

## Baseball Ambassadors and Globalization

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Japan's proud victory in the World Baseball Classic in March 2006 represented more than one nation's triumph over another. Although we rooted for nation-states, in reality, the real winner was the dynamic corporate entity called Major League Baseball (MLB). This juggernaut dominates through the process of sports globalization. The curiously named World Baseball Classic (can an event reach the status of a classic in its first rendition?) was contrived by MLB to market the wares of global talent hoping to play in the United States. The very name was a means of linking baseball history (a long, illustrious story stretching back into the mid-nineteenth century) with global audiences, under the marquee of the American corporation that stands atop the professional baseball world. Although disappointed in the U.S. team's performance, MLB was in no way unhappy with the outcome of the Classic. The high profile garnered by the surprising world-wide interest in the tournament, and the triumph of Japan, which supports the strongest organization after MLB, furthered the business ambitions of the American company. Commissioner Bud Selig ignored the U.S. loss, focusing on growth: "we [MLB] were here not only to perpetuate and provide the internationalization of the sport [*sic*], but to create interest in places that there hasn't been a lot of interest, and we've achieved that."<sup>1</sup>

Lurking behind the Classic's superb play on the field and the patriotism off of it was the MLB empire that had already driven stakes deeply into Asia and Latin America. Private enterprise and consumerism undergirded this effort. I will draw on a variety of sources, including MLB's marketing publications from 2004 (the latest year for which there is substantial data), to build a case that the company has built an "empire" in Asia that is quite distinct from the diplomatic influence of the United States government. Despite the oft-cited close ties of sports and official diplomacy, if anything, America's elite baseball establishment has used government (rather than vice versa) to further its agenda of shaping the business culture in Asia and elsewhere along a free-market model. American ballplayers might visit abroad as ambassadors for the game and for their country, but the master they truly serve is the corporation that pays them for their part in the globalization process.<sup>2</sup>

Some of America's most important cultural exports abroad — Disney, fast food, and

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<sup>1</sup> "Commissioner Bud Selig on the Success of the Classic," <http://ww2.worldbaseballclassic.com/2006/index.jsp>.

<sup>2</sup> For sports as a diplomatic tool for governments, see U.S. Department of State, "Sports and Diplomacy in the Global Arena" (Washington, D.C., 2005). For the business-government diplomacy relationship, see William H. Becker and Samuel F. Wells, *Economics and World Power: An Assessment of American Diplomacy* (New York, 1984).

baseball — point to sources of America’s influence in Asia. Corporate-run globalization has penetrated Asia where diplomacy could not, and in baseball, MLB has propagated a culture of American-style business that has created a mini empire in the region. While holding domestic protectionism at bay, Washington supported — but most notably, agents of free enterprise carried out — the expansion of American products. Corporations were naturally the dynamic forces in the liberal trade order. They crafted strategies and used their own resources to capture markets abroad, even during a Cold War era laden with the heavy hand of government in security policy. Transnational service-oriented and cultural export companies constructed social and institutional networks across frontiers to become catalysts in globalization, the process of treating the world as a single marketplace both for producing and sourcing goods and services through economic and cultural integration. Such businesses forged a private-based “empire”, if you will; carriers of mass culture, they have been America’s most effective exporters and have harmonized the global economy to the extent that their cultural empires rival the nationally-based U.S. empire in influence. The state played the role of usher to the corporate actors, which targeted the buying audiences in Asia.

That American mass culture seems so ubiquitous raises claims that the United States has generated an empire — an informal one, but an empire nonetheless. Such a view misses the point. One authority defines the term as “a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society.”<sup>3)</sup> That is too state-centered. The government might have controlled Asian nations in formal and informal ways, but corporations spread the American dream to Asia. For driving transnational empire is American branding, which has given globalized business such a worldwide appeal that foreign consumers have adopted them as their own (as Japan did with baseball). The mass culture empire is marketed abroad as well as invited. Above all, it is undeniably pervasive.

How did this happen? Clearly, gaining market access in Asia, and especially Japan, were famously troublesome from the 1950s onward. The US government poured technical assistance and encouraged trade and investment in outposts deemed critical to the Cold War. With half the planet’s population and ten newly independent nations, Asia held opportunities in an era of “interconnected, interacting, and interdependent” people, announced a State Department official in 1956. “Air flight, radio, television, and projected spatial exploration crisscross meridians and longitudes; consolidation of the globe has thrown closer together the immense diversity of cultures, arts, racial, and national groups,” he added in an unwitting explanation of globalization.<sup>4)</sup> Consumer aspirations made Asia ripe for the reception of American free enterprise, but exports to the region, while climbing to over 20% of total U.S. overseas sales in 1960, rose no higher than 27% into the 1980s. The lucrative Japanese market, in particular, seemed resistant to US goods.<sup>5)</sup> Enter Major League Baseball.

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<sup>3)</sup> Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, 1986), 45.

<sup>4)</sup> Kenneth Young, Jr., Director, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, “The Challenge of Asia to United States Policy,” *Department of State Bulletin* 35 (August 27, 1956): 341.

The professional American baseball establishment has long campaigned for the expansion of baseball overseas; it has championed an “imperial” policy of private enterprise through the pursuit of a single (baseball) market, which is the ultimate goal of globalization. Writers have chronicled the arrival, dissemination, and popularity of the sport, specifically in Japan.<sup>6)</sup> Professional American football, basketball, and hockey have gone global, but it is Major League Baseball that is truly the most internationalized, as non-North Americans comprise over a quarter of big league rosters, 224 countries and territories (forty-nine in the Asia/Pacific Rim area) receive telecasts of games, and the company is pouring money into overseas markets to promote the sport.<sup>7)</sup> This effort has led MLB to marshal its funds and organization in a blitz of promotional schemes that promise to change — through business networks — the very culture of Asia.

The most effective initial promoter of the sport abroad was Albert Goodwill Spalding, who took his Chicago White Stockings and a team comprised of allstars around the world in 1888–1889 to sell the game and his sporting good equipment, all under the guise of American exceptionalism. An entrepreneur with a unique sports business acumen, Spalding combined economic ambitions with the cultural icons of nationalism, manliness, Anglo-Saxonism, and the frontier spirit. Although his tour bypassed East Asia, the sport had already taken hold in Japan.<sup>8)</sup> The tour hinted at the potential for profits in the international arena for U.S. baseball.

In baseball and its relationship to Asia, globalization has long been a catalyst to change in the form of the back-and-forth pattern of baseball migration. Tours have been ever-present; the next big one after the Spalding trip occurred in 1913–1914 by the New York Giants and Chicago White Sox. Unlike Spalding, who, in a race-conscious ranking of nations had taken his teams through the British empire and Europe and bypassed nations of color, the Giants-White Sox tour stopped for games in Tokyo, Kobe, Osaka, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Manila. MLB had hit on a marketing idea, as the Japanese — witnessing their first Major League caliber games — found nirvana.<sup>9)</sup>

The MLB corporation did not pursue an international marketing strategy until the 1990s, but the global presence existed and Asian baseball remained a source to be tapped. Tours continued, the most famous being the Yankees eighteen-game trip to Japan of 1934 when Americans got a taste of Japanese potential as Lou Gehrig, Babe Ruth, and two others struck out in succession against the 90-mile an hour fastballs of the great Eiji Sawamura, who would

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<sup>5)</sup> For instance, American Embassy, Tokyo to Department of State, August 13, 1959, box 1397, 394.41/8–1359, Decimal Files, Record Group 59, Department of State Records, National Archives, College Park; Alfred E. Eckes and Thomas W. Zeiler, *Globalization and the American Century* (Cambridge, 2003), 263–264.

<sup>6)</sup> Sayuri Shimizu-Guthrie, “For Love of the Game: Baseball in Early U.S.-Japanese Encounters and the Rise of a Transnational Sporting Fraternity,” *Diplomatic History* 28 (November 2004): 637–662.

<sup>7)</sup> Robert Whiting, *The Meaning of Ichiro* (New York, 2004), xv–xvii.

<sup>8)</sup> Thomas W. Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes: The Spalding World Tour and the Birth of the American Empire* (Lanham, 2006).

<sup>9)</sup> James E. Elfers, *The Tour to End All Tours* (Lincoln, 2003).

perish in the Pacific War. MLB did not seem to mind; indeed, the tour stimulated the organization of a professional league in Japan in 1936. After World War II, Little League and U.S.-Japan college series flourished, and since the 1950s, minor and major league players from the United States have been recruited to Japanese professional clubs. Most recently, in November 2004, US allstars led by Roger Clemens and David Ortiz played a Japanese squad in what has become a biannual tradition of American Major Leaguers touring Japan since 1986. They now return, however, with their own Japanese stars.

The flow of American players to Japan for a half century has been impressive; the rising stream of Japanese (and Korean) players in the other direction is the story of globalization. The Republic of Korea's experience with the game extends back to high school play in 1905, and now such players as Chan Ho Park and Byung-Hyun Kim are household baseball names. Taiwan has won nearly a dozen Little League world titles, and Major League scouts have snapped up these youngsters. The Philippines is another source rich in talent and MLB is involved in developing the game in the China market, as well. And, of course, there is the prime Asian baseball nation of them all, Japan.

The striking thing about the Japanese experience with Major League Baseball is the flow of top-notch players to the United States, which stands at the nexus of the globalized labor pool of players.<sup>10</sup> For starters, Hideo Nomo defied the ban on Japanese players signing with MLB, placed by the Nippon Professional League since 1967, and inked a contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1995. He seemed to epitomize the post-Cold War era of globalization: Nomo was the first Japanese player to wear Nike shoes in Japan's All-Star game, he steadfastly adhered to MLB training methods (rather than the more punishing Nippon League regimen), and he showed an understanding of how global public relations marketing can overcome parochialism when he signed in front of 24 photographers and 15 television cameras. When he pitched in the All-Star game (the first Japanese pitcher ever to start that contest), it was broadcast to 15 million fans back home, many of whom watched at in morning rain on the streets. They are able to watch because of globalization, namely the confluence of satellite technology and entrepreneurial broadcasting companies.

Nomo became an ambassador of sorts for Japan, who opened the door for other Japanese stars to move to the United States, but his arrival signaled more for MLB. He showed the Americans that fortunes lay in the international arena. Thus, when Ichiro Suzuki made his appearance in Seattle, MLB welcomed a Japanese television network's plan to set up a booth at the park and broadcast to Japan all exhibition and regular season games played by the home team. In September 2004, millions of Japanese fans watched early in the morning on huge television screens in Tokyo as Ichiro surpassed MLB's single-season hits record. Ichiro was more popular than the Emperor, it was said, but he proved very appealing to Americans, too. American kids wore his number and fans shouted "gambare!" to cheer him on. While the Prime Minister of Japan announced that, "Ichiro makes me proud to be a Japanese," the most

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<sup>10</sup> The following section on Nomo, Ichiro, and Matsui is drawn from Whiting, *The Meaning of Ichiro*.

revealing point was the feeling that, as one journalist wrote, “we Japanese have become members of the world.”<sup>11)</sup> Major League Baseball found itself at the forefront of a cultural convergence.

Driving this new hands-across-the-seas mentality was money, however. In 2003, Hideki Matsui joined the New York Yankees, helping to attract an estimated \$500 million into the NY economy through advertising and tourism from Japan. He was a little empire unto himself, although MLB preferred to think of him as a global citizen working for the American League! It is stunning how technology, money, travel, and culture have fused in ways that have made the baseball world smaller. Nomo, Ichiro, Matsui, now catcher Kenji Johjima, who is learning English in order to guide the Seattle Mariners, represent the dynamism of globalization which MLB hopes will transform the baseball world into a single, global market under its banner (and thus give it a more secure competitive footing with American football, the NBA, and FIFA). In team sports that have an international appeal and a huge profit motive — baseball, soccer, basketball — there is less place for proud nationalism (as we see in the highly symbolic but economically dwarfish Olympics) and much room for corporate, transnational empires.

Heeding the calls of many MLB critics (among them, Chiba’s Bobby Valentine), the American company instigated what might become a real world series with the Baseball Classic. The sixteen national teams which played in the US, Japan, and Latin America before an ESPN audience in all regions of the planet, including the Middle East, Australia and New Zealand, and Africa, proved that international play means profits. Incredibly, television market share reached 36 in Japan for the Saturday semi-final, and throughout Asia and Latin America, TV ratings were very high (although attendance at the Tokyo Dome was lackluster). MLB had hit on a goldmine; more merchandise was sold in the first round of the Classic than organizers expected to sell in the entire three-week tourney. Having coaxed other national professional associations to send their players, MLB wanted them, above all, to buy into its vision. That idea, simply, is “of a day when its game is played on multiple continents and the demand for the major league brand — think programming, advanced media, international corporate sponsorship, and yes, T-shirts and hats — cover the globe.” Commissioner’s Selig’s “dream” is a postseason, international tournament, once there are “advances in speed of air travel to help facilitate it.” For now, MLB was happy to sell an Italy cap, South Africa home jersey, and a \$234.99 Derek Jeter USA shirt.<sup>12)</sup>

Baseball flourishes in Asia, and the American brand is a hot commodity. Kids prove the point. Japan has nearly seven hundred Little League teams, second only to the US. Japanese kids are better prepared than Americans, playing under highly-skilled coaches and practicing year round. No wonder that Japanese teams have won Little League world championships

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<sup>11)</sup> Whiting, *The Meaning of Ichiro*, 30.

<sup>12)</sup> Tom Verducci, “Global Warming,” *Sports Illustrated* (March 6, 2006): 56. See also Barry M. Bloom, “With Classic over, MLB looks ahead,” [http://ww2.worldbaseballclassic.com/2006/news/article.jsp?ymd=20060321&content\\_id=1358067&vkey=wbc\\_news&fext=.jsp&sid=wbc](http://ww2.worldbaseballclassic.com/2006/news/article.jsp?ymd=20060321&content_id=1358067&vkey=wbc_news&fext=.jsp&sid=wbc).

three of the past six years. But revealing are the remarks of the Fuchu team, whose members said after winning in 2003 that they dreamed of becoming stars in Yankee stadium — on a world stage — rather than in Japan.<sup>13)</sup>

Globalization, promoted by the “imperial” Major League Baseball corporation, has changed the face of Japanese baseball. That Major League Baseball International (the global arm of MLB) established an office in Tokyo in 2002 (it also has offices in London, New York, and Sydney) means that Americans will continue to identify Japan’s finest players. The very timing of MLB International’s debut, in 1994 during the strike year that cancelled the season and World Series and undermined domestic fan support for the game, apparently points to the desire of the company to find a fix to its financial and image woes. From the outset, MLB International organized a pitch, hit, and run program in Australia, and within two years, it planned to expand the event to Germany, Britain, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. From these offices emanates a host of programs for kids, coaches, and seasoned players.

Critical to building on its hegemony over the game is MLB International’s “initiatives to grow the game and the MLB brand” through “broadcasting, special events, market development, licensing and sponsorship,” and the like, as the New York headquarters of MLB has reported. The results were impressive: MLB International supported the growth of baseball in over sixty countries during the past ten years; its broadcasts were translated into thirteen languages (including Japanese, Mandarin, Korean, Papiamento, Arabic, and Hindi); its licensing business yielded healthy growth in retail sales that proves the brand reaches more international consumers than ever before; and MLB sponsorships rose by more than a third from 2003 to 2004 alone, with partnerships forged between the company and some of the world’s best-known brands on a global, regional, and local level.<sup>14)</sup>

Some in Japan certainly view this as US imperialism, though globalization may one day tip the scales back in Japan’s direction. For starters, the internationalization of the Major League Baseball player pool is so extensive that other nations besides Canada will likely soon demand teams. With the number of foreign born players in the Majors skyrocketing over the past decade or so, and their presence clearly being a savior for the professional sport in America, it is in MLB’s interests to expand overseas. There are now over one hundred national baseball federations. In 2004, foreign players in the Majors and Minors hailed from thirty-three nations, including places not considered hotspots such as Brazil, Germany, New Zealand, and the Netherlands.

In addition, Major League Baseball’s Japan office generates a rising tide of revenue with endorsements, licensing and broadcasting partnerships, and sponsorships in retail outlets that make Japan a key element of the corporation’s marketing strategy and bottom line. One critical element is the lucrative broadcasting partnership with Dentsu, Inc.. Under a six-year contract beginning in 2004, this communications giant airs MLB regular season games three times a

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<sup>13)</sup> Whiting, *The Meaning of Ichiro*, 266.

<sup>14)</sup> MLB, *Major League Baseball International 2004: Year in Review* (New York, 2004), 3.

week over the Fuji, NHK, and TBS networks, as well as showing over 250 games via satellite television on NHK BS and Sky Perfect TV!. Dentsu not only manages broadcast rights in Japan but it also sublicenses a nightly news highlight program as part of the deal with the Major Leagues. As well, MLB partners with MBC and ESPN Star to deliver games in Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and China. Relatedly, the Cartoon Network Japan has teamed with the Majors to encourage the game among kids.<sup>15)</sup> In short, MLB International has moved in on Asian media markets.

The marketing onslaught has penetrated many sectors of the Japanese economy, blitzing citizens with the MLB product. “Nothing compares to the excitement of attending a Major League Baseball game,” claims MLB International, and thus the company remains committed to playing games in major markets around the globe. The season in America has opened twice in Japan, in a sold-out Tokyo Dome, in 2000 and 2004. Combined with exhibition games against the Yomiuri Giants and Hanshin Tigers, the MLB teams brought attendance for the six games above 300,000, and NTV recorded a 12.06 household rating for terrestrial television while NHK provided satellite coverage. Domestically, the games in 2004, hosted by Yomiuri and supported by Ricoh and Mastercard, were telecast on ESPN 2 and the YES Network, garnering a nineteen percent higher audience than those Japanese who watched the Yankees opener of 2003. Concessions sales in 2004 shot up 264% from 2000, as MLB secured a large space next to the Tokyo Dome that exclusively sold its merchandise.<sup>16)</sup>

The All-Star matches between MLB and the Nippon Professional League, sponsored by Aeon and Mastercard, and promoted by Mainichi Shimbun, were the latest in a line of series dating back to 1986. Five cities hosted the games, in which over 300,000 fans attended, and NTV, TBS, and TV-Asahi carried the contests on television. Surrounding the games were so-called “fan-oriented retail outlets”, such as the Sports Authority, Xebio, Alpen/Depo, and Ikspiari, which all participated in sweepstakes to support the sales of logos, team, and player products. Concession sales were strong, as was attendance at player appearances. Fan shops at Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka, Sapporo, and Nagoya Domes stocked MLB goods. In addition, with support from McDonald’s of Japan and the Mizuno Corporation, MLB launched the Kids MLB Club in Japan in 2004. This outlet provided children with special access to baseball information and events, and McDonald’s invited children at Japanese outlets to enter a drawing to take batting practice at All-Star series games. Sporting goods manufacturer Mizuno offered the same opportunity, and forty winners were selected for each of the eight games, greeted by MLB players who signed autographs and posed for photos. The juggernaut of fast-food, Mizuno, and baseball’s elite professional organization showed MLB’s intention of expanding its imperial domain by flooding the consciousness of adults and children.<sup>17)</sup>

Winning the hearts, minds, and wallets of children is a time-tested means of building the

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<sup>15)</sup> MLB, *Major League Baseball International 2004*, 8.

<sup>16)</sup> MLB, *Major League Baseball International 2004*, 14, also 15–16.

<sup>17)</sup> MLB, *Major League Baseball International 2004*, 17. Also sponsoring Kid’s Day were Wacoal, Sports Authority, Yomiuri Shimbun, New Era Cap Company, Majestic Athletic, and Upper Deck.



base of expansion, as the Disney model attests. Kids Day at the Tokyo Dome on March 27, 2004, in conjunction with the Yankees-Devil Rays workouts, attracted 30,000 children and parents, free of charge. The schedule of activities were built around the workouts of the two teams. McDonald's distributed tickets at their 521 Tokyo-area restaurants and Mizuno handed out tickets to members of their K-Klubs and baseball teams. This same focus on children is behind youth league start-up programs, pitch, hit, and run contests for ages eight to twelve (replete with video guides for kids and teachers), and the "Roadshow": a mobile, interactive experience in malls, schools, and sporting events that provides a batting cage and pitching tunnel for participants to test their skills against mock professional players. An "Envoy" program sends high-school and college coaches to twenty-six countries to develop players, coaches, and umpires; eight coaches traveled to China in 2004 to prepare players and managers for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Many of these youth programs have focused on developing baseball markets, such as Australia, South Africa, and Germany, though Asia has gotten its share. In 2003, in tandem with the China Baseball Association, MLB began to train the Chinese team. In addition, in July 2004, MLB joined Mizuno and the Chinese baseball organizations in the first-ever national schools tournament that featured more than 160 teams from Beijing, Shanghai, Tian Jin, and Guangzhou playing in elementary through university divisions.<sup>18)</sup>

The MLB advertising effort occurs on both sides of the Pacific. Virtual signage, in which foreign advertisers insert their brands electronically behind the batters, sold out for the 2005 Allstar game from Detroit, and was used since 2003 in the World Series and playoff games and on opening day from Fenway Park in Boston. Toshiba electronics, Aeon department stores, and sports and fitness and energy companies advertised in U.S. parks. Meanwhile, deals with the Sports Authority athletic chain in Japan, a Snoopy-Major League partnership, and the development of a super ball with team logos to be sold in vending machines throughout Japan are some of the marketing efforts taken by the US organization. Similar retailing arrangements launched by the Majors have occurred in Korea and Taiwan (and in Australia, Quebec, and at the European Baseball Championship in the Czech Republic in 2005). In all, the MLB has fast developed its global empire.<sup>19)</sup>

In 1989, international revenue for the Majors was about \$10 million; since Ichiro and Matsui appeared in America, global revenue from television, sponsorships, licensing, and events alone topped \$100 million in 2004, with half of this coming from Japan. These impressive figures show that the Japanese hold substantial purse-strings over professional baseball in America, and MLB welcomes that. Japanese companies advertise in American ballparks; Nintendo bought Japanese-language signs behind home plate at Seattle's Safeco Field. Thus, global recruiting of players is important to MLB's bottom line. MLB International

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<sup>18)</sup> MLB, *Major League Baseball International 2004*, 16, 20-21.

<sup>19)</sup> MLB International, "Development Initiatives," <http://mlb.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/mlb/international/index.jsp?feature=development>.



believes that foreign players are a prime reason why licensing of foreign businesses to sell its products has steadily risen over the past half decade. For instance, Doublepark, the Hong Kong fashion retailer, built on its Spring/Summer MLB line to expand into a Fall/Winter collection of apparel and accessories in eight different team styles. Korea's F&F Company remodeled its MLB Store with retro designs to "make MLB recognized as a sports and lifestyle brand" throughout the country. In Taiwan, apparel licensee Pegasus introduced a girl's line of clothes (to join its men's fashions) and Hannspree, the nation's LCD television vendor, opened its first flagship store in Taipei featuring a high-end TV with a MLB theme that created a media buzz across Asia.<sup>20)</sup>

In Japan, at the Tokyo Big Site in Odaiba in 2004, more than 7,300 potential and existing clients visited booths and listened to lectures about the importance of marketing. The MLB booth consisted of Collectibles, Ladies wear, and Kids wear. New licensees followed, including Mother, specializing in pet wear (especially popular are pink and army-colored tee shirts and caps designed for pets), Tokyo Nuts, which introduced a line of MLB canned almonds with crackers (initially with six Major League club designs) for distribution in supermarkets and convenience stores, and a Uniqlo campaign to imprint the MLB brand on tee shirts by featuring Japanese celebrities in print advertisements. Also of note were figurines of twenty-four players offered at sports shops and toy stores by Corinthian, and Citizen's commemorative watch of Ichiro Suzuki's record-setting season. Sponsorships also increased, especially after the opening of MLB Japan's office doors in February 2004. In its first year of existence, the company increased the number of sponsors from twelve to seventeen (adding, among others, Kagome, Magnum Dry beer, Meiji Yasuda and Mass Mutual insurance, and Shiseido cosmetics), with a corresponding forty-two percent rise in gross revenue. Its gross revenue from the 2004 Opening Day series games in Tokyo shot up 108% over the 2000 games, and the intake from the All-Star series of 2004 increased 117% from the matches of 2002.<sup>21)</sup>

Does all of this promotional effort, which obviously yields dividends for MLB, change the "culture" in Asia toward a less protectionist business ethic? As American baseball activity has escalated, Japanese parochialism about limiting its teams to four foreign players each is coming under increasing pressure, and mergers with other Asian national baseball associations is a possibility. The World Baseball Classic has instigated discussion, once again, of MLB expansion outside of North America. As a top U.S. sports columnist wrote after the U.S. loss in the contest, "the cost of doing global business included the devaluing of the American ideal of what it means to be major league."<sup>22)</sup> Japan's triumph signals that the competition on the field is substantial and that there is no reason to remain protectionist.

International baseball cooperation, furthermore, is not a new phenomenon. In 1950, the American Baseball Congress had affiliates in sixteen nations beyond the United States and

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<sup>20)</sup> MLB, *Major League Baseball International 2004*, 24, 26–28.

<sup>21)</sup> MLB, *Major League Baseball International 2004*, 24–26, 30.

<sup>22)</sup> Tom Verducci, "Inside Baseball," *Sports Illustrated* (March 27, 2006): 70.

Canada, including the Philippines, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. In 1968, an ill-fated “Global Baseball League” laid plans for clubs in America, the Dominican Republic, and Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Yokohama. The Tokyo Dragons actually trained in Florida and won seven of eleven games before this rival to MLB collapsed in May 1969.<sup>23)</sup> The only real barriers to Major League Baseball’s imperial expansion are distance (and there are supersonic passenger jets on the drawing board) and vestiges of nationalism. But Japan and all national associations will have to play by Major League rules — for now, this transnational commands global baseball consumption.

There are no rivals off the field, really, for Major League Baseball when the promotional machine, international presence, and market appeal behind the American company is taken into consideration. MLB brings abroad the allure of American culture and its consumer values, providing the US government with, as one analyst has said, “the power to make others want the things Americans wants.”<sup>24)</sup> This transnational empire represents the world’s elites. Along with academics, media types, and government officials, these business people represent a global cosmopolitan set that fly in the same planes, stay in the same hotels, read the same newspapers, and communicate by cell phone and email as they operate beyond the American market. Government facilitated this world marketplace but diplomats no longer serve as its gatekeepers. Despite 9/11, which enhanced state power, in the networked world, individuals, corporations, and NGOs talk with officials. It is a simplification to speak of an American empire, regardless of the political hegemony of the United States today. Rather, globalization has vaulted the corporation to the top rank once held by foreign ministries. This development has made Major League Baseball the king of the planet when it comes to this profitable sport, Japan’s national pride over being the first world champion notwithstanding.

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<sup>23)</sup> Jonathan Fraser Light, *The Cultural Encyclopedia of Baseball* (Jefferson, 1997), 297, 381.

<sup>24)</sup> Martin Walker, “An Empire Unlike Any Other” in *Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire*, ed. Andrew Bacevich (Chicago, 2003), 144.