacy; the continued support for baseball has thus contributed to the success of the American state as a whole. By mobilizing and redirecting the support baseball has garnered into nationalistic spirit, American government officials have used baseball as a powerful propaganda tool. Images like the one below, for example, explicitly link baseball with patriotic commitment.

⁴¹ “Opening Day Rosters,” MLB.com, last modified 1 April 2014. <http://m.mlb.com/news/article/70623418/2014-opening-day-rosters-feature-224-players-born-outside-the-us>.

⁴²Zelinsky, *Nation Into State*, 110.

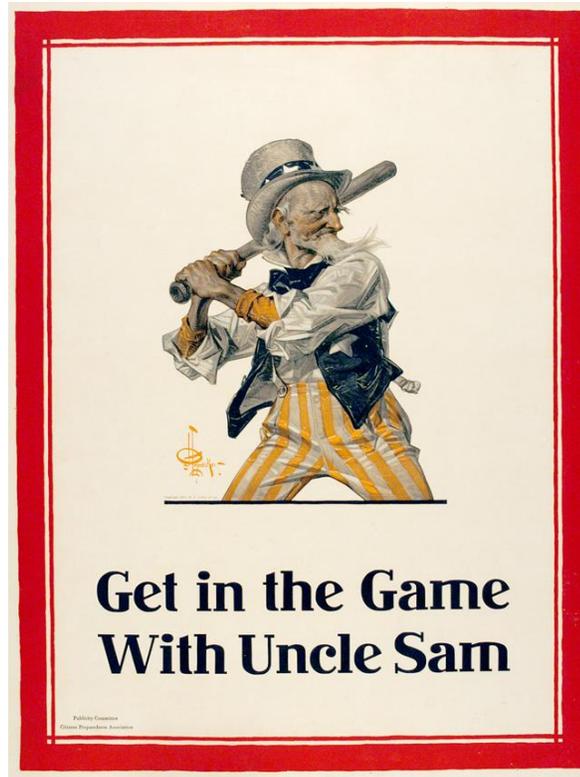


Figure 1: "Get in the Game," designed by J.C. Leyendecker (1917).⁴³

This trend is not confined to historical events: even today, ties between baseball and politics endure. Whenever presidents or other government officials throw out the first pitch at a baseball game, for example, they are reaffirming and recreating the idea that participation in baseball (whether active or as a spectator) is a form of patriotism. Rituals of modern baseball also include patriotic rituals; each game begins with a performance of the National Anthem and often includes recognition of veterans or active military members. Through traditions like these, merely watching a baseball game becomes a way of pledging allegiance to the American state.

Baseball's enduring popularity and strategic political use has not been limited to the United States, however. While the next chapter explores the political history of baseball in Japan in greater depth, baseball has, on the whole, retained a high level of popular support since its inception in the

⁴³ Nicholas Ricketts, "Batter Up, Uncle Sam!" *Museum of Play*, 19 January 2010, accessed 6 April 2015, <http://www.museumofplay.org/blog/play-stuff/2010/01/batter-up-uncle-sam/>.

1870s. This support, however, has not always coincided with state or media backing; the *Asahi Shimbun* ran a series of articles in 1911 expounding on the evils of baseball. The four main evils, according to the articles, were: its status as a time-consuming activity that detracted from study opportunities; its ability to promote fatigue in players; its encouragement of postgame parties and alcohol consumption; and its use of “unnatural” motions in its play.⁴⁴ When it became clear that baseball was no passing trend, however, bureaucrats used the sport to their advantage, lauding it as an activity that encouraged team spirit and self-sacrifice.⁴⁵ By embracing the sport in this manner, the Japanese government officials began a trend of using the sport and the identity lines fostered by it to their own advantage; they now had an additional tool for fostering nationalism, demarcating enemies, and promoting a specific kind of leisure culture that would allow for continued government shaping of Japanese society. Posters like the American example above were popular in Japan throughout the pre- and post-war eras; based on the specific period, the posters would include more or less English, possibly in an attempt to foster a stronger sense of anti-American Japanese nationalism during antagonistic times in the bilateral relationship.

V. Conclusions

The concept of identity is complex: no individual in the modern world possesses just a single identification. Rather, identities are multiple, changing, and interdependent; they are constantly evolving in ways that affect the worlds of both politics and sports. In considering sports loyalties, political movement formation, and international discourse on sporting events, identity is central. Identity both influences and is influenced by these events and movements, leading to a complex web of interactions and interdependence. In Japanese and American baseball, in

⁴⁴Leheny, *Rules of Play*, 49.

⁴⁵Leheny, *Rules of Play*, 49-50.

particular, governments have appealed to identity constructions related to sports to strengthen their own regimes. Baseball and the fandom associated with it serve as more than just pastimes; the sport has become a powerful tool for shaping and framing political interactions.

Chapter Two: A Political History of Japanese Baseball

I. The Evolution of a Game

Discourse related to Japanese baseball has framed the sport in many ways since its inception: as a symbol of modernization, a tool of imperial power, a forum for nationalist expression, a mitigating factor in bilateral relations, and countless others. Baseball has, according to historical narratives, evolved along with the political development of the Japanese nation, serving as an indicator of the political climate in Japan. Observing these changes in Japanese baseball ideology and the ways in which they are depicted is especially useful when examining the US-Japan bilateral relationship; the sport and professional policies related to its execution have often reflected the status of this relationship.

In this chapter, I explore changes in Japanese baseball policy or playing style during key moments in Japanese history as portrayed in historical narratives. Based on the evidence I have uncovered in my research, I explore the relationship between Japanese baseball ideology and political policies of the state. I examine the ways in which baseball policy, approaches to play, and general attitudes toward the sport have adapted to reflect Japanese political climate. In the following chronological exploration of Japanese baseball history, I investigate the links between politics and baseball in Japan. The evidence presented by these links suggests that an examination of baseball at any given period can offer insight into the political climate of Japan, especially as it relates to the US-Japan bilateral relationship.

II. The Beginning: Baseball as a Symbol of Modernization

Baseball in Japan began with Horace Wilson, an American professor who introduced the sport to his students in 1873. In its initial phase, baseball was most popular among students; college and high schools represented the first breeding grounds for Japanese baseball teams. While Wilson's introduction was undoubtedly important in ensuring the sport's success in Japan, these students played an even more critical role in cementing baseball's role in the nation. The introduction of the sport took place in the early years of Japan's Meiji Restoration, a period of modernization and Westernization after Commodore Perry's arrival prompted the so-called 'opening' of Japan. The Meiji era represented a time of inner conflict for the Japanese people as they attempted to reconcile their own traditions and customs with the sudden influx of foreign influence.

Overall, however, this period was characterized by widespread embrace, and even idealization, of Western culture. The relatively quick spike in baseball's popularity after its inception exemplifies this principle: what could be more Western than baseball, the favorite pastime of a state well on its way to becoming the most powerful in the world? The United States, furthermore, exerted more influence in the educational and cultural arenas than other imperial powers vying for control in Japan at the time. While Great Britain, for example, dominated in the commerce sphere, it was no match for the US in the cultural realm.¹ US persistence in pursuing trade and diplomatic relations with Japan was high; this repeated pressure exerted on Japanese citizens to accept US influence eventually led to a pervasive spread of American culture across the Japanese state. In addition, cultural exchange program from both sides helped facilitate the growth and development of baseball; American *oyatoi*, or cultural ambassadors employed by the Japanese

¹ Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 82.

government, brought baseball with them, and Japanese students returning from study abroad experiences in the United States reinforced its popularity.² These exchanges strengthened an already prevalent trend in Japan of adopting American leisure activities to promote modernization. It is hardly surprising, then, that baseball (as opposed to cricket) took root almost immediately in Japan.

In addition to garnering attention as a popular American sport, baseball gained popularity in the Meiji era by branding itself as a uniquely modern pastime; it meets the qualifications that categorize it as a definitively modern sport. Under Allen Guttman's definition, these characteristics include secularism, equality of opportunity, bureaucratization, specialization, rationalization, quantification, and an "obsession with records."³ When contrasted with a traditional Japanese sport like *sumo*, baseball clearly epitomizes these principles. Where *sumo* has its roots in Shinto ritual, baseball worships capitalism and democracy; where *sumo* offers only one possible position, baseball hires players designated for nothing but relief pitching. While some scholars have argued that the Japanese people embraced baseball because of its reflection of traditional Japanese values,⁴ this explanation seems out of place as an explanation during the pro-West Meiji period, in which Japanese citizens were simultaneously contributing to true nation-building and renouncing tradition in an effort to become a global power.

In an era during which Japan's primary focus was on modernizing, where modernizing was often conflated with Westernizing, the explosion in popularity of baseball was logical. Somewhat more unexpected has been the sport's enduring popularity; baseball's ability to adapt to the

² Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams: How Baseball Linked the United States and Japan in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 12-13.

³ Guttman and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 3.

⁴ Donald Roden, for example, argued that baseball reflected values found in the "civic rituals of state: order, harmony, perseverance, and self-restraint." See Donald Roden, "Baseball and the Quest for National Dignity in Meiji Japan," *American Historical Review* 85, no. 3 (1980): 519.

political climate of Japan extends far beyond the Meiji period. This survival is largely due to the work of Japanese students: many young Japanese citizens sent abroad to study Western culture came back with a love of baseball, one that prevented the sport from “fad[ing] away as an exotic fad doomed to oblivion” without the continued support of American professors.⁵ Instead, baseball took strong hold in the new Japanese nation, taking its place as “modernity incarnate”⁶ in the increasingly innovative Meiji society.

III. Rise of *Bushidō* Baseball

The rise of what is now popularly known as *bushidō* or *samurai* baseball occurred not in the 1970s, when Robert Whiting published his ubiquitous *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat* asserting the pervasiveness of such a philosophy in Japanese professional baseball, but much earlier in Japan’s history. Warrior baseball, as it is sometimes known, traces its roots to the Ichikō high school. Like all high schools during the early Meiji period, Ichikō was a place for elites; by 1886, only 1500 students, or 0.4 percent of high school-aged adolescents, attended high school.⁷ Even for those who could afford it, attending Ichikō was not easy. One out of every five students failed the rigorous examinations. For those who did attend, life at the high school was a formative, holistic experience, with an emphasis on cultivating good morals in every aspect. While the initial purpose of Ichikō was to foster academic capability alone, students were encouraged to build up self-governance skills and independence after dormitories were constructed in 1890.⁸

⁵ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 19.

⁶ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 22.

⁷ Nakamura, Tetsuya. “Reexamining ‘Ichiko-Baseball’ Figure: Educational Circumstances of Latter Meiji Period,” *Hitotsubashi Daigaku Supōtsu Kagaku Kenkyū Shitsu* 28 (2009): 28.

⁸ Nakamura, “Reexamining,” 28-29.

The solution, Headmaster Kikuchi Hirotsugu decided, was sports. By incorporating sports into the curriculum, the school hoped to encourage a more complete development of its students. From the start, baseball was the most popular,⁹ but it was not until a now infamous incident involving a foreigner that Ichikō baseball pioneered a style of baseball that would become its legacy.

When an American trespassed onto Ichikō territory in the 1890s, the students responded by hitting him with rocks. The encounter soon garnered international attention, quickly becoming a source of shame for the school.¹⁰ The best way to recover their pride, the students decided, was to excel at baseball, to beat the Americans at their own game in a civilized and regulated way.¹¹ The road to achieving this goal, Ichikō students and teachers believed, involved an extreme intensification of the training process. After the incident, students in the baseball club were prohibited from taking part in other club activities. They were completely dedicated to the idea of victory, engaging in rigorous practices that proponents described as representative of uniquely ‘Japanese’ values like courage, honor, and loyalty.¹² By the time the team played its foreign rivals based in Yokohama, the game had evolved from a match between Ichikō and the Yokohama *gaijin* (foreigners) to a symbolic battle between Japan and the United States. The winner was clear: Ichikō obliterated Yokohama, 29-4. A series of successive games only proved Japanese dominance, as the Ichikō team won time and time again.¹³

In this later period of the Meiji era, as during the earlier years, patterns in baseball ideology reflected the political climate of the time. After the full-fledged embrace of ‘modern’ culture at the

⁹ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 34.

¹⁰ Nakamura, “Reexamining,” 29.

¹¹ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 34-35.

¹² Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 34.

¹³ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 35.

beginning of the Meiji Restoration, the rise of Ichikō baseball also marked the inauguration of “nationalistic backlash” against Western influence.¹⁴ This backlash did not center on an outright rejection of the modern or Western, but rather placed strong emphasis on asserting Japanese worth by contributing to what some scholars refer to as the ‘Japanization’ of foreign sport.¹⁵ This process and its role in the Ichikō era are exemplified in the emergence of the term *yakyū*. Before former Ichikō player Chūma Kanoe created the term while writing a history of baseball at his alma mater,¹⁶ the only word used was *bēsubōru*, a Japanization of the English ‘baseball.’ The advent of *yakyū* meant a new Japanese nation and with it a new, uniquely Japanese form of baseball. Baseball was no longer a Western import; it had become a vessel for communicating Japan’s power as a distinct, modern state.

IV. Colonial Baseball and its Legacy

The next distinct phase in both Japanese history and baseball ideology in the state occurred as Japan began to focus on its colonial empire. This period of colonialism began after the first Sino-Japanese War, when Japan gained control of Taiwan. In the succeeding decades, Japan built up its empire gradually until its bitter defeat in World War II. During this era, baseball became an important means through which Japan could assert its imperial power and its subjects could play out colonial tensions in a regulated, nonviolent forum. While Japan spread its love of baseball to many areas, including Taiwan, Korea, and Southern Manchuria, I focus on the former two as the most illustrative and well-developed examples of colonial baseball.

¹⁴ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 34.

¹⁵ Toshiaki Yoshimoto, “The Japanization of American Sport,” in *Japanese Martial Arts & American Sports: The Historical and Cultural Background on Teaching Methods*, ed. Minoru Kiyota and Sawamura Hiroshi (Tokyo: Nihon University, 1998).

¹⁶ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dream*, 37-8.

The legacy of colonial baseball in Taiwan, Japan's first conquest, endures to this day. In a recent speech, the Taiwanese Prime Minister referred to baseball as the "national sport" of the country,¹⁷ indicating the extent to which the Taiwanese people have embraced it. In this and many other respects, baseball in Taiwan almost eerily parallels the sport's development and acceptance in Japan; what started out as a foreign imposition has become an essential part of national character.

Despite the full-fledged Taiwanese adoption of baseball, the colonial origins are still clearly evident. The Taiwanese word for baseball, *yagyū*, derives from the Japanese *yakyū*.¹⁸ Japanese officials first introduced the game to Taiwan in 1897 (a mere 24 years after its debut in Japan), though initially participation was limited to Japanese expatriates. Gradually, however, Taiwanese citizens picked up the sport and almost immediately excelled. In one remarkable example of this skill, members of the Kanō team, which included Japanese and Taiwanese players, proved strong enough to compete at Kōshien. This event, as seen through Japanese eyes, demonstrated the practical possibility of Taiwanese assimilation; to the Taiwanese, conversely, their inclusion demonstrated the distinct strength and power of their own people.¹⁹ In either interpretation, baseball served as a stage for enacting colonial tensions. Much like the Ichikō versus Yokohama games, matches between Taiwanese and Japanese players soon took on a symbolic role as a clash between nations, the subjected Taiwan against its colonial oppressor.

Korean participation in baseball followed a similar pattern. Though the sport was officially introduced to the state by American missionaries, it was the colonial Japanese rule that truly cemented baseball's acceptance and popularity in Korea. Just as an emphasis on physical exercise emerged in Japan during the Meiji Restoration, sport soon became a focus in Korea under Japanese

¹⁷ Andrew Morris, "Taiwan: Baseball, Colonialism, and Nationalism," in *Baseball without Borders: The International Pastime*, ed. Geogre Gmelch (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 65.

¹⁸ Morris, "Taiwan," 66.

¹⁹ Morris, "Taiwan," 67.

military rule. Once Japan annexed Korea in 1910, baseball truly took hold in the nation; a game between Hansong High School and the Hwangsong Christian School secured the foundation of baseball in Korea.²⁰ Unlike in Taiwan, however, the sport never became truly nationalized. The Korean people saw the game as a Japanese sport, one that the Japanese people had mastered perfectly if not invented themselves. Here again, baseball became a way to participate in a foreign imposition while still asserting national dignity; Koreans used the game as a way to both “appease and challenge their occupiers.”²¹ The sport as it is played today still clearly reflects a Japanese influence, from the cheering mannerisms to the scoreboards and managing styles.²² Though it was the Americans who pioneered the game and even introduced it to Korea, it was the Japanese who left a legacy of baseball in the nation during its colonial period.

Enduring colonial tensions, whether real or imagined, still figure prominently into commentary on matchups between Japan and Taiwan or Japan and Korea. Coverage of the 2006 and 2009 World Baseball Classics (WBC) exemplifies this phenomenon. Media coverage of the semifinals between Korea and Japan centered on a series of colonial images, including the planting of the Korean flag on the baseball field and a decided emphasis in coverage of the Dokdo/Takeshima debate as it played out on in the sports arena.²³ This latter issue refers to enduring tensions over the territorial rights over a small group of islets known in Korea as Dokdo and in Japan as Takeshima. Protests over the islands often surface at events that receive international media coverage, such as the WBC. Nevertheless, some scholars have suggested that coverage of these protests and other colonial images has been overemphasized in an effort to draw

²⁰ Joseph A. Reaves, “Korea: Straw Sandals and Strong Arms,” in *Baseball without Borders: The International Pastime*, ed. George Gmelch (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 93-5.

²¹ Morris, “Taiwan,” 96.

²² Morris, “Taiwan,” 112.

²³ Jerry W. Lee, “Commodifying Colonial Histories: Korea Versus Japan and the Re/Productions of Colonial Violence in the World Baseball Classic,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26, no. 3 (2012), 233-5.

in viewers and, as a result, increase the profits from the WBC.²⁴ Because the WBC is, at its core, a “money-making venture,” playing up colonial tensions between the two nations serves as a logical means to induce increased viewership.²⁵ This spin has the unfortunate consequence of reproducing a Korean identity “confined to the historical narrative of Japanese imperialism.”²⁶

But are these lasting colonial tensions merely unfounded constructions of Western media coverage? Recent events would suggest otherwise. Since Prime Minister Abe Shinzō’s December 2013 visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, where fourteen Class A World War II criminals are enshrined, tensions between Korea and Japan (as well as China and Japan) have been high. These criminals are guilty of committing crimes against peace and were among the most integral members in executing massive human rights violations that occurred during the Nanjing Massacre. Abe’s decision to visit the shrine defies realist logic; he undoubtedly knew the effects this visit would have on bilateral relations with both China and Korea, yet chose to pay his respects at Yasukuni simply out of personal desire to do so. The action itself, as well as the international backlash it fostered, illustrates that colonial tensions are alive and well. Foreign media coverage during international events like the WBC may focus disproportionately on these tensions, but they are not a mere fabrication created by profit-seeking sports organizers. In actuality, sporting events between the two nations may serve as a forum through which to enact bilateral friction, much as they did in the colonial era itself.

Japan’s colonial era saw a new role for baseball, one that allowed for both the assertion and subversion of Japanese power. Colonial subjects used baseball to contest Japanese dominance, much in the same way as the Japanese used it to challenge American power in Japan. Current

²⁴ Lee, “Commodifying Colonial Histories,” 238-9.

²⁵ Lee, “Commodifying Colonial Histories,” 238-9.

²⁶ Lee, “Commodifying Colonial Histories,” 242.

events in East Asia suggest that tensions between Japan and its former colonial subjects has not entirely disappeared, and the baseball field still serves as a forum for expressing this enduring antagonism.

V. Commercialization and Individualism in Japanese Baseball

Back on Japanese home soil, baseball began to develop in new ways. In the advent of the Taishō era, a new wave of capitalistic liberalism swept the country. Whereas the Meiji era was characterized by a constant tension between desires to modernize and attempts to retain and redefine ‘Japaneseness,’ the Taishō period saw a clear triumph of the liberal rhetoric and ideology that began after Japan’s victory in the First Sino-Japanese War.

Changes in baseball policy reflect this shift in political climate. The unapologetically nationalistic, team-centered philosophy pioneered by Ichikō lost much of its popularity to a new, more individualistic form of baseball.²⁷ During this period, techniques and ‘rules’ propagated by the same man, Chūma Kanoe, who coined the term *yakyū* fell in favor. His 1897 manual warned against bunting, a tactic he considered dishonorable.²⁸ In 1905, as an answer to this volume, Waseda’s team captain, Hashido Makoto, published *Saishin Yakyūjutsu* (Brand New Baseball Techniques). This manual focused more openly on American techniques and style, advocating modern tactics and the use of gate receipts to defray costs.²⁹

This decided pivot towards Western liberalism during the Taishō era, combined with rapidly advancing technology and economic expansion in the 1920s, soon led to the commercialization of baseball. Under these conditions, Japanese citizens began to embrace leisure

²⁷ Nakamura, “Reexamining,” 32.

²⁸ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 90.

²⁹ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 90.

culture on a mass scale. With the mass-communications capabilities offered by the newly developed radio, baseball started its transition into a profitable enterprise. While this transition was rapid, it was not always smooth; for many Japanese citizens, the idea of turning baseball into a money-making enterprise was practically sacrilegious. These uneasy spectators believed that the process was a betrayal of *bushidō* ideals, as embodied in the earlier era of Ichikō baseball.³⁰ Nevertheless, in spite of this opposition and tension, baseball continued on its trajectory towards commercialization, a trajectory that has led to the mass commercialization that persists into the modern era. This process included a growth in corporate teams; many companies began to sponsor teams or encourage their employees to start their own in an effort to promote “paternalistic capitalism.”³¹ Before long, baseball exploded in popularity, cementing its place in modern Japanese sport.

VI. The Turn to Nationalism: Baseball in the World War II Era

The next major movement in Japanese baseball occurred as Japan prepared to enter World War II. This period was one of extreme nationalism in the country. Much as it was in the United States, the prewar and war era followed a total war pattern; war efforts shaped and affected nearly every aspect of the daily lives of Japanese citizens. Laws like the National Mobilization Law led to the implementation of extreme economic measures that sent out a clear, unequivocal message: Japan was singularly focused on its combat efforts.

Baseball was hardly an exception to the atmosphere of ultranationalism. On the contrary, changes in baseball ideology during this period epitomized government efforts to cultivate national spirit in every aspect of Japanese life. There were a series of concrete policies enacted in the prewar

³⁰ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 107.

³¹ Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 131.

era which illustrate this effort. As Japan left behind the “liberal, individualistic, autotelic approach to sport” in favor of a “militaristic, collectivist, instrumentalist view,”³² baseball itself faced a challenge to its survival. Calls for its abolition were not uncommon; some right-wing Japanese citizens viewed its Western origins as dangerous and inconsistent with prewar goals. One ultranationalist even went as far as to stab Shōriki Matsutarō, widely considered the father of Japanese professional baseball.³³ By this point, however, baseball had become so entrenched in Japanese culture that it would have been nearly impossible to eradicate it entirely. In recognition of this fact, Japanese leaders chose to focus instead on using the sport as a tool of their jingoistic efforts to unite the nation. Sport and baseball in particular, they believed, could be a means of fostering national mobilization efforts.³⁴

One such effort took the form of linguistic modification. From 1940 on, professional teams were prohibited from using English terms in their games. Whereas terms like ‘*outto*’ (out) or ‘*seifu*’ (safe) had been widely used before 1940, they were quickly replaced with Japanese equivalents. Team names were also changed during this period; the Giants, formerly known by a Japanese phoneticization of the English word (*jaiantsu*), for example, became known as the *kyojin* (roughly equivalent in meaning to giants).³⁵ In another clearly militaristic policy change, middle-school baseball tournament participants were required to demonstrate their loyalty at the start of each game beginning in 1937. These demonstrations of loyalty included measures such as pledging allegiance to the *bushidō* spirit and bowing in the direction of the Imperial Palace.³⁶ Even the visual aspects of baseball were altered to conform to a militaristic, collectivist ideal; khaki became the

³² Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 129.

³³ Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 138.

³⁴ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 146.

³⁵ Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 139.

³⁶ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 173.

only acceptable color for uniforms, the designs were militarized, American characters were replaced with *kanji*, and, in 1944, numbers themselves were removed entirely from the jerseys to combat any remaining individualist tendencies in the game. In perhaps one of the most extreme measures, the rules of the game itself were changed as well. Tie games were prohibited, and the number of innings required to be played before a game could be rained out was increased.³⁷ These latter measures were meant to promote an extremist, unrelenting image of Japan and the players; they would, the new rules suggested, fight to the finish with no thought of surrender.

In a continuation of the total war theme, baseball teams in Japan during this era attempted to prove their loyalty to the Japanese cause by sending resources to the government. College baseball teams, for example, would send significant portions of their gate revenues to the imperial military forces. From late 1939, ten percent of professional baseball net profit was also given to the military.³⁸ These measures represented the teams' efforts to survive the staunchly anti-Western sentiment by proving their dedication to the nation; contributions like these were not only common, but often expected from companies and industries in all sectors of Japanese society. Unfortunately, however, the all-encompassing scale of the war soon relegated baseball to the backburner, condemned to a purgatory of sorts as it awaited an uncertain future.

The prewar and war era serves as one of the strongest and most distinct examples of baseball ideology as a reflection of Japanese political changes. While all facets of Japanese society during this period undoubtedly reflected the political climate of the time, few sectors reflect this atmosphere as clearly as the sporting realm. From the complete reform of terminology and uniforms used by professional teams to the teams' direct contributions to the military efforts, baseball demonstrated the ultranationalism that permeated life in Japan during this time.

³⁷ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 178.

³⁸ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 176-8.

VII. 'Democratic' Baseball

With the end of the war came the dawn of a period of dramatic change across the nation. The American occupation of Japan led to a complete reform of Japanese government. The Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP), led by American General Douglas MacArthur, worked to entirely restructure Japanese society. One of the most significant and enduring aspects of this reform was the creation of a new constitution, embedded with a pacifist clause. Transitioning from a period of jingoistic militarism to one of peaceful democracy could not have been simple, but with understandable exceptions, the process was relatively smooth. Within a comparatively short period, Japan transformed into a beacon of democracy, a capitalist success story, and a secure American ally.

Fortunately for Japanese baseball enthusiasts, American occupiers encouraged the restart of baseball after the end of World War II as a means of fostering democratic ideals in the new Japanese nation. The sport exploded in popularity like never before, with spectators coming in droves after the dry period during the war. Its reinstatement was almost immediate: the first postwar professional game was played on November 23, 1945,³⁹ just over three months after Japan's surrender. Baseball soon became the unquestionable top sport in the nation, far surpassing sumo. The game soon took on a new role, serving as "a metaphor for democracy and American-style consumer culture and a symbol of a new partnership between the two nations."⁴⁰ The success of baseball in Japan became integral to postwar reform; if baseball could flourish there, so could democracy. Baseball also became a forum for communication and cooperation between the two nations. In the end, baseball's triumph meant a win for all sides: Japan could reinstate what had

³⁹ Guttman and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 170.

⁴⁰ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 198-9.

become, in many ways, its national pastime, and the United States could portray this triumph as a victory for American democracy. The game could once again serve as a means of connecting to, instead of struggling against, American influence.

This renewed love for baseball was, in part, constructed by American forces. As SCAP officials were not hesitant to use censorship to promote democratic ideals, baseball was intentionally conflated with images of democracy in the reformed Japan. In addition, undoubtedly with American encouragement, the imperial family began to promote the sport. Crown Prince Akihito, for example, was photographed playing baseball for the first issue of the baseball magazine *Yakyū Shōnen*. Pictures of imperial family members attending baseball games were also widely circulated, no doubt with cooperation from American officials.⁴¹ Still, the explosion in popularity of baseball cannot be entirely attributed to American orchestration; though the SCAP administration may have helped it along, baseball's expansion reflects a Japanese willingness to move beyond the militaristic structure of the pre- and interwar period and into a new era of prosperity.

VIII. The Postwar Years: Policies Towards *Gaijin Senshū*

Most scholarship on the role of baseball in the US-Japan bilateral relationship ends with the immediate postwar era.⁴² To address this gap, I have chosen to focus on the policies related to foreign players on Japanese teams since the end of World War II. These policies have changed several times in the past few decades, and these changes often correspond to major events in the

⁴¹ Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, 210-3.

⁴² Guthrie-Shimizu's *Transpacific Field of Dreams*, for example, ends in the immediate postwar era; while some of Robert Whiting's scholarship extends beyond this period, his assertions are often problematic (see following chapter for further analysis of Whiting's work).

bilateral relationship. By examining the connection, I demonstrate the links between Japanese public sentiment during these periods and the reflection of these sentiments in the sporting world.

In investigating these changes, I rely heavily on Japanese newspaper analysis. While specific commentary on both politics and its connection to sports and baseball in particular were limited, articles related to major political events did provide insight into the political climate in Japan during momentous changes in the bilateral relationship. To conduct this research, I performed a search of the *Yomiuri Shimbun* database within the year of player policy changes. I searched these databases using keywords related to major bilateral events, focusing on articles relating to popular opinion or sentiment related to the United States and its citizens. The discussion progresses chronologically through five major phases in the policy changes.

A. First Restrictions on Foreign Players

Through 1951, there were no official limits on the number of foreign players who could play on a Japanese team. Starting in 1952, however, the maximum number of foreign players permissible on the active roster was restricted to three.⁴³ This restriction lasted until 1955, when the limits became even stricter: starting in this year, the limit applied to the entire organization as opposed to the active roster alone.

The introduction of this restriction coincides with the signing of the 1951 security treaty between the United States and Japan. This first treaty established the collective security arrangement that has largely defined the bilateral relationship in the postwar era. Under the agreement, the US gained the right to station troops and maintain bases in Japan. Japan also relinquished the right to allow other states to establish bases within its geographical boundaries unless granted permission to do so by the US. Reactions to the treaty were mixed; according to a

⁴³ Nishizaki, Shinichiro, "Foreign Player Restrictions?" trans. Joshua A. Reyer, accessed 1 April 2015.
<http://japanesebaseball.com/faq/gaijin.jsp>.

public opinion survey published in an October 1951 issue of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 54.9 percent of respondents were “somewhat satisfied” with the signing of the treaty itself, though only 17 percent were “very satisfied.”⁴⁴ A mere 34.9 percent thought the treaty should be approved immediately, with 26.2 percent hoping for an extended discussion before its approval. In addition, an overwhelming 63 percent of respondents wanted the treaty to be paid for without sacrificing any aspects of their current lifestyle.⁴⁵ These responses indicate a certain wariness or, at the very least, ambivalence towards the concept of the treaty itself and towards the United States more broadly: the idea of a formalized, concrete conceptualization of enduring foreign control in Japan came with both benefits and challenges.

While this link between baseball policy and bilateral events is not explicit, the coincidence cannot be ignored. Japanese popular reaction to the signing of the first bilateral security treaty foreshadowed the serious repercussions that were to come, including widespread manifestations of Japanese resistance to increasing foreign influence. The first limitations on the number of foreign players allowed on Japanese baseball teams exemplify this idea: the all-encompassing nature of the anti-Western sentiment extended into the realm of sports. The close timing between the signing of the treaty and the implementation of the player policy changes suggests an undeniable link. As the following sections demonstrate, this pattern continues into the modern era. Changes in the player policies cannot be fully explained by other factors, such as economics; as the shifts in 1970s policy illustrate, even when trade between the US and Japan is high and the Japanese economy is prospering, an atmosphere of mistrust in the bilateral relationship can lead to stricter limits on foreign players in NPB. Though the initial effect of this type of policy change was subtle, it sent a clear message that Japan was willing to accept foreign influence up to a certain

⁴⁴ “*Shichi Wari Ni Bun ga ‘Manzoku,’*” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 8 October 1951.

⁴⁵ “*Shichi Wari Ni Bun,*” *Yomiuri Shimbun*.

point. Baseball may have had its origins in the United States, but it had become a core component of Japanese sporting culture; even with an increasing postwar American presence, Japanese citizens would not relinquish control over their personal lives and leisure culture.

B. The Lucky Dragon Incident and Security Treaty Ratification

The next change in foreign player policy was implemented in 1955. Under the new rules, the number of players was limited to three in the entire organization, a departure from the previous restriction's sole focus on the active roster. This new, stricter limit represented a definitive attempt to truly constrict the proliferation of foreign influence.

In considering factors and events that may have influenced this change, the most obvious explanation relates to the 1954 "Lucky Dragon" (*Daigo Fukuryū Maru*) incident. This incident proved to be one of the first and most memorable challenges to the success of the bilateral relationship since the end of World War II. On March 1, 1954, the crew of the Japanese fishing boat *Daigo Fukuryū Maru* (SS Lucky Dragon 5 in English) encountered fallout from a nuclear detonation test conducted by the United States at Bikini Atoll. Although the ship was outside the danger zone declared by the US government, the test was more powerful than expected and the effects were much more severe. The crew members returned to Japan in mid-March and were soon diagnosed with acute radiation syndrome. The US response to the incident, including its attempt to downplay the effects and its reluctance to release details about the fallout composition, caused widespread criticism across Japan. A *Yomiuri Shimbun* article described the conflicting Japanese and American interpretations of the investigative results as a "cold war." The article questioned the biases of the reported results, noting that while learning has no national boundaries, scholars

and scientists do.⁴⁶ A separate article specifically noted an American spokesman's lack of apology in discussing the incident and its effects.⁴⁷

Japanese reaction to the incident and the American response, then, was far from positive. The strain the Lucky Dragon incident put on the bilateral relationship was decidedly significant. In this climate, again, implementing a stricter foreigner policy seems logical. The policy itself, additionally, lasted until 1962, allowing for another period of renewed wariness towards foreigners after the signing of the 1960 security treaty.

The period immediately preceding and following the ratification of the 1960 security treaty represented one of the most contentious in bilateral history. The ratification was followed by a series of riots in Tokyo led by students and trade unions. In a 1960 *Yomiuri Shimbun* poll, only 21 percent of respondents hoped for the ratification of the treaty, with the expansion of military armaments cited as the most serious problem in the opinions of Japanese citizens.⁴⁸ The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) issued a public opposition to the treaty, calling for an estrangement in US-Japan relations.⁴⁹ The protests ultimately prevented US President Dwight Eisenhower from making a scheduled diplomatic visit to Japan. The disastrous response to the security treaty led to a definitively cooler relationship between the two states in the years that followed. Amidst this chaos, the player policy was once again revised to restrict the total number of permissible foreign players to three, including managers and coaches. This policy, the strictest implemented until that point, undoubtedly reflected the heightened tensions between the two states. With widespread dissatisfaction and popular opposition to US influence, the policy change worked to both appease the general population and to protect the foreign players from aggressive scrutiny.

⁴⁶ “*Nichibei Shi no Hai Chōsa Kassen*,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 19 March 1954.

⁴⁷ “*Beigenshiryoku Iinkai wa Chinmoku*,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 17 March 1954.

⁴⁸ “*‘Shōnin Hantai’ Fueru: Kaisan no Hitsuyō Nai 36%*,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 3 April 1960.

⁴⁹ “*Nichibei Rikan Nerau: Jiyūmin, Anpo Hantai ni Hanron*,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 7 June 1960.

C. Japan as an Economic Superpower

The next change in foreign player policy occurred in 1966. From this date until 1980, the limit was set at two players in the entire organization. While there is not a single event that correlates with the change, this period represents a time of extreme economic growth for Japan. It was during these years that Japan transformed from a revitalizing market to an economic superpower. With the rise in economic power came a reassertion of Japanese political power and independence; the Japanese population expressed stronger opinions on issues like the Okinawa bases. In one survey, for example, 61 percent of respondents agreed that keeping US bases in Japan was not good for the Japanese people.⁵⁰

Trust between the two states was also at a historic low during this period. In a 1974 US government survey of 2,763 American citizens, 37 percent responded that they could not trust Japan. This number illustrated an increase from a 1947 poll, in which 33 percent of respondents answered in the same way. This result is remarkable: that the rate of distrust in 1974 should be higher than in 1947, a mere two years after the end of World War II, is notable. The number of respondents who answered that they could trust Japan, similarly, decreased from 48 percent in 1947 to 36 percent in 1974. This 1974 rate was the lowest in the history of the survey with the exception of 1935. The possible reasons centered largely on economic factors; Americans likely felt threatened by Japan's new economic prowess. The *Yomiuri Shimbun* article detailing these findings called the US a "selfish rival," indicating the state of affairs between the two states.⁵¹

Heightened tensions, then, once again help explain the change in player policy. The Japan of the late 1960s and 1970s was a Japan of complete dominance; this was the era of the Yomiuri Giants' nine consecutive Japan Series wins and a renewed understanding of *Nihonjinron* (theories

⁵⁰ "Nihon Seron wa Bei Kichi Hantai 61%," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 13 March 1969.

⁵¹ "Amerikajin no 37% ga 'Nihon wa Shinrai Dekinu,'" *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 29 July 1974.

of Japaneseness). Across Japanese society, there was an embrace of Japan's unique merits and a move away from the idealization of Western culture. The limit on foreign players fits in with this ideological shift; with a reassertion of Japanese dominance, a restriction on American influence would be reasonable.

The restrictions were also likely a response to another trend in baseball during the period from 1966 to 1980. Whereas foreign players up until and through the early part of this era had mostly been players without Major League Baseball (MLB) experience, the players from the late 1960s on were increasingly former MLB players. As the players without MLB experience had included greater numbers of *Nikkeijin* (first generation Japanese Americans), their decrease in number meant a more visible and overt foreign presence in Japan. In 1954, for example, only one of the sixteen American players in Japan had prior MLB experience; by 1965, that ratio had increased to fifteen out of twenty-one total players; and in 1977, only one out of the twenty-four American players in Japan did not have MLB experience.⁵² With more white Americans and retired MLB players making up the foreign players on NPB rosters, the stricter limits likely reflected a desire to preserve the "Japaneseness" of NPB.

D. A Release in Tensions

With the advent of President Ronald Reagan's administration in the US came a slackening in bilateral tensions. After Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's election, US-Japan cooperation increased as the two leaders developed stronger ties between the two states. While there were bumps along the way, the relationship generally functioned well as their economic interdependence grew. While Japan's economic growth had not slowed, its increased cooperation

⁵² Edward A. Broder (editor), *Japanese Pro Baseball Foreign Player Registry (1950-1974)* (Whittier, CA: E.A. Broder, 1975) and Wayne Gracyzk (editor), *Americans in Japan: American Players in Japan Pro Baseball 1950-1986* (Tokyo: W. Gracyzk, 1986).

with the United States may have contributed to lower friction. With deals like the August 1984 agricultural product agreement, the 1986 agreement on semiconductor products, and the Japanese decision to participate in Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to protect the US from ballistic missile attacks,⁵³ cooperation between the two states was robust. Accordingly, the foreign player policy was relaxed slightly, with three players permitted in each organization; the active roster limit remained at two. Though this policy change is relatively minor, it reflects the wary ease with which the two states began to view each other; the promise for a renewed era of revitalized cooperation seemed near, but economic competition prevented either side from letting down its guard entirely. With the increase in globalization beginning in this period, additionally, Japanese teams may have started to embrace the inevitability of foreign presence; with their economic future (seemingly) secure, additionally, the US presence posed less of a threat than it had in the past. Irrespective of cause, however, the change in policy represented a new period of openness and freedom in Japanese baseball.

E. Foreign Player Policy in Recent Years

Since 1995, which marked the year from which the United States and Japan “have no longer suffered from mutual threat perceptions,”⁵⁴ there has been no organizational limit on the number of foreign players in a team's overall organization. The limit for the active roster, however, remains at four today. One possible explanation for this further move towards leniency is a further shift in US-Japan relations inspired by the 1996 agreement to relocate the Futenma air base, a Marine Corps base positioned in the key strategic location of Okinawa. As previous surveys demonstrated, the Futenma base issue was (and still is) one of the more contentious aspects of bilateral diplomacy;

⁵³ “Chronology of U.S.-Japan Relations,” Embassy of the United States in Japan, last modified 30 September 2013, accessed 14 April 2015. <http://aboutusa.japan.usembassy.gov/e/jusa-usj-chronology.html>

⁵⁴ Akihiko Tanaka, “The International Context of US-Japan Relations in the 1990s,” in *New Perspectives on US-Japan Relations*, ed. Gerald L. Curtis (New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000), 289.

its supposed resolution could have contributed to lower tensions and improved US-Japan cooperation. In addition, the increase in the number of NPB players joining MLB, combined with economic changes that led to the development of more neoliberal economic policies, could have contributed to the reconceptualization of baseball teams as global markets. With the relaxation of foreign player policies, both the US and Japan were free to open up a new field for bilateral economic exchange.

While there certainly are correlations between the state of US-Japan bilateral cooperation and changes in Japanese baseball policies, the latter cannot be attributed solely to the former. As with any policy changes, the evolution of Japanese baseball policy and ideology were likely influenced by a wide variety of factors. In recent years, for example, the rise of soccer could have contributed to a decreased emphasis on foreign player policies in baseball; with the advent of a new and more globalized sport, the impact of Americans playing on Japanese teams may have dwindled. Other economic and regional factors may also play into these policies and their implementation.

Nevertheless, the closely linked nature of baseball and political policy in Japan is undeniable. This examination of the history of Japanese baseball from its inception to its current state demonstrates clear patterns between the two areas; while baseball has played a wide variety of roles since its introduction late in the 19th century, it has always reflected the status of US-Japan relations in some way. Throughout some of its history, baseball has represented efforts to construct or maintain close relations with the United States; at other points, it has served as a method of asserting Japan's independence and distancing the state from American influence. Foreign player policies, in particular, have tended to reflect the status of the bilateral relationship. As this

relationship continues to develop, monitoring these and other changes in sports policies could offer invaluable insight into its direction and progression.

Chapter Three: The Myth of ‘*Samurai* Baseball’

I. The Samurai Baseball Myth

The concept of ‘culture’ is complex, with its own unique history and evolution. At its most basic core, culture can be conceptualized as “the learned, ideational aspects of human society.”¹ Since its inception, however, culture has been morphed into a term synonymous with ‘civilization,’ where civilization equates to Western society.² Accordingly, it is often invoked as part of an othering process designed to paint a portrait of a foreign, incomprehensible, and utterly perplexing society or state.³ This exotification, employed often by Western imperialists, is commonly used to idealize or dehumanize a group of people by depicting them as so different as to be incapable of conforming to ‘civilized’ norms. While not unique to Japan, Westerners have referenced this form of Japanese ‘culture’ for centuries, with such memorable examples as Pierre Loti’s overtly racist *Madame Chrysantheme*. This supposedly fictional narrative tells the story of a French naval officer stationed in Nagasaki and his relationships with and racial fetishism of Japanese women. Implicit in these comparisons is an unflinching sense of Western superiority; reductionist, overly simplified descriptions of foreign peoples pale in comparison to the progressive, complex characterizations of Western society.

Japanese baseball is far from immune to this phenomenon. The most prominent example is undoubtedly Robert Whiting’s account of Japanese ‘*samurai*’ baseball. The name itself comes from the Japanese term *bushidō*, translated literally as ‘the way of the *samurai*’ or ‘the way of the warrior.’ While a version of *bushidō* baseball did flourish around the 1890s under the Ichikō

¹ Chris Jenks, *Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 8.

² Jenks, *Culture*, 8-9.

³ Uma Narayan “Cross-Cultural Connections, Border-Crossings, and ‘Death by Culture,’” in *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*, ed. By Elizabeth Hackett and Sally Haslanger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 62.

system, Whiting's characterization of *samurai* baseball is neither an accurate description of the *samurai* way nor a representative portrayal of Japanese baseball in the modern era. Despite its many flaws, Whiting's depiction of Japanese baseball continues to pervade discussions of Japanese baseball style: one recent news article called Whiting's *You Gotta Have Wa* "the best analysis of Japanese culture as seen through the lens of sport."⁴ Another recent article 'explains' Japan's style of baseball by stating that "Japanese culture has fostered the philosophy of precision, technique and discipline while incorporating the ancient martial art of Aikido in order to cultivate the spirit."⁵ Perceptions of Japanese baseball as the product of some mystical Orientalized culture, then, still exist and thrive in modern Western culture.

The *bushidō* ideal is a problematic concept itself. Originally described by Nitobe Inazō in his *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan*, the caricature of true *samurai* lives and values bears little resemblance to actual behavior exhibited by *samurai*.⁶ An observer described Nitobe, who was educated in English and spent a significant period of schooling in Hokkaidō, isolated from the general Japanese population, as an atypical and extraordinarily Westernized specimen.⁷ Despite his tenuous understanding of Japanese history, however, Nitobe deemed himself qualified to write a monograph on the "soul of Japan" that was eagerly snatched up by Westerners searching for a 'cultural' understanding of the state. Whether Nitobe's ascribed ignorance of Japanese culture and society was genuine or merely feigned to conform to Western ideas of Japan is unclear, but in

⁴ Kris Kosaka, "'You Gotta Have Wa' is Still the Best Analysis of Japanese Culture Seen through the Lens of Sport," *The Japan Times*, 18 April 2015, accessed 19 April 2015.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/04/18/books/book-reviews/gotta-wa-still-best-analysis-japanese-culture-seen-lens-sport/#.VTPXZfnF-MM>.

⁵ Lyell Marks, "Spirit Power: Unearthing the Roots of Japanese Baseball and Sadaharu Oh," *Bleacher Report*, 7 October 2012, accessed 19 April 2015. <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1361909-spirit-power-unearthing-the-roots-of-japanese-baseball-and-sadaharu-oh>.

⁶ G. Cameron Hurst III, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal," *Philosophy East and West* 40, no. 4 (1990), 512.

⁷ Hurst III, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty," 511-512.

either case his writing was undoubtedly influenced by his unusual background. The *samurai* ethics Nitobe describes include loyalty, honor, politeness, and truth,⁸ all terms associated with enduring stereotypes of the stoic and unrelentingly devoted Japanese citizen inscribed in the minds of Westerners today. Nitobe's descriptions were, unfortunately, taken as truthful representations of the Japanese people; though they were "simply inaccurate,"⁹ they contributed to a lasting caricature of *samurai* that bears little resemblance to the actual historical figures.

Whiting, then, starts with an erroneous, distorted conception of *samurai* values and builds from its principles. In *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat: Baseball Samurai Style*, he outlines a list of twelve articles that comprise the "Samurai Code of Conduct for Baseball Players."¹⁰ This almost farcically stereotypical list of characteristics depicts the Japanese ballplayer as a veritable baseball machine, devoted selflessly and completely to The Team. These articles include mandates such as "[t]he player must be a total team member," "[t]he player must follow established procedure," "[t]he player must play 'For the Team,'" and "[t]he player must follow the rules of sameness."¹¹ These generalizations overlook the complexities of baseball in Japan and reinforce Western stereotypes about the Japanese people.

The vast majority of Whiting's assertions have little or no evidence, with sparse anecdotal 'proof' used throughout the book to make sweeping claims about the national character of Japan. These types of claims, William Kelly argues, are problematic in nature; the conflation of sporting style and national character leads to generalizations and stereotypes that do not accurately represent the people it seeks to describe.¹² Whiting's descriptions of Japanese sporting style are

⁸ Hurst III, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty," 513.

⁹ Hurst III, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty," 513.

¹⁰ Robert Whiting, *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat: Baseball Samurai Style* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1977), 38.

¹¹ Whiting, *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, 38-56.

¹² William W. Kelly, "Samurai Baseball: The Vicissitudes of a National Sporting Style," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 3 (2009), 434.

distressing enough on their own, and using this already distorted portrayal of Japanese baseball to draw conclusions about Japanese society as a whole compounds the inaccuracies.

There are countless examples of Japanese players and teams that contradict Whiting's "Samurai Code of Conduct." Though Whiting himself draws on the famous Ōh Sadaharu, the Japanese home run king and Giants player from 1959 to 1980, as an example of the ideal Japanese baseball player, Ōh actually contradicts many of Whiting's principles. Whiting's second article flatly states that a Japanese ballplayer's duty is to follow established procedure without deviation, as failure to adhere to traditions and rules is seen as insubordination.¹³ Ōh is, in fact, known for his distinctive and unorthodox batting stance, a clear deviation from the "established procedure" that Whiting insists all Japanese adhere to above all. Though his methods of training, which included a study of Zen and *kabuki* along with practice in sword-wielding, are what William Kelly describes as "Orientalized,"¹⁴ Kelly notes that these methods were also a deviation from, as opposed to a way of conforming to, traditional Japanese baseball training. This deviation also directly contradicts Whiting's ninth article of his samurai code, which refers to the imperative to "follow the rules of sameness."¹⁵

Ōh Sadaharu is merely one of a great many players who break the rules Whiting so decidedly puts forth. Other examples include Suzuki Ichirō, who, despite undergoing rigorous coaching from a manager Whiting characterizes as a strong proponent of samurai baseball,¹⁶ employs a distinctive batting stance noted as "weird" even in the allegedly more individualistic

¹³ Whiting, *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, 40.

¹⁴ William W. Kelly, "Learning to Swing, Oh Sadaharu and the Pedagogy and Practice of Japanese Baseball," in *Learning in Likely Places: Varieties of Apprenticeship in Japan*, ed. John Singleton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 266.

¹⁵ Whiting, *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, 56.

¹⁶ Robert Whiting, *The Meaning of Ichiro: The New Wave from Japan and the Transformation of Our National Pastime* (New York: Warner Books, 2004), 24.

and diverse world of Major League Baseball.¹⁷ If these players managed to attain the levels of fame that they possess in spite of their clear defiance of established norms and conformity, then Whiting's "Code of Conduct" cannot possibly be as binding as he suggests. Examples of nonconformity to this supposedly rigid code are not limited to players; Kelly describes the Hanshin Tigers' stadium, Kōshien, as a site that "reveal[s] samurai baseball as futility."¹⁸ Kelly argues that for Tigers fans, the allure of the game lies in their team's inability to perfectly live up to this samurai ideal. Hanshin baseball is characterized by "factional infighting, inept management, and disgruntled players," features not lost on the Tigers' numerous fans.¹⁹ Japanese fandom, then, is not contingent upon strict adherence to the principles Whiting outlines. Like its American counterpart, Japanese baseball is a complex system of teams and players, each with a distinctive personality. The examples listed are by no means exhaustive and are merely meant to highlight some of the most prominent instances of successful players and teams that do not fit into Whiting's narrow view of Japanese baseball standards.

Evidence to support Whiting's claims that Japanese people value the principles outlined in his Code is exceedingly scarce. In fact, an in-depth study of the norms fostered by and associated with certain sports contradicts many of the stereotypes associated with Japan in general and its sports philosophy specifically. In a survey of 512 Japanese university student athletes and non-athletes, published originally in 1983, participants were asked to evaluate statements related to sports in terms of how strongly they agreed with each statement. The study, which sought to identify the ingrained social norms as opposed to their easily changeable counterparts—overtly

¹⁷ Timothy Howell, "The 11 Weirdest Stances in MLB History," *Bleacher Report*, 4 November 2011, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/924827-some-of-the-weirdest-batting-stances-in-major-league-baseball-history>.

¹⁸ Kelly, "Hanshin," 38.

¹⁹ Kelly, "Hanshin," 38.

stated rules—explored which statements were rated highest and lowest by participants in sports that are traditionally American, Japanese, or English, respectively. In contrast to stereotypes of the Japanese nation, the lowest rated statements included “[l]osing a game is shameful” and “[p]layers should play for the team, not the individual.”²⁰ Even among Japanese athletes themselves, Whiting’s supposedly ‘Japanese’ values hold little weight.

Why, then, did Whiting present these ideas of a distinctive Japanese culture based on an ideology that contrasts traditionally ‘American’ values in nearly every way? At the time of Whiting’s writing in the 1970s, the US-Japan bilateral relationship was undergoing a major shift. This period, no longer part of the ‘postwar era,’ saw a rise in Japan’s economic and political power. Along with Japan’s emergence as a budding economic superpower came a “widespread [American] acceptance of the idea that Japan is somehow unique, that its economic institutions and basic cultural characteristics make it an outlier among trade nations.”²¹ Whiting’s ideas are not unique in their content, then, but rather in their context; economists and policy-makers put forth similar claims of Japanese exceptionalism based on a distinctive Japanese culture. This underlying idea, originating in the Nixon era, served as the basis for policies extending into the Clinton administration.²²

Claims like those that Whiting and his peers put forth tend to emerge in times of international tension; the othering process of culture becomes particularly useful in justifying broad economic or political policies like those that the United States drafted during Japan’s period of rapid economic growth. In these periods especially, the differences within a state are overlooked

²⁰ Takaaki Niwa, “The Cultural Characteristics of Sport: Especially Concerning the Implicit Norms of Sports as Seen in the Attitudes of Japanese University Athletes,” *The Japanese Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 32 no. 3 (1993): 245.

²¹ Gerald L. Curtis, “U.S. Policy toward Japan from Nixon to Clinton: An Assessment,” in *New Perspectives on U.S.-Japan Relations*, ed. Gerald L. Curtis (New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000), 5.

²² Curtis, “U.S. Policy,” 6.

in favor of creating a larger, overarching national identity. Sports, including baseball, are no exception to this rule. Sports fans from different regions in the United States, for example, who normally engage in bitter rivalries with each other, will temporarily unite in a spirit of American patriotism during international events like the Olympics.

In my experience, Japanese fans themselves willingly participate in this construction of a single national identity when asked to contrast their version of baseball with MLB. When I asked several Japanese fans to identify factors that made Japanese baseball distinctive from its American counterpart, many rattled off answers similar to Whiting's samurai code. When I spoke to Hanshin Tigers fans specifically about the distinctiveness of their own team, however, they were quick to point out differences from other Japanese teams, particularly the well-known Yomiuri Giants. Similarly, American baseball players and coaches have spoken endlessly on their perceptions of differences between Japanese and American baseball style. Red Sox fans and Yankees fans, however, are often loathe to acknowledge any similarities in the playing strategies, core franchise principles, or perceived philosophies of their respective teams. Local identity and difference, then, is often superseded by international pressure, which requires construction of a strong and unified national identity. In some situations, however, these local differences cannot be suppressed; by examining tensions between local and national constructions of identity, I explore the subtleties of distinctions in Japanese baseball at all levels.

II. Concrete Differences between MLB and NPB

Even in the cases where Whiting's listed articles are based on institutional differences between Japanese and American professional baseball, his analysis is flawed. There are, of course, actual differences between Major League Baseball and Japanese Professional Baseball, but

immediately interpreting these differences as direct products of ‘cultural’ differences is lazy and highly problematic. The following section examines quantifiable and concrete dissimilarities between baseball in the two states. I explore the causes of these dissimilarities and distinguish between practices that have arisen as a product of logistical issues and those that represent true distinctions in playing style or philosophy. To assist in this analysis, I have divided the differences into three categories: differences often used to justify the idea of samurai baseball and that arise as a result of structural or logistical limitations and variations; differences that are caused by or relate to structural or economic factors; and stylistic differences.

A. Differences Related to Samurai Baseball

Many of the differences ascribed to cultural dissimilarities can be easily explained by considering logistical factors in the Japanese baseball system or society as a whole. One of the most commonly cited examples of so-called Japanese style baseball, for instance, is the conditioning procedures for Japanese baseball players. Tales of the 1,000 fungo drills and similar intensive training practices run rampant in literature intended to describe an almost inhuman and inherently foreign level of dedication and commitment on the part of Japanese players. While this characterization itself is illogical, considering the extreme dedication displayed by most MLB players, it also fails to recognize differences in the structure of Japanese baseball. Unlike MLB, Japanese baseball does not have an extensive farm, or minor league, system, which usually consists of teams and clubs designed to prepare players for the Major Leagues. Instead of a hierarchical minor league organization like that of MLB, Japanese baseball consists of relatively large rosters divided into two squads. The first squad represents the professional team, while the farm team is comprised entirely of the lower squad. The Japanese rosters, then, are large and contain a wide range of talent; with fewer minor league teams in which to place the players, the rosters must

incorporate both recruits newly out of high school and players just on the cusp of participating in NPB games. Japanese teams must therefore spend more time on fundamentals than their American major league counterparts to cater to the lowest common denominator; with such disparities in experience level and ability, coaches tend to concentrate on the basics.²³ This system does not represent a fundamentally ‘Japanese’ love of ritual or routine, therefore, but rather results logically from a profoundly different minor league structure. The question of why the Japanese system developed in this way might be considered separately, but its existence indisputably creates a need for a more drill-oriented conditioning program.

The Japanese transportation system also has a profound influence on baseball. As discussed earlier, the extensiveness of the system makes travel less of a concern than in MLB. On a more local level, however, the public transportation causes several distinct factors in NPB. Tie games, though rare, are possible in Japanese baseball. In MLB, where teams continue to play until there is a single definitive winner, games have lasted as long as 33 innings.²⁴ In NPB, however, if there is no winner after 12 innings, the game is counted as a tie. Though these tie games represent a mere three percent of total games,²⁵ their existence marks an obvious difference between Japanese and American baseball. These tie games are not indicative of any lack of commitment on the part of Japanese fans; they are a direct result of limitations on the transportation system. Since almost all games are evening games and the overwhelming majority of fans come to the stadiums by public transportation, any games that extended past the last train departure would effectively strand thousands of fans with no alternative method of commuting home.²⁶ Rather than representing some

²³ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 25.

²⁴ “A Look Back at Professional Baseball’s Longest Game.” International League, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://web.archive.org/web/20050208112150/http://www.ilbaseball.com/longestgame.html>. In 1981, the Pawtucket Red Sox and the Rochester Red Wings played for over eight hours before Pawtucket finally won the game. This game holds the record for longest professional baseball game in history.

²⁵ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 29.

²⁶ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 29.

overarching example of Japanese ‘culture,’ then, tie games exemplify a structural difference in the commuting systems of Japan and the US.

A final logistical variation involves the physical structure of Japanese baseball stadiums. Infields in Japanese baseball are one example of this variation. Most Japanese infields are all dirt to help with drainage during the rainy season. Since Japanese baseball stadiums rely less on tarps,²⁷ this drainage system is a necessary and efficient way to ensure that the fields remain playable. Kelly notes that this dirt infield, in turn, leads to an infield that plays fast, perhaps because the dirt fails to decrease the ball speed and leads to a more unpredictable bounce that takes players longer to field. This trend, in turn, leads to more hits and errors, which slows down the overall time of the game. Japanese games tend to run longer than their MLB counterparts for a variety of reasons, but this structural aspect is critical to consider. I discuss the length of the games themselves as a legitimate stylistic difference; addressing the concrete logistical differences, however, is also critical in establishing that even overarching disparities in style can be influenced by structural factors. In addition, the foul areas are often wider than MLB stadiums’ foul areas, leading to more fouls caught for outs and therefore contributing to a lower average number of runs per game in the NPB as compared to MLB. In 2014, for example, the NPB teams scored an average of 4.11 runs per game as compared to 4.27 in MLB.²⁸ While this difference is not large and cannot be accounted for entirely by this disparity in foul areas, the phenomenon is worth noting. Other hypotheses regarding the reasons for this gap, which does seem to be narrowing in recent years, center on stylistic differences between the two organizations. Runs are another example of cases in which culture often comes into play: this physical difference in stadium setup, though not specifically

²⁷ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 41.

²⁸ “*Chīmu Dageki Seiseki*,” *Puro Yakyū Dēta Freak*, accessed 1 April 2015, <http://baseball-data.com/team/hitter.html>, and “MLB Team Runs per Game,” Team Rankings, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.teamrankings.com/mlb/stat/runs-per-game?date=2013-10-30>.

related to the samurai image, at least partially challenges the idea that American baseball teams are made up exclusively of power hitters who can outscore any Japanese team.

B. Other Structural and Economic Factors

The following list of differences does not relate to the *samurai* stereotype explicitly, but rather serves to illustrate some of the other dissimilarities between MLB and NPB, all of which I believe merit examination. The list is not exhaustive, but represents the most significant or striking differences I encountered, either through an exploration of previous scholarship or through personal observation.

One such structural consideration is the number of teams in Japanese versus American baseball and the logistical factors influencing this difference. Though NPB, like MLB, is divided into two leagues, each Japanese league consists of six teams, as compared to fifteen teams in each MLB league. The reason for this difference is simple: with significantly less land area and a much smaller population than that of the US, Japan simply could not accommodate thirty teams. The smaller land area and exceptional transportation networks also mean that travel is a considerably easier process in Japan than in the US. The two most popular teams, Hanshin and Yomiuri, for example, are located less than three hours from each other by bullet train. Monday is usually a designated travel day, though this system occasionally varies, and teams play three-game series from Tuesday to Thursday and Friday to Sunday.

The smaller number of teams itself also creates another dissimilarity. With fewer possible opponents, teams face each other more often (a total of 26 times per 144 game season), fostering intense rivalries with comparatively more opportunities for inciting these tensions than in MLB.²⁹ While the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry is infamous, the Hanshin-Yomiuri undoubtedly matches it in

²⁹ Kelly, "Hanshin," 26.

intensity. As an observer at games between both of these sets of rivals, I noticed the same palpable tension and excitement in the fans and the same buzzing, restless atmosphere at the stadiums. Although measuring the strength of a rivalry is difficult, it is clear that rivalry is not a concept unique to or even dominated by American teams. While the Hanshin-Yomiuri rivalry is ubiquitous, the latter team has a reputation for winning strong enough to ensure that nearly every other club in the league considers the Giants their main competitor. With the greater frequency of team matchups, Japanese baseball is home to a variety of rivalries in their most powerful form.

Comparing the economics of Japanese baseball to its American counterpart presents possibly the most dramatic set of differences. The two systems differ fundamentally on a wide range of significant aspects, including their basic purpose. With these numerous differences, it is remarkable that so many features remain constant throughout both organizations. Examining the dissimilarities, however, gives a clearer and more realistic picture of the ways in which Japanese baseball truly differs from the American major leagues.

The most obvious difference is also one of the most important: the names of the teams. While American teams are known by the name of the team itself and the city associated with it (e.g. the Boston Red Sox, the New York Yankees, the Washington Nationals, etc.), Japanese teams replace this city identification with the name of their corporate sponsor. Any Japanese fan knows that the Tigers, for example, are based in Osaka, or that the Giants hail from Tokyo. To refer to the Osaka Tigers, however, would be a serious faux pas; the Tigers are and always have been the Hanshin Tigers, after their railway parent company. This system, which was likely a logical development arising out of the company-organized teams that originally flourished when baseball was getting its start in Japan, continues today. Unlike American teams, most of which are owned

by wealthy individuals, Japanese teams have always been subsidiaries of their parent corporations.³⁰

This difference in fundamental structure is closely linked to a major difference in purpose. American teams have the express purpose of making money; it would be “inconceivable that American owners wouldn’t seek to maximize their investment.”³¹ While Japanese parent companies are not opposed to maximizing their own investments, this maximization takes a different form for them. The baseball teams serve as a means of creating publicity for the owners; though the clubs themselves are rumored to run consistent deficits,³² their advertising potential is not insignificant. The corporate sponsor of the Nippon Ham Fighters, for example, went from ranking fifth in Japan’s largest meat companies before buying the franchise to second after the purchase.³³ The Tigers’ owner, the Hanshin group, is also perhaps more well-known for its connection to baseball than its status as an independent corporation. While both American and Japanese owners have commercial interests in their teams, the American version of this interest takes the form of direct profits from the team. Japanese sponsors, conversely, derive their ‘profit’ from the advertising opportunities created through team ownership.

These broad differences in economic structure of the organizations are not the only ways in which NPB and MLB differ. Many of the policies related to the players themselves also vary between the two states’ clubs. Perhaps the most immediately apparent is the salary differences. Unsurprisingly, given the total revenue generated in MLB as compared to NPB, players on American teams tend to earn significantly more than their counterparts on Japanese teams. The

³⁰ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 25.

³¹ Alan M. Klein, *Growing the Game: The Globalization of Major League Baseball* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 149.

³² Kelly, “Hanshin,” 25.

³³ Klein, *Growing the Game*, 149.

average salary in 2014 for a Giants player, according to one estimate, is about \$721,000; the average Tigers salary is much lower, resting at approximately \$478,000.³⁴ By comparison, the official MLB calculated salary average for all players in 2013 was \$3,320,089.³⁵ William Kelly notes that “compared with MLB, salaries are lower at the high end and higher at the low end of the player spectrum,”³⁶ perhaps lessening the superstar phenomenon that tends to conflate outrageously high salaries with player worth. These players are obviously talented, but observers of both MLB and NPB might question whether the attention paid to MLB players’ disproportionately large salaries detracts from the purpose of the game itself. With a mere 91 players in NPB making above \$1 million, 26 of whom are foreign,³⁷ the expectation for extremely high salaries for players is significantly lower in Japan than in the US.

Another player-related difference relates to the time length for exclusive rights to players. In Japan, clubs possess the rights to players for nine years, “which is an effective hold over most players for their entire professional career.”³⁸ The American system imposes a limit of six years before free agency, when a player is free to negotiate contracts with any team; while far from inconsequential, this limit allows for greater player movement and undoubtedly affects the salaries of MLB players. These three years, additionally, take on extra significance when considered in the context of the brevity of the average baseball career; according to a recent study, the average MLB career lasts a mere 5.6 years.³⁹ This difference, then, is more than trivial. Its impact on player mobility and salary negotiations cannot be overstated.

³⁴ Patrick Newman, “2014 NPB Payrolls,” accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.npbtracker.com/2014/02/2014-npb-payrolls/#content>

³⁵ “MLB Average Salary is \$3.39 Million.” ESPN, last modified 18 December 2013, accessed 1 April 2015. http://espn.go.com/mlb/story/_/id/10158314/mlb-average-salary-54-percent-339-million

³⁶ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 30.

³⁷ Newman, “2014 NPB Payrolls.”

³⁸ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 30.

³⁹ Sam Roberts, “Just How Long Does the Average Baseball Career Last?” *New York Times*, 15 July 2007, accessed 1 April 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/15/sports/baseball/15careers.html?_r=0.

Economics, in combination with structural factors, also play a role in the number of players drafted annually by American and Japanese teams. With smaller budgets overall and no extensive minor league system like that of MLB, Japanese teams only draft between four and eight players per season. When compared to the 45-50 players drafted annually by each team in the American major leagues,⁴⁰ this number seems almost impossibly small. Considering that each club in NPB consists of only 70 players, however, the figure is fairly proportional. As Japanese draftees also typically have higher average salaries than their MLB counterparts, this difference is a logical development.

The draft system also leads to one final significant difference dictated by economics: the so-called “reverse designation” system of Japanese baseball. Under this system, an Industrial League member (an amateur player and company employee) or college player can choose which team he wishes to play for, leading to an arrangement that clearly favors wealthy teams like the Giants.⁴¹ The American organization, on the contrary, functions through a rotary draft system that supposedly counteracts this consolidation of power by any single team. The Japanese method often results in bribery, as in the case of a 2004 scandal in which the Giants were exposed for surreptitiously offering a college player approximately \$20,000 to play for their team.⁴² Although the US system is assuredly not free from corruption, it does manage to avoid this particular realization of draft manipulation.

C. Stylistic Differences

A final category of differences are those that do not have a single obvious structural or economic justification. Despite the fact that these factors are less easily explained, they are not

⁴⁰ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 30-31.

⁴¹ Klein, *Growing the Game*, 151-52.

⁴² Klein, *Growing the Game*, 152.

necessarily reducible to cultural difference. Their existence does, however, offer some insight into stylistic variations between American and Japanese baseball. These differences also give a more solid, quantifiable basis upon which to base judgments about distinctions in sporting style between the two states. Here again, the list is not meant to be comprehensive; I have omitted some often cited differences, such as the size of the strike zone, due to conflicting views on the actual extent or validity of assertions regarding variation. I have chosen to focus on differences I found most easily observable or most striking.

One immediately apparent difference is the number of games per season. While each MLB team plays 162 games, the number of games played by each NPB team is generally closer to 144. The seasons generally run during the same time, from April to October, so climate differences do not play a significant factor. The Japanese baseball schedule does include more off days and a longer break in June, but there is no immediate explanation for these differences. As discussed earlier, travel is easier within Japan than in the United States. A need for additional travel time, then, is also not a viable explanation. Given the financial strain involved in sponsoring an NPB team, it is possible that this shorter season is meant to accommodate the corporate sponsors. Still, this possibility is based on conjecture, and there is no concrete evidence to support this or other explanations.

The games themselves also tend to run longer, on average, in Japan. Despite the possibility of a tie game to cap game time, the regular, nine-inning games last longer than their MLB counterparts. While this disparity may be partially explained by factors such as the slower play caused by dirt infields, which leads to balls bouncing unpredictably and therefore a greater number of hits and errors, there are other aspects of this extended game length that are not explained as simply. Kelly notes that, in Japan, “many pitchers prefer to work the count, batters take more

elaborate set-up time, and Japanese umpires are more indulgent toward coaches and managers who want meetings on the mound.”⁴³ My own observations confirm at least the first two characteristics; individual at-bats seemed to take significantly longer. Yet there is no clear reason for this lengthiness: Japanese players may just be trained to take their time. Especially in recent years, in addition, MLB has enacted policy changes to attempt to limit the length of games; in a recent rule change, for example, batters will be required to keep one foot in the batting box at all times as a way of shortening the length of each at-bat.⁴⁴

Another difference in playing style relates to the use of the bunt. I noticed a significantly greater number of bunts, both sacrifice and for hits, during my observations of Tigers and Buffaloes games at Kōshien and Kyocera Dome, respectively. While bunts are, of course, employed in MLB as well, they are used sparingly and usually by exceptionally speedy base runners or batters not traditionally considered ‘power hitters.’ Japanese leagues have tended to have fewer power hitters, though this trend may be changing, so this development is possibly a natural one arising out of a difference in physiques or natural playing strengths.

Japanese baseball also employs a six-man pitching rotation, which allows pitchers to play once a week instead of once every five days as under the MLB five-man rotation system. This extra rest period may have benefits for improving pitcher longevity and preventing injuries; Japanese teams generally have fewer pitchers who opt for Tommy John surgery, though former Red Sox pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka suggests that this phenomenon could be due in part to a reluctance on the part of Japanese teams to employ what they originally considered a more

⁴³ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 29.

⁴⁴ “David Ortiz Blasts New MLB Rule on Staying in Batter’s Box,” *Boston Herald*, 25 February 2015, accessed 1 April 2015.

[http://www.bostonherald.com/sports/red_sox/mlb/clubhouse_insider/2015/02/david_ortiz_blasts_new_mlb_rule_on_staying_in_batters.](http://www.bostonherald.com/sports/red_sox/mlb/clubhouse_insider/2015/02/david_ortiz_blasts_new_mlb_rule_on_staying_in_batters)

experimental treatment.⁴⁵ Under Japan's system, pitchers play less frequently but generally throw a greater number of pitches, causing them to play later into the game. This system does require a greater number of starting pitchers, but decreases the need for relief pitchers. Regardless of the efficiency of either system, the five- versus six-man rotation exemplifies an important stylistic difference between the MLB and NPB systems.

A final difference related to players involves the policy towards foreigners in each state's organization. While I have discussed the evolution of this policy extensively in the previous chapter, it is critical to note its significance in the context of cross-cultural differences in playing style. The current policy limits the number of foreign players to four on the active roster, with a maximum of three pitchers or fielders.⁴⁶ American teams almost always have a far greater number: according to the most recent MLB estimate, approximately 26 percent of MLB players are foreign born, and the 2014 Texas Rangers had a whopping 15 foreign-born players on their roster.⁴⁷ This disparity undoubtedly affects American playing style. With a mix of cultures and varied backgrounds represented in its players and teams, MLB is likely to have greater variation within its overall organization and perhaps even within its teams. I explore this local variation within both Japan and the United States later in the chapter.

One final category of stylistic difference does not involve the actual players or teams at all, but is perhaps the most noticeable of any dissimilarities. The cheering customs and conventions for American and Japanese baseball differ enormously. One of my first and strongest memories of Japanese baseball from my childhood days in Tokyo relates to these traditions. Long before I was

⁴⁵ David Lennon. "The Tommy John Crisis: Could a Six-Man Rotation be the Answer?" *Newsday*, 12 July 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.newsday.com/sports/columnists/david-lennon/the-tommy-john-surgery-crisis-could-a-six-man-rotation-be-the-answer-1.8782642>.

⁴⁶ Nishizaki, "Foreign Player Restrictions?"

⁴⁷ "2014 Opening Day Rosters Feature 224 Players Born Outside the U.S." MLB.com, last modified 1 April 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://m.mlb.com/news/article/70623418/2014-opening-day-rosters-feature-224-players-born-outside-the-us>.

captivated by home runs or batting averages, I would look forward to the moment in every Yakult Swallows games when the fans, led by a designated cheering section, would brandish miniature plastic umbrellas and dance with them. I was disappointed, upon moving back to the United States, to discover that this act was a uniquely Japanese one; it was not until I returned to Japan that I learned the umbrellas were not only unique to Japan, but to the Swallows specifically. Each team in Japan has some version of this distinctive show of support. For the Hanshin Tigers, fans blow up long, unfortunately phallic-shaped balloons and release them in unison. At Kyocera Dome, it was towels; I was presented with an Orix Buffaloes towel upon entry, which I was then expected to wave at appropriate moments throughout the game. In addition to these team-specific customs, Japanese games employ the use of small plastic bats, usually printed with team logos or action shots of the players themselves, which are used in place of clapping.

Cheers in Japanese baseball are also more organized than the sporadic drunken shouts that punctuate most American games. Each Japanese team has a fan club which leads the rest of the fans in cheers throughout the game; members of this club also follow their team on away games and sit in another designated section at their opponent's stadium. While seemingly complex to the first-time fan, the cheers usually follow general patterns (foreign players, for example, often do not have a personalized cheer like Japanese members of the team; their names are instead substituted into a general 'foreigner chant' during their at-bats). In addition to the cheers for individual players, there are cheers for specific instances, such as when a batter is at the plate with runners in scoring position. There are no cheers, it is critical to note, for a team playing defense. During this time, the opposing team's fan club will start on its own batter cheers.

I do not mean to imply that there are no customs or rituals in American baseball. The near-universal seventh inning stretch comes to mind: fans standing to sing 'Take Me Out to the

Ballgame' is a time-honored tradition. Specific teams also have their own customs, like the Red Sox ritual of singing 'Sweet Caroline' in the middle of the eighth inning. Over time, certain players even develop set personalized cheers. The scarcity and irregularity of these types of cheers, however, contrasts sharply with the Japanese system. While this difference is certainly significant, immediately reducing it to evidence of sweeping claims about cultural difference cannot be condoned. Kelly notes that the Tigers' fan club, for example, developed not from "national character but local circumstances," including a strong gambling culture in Osaka that the founders of the fan club hoped to reverse by altering the "participatory spirit."⁴⁸ By creating a cheering section, these founders created a more regulated environment that would discourage unsavory practices. Certainly the differences in cheering styles, like all other concrete and observable differences, can inform a discussion on stylistic variations between MLB and NPB and their significance, but it is crucial to avoid jumping to conclusions about each state's national character. Unique characteristics of each system must be considered in their context and conclusions must be founded in demonstrable evidence.

D. Conclusions and Discussion

Keeping in mind the dangers of reverting to unfounded universalism, what conclusions can be drawn from these concrete differences? For a wide variety of reasons outlined above, the NPB and MLB games have distinctive and noticeable different atmospheres. The playing style in Japan, based on my observations and previous scholarship, tends to be slower and somewhat more precise in some ways than that found in MLB games. The emphasis on fundamentals, propagated because of the lack of an extensive farm team system, undoubtedly contributes to this style. Overall, the experience of attending a professional baseball game in Japan gives an impression of greater

⁴⁸ For full description of the factors leading to the creation of Hanshin's fan club, see William W. Kelly, "An Anthropologist in the Bleachers: Cheering a Japanese Baseball Team," *Japan Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1997).

finesse, control, and attention to detail than I have found in any American major league game. The coordinated cheering, precision in batting and pitching, and liberal use of bunting contribute to a uniquely Japanese style of baseball. This fan experience represents an area of particular contrast; when compared with the rowdiness I have encountered at nearly every American baseball game, the differences between Japanese and American fan culture are striking.

While these differences are real and apparent to most observers of both Japanese and American baseball, they are neither universal to every team within the respective states' organizations nor a clear indication of cultural differences. They are, at their core, generalizations, and should be taken as a broad overview of frequently observed differences between the two systems. These universalisms, which gloss over regional and local variations, do have a value and a function in political discussions, however; the next section explores the construction of these generalizations, including who contributes to them, what function they serve, and how they come into conflict with local sentiments and identities.

III. "That's Japanese-style Baseball": Identity Intersectionality in NPB and MLB

As I conducted research for this project, I frequently asked Japanese citizens about their perceptions of the differences between American and Japanese baseball. I was almost always answered in broad generalizations, some even coinciding with Whiting's (often misguided) depictions of Japanese society. I encountered descriptions of the Japanese team ethic and lack of individualism, of a distinctively Japanese dedication or selflessness. Some of these answers were given with a firm sense of national pride, others with a self-deprecating air that suggested an attempt to excuse inherent deficiencies. I rarely received answers that included team-specific characteristics or regional variations. The framing of the responses I received were doubtlessly

framed for my benefit; as a Westerner, I had asked for comparative differences. In doing so, I contributed to a construction of identity based on a broad othering process.

What causes the creation of these generalized, and often even misleading, identities? Ask any Red Sox fan to describe his or her team's style of baseball and the answer will involve specific characteristics of Boston's club. Ask the same fan to characterize American baseball, however, and he or she will almost certainly expound on a different set of values and stylistic traits, some that may directly conflict with the previously stated regional attributes. Had I asked about the distinctive features of the Hanshin style of baseball, then, I would have received answers quite different from those I received in response to my questions about bilateral differences. This phenomenon is not unique to Japan, the US, or baseball itself; ideas of culture and identity are constantly influenced and shaped by context.

Anna Tsing explores this concept in *Friction*; the title refers to what she describes as “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.”⁴⁹ This process not only shapes but actually creates culture.⁵⁰ Tsing discusses the construction of what she calls ‘universals’ (what I have referred to as generalizations or universalisms) as “bridges, roads, and channels of circulation” that can create a larger frame of reference for reform and social criticism, both in liberating and repressive ways.⁵¹ The construction of these identities when comparing Japanese and American baseball is a relatively logical and natural process; it allows for a frame of reference that makes more sense on an international scale. Regional differences, while crucial to evaluate and note, are not as useful when trying to examine dissimilarities on a global scale.

⁴⁹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

⁵⁰ Tsing, *Friction*, 4.

⁵¹ Tsing, *Friction*, 7-9.

The danger comes in taking these universalisms at face value. The tendency to generalize, while often undertaken with the best of intentions, can have serious and unintended consequences. As in Whiting's case, outsider propagations of these generalizations can contribute to harmful, inaccurate stereotypes about a state's culture. Even when the individual creating these generalizations is a member of the culture being characterized, however, the effects are not always benign. Many of the Japanese people I interviewed gave me answers that painted a far from favorable picture of Japanese culture. The need to define oneself in opposition to a foreign other often fosters these inaccuracies that, whether truly believed in by their propagators or not, spread with unfortunate ease.

As powerful as the urge to revert to a broad, generalized version of identity can be, however, there are circumstances in which local identities push back against these universalisms. Randy Bass presents one such example. When Bass began playing for the Hanshin Tigers in 1983, the idea of bringing foreign players into the NPB was far from new. The American players who had come before Bass, however, had been largely unsuccessful; one analysis attributes their failures to severe media scrutiny and culture shock.⁵² Their lack of success contributed to an inflated Japanese sense of self, influenced by the perception that if former Major Leaguers could not thrive in the Japanese system, then the NPB was no longer merely a second-rate version of the MLB.⁵³ It was into this environment of barely concealed animosity that Bass entered and not only survived, but flourished. He broke multiple records and even threatened Oh Sadaharu's single season home run record. Despite his success, Japanese teams and media criticized Bass widely for everything from negotiating his contract too aggressively to leaving the season early to see his dying father.⁵⁴ Bass

⁵² Masaru Ikei, *Yakyū to Nihonjin* (Tokyo: Maruzen Library, 1991), 115.

⁵³ Klein, *Growing the Game*, 126.

⁵⁴ Klein, *Growing the Game*, 127-128.

was working against a universalized identity of Japanese nationalism; the image Japan projected was one of Japanese exceptionalism, based on a sense of shared cultural values that formed what Tsing calls an “axiom of unity,”⁵⁵ a requisite precursor to any universalism.

Amidst this generalized atmosphere of Japanese superiority, which carried with it an implicit mandate for prioritization of national over foreign players, Bass somehow became a sensation among Hanshin Tigers fans. Given nicknames like Kami-sama (god), Bass was revered by Tigers fans, especially after the Tigers won the Japan Series in 1985 with Bass’ help. Examples like these illustrate Tsing’s conception of friction: local sentiments colliding with broader national identity.

This type of tension is present in nearly every formation of national identity. Universalisms depend on a combination of two factors: the previously mentioned axiom of unity and convergences to negotiate “across incompatible difference.”⁵⁶ The beauty of these two interrelated forces is that each works to erase the existence of the other; this denial of collaboration, in turn, makes the generalizations seem more natural, less contrived.⁵⁷ The relative novelty of incidents like that of Randy Bass, in which local support for a foreigner contradicted an emerging and implicit construction of national identity, illustrates the effectiveness of this hidden collaboration process. The ability of universalisms to appear inherent discourages overt challenges to the doctrine it advances. Nevertheless, these challenges are occurring constantly, some with more visibility than others.

Given the fact that local citizens are aware of contradictions between their personal views and the identities broadcast on a national or international context, how can we account for their

⁵⁵ Tsing, *Friction*, 89.

⁵⁶ Tsing, *Friction*, 89.

⁵⁷ Tsing, *Friction*, 89-90.

roles in perpetuating both types of identity? The knowledge that broader generalizations are also fraught with inaccuracies or misrepresentations should rationally prevent their dissemination by local communities. These universalisms, however, do have a purpose that local characterizations cannot serve. In the case of my own interviews and discussions, Japanese citizens offered generalizations in an attempt to convey a sense of their own identity in a cross-cultural context. By presenting Japanese baseball in this digestible, sweeping manner, they were undoubtedly trying to highlight the differences I was seeking while offering a picture of Japanese life that I could understand. In situations like these, regionally specific knowledge would seem out of place and possibly confusing to an outsider. Contributing to universalisms can also serve as a way of demonstrating patriotism; by focusing on the “axiom of unity,” Japanese and American citizens can unite rather than divide themselves around their respective states. One critical factor to note in both of these instances is the necessity for an Other to contrast or rally against: universalisms are most useful in a comparative context.

Considering the context in which Robert Whiting was writing, his analysis, though often inaccurate, is not surprising. In a time when foreign scholarship on Japan focused on the state’s economic success as a direct result of its distinctive ‘culture,’ the emergence of an analysis of baseball using the same logic is not shocking. A modern critical reader, however, must question the ideas Whiting puts forth; many aspects of the ‘rules’ and *samurai* code he discusses are based on broad stereotypes of Japanese people and their society. These generalizations may not have been entirely a product of Whiting’s own mind, however. Universalisms, as Anna Tsing has suggested, have a value that allows for their perpetuation even by members of the state or society about which they generalize. The fact that Japanese members may disseminate such universalisms does not mean that we should accept them as absolute truth: more likely than not, citizens are

creating the generalizations to serve a greater cross-cultural or political purpose. We would do better to focus on the discernable differences between Japanese and American baseball and draw reasonable conclusions from these observations. Attempts to portray these differences as representative of an entire state's people or to conflate the dissimilarities in baseball with differences in national character ultimately leads to problematic and misleading depictions of a foreign 'culture.'

Chapter Four: The ‘Crisis’ of Japanese Baseball

I. Baseball in Decline?

In his discussion of recent trends in Japanese baseball, William Kelly introduces the question of the “crisis and impending doom” of the sport in the Japanese nation. While Kelly discourages these types of “inflammatory claims” in debates on the subject, he does acknowledge that baseball in Japan is not as ubiquitous as it once was.¹ Especially for the younger generations, baseball appears to be losing its status as *the* sport of the nation. Though baseball is far from *passé* in Japan today, its popularity may be waning.

This chapter examines the extent to which claims of a crisis in Japanese baseball are justified by exploring the causes that might contribute to such a decline. Among the most widely circulating explanations, for example, is the rise in popularity of soccer; as this newer, flashier sport gains traction with Japanese students and young professionals, baseball may see a gradual slip in prominence. Other possible factors include the effects of NPB player defection to MLB and the continued financial strain on NPB sponsors. While baseball has indisputably lost ground in recent years, a closer examination of these factors will indicate whether this decline is a mere fluke or, as I argue, a trend that will likely continue in the near future.

Finally, I explore the relevant political causes and implications of a baseball ‘crisis.’ How has the decline in popularity affected the US-Japan bilateral relationship thus far, and what might be the effects if the trend continues? Based on my findings, I conclude that though the consequences thus far have been minor, a continued decline could both indicate and contribute to a more distant relationship between the two states. This section also includes politically relevant

¹ Kelly, “Hanshin,” 38.

events or decisions that have impacted sport and, more specifically, baseball in recent years. Ultimately, the combination of social and political factors suggests that Japanese baseball is headed for a definite, though not fatal, decline as Japan enters a new era of global leadership.

II. Factors Affecting Baseball's Popularity

Baseball is still the top sport in Japan. Despite talks of a Japanese baseball crisis, the sport remains popular and well attended; comments on its imminent demise, however, run rampant. Kelly raises three possible reasons for an actual (or, perhaps, imagined) decrease in the sport's prominence. I explore each of these reasons and examine recent trends in baseball attendance and viewership to determine whether these factors actually contribute to a baseball crisis. Recent and historical developments indicate that these explanations do, in fact, contribute to an increasingly lower status for baseball in Japan.

A. Defection to MLB

Masahiro Tanaka. Yu Darvish. Daisuke Matsuzaka. Ichiro Suzuki. Names like these are familiar to any baseball fan, regardless of nationality. In recent years, each of these players has gained significant media attention during their transitions from Japan's NPB to the legendary Major Leagues. Many of these players were, and perhaps still are, considered the best of the best from Japan. Most reached celebrity status before graduating from high school and continued to amass fame during their NPB careers. And yet: every one of them eventually left Japan to play for American teams. For many Japanese fans and sports commentators, this phenomenon raises several questions. Why are these players choosing to leave? Does this trend eliminate the possibility of NPB ever truly rivalling MLB in power and status? And, most fatalistic of all, is NPB heading down an irreversible path to becoming a farm team for MLB?

Without question, the Japanese players who have made the transition to MLB are immensely talented. While there is no precise method of ranking overall talent among NPB players, these expatriates have consistently produced exemplary records. Matsuzaka, for example, was the Rookie of the Year during his 1999 NPB debut season; Ichiro won three consecutive Most Valuable Player awards in Japan's Pacific League; and the other players have similarly impressive records. The claim that Japan's "best players" are defecting to MLB, then, may not be entirely unfounded.

The number of players making this transition has also increased rapidly since Hideo Nomo became the first Japanese player to relocate long-term to the US in 1995. In 2014, the MLB rosters featured nine players from Japan.² When combined with the dozens of players who have played for various MLB teams in these interim years, the Japanese explosion is undeniable. In a mere 20 years, the presence of Japanese players in the Major Leagues has transformed from a remarkable rarity—a cultural curiosity of sorts—to a full-fledged, integral, and accepted component of many US teams. The 2014 Yankees had three Japanese players on their roster, while the Red Sox boasted two. An examination of the types of organizations recruiting these players suggests that, due to high posting fees, the process may still be luxury afforded to only the most wealthy teams (as of 2014, the Yankees and the Red Sox generated the highest revenues of any MLB teams³). Nevertheless, the rapid infiltration of Japanese players indicates that this system may change in the very near future.

The type of player transitioning to MLB is also changing: whereas Japanese imports in earlier years were almost exclusively pitchers, they now vary widely in position. Before Ichiro

² "2014 Opening Day Rosters," MLB.com.

³ "The Business of Baseball: MLB Team Values," Forbes, accessed 2 January 2015. http://www.forbes.com/mlb-valuations/list/#page:1_sort:5_direction:desc_search. As of March 2014, the Yankees brought in \$461 million in revenue, while the Red Sox generated \$357 million.

joined the Mariners in 2001, every single player who came to the Major Leagues served as a pitcher. Of the 53 total Japanese players who have played in MLB, 39 were pitchers; in 2014, all but three of the nine players from Japan also pitched for their MLB teams. These data suggest that while, even in recent seasons, US teams have tended to seek out pitchers in their recruiting processes for Japan, the pattern is changing slowly. Players like Ichiro and Hideki Matsui have proven that Japanese players cannot only survive, but actually thrive in other defensive positions. With their success, it cannot be long before others follow in their footsteps.

Given these trends, Japanese player defection to MLB teams certainly seems to pose a threat to NPB success. The incentives for the players themselves are immense: as discussed in Chapter 3, average salaries in MLB are considerably larger. Matsuzaka's contract with the Red Sox, for example, outlined a six-year, \$52 million agreement with added bonuses such as housing arrangements and flights back to Japan.⁴ In addition, the prestige of the Major Leagues can be difficult to ignore. Jim Small, managing director for MLB Japan, noted that "right now, the best players in the world are in Major League Baseball," making its allure impossible to overlook for Japanese players.⁵ Part of this prestige, Small qualifies, comes from MLB's composition: the teams themselves are comprised not only of American citizens, but also of players from around the globe. Despite these pronouncements, Small also states that the number of Japanese baseball professionals who believe that MLB is draining the NPB of resources is extremely low; he argues that there is little evidence to support the claims that MLB functions as such a resource drain.⁶

⁴ "Matsuzaka, Red Sox Reach Agreement on Six-Year Deal," ESPN, last modified 23 February 2007, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=2696321>.

⁵ Matthew J. Bartkowiak and Yuya Kiuchi, *Packaging Baseball: How Marketing Embellishes the Cultural Experience* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2012), 157.

⁶ Bartkowiak and Kiuchi, *Packaging Baseball*, 156-8.

Still, the trend and the overall prevalence of MLB in Japan cannot be ignored. One 2001 article by prominent baseball commentator Bob Klapisch, boldly titled “Land of the Rising Stars: Japan Becoming a Farm System for US,” suggested that NPB’s days as an independent organization were numbered.⁷ While the article is riddled with hyperbole (Klapisch describes the Mariners as “practically Japan’s most popular team” and Japan as a “culture obsessed with tradition and protocol”⁸), he does include revealing statistics. In 2001, for example, Ichiro received the most All-Star votes of any player in the Major Leagues, indicating an unprecedented acceptance of Japanese players in the US. In the same year, furthermore, Blue Wave attendance went down 40 percent and overall NPB TV ratings experienced a 15 percent drop.⁹ Even more unbelievably, (now former) Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi stated that “[t]hese days, watching Major League Baseball games is more exciting than watching games in Japan.”¹⁰ Regardless of whether this statement accurately represents the sentiments of the Japanese population, Japanese citizens had significantly more opportunities to view MLB games than their NPB counterparts on television in 2007: NHK broadcasted 260 regular season MLB games compared to a mere 127 from NPB.¹¹ This figure is not insignificant: the enormous disparity suggests intention and recognition. While many Japanese citizens watch MLB games for the express purpose of seeing other Japanese nationals, like Ichiro or Tanaka (affectionately known throughout Japan as Ma-kun), the question remains: Why tune in to see a single Japanese player in the Major Leagues instead of watching a game almost entirely run by and comprised of Japanese nationals? This trend supports the idea of MLB as the pinnacle of baseball excellence.

⁷ Bob Klapisch, “Land of the Rising Stars: Japan Becoming Farm System for the US,” *The Record*, 16 August 2001.

⁸ Klapisch, “Land of the Rising Stars.”

⁹ Klapisch, “Land of the Rising Stars.”

¹⁰ Klapisch, “Land of Rising Stars.”

¹¹ Bartkowiak and Kiuchi, *Packaging Baseball*, 125.

At its current levels, the pervasiveness of MLB in Japan does not truly merit the label of a “crisis.” Nevertheless, the trend does warrant some scrutiny. Though it may be extreme to decry MLB as a resource drain for NPB, the fact remains that the players leaving Japan’s teams are some of the best in the world. Even with the strict posting system and lengthy mandated period before free agency in Japan, MLB may pose too strong a draw. The rapidity with which this trend has taken hold, furthermore, does not bode well for Japanese baseball. Without drastic reforms or new organizational strategies, NPB may very well be in danger of losing player after player, viewer after viewer, to the omnipotent and resource-laden Major Leagues.

B. Sponsorship Woes

As discussed in Chapter 3, many of the major differences between MLB and NPB lie in the realm of economics. Whereas MLB teams are profit-making enterprises, NPB teams serve instead as advertising vehicles for their parent companies. Although this difference may, to some extent, be intentional, the hard truth is that NPB teams are not as profitable as their Major League counterparts. If indeed baseball is on the decline in Japan, it may be a mere matter of time before NPB parent companies decide that continued sponsorship of the teams is simply unsustainable.

While the total revenue taken in by MLB and NPB were once relatively similar, the numbers have changed dramatically over a short period. From 1995 to 2010, MLB quadrupled its total revenue, while NPB’s proceeds have remained relatively steady.¹² This difference means that MLB brings in about six times more revenue than its Japanese counterpart. There are a variety of structural explanations for this disparity: one of the main differences is in the broadcasting and merchandise systems of the two organizations. In the US system, teams share broadcasting rights

¹² Yūta Namiki, “*Shūeki Kakusa Yonbai, Meiyā to Puro Yakyū no Chigai wa Doko ni,*” *Nikkei Business Online*, 8 May 2012, accessed 1 April 2012. <http://business.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/opinion/20120426/231411/>.

and profits from merchandise, distributing them equally between teams.¹³ This arrangement has fostered tremendous growth in both industries, especially with the development of a centralized marketing scheme. The Japanese system, on the other hand, has no such agreement or cooperative structure in place. Instead of receiving significant dividends from the central organization, NPB teams must pay approximately \$680,000 to the Commissioner's office to keep the system going.¹⁴ In addition, while the widely popular Yomiuri Giants draw in immense profits from their broadcasts, other teams are left with much smaller revenues.¹⁵ Even in the case of successful teams like the Giants, however, sponsors and officials are not maximizing profit opportunities; there is no Japanese equivalent to mlb.com, a site that brings in over \$250 million in merchandising annually for Major League teams.¹⁶ Though there is no guarantee that such a site might benefit Japanese baseball to the same extent, the fact remains that NPB teams are struggling.

Perhaps the most prominent example of these struggles involves a series of events that occurred in 2004. Until this time, the team now known as the Orix Buffaloes did not exist; in its place were two separate teams, the Kintetsu Buffaloes and the Orix BlueWave. For years, however, the Kintetsu Buffaloes operated with an annual deficit of approximately \$40 million. Eventually, this model became unsustainable for Kintetsu, and in mid-summer 2004, the Buffaloes merged with the BlueWave to become the Orix Buffaloes.¹⁷ The decision was not without controversy: without a twelfth team, the entire structure of the leagues would have to be reevaluated. After the merger announcement, the baseball world erupted into a frenzy. Proposed solutions included a

¹³ "The Old Ball Game." *The Economist*, last modified 27 March 2008, accessed 1 April 2015.

<http://www.economist.com/node/10925686>.

¹⁴ Robert Whiting, "NPB Needs Major Reform, Vision to Prosper Like MLB," *The Japan Times*, 13 April 2007, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2007/04/13/baseball/npb-needs-major-reform-vision-to-prosper-like-mlb/#.VLrcpyvF-MO>.

¹⁵ Klein, *Growing the Game*, 151.

¹⁶ Whiting, "NPB Needs Major Reform."

¹⁷ Klein, *Growing the Game*, 152-3.

contraction that would combine the Pacific and Central leagues into a single, ten-team league. The popular response was vicious: thousands of fans protested the merger and single league proposal, and the Japanese Players Association conducted the first strike in its history. Finally, in an effort to end the unrest and to mollify the public, the online shopping tycoon Rakuten stepped up to create a new team, restoring the twelve-team, two-league balance. In another significant move, Softbank bought the struggling Daiei Hawks and order was restored, at least temporarily, to NPB.¹⁸

Even with these major changes, however, ownership of an NPB team remains an unprofitable venture. If Japanese baseball truly is in decline, then it seems likely that the teams' value as vehicles for advertising would also decrease. This pattern could make ownership of a team virtually untenable for any corporation; gradually, the cycle could become both a symptom and a cause of the crisis of Japanese baseball. Though the current situation is not quite so dire, it is feasible to imagine that if financial difficulties continue in NPB, baseball may truly be on its way out in Japan. Unless NPB makes serious structural changes in the future, the teams will remain less than lucrative enterprises for their parent companies.

C. The Rise of Soccer

Although the problems within NPB undoubtedly merit scrutiny, the greatest threat to baseball in Japan comes from the outside the realm of the sport. In recent years, soccer has soared in popularity across the nation, appealing especially to the younger generations. Examining this phenomenon and its causes is essential to understanding the so-called crisis of baseball. If recent trends continue, soccer could soon replace baseball as Japan's most beloved sport.

While soccer was introduced to Japan during the Meiji era, it did not enter the world of mainstream sports culture in the nation until the late 1980s. Following consecutive Japanese

¹⁸ Klein, *Growing the Game*, 156-7.

victories in 1986 and 1987 at the Asian Championship Teams' Cup, soccer spread to university campuses by the early 1990s. Of critical importance to the sport's rise in popularity was its ability to attract female fans: baseball has faltered in its attempts to appeal to this demographic. Though baseball was once almost universally well liked, it is now most popular with men over the age of fifty. Soccer, conversely, is most popular with males and females between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five.¹⁹ The fact that soccer is a sport that both men and women can play undoubtedly contributes to this trend. With the recent rise in women's sports participation,²⁰ soccer has a definite edge over the all-male baseball, even with the existence of its supposedly equal female counterpart: softball.

Evidence of soccer's increasing popularity is common. In addition to airing games played by Japan's professional J-League teams, NHK, Japan's national public broadcasting organization, airs a weekly show devoted entirely to soccer. No such equivalent exists for Japanese baseball (though programs focused on MLB do air regularly).²¹ On university campuses, students take part in soccer fan clubs. When I spoke informally to Doshisha University students about baseball, the subject of soccer came up repeatedly. Of course baseball is popular, many of them conceded, but soccer is truly the 'cool' sport in Japan today.

Understanding soccer's appeal for the people of Japan is not difficult. Possible reasons that the sport has taken such a strong hold in the state are numerous, but I consider the most prevalent explanations individually to help explain what the progression of soccer means for baseball. In doing so, I first briefly explore the differences between soccer and baseball. The number of games played annually is one significant difference; whereas baseball has well over 100 games per year,

¹⁹ Guttman and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 217-18.

²⁰ William W. Kelly, "Japan's Embrace of Soccer: Mutable Ethnic Players and Flexible Soccer Citizenship in the New East Asian Sports Order," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 11 (2013), 1236.

²¹ "Supōtsu," *NHK Online*, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www3.nhk.or.jp/toppage/navi/sports.html>.

the J-League regular season consists of thirty-four games. In terms of game duration, soccer games tend to average slightly over two hours, while baseball games are usually just under three. Perhaps more difficult to quantify is the atmosphere during each of these games. Soccer, on the whole, is more action-filled, more dynamic: there is a sense of an environment constantly in flux. This lively, vibrant sense may contribute to the image of soccer as a flashier, trendier sport. Baseball, on the other hand, is filled with slower, more calculated movements. These overarching differences often translate into the players themselves; the celebrity status of soccer players has a distinct flair.

Some commentators have argued that heroes of the respective sports reach their superstar status for entirely different reasons. While baseball players may be “admired for their self-discipline and their contribution to team harmony,” soccer players are more inclined to “express their individuality with long hair and short tempers, with fashionable clothes and fast cars.”²² It is not difficult to imagine why the latter type of celebrity might appeal more to the younger population. Baseball itself may lack the “freer spirit” embodied in soccer, a spirit that would easily charm the next generation of Japanese citizens. Figure 1 exemplifies this difference; it shows famous soccer star Keisuke Honda as one of GQ Japan’s 2010 men of the year. Honda embodies this idea of a ‘cool,’ fashionable icon; indeed, when performing a Google search for Honda’s name, some of the first suggestions to appear, both in English and Japanese, relate to his clothing or fashion.

²² Guttman and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 218.



Fig. 1. Soccer star Keisuke Honda on the cover of GQ Japan.²³

In its structure, too, soccer has an advantage over baseball. Unlike the “entrenched corporate control” of professional baseball, soccer in Japan operates through a more flexible and cooperative system. As many of its clubs are located outside of the major cities, soccer has managed to build up a broader fan base. The local clubs also organize community programs, such as youth soccer clubs.²⁴ This grassroots-style development has clearly paid off; soccer’s popularity is ever on the rise.

To truly understand soccer’s explosion in popularity, however, it is essential to examine the phenomenon on a larger scale. In one crucial aspect, soccer differs from baseball on this level. Put simply, soccer is an international sport; baseball is an American one. Though this oversimplification ignores the complexities of team composition and individual exceptions, the

²³ “GQ Men of the Year 2010 Keisuke Honda,” High-Toned, last modified 17 December 2010, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.high-toned.fr/en/2010/12/gq-japan-men-of-the-year-keisuke-honda/>.

²⁴ Kelly, “Mutable Ethnic Players,” 1236.

fact remains that soccer is decidedly more global than baseball. Soccer is, by far, the most popular sport in the world; one of the only places in the world in which it has not attained widespread popularity is, in fact, the United States. While baseball is popular across Latin America, parts of East Asia, and the United States, its appeal has not spread to the rest of the international community. In Japan especially, “baseball, from its Meiji origins to the present, has been framed primarily as a binary with American baseball, from friendly competition to ideological rival.”²⁵ Chapter 2 outlined the critical roles that baseball has played in the US-Japan bilateral relationship, illustrating the extent to which baseball has become a symbol and an indicator of the relationship itself.

Soccer, however, offers a new frontier— a chance for an equal playing field. Particularly within East Asia, this opportunity is invaluable. Unlike baseball, which is fraught with colonialist associations and imperialist undertones, soccer appeals equally and offers a medium for fair play to states across the region. The Asian Football Confederation is now the second largest regional association in the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) realm,²⁶ making soccer a uniting force for nations throughout Asia. This increasing emphasis on globalized sports creates new opportunities for Japan to proclaim its presence in the international community.

The teams themselves also exemplify the globalization fostered through an emphasis on soccer. Unlike the often nationalistic baseball environment, soccer encourages international cooperation and intermingling. Whereas NPB has limited the number of foreign players allowed to play for each team to preserve a sense of ‘Japaneseness,’ as detailed in Chapter 2, the J-League has embraced foreign presences as a way of attracting fans.²⁷ A globalized, multiethnic team is an asset, rather than a detriment, in the formation of a soccer team. This exchange works both ways:

²⁵ Kelly, “Mutable Ethnic Players,” 1236.

²⁶ Kelly, “Mutable Ethnic Players,” 1236.

²⁷ Kelly, “Mutable Ethnic Players,” 1241.

foreign teams have also recruited Japanese players for their own teams. The movements here are much more fluid than in MLB exchanges with NPB and the mere fact that the exchange occurs both ways removes the connotation of a resource drain. This process also helps to blur the lines of national identity for people like Nikkeijin (second generation Japanese) or Zainichi Koreans (Japanese citizens descended from Koreans), who have traditionally faced discrimination and bias over questions of ethnicity and citizenship.²⁸ In an increasingly interconnected world, these characteristics make soccer more modern than the stricter, more rigid realm embodied in baseball.

Given the factors addressed above and the steady, rapid rise in soccer's popularity, it is safe to assume that the sport is gaining firm traction in Japan. With its appeal to young people and women, soccer could easily displace baseball as the state's most popular sport in the future. When considered in the context of NPB's financial struggles and the prioritization of MLB over Japanese baseball, the rise of soccer may very well indicate a baseball crisis in Japan. To be sure, for now baseball is still the state's most popular sport. It may be only a matter of years before it loses this position to its flashier, more globalized complement: soccer.

III. Political Explanations for and Implications of Baseball's Decline

The fact that soccer exemplifies a more multiethnic, globalized playing field undoubtedly contributed to its growth, but the underlying question remains: why does this globalized image appeal to Japan, and why now? Soccer has been popular in Europe and around the world, after all, for many decades. Only in the past few years, however, has soccer truly taken hold in Japan. Some of the sport's appeal can be attributed to Japan's (somewhat unexpected) success in the 1968

²⁸ Kelly, "Mutable Ethnic Players," 1241-42.

Olympics. From the late 1980s onwards, Japan continued to pick up championship titles across Asia²⁹, and before long soccer was a staple of Japanese sports.

To understand soccer's triumph, it is necessary to consider the sport's development in the context of Japan's political climate. The 1980s represented a decade of enormous growth. The latter half of this decade, as the last period before the bubble burst, signified the height of Japan's economic superpower status. During this time, US-Japan relations also experienced momentous changes, most of which were marked by high tensions. In the late 1980s, for example, Japan's high level of exports to the United States incited widespread dissatisfaction in the American population that poisoned bilateral relations, prompting Japan's foreign minister to label the relationship "at its worst since the war."³⁰ At the same time, Japan was increasingly involving itself in the global community. By 1992, Japan was second in terms of financial contributions to the United Nations, and the state's leadership sought a permanent seat on the Security Council.³¹ Under these circumstances, the reasons for Japan's embrace of the less America-centric, more globalized sport of soccer become clearer. With Japan's rising status as an international power came a need to compete recreationally on a worldwide scale: after a loss to the Korean team in a World Cup qualifying round, one Japanese soccer player remarked that his team could not possibly compete with Korea because "its team is composed of professionals."³² International politics clearly influenced the decision to develop soccer within Japan.

Another critical factor to consider in explaining soccer's development and subsequent success lies in the economic realm. Contrary to popular expectations, soccer quickly became an

²⁹ Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 216.

³⁰ Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 380.

³¹ LaFeber, *The Clash*, 389.

³² Ichirō Hirose, "The Making of a Professional Football League: The Design of the J. League System," in *Football Goes East: Business, Culture, and the People's Game in China, Japan and South Korea*, eds. Wolfram Manzenreiter and John Horne (New York: Routledge, 2004), 40.

immensely successful economic venture, with the J. League bringing in 472 billion yen in its first decade.³³ The impetus for developing the current professional Japanese soccer system emerged from both international and domestic pressures: on the domestic side, 1985 marked the 20th anniversary of the Japan Soccer League and its popularity still remained low; and internationally, many Japanese nationals believed, the fact that Japan did not truly have a ‘professional’ team reflected poorly on the state. With these motivating factors in mind, the first JSL activation committee was formed in 1988. Members of this committee worked to organize sponsorship for the new teams, an undoubtedly challenging task: the prospects were widely considered dismal, and any profits gained would be long-term only.³⁴

Once the sponsors were secure, however, other challenges remained. To differentiate soccer from its other competitor of foreign origin, baseball, officials introduced an entirely new lexicon to create a unique soccer culture in Japan. To guarantee the new J. League’s success, mass media involvement was also critical. The sheer volume of advertising led to marketing costs that were practically “incalculable,”³⁵ but the strategy eventually paid off. Technological developments including the development of satellite broadcasting and multi-channel broadcasting was beneficial in this arena; with an increase in available broadcasting space, soccer and its related content proved to be a perfect filler.³⁶

In addition to this professional and economic development of soccer, its establishment in the Japanese school system played a crucial role to its success in the state. Like baseball, soccer was first introduced to Japan in the Meiji era, though it was not incorporated into educational

³³ Hirose, “The Making of a Professional Football League,” 38.

³⁴ Hirose, “The Making of a Professional Football League,” 39-43.

³⁵ Hirose, “The Making of a Professional Football League,” 49.

³⁶ Hirose, “The Making of a Professional Football League,” 49.

institutions until after World War II.³⁷ For a significant period, soccer remained closely tied to the official educational curriculum; in the 1980s, for example, the teaching guidelines defined specific objectives for soccer, including a goal of playing “under the theme of teamwork.”³⁸ Once the J. League was established, however, the dynamic shifted. Because professional soccer in Japan is truly a regional sport with ‘home towns’ spread out across the state, soccer enthusiasts soon began playing in their regional clubs. Opportunities for involvement with soccer, then, are twofold: students can play the sport both at school and at home. This unique system has created a niche for soccer that baseball cannot rival.

Domestically, then, the conditions were highly conducive to developing a new sport market. With the increasing international popularity of soccer, the sport served as the ideal candidate. The combination of these factors cemented soccer’s place in Japanese society and set the stage for its eventual rivalry with baseball.

While baseball itself is an international sport, its global scope is somewhat limited in comparison to that of soccer. Baseball has been and likely always will be a forum for playing out tensions and power relations between the United States and Japan, but the influence of the baseball diamond ends at this point. To mark its presence on the international sporting scene, Japan must demonstrate its prowess in a realm that extends to all corners of the world. It is no surprise, then, that at the height of its economic power and period of contention with the United States, Japan would turn towards soccer. This international impetus, combined with domestic factors that made the development of a new sport possible and profitable, has caused soccer to take firm hold in the state. The investment in the sport is one that undoubtedly paid off for Japan: soccer’s success

³⁷ Atsuo Sugimoto, “School Sport, Physical Education and the Development of Football Culture in Japan,” in *Football Goes East: Business, Culture, and the People’s Game in China, Japan and South Korea*, eds. Wolfram Manzenreiter and John Horne (New York: Routledge, 2004), 115.

³⁸ Sugimoto, “School Sport,” 109.

throughout the Japanese nation cannot be ignored. In recent decades especially, the ability to participate in global events like the World Cup or the Olympics has become “the most fundamental and important issues for success” in sport.³⁹ Now that Japan has invested in soccer, the state has another medium through which to demonstrate its status as a permanent global power.

IV. The Reality of the Baseball Crisis

Baseball is an immensely popular sport throughout Japan, and it is unlikely that the sport will drop off drastically in popularity any time in the immediate future. From the almost sacred status of high school baseball tournaments to the close media coverage of Japanese stars abroad, baseball holds a firm place in Japanese society. Nevertheless, the factors addressed above illustrate that baseball may be losing ground.

Calling the current situation a ‘crisis’ of baseball is, ultimately, unwarranted. True, soccer is increasingly popular with the younger generations, and NPB does have its own internal struggles. Up until recent years, however, these problems have done little to damage the standing of baseball in Japan. As Japan negotiates its position in the international community, this standing may change; the next chapter examines current events in Japanese politics to determine their implications for the future of baseball and the US-Japan relations. For now, however, baseball is still flourishing across Japan, even (or perhaps especially) in its non-professional forms. While its primary demographic audience becomes increasingly older and more male, it still draws in fans of every possible age and gender. The fervor of its varied fans is palpable in any packed train headed for Kōshien, in any high school tournament game riddled with supporters crying in joy or

³⁹ Hirose, “The Making of a Professional Football League,” 51.

desperation at the close of the ninth inning. Baseball may be in decline, but it is certainly not finished yet.

Chapter Five: The Future of Baseball and the Bilateral Relationship

I. Baseball in the Abe Era

After resigning in 2007 for health reasons, Shinzō Abe assumed the office of prime minister of Japan again in December 2012. Since taking up this position for the second time, Abe has made his presence known both within Japan and throughout the international community. Through a series of bold reforms and personal actions, Abe has ushered in a new era for Japan on the global stage. His actions have largely followed a trend of asserting Japanese independence from the United States and assuming greater responsibility for Japan in the international political arena.

These moves, in addition to changing Japan's global dynamic, have also affected its sports. This section examines recent political events as well as newer trends in the realm of sport. Just as previous events triggered a spike in the popularity of soccer, so will current events impact the future of baseball and, in turn, Japan's relationship with the United States. Based on Abe's vision for the future, combined with the economic growth stimulated by soccer and the increasing popular support for the sport, it is plausible that the somewhat newer Japanese love for soccer could become an enduring trait. Conversely, if baseball remains an economic drain and continues to appeal only to a small and specific demographic, the country's well-established passion for baseball could fade along with the former omnipotence of the US-Japan bilateral relationship.

II. The Renewed Nationalism of Abe's Japan

Before examining trends in sports specifically, I would like to consider the character of the current Abe administration. Before Abe's return to power, Japanese politics were in a state of turmoil: prime minister after prime minister took office and left, most within a year of starting the

position. In addition to a personal vindication, Abe's comeback also marked the return to power of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), by far the most consistently successful party in Japan. The conservative LDP has traditionally associated itself with economic success and, until recent years, a strong bilateral relationship with the United States. Since Abe's assumption of power in 2012, however, the LDP has taken a new approach. In this most recent era of LDP leadership, the importance of Japan and its people trumps bilateral considerations. This neo-nationalism is spreading slowly but surely to all corners of the administration, marking a noticeably different period in Japanese leadership.

Consider, for example, Abe's December 2013 visit to the infamous Yasukuni Shrine. Yasukuni has been a site of controversy since its 1978 enshrinement of fourteen Class A war criminals, all of whom played significant roles in orchestrating major maneuvers like the Nanking Massacre during the World War II era. Only four prime ministers have visited Yasukuni since the interment of these criminals, as these visits invariably inflame tensions with South Korea and China. Before Abe's visit, no prime minister had visited the shrine since Junichiro Koizumi in 2006. US Vice President Joe Biden called Abe specifically to warn him against making the visit, but to no avail.¹ With full knowledge of the controversy he would incite, Abe chose to pay his respects late last year.

What motivated this decision? Though theories ran rampant after the incident, the simplest and most unnerving argument is ultimately the most plausible: Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine because he wanted to. In response to Biden's call, for example, Abe simply stated that "I will decide for myself whether I will go."² The Abe administration itself offered a weak justification,

¹ "Biden Tried to Talk Abe out of Yasukuni Visit," *The Japan Times*, last modified 29 January 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/01/29/national/politics-diplomacy/biden-tried-to-talk-abe-out-of-yasukuni-visit/#.VMj0SWjF-MM>.

² "Biden Tried," *The Japan Times*.

depicting the visit as a means of emphasizing Abe's commitment to peace. In an official statement, Abe stated that he had gone to "renew [...his] determination before the souls of the war dead to firmly uphold the pledge never to wage a war again."³ In the context of Abe's repeated attempts to revise Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, commonly known as the "peace clause," however, this explanation falls flat: while Yasukuni does house a significant number of war dead, a visit to the shrine hardly seems like an expression of a firm commitment to peace.

To some extent, Abe acted as his supporters in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) expected and hoped he would. He demonstrated a nationalistic commitment to Japan and Japan alone in a move that undoubtedly strengthened his party ties. Party loyalty cannot, however, fully explain this flagrant disregard for diplomatic consequences with South Korea and an increasingly powerful China. While 56 percent of Abe's supporters backed his decision to visit the shrine,⁴ 47 percent of the overall population believed that it was "not good" that he made the visit and nearly 70 percent believed he would have to consider his action's consequences in the realm of international relations.⁵ Especially when considered in this context of the extremely low popular support for Abe's overtly nationalistic moves, the action must ultimately be interpreted as a bold display of personal authority: Abe is paving the way for a new, unabashedly unapologetic Japan that acts exactly as it pleases.

This undercurrent runs through many of the Abe administration's recent actions. In the most recent release of elementary school textbooks, for example, some geography texts unequivocally claim that both the heavily disputed Takeshima and Senkaku islands are Japanese

³ "Statement by Prime Minister Abe: Pledge for Everlasting Peace," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 26 December 2013, accessed 1 April 2015. http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page24e_000021.html.

⁴ "Asahi Poll: 46% of Voters Oppose Prime Minister's Visit to Yasukuni," *The Asahi Shimbun*, 28 January 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201401280044.

⁵ "69% Say Abe Should Heed Fallout from Yasukuni: Poll." *The Japan Times*, 29 December 2013, accessed 1 April 2015. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/29/national/69-say-abe-should-heed-fallout-from-yasukuni-poll/#.VMj_FWjF-MP.

territories.⁶ Disagreement over ownership of these territories has caused significant tension with South Korea and China, respectively. In an additional blow to relations with the other East Asian states, the Abe administration considered a revision of the Kono statement, a 1993 public apology for the Japanese enslavement of women in brothels during World War II. These “comfort women,” as they are often euphemistically titled, have served as a point of major contention between Japan and South Korea. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga released a statement indicating that Japanese officials would conduct a new investigation into the matter, implying that prior reports were exaggerated or simply inaccurate.⁷ Even the suggestion of such brazen historical revisionism characterizes the new administration as far more openly nationalistic than its predecessors.

The fostering of this new nationalism sets the stage for the ultimate focus of the administration: drastic reforms to Japan’s defense and security policies. Abe is slowly inching towards constitutional revision that will permanently change Japan’s role in global politics. Revising the famous Article 9 of the Japanese constitution in particular has served as a major focal point of the administration. This article, commonly referred to as the “peace clause,” outlaws war as a means of addressing international disputes. It has garnered global acclaim as a revolutionary step toward world peace. Abe has worked to reinterpret this clause to allow for the use of collective self-defense; in July 2014, he made this reinterpretation official through a cabinet decision.⁸ While this move lacks the gravity of a full and official constitutional revision, it represents a major change

⁶ “Most New High School Textbooks Describe Takeshima, Senkaku Islands as Japanese,” *The Japan Times*, 27 March 2013, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/27/national/most-new-high-school-textbooks-describe-takeshima-senkaku-islands-as-japanese/#.VM5IP2jF-MM>.

⁷ Martin Fackler, “Japan to Revisit Apology to Wartime Sex Slaves,” *The New York Times*, 28 February 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/01/world/asia/japan-to-review-apology-made-to-wwii-comfort-women.html?_r=0.

⁸ Norihiro Kato, “Japan’s Break with Peace,” *The New York Times*, 16 July 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/17/opinion/norihiro-kato-japans-break-with-peace.html>.

in policy. Especially if Abe eventually manages to pass the official amendment, Japan will enter a new era of revitalized militarization and hard power.

Of particular concern to the United States on this front is the possibility of Japanese retaliation after an attack: if left unchecked, this power could evolve into an obstacle to rather than a tool for promoting peace. Abe's actions on the defense front are a clear response to the proposed removal of 9,000 US troops from Japanese territory as outlined in an April 2012 bilateral agreement. While the agreement to relocate these troops provided a much-needed reduction of tensions in Okinawa, it also created a void in Japan's defense strategy that only Japan itself could fill. When Abe took power, Japan was a nation drifting quietly on the international stage. Abe saw the opportunity for dramatic reform and took it. The time was right, Abe evidently decided, for definitive action to save Japan from a gradual slip into irrelevance. To promote this new world image, Abe has been traveling abroad to an unprecedented level: by late 2014, Abe had made diplomatic visits to 49 countries, nearly triple the number of visits made by his past two predecessors combined.⁹ By making these visits, Abe is working to ensure that Japan's presence in the global arena cannot be overlooked.

There are factors that may limit Abe's intended progress towards remilitarization and a newly dominant Japan. Abe came to power on the promise of bold economic revitalization. Now known as 'Abenomics,' Abe's radical economic policies initially seemed promising. The potential economic boost may have influenced popular acceptance of Abe's policies; the LDP has traditionally linked itself with economic success, retaining a firm grasp on power when it has delivered on this front. The renewed promise of growth, then, may have induced the Japanese

⁹ Ankit Panda, "Shinzo Abe Has Visited a Quarter of the World's Countries in 20 Months: Why?" *The Diplomat*, 11 September 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/shinzo-abe-has-visited-a-quarter-of-the-worlds-countries-in-20-months-why/>.

people to accept Abe's nationalistic rhetoric. The recent economic downturn, however, changes everything: Abenomics unexpectedly fell flat, leaving the state in a recession. Without the promise of economic growth, Abe must appeal to the public in new ways. This shift will necessitate a tempering of Abe's policy proposals, resulting in a milder, or at the very least a slower, progression towards remilitarization.

There are, of course, additional limits to this push for increased international visibility and renewed nationalism. Abe and his administration may be bold, but they are rarely reckless. While many of the recent policy changes and statements seem intent on pushing boundaries with South Korea and China, they do not definitively cross them. Abe's actions suggest that he wants to assert his authority in the East Asian region, but he knows better than to make any moves that could irrevocably damage diplomatic relations with these neighbors. Similarly, although Abe is testing out a new level of independence in the US-Japan bilateral relationship, he undoubtedly recognizes the strategic importance of maintaining this alliance.

III. Sports in Abe's Japan

In this era of revitalized nationalism and an increasingly globalized Japan, questions remain about the future of baseball and the US-Japan bilateral relationship. Undoubtedly, both must change: established trends and recent events suggest a Japanese future markedly different than its past. Just as in earlier decades, an examination of baseball's place in Japanese society today can reveal developments in the nation's politics, constructions of identity, and attitudes toward the United States.

A. Soccer in Japan's Global Politics

Perhaps the most critical trend to consider is the rise of soccer. As discussed in the previous chapter, soccer experienced a meteoric rise in popularity starting in the late 1980s. This rise was the result of a combination of economic factors, domestic political factors, and international pressures. Examining recent events leads to an inevitable conclusion: soccer is increasingly becoming the language of diplomacy in Japan. As Japan's interactions with states other than the United States multiply and become more complex, soccer's status as the representative forum through which tensions and negotiations play out has solidified. While baseball may remain key to the US-Japan relationship, the ever-increasing visibility of soccer suggests that both the bilateral relationship and baseball itself may be declining in importance.

As a positive example of this phenomenon, consider Abe's visit to Brazil in summer 2014. The visit, aimed at improving trade relations between the two states and encouraging a new era of cooperation, also involved a departure from strictly political negotiations. Abe also made a prominently featured stopover to meet with Brazilian soccer stars, reportedly to thank them for helping to cement soccer's place in Japan.¹⁰ The meeting garnered widespread media attention: pictures of Abe kicking a soccer ball during the meeting appeared in articles covering the diplomatic visit itself.

The conflation of these two events is not accidental. The Abe administration undoubtedly scheduled the soccer gathering explicitly to coincide with the diplomatic visit as both a gesture of goodwill and a symbol of strengthening relations. During the trip, Abe told Brazilian executives that "[w]ith Japan growing again, we can grow with other nations."¹¹ The message could not be

¹⁰ Anthony Boadle, "Japan PM Tells Brazil 'Abenomics' Working, Time to Do More Business," *Reuters*, 1 August 2014, accessed 1 April 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/02/us-brazil-japan-idUSKBN0G200O20140802>.

¹¹ Boadle, "Japan PM Tells Brazil 'Abenomics' Working."

more straightforward: we are one of you. Instead of remaining a permanent protégé of the United States, Japan is proclaiming its status as a global player, a nation on the verge of (re)gaining economic superpower. By playing up the soccer connection, Japan is subtly allying itself with Brazil in the new world order, one that will be characterized by increasing multilateral cooperation and a decline in American power. This vision is likely one that appeals to Japan, as the state will be able to assert its power in a new way. Abe himself has stated that he is set on ensuring that Japan will return to its rightful place at “the glowing center of the world,”¹² and his actions suggest that he believes the time for this return is now.

There is, however, a darker side to this vision and soccer’s role within it. Just as baseball historically served as an outlet for racist, nationalistic sentiments in US-Japan relations, so soccer is becoming a medium through which the neo-nationalism fostered by the current Abe administration is enacted. During a soccer match in March 2014, Urawa Red Diamonds fans displayed a sign reading “Japanese only” in a clear demonstration of xenophobic ultranationalism. As punishment, Japanese soccer officials prevented all fans from entering the grounds for a game later in the month, forcing the Reds to play to an empty stadium.¹³

This latter example represents the collision of two quickly growing forces within Japan: a renewed sense of nationalism and an increasing emphasis on globalization. This trend is not unique to Japan; in a phenomenon that Benjamin Barber called “Jihad vs. McWorld,” states around the globe are battling competing forces of fundamentalism and globalization.¹⁴ Japan, a state with no

¹² Barney Henderson and Mehreen Khan, “Can Shinzo Abe Put Japan ‘Back at the Centre of the World?’” *Telegraph*, 12 December 2014, accessed 1 April 2015.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/11282106/Can-Shinzo-Abe-put-Japan-back-at-the-centre-of-the-world.html>.

¹³ Kirk Spitzer, “A Japanese Soccer Team Plays to an Empty Stadium Because of Racist Fans,” *Time*, 25 March 2014, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://time.com/36670/urawa-reds-soccer-team-japan-empty-stadium-racist-fans/>.

¹⁴ Benjamin Barber, “Jihad vs. McWorld,” *The Atlantic*, 1 March 1992, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/303882/>.

single religion to lead a fundamentalist revival, tends to exhibit a nationalist variation of this basic conflict. Japan's case differs dramatically from Barber's predictions and scenarios, however. Instead of opposing each other, both the nationalistic and globalizing tendencies are working toward a common goal in Japan. Both support a strong, powerful Japan with an integral role in a transnational, multilateral world. Given the vastly dissimilar nature of the two forces, it is not surprising that the minutiae of this common vision differ from one to the other; proponents of a more nationalistic Japan, for example, may seek a position of greater power on the world stage, while supporters of a more globalized Japan may work towards improving Japan's image internationally.

As demonstrated by the Urawa Reds incident, however, these forces are not without friction even when they share a common goal. While Abe's recent diplomatic visits and decided emphasis on soccer depict a Japan ready to take part in the new global order, nationalistic snafus such as the "Japanese only" episode set back his administration's progress. Abe has yet to find a balance: actions like the Yasukuni visit encourage an unsustainable form of jingoistic historical revisionism that isolates potential allies and does directly conflict with the globalizing forces he is simultaneously working to promote. Soccer could be an increasingly important tool in taming these tensions without discouraging a rise in nationalist sentiments, but only if utilized correctly. If soccer continues to serve as a forum for expressing ultranationalist sentiments that cross over into racism, its power to unite Japan to other nations will be lost. If, however, soccer continues to globalize within Japan itself by recruiting more foreign players and participating in international tournaments, it could easily become a dominant form of soft political power for Japan.

Recent events, then, paint a conflicting but promising picture for the future of soccer. While the nationalism it promotes does have the danger of tending towards extremism at times, it is also

quickly becoming a tool for Japanese diplomacy. The global and even near-universal appeal of soccer makes it more valuable political currency than baseball, which is limited to a few states in terms of mass popularity. Especially considering the political goals the Abe administration is evidently working to achieve, it seems likely that the future of Japanese politics will be closely tied to a continually successful promotion of Japanese soccer.

B. Other International Sporting Developments

Soccer does not represent the only arena in which the current Japanese administration is attempting to assert its presence on the global stage. Japanese endeavors to increase involvement in events like the World Cup and the Olympics have been noticeably on the rise. This trend further illustrates a Japanese desire to become more active and prominent in both the international political and sporting arenas.

Japan put in bids to host for both the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. While the 2018 bid was abandoned in early 2010, Japanese officials pushed for the 2022 bid until FIFA ultimately selected Qatar. As Japan had already cohosted the 2002 World Cup, this relatively quick repeat bid demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm and represented a bold request for international recognition. The move was particularly striking in conjunction with Tokyo's Olympic bid; while the 2016 bid was not successful, Tokyo's selection for the 2020 Olympics marks what Japanese leaders hope will be a forthcoming economic and political boon for Japan. These efforts to host prestigious international sporting events align with the Abe administration's push for a more overt presence on the global arena; the political significance of these ostensibly sports-related events is far from negligible. The success of the Tokyo Olympic bid was a victory for far more than the sporting world of Japan: it was an affirmation of the state's power and prominence in the realm of international politics.

C. The End of Baseball?

The bilateral relationship, as it stands, is not in immediate danger of eradication. The economic and political partnership still offers irreplaceable advantages to each state, and neither is likely to turn away from such a well-established diplomatic relationship. What has ended, however, is the era of unquestioned American dominance in Japan. The postwar patterns are definitively over: Japan, as Abe has demonstrated time and time again throughout his current administration, will no longer unquestioningly obey the wishes of the United States.

US input, indeed, seems to have significantly less impact on policy decisions than it has in previous decades. Abe went against explicit warnings from the US in making his decision to visit Yasukuni, and American backlash over the comfort women issue was notable. While it seems highly unlikely that Abe will pursue any actions that could permanently and irreparably damage the relationship, he is set on proclaiming Japan's status as a strong, independent nation that will make its own decisions. Abe's focus on stepping up Japan's military prowess is a direct affront to the bilateral relationship: whereas Japan was previously under the US defense umbrella, Abe is now taking radical steps to ensure that Japan's independence publicly and unabashedly extends to its defense sector for the first time since World War II. The increase in diplomatic visits to other states under the Abe administration, furthermore, suggests that Abe may be courting new potential allies; though these prospective partnerships will never match the strength of the postwar US-Japan relationship, they will have the power to offset any losses Japan incurs by pulling back from American influence.

How is this fundamental shift represented in baseball, and what does it mean for the future of the sport in Japan? As discussed in the previous chapter, NPB is already facing significant challenges, due largely to a combination of continued financial difficulties and competition with

MLB. In recent years, this latter factor is becoming more pronounced: NPB is fighting a losing battle with American baseball. In 2008, for example, when the Boston Red Sox and the Oakland A's held their season openers in Tokyo, the results were disastrous for NPB. As one source noted, "Every time the MLB holds one of their openers in Japan, sales of our opening week tickets go down...We see more and more empty seats."¹⁵ The competing playoff schedules of the two organizations, moreover, inevitably means bad news for Japanese baseball.¹⁶

If Japan is truly gaining a renewed sense of nationalism, however, this outcome may seem confusing. Theoretically, the neonationalist sentiments promoted by the Abe administration should mean an embrace of Japanese baseball and a rejection of MLB. Unfortunately for baseball, however, current trends suggest an entirely different future. Baseball, at its core, will never be able to rid itself of its American influences and origins. While this truth is not a new one, it does have different implications when viewed in the context of soccer's meteoric rise. Now that a more globalized alternative to baseball exists, Japan may gradually but definitively move away from its former national pastime. Japan is no longer trying to assert its power to Americans alone, but is instead working towards creating a truly international presence. This new global order may mean a schism in Japanese sports: one likely outcome is that baseball will retain its popularity, especially with the not insignificant elderly population, as a symbol of American influence and the strength of Japanese adaptability. Soccer, on the other hand, will continue to rise and will eventually overtake baseball as the sport of Japan. This latter trend will allow Japan to take part in a global sport, one that promote connections and interactions with states from around the world. Baseball

¹⁵ Robert Whiting, "Baseball in Japan: Not All Cheers," *Time*, 27 March 2008, accessed 1 April 2015. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1725911,00.html>.

¹⁶ Jason Coskrey, "Playoff Schedule Denies NPB Center Stage," *The Japan Times*, 19 October 2010, accessed 1 April 2015. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2010/10/19/baseball/playoff-schedule-denies-npb-center-stage/#.VM_tgmjF-MN.

simply will not be able to compete. With continued economic difficulties, baseball franchises may shrink in number until the sport loses all semblance to the leisure giant it once was.

This scenario, however, represents only a single possibility. The future of soccer remains unclear for now: unlike baseball, soccer's popularity is relatively new. The current wave of enthusiasm could mark the advent of a new era in Japanese sports, or it could represent a mere fluke. Japan's performance in the 2014 World Cup, for example, was underwhelming at best; if the Japanese team continues to lose prestige, the sport may lost ground in Japan. With enough revitalization or rebranding, additionally, baseball could enlarge its demographic and regain its status as the top sport in the state. For now, the outcome is difficult to predict: baseball's future will be determined by a combination of internal and external factors. Unless major changes occur, however, baseball will likely continue on its path of gradual but definitive decline.

IV. Conclusions

The above analysis is not meant to describe any near future in the world of Japanese sports. Baseball has endured in Japan for well over a century, and a few years of trouble are hardly enough to declare its demise. The picture I have painted, however, is the most likely if current trends in Japanese politics and society continue. While Abe will certainly not be in power forever, the LDP has had almost constant control over the nation's politics since World War II. If Abe's successors follow the path he has begun to pave, the Japan of the future will look significantly different from the Japan of the recent past. Both baseball and the bilateral relationship are likely to see a steep decline if Japan continues to brand itself as independent, increasingly globalized, and aggressively patriotic. The importance of soccer cannot be overstated: now that Japan has a viable alternative, it may no longer choose to adapt baseball to fit its needs. Instead, the Japanese people may

increasingly turn to soccer as a sport that inherently encourages multilateralism and Japanese participation on an international scale.

For the time being, baseball is safe. If Abe gets his way, however, that may not be the case for long. With the rise of a new Japan comes the rise of a new sport, and baseball's days as the Japanese national pastime may be limited.

Conclusion

This study developed out of a desire to answer several overarching questions regarding topics as broad as identity and as specific as samurai baseball. When I first considered pursuing this thesis, my main concern was defining and explaining the differences between Japanese and American baseball. As I delved deeper into this issue, however, I realized that expressing these differences required conceptualizing a framework through which to see sport, society, and politics at its various levels. Starting at the broadest level, then, I explored the relationships between identity, leisure, and politics, both in the context of sports themselves and in the larger context of national identification. Based on my research, I determined that baseball and politics are much more closely linked than they initially appear. The success of both baseball and any given nation-state is dependent on the construction of a unified identity; both entities work to strengthen this identity, and often use one another in this process. Sports teams also often serve as a symbol for a nation-state; in international events like the Olympics, for example, the Japanese teams and terms like 'Japan' or other national signifiers become interchangeable. Some cases present a more complex relationship, however. When a player like New York Yankees pitcher Masahiro Tanaka, a Japanese national, participates in Major League games, his role as a symbol of Japan becomes more ambiguous. Would a Japanese baseball fan root for him with the same fervor as would be exhibited during an Olympic event? Does Tanaka truly serve as an extension of the Japanese nation-state, or does that role disappear when he becomes part of the Major Leagues? These questions illustrate the complexity of identity: because multiple identities can coexist simultaneously, because identities can evolve over time, because context dictates identity construction, and because various actors contribute to the construction of identity, there is no single answer to either query. For some fans, Tanaka may embody Japan every time he pitches. For others,

he may have lost his status as an ambassador of Japanese culture and society when he signed a contract with the Yankees. While identity is individualized and contextual, however, looking at broader patterns in societal and media framings of identity can provide valuable insight into the ways in which identity and sports may influence politics.

This thesis, then, has demonstrated what can be learned about a state's politics and society from its leisure culture. Trends in leisure can illustrate the ways in which members of a society construct local, regional, national, and international identities. These trends can also reflect the political climate of a state at certain key moments of change and growth. Although there are limitations, movements in leisure culture can serve as effective indicators of popular reactions to political developments.

In considering this type of pattern, my next step was to examine historical roles baseball has played in the US-Japan bilateral relationship and the key events related to its development. To investigate this issue in greater depth, I consulted historical accounts of Japanese baseball from its origins. By considering the roles baseball has played throughout this history, I explored the actual, demonstrable ways in which factors like identity contribute to trends in sporting culture and political movements. From an American import played sporadically in schoolyards and parks to a full-fledged professional sport with millions of annual spectators, baseball has become an integral component of Japanese leisure culture. Baseball has shaped identities and reflected changes in Japan's political system. Whether or not it has already peaked, baseball has had real and demonstrable effects on Japanese society.

Because most scholarship on Japanese baseball focuses on its development only up to the immediate postwar era, exploring this second question also involved conducting original research to consider the connection between postwar events in the bilateral relationship and changes in

foreign player policies within the NPB. In the future, I would like to expand this area of scholarship: with access to a greater number of Japanese language newspaper databases, for example, I would be able to create a deeper and more nuanced discussion of these policy changes. Future scholarship, in addition, might consider other areas or aspects of Japanese baseball in the postwar era that reflect shifts in Japanese popular attitudes towards the United States in the same ways that these foreign player changes do. These areas may include incidents between fans from each of the two states or a closer examination of linguistics and terminology with English origins as it is used in Japanese baseball.

After exploring this history, I returned to my original question: what are the differences between Japanese and American professional baseball, and what is the significance of these differences? Much of the research process involved in answering this question centered on debunking prevalent and enduring myths about Japanese ‘culture.’ There are certainly substantive discrepancies in the setup and execution of professional baseball in each of the two states, but many of these differences are based in logistical factors that should not be explained away as inherent features of the Japanese or American populations. My goal in writing this chapter was to urge spectators and readers to think critically about what they see or hear about Japanese baseball. Fighting the instinct to attribute differences to culture alone is crucial to understanding the true significance of baseball in both Japan and the United States. Even conversations with Japanese or American fans and players about their own state’s sporting style can be misleading: when the question of identity in relation to an Other is posed, broader and occasionally inaccurate characterizations emerge.

I then turned my attention to the next generation of baseball. While it has not been my goal to conclusively predict the future of Japanese baseball, I have explored recent events and trends to

assess the direction in which it may be headed. This issue represents another area that will benefit from further research: with the additional data and observations available in upcoming years, future studies can better isolate and define trends based on the ultimate outcome or continuation of relatively new phenomena. The future of soccer, in particular, will likely be closely tied to the future of baseball; once soccer's place in Japanese society becomes clearer, then, the outlook for baseball will be easier to predict. If soccer continues to gain popularity, for example, it is likely that professional baseball will eventually downsize or even collapse. Another key area to monitor will be the political path that Japan pursues: if Japan continues to assert its independence and move away from the United States, professional baseball will move towards obsolescence.

Ultimately, however, the future of the sport may not hold as much significance as its past. Examining the history of the US-Japan relationship through the lens of baseball allows for a deeper and more unique understanding of the ways in which the two states and their citizens have interacted. Baseball has, in each state, served as a means through which individuals, teams, and nations have told their narratives. Examining the construction of these narratives offers insight into the various identities that have informed and influenced politics. As I have demonstrated through my research, baseball's narratives have alternately conveyed stories of anti-Western sentiment and of efforts at bilateral cooperation.

For all the rhetoric surrounding the "American-ness" of baseball, the sport has long since ceased to belong to the United States alone. Regardless of its future, *yakyū* will remain an integral part of Japanese political and cultural history. It is my hope that this thesis will become a starting point for further research and exploration into the fascinating and ever-evolving world of baseball in the bilateral relationship.

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