

## Making Japan's National Game





# Making Japan's National Game

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF BASEBALL IN JAPAN

Blair Williams



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In memory of Ken Port



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## **A Note on Transliterations and Translations**

This book uses English and Japanese-language sources. Unless otherwise indicated, Japanese names are ordered with the family name first. For example, in the name Abe Isoo, “Abe” is the family name and “Isoo” is the given name. If a place name has a common English transliteration, such as Tokyo or Kobe, then I follow that usage and drop the macrons that accurately represent the Japanese kanji. Where necessary, I have consulted Korean-speaking scholars for translations and transliteration of Korean materials. Many English-language archival resources do not use macrons for Japanese words; in this book, I maintain the original format of the wording seen in the archival material. Unless noted, the author performed all translations appearing in this book. The author assumes all responsibility for any errors, inconsistencies, or oversights.





## A Note about Sources

This book uses archival sources acquired from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, and the National Diet Library (NDL, 国立国会図書館) in Tokyo, Japan. In regard to the sources that originate from the period of the Allied Occupation of Japan (formally, 1945–1952): the records housed at the NDL are microfiche facsimiles of materials housed at NARA. This book indicates the origin of these archival materials based upon their box and folder number as indicated by NARA, which is the system used by the NDL as well. This book uses images that have been declassified and are in the public domain. This book also uses materials acquired from the microfiche edition of the Prange Collection housed at the University of California-Los Angeles. The originals of these materials are held at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland. Other graphs and images appearing in this book are used under fair use laws.



## Foreword

### The Transformative Power of Baseball

In the 1970s, Murakami Haruki and his wife ran a popular jazz café in Tokyo, where he spun records and made fresh sandwiches for workers passing through on their lunch hours. As the sun set, Murakami set up a small stage for musicians and poured drinks for patrons who lingered until late in the night. The Murakamis loved the community they had created, but the costs to operate their business had them drowning in debt. The thought of escaping their situation crossed their minds frequently. One night after work, they found a ten-thousand yen note (about three hundred US dollars) on the street. Instead of reporting it to the police as was the Japanese custom, they pocketed the money and hoped that it would provide some financial relief that month.

One summer day, Murakami Haruki went to a Yakult Swallows baseball game in Meiji Jingū Stadium. Completed in 1926 and located in the gardens dedicated to Japan's first modern emperor, the stadium was the oldest sporting venue in Tokyo and the second oldest stadium in Japan. After the extensive damage done to Tokyo in the firebombing of World War II, Meiji Jingū Stadium was one of the oldest structures in Japan's capital. As Murakami stretched out with a beer to watch the game, the sound of a bat hitting a baseball inspired him to escape his stressful work situation and start a new life. Murakami recollected in a 2015 essay:

Young people like us who were determined to avoid 'company life' at all costs were launching small shops left and right. . . Although we were doing what we liked, paying back our debts was a constant struggle. . . My twenties were thus spent paying off loans and doing hard physical labor. Looking back, all I can remember is how hard we worked. I imagine most people are relatively laid back in their twenties, but we had virtually no time to enjoy the 'carefree days of youth.' We barely got by. . . One bright April afternoon in 1978, I attended a baseball game at Jingu Stadium, not far from where I lived

and worked. . . The sky was a sparkling blue, the draft beer as cold as could be, and the ball strikingly white against the green field, the first green I had seen in a long while. . . In the bottom of the first inning, [there was] a clean double. The satisfying crack when the bat met the ball resounded throughout Jingu Stadium. Scattered applause rose around me. In that instant, for no reason and on no grounds whatsoever, the thought suddenly struck me: *I think I can write a novel.*<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of whether one is an elite player or an underdog, when a baseball player succeeds, that moment in the spotlight etches the belief that anything is possible upon the hearts of fans. At that game, Murakami experienced the transformative power of baseball. Baseball, and the community around it—the players, the managers, the stadiums, the crowds, the newspapers and journalists, the politicians and businessmen, the television stations and photographers, the security personnel, the vendors everywhere selling peanuts and beer and soda and gum and programs and jerseys and hot dogs and soba noodles—is a microcosm of society. Inspired by the crack of the bat, for the next six months Murakami spent every night at his kitchen table typing out his first novella, *Hear the Wind Sing*, which went on to win a prize from one of the country's premier literary journals, *Gunzo*. Following the award, Murakami closed his jazz café and set out to be a professional writer. Sparked by the transformative power of baseball, Murakami Haruki became the most celebrated novelist in contemporary Japan.

We can see how baseball transformed the life of one Japanese person. Now, let's begin the journey to understand how baseball shaped the trajectory of the entirety of Japanese society.

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1. Murakami Haruki, "The Birth of my Kitchen-Table Fiction: An Introduction to Two Short Novels," in *Wind/Pinball: Two Novels* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 2–4.

## Introduction

This book tells the story of how the Japanese people imagined and built their country, and it does so through the lens of the baseball communities in Japan. I begin with the first appearance of baseball in 1872, and then illustrate how the Japanese baseball community became the most powerful, influential, and enduring sporting culture within modern Japan. I contend that the nature of baseball and its community evolved within the changing circumstances of Japanese and global society. At times, the Japanese baseball community embraced an ethic of cosmopolitanism, while at other times, it was the vanguard of producing isolationist Japanese nationalism. In other words, at times the Japanese baseball community created new pathways for intercultural communication and cooperation, and at other times, the baseball community created homogeneous communities that delineated who was Japanese and who was not. As an import from the United States, baseball created unique channels of communication, cooperation, and tension between Japanese and American peoples that lasted throughout the twentieth century. However, the Japanese baseball community continuously reinvented itself, and produced a dynamic identity that often contrasted with American baseball communities.

This book illuminates how baseball became the Japanese national game. Because the “national game” is affected by the “nation” — which is a people’s concept of ethnicity, culture, history, language, and territory — it is important to know the massive shifts that occurred in Japanese nationality throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I tie the story of baseball into discussions of Japanese nationalism and discuss *bushidō* philosophy (“The Way of the Samurai”) before 1945, *nihonjinron* (“Theories of Japaneseness”) during the Cold War, and *kokusaika* (“Internationalization”) from the 1980s onward. I also explain how broader athletic cultures, such as physical education systems and mega-events like the Olympics, prepared the Japanese people to strengthen their bodies in the defense of the Japanese nation and state. Therefore, my history of baseball in Japan speaks to how corporate and governmental entities

leverage sports, athletics, and recreation to transform the behavior of individuals and communities to meet goals of political and ideological agendas. In this case, I demonstrate how the Japanese baseball community shaped and reacted to nationalist philosophies that emerged throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, baseball became the Japanese “national game” not just by means of popularity, but through its imbrication with the very notion of what constituted being “Japanese.”

There are two important recurring themes throughout this book that unite my narrative. The first theme is nationalism, or the discourse about the qualities of those people included in the nation. In this book I demonstrate how *bushidō*, *nihonjinron*, and *kokusaika* philosophies of Japanese nationalism are linked through the community of baseball. Thus, we are able to see ways in which the baseball community shapes nationalism over multiple periods of Japanese history through the actions, thoughts, and writings of politicians, journalists, and pundits. The second theme is of unequal treatment of the Japanese by the Americans, both in terms of general society and in terms of baseball. Like many books about Japanese history, this book divides the history of Japan into “pre-war” and “post-war,” with Japanese defeat in World War II in August 1945 being the demarcation point. From 1868–August 1945, Japan’s state and empire was predicated upon undoing the humiliating and unequal treaties and colonialism enacted upon Japan—and Asia—by America and the Western powers. After August 1945, Japan spent nearly fifty years under a “subordinate independence” to the United States. Americans treated the Japanese baseball community as inferior and unequal, so the Japanese baseball community sought equality both on the playing field and in global society.

## Setting the Stage for Global Baseball Communities: The Age of Imperialism

There is a prevailing belief among Anglophone scholars that the baseball community in Japan is—and has always been—characterized by masochistic and self-sacrificial behavior. Scholars claim these abusive behaviors—both towards oneself and inflicted upon others—are a modern continuation of traditions begun by Japan’s ancient warrior class, the *samurai* (侍). I contend that these claims of a transcendent masochistic national character trait of Japanese people are inaccurate and not supported by historical evidence. To address this issue, I will first summarize how baseball developed in the United States and become linked to the American imperial agenda throughout the nineteenth

century. As a result of American imperialism, Japan formed into a modern state to protect itself from Western encroachment. The nascent Japanese state studied the West passionately, which led to the formation of a Westernize physical education system and eventually the importation of baseball. The Japanese baseball community then became enmeshed with Japanese nationalism, which laid the foundation for the creation of Japan's national game.

## Origin Stories: Baseball Becomes the American Pastime

The sport of baseball is not strictly of American creation; baseball evolved from the British game of rounders. John Thorn, Major League Baseball's current official historian, located evidence that the first reference to "baseball" appeared in the United States in 1791.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the early nineteenth century, baseball spread on the United States' east coast, and in 1845 Alexander Cartwright of Knickerbocker Base Ball Club in New York City codified a set of rules that led to the creation of the first amateur baseball leagues.<sup>3</sup> In 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first professional team in the United States, and they were joined shortly thereafter by other professional teams to create Major League Baseball (MLB).<sup>4</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, baseball had colloquially become the American "national pastime." In 1907, Henry Chadwick — a British essayist who had earned President Theodore Roosevelt's approval for his historical work linking baseball to rounders — joined a group of American writers to write the official history of baseball. However, Chadwick was shouted down by a cadre of American men who insisted that baseball originated in the United States. These American authors created a mythical father of baseball, Abner Doubleday, who was a Civil War general who had no documented interest in baseball. This "lie agreed upon" shifted baseball's origins from Europe to the United States and provided the sport and its players with a military pedigree.<sup>5</sup>

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2. John Thorn, "The Pittsfield 'Baseball' Bylaw of 1791: What It Means," *Our Game*, August 3, 2011, <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/the-pittsfield-baseball-bylaw-of-1791-what-it-means-940a3ccf08db#.uphpocsu3>. Thorn argues that textual evidence shows "baseball" was played as early as the 1750s in the United States, but corroborating evidence has yet to be found.

3. Steven P. Gietschier, "The Rules of Baseball," In *The Cambridge Companion to Baseball*, ed. Leonard Cassuto (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10.

4. Although not an immediate predecessor, the Red Stockings were a precursor to the current Cincinnati Reds professional baseball team, which formed in 1882.

5. John Thorn, "Abner Cartwright," *Our Game*, <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/abner-cartwright-defba02abf5f>.

As participants in the “national pastime,” the American baseball community was complicit in American imperialist, colonialist, and militarist endeavors. Broadly speaking, the nineteenth century saw white European settlers displacing Native peoples in the West, and the American Navy was also present in the Caribbean and East Asian countries in efforts to locate colonies, establish trade relationships, and bring American “civilization” to the indigenous peoples. Baseball team owners utilized these expansionist policies to pursue cheap baseball labor and employ players who did not enjoy the same civic rights of the audiences who watched baseball (and thus could be taken advantage of). Beginning in the 1880s, MLB implemented the “Reserve Clause,” which permitted team owners to control player contracts indefinitely and effectively treated humans as property. The United States Supreme Court upheld this Reconstruction-era clause — which mimicked aspects of slavery while giving it the appearance of “choice” in labor and wages — twice in the twentieth century, first in 1922 and again in 1970.

The preservation of the Reserve Clause until 1975 encouraged baseball managers and owners to find players willing to work for ever-lower wages.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, MLB did not have a coherent policy regarding employment based on race. On the one hand, MLB prohibited the employment of black Americans on their team rosters, which resulted in the creation of the independent Negro Leagues. On the other hand, MLB owners employed Native American, Hispanic-heritage Latinos, and Afro-Caribbean players by the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> In 1886, Major League Baseball expanded beyond the borders of the United States and held regular exhibition games between white American teams and Cuban teams, and in 1890 the New York Giants baseball team spent the winter in Havana training with professional Cuban players.<sup>8</sup>

Americans used baseball to justify the spread of American influence and military might. When the *USS Maine* was sunk in Havana Bay in 1898, newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst advocated that the United States intervene on behalf of the baseball-loving Cubans to fight the *fútbol*-loving Spanish

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6. Thomas F. Carter, *The Quality of Homeruns: The Passion, Politics, and Language of Cuban Baseball* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 51.

7. Peter Bjarkman, *Baseball with a Latin Beat* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1994), 204; Jeffrey Powers-Beck, “Chief’: The American Indian Integration of Baseball, 1897–1945,” *American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2001): 508.

8. Carter, *The Quality of Homeruns*, 51.



colonial masters.<sup>9</sup> By 1912, famed author Carl H. Claudy readily equated baseball to “civilized warfare.” Claudy wrote in his book, *The Battle of Base-ball*,

[W]hen you come to think of it, base-ball is a battle. It has its generals, its captains, its lieutenants, its rank and file. It has its grand strategy, its tactics, its drill. It has its battlefield, its arms, and its equipment. It is a battle with rules, to be sure, but then, a real battle, between real armies, is also fought according to certain rules, called by nations the laws of civilized warfare. These rules prohibit, for instance, the use of expanding or mushroom bullets, or poisoned swords or bayonets. The rules of the battle of base-ball prohibit certain kinds of balls, shoes, gloves. Civilized warfare recognizes the flag of truce, and will not permit a man carrying one to be shot. He is safe so long as he has the white flag. Base-ball...permits a soldier of the enemy to be safe from danger of being ‘put out’ so long as he keeps his foot upon any of the white bags used as bases.<sup>10</sup>

Claudy wrote in the context of generalizing warfare from individual actors to broader communities. Sports in the European context had long been an activity to subsume violent tendencies among elite males into socially appropriate action, with famous examples being fencing, equestrian skills, rowing, shooting, and dancing. Claudy’s work remarks on how now the masses are engaged in “civilized warfare,” meaning baseball had delivered to the common man the ability to subsume violence in society and instead express aggression on the baseball field.

Therefore, baseball in the American context was well-known for militarist and imperialist affiliations, and the American communities delineated themselves based upon ethnicity. By treating players — that is, the laborers of the game of baseball — as ownable proxies within ephemeral contests of simulated warfare, the American baseball community created a hierarchy of athletic shows of bravado. As men played baseball, they showcased not only their body’s strength and power, but the strength and power of their homeland in relation to other territories. Because most other sporting communities in America did not form a professional league or have the social importance of baseball, this was a trend unseen in other athletic communities.

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9. Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 38–39.

10. Carl H. Claudy, *The Battle of Base-Ball* (New York: The Century Co., 1912), 4–5. Claudy, a noted speculative fiction writer, noted in the preface of *The Battle of Base-ball* that his parallels between baseball and warfare were authentic and not dramatized.

## Revolutionary Beginnings: Japan Becomes a State

This book focuses on the baseball community in Japan during the twentieth century, but in order to understand many of those narrative arcs, it is necessary to discuss some aspects of pre-modern Japanese history. The most important aspect of pre-modern Japanese history as it applies to the story of baseball is the social function of the samurai warrior class. In the 1870s, the elimination of the samurai as a privileged class contributed greatly to the emergence of Japan as a modern state. However, it was also the hallmark of this modernity—the arrival of capitalism, the emergence of markets, the appearance of Japan’s internal national consciousness and its empire—that Japanese elites *reimagined* the role of the samurai in their country’s history. This reimagining happened in the literary and intellectual realms in the form of *bushidō*, which was a late-nineteenth century discursive invention that linked modern Japan to its ancient territorial and cultural roots via the character of the noble and self-sacrificing samurai. Although the majority of nineteenth-century *bushidō* proved to be conjured myth, *bushidō* became foundational to the educational systems of Japan throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Because baseball communities in Japan emerged in these elite schools where *bushidō* was constructed and taught, it is crucial to understand the influence of *bushidō* philosophy upon the creation of the Japanese state and how those powers shaped the Japanese baseball community.

## A Brief Overview of the Samurai in Tokugawa Japan

The samurai class emerged gradually over several hundred years, from about 700AD until 1100AD, when a conglomeration of economic, political, and military forces necessitated a landed military elite that was distinct from the aristocrats of the Emperor’s court.<sup>11</sup> In the sixteenth century, violence among the samurai class became normalized when the local lords, called *daimyō*, competed for regional hegemony by military or political conquest.<sup>12</sup> However, the samurai became so over-militarized in their defense of individual honor that they began seeking vengeance outside of the jurisdiction of their *daimyo*. The *daimyō* quelled the samurai’s cycle of retribution by instituting a policy

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11. Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), Chapter 2: The Coming of the Samurai: Violence and Culture in the Ancient World.

12. Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, 138.

of *kenka ryōseibai*, which delivered “equally severe punishment of all parties to a quarrel regardless of the reason behind a conflict,” and it became a law by 1616.<sup>13</sup> At this time, the Tokugawa family had claimed the position of *shogun*, a title reserved for the military leader of Japan who was the *de facto* warlord. The Tokugawa family combined centralized rule in Edo (now Tokyo) under the “great public authority,” with local or regional oversight by *daimyo* lords.<sup>14</sup> This *bakufu* system, wherein the Tokugawa shogun led the regional *daimyo*, controlled Japan from 1603–1868 and possessed a near monopoly on formalized violence, forbid a number of non-Japanese customs, and closed the Japanese borders to most Western interaction.

The limited interaction with Western traders was conducted on the island of Dejima near Nagasaki, where Dutch traders were allowed to land. Western scholarship trickled into Japan by means of this trade. Thus, at a time when imperial European powers were racing to control much of the world’s landmass and forcing indigenous cultures to adopt “enlightened” Western knowledge, most people in Japan were insulated from this process. Although knowledge of the Western processes of statecraft, capitalism, the industrial revolution, and the scientific revolution seeped into Japan by means of trading with the Dutch, much of that knowledge remained unacted upon until the nineteenth century. Despite rampant European imperialism in Asia throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the people living under the Tokugawa *bakufu* remained protected from the military and cultural traumas experienced by their geographical neighbors. By the mid-nineteenth century, the British controlled India and were fighting wars with China; the United States had expanded to the American west coast and were interfering in Hawai’i and the Caribbean, and the Russians had long controlled Siberia.

While the Western imperial powers dissected Central and South East Asia, the Tokugawa shogunate restricted samurai violence, which dramatically shifted samurai from a warrior class into a bureaucratic class. As sociologist Eiko Ikegami summarizes, life for most of the samurai population throughout the Tokugawa era became mundane, “uncolored by power and glory. . . Increasingly, a strictly defensive attitude crept into the samurai mentality that combined an orientation toward personal safety with procedural perfectionism.”<sup>15</sup> Many samurai were monetarily indebted to the socially lower-ranked (yet wealthy)

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13. Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, 142.

14. Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, 152.

15. Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, 260.

merchants; these merchants became the *de facto* patrons of many samurai families.<sup>16</sup> In summary, by the nineteenth century, the samurai class had not been characterized by their prowess in battle for nearly two hundred years, but were instead known for their prowess in managing the *bakufu*'s bureaucracy.

## The Meiji Restoration and the End of Tokugawa Japan

Russian and British traders frequently approached the Japanese *bakufu* in the early nineteenth century asking for trading privileges. The *bakufu* responded with increasingly vociferous rejections of foreign encroachment. However, many samurai and *daimyō* wondered if the *bakufu* could effectively reject European encroachment. In 1839, the British commenced a war with China over the right to trade opium. In 1842, the Chinese conceded defeat and signed humiliating treaties that permitted the continued sale of opium and the extraterritorial right of British subjects to be tried by British law on Chinese soil. Many Japanese elites understood that China's failure to resist the West was a foreshadowing of what could happen to Japan if the *bakufu* clung to its traditional isolationism.

In 1854, American Commodore Matthew Perry sailed his steam ships into the harbors outside of Yokohama, and demanded that Japan open their borders and accept trade with the United States. By 1860, the United States had won the right to keep consulates and opened up a total of eight Japanese ports to trade; thus Japan had been subjected to numerous unequal treaties that permitted American influence on Japanese soil.<sup>17</sup> Over the next few years, dissatisfied samurai and peasants revolted against the Tokugawa *bakufu*. In 1868, a group of samurai from the Satsuma and Chōshū domains in Kyūshū defeated the shogunate armies, and installed the hereditary emperor, Mutsuhito, to lead the newly consolidated state of Japan.<sup>18</sup> The new bureaucrats' motto would be to learn from the West through the mass importation of Western industrial, scientific, intellectual, military, and cultural practices in order to undo the humiliating treaties and protect Japan from becoming a colonized territory of a Western power. Although the hereditary samurai elite played a significant role in enacting these changes, it was the reimagining of the samurai as warriors that transformed these Western imports into something truly "Japanese." It is

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16. Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, 175.

17. Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2009), 54.

18. Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 59.

within this context that baseball — the American national game — entered into Japanese society, and its adherents began the journey that made baseball the Japanese national game.

## Book Trajectory

Chapter one discusses the creation of a Westernized athletic system in Japan from 1868–1890. Although baseball was introduced to Japan four years after the Meiji Restoration, when the country was still in a massive race to “catch up” to the West by using European and American models of science, politics, and industry, Japan lacked any sort of athletic culture where sports could be played. Chapter two discusses the evolution of *bushidō* philosophy, and how it became entangled within the emerging baseball community in Japan. Chapter three briefly discusses baseball within the early twentieth century Japanese empire in Taiwan, Korea, and the Liaodong Peninsula. Chapter four discusses the creation of the National High School Baseball Tournament (“*Kōshien*”), which became the world’s largest sporting event in the early twentieth century and brought ethnic minorities from throughout Japan’s empire into the Japanese baseball community. Chapter five discusses how the period from 1920–1944 featured numerous Japanese “athletic mega-events,” wherein athletics as a whole served to strengthen the bodies of Japanese people and demonstrate loyalty to the emperor, thus creating a connection between individual health and national health. Chapter six discusses how the Japanese baseball community operated in the “Fifteen Year War” from 1931–1945. A brief Interlude follows, which discusses the level of destruction in Japan during World War II and the dire need for recovery, rebuilding, and rehabilitation.

Chapter seven discusses the resumption of baseball after World War II, and the steps the Americans took to control the new athletic environment in post-War Japan. Chapter eight discusses how the Japanese athletic world operated at the onset of the Cold War in 1947 and the subsequent “Reverse Course,” wherein the American Occupation authorities remilitarized Japan to serve as a bulwark of democratic capitalism in the defense of Asia from communism. Chapter nine discusses how the Japanese baseball “cold warriors” made intense efforts to connect with the American baseball communities and created Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) in the image of the United States’ Major League Baseball. However, during this period of courting, the Japanese baseball community realized that the Americans were conducting a broader plan to control global baseball organizations, leading to the discussion in chapter

ten of how the American and Japanese professional baseball leagues severed official relations throughout the remainder of the Cold War. Chapter eleven discusses how in the context of *nihonjinron* — a form of culturally homogeneous Japanese nationalism — that the NPB yet the league’s superstars in the 1960s and 1970s were almost all ethnic minorities. The most iconic figures of Japanese baseball, Oh Sadaharu, played at this time and was neither an ethnic Japanese nor a Japanese citizen. Lastly, in chapter twelve, I discuss the resumption of official relations between the Japanese and American professional leagues in the context of post-Cold War *kokusaika*, or “internationalization” policies that sought to export Japanese culture in the world to protect domestic interests and maintain Japanese global power.