

(SP) THE GOVERNANCE OF PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL IN TAIWAN: THE SUCCESSFUL MERGER BETWEEN THE TWO PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL LEAGUES IN 2003

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Introduction

Baseball has been traditionally recognised as Taiwan's national sport and there has been a strong public following for the game. In 1990 the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) was established with a rival professional league the Taiwan Major League (TML) inaugurated in 1997. The long-term financial viability of these arrangements was in doubt almost from the outset. A major gambling scandal which erupted in 1997 led to a decline of baseball attendances and provoked a crisis for the leagues. Surprisingly, the hosting of the 2001 Baseball World Cup (BWC) in Taiwan helped to reestablish the legitimacy of the sport and to revive it after it had stagnated since 1997. In 2003, boosted by the success of the BWC, the merger between Taiwan's two professional baseball leagues further revived interest in a sport struggling to recover from the gambling scandal and financial difficulties (Lin, 2003). The merger was however an (often bitterly) contested outcome.

Within this context, this paper seeks to analyze the structures and processes evident in this successful merger between the two professional baseball leagues in 2003, and evaluates how the system of governance was managed in political and managerial terms. Governance in this sense relates not simply to the normative aspects of corporate governance, but also to aspects of political governance (where governments and national governing bodies seek to 'steer' rather than directly command change), and of systemic governance referring to the process of mutual adjustment between organisations and groups of actors in seeking to secure desired outcomes (Henry and Lee 2004).

Methods

The research approach draws on primary data in the form of interviews with key stakeholders. Within the public sector, six interviews were conducted with the government officials, the Ministers of Sport, Directors of Department of Physical Education, and members of parliament from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Kuomintang (KMT), who had responsibility for promoting sports policies. Within the private sector, the five interviews, included interviewees who represented the leagues, clubs, players, and the media. Within the volunteer sector, seven people were interviewed who were representatives from Chinese Taipei Baseball Association (CTBA), fans association of clubs, academic experts in baseball, and principals of three Taiwanese specific sport universities, which mainly recruit players to the professional baseball leagues. Secondary data are in the form of government policy documents, reports on parliamentary debates, newspaper articles and so on from 1990 to 2004. In addition, the computer software Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching Theorizing (NUD*IST) is employed to help code/categorize the gathering data and subsequently contributes to the analysis of data.

Results and Discussion

The nature of the relationships between stakeholders and the tactics adopted underline the claim that the nature of the system of governance which has developed in baseball in the Taiwanese context has culturally very specific characteristics. The case of the merger illustrates for example how political actors (members of the two major political parties) behaved in order to achieve strategic goals. The state (in both its political and administrative machinery), though incorporating the most powerful set of actors within the Taiwanese sporting system, with access to financial resources, personnel, information, and if necessary

force of law, sought to steer rather than demand its preferred outcome. Relationships between the state's various actors in the policy process changed after the DPP took power in 2000, and though the state [in particular the national President] remained a major force in the merger (reflecting its political salience as an issue), nevertheless, significant policy change was only to be achieved by negotiation and/or trade-off between various parties in the network. The two league organisations sought to use political contacts in the principal parties to protect their interests in the process of the merger, while players, clubs, and supporters represented weaker stakeholders because of their lack of access to strategic resources to affect outcomes.

Understanding the exercise of power in achieving outcomes, the paper argues, required identification of the formation of various alliances, which were constructed under conditions of mutual interest and/or clientelistic relations between stakeholders who had competed, negotiated, or cooperated in achieving these outcomes. The paper concludes that a strategic relations theory, which considers all types of forces that might act within, beyond and around the state while analyzing the state form, offers an adequate framework within which to analyze such contexts.

References

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