

**AMERICAN BASEBALL IMPERIALISM, CLASHING NATIONAL CULTURES, AND THE
FUTURE OF SAMURAI *BESUBORU***

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El béisbol is the Monroe Doctrine turned into a lineup card, a remembrance of past invasions.

– John Krich from *El Béisbol: Travels Through the Pan-American Pastime* (1989)

When baseball (the spectacle) is seen restrictively as American baseball, and then when American baseball is seen narrowly as Major League Baseball (MLB), two disparate views will tend to appear. In one case, fans happily accept league expansion, soaring attendance figures, even exciting home run races as evidence that all is well in this best of all possible baseball worlds. In the other case, the same evidence can be seen as mirroring the desperate last flailing of a dying institution – or at least one on the edge of losing any recognizable character as the great American national pastime.

Big league baseball's modern-era television spectacle – featuring overpaid celebrity athletes, rock-concert stadium atmosphere, and the recent plague of steroid abuse – has labored at attracting a new free-spending generation of fans enticed more by notoriety than aesthetics, and consequently it has also succeeded in driving out older generations of devotees once attracted by the sport's unique pastoral simplicities. Anyone assessing the business health and pop-culture status of the North American version of professional baseball must pay careful attention to the fact that better than forty percent of today's big league rosters are now filled with athletes who claim their birthright as well as their baseball training or heritage outside of the United States. At the outset of the twenty-first century major league baseball as an institution could hardly survive, let alone thrive and prosper, without its substantial population of "foreign-born" athletes. And we may be only a decade or two from the time when the American national pastime, translated narrowly to mean the Major Leagues, will also not be sustainable without audiences (cash customers) drawn from at least several of the four corners of the globe.

Such pessimism (realism, as the pessimists would of course call it) is not born out of nostalgia alone, not even of the historically literate nostalgia that knows what the past was actually like. Much more, such a bleak view of today's Major League Baseball is informed by experience and knowledge of competing baseball worlds, distinct and self-contained versions of the sport that exist outside the borders of the United States and have only occasional and irregular contact with the North American professional game. The American "national pastime" is also played enthusiastically in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan on the distant Asian frontier, or on the geographically closer yet still more isolated island of Communist Cuba. Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Cuban baseball constitute alternative sporting universes – bat and ball worlds that are distinctively different in both essence and appearance, yet not necessarily inferior just for being

outside of the epicenter major leagues. Formal league baseball has long thrived in amateur and professional play around the world, especially in the Caribbean Basin and along the Asian-Pacific Rim. Its history in those regions is every bit as ancient and deep-rooted as it is on the North American continent. Other countries have thus made baseball culturally their own, sometimes more deeply and intuitively than we have here in the United States. One object lesson here may have been the just concluded World Baseball Classic, an MLB conceived and orchestrated event in which two surprising Asian national teams largely devoid of big leaguers – along with the usually discounted juggernaut Cuban national team – together stole the scene from star-studded USA, Dominican, and Venezuelan lineups featuring celebrity superstars representing the finest performers from the U.S. professional ranks.

Most American baseball fans suffer from a telling and in the long run devastating form of sports-culture jingoism. This is the narrow view that *baseball* rightfully refers solely and exclusively to the professional entertainment spectacle now being marketed to North American consumers by the capitalist powers that control major league baseball. This is a longstanding misapprehension of the sport, of course, and stretches back across much of the past century. It manifests itself in such false notions as the following collection of apparent truisms. The first is that a sport's only genuine entertainment comes from watching the most talented professional stars whose credentials are rubber-stamped by top dollar salaries and by constant media exposure. A similar notion, perhaps even more deeply ingrained, is that the two-week event that caps big league seasons and floods TV screens each October is rightfully called the "World Series" and represents the ultimate championship of the diamond sport. This latter notion was only recently challenged in the mainstream press on the heels of the landmark inaugural World Baseball Classic and has long been justified, like so much in Major League Baseball, by the summoning of time-worn tradition.¹ A third and noteworthy fall-out of the assumption of a single narrow baseball universe is the popular mantra that frequent (even regular) failures of American teams in international tournaments like the Olympics Games, IBAF World Cup or Intercontinental Cup can be easily discounted as illegitimate measures of the national pastime as an international sport. Conventional wisdom has it that if Team Cuba beats up on USA teams in tournament after tournament on the international scene it is merely because no one in charge of USA baseball fortunes truly cares about such off-the-radar exhibitions, and because all the true talent is ensconced in the majors where it belongs.

What is most disturbing about American MLB-centric views is that they deny the existence of baseball as a truly international sport. It has always been a staple of the game's lore that baseball was invented by Americans – even if not by Abner Doubleday; that the sport is an American national pastime and indigenous American passion and thus justifiably celebrated as The American Game; and that it was American proselytizers during baseball's infant nineteenth-century growth spurt who carried baseball play to other corners of the world, where it has been played first and foremost as an imitation of the USA-spawned version. None of these assumptions, of course, are quite true. For one thing, baseball evolved in Europe and North America from many ancient roots and thus had no immaculate conception as did basketball in the hands of James Naismith. As scholar David Block, in *Baseball Before We Knew It*, has now quite brilliantly

¹William C. Rhoden, "Now This is What the World Series Should Be," *New York Times*, March 21, 2006.

demonstrated, the most fertile evolutionary grounds for town-ball or rounders and all its many cousins may well have been in New York and Massachusetts.² But the European sport of bats and balls took off in the late nineteenth century with just as much enthusiasm in Asia, the Caribbean islands and Canada as it did in the post-colonial United States. Historical records show indisputably that it was Cubans, not North Americans, who spread the game widely almost everywhere throughout the Caribbean Basin during the 1860s and 1870s.³ In Asia, if American apostles did indeed bring their game to Japan and to China, the enlightened Japanese quickly converted the new athletic acquisition into their own unique cultural adaptation and then introduced it in turn – albeit Japanese flavored – to their own colonial subjects on Korea’s peninsula (occupied from 1905 to 1945) and the island of Formosa (a half-century Japanese colonial outpost from the Treaty of Shimonoseki at the conclusion of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 to the end of World War II in 1945).

Americans can indeed lay claim to the most successful and easily the most prominent professional league throughout the twentieth century. But in Japan and Cuba, as well as in other Caribbean nations, baseball in the twentieth century has become equally as much a national passion; and in several locations it today maintains perhaps even stronger claims to being “the national pastime” than it now does in the United States. The island nations of Japan and Cuba are quite obviously the showcase examples of this truism about baseball’s iron grip in other far-flung nations. But another island bastion, Taiwan (Chinese Taipei, as it is formally designated in international sporting events), also provides an equally instructive example.

Taiwan is one locale where baseball’s pioneering apostles are not actually the automatically expected culprits. Taiwanese baseball is not a stepchild to the American game, as one might expect; nor was it a mainland Chinese import, even though China itself had already discovered American-style baseball by the 1870s.⁴ Taiwan’s adopted national sport is instead a strictly Japanese phenomenon in both flavor and historical development, and this fact is reflected in just about every single feature of the Taiwanese national pastime as it is today played religiously at all levels everywhere around the large island nation.⁵

The Japanese origins of Taiwanese baseball have had numerous ramifications. During the earliest Japanese occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century, baseball was a game taught exclusively to Japanese immigrant children attending hundreds of Japanese-sponsored schools. The adult version of play caught on rather sporadically during the century’s second decade. Postal workers and army personnel established the first adult teams at the southern outpost of Tainan in 1910; five years later, the Taiwanese Baseball Association established the first league play (with mostly

² David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

³For further details see Peter C. Bjarkman, *Diamonds around the Globe* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005) Chapter 1 (Cuba), Chapter 4 (Dominican Republic), Chapter 5 (Venezuela), Chapter 6 (Puerto Rico), and Chapter 7 (Mexico).

⁴Joseph A. Reaves, *Taking in a Game* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 19f **omit**

⁵For the origins and history of baseball in Taiwan see *Diamonds around the Globe*, Chapter 9, 365-370, or Chapter 8 of Joseph A. Reaves’s *Taking in a Game*. Reaves’s treatment of the Taiwanese baseball story is especially insightful and detailed, whereas *Diamonds around the Globe* provides broad historical outlines.

Japanese ethnic players and only a handful of native Taiwanese athletes, though there were reported to be fifteen initial active amateur teams). American pros also made two brief visits, one during each of the next two decades. Both of these visits were actually attached to tours of Japan by the big leaguers, the first in 1921 when a group of seasoned professionals faced off with a Japanese squad in Taipei. The great Bambino Babe Ruth himself, accompanied by the likes of Detroit's Charlie Gehringer, New York's Lou Gehrig and Lefty Gomez, and Philadelphia's Connie Mack, appeared on the island (again at Tainan) during a brief 1934 stopover en route to a celebrated series of wildly successful exhibitions across Japan.

Taiwanese baseball has never been widely known in the United States for professional stars coming to the majors (as with Japan, for example) or for national team triumphs in world amateur senior-level play (as with Cuba). Rather, Taiwan earned its stripes in the U.S. primarily through a sudden and even startling mid-twentieth-century involvement in Little League baseball. Taiwan's Little League successes in Williamsport date back to the late 1960s and are still often the subject of controversy four full decades later. The initial surprising victory came when the Taichung Golden Dragons team walked off with a 1969 Williamsport championship, after first emerging as Far East Regional winners in the inaugural year of Taiwan's National Youth Baseball Association. Another glorious win occurred when Tainan City's Giants captured a second crown for Asian representatives a mere two years later.

Theories abound concerning the successes of Taiwanese youth teams, which were often accompanied with disputes about the ages and actual identities of Little Leaguers from Taiwan, payments to youth stars for winning key games, and scandals involving gambling on youth matches. Certainly age was a factor (some top Taiwanese players were clearly over-age), but that doesn't explain enough about the high degree of baseball skills among the nation's youth. There was obviously an element of national pride combined with the local prestige and benefits (including travel opportunities) offered by a slot on the top youth teams. Quite important was the matter of dedicated training and the use of skilled, paid coaches (the latter being another blatant violation of established Little League rules and the avowed Little League spirit of competition). A narrow and even obsessive dedication to the unrivaled national sport by officials, coaches, fans, and players alike is most likely the best explanation of all.

If South Korea is not as much of a traditional baseball hotbed as Japan or even Taiwan, its own history with the sport is nonetheless impressive even if sometimes erratic. During the just-concluded World Baseball Classic, South Korea suddenly became a nation altogether obsessed with the diamond sport. (Support in the Seoul government reached such a peak that 11 members of the South Korean squad were rewarded with release from compulsory two-year military service.) South Korea has long played second fiddle in Asian baseball. For decades, the Koreans have trailed far behind the Japanese when it comes to almost any measure of baseball growth. Their own clubs have rarely rivaled the Japanese teams in any international competitions: at least until the bronze medal win over Japan at the Sydney Olympics, the silver medal finish in the Baseball World Cup in Rotterdam in 2005, and the head-to-head successes against their Asian rivals they achieved in the inaugural WBC. Their few pro stars have played in Japanese circuits, not domestic leagues, and then mostly as journeymen and fill-ins rather than major stars. South Korea does not boast a strong native baseball tradition like the

Japanese, or even one measuring up to the sport's considerable stature in Taiwan. There have been very few inspired triumphs in world tournament games (one was a 1982 World Cup XXVII title earned in Seoul when Cuba didn't attend) or in Olympic matches (where Sydney 2000 represented the only moderate success). Nonetheless, there have been a few Korean major leaguers over the past decade – most notably Chan-Ho Park, Byung-Hyun Kim and Hee-Seop Choi – to boost the country's modest baseball-playing reputation. A growing big league presence and a substantial number of Korean stars (like Asian home run king Seung-yeop Lee) in the Japanese Central and Pacific leagues are about the only areas in which Korea can rival the Japanese or outstrip the Taiwanese when it comes to competitive bragging rights. But a silver medal finish in the 2005 World Cup and a strong showing in the just-concluded WBC may signal that such second-class status is about to change.

Korea does boast a showcase professional league that has experienced both promising highs and disappointing lows since the early 1980s.⁶ The circuit known as the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) began in a flurry of political motivation that recalls Jorge Pasquel's use of Mexican League baseball as a political platform in the mid-1940s, or Dictator Rafael Trujillo's similar efforts at propagandistic baseball triumphs during rigged election campaigns in the Dominican Republic back in the 1930s. A half-century after Trujillo and four decades after Pasquel, then-president Chun Doo Hwan sought to salvage his own sinking popularity and bury worsening political chaos with the public enthusiasm he hoped would become attached to a competitive professional baseball league. The plan was put into operation with a 1982 KBO season featuring six teams (Lotte Giants, Samsung Lions, Haitai Tigers, OB Bears, MBC Dragons and Sammi Superstars), 126 games, and a postseason culminating in the seven-game Korean Series. Following the typical Asian model, KBO teams are all sponsored by and named after huge business conglomerates. The number of teams has now doubled at the start of the KBO's third decade, and the KBO has already been producing dozens of homegrown stars for the last two decades (Samsung Lions slugger Seung-yeop Lee was the biggest before his flight to the Japanese Pacific League Chiba Lotte Marines) and even some thrilling pennant competitions.

The two outpost nations that have most fully made baseball their own are of course Japan and Cuba, home bases of the two most talent-filled and history-rich leagues found outside of MLB's expansive realm. In multiple ways the long evolution of the sport in both locales provides intriguing and even quite startling parallels. Both island nations originally uncovered in the culture of baseball the key to a new national identity, and did so at the crucial moment of their own nineteenth-century cultural awakening and fledgling political independence. Both, early on, radically transformed an adopted American sport into something uniquely their own – a homegrown if not entirely home-born institution boasting its own unique national character. Both lands were soon spreading their new revamped sporting fervor to nearby shores as an important instrument for acculturating or at least sanitizing neighboring populations. The Japanese and the Cubans were thus both largely baseball imperialists in their own right. It was the

⁶Korea's baseball history is outlined in *Diamonds around the Globe*, Chapter 9, 362-365) and *Taking in a Game* (Chapter 7). For complete lists (through 2003) of Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean big leaguers see tables at the ends of Chapter 3 (Japan) and Chapter 9 (Europe, Africa and the Pacific Rim) in *Diamonds around the Globe*.

Japanese and not the Americans who were Asia's original baseball apostles when they transported their new-found national craze to Korean and Taiwanese outposts. The same is true for the Cuban and Caribbean versions of the game: Mexico, Venezuela, and Hispaniola (Dominican Republic) all had their first taste of bats and balls as the result of Cuban migration during a destructive ten-year-long war (1870s and 1880s) for independence from the ruling Spaniards.

For these parallel reasons, then, baseball in China, Taiwan, and Korea reveals a defining Japanese and not the expected American flavor. And Cuban emissaries, in turn, made Latino baseball a distinctive brand that is now (in something of a fitting irony) transforming the major leagues to look – in both personnel and resulting playing styles – far more akin to the native Cuban game than to the original and less flamboyant American version.

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It is also arguably Japan and Cuba that represent the only truly distinctive baseball universes today existing outside the increasing sphere of U.S. organized baseball. Until recently, at least, the traffic between Japanese and American pro leagues was all one way – washed up or cup-of-coffee big leaguers salvaged careers in Japan but Japanese leaguers rarely (with but a single exception) set foot in the majors. Only Masanori Murakami (1964) made a token appearance before Hideo Nomo loudly broke MLB's Nippon barrier in 1995. Japanese players didn't go to the big leagues in part because a reigning notion that they were neither big enough nor good enough made them an undesirable commodity, and also in part because the Japanese leagues (Central and Pacific) made it far too difficult and far too expensive for organized baseball to gain access to Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) league talent. There was also a 1967 formal working agreement between the two top professional circuits, which came about on the heels of the celebrated contract dispute between MLB and the Nankai Hawks over Murakami's brief 1964-65 tenure with San Francisco's Giants. Contact between the U.S. and Cuba, on the other hand, was made virtually impossible after 1959 by political fallout from the Cuban revolution and the subsequent banning of island-based professional leagues by the new Fidel Castro-led socialist government. Only a handful of stars escaped Cuba's new amateur baseball system after 1962, and these have almost never been the best among the island's huge cache of diamond talent. Even Orlando Hernández (1998) and José Contreras (2003) – the most celebrated turn-of-the-century defectors – were not the best Cuban pitchers at the time of their celebrated “turn-coat” flights to the high-paying majors. El Duque was overshadowed on the 1990s Cuban scene by the likes of Lázaro Valle and José Ibar, while Contreras played second banana after 2000 to Norge Vera, Maels Rodríguez, and Pedro Lazo.

There is also another factor in Japanese and Cuban baseball isolationism that most big league scouts and stateside fans find nearly impossible either to fathom or accept. This is simply that a vast majority of Nippon's or Castro's stars have not wanted to leave their homelands no matter what amount of American dollars might be tossed their way by cash-waving player agents. Their own baseball universes were perfectly satisfactory and perhaps more to their liking in the long run; and in the case of the Cubans, escape to the big leagues meant not only cultural disruption but also potential loss of all family and homeland ties. A shot at big league lucre has in most cases been too big a price to pay for the Cuban or Japanese leaguer.

Unique baseball universes in both Japan and Cuba have yet another easy explanation – beyond the transparent economic and political conditions. Baseball realms found in China, Korea, Australia, and Taipei, or anywhere throughout Latin America, are certainly not distinct “universes” to anything like the same degree as the Cuban League or NPB. Joseph Reaves’s *Taking in a Game* (2002) has made this evident regarding Asia. Korean and Taiwanese league baseball are not special unto themselves but instead unavoidably Japanese flavored. If China is farther removed from Japan’s influence on the diamond, it is at the same time a minor baseball satellite region at best. A three-season-old, four-team pro circuit remains a mere blip on the Chinese sporting radar, and the national squad now being prepared in connection with the 2008 Beijing Olympics is largely the product of MLB-supplied coaching (Jim Lefebvre is on loan as national team manager and Bruce Hurst as Team China pitching coach). South Korean and Taiwanese baseball, as already established, are more akin to Japan’s version (emphasizing an exhausting work ethic and unrelenting team spirit) and not the American game in on-field playing style, though the business models found in the KBO and TPL are rather American in conception (with corporation-owned franchises and free-agent ballplayers who often seek higher salaries in Japan). By any measure, South Korean baseball is not uniquely Korean, nor is Taiwanese baseball very Chinese.

Throughout the Caribbean, the influence is admittedly more Cuban than anything else. But the U.S. majors have for decades also pulled the strings in winter league sites outside of Cuba. There has never been a truly isolated Dominican or Venezuelan or Puerto Rican baseball world, at least not after the mid-twentieth century and the post-World-War-II formalization of MLB-controlled winter circuits. Winter leagues in the region since the 1930s (Mexico, Puerto Rico), 1940s (Venezuela) or 1950s (Dominican) have been loosely connected branches (feeder systems) in MLB-organized baseball. Jorge Pasquel nearly succeeded in creating a separate Mexican League universe in the 1940s to challenge big league hegemony, but the forces of major league baseball were able to nip Pasquel’s brazen challenge in the bud. After the merciful deaths of independent U.S. Negro leagues at the close of the forties and dawn of the fifties, only Japan and Cuba have doggedly remained outside the control of MLB and its seemingly ever-expanding operations.

Most distinctive and parallel in the Japanese and Cuban realms, then, is the surprising degree to which these two baseball-crazy nations have, across the second half of the twentieth century, maintained their iron grip on unique and essentially closed baseball universes. Of course there are some huge differences on the surface between both the on-field playing styles and the historical circumstances defining the two leagues. Throughout the first half of the past century, ties between Cuba and the United States were sufficiently intimate if not always mutually rewarding, and as a result, Cuban and American baseball traditions are much closer (sometimes even parallel) in kinship. But Cuba was wrenched from its half-century-long American dependence after Castro’s emergence, and for four-plus decades, Cuban League clubs have had no intercourse with MLB operations of the kind that Japanese Pacific and Central League franchises have continually enjoyed. There have been no player exchanges, no exhibition tours of visiting big leaguer clubs (with the single exception of the one-time Baltimore Orioles visit in 1999), and thus the Cubans have evolved their own sport over several generations, with no real concern about measuring themselves against the big league game. As a result,

Cuba's baseball universe has been a far more hermetically sealed and self-contained one. And Cuban leaguers therefore have measured their on-field stature strictly against the world of amateur baseball in Olympic, World Cup, Intercontinental Cup, and Pan American Games matches – all venues that they have thoroughly dominated, even after the 1999 emergence of professionals representing other nations in most of these venues. This focus may explain the Cubans' far greater successes in this “amateur baseball” realm than those enjoyed by Japan's often outclassed national teams.

Robert Whiting has authored three seminal volumes (see the Bibliography below) detailing the “Japanized” approach to America's self-proclaimed “national pastime” and explaining to the uninitiated just how much Japan has turned the game of bats and balls into its own unparalleled cultural phenomenon. Japan's *samurai besuboru* version mirrors all things culturally Japanese and (to some lesser extent) culturally Asian. Team spirit and group unity – the *Wa* of Whiting's best-known title – is valued above individual performance in a society for which the harmonious group and not the self-preserving individual is sacrosanct. Much has been written about how NPB ballplayers train relentlessly (with voluntary “spring” workouts in the dead of winter, thousand fungo drills, and vomit-inducing day-long exercise sessions) and how they approach the game philosophically (with Zen meditation and shadow-swinging exercises), resulting in a game that is far more symbolic and emblematic than merely athletic in nature. Physical preparation and selfless dedication by a Japanese ballplayer is seemingly more important than the individual ballgame itself. Saving face (preserving honor) is crucial and thus managers and coaches always control every on-field movement of their athletes; and tie games are not only tolerated but even idealized as perfect “face-saving” outcomes.

Transplanted American big leaguers have rarely enjoyed success in Japanese league play because they have usually not adapted to this distinct game that undervalues individual initiative (freelancing and risk-taking) or on-field offensive and defensive creativity. Batting stances, pitching styles, punishing training routines, and fielding tactics are all painstakingly copied and molded to sanctioned models. While few Japanese players have had an opportunity to test their skills in the U.S. majors because of size and playing style (and also because of the tight reins the NPB has always kept on them), equally few major leaguers (among the several hundred who have tried during the past half-century) have found success in the Japanese game. Those who have not adapted – “Ugly Americans” like Joe Pepitone or Bob Horner – have failed to duplicate their big league performances and have exited quickly. Some who have impressed, especially as sluggers – Daryl Spencer, Boomer Wells, Clete Boyer, Charlie Manuel, Randy Bass, Leron and Leon Lee, Warren Cromartie, and Reggie Smith, for example – nevertheless have met deep frustration in their efforts to find acceptance as *gaijin* outsiders. Daryl Spencer suffered the humiliation of receiving constant intentional walks from Japanese hurlers in 1965 when he threatened to edge out national icon Katsuya Nomura in a Pacific League triple crown race and thus become Japan's first full-fledged home run king. Charlie Manuel was victim of an ugly bean-ball incident that broke his jaw and ruined his best season. Leron Lee was shunned by Lotte teammates and club management after winning a 1980 Pacific League batting crown. *Gaijin* have historically drawn the ire of Japanese fans and ballplayers alike for their high salaries, avoidance of overbearing Japanese training techniques, seeming lack of full dedication to team unity (Randy Bass drew universal wrath in mid-season 1984 when he left his club to be at his dying father's

bedside), unwillingness to play even harder or train more rigorously when injured, inability to master spoken Japanese, and brazen assaults on cherished batting and pitching records held by national icons like Sadaharu Oh or Shigeo Nagashima. The two baseball universes have always been far too different to accommodate any easy transitions.

But for all their strenuous cultural independence, the Japanese have never been seemingly able to enjoy fully the isolation of their separate baseball universe. There has always been an eye toward the touchstone standards of the U.S. majors and the cherished dream of beating the Americans at their own game. It began in large part with the aspirations of Matsutaro Shoriki, in the aftermath of forming his Yomiuri Giants during the mid-thirties. Shoriki, spurred by the success of a 1934 tour of American professionals including Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and sponsored by his own Yomiuri *Shimbun* newspaper chain, established Japan's first professional club that included a pair of promising young pitchers named Eiji Sawamura and (Russian-born) Victor Starffin. First called the *Dai Nippon Tokyo Yakyu Kurabu* (the Great Japanese Tokyo Baseball Club), Shoriki's All-Japan stars roster – that would later evolve into the Tokyo *Kyojin* (Giants) – visited American shores in 1935 for a 110-game tour against mostly PCL clubs and assorted semipro outfits and managed to win a remarkable 93 games. But in truth the Japanese dream of conquest reaches back far longer than the mid-thirties. It begins with the victories of the First Higher School (Ichiko) of Tokyo, which pummeled American yacht club forces (mostly rank amateurs) from Yokohama 29-4 back in 1896, then won a rematch 22-6 despite some American reinforcements in the form of sailors from U.S. warships anchored in Yokohama harbor. The “baseball dream” would meet years of frustration in countless losses by touring school teams in the United States across the early twentieth century. And it suffered much damage and experienced much futility with the first visits from American big leaguers in the 1930s (in the 1934 tour the Ruth-Gehrig forces won 17 straight). So strong was the hope of eventually embarrassing the Americans at their self-proclaimed pastime, however, that 18-year-old phenom Eiji Sawamura became a national hero overnight during the 1934 Ruth-Gehrig tour just by striking out four vaunted big leaguers (Gehringer, Ruth, Gehrig, and Foxx) in a row.

It is again Whiting who most thoroughly recounts this preoccupation with defeating the American big leaguers in his first and perhaps best book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat* (1977). The Japanese obsession seemed to reach a peak in October 1971 with a much anticipated (in Japan, that is) showdown between perennial Japan Series champions, the Yomiuri Giants, and the MLB 1970 “world champion” Baltimore Orioles. The Central League Giants at that time boasted the best squad and greatest stars in NPB history – sluggers Nagashima and Oh most prominently. The Orioles were easily the strongest big league team of that era with a lineup including Frank Robinson, Brooks Robinson, and 1970 American League MVP Boog Powell. Some of the luster was stolen from the scene by the Orioles' unexpected loss to the Pittsburgh Pirates during the 1971 World Series, on the eve of their trumpeted visit to Tokyo. But the real disappointment for Nippon fans came with the celebrated series itself. Baltimore crushed the Giants (winning eight and tying another three) and also teams of Japanese league all-stars (who managed to squeak out two wins but also lost four and tied only one). The humiliating string of endless Yomiuri defeats even included a rare no-hitter fashioned by Baltimore's Pat Dobson. The dream was thus quickly buried, at least for awhile.

Whiting interprets the Japanese dream of defeating the top American pros in a “Real World Series” as having a quite transparent explanation found in the Japanese cultural psyche.⁷ Japanese people are among the kindest and most generous in the world, even if they are sometimes accused of being unimaginative and far too group-oriented for American tastes. They maintain a deep-seated sensitivity to how they are perceived and accepted by the outside world. (In Whiting’s words, “how the world views Japan is more important to the Japanese than most Americans will ever understand.”) It is all part and parcel, perhaps, of the complex interplay between group image-building and national face-saving. As a rare reflection of Japanese culture, Japanese baseball is thus a vital measure of international acceptance and global recognition. It is an ingrained personal yardstick for an entire population, and not just a matter of savoring transitory and illusory sporting thrills.

While it became overly apparent in 1971 that Japanese fans were not about to realize, anytime soon, the cherished dream of victories in a Real World Series (or perhaps even to stage such a mythical series as a landmark event by which they could ultimately measure themselves), a new version of the illusive dream and illusory yardstick would soon enough emerge. This replacement national fantasy is one that Whiting, once again, details in his latest book, *The Meaning of Ichiro*. It is the recast fantasy of native Japanese ballplayers now demonstrating the quality and potency of the home-grown leagues – and thus of the very nation’s value itself – by succeeding and maybe even dominating as first-rate stars in the major leagues. The first Japanese big leaguer, two-year pitching flash Masanori Murakami of the San Francisco Giants, was perhaps a mild curiosity but hardly anything more. But starting with Hideo Nomo in 1995 and peaking with Ichiro and Hideki Matsui at the turn of a new century, Japanese successes in the big leagues would become a true national obsession back home in the Land of the Rising Sun. Nippon television cameras cover Ichiro’s and Matsui’s every on-field move (Matsui’s first 2003 spring training batting practice at the Yankees’ Tampa camp was televised live in Tokyo at one in the morning.) Dozens of Tokyo sporting dailies provide as much coverage of a handful of big league exports as they do of the local NPB pennant races. Of course it is not just rabid fandom but rather a sense of fragile national identity that is at stake here.

Cuba has never seemed to bother itself quite so much about the stature of its own national game as measured by victories over barnstorming big leaguers or successes of hometown heroes in the U.S. majors. There has always been sufficient pride in such events, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century when Cuban League clubs (usually composed mostly of Afro-Cubans) regularly held their own against visiting barnstormers or touring black all-stars from the “outlaw” Negro leagues. But such landmark feats as José Méndez mesmerizing the New York Giants and Detroit Tigers in 1908 and 1909, or Cristóbal Torriente out-slugging Babe Ruth in 1920, never substantially altered the way Cubans evaluated or enjoyed their local winter league scene. For one thing, for more than a century the Cubans have cherished a very different national dream. It is one of cultural and political independence born of being on the wrong side of the imperialist equation. Certainly the Cubans have long been the most highly Americanized of nations in all things cultural as well as in the small world of

⁷Robert Whiting, *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1977), 244-45.

baseball. But Louis Pérez⁸ has argued convincingly that an essential cause of the mid-century socialist revolution bringing Fidel Castro to power was a widespread national reaction against just such excessive Americanization, which by World War II had begun to strip the island of its essential Cuban-ness. And after the Castro revolution, baseball contact with the Goliath to the north was almost overnight made virtually impossible. If there were occasional players escaping to the majors after 1960 they were not the best Cuban leaguers; Contreras and the Hernández brothers (Orlando and Liván) may have been quality pitchers, but they did not surpass Norge Vera, Lázaro Valle, or Pedro Luis Lazo. And virtually all the top sluggers from Antonio Muñoz and Wilfredo Sánchez in the 1970s to Omar Linares and Orestes Kindelán in the 1990s opted to remain loyal soldiers on crack national teams at home. There were no battles between the Cuban national team and the big leaguers until the Orioles visited Havana early in 1999; and even then the confrontation seemed more important as a political tool for the Castro government than it did as a benchmark for multitudes of Cuban fans. Island *aficionados* celebrated briefly after a lopsided win by their national team in Baltimore and then got back to their real passion – National Series action played on native soil, along with the national team’s more important continued good fortunes in “amateur” Olympic and World Cup venues.

An entire Japanese archipelago, by stark contrast, has seemingly become fixated on the U.S. majors, for all its former devotion to the national game being played at home. In the *Meaning of Ichiro*, Whiting details current Japanese big league addictions – with MLB games (mainly those of Ichiro’s Mariners, Matsui’s Yankees and Iguchi’s White Sox) beamed back to Tokyo, Osaka, and Kobe at ridiculous early morning hours and with every on-field move and off-field transgression of Ichiro and Matsui making ten-point media headlines. There is a most interesting contrast here with the scenes Whiting has described almost three decades earlier. In *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat* (1977), the same author painted the portrait of a near-perfect baseball paradise relished by fans totally obsessed with the self-contained world of *besuboru*, which Whiting then celebrated as a charming form of “outdoor *kabuki* (theater).” In less than a quarter-century “paradise” had seemingly been tarnished by all-too-welcome MLB intruders.

It is most obvious from the contrasting portraits provided by Whiting’s two studies that Japanese baseball today faces a huge and foreboding crisis of conscience. Whiting cites an old Japanese proverb that “the frog in the well doesn’t know the ocean.” The looming fate of Japanese baseball may well call for any equally potent piece of native American folk wisdom – “Be careful what you wish for because your dreams just may come true.” Nippon fans may now be enjoying at least a small piece of their dream, with several home-grown NPB heroes enjoying marked success among American pros, and even (with Ichiro’s recent batting records or Matsui’s slugging prowess) sustaining a notion that perhaps Japanese baseball is indeed on a par with the long-admired majors. Ichiro, Big Matsui (Godzilla), Little Matsui, So Taguchi and Tadahito Iguchi are today proving the worthiness of their brand of the shared national game by starring in the big time on MLB rosters. But it is a two-edged samurai blade, and Japanese rooters may soon discover that their Pyrrhic victory was in reality their greatest defeat. With the 2006 WBC Japanese fans finally experienced a long-coveted “Real World Series” of sorts and even witnessed the devoutly wished-for victory over MLB’s top forces. But at the same

⁸*On Becoming Cuban*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999)

time Nippon Professional Baseball seems now to be an organization increasingly reduced to a diminished role as the “feeder league” for MLB, and a once-proud Japanese league also now seems quite helpless to stem an increasing flow of top-flight talent out of the country.

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We might reprise here, however briefly, the history of big league baseball’s century-long inroads into all professional and amateur leagues that have surrounded its own universe and fed its own ravenous hunger for constant supplies of replacement athletic talent. Major league baseball as a cultural institution – and even more so as a thriving business – has never willingly shared the stage with rival baseball enterprises. Its interest in other baseball worlds has always been to ruthlessly exploit them for any available pools of promising recruits, or else to squelch them as potential rivals for the all-important dollars to be gleaned from a ticket-buying public.

Caribbean winter leagues or Japanese professional leagues provide perfect examples of the former stance, while Jorge Pasquel’s 1940s Mexican League ambitions or thriving U.S. minor league baseball in the 1950s are test cases of the latter vested interest. The complex saga involving an almost overnight collapse of a thriving Negro league culture in black urban communities during the post-World War II years provides a still-more-revealing illustration of both self-serving motives simultaneous at work in the front offices of major league baseball.

The most dangerous threat to the existence of alternative baseball universes lately to raise its head has been the creation and promotion by major league baseball of the institution now known as the World Baseball Classic. MLB has hyped its plan as being the logical replacement for Olympic baseball tournaments (now apparently dead after the 2008 Beijing Games) and for what MLB sees as a second-rate World Cup event run since the early forties by the IBAF body, which also governs Olympic-style international baseball.⁹ MLB officials have argued repeatedly that Olympic baseball has never been legitimate (as a world championship litmus test) because the best stars in the world don’t play in that venue. This reasoning goes something as follows: Olympic baseball (including the IBAF World Cup) is largely a sham because teams from Cuba or Japan or Chinese Taipei repeatedly defeat inferior amateur competition and thus unjustly bruise the American national ego. In short, everyone knows that baseball is “the American game” and the best players are found in the American majors. It is the same line of reasoning that led to NBA players in Olympic basketball tournaments – a move that meant soaring TV revenues for NBC coverage (since celebrity players and USA wins could now be better marketed, especially at home) but also – at least before Athens – killed off competitive tournaments. A similarly fashioned MLB argument of course

⁹ Major League Baseball officials reportedly had aimed to promote their tournament as “The Baseball World Cup” and likely envisioned the kind of TV interest generated by soccer’s every-fourth-year mega-festival, which enralls a large portion of the globe’s population and generates billions in revenues. The plan was foiled by the Europe-based International Baseball Federation (IBAF), which had earlier (in anticipation of MLB intrusions on their domain) trademarked the World Cup designation in U.S. courts. Big league moguls had to settle on the WBC label for their own enterprise and did eventually incorporate IBAF sponsorship (at a financial profit to the latter group) in order to protect the Olympic eligibility of ballplayers taking part in the WBC.

overlooks the fact that if the best players undoubtedly are in the majors, most of those players are no longer American born and bred stars. It also ignores the question of whether or not the quality of a spectacle somehow depends solely on some absolute measure of the quality of talent being put upon the stage or the arena floor.

As it turned out, MLB's inaugural World Baseball Classic was a smash hit by almost any conceivable measure. Even if a dream match-up featuring Jeter and Company versus Pujols and Company did not materialize on the final Monday in San Diego, MLB was hardly a loser despite such an unpredictable turn of events on the field of play. The announced goal of spreading the message that baseball is truly an international sport was a resounding and even larger-than-expected success. Merchandise was sold in record volumes and stadiums were jam-packed with rabid and rapt flag-draped rooters. All-important TV ratings exceeded even the loftiest of expectations, despite the underwhelming underperformance of a star-studded Team USA. Fans tuned in to the games at Petco Park intrigued to discover who these no-name teams were that had reached the pinnacle of international baseball competition. The atmosphere was especially electric for second round matches in San Juan's Hiram Bithorn Stadium, where four Latin American powers faced off in the first true "Caribbean Series" matching the Cuban juggernaut against top big leaguers from Venezuela, the Dominican, and host Puerto Rico. And most importantly, a huge North American TV audience had its eyes rudely opened to the undeniable fact that top-flight baseball is no longer restricted to the United States or to MLB's primary talent farm in the Dominican Republic.

But this success came in a form very different from the one MLB honchos and ESPN television executives had likely envisioned. Best-laid plans for a showdown final in San Diego between ballyhooed Team USA and star-studded big league lineups of Venezuelans or Dominicans – a game whose appeal lay in the appearance of Derek Jeter, Roger Clemens, Alex Rodríguez, Albert Pujols, and other household names – did not materialize. The only star big leaguers to make it to San Diego other than Japan's Ichiro were the Dominicans, who themselves were not around for the grand finale. Japan, Korea, and Cuba were able to demonstrate to a nation of American skeptics that the most successful baseball winning style was one largely abandoned in the big league camps. What could possibly have been a better scenario for marketing international baseball – at least everywhere outside the USA – than a final showdown featuring all-stars from two top non-USA-based leagues? The WBC ultimately showcased baseball from the two prime outposts of the sport's expanding universe.

The prime lesson of the tournament was the discovery that major league baseball and especially American-style baseball no longer had an exclusive claim upon the sport. Japanese, Cuban, and Korean teams – all largely devoid of big league stars – defeated USA, Dominican, and Venezuelan big leaguers by playing the game the way it had once been played in the United States. That is, by emphasizing fundamentals such as bunting and sharp team defense, relying on deep pitching and "small-ball" strategies of gaining and protecting an early lead, and eschewing a "sit back and wait for the big home run"-style philosophy that permeates big league strategies. Japan and Cuba also won consistently by demonstrating the manner in which the game for years has continued to be played in the Japanese leagues (Pacific and Central) and in the politically isolated Cuban League, a game in which middle-of-the-line-up hitters sacrifice runners into scoring position, pitchers are quickly yanked without displaying bruised egos, and team

spirit is a driving motive and not just a “sound-bite” cliché. Dominican manager Manny Acta struck a responsive chord when he noted in his press conference comments following his team’s semifinal defeat that the world had now discovered just how much quality pitching exists outside of the majors. But it was not pitching exclusively that defeated the American and Dominican big leaguers. It was the spirited and intelligent play of Asian and Latin teams stocked with players for whom putting on the national team jersey actually strikes a deep-seated and highly motivating inner response.

The question now remains whether or not the triumphs of Japanese and Cuban teams in the WBC will lead directly to the retooling of a purer big-league style of play, one that is a throwback to the way the big leaguers used to approach their trade before pro baseballers became quasi rock stars and before major league games were turned into seemingly made-for-television versions of Home Run Derby.

This is of course the scenario devotedly to be wished for. It may also be an idle hope given the long-term conditioning of USA fans to games based upon celebrity star appeal and rampant home run bashing. American professional baseball has long since become a television spectacle built on the instant gratification of the dramatic long ball and the marketing value of the celebrity icon whose mantra is gaudy individual stats and not team triumphs. There is little remaining space in today’s big league stadiums for the “small-ball” style built on subtle offensive strategy (bunt, steal, walk, hit behind the runner) and selfless individual sacrifice to the team concept. There is little “we” and even less *Wa* in contemporary American-style baseball. WBC results have again revealed that retro-style play is nonetheless the most effective and the most aesthetic diamond style. This is what most entertains fans in Japan and Cuba; and this is also what wins games in the short-format, one-loss-and-out scenario of pressure-packed international tournaments.

Today’s hope for international baseball is not at all that more non-American stars will soon flood into the major leagues. That will inevitably be the case, for good or for bad, despite the best efforts of the Japanese and Cubans to protect the integrity of their native leagues. (The “bad” I see here is not that the majors will become too “foreign” but rather that such raiding of Asian and Caribbean teams will ultimately leave Japanese league and Cuban League fans stripped of their own stars on the home front in Tokyo and Havana.) The true hope is that the Japanese pro leagues and the Cuban amateur league can survive with their own home-grown stars and their own unique flavor largely intact. The sporting world is always most healthy when it contains several thriving alternative baseball universes. Global corporate capitalism in baseball, after all, serves only the narrow interests of those few entrepreneurs making money from the business practices of the U.S. major leagues.

MLB has lent much lip service to the internationalizing of the American pastime. But one has to remain vigilant to what this really means. For the skeptic at least, the history of MLB relations with competing baseball universes makes the true meaning altogether transparent. What U.S. big league bosses narrowly apprehend is a two-fold bonanza to be successfully reeled in under the thinly veiled guise of token internationalizing. Foremost is the opportunity to replenish rapidly diminishing talent supplies. MLB can not continue to expand or even maintain its existing product without tapping exciting players from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba, or Japan and Taiwan. Without Ichiro, Matsui, Contreras, Pujols, and A-Rod the MLB product has a strictly limited future. (Baseball is no longer a magnet for children on

American sandlots.) But a second front for foreign exploitation is more crucial still. TV markets for the game and its life-blood advertising have been nearly exhausted on the American home front. It is now necessary to replenish those markets in Tokyo, Taipei, and Seoul, as well as in Santo Domingo, Caracas, and Mexico City, and maybe someday even in Havana. The plan of MLB has never been, nor could it be expected to be, the fostering of independent and thriving leagues in Japan or Cuba or Korea or elsewhere. The motive is rather to extract enough talent from other countries to fill shrinking MLB rosters and at the same time beam the exploits of those “international” stars back to their own homelands via an MLB-owned and operated television enterprise. Corporate globalization has now come to the winnowing universe of international baseball with a frightening vengeance.

It is baseball in Japan that today seems most immediately threatened. For generations (certainly since the 1950s) the Japanese enjoyed a game that was distinctly their own. *Besuboru* played in the Pacific and Central Leagues had just enough contact with the American big league variety to stimulate comparative interest and foster exciting if pointless debate. But Japanese-style baseball has always been mostly about the culturally unique Japanese adaptation. Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Osaka fans had their distinct diamond-based universe and reveled in it endlessly. The game was played their own special way and whether or not it was better or worse or just different from the game in big league parks was never a very relevant issue. *Besuboru samurai*-style was good enough to reign as a national obsession, and also good enough to make the sport far more of a national touchstone in Japan in recent decades than it has been of late in the NFL/NBA dominated American marketplace.

There have always been those isolationists in Japan who have argued that their own national game should remain pure, that it should not welcome *gaijin* players who sullied *besuboru* and its cultural purity, who made it more American and thus not something to truly stimulate national pride. In the fifties, sixties, and seventies these arguments had largely to do with the failures of imports like Pepitone or Horner or Daryl Spencer, who drew bigger salaries than the local stars and didn't always perform up to expectations – who were not big-league-level supermen as they had been advertised, but instead were seeming malcontents unwilling to strain and sacrifice like their Japanese teammates. At the time, the argument might have seemed extreme and even distastefully jingoistic to many – even perhaps to Whiting. And yet those doomsayers may well have been right after all. If Japanese stars now begin to flood the majors and no longer play in Tokyo or Osaka with the Yomiuri or Hanshin clubs, will not Japanese baseball as it always existed in all its glory be once and for all diminished in stature? If the games aired on TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) are those of the Yankees, Braves, and Red Sox of New York, Atlanta, and Boston – no matter how many Ichiros or Godzillas or Hideki Irabus or Daisuke Matsuzakas are in the lineups – and are also games played American-style and not Japanese *samurai* style, will not the Japanese national sport have faded beyond current recognition?

One might build an argument that MLB has been anything but imperialistic in its relationship with Japanese professional baseball down through the years. In his most recent book (*The Meaning of Ichiro*) Whiting actually raises the question of why it took MLB thirty years – between Murakami and Nomo – to rediscover Japan's substantial talent pool and begin plucking from its enticing resources. He raises and dismisses the

possibility that there was any kind of *de-facto* ban on MLB movement in this direction, perhaps one imposed by cautious U.S. government officials straining to keep open friendly relations with their Japanese counterparts. So why then should the major leagues not have gone after Japanese talent during the sixties, seventies or eighties? And since they never did pursue Japan as a recruiting ground the way they pursued Latin America and the Caribbean Basin, would this not tend to debunk any claims I have just made about the voracious appetite of big league moguls for sucking up new talent pools or squelching rival baseball circuits?

The truth is that there are a myriad of available explanations for the long-time blind eye of organized baseball to Japanese hunting grounds. Whiting himself directly provides some of these explanations in *The Meaning of Ichiro* and implies several others.¹⁰ Perhaps most obvious is the long-reigning belief that Japanese talent was just not good enough to bother with. The old belief that Japanese hitters and pitchers were too small for the majors was certainly not put to rest by the limited successes of spot pitcher Masanori Murakami in 1964: the Giants' oversized (for Japan) lefty worked some brief magic on National League hitters but didn't stick around long enough to provide any valid measure. It was only the surprising overachievement of rookie Hideo Nomo in Los Angeles that left serious dents in a theory about Japanese leaguers' inherent inferiorities.

International contract battles surrounding Murakami (1964) and Nomo (1994) both worked to underscore a second and even stronger reason for MLB officials not simply scrapping the 1967 Working Agreement and raiding Japan as it had raided Cuba before 1959, or has it had even more intensively raided the Dominican Republic after Castro slammed the doors tight on Cuba. It was simply too difficult to go after Japanese players under contract to the teams of the Central or Pacific Leagues. There had certainly been more than mild interest during the '70s and '80s in the big stars like Nagashima and Oh and a handful of others. Whiting summarizes efforts by Walter O'Malley's Dodgers and Bill Veeck's White Sox to coax the popular Nagashima away from the Yomiuri club; and the Cardinals, Giants, and Angels reportedly lusted for stars like Yutaka Enatsu (a 200-game winner with the Hanshin Tigers) and Shinichi Ono (southpaw ace for the Hiroshima Carp).¹¹ But those human treasures simply didn't want to leave home, with language and cultural barriers seemingly the main inhibitors. While most top Cuban stars have been unwilling to abandon Castro's realm for ideological as well as social reasons, the Japanese leaguers had even more motive to stay put, since they were exceptionally well paid by the Japanese corporations that employed them. Yet even if slugger Shigeo Nagashima had wanted to break his lucrative Tokyo Giants contract with the Yomiuri Corporation, it would have been nearly impossible for him to do so, given Japan's own version of the player reserve clause.

The 1965 Murakami affair had taught MLB a lasting lesson about the legal intricacies of luring Japanese league talent. The situation was similar to that in Mexico, where the price was also far too high for perhaps questionable (at least unproven) talent that might not adjust easily to big league conditions. It was Nomo's revolt (he escaped Japan through a contractual quirk that allowed him to invoke voluntary retirement) that finally opened a window of opportunity and made Japanese recruitment far easier. And

¹⁰Robert Whiting, *Meaning of Ichiro: The New Wave from Japan and the Transformation of Our National Pastime* (New York: Warner Books, 2004), especially Chapter 6.

¹¹ Ibid.

once the door was left ajar, MLB was no longer quite so hesitant to pounce. The Nomo saga (especially Nomo's successes once he reached the Dodgers) suggests that it was the obstacles of contracts and the doubts about Japanese player value that can best explain the hands-off policy of MLB clubs over the thirty years separating Murakami from Ichiro.

The success stories of Nomo in the nineties and Ichiro and Matsui at the dawn of the new millennium have also opened MLB's eyes full gaze to the economic potential of Nippon stars in the big leagues. The Tokyo media craze surrounding the Japanese big leaguers could hardly be ignored by an MLB corporation always searching to expand markets and tap fresh revenue. Even if Nomo or Ichiro or future imports didn't help that much on the field (although of course they did), they would apparently sell countless hours of TV time to ravenous Asian fans wanting to feel good about their conquering heroes abroad. If the Japanese could so easily exploit this new instant market for Godzilla airtime and Ichiro merchandise themselves, then why couldn't the partnership between MLB and North American television networks not get in on the act and reap the same harvest or enjoy the same benefits? The landscape had now changed dramatically in the wake of Nomo and Ichiro, and suddenly there was plenty of new money to be made in Japan.

Japan may long have owned the second best (or more likely third best for any who have watched the Cuban national team) baseball league in the world. This has remained true not because Japan could provide a handful of players for the talent-hungry majors, but rather because the Japanese had made of their national pastime a rare cultural phenomenon – a distinct and separate baseball universe of their own. The loss of that *samurai*-brand baseball – its replacement by an expanded major leagues that assimilates Japanese born stars wholesale into its own cultural milieu – will be a loss whose implications will likely stretch far beyond the small world of baseball and the simple entertainment pleasures of the *samurai* baseball diamond.

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American culture is a diverse mix of customs and traditions from nearly every region of the world. Here is a brief overview of American holidays, food, clothing and more. American culture encompasses the customs and traditions of the United States. "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things," said Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London. The United States is the third largest country in the world with a population of more than 325 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. A child is born every 8 seconds, and a person dies every 8 seconds. Long called America's national pastime and thought to have been invented in the U.S., the game was actually derived from the English game of rounders. But baseball, despite the spread of the game throughout the globe and the growing influence of Asian and Latin American leagues and players, is the sport that Americans still recognize as their national pastime. The game has long been woven into the fabric of American life and identity. "Our game," exclaimed the poet Walt Whitman more than a century ago, "is the chief fact in connection with it: America's game." He went on to explain that baseball. Despite their cultural differences, the growing popularity of baseball in Japan encouraged Japanese university teams and other baseball clubs, led by a team from Waseda University in 1905, to travel to the United States in the early 1900s to study American baseball more closely and play exhibition games against American teams. Baseball, or *kyôgi* (field ball), as it is also called, is the national sport of Japan, but it is not the game that Americans know and love. Take a trip to a Japanese ballpark such as the Tokyo Dome, home of the Yomiuri Giants, and a completely different baseball culture will reveal itself. It's not just the sake and squid and the beer girls in short shorts carrying draft beer kegs. Free Essay: Baseball has for a long time been a staple in the American sporting culture as baseball and America have grown up together. Exploring the... That is the links between our heritage and national institutions and the game of baseball as a cultural and political representative abroad and unifying tradition at home. I will also address ideals and injustices. That is how baseball's acceptability has changed over time, and how this acts as a microcosm for America's changing attitudes about equality and opportunity. Fighting not only for his future, but also for the overall well-being of his sport, Robinson received death threats for his efforts. On a daily basis, this disciplined African man fought the pressures of hatred toward his entire race. Baseball is an American family tradition. This Game is closely tied to us in a very personal way, but what you may not realize is how much it is also tied to history. Often referred to as America's National Pastime, baseball has had a very active role in the shaping of this nation. From the Civil War to Civil Rights and all points in between and beyond, the game of baseball supports and reflects many aspects of American life, from culture to economics and technological advances. This story is told at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, where the plaques and artifacts all have something to say about the special place baseball holds in the hearts of Americans. These are just a few of the places where the history of our National Pastime and American history have crossed