Colonial Project, National Game: A History of Baseball in Taiwan Transcript

Author: Andrew Morris (AM)
Conversation Partners: John McKinstry (JM) and Brett Bodemer (BB)
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Description: Transcript of a podcast of the discussion of the book, Colonial Project, National Game: A History of Baseball in Taiwan between the author, Andrew Morris of history, John McKinstry of sociology and College of Liberal Arts Librarian, Brett Bodemer.

[Music]

Karen Lauritsen (Moderator): Welcome to Kennedy Library Out Loud, podcasts of library programs and events. This podcast captures Conversations with Cal Poly Authors, a public engagement and outreach program of the library that occurs approximately once per quarter in room 111H of the library. This podcast was recorded, the second event, on May 13th 2011. For more information about library podcasts visit the website lib.calpoly.edu/outloud and for more information about Conversations with Cal Poly Authors visit the series website, lib.calpoly.edu/authors. Conversations with Cal Poly Authors is a celebration of the published work of Cal Poly faculty, a way to share their work across colleges and disciplines and attempt to stimulate the interest of students in new areas of research. This podcast features Professor and Department Chair of the History Department Andrew Morris discussing his book Colonial Project, National Game: A History of Baseball in Taiwan, published in 2010 by the University of California Press. Two invited respondents join Professor Morris in discussing his book; professor of sociology, John McKinstry and College of Liberal Art Librarian Brett Bodemer. The podcast is divided into four segments. This first segment features Andrew telling the story of his 12 year journey to write his book. While living in Taiwan as a graduate student studying modern Chinese history, his side interest in the history of baseball on the island became a serious research study. His research revealed stories of the contradictions of colonialism and how the aboriginal people of Taiwan are at the center of this fascinating baseball narrative.

AM: I'd first like to say thank you to Eileen and Anna for putting this together, putting the series together and for inviting me. The first event with Dr. Dandekar from City Regional Planning was really enjoyable and so I was very happy to be invited. I wanted thank John and Brett for being discussants and looking at the book and hopefully raising questions. And so I guess I would take a few minutes just to talk about where this all came from and then I would love to just hear the kinds of questions that Brett and John have and also if other people have questions. It started in 1991, I went to Taiwan for the first time after I graduated from college and I just happened to move into this very strange living arrangement in downtown Taichung in central Taiwan and it happened to be very close to the Municipal Baseball Stadium and I realized that later and then over time I started going to see the baseball games there and there's a pro league there and that was the second year of their pro league. I, at first, I remember having this sense like oh that's kind of neat. I grew up always paying attention to baseball and I remember thinking it's kind of neat that they're playing my game. I can kind of go around the world and people play
the American game of baseball. And I was pretty quickly disabused of that idea when I started hearing people referring to it as a Japanese game and how much they owed to Japanese culture and Japanese history, Japanese heritage, and I think it was one of those great moments where I was very humbled as to how much I didn't know and really interested to find out how much as I could find out about how baseball became a Japanese, how it got to Taiwan, how it became so popular in Taiwan. I grew up, every year, I think there are a lot of people that remember every year, every summer the Taiwanese Little Leaguers would come to America and just clean the clocks of whatever German, American, Puerto Rican team they happen to play against. I mean it was really, it was actually kind of ridiculous. They would win one year in the Little League World Series, they had 57 runs and their opponents have 0 runs. Every game was a no hitter. It was just this kind of strange, and there are all these ways of understanding this oriental kind of machine and the great yellow machine and all these weird kinds of terms that we throw around in the 70's. But anyway, so I had this kind of basic understanding about baseball and Taiwan but then when I started to realize that it was the Japanese artifact, an artifact of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan, the Japanese ruled Taiwan from 1895 to 1945, I just became really interested. So for a long time it was just kind of this interest. I was a grad student, I was studying very important things in modern Chinese history and it was just this kind of thing that was on the side, like it was just moderately interesting, and then I just kind of started paying more attention to it and I would just read about it again on the side and at some point I realized it could probably studied, it could actually be studied as a history, you know written as a history. My advisors in grad school weren't terribly supportive of that. They were supported of everything else but not that, which is fine, and they kind of urged me not to really sink into that too much in terms of a dissertation or something. So I always just kind of kept it on the side but I was always really interested then as I kind of went on with it just to see how people in Taiwan remembered the Japanese colonial period and how different it was from how it's remembered in China and how it's remembered in Korea. In Korea and China, you don't have people remembering fondly the good old days of Japanese colonialism, and it has a lot to do with what happened after 1945, so again at some points in the last, you know that was 20 years ago that I kind of got interested in it, but I started to take it more seriously and then on a dare to myself when I was writing my dissertation there was this conference at University of Texas in Austin and I really wanted to go to this conference. I kind of dared myself to see if I could write a good paper about this just to see if it could be done and I could go to this conference. And I can't say it was a good paper, but it was a paper and it got me to the conference and it got me just thinking about it that much more. That was in 1998 so it really took 12 years from start to finish, really the first time when I actually started to think about it historically and write about it historically too in the book you know. And over those 12 years my life changed in all sorts of different ways and I was in different places and it kind of came together piece by piece. And so that's, you know, I don't know if people are interested in that part of it, but I guess in terms of the book itself and this history, so I became interested in the period of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan and why they brought baseball and what they thought baseball was going to do in Taiwan. It had a lot to do with civilizing people. They got Taiwan from the Ching Dynasty in 1895, it was full of mostly Chinese people but also people, they were called the Aborigines, they're Austronesian people. They're people who originally started in Madagascar many, you know, tens of thousands of years ago and kind of island hopped. We don't have the proper
maps here to show but island hopped their way to the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, the Ryukyu Islands. They’re the original peoples of Taiwan. They're often the really good players in baseball, and so there's this interesting understanding about these Aborigine people what were headhunters and they were fierce and the Japanese had this interesting way of talking about these people and why they were good at baseball, and the Chinese when they took over Taiwan, again in 1945, had these interesting discussions of these people as kind of natural athletes, and maybe they weren't really developed thinkers so much, but they used to throw spears and now they can throw a baseball. They used to cut people's heads off and now they can swing a bat. There was always this great contradiction about colonialism with the Aborigines, and so one thing I really wanted to do in this book, and I think I kind of did it, was to really center them in Taiwanese history. They're 2% of the population and it's really hard to understand Taiwanese history I came to see without putting these people in the center. Maybe it would be like trying to understand American history without paying attention to the first peoples of North America. That would just, it wouldn't make much sense historically to try to do that. And so I wanted to try to center these people who are kind of at the center of this baseball narrative, and when the Japanese took over Taiwan they wanted the resources from Taiwan. Largely were, the things they wanted were camphor, the camphor trees, marble, a lot of this stuff came from the mountains of Taiwan, which were mostly the mountainous, eastern two thirds, and the way, when the Japanese took over Taiwan, they were very afraid of these Aboriginal people. And one of the things that they came to over time was to civilize them with things like baseball. And by civilizing them, to then much more easily get their hands on these resources that were one of the reasons for taking over Taiwan in the first place. So there's this weird contradiction then about these people being naturally fierce, genetically, I mean fierce is the word they always used, but then also being, the way they were was sometimes it was, it was a matter of genetics and sometimes it was a matter of being civilized by the Japanese. And so there was this really interesting contradiction and about colonialism and what it can achieve and what it doesn't achieve and there's these moments of self-congratulation in Japan that we finally got everyone pacified and civilized and then it kind of comes right back at you when these same people that you've civilized that pacified massacre many, many dozens of Japanese in this 1930 incident. So the Aborigines were a group, again the Austronesian Aborigines were, that was an issue I really wanted to deal with and to historicize and to think about how people see them and what that has to do with history.

[Music]

Moderator: You're listing to a podcast of Conversations with Cal Poly Authors. In this second segment, Andrew continues to describe the complex story of baseball in Taiwan, how it is integral to the island's long history of colonization by many different cultures, the research for his book including studying the transition from Japanese to Chinese rule at the end of World War II and how it affected the game of baseball.

AM: I was interested in what happened at the end of World War II, Taiwan is given to the Republic of China. They don't last very long in China. They last for four more years until 1949, then China they moved to Taiwan and so Taiwan, these days, is still called the Republic of
China, and that government for the first 40 years or so, really first 50 years in Taiwan really till
the mid to late 90's was very dominated by a mainlander; people from mainland China. And so I
was really interested in what would happen or what did happen to this Japanese game once
this mainland Chinese regime came over and took over Taiwan because they tried to destroy as
much Japanese culture as they could. And so it's another interesting question about Taiwan,
Taiwan has had these waves of colonialism, first from the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch
then to the Manchu's then to the Japanese then to the Chinese in the 1940's, and so Japan
never really, sorry Taiwan never really gets to be decolonized in the 1940's because as they're
decolonized, as soon as the Japanese leave, here comes this other regime from outside that's
just as interested in civilizing people in terms of Chinese morals, Chinese culture. I was really
interested to see how baseball lasted, because most Japanese culture couldn't last. There were
certain things that could say, that could be used like buildings could be used and things like
that, but really they tried to suppress Japanese language and music and, of course, flags and
fashion and it really drove the Chinese crazy that they got to Taiwan and they'd been fighting
the Japanese for eight years, I mean this incredibly bitter war in China in World War II, and they
get to Taiwan and everyone there looks Japanese. They wear Japanese clothes, they speak
Japanese, for 50 years they've assumed that the way to get ahead in life was to be educated, to
work their way through the Japanese system to become Japanese imperial subjects. And so the
Cantonese, the Nationalist Party really tried to suppress as much Japanese culture as they could
but baseball is allowed to stick around because baseball must have had some kind of value to
them. So I was really interested to see what that was. Two more things that I would mention.
To get back to that Little League era from the last 60's into the pretty much the late 80's this
question then of Chiang Kai-shek regime winning a lot of, they took this very seriously. I think it
might sound kind of strange to us to think of Little League baseball as being this great triumph
but in Taiwan they took it really seriously. Their boys, their 12 year old boys, played baseball
like no 12 year old boys had ever played. I mean they were so darned good and they talked
about it as again, this great triumph of Chinese civilization, of Chinese culture, of Chinese work
ethic, the Chinese family, Chinese education. Sun Yat-sen's three principles of the people, but I
was interested then again to try to explore how the contradictions within that picture and the
fact that this was still remembered as the Japanese game largely played by the Aborigines kids.
And so these Aborigines kids playing a Japanese game winning glory for Chinese culture just
seemed like a really rich thing to get into. And then what I close the book with is the way it
works these days, this real pretty strong Taiwanese nationalism over the last 20 years or so
that's really based on a difference from China, this understanding of Taiwan being culturally
different from China, that obviously the period of Maoism in China that they didn't experience
in Taiwan, by definition, means it's a different place. People take it to really great lengths and
they talk about the genetic differences between people in Taiwan and the people in China and
of course the people in Taiwan pretty much by definition have Aborigine blood as well and all
this mixing that used to go on back in the day. And so, I was interested to see who baseball was
used these days as a way of expressing difference from China, cultural independence that can
then be used to make political independence very logical. And then this is also very fragile. If
China didn't have, and so that's the other part of this that China ever really had a history of
baseball. For them the fact that this was a Japanese game made them not want to play it, and
so in Taiwan it being a Japanese game gave it great prestige. In China the fact that it was a
Japanese game meant that it was to really be avoided. And so people in Taiwan, especially in the 90's and the first decade of the 21st century, made a big deal about how different Taiwan was that they had baseball and China didn't. And that's a great ideology I guess because it's very useful until the 2008 Olympics when China beat the Taiwanese team and then the whole thing crumbles. And not only does it crumble kind of ideologically but this very kind of tragic moment this old man actually dies, he has a heart attack. He's watching this game, it goes into extra innings, the PRC team wins and that's, he can even, he can't even live beyond that. People actually were coming to the hospital that day with depression and physical problems and all these articles in the paper urging people to get to the doctor. It was really a traumatic event to build this kind of Taiwanese nationalism on baseball and then to see it kind of crumble. And then I guess I'll kind of throw in one more thing, and then to even find out and to make it even worse is to find out that the Taiwanese players probably threw that game purposely because of gambling and the big, the Mob in Taiwan. So it was just this incredibly traumatic moment that was happening as I was really wrapping up the book. And so it turned into an interesting way for me to finish that century of baseball as the national game.

JM: Well before baseball came from Japan to Taiwan, it had to come to Japan and it's you know people talk about round pegs in square holes, I don't think there's ever a more spectacular example of a square peg fitting into a square hole. Japan it's almost as if Japan had for 400 or 500 years had, there was something missing. They had this tremendous group effort, kind of a team spirit that's really strong in Japan. It's immersing yourself into group effort and they have a lot of *tamashii* is a Japanese word meaning spiritual emphasis, you know, that goes beyond materialism. During the war the Japanese used the word *yamato-damashii* which means, *yamato* is the Japanese race and it's the spirit of a Japanese race. We know that the Americans can make more tanks and planes, we know they have more soldiers, don't worry, we have *tamashii* it's the spirit, it's the mobilization of mental power and they had this, but of course they modernized the samri went away so they sort of sunk down to youth and they had this youth spirit and yet every sport in Japan, until the 1880's was individual. It's sumo, kendo, all kinds or archery, all individual sports. They never had a team sport. Only place in the world, the one place in the world that would have jumped on team sports it's almost as if they had a committee and they said hmm, we've got all this youth, we've got all this emphases on group effort, we don't have a team sport. Some Americans came over in 1880 and said we've got just the thing for you. And so whoever, I don't know exactly how Japanese started, it started very early in contact with Americans and it just seemed to fit so perfectly and it has been, I was a baseball player. I was supposed to be an East Asian specialist but I also played baseball professionally for three years so I know baseball very well, and I've played baseball in high school and when I went to Japan for the first time, early 1960's, late 1950's actually, I saw a game that I did not recognize. I mean the dimensions were the same, the rules were the same, but here are people who I mean *seishin* spirit, *tamashii* another kind of spirit, I never heard these words used for baseball when I played. America has this theme of coolness, you're supposed to be cool, you know sort of thing. There's no coolness in Japanese youth culture. You go all at it with your whole psyche and you have to see this and that this spirit was transferred to Taiwan, I don't know much about Taiwan, but after reading this book, of course, I'm an expert. [Laughter] But anyway that whole effort was transferred and then the Japanese youth
culture was transformed or was given to the Taiwanese youth, but the Japanese who played
the game themselves and then gradually brought in the Taiwanese and the Aborigines, but
there's some things about when you go to Japan and you start realizing what's going on you see
things which are really quite amazing. They have two high school, and, and professional
baseball, they have college baseball, no bigger deal than it is here with about college football
and professional baseball, but high school baseball is a religion and you start understanding this
when you see their two tournaments, one in March and one in autumn every year. Thirty two
teams come to this place called Koshien. Koshien is like Mecca in the Islamic world. It's just a
stadium, it's an old stadium, it's even a very attractive looking stadium. They've got much nicer
stadiums in Japan. That was built in 1925. It is the home of the high school baseball
tournament, which you think of March Madness, I mean 15 to 20% of Americans are interested
in March Madness, 90% of the Japanese are interested in the high school baseball tournaments.
The one in the spring in big, the one in the fall stops everything, 15 days. There's a professional
baseball team that uses that stadium that can't go home, it can't play a home game for two
weeks. You see things like single elimination tournament when teams lose you're sitting there
watching TV and the entire team is in serious crying, all of them. You look in the stands all the
spectators associated with that team are crying. The players have a little satchel and they reach
down and they take the earth of Koshien which is like taking a small piece of earth of Mecca, I
don't know, some sacred place and putting it in a thing and those people will take that home,
especially teams that don't win all the time. I suppose if you won it three or four times in the
past it's not a big deal, but there are 49 teams there, there are 4000 teams that start the
tournament locally, so a little more than 1% of the teams can make it to Koshien. So going to
Koshien is something a community talks about for decades and that little satchel with the,
all the players do this, with the earth will be on the mantel in everyone's home and the school
will have some of that too. It's sacred earth of Koshien.

AM: Wow.

JM: And I've never, you know, and when I played baseball we never got into that kind of
spiritual thing; it was a game you know? So a lot of what Andy talks about in the book, this
transference of that youth baseball to Taiwan which is like a rite of religious passage for youth
and it is so important and it just beyond anything you could imagine in football or basketball,
anything in this country. Baseball just is exactly what the Japanese apparently needed and
when they got it, it's sort of sunk down to a very youthful kind of emphasis, high school mainly.
Also college baseball, there's the Big Six in Tokyo and that's kind of a big deal, but no more than
our college sports, but high school baseball is something that, it says a tremendous amount
about Japanese society, about the culture, about their, the purity of youth and they train
unbelievably hard, even though in Japan high school is a very strategic time because the only
way to get really in upper middle class status in Japan is to go to a good university. And so you
have to study very hard because the, all things like volunteer work, sports, being a well-
rounded person mean nothing. There's an examination you take anonymously and if you get a
high enough score on the examination you go to that university. They don't even know who you
are. They don't care about anything else. Even your grades in high school are never looked at.
Theoretically you could not even go to high school and take the exam and go to the University,
Tokyo which is the highest ranked university. And so it’s so important that they spend all this time studying yet there's all this emphasis on baseball. A lot of it is vocational high schools, not always, but about half of the people who make it to [foreign language spoken] vocational high schools but many of them are ordinary academic high schools and these guys the comradery, the sacrifice; they slide into first base. As a baseball player I could say that's a bad idea but they do it anyway. It's just showing the dedication and to get your uniform dirty is, it's honor, it's an honor that you wear it on the field. Only one team ends up as the victor and that is, and even before the first day, the first of the 15 days, they have these opening ceremonies and, my God, its flags and everybody has the school anthem played on national TV every time they play, I mean for each team, and they do a little background. These are high schools background and you know they show a picture of the school and they'll interview people in the community, it's really something and it was really an eye opener. So this is something that's an extremely important part of Japanese society. If you don't know anything about it you won't understand Japan very well.

[Music]

Moderator: You're listening to a podcast of Conversations with Cal Poly Authors. In this third segment participants Brett Bodemer and John McKinstry join the conversation. Brett points out the mark of a good book as one in which the reader takes away overarching themes and in his book Andrew points out some of very interesting ones; the connection between nationalism and sports and the history of colonial powers spreading their supports to the cultures they dominate. John and Andrew talk about the continued cultural importance of the teams and players from the 1930's and how baseball was considered a ticket to Japanese assimilation.

[Music]

BB: Well, I guess, to me, the mark of a good book is when you actually can start thinking about the themes in it and not just think about the actual content, the topical content, so that was fascinating, and usually if there's some things bubbling in your mind already and you read a book at the right time, it can sort of keep the things percolating. So you had talked about the fact that the British had actually used cricket kind of as a civilizing thing in their colonies, and I remember when I was living in Hawaii I would see South Asians play cricket you know Diamond Head you know things like that, so that's still a tradition and in Seattle. There were Samoans who were playing cricket and sometimes the police would have to come out because they were having a two team riot on the play field. I got to thinking well then some of the other colonies; the French didn't really spread a game as far as I know of in their colonies. The Germans never spread a game, so you have these two things and then of course the question came to me, well how does this apply to baseball in America? I actually played Little League in the early 70's, I was probably on the worst team ever. We had a game called in the third inning because it was 32 to nothing and we couldn't get an out. The Taiwanese teams they were on a different planet as far as we were concerned. I was thinking about when I watched the Super Bowl this year I was alternately nauseated and appalled when I'm waiting for the game and for 45 minutes I'm watching jets fly over and football players doing a montage of reading the Declaration of
Independence, this long thing. How did nationalism and sport get tied up like this? And then of course I'm reading this book, I'm going well baseball, what was the deal there anyway and how did it get to Japan? So I did a little scratching and there was a guy named Spaulding who was a baseball player and baseball players originally were running the team and stuff like that. Well he decided no, we need the owners to run baseball. Spaulding you probably recognize from the name on all the balls and stuff, and he actually took a show on the road to Japan, among other places, to try to promote baseball. So there's that element. There also was this, there was a concerted campaign to make baseball America's game so they were promoting it and pushing it, and then of course around the First World War, you know, they're promoting it as baseball game, okay so then the government has this opportunity and says okay well, we've promoted it as America's game and you can do something with this, so they start singing the national anthem just at the beginning of World Series games originally, and then by World War II they were singing it at every game. You know you think well in your book you see in Japan you know the Japanese makes this concerted effort to okay we're going to civilize these people and we're going to use this game as one way to do that. Here, it's just sort of this ad hoc merger of symbiosis between like government and private enterprise basically, capitalist enterprise, and yet the people who participate in it, basically like myself, I get mad when I can't buy my beer because this national anthem is playing right, everything stops. It's like what is this right? So these things that affect all of us we're doing unconsciously without being aware of, so this was an example of, so it really got me to think more about that, to actually explore that; that was interesting. The other thing is the fact that they're promoting ethnic, you know the ethnic, you know sort of the savage Aborigines who are really good at baseball and stuff like that. At this time they're still, you know, in a very similar situation to Native Americans and Hawaiians in particular. They're sort of exalted in some strange kind of way and yet you know from a health standpoint they have a huge hepatitis problems and things like that. They're used but they aren't necessarily valued for the other things like that, so those are just some of the things I thought about. There was one other thing I wanted to ask about, actually I asked Andrew about it originally but it's interesting, I thought it was interesting was he cited an author named Michael Herzfeld who talked about with the Taiwan thing of course you know it's great shame that they're winning because they're cheating basically by having a Little League team drawn from a population of 9 million people against Rochester New York, but then it's glory too. And he was saying that sometimes when you have something that's shameful and at the same time, shameful to outsiders, but something you can be proud of yourself in some weird way that that's actually bonds people in unity, and I kept groping for an example in our culture and I couldn't think of one. But Andrew immediately had one, which was prohibition. It's kind of glorified but it's actually kind of a—really it's not a thing we should be proud of on any facet. And I don't know, John can you think of anything else that would be like that or another example?

JM: Not exactly. Because it's a small country, it's been besieged by the outside for so long, I think there's this really strong need for bonding, for national bonding. I don't think we feel that so much. U.S.A., U.S.A. and all that stuff but you know we don't have much to bind us. We don't have race, we don't have religion, we don't have, there's nothing, there's no single fact except nationality that bonds citizens of the United States. Places like even Japan which is pretty much
mono-racial and a place like Taiwan, although it's diverse, I think they, especially in relationship to the mainland, they need something to feel that's theirs and that's unique, so nationalism I think has a real strong core in a place like that. So I can't think of any example from the United States that would, that we would feel sort of secretly proud that was sort of dishonored or something.

BB: And Andrew you did a lot of interviews. How did you, how did you pick your interview subjects and how did you get them to participate? Was it easy because they love baseball or?

AM: Most of these people—I think there are different stories for a lot of them. Some people I would just kind of happen to meet and it's something that people talk about. I guess it probably wouldn't come as a surprise; like that sports can kind of be something that you can kind of talk about across class and things like that. Or if I met someone and people you know would want to, would be interested in you know what, why I was there, so what brings you to Taiwan or something and I start talking about these kinds of interests. And so it became kind of easy to find people who had been involved in this in some way. I guess I have different stories for different people like interviews and then others just kind of through contacts and through friends, but those are pretty, some of those were pretty fun interviews with people who had been around for a long time, people who'd seen a lot of this and lived through a lot of this and brought this whole other kind of understanding to it. So one interview that I did was with a friend of mine who he's written a lot about this topic, specifically the Japanese period, the East Taiwanese but he'd gotten to know this fellow who was, he started playing in the 20's so by the time I met him you know he was in his 80's. And he had, so he'd played under the Japanese and he had, I think he had been coached kind of under the Japanese period and then he became a really famous Little League coach in the R.O.C. period. And I know that probably sounds like a strange category, the famous Little League coach. I guess we have other strange categories like the famous reality show person or something. The famous Little League coach is a category of people in Taiwan and some people actually become such Little League coaches they can coach professional teams which is kind of hard for us to imagine here. But he had taken the first Taiwanese championship team to Williamsport to win the World Championship in 1969 and it was a really great interview. Just thinking about the way that he remembered the Japanese period and remembered what it was like to get this, to still play this game under the K.M.T. He very strongly identifies as a Taiwanese person. He wrote his autobiography in, probably in the 90's in 6 volumes and the volume of each of them would alternate between Chinese and Japanese, kind of depending on how he felt about that period of his life and kind of what, and it wasn't necessarily chronologically organized. It was kind of more by mood and he could say things in Japanese that he couldn't really say in Chinese. And he had this great, the great explanation when I asked him about when he was first playing in the 1920's, he said he liked baseball because “they told us we weren't Japanese and we weren't Chinese either.” That stuck with me for so long and came to really help me organize what I was working with in a sense of Taiwanese people having been Chinese, but then not being Chinese anymore, trying very hard to become imperial subjects, to be treated as equals in the Japanese empire, but then also being told pretty much, you know, honestly you won't really be Japanese. You can try really hard and you can go in the military and you can do all these things but you can't really ever be
true Japanese. And so that contradiction then really helped me. You wouldn't expect that you could get a kind of theoretical orientation from just an interview that some guy's living it, but it really did help me when he talked about it that way.

JM: In terms of the empire and their positioning it's interesting that the high school tournaments started in 1912 and in 1931 a team from Taiwan was runner up, made it all the way to the final game, which is a big deal, and the final game, no work gets done, no one goes to school. I mean like the Super Bowl it gets a good audience but the Super Bowl is always played on Sunday. This is a weekday and it's in the afternoon. I had a friend once who ordered pizza during, this wasn't even the final game, it was like the quarter final game and this is a business selling pizza is their business and they told him the high school game is on, there are no drivers available, as if dummy, don't you know that? To make it to the semifinal game is a very big deal and Taiwan was integrated that much and this was mainly an Aboriginal team I think, G.I.— Exactly what Andy was saying, they had this ambivalent attitude in the press, they honored them, they praised them but of course it was always very clear that they were not Japanese. This was a kind of foreign body even though it was part of the Japanese empire. These were, they praised them in sort of ways which were condescending.

AM: Yeah, that team is a really famous team in Taiwan. They're still really famous in Japan and so I met a guy who's the head of the alumni association for that school. It's now, it used to be a forestry and agricultural vocational school, but over the years it's become a university, and so this fellow is a head of that university alumni association. I met him in his apartment and he had a book of pictures of all the people he'd met with. I met him in, that was in 2007 in the summer and he showed me a picture of the last person who came to his living room to visit him and it was Ma Ying-jeou who is now the President of Taiwan and that's something that he had, like you give respect to the Head of the Alumni Association of Gi Nou University because many 80 years ago that team came in second.

JM: But any team that comes in second, it's a community achievement. It's something you would talk about as a tremendous source of pride. Even if you got to the quarter finals it's just such a big deal. It's hard for I think outsiders to understand and see how important it is.

AM: So there's this team that's really famous then, for a while I was just kind of like wondering what to do with it in terms of writing about it until I realized kind of the timing of it and the way that the Japanese treated them in 1931 it made a lot more sense and that is it came very soon after this massacre, I made a quick reference to a second ago, in 1930 which is up in the mountains and it's called, is it called, they call it an incident technically, the Musha incident, but it's an incident where again it was a sports meet, just a school sports meet up in the mountains October of 1930, and as they're playing the national anthem out come these [foreign language spoken] Aborigine braves who just start killing Japanese people, any Japanese people they can find. They're even killing Taiwanese people because they can't tell. They're dressed like the Japanese subjects and they can't really tell who's Japanese and who's not. They kill 140, 150 of them. It was this incredible crisis in the Japanese empire because after 35 years in Taiwan they thought they had gotten this all figured out. They thought they had civilized these people. They
were very proud in their guidebooks. They would say you can travel to Taiwan and you can go through the mountains and nothing will ever happen to you and the head hunters have been civilized and pacified and it was this great crisis then. We'd been doing this for 35 years and they're still killing us, and the whole point of Japanese colonialism is that that doesn't happen to the Japanese. The Japanese colonize better than the French, then the Americans, than the English, than the Dutch. They're Asian. They know how to treat Asian people. They have these links with the Aborigines, these deep links back into the millennia, links with Chinese culture. The whole point of Japanese colonialism was that this would not happen to them. They would not trample on people the way that the English did and the Dutch did. And so when this happens in the 1930's, this great crisis I think I mean it is a great crisis, and so it came to make a lot more sense why in 1931 they really, really loved seeing this team come to Japan and do really well. It seemed to, it made them feel like it is working. You have this team from Kano, this school called Kano, and the team had Japanese players, it had Chinese players, it had Aborigines players, they worked together. The manager is Japanese and he gets them all to work together to see a single goal. People still talk that way at that school now, again, 80 years later.

JM: There's a plaque.

AM: There's this massive statue when you go onto campus and it's a reproduction of the plaque that they won for coming in second place and it's a very, that language gets reproduced all the time in Taiwan today about the different ethnic groups coexisting, working together. And so that team, then the fact that that team, because you would see in the newspapers all the teams that parade around at the tournament and they came out last, they were saved for last, they got the biggest ovation. And people had this great investment in Japan to really cheer for this team to get to the finals but then not to win. You can't have a win but you can have them come in second and it makes everything, everything's back the way it should be about how colonialism is supposed to work and who's on top and who's really in charge. But these Aborigines, the Chinese people they get it. More importantly we—again it proves that we've done this colonial, we've worked this out. Even today, again this guy who runs the alumni association, they get invited back all the time. So these guys are dying of course, I mean there aren't many left of them, this was a long time ago, but when they go back they get approached all the time by people like on the streets. They wear these, they wear their hats and people see them wearing these hats like oh my gosh can I get a Kano hat. I just happen to see this; this was in Yokohama at a newspaper exhibit. It was a newspaper museum and I was looking at just different kinds of front pages they'd had through the years of the Asahi I think, and I was taking some notes because they had the front page of this, they had the front page of this Kano team from Taiwan coming in second place. And this usher came over and kind of asked me and I tried in this tragically horrible Japanese to explain like what I was doing, and he got so excited. Kano, you know that was, it was just, again there's some, it still has its value that they did, there's a value to the way that they did colonialism and this still works that way.

[Music]
Moderator: You're listening to a podcast of Conversations with Cal Poly Authors. In this fourth and final segment Andrew and John continue to discuss the profound impact of the Japanese colonial period and baseball on the Taiwanese people. They talk about the impact and importance of the famous baseball player Sadaharu Oh born in 1940 in Tokyo to a Chinese father and a Japanese mother, who dominated the powerhouse Tokyo Giants for 22 years. His story reflects the cost of assimilation. Early in his life he was the victim of discrimination because of his Chinese ancestry and despite his celebrity in Japan, he never became a Japanese citizen. In fact, he holds citizenship in the Republic of China and cultivates his Chinese identity.

[Music]

AM: Maybe I’ll just mention one more thing that was along those lines about the *yamato-damashi* this *yamato* spirit. There's great stuff from World War II about the Aborigines from Taiwan who fought in the jungle and how there’s great stuff on how the Japanese came during World War II to describe these Taiwanese, Aborigines as the most Japanese people of all. That they had, and it’s kind of this triumph at the end of the empire, the empire is going to end, these Aborigines don’t get any points for being Japanese anymore when they go home to Taiwan. In fact they get in big trouble for having fought for the Japanese. But they knew their way around the jungle, they knew the plant, because their people had been in these jungles, you know they had retained this knowledge of the jungles and the plants and just survival and stuff for all these years. And there’s this great stuff then from World War II about people kind of realizing they’re more Japanese that we could have ever been, and then it ends and these people go back to Taiwan and like I said, you don’t, it’s not prestigious to have had more Japanese spirit than the Japanese when you go back to Chinese Taiwan. So there are all these people that moved back and forth and that these stories really grabbed me then of people trying to achieve things for their family and these stories of these Aborigines high school students that would go to Japan, they would study at good schools in Japan. No Aborigines ever went to study at good schools in Japan. It just didn't happen. There are the figures to prove it. The people who did it were the baseball players and that’s, there was this kind of mobility in these, you could actually trace these people by becoming civilizes and performing these Japanese rituals were able to do things for themselves, for their families, it brings up other kinds of questions about what the cost is in assimilating and how one lives with oneself when one assimilates and kind of leaves other people behind that don't get to assimilate.

JM: You mentioned the great Oh Sadaharu or Sadaharu Oh as they we say who's Chinese, whose father was Chinese, his mother was Japanese. This is long before he finished his career playing in the 70's and this is before we took the best players and brought them over here. He should and would have been a star here. He was a great hitter. He hit more homeruns than Hank Aaron but of course it’s not in American baseball, and it's true that fences are a little shorter and the baseball may have been a little more lively. So it's hard to say in direct competition how he would have done, but of course he has a Chinese name. Oh is a Chinese name. It's Wong in Chinese, and everybody knows that but I think they've completely, they've adopted him as into their national fabric. They don't think of him as any kind of foreigner. Although I found out through reading Andy’s book something that just completely blew me
away. When I first went to Japan, Oh Sadaharu was at his peak. He was hitting 40 homeruns, 50 homeruns a year and he was just an unbelievable hero. He played on the Tokyo Giants. They have the same colors as that team that used to play on the polo grounds and they moved someplace else, I can't remember. Anyway, they took that sort of the same colors and everything and it's the dominate team in Japan. It's like the Yankees in the 30's and so on here. And then another player, Nagashima, who was like a movie star, very handsome guy, and these two guys were the most popular men in Japan because they don't have any other competing sports that reach that level. High school of course but in professional sports, basketball, soccer, nothing really is much off the ground. And here's this guy and I describe him by reading Andy's book that he never took Japanese citizenship. It's like reading that yes, Lou Gehrig was a great player but actually he was a German national or something like that. Not a Japanese citizen? He's the quintessential Japanese. So it's very strange because there's that feeling, although his father didn't come from Taiwan as I just learned, he has this connection to Taiwan and he goes there and by reading Andy's book I realized he spent a lot more time there than I realized and he's done more things there than I realized. I don't think the Japanese are clued into that much. He is Japanese, he's a manager of a team, he's been the manager of a couple of teams, his face appears in commercials countrywide. He's still kind of a demi-God in Japan and he's in the Japanese mind he's Japanese, but of course he's, I don't think he speaks Mandarin at all, he speaks, of course he grew up in Japan, but he does, I wonder how it is, probably in the third grade. But anyway he goes there and is accepted as a hero in Taiwan.

AM: Yeah I was telling John this is kind of my favorite part of the book, learning about this, and so it's also misunderstood in Taiwan. A lot of people think that Sadaharu Oh is Taiwanese. His dad was from China, his dad was from Juzhong Providence in China. He went to Japan at the same time in the 20's and 30's when a lot of kind of poor Chinese people were going to Japan to work and send some money home. He stayed there, married a Japanese woman, so Oh was born in, I think it was 1940 or something. I learned that when his team made it to Koshien he wasn't allowed to play. So John remembers him playing one year so maybe it's the fact that he played one year but didn't play his first year. But it's this incredibly traumatic moment that he talks about that he couldn't play at Koshien at this incredible tournament because he wasn't ethnically Japanese; his dad was Chinese. And he decides I'm not—okay if I can't be Japanese I'm not going to be Japanese. So he starts to cultivate this Chinese identify for himself. He still—on his mailbox his name is written in Romanized, Romanization in the Chinese pronunciation.

JM: Wong—

AM: Wong Chen-chih

JM: No Japanese knows that by the way. They hadn't seen the mailbox I guess. [Laughter]

AM: And so he cultivated this Chinese loyalty and what was interesting is that of course that Chinese government that had ruled China where his dad lived there was now in Taiwan. So for him to fulfill that and to fulfill that filial observation he now had to go to Taiwan. He couldn't go to Communist China. And Communist China always tried to get him to go, they wanted to win
this proper— the most famous Japanese slash Chinese person on earth to go to China. He never did. He would always go to Taiwan. And he'd meet with Chiang Kai-shek every time he would promise Chiang Kai-shek, I'm really going to work on my Chinese this time, you know, I promise you. And he would, again it was like everything would stop in Taiwan when he would come to Taiwan. He would tour around but it was, I found these great news reels from the 60's of him visiting all these places and what was so interesting to me about it was that people in China, sorry, the Chinese ethnic people in Taiwan, so the mainlanders, the people that came in the 40's to Taiwan, they love Sadaharu Oh because he was a Chinese person who had triumphed in Japan despite Japanese discrimination. They tried to keep him down, but he'd become the best baseball player in Japan. Taiwanese people loved him because he was Japanese. He had triumphed over his Chinese heritage. They loved it when he came and gave, he would come to stadiums and the stadiums would be full, you know, tens of thousands of people and he'd give these hitting clinics and he could only speak in Japanese. And of course every Taiwanese person in the 1960's could speak Japanese. They'd been educated under the Japanese. They loved the fact that he couldn't speak Mandarin. There would be these really weird moments and again, the officials of the K.M.T. they knew that he was famous, they knew that he was great but they didn't really know what homeruns were, they would confuse homeruns with touchdowns sometimes, they would, I saw this news reel of, he's like, I think he was—I'm forgetting his position right now, but he was an extremely important person in the government who's kind of—Oh hands him a bat. He's [multiple speakers, inaudible, laughter]. And so Oh kind of goes when he's in Japan he's remembering how he's Chinese, he's remembering how he's going to live up to his father's kind of Chinese heritage. When he goes to Taiwan he seems to remember that he actually isn't Chinese, he's Japanese. And then again in Taiwan today no matter what party you represent, no matter what politician you're talking about, you always have to give, you have to give it up to Sadaharu Oh. You have to go to Japan, you have to make a pilgrimage to show respect to Sadaharu Oh, again, as this great Chinese slash Japanese figure. He kind of stands for everything. He's the greatest Japanese, he's the greatest Chinese, he's the greatest almost Taiwanese. So that actually kind of became my favorite part of the book because it was just something I was able to do through these news reels that I couldn't quite, I wouldn't have quite understood without seeing.

JM: And when you say discrimination, that's strictly in the governmental level. Baseball administrators, the average person loves this guy. There's no discrimination at all. I mean every young person idolized him when he was a player. He managed the Giants for a long time until they had several losing seasons and that's hard to do. To manage the Giants is like managing the Yankees in the 30's. And it's, it's just pinnacle baseball, professional baseball, and when he left the Giants he took another team. So in the population, except maybe some government strange nationalistic ethnocentric thing at the top, he is a very, very popular person. So he's not seen as some sort of minority person to look down on.

[Music]

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