

community, or the experiences of other kinds of workers, it offers data with which to explore family life and gender, the emergence of a new, corporate middle class, the ways in which work expectations and organization shape new subjectivities, and unionization in this sector of the economy. The film would be useful in classes on South Asia, the global economy, the anthropology of work, and business anthropology.

Kōkōyakyu: High School Baseball

Directed by Kenneth Eng and Alex Shear, 2006, 54 minutes. Distributed by the Public Broadcasting Station, 2100 Crystal Drive, Crystal City, VA 22202, www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/kokoyakyu/

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In July 2006, the United States Public Broadcasting Station (PBS) began broadcasting a documentary on high school baseball in Japan entitled: “*Kōkōyakyu: High School Baseball*.” Directed by Kenneth Eng and written and produced by Alex Shear, the film depicts two Japanese high school baseball teams in their quest for a berth at the National High School Baseball Tournament called *Kōshien*. It is a moving documentary which situates the viewer as a fly on the dugout wall. Not made for commercial purposes, the filmmakers claim it was made in the admirable hope of helping people “realize that although traditions may vary in different cultures, many of our experiences are universal.” The film is shot crisply, opts for the original Japanese accompanied with subtitles instead of voice-overs, and focuses heavily on the experiences of the teams’ coaches, players and fans. For this, and for the filmmakers’ attempt to create a film that doubles as a “cultural bridge” and an attempt at “destroying stereotypes” many Americans have of modern Japan, the film should be praised (*Kōkōyakyu* PBS Website, www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/kokoyakyu/behind_interview.html, accessed July 18, 2006). Despite pursuing these very admirable goals, however, “*Kōkōyakyu: High School Baseball*” reifies, essentializes and misrepresents high school baseball in Japan. Moreover, the film rekindles a debate about what conclusions about a society and/or a culture can be drawn from analyses of sport.

For over one hundred years baseball has arguably been the most popular team sport in Japan. It is widely held that Horace Wilson, an American teacher, introduced the game to the Japanese at the beginning of the Meiji period toward the end of the 19th century, and ever since high school baseball has maintained its popu-

larity as an extra-curricular activity for young Japanese. At the same time, professional baseball is a sizeable entertainment industry with teams owned by such household commercial conglomerates as Yomiuri, Hanshin, and in recent years, Softbank. Meanwhile, the meaning of baseball in Japan has been the topic of much debate in and out of academia. The eminent baseball journalist Robert Whiting published his first book on baseball in Japan in 1983, suggesting that it was played in a fundamentally different way from the way it was played in America (*The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, Robert Whiting. New York, NY: Avon Books, 1983). The premise that Japan’s baseball players are modern day samurai “working” the game rather than “playing” it—as it is assumed American players do—is central to Whiting’s work. Although Whiting has recently retracted some of these generalizations, the anthropologist William Kelly has critiqued Whiting on the grounds of essentialism and overgeneralization (William Kelly, “Caught in the Spin Cycle: An Anthropological Observer at the Sites of Japanese Professional Baseball,” In Susan O. Long, ed., *Moving Targets: Ethnographies of Self and Community in Japan*, Cornell University East Asia Papers. P. 136–149, research.yale.edu/wwkelly/publications/articles.htm, accessed July 18, 2006). “*Kōkōyakyu: High School Baseball*” rekindles this debate over what baseball, especially high school baseball, means in Japan, and in doing so both implicitly and explicitly rephrases Whiting’s arguments on film.

The filmmakers claim that the “Schoolboys of Summer” chapter in Whiting’s book *You Gotta Have Wa* directly influenced their claim that high school baseball is “the essence of Japanese baseball” (*Kōkōyakyu* PBS Website, www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/kokoyakyu/special_wa.html, accessed July 18, 2006; *You Gotta Have Wa*. Robert Whiting. New York, NY: Vintage, 1990). Indeed, many of the film’s premises seem reiterations of Whiting’s theories on Japanese baseball, so it is perhaps not surprising that *You Gotta Have Wa* is excerpted extensively on the film’s PBS website. This highlights what Kelly called the “Robert Whiting problem.” As a fellow American doing research on baseball in Japan, Kelly complained that Whiting’s shadow over Japanese baseball, and in particular his opinionated commentary regarding its “wastefulness,” “unevenness of talent,” and “authoritarian managing” was “inescapable” (William Kelly, “Caught in the Spin Cycle: An Anthropological Observer at the Sites of Japanese Professional Baseball,” In Susan O. Long, ed., *Moving Targets: Ethnographies of Self and Community in Japan*, Cornell University East Asia Papers. p. 145, research.yale.edu/wwkelly/publications/articles.htm, accessed July 18, 2006). Kelly’s argument seems astute then, for “*Kōkōyakyu: High School*

Baseball” seems locked in a Robert Whiting paradigm which portrays Japanese baseball as monolithic and incomparable. The authors admit several times on their website that they “learned for the first time” of the *Kōshien* tournament when they “discovered” Whiting’s book. It should be noted that Whiting has since rephrased some of these arguments in more recent publications (see, for example, *The Meaning of Ichiro*, Robert Whiting, New York, NY: Warner Books, 2004).

Even measuring the film against the filmmakers’ own specified goals, *Kōkōyakyu* suffers from some of the very problems the filmmakers say they had wished to avoid, insofar as it reproduces stereotypes instead of helping to break them down. Specifically, the film suffers from two glaring problems. First, it paints a misleading picture of “Japanese high school baseball” as some monolithic entity. Second, the filmmakers subject their study of two Japanese high school baseball teams to unfair comparative criteria for evaluation, and use an Americo-centric view of what baseball, baseball players and baseball coaches should be. The comparative perspective the filmmakers bring to the film is laid bare on their website:

In “*Kōkōyakyu*,” the rules, uniforms and stadium hoopla may seem all-American. Even the cheerleaders and their uniforms, though oddly borrowed from American football, obviously derive from the U.S. But—in what may be a revelation to Americans, especially American kids involved in sports—the intensity, discipline, earnestness and unselfish dedication to team, school and family are all Japanese. High school baseball in Japan appears to have sublimated the country’s traditional samurai values in a markedly non-violent sport, whose essential grace and emphasis on teamwork strike a deep chord in Japanese hearts” (*Kōkōyakyu* PBS Website, www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/kokoyakyu/sfvideos_tamaki.html, accessed July 18, 2006).

While the argument is made explicit, the justification is not. Certainly hard-working athletes across America would dispute the claim that the Japanese somehow solely possess domain over such characteristics as “intensity, discipline, earnestness and unselfish dedication to team, school and family.” Likewise, the claim that baseball is a “markedly non-violent sport” is currently being challenged, as any trip to the *Kōyaren* homepage or Asahi Shimbun’s website’s section on amateur baseball will attest. The film appeared at a controversial time for high school athletics in Japan. The summer 2006 *Kōshien* tournament was widely regarded as one of the most exhilarating in recent years. However,

the excitement was tempered by concern within Japan about an apparent increase in the number of scandals plaguing high school athletic teams—in particular baseball clubs—nationwide, including allegations of *taibatsu* (corporal punishment), *bōryoku* (violence), *ijime* (bullying), theft and other miscreant acts. Indeed “*Kōkōyakyu: High School Baseball*” was produced under restrictions from the Japanese High Baseball Federation (*Kōyaren*), which routinely publishes reports on the number of *fushōiji* in high school baseball, varying from underage smoking to child abuse by coaches.

Baseball is played all over the world in myriad forms and styles, none of which can be specifically co-opted as “Japanese,” “American” or otherwise. Considering Japanese people or Japanese sports as monolithic entities serves to essentialize and reify them as bounded bodies with fixed criteria for membership, thereby perpetuating stereotypes of what is “Japanese” and what is “American.” This is a shame considering the filmmakers’ professed goals in making the film. The problem is, by bringing to bear their own ideas of what constitutes “Japanese” baseball, as well as in unfairly selecting America for comparative criteria, the filmmakers have inadvertently perpetuated old stereotypes. Moreover, while the filmmakers might be forgiven for leaving some of this commentary on stereotypes out of the film itself, a more in-depth and reflective discussion of the implications of their work, the role their subjective presence played in the making of the film, and the film’s use as a “cultural bridge” would have been useful on their otherwise extensively considered website.

A viewer might reasonably ask for a more critical analysis of a filmmaker’s basis for cross-cultural comparison. In that vein, I wonder what the *Kōkōyakyu* filmmakers would make of a Japanese-American baseball player or an American playing for a Japanese high school baseball team. Ironically, the filmmakers can easily find such insight on their own PBS website. The current Yankees outfielder Matsui Hideki—the famous “Japanese” ballplayer who happens to play for America’s most famous team—can offer some very authoritative advice. Matsui is asked what he thinks the “reason [is] for so much practice [in Japanese baseball],” itself a question laden with unfair comparative criteria. Matsui replies simply: “For us, that was normal.”

Matsui’s answer is telling, for it highlights his understanding that while one cannot always seamlessly compare two different cultures, it is also difficult to seamlessly compare two different ways of playing baseball. Lastly, one might justifiably wonder, in a world where adjectives like “Japanese” and “American” mean less every day, exactly to what extent sport can shed light on culture, and vice versa.

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