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**MLB: The Next NBA China? The Importance of Isomorphic Process for
MLB in China**

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ABSTRACT

Major League Baseball (MLB) has taken a series of actions over the past five years to penetrate the Chinese market. Watching the success of the National Basketball Association (NBA), MLB can easily identify opportunities in the Chinese market of 1.3 billion people. However, in comparison with an established American market, the Chinese market presents its own challenges and unknown factors, which are challenging the success of MLB's marketing strategies. With over 20 years' development in China, the NBA has become a model for the MLB. The focus of this paper is to explore the mimetic and coercive mechanisms of the Isomorphic process being used on the MLB. By describing the history of both the NBA and MLB in China, Institutional Theory offers a felicitous explanation for the reasons why, and how, the MLB has developed based on the practices of the NBA. Data were gathered from news reports and information presented on the official websites of the NBA and MLB. Results from the analysis indicate that a practical way for the MLB to explore the Chinese market is to mimic the practices of the NBA.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------|--|
| NBA | National Basketball Association |
| MLB | Major League Baseball |
| MLBI | Major League Baseball International |
| CBL | China Baseball League |
| CBA | China Basketball Association |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| PLA | People's Liberation Army |
| CCTV | China Central Television |
| SMG | Shanghai Media Group |
| NCAA | National Collegiate Athletic Association |
| YMCA | Young Men's Christian Association |
| KMT | Kuo Ming Tang, ruling party of Republic of China |

Introduction

The NBA has done a terrific job in China and we have learned a lot from them - that it took a while for them to do this. If it takes us 20 years, so be it. But we know it won't happen overnight. Although the NBA appears to have been an 'overnight success' in the Chinese market, the basketball league had been 'setting the table' for some 20 years before it really started to take off.... I promised to my boss MLB will be like the NBA in 25 years in the Chinese Market.

Jim Small, Vice President of Major League Baseball. (Can baseball hit home run in China? 2008)

Major League Baseball (MLB) is one of the four major league sports in North America. The MLB saw the potential for growth into the Chinese market as a result of the development and success that was achieved by the National Basketball Association (NBA). In 2006, NBA gained revenue of 50 million dollars in Chinese market. According to an article from Wharton business school website, China has become the NBA's largest international market, and the NBA's revenue in China is growing at a rate of 30% to 40% per year. Deciding to march into this new land, in 2008, the MLB arranged for the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres to play two games in Beijing; the event, marked the first appearance of MLB in China and was known as the MLB China Series. It was

only the beginning of the effort to popularize baseball in China. To further this effort, the first MLB training center was opened in September 2009, located in WuXi school in JiangSu Province. It is clear that the MLB is determined to break into the Chinese market. Ever since the MLB first started developing its market in China, its broadcasting networks, marketing strategy, adaption to local policy, and relationships with the China Baseball League (CBL) have been compared with the NBA (Chen, 2009; Yang & Li, 2008). However, whether the MLB will be the next NBA in China remains unclear.

According to Reaves (2002), baseball came to China at the Qing Dynasty, which was in the 1800s. However, the environment has become drastically different since the communist era in China began. While both the Nationalists and the Communists rejected many Western influences, basketball was not one of them. Both sides actively embraced basketball, and the Communists continued to do so after their triumph in 1949. A news report from WangYi Sport summarized that, in 1959, teams from 30 regions of China came together in the First National Sport Competition ("Journalist Says", 2009). The same year, under Chairman Mao's leadership, a "Baseball in the New China" seminar took place for the benefit of military and civilian teams. Unfortunately, this was on the eve of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. So, like most other foreign creations, baseball was labeled an evil Western influence and banned by Mao (Swiryn, 2008). However, basketball was not similarly prohibited. Some

speculate that Mao's love of basketball, and encouragement of talented young athletes to pursue the sport, is a contributing factor to the development of this specifically Western game of basketball, and why it too was not banned.

Unfortunately, baseball was banned during the Cultural Revolution, and was not again allowed in the People's Republic of China (PRC) until 1975.

The first officially recorded baseball tournament had just started in 1988, the same time David Stern—the president of the NBA, visited Beijing and signed a very important television contract with China Central Television (CCTV). At a time when MLB was just starting to contemplate expansion into China, David Stern had already signed a TV contract for NBA expansion into the country. MLB was forced to overcome the lack of popularity of baseball, while the NBA did not have to overcome similar barriers. Basketball has been popular and wide-spread in the past a hundred years due to government policy and some other reasons, which are described in the basketball history section. Recounting the history of MLB's development in China, it is apparent that major actions did not start until after 2003. In November 2003, MLB and the Chinese Baseball League (CBL) signed a development agreement to help train the country's national team, coaches and umpires, and to help its school-aged children learn and play the game. A system was also established enabling MLB clubs to scout and sign Chinese players to professional contracts (Connor, 2006), approximately 15 years later than the NBA.

To examine how MLB came to China, I draw on Institutional Theory. More specifically, I utilize the concept of isomorphism. Isomorphism, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), is explained as a “constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (p. 150). As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) said, “Isomorphism happens when organizations faced with uncertainty model themselves on other organizations which they recognize as legitimate or successful. They mimic the actions of peers driven by the environmental uncertainty” (p. 153). The environment in China is under a great amount of environmental uncertainty, and so, I want to see if the MLB is modeling its approach after the NBA. According to DiMaggio and Powell, coercive isomorphism is also the result of formal and informal pressures imposed by organizations on other organizations that might be dependent on them. It may also result from cultural expectations within the societal context in which the organizations exist. In this paper, China, as a socialist country ruled by a communist party, has a different economic and political environment than the United States. At the same time, with a social and political history dating much farther back than that of the United States, it is not surprising that many culturally specific phenomena are deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

In particular, my research question asks how do the Chinese government and the NBA impact the spread and popularization of the MLB? In the section

that follows, I looked into a number of literature about Institutional Theory. The summary explained what is Institutional Theory and what research have been done in this area.

Literature Review

In order to explain the changes that take place within and across organizations, Institutional Theory is employed in many research papers. Institutional theory is traditionally concerned with how various groups and organizations better secure their positions and legitimacy by conforming to the rules and norms of the institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Scott, 2007). The institutional perspective directs attention to the rules, norms, and beliefs that influence organizations and their members, which can vary widely across countries and cultures (Fang, 2010; Scott, 2007). Such structures, processes, and mindsets that become taken for granted are either not subjected to scrutiny at all, or are scrutinized and judged as suitable and appropriate, and taken for granted (Jepperson, 1991). As in this case, the emphasis has been placed on the how the organizations become isomorphic, or more similar.

Isomorphic processes.

According to Galaskiewicz and Wasserman (1989), the environment is made up of more than fully informed organizations that are making strategic choices based on the strategic choices of other uninformed organizations. O'Brien and Slack

(2003) believe that uncertainty is particularly common in the interorganizational arena. Also, Haveman (1993) pointed out that high level uncertainty, combined with exposure to the strategies and behaviors of organizational peers, leads to mimesis – the concept of change through imitation.

Galaskiewicz and Wasserman (1989) and Haunschild (1993) found evidence to support DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) argument within organizational fields while investigating mimetic processes. They found that when faced with uncertainty, strategic decision makers mimic the behavior of other actors in their environment. However, both Galaskiewicz and Wasserman's and Haunschild's work suggested that social networks are quite important in determining which actors will be imitated. More specifically, both research papers suggested that strategic decision makers are more likely to imitate the behaviors of actors within their network, whom they know and trust. Kraatz (1998) found that the strength and number of interorganizational ties affect the exposure of the central organizations to the various adaptive responses being employed elsewhere in their environment, and as a result, this will lead to particular types of diffusion process. Thus, it also seems important to understand the diffusion processes.

DiMaggio and Powell argued that, at the organizational level, organizations modify their features in the direction of increasing compatibility with environmental characteristics. They identified three mechanism by which

institutional isomorphism takes place: the coercive, normative, and mimetic processes.

Coercive isomorphism is the result of formal and informal pressures imposed by organizations on other organizations that might be dependent on them. It may also result from cultural expectations within the societal context in which the organizations exist. In this paper, China, as a socialist country ruled by a communist party, has a different economic environment than the United States. At the same time, with a social and political history dating much farther back than that of the United States, it is not surprising that many culturally specific phenomena are deeply rooted in Chinese culture. This special cultural background, paired with a government-control pattern, has forced sport organizations to depend on the government for operation and development.

The second isomorphic mechanism is mimetic. Mimetic isomorphism happens when organizations faced with uncertainty model themselves on other organizations which they recognize as legitimate or successful. Driven by the environmental uncertainty, they mimic the actions of peers (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In this paper, the institutional environment of MLB in China is the uncertainty cultural background. This mechanism is particularly useful for this research, and is discussed in further detail later.

A third source of isomorphic change is normative. Normative isomorphism results primarily from professionalization, as the organizational

members struggle “to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 160). Normative isomorphism has two aspects. The first involves similarities in the formal education and training of specialists in a particular sector, which leads to legitimation of cognitive bases of organizational norms that result from this education and training. The second relates to the development of professional networks that connect organizations and facilitate the diffusion of normative rules about legitimate organizational and professional behavior (O’Brien & Slack, 2004).

Coercive, mimetic and normative mechanisms act as constraining processes “that force one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 151). Although each mechanism involves a separate process, two or more of them may work at the same time, and their effects are not always distinguishable.

There are several studies that apply institutional theory to sports. Washington and Patterson (2011) provided a summary of how institutional theory has been used in the sports management literature. O’Brien and Slack (2004) used institutional isomorphism to show that the English Rugby Union has undergone vital changes since 1995. O’Brien and Slack’s 2004 paper built their on earlier paper of 2003, and explored how the shift from an amateur to a professional approach took place and actually evolved. Slack and Hinings (1994)

examined how the Canadian Federal Government impacted an organizational field by applying normative isomorphic processes. They found that 12 out of 36 sporting organizations adopted a bureaucratic professional design, and that as a result, the variation between all 36 organizations was significantly reduced. They argued that the increasing isomorphism of the 36 organizations was also due to the increasing normative pressures brought about as professionals transferred from one organization to another and as the organizations drew upon the same sport consultants (Slack and Hinings, 1994). Unlike O'Brien and Slack (2003) mentioned above, Carolan (2005) applied the institutional theory to an educational field. He used institutional isomorphism to explain how the urban district's organizational reform efforts have been affected. The paper focuses on the role of coercive pressures in the isomorphic process by using a subset of the educational field in New York City.

There is no previous comparative research on the MLB and the NBA in China, so this paper complements and extends knowledge on how major league games are developing in China.

This research examines the role of isomorphic processes in the introduction of MLB to China, by focusing on the particular mechanisms by which the process of isomorphism took place. Based on the literature review and background introduction, the two isomorphic mechanisms—coercive and mimetic process – may lead to the next research questions.

1. How have the Chinese government and its culture impacted the diffusion of the MLB?

2. How has the successful diffusion of the NBA as a practice impacted the diffusion of the MLB?

Methodology

This research employs a historical embedded case-study design (Washington, Forman, Suddaby, & Ventresca, 2005; Yin, 2003) to answer the research question. Yin (2003) posited that case-studies are the preferred strategy when how or why questions are being proposed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. Yin also argued that an embedded case-study design is useful when there are subunits of the case that “add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case” (p. 46).

Historical research requires the systematic collection and analysis of archival data (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). Archival research methods include a broad range of activities applied to facilitate the investigation of documents and textual materials produced by and about organizations. It provides us access that we might not otherwise have to organizations, individuals and events of that earlier time (Ventresca & Mohr, 2005). Washington and Ventresca (2008) used an archival research method to study U.S. collegiate basketball from 1880 to 1938. They

collected data from sources like NCAA convention summaries, notes of various meetings between the NCAA, YMCA, and AAU, and individual college athletic histories, and they created graphs to help present the data. Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, and King (1991) also used an archival research method to conduct their study on the U.S. radio broadcasting industry. Through a historical analysis, their study documents the cycles of the institutional change in the U.S. commercial radio broadcasting industry from its inception in the 20th century's first decade through its mature state in the 1960s. They presented historically grounded descriptive material, and developed a set of conjectures for understanding institutional changes.

Several other research papers have also applied the archival research method in their study. Washington and Patterson (2011) believe that sport is an area where data are in abundance; newspapers, magazines, Internet chat-rooms, and websites are all filled with issues pertaining to sports. The rich context and sheer amount of information available was conducive to understanding the processes commonly assumed to be happening, and this was rarely addressed in institutional theory research.

This study draws upon several primary data sources, such as Chinese sport system summaries, and histories of baseball and basketball in China. Documents on Chinese sports history, and the development of the NBA and MLB China were obtained from the relevant sport organizations. The Chinese sports system

documents were collected from the Chinese government.

Analysis was driven by an effort to determine the dynamics of actions and reactions of the parties as the struggle over the contested land unfolded (Kieser, 1994; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). The focus of the analysis is to work between past and present accounts of the events in an effort to identify a generalized interpretation and coherent account (Hodder, 1994). Secondary data were gathered from the official websites of each organization, existing histories, and other published accounts to complement this primary method.

According to Ventresca and Mohr (2005), archival methods can also be applied to the analysis of digital texts, including electronic databases, emails, and web pages. It gives me access to the senior level management staffs in both sports organizations and political organizations who are not available to be interviewed.

I constructed an institutional history of basketball and the NBA. Then I constructed a similar history for baseball. Using historical analysis, I looked to see how the government has impacted basketball and baseball, and how the MLB story is shaped by the NBA, and the discourse between MLB and the NBA. I collected literature and paper in several aspects of resources: Basketball and baseball history in the U.S. and China from academical journals and books; Chinese sport system literatures in several major Chinese database and sport

university school library database; official records on basketball development in China basketball Museum; NBA and MLB news and blogger's view from Internet and also databases. During the process of writing, I collected more literature about the government-control system impacting sport and the history of Culture Revolution. Since the literature on Culture Revolution are politically sensitive, many of them can only be found in Hong Kong or Taiwan based databases or published books. I spent around four months collecting the sources and literature to get it objective, detailed and accurate.

Empirical Setting

In the section that follows, I discuss the development of basketball from 1895 to 1978. The history shows how basketball has developed and changed along with the upheaval of the society during these 80 years. I generated Table 1 shows the key features and time happened in the development of basketball in China from 1895 to 1978. After that, I discuss events since 1978, including the entry of the NBA into China. I develop a description of how the NBA has adapted to China in several aspects: broadcasting and media, NBA players, marketing partnerships, NBA China, and the NBA junior leagues and Community and Grassroots Program. Then I give a similar history of baseball from 1881 to 1978. I indicate some crucial differences between basketball and baseball: in China, MLB decision makers face a completely different environment from

basketball. I then discuss what MLB has done since 1978, under similar headings to those for the NBA: broadcasting and media, MLB players, MLB partnerships, and MLB China. At the end of each section, there is a conclusion table to summarize the key features. The tables will help to present the data in a better and briefer way.

1895-1936.

As described in the literature review, normative isomorphism has two aspects. The first involves similarities in the formal education and training of specialists in a particular sector, which leads to the legitimation of cognitive bases of organizational norms that result from this education and training. The second relates to the development of professional networks that connect organizations and facilitate the diffusion of normative rules about legitimate organizational and professional behavior (O'Brien & Slack, 2004). The early development of basketball in China involved a process of getting more and more professional.

The history of NBA China involves a history of basketball in China. Basketball was invented by Dr. James Naismith at Springfield, Massachusetts in December 1891. By 1898, the team of five players became standard, and the game rapidly spread nationwide to Canada and other parts of the world, played by both women and men.

In September 1895, basketball came to China, first appearing at the harbor city of Tianjin. It was brought by YMCA missionary Dr. David Willard Lyon –

he was sent to build a YMCA in Tianjin. The first basketball game was played in September 1895, while the first officially recorded basketball game was on January 11th, 1896. According to China Basketball Museum record, the Tianjin YMCA put up three English notices in 1896:

1. January 11, 1896. A game of basketball will be played this afternoon. All young men interested in athletics are invited to be at the room promptly at 4 o'clock in order to join the game.

2. January 18, 1896. A game of basketball will be played this afternoon at four o'clock if the weather permits. Come and join the game.

3. April 4, 1896. An enthusiastic game of basketball was played on last Saturday afternoon. Another game will be played today at four o'clock. Come and learn the game.

In the late 1800s, China was ruled by the Qing Emperors. Even though the old regime was crumbling due to the social transformation, people still had their hair braided in long pigtails and wore long gowns; this was not suitable for sports like basketball. Tianjin He Ping Archive Center recorded that Dr. Lyon mentioned that members were very interested in basketball, and that it was interesting to watch the players do their preparations. They had to put up their pigtails, cut their fingernails, and take off their long gowns before they got onto the court. They had to give up their natural bookish style to become more active and lively. However, they could only play beside a wall, and the court was

narrow and inconvenient. According to the description above, we can see that basketball was not a real sport when it first came into China.

After the establishment of the Tianjin YMCA, one of its goals was to use modern sports as tools to spread the YMCA to other areas of China. Basketball, as a newly invented game, was one of the very first sports used to accomplish the goal. During the two years Dr. Lyon worked in China (November 1895 - April 1897), basketball was introduced to China, and rapidly became popular within the members of the YMCA and some other individuals. After that, the YMCA North America Association sent Robert R. Gailey to take over Dr. Lyon's work. When Mr. Gailey got to Tianjin, he started to develop a series of plans to promote basketball. In 1903, he set up a junior high school named Ordinary Middle School, while building the new club house at No.11 East Gate Nei Jingsi Road. According to the *Tianjin Public Newspaper* and *Development of YMCA in China*, written by Dr. Zhigang Wu (Dr. Lyon's wife) Ordinary Middle School was the first school that popularized basketball. Not only did the missionaries teach basketball, Mr. Gailey himself paid a lot of attention on it. He put basketball into the Physical Education (PE) lessons, and selected the top students to train as a school team. Based on that, Mr. Gailey held the first inter-school basketball game. Qilin He, a 102-year-old former PE teacher, recalled that:

Basketball was very popular in this school. There were school teams, grade teams, class teams and many other free teams. Basketball was the

hottest game in students' free time among various forms of games. The school produced a lot of sport talent, and many basketball stars grew up here. Mingyi Liu and Mingzhi Liu, who represented China and attended Far Eastern Championship Games, both graduated from this school.

(Tianjin, The Number one in China. November 24, 2008)

In 1908, Tongren School at Baoding started to play this game. It hung two baskets on two trees in a clear space, and made its first simple court. Along with Tianjin Ordinary School and Baoding Tong Ren School, Beijing Qsinghua School, Huiwen Middle School, Senior Normal School, and Tongxian Xiehe School were the earliest schools to play basketball.

In October 1910, the first T'ung-meng Hui National School District Team Sport Meeting was held in Quan Ye Chang in Nanjing. This sport meeting was convened by the students from national industrial schools belonging to Yu-chuan Pu and by youth from all over China. What's more, the sport meeting reflected the colonial characteristics.

The sport meeting did not include a competitive game of basketball, but exhibition games were held after the sport meeting. Teams from North China, Shanghai, Wu Ning (including Suzhou and Nanjing today) attended the basketball games. The final was between Shanghai and North China, and North China won the game. That was the first time basketball appeared in a national sport meeting. According to data from [China Basketball Museum](#), there was newspaper at that

time commented:

Our basketball technique and tactics were extremely poor at that time.

Most of the players were wearing long gown and long pigtails. It was full of the flavor of the middle ages. It is a pity that there were no pictures left, otherwise the museum could have kept them and shown them to tourists.

(Basketball in China. November 29, 2007)

After becoming an official men's sport in the 2nd National Games of the Republic of China held in 1914, basketball was added to the formal women's competition in the 3rd National Games in 1924.

According to the records of the China Basketball Museum (2007), a man named Shu Hong helped basketball change from an imported sport to a symbol of national glory. The public recognition of basketball has grown ever since then.

The physician who invented basketball-- written by Cantwell J.D., recorded that in 1936, basketball had been listed as a formal competition item for the first time in the Berlin Olympic Games, which attracted teams from 21 countries to participate, and teams from United States and Canada eventually fought for the championship (Cantwell, 2004). Prior to the final, the International Basketball Federation hesitated in choosing referees for this competition. Although referees from many countries applied for it, as European referees were untrustworthy, while US referees could not be selected without arousing suspicion, eyes of the officers of

the International Basketball Federation finally fell upon Shu Hong, the assistant coach of China national men's basketball team (Morris, 2002). After learning the game from Naismith, the inventor of basketball, Shu Hong fully mastered the rules of basketball while he studied in the United States at Springfield College. In 1928, an International Friendly Match was held in Shanghai. Mr. Shu, who served as President of National Games of the Republic of China at that time, insisted that Chinese basketball referees should be used as long as the competition was held in China, but this request was declined by the organizers because they thought that Chinese people were unqualified as referees of international competitions, as they were known as the "Dong Ya Bing Fu--Sick Man of Asia" (Xu, 2008).

Mr. Shu, with great national integrity, refused to accept this reason and appealed to the U.S. Referee Committee, requesting that tests be carried out to decide whether the Chinese were qualified as international referees. The lowest score the four Chinese referees got was 88, while only one of the five US referees passed the test. Thereupon, four Chinese referees, including Mr. Shu, were granted the first qualification certificates of international referees.

Bei Xiaojing wrote an article on the first Chinese Olympic referee in the history. In the book, he mentioned that when the news that a Chinese would be the referee of the Olympic Games got round, players from the United States and Canada discussed this vigorously, and some even sneered because they wondered

how a “sick man of Asia” could be the referee (Bei, 2010). However, coaches from the two teams supported this decision because of the high-level and impartial rule enforcement of Mr. Shu. Thereupon, an energetic Chinese man wearing a white sweater and trousers appeared at the competition site of the first basketball final of the Olympic Games.

On the morning of August 14, 1936, Shu Hong announced the opening tip-off of the competition on an open-air court. Although it rained that day, Mr. Shu completed his work impartially under the attention of 3,000 spectators and with the support of the Chinese delegation. After the competition, Dr. Naismith walked from the stand to his student and hugged him tightly, taking pride in his outstanding performance. After the journalists at the site sent the news back to China, on the afternoon of August 15, 1936, the rotund shouts of newsboys could be heard at every corner of streets and alleys in Shanghai, “Extra, extra, Shu Hong won glory for the motherland.”

Shu Hong is very much like Yao Ming today. His success has been taken as a national success; the glory was shared by public and lifted to national pride. The sport of basketball was legitimized at that time, and succeeded in attracting people’s attention. If it were not for World War II and the Communist Party, maybe basketball would have continued to develop as it used to do – not so fast perhaps, but slowly making progress. However, KMT (Kuomintang, the ruling political party of the Republic of China) failed in the Civil War, and the Chinese

Communist Party seized power. The Chinese social environment has become different from what it used to be.

Since then, basketball has gradually developed in China; it was initially listed as a formal competition item in regional sports meetings in North China and some other areas. Men players took part in the Far Eastern Championship Games 10 times, and won the championship in the 5th Games held in 1921. In addition, teams were sent to participate in the basketball competitions in the 11th and 14th Olympic Games in 1936 and 1948; although China failed to reach the finals, participation in these competitions was of significance in foreign communication and promotion of the basketball development in China. Basketball has become professionalized in China since then, and has turned into a professional sports competition rather than just an entertaining game.

1937-1978.

After China joined the International Basketball Federation during the 1936 Olympic Games, basketball became the focus of more people, and basketball competitions became more active. The period from 1936 to 1978 can be divided into three parts: the 1936 Olympic Games, the Republic of China (1937-1948), and the People's Republic of China (1949-1978).

1937-1948.

In the 1930s, in revolutionary base areas, as governments of border regions attached importance to sports, basketball became popular with the broad

masses of the people and the officers and soldiers of the Red Army and the Eighth Route Army.

Chen & Chen (2009) mentioned in their paper about Chinese basketball history that the most noticeable and nationally prestigious teams at that time were the Fighting Basketball Team established by the commander, He Long, and the commissar, Guan Xiangying, of the 120th division of the Eighth Route Army in 1938 and the Northeast Cadres Basketball Team, mainly composed of cadres based in Northeast China from the 3rd branch school of the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University. The two teams both had specific tenets, strict discipline, tenacious fighting will, simple skills, fierce playing methods, favorable physical fitness, and they fully reflected the excellent morality and fighting style of revolutionary soldiers led by the Communist Party of China, and deeply impressed the armies and the people in revolutionary base areas. They not only powerfully promoted the popularity and improvement of basketball in these areas, but also helped the formation of the fine traditions of basketball teams in the armed forces.

The China Army Men's Basketball Team served as the leading team for a long time in China, and this was closely related to its inheritance of glorious revolutionary traditions. Many team members joined the senior cadres of the party, and political and military departments in the new China in later years.

Some of them became pioneers and leaders for sports undertakings in the new China, and contributed greatly to the sports undertakings and the development of basketball games in the new China.

In contrast, in Kuomintang governed areas and Japanese occupied areas, basketball activities fluctuated and stagnated due to the influence of the political situation. After the victory in the Anti-Japanese War in 1945, basketball flourished, especially the basketball competitions among the public, which happened more often than in the past. A great many new basketball teams sprang up in Tianjin, Beijing, Shanghai, and Northeast China. This laid a foundation for the booming development of sports undertakings, the popularity of mass basketball games, and the rapid improvement of sports techniques.

1949-1978.

During this period, the government played a key role in developing basketball. In the years before the initiation of reform and opening-up, China experienced the establishment of the communist regime and the Cultural Revolution. The social environment forced sport to depend on government policy to survive. Fortunately, basketball, with the advantage of a good foundation in revolution base areas, enjoyed the benefit of favorable policies.

In the liberated areas, sports meetings were held on the eve of the founding of new China in 1949, and basketball was listed among the competition items.

After the founding of the new China, university students from Beijing and

Tianjin organized teams to participate in the 10th World University Games held in Hungary, and won 10th place. Afterwards, basketball in China entered a period of unprecedented popularity, development, and improvement. After decades of practice, the basketball development history of China gradually led to an integration of basketball competitions, social mass activities, school teaching, scientific research, and basic theories.

To accelerate the improvement of basketball level in China, the National Basketball Team was established in Beijing in the early 1950s.

To study the experience of former Soviet Union and to increase international contacts, on December 24, 1950, the basketball team from the Soviet Union, a powerful team in the world then, visited eight cities in China: Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Wuchang, Shenyang, and Harbin, and participated in 33 basketball competitions.

China's lack of basketball competitiveness was thoroughly exposed by contrast. To resolve this problem, the Competent Department of China took measures to accelerate the establishment of special teams further, to gain advanced experience and learn advanced playing methods, and to update the traditional restrictive viewpoints. It actively took part in international competitions, which produced remarkable effects after a short period; for example, Chinese teams defeated a great many powerful European teams, and Huang Bolin and some other excellent players put together a brilliant record with their

outstanding performance in the basketball history of China. Shortly afterward, as many areas and regions organized teams of athletes for basketball training, basketball entered into a new development period.

National Basketball League began in 1955, a relatively stable grading competition system has been established in China. Dr. Shi (2009) in his paper discussed that after decades of development and reformation, the competition system gradually become CBA nowadays.

In the 1970s, as order emerged out of chaos, a new target of becoming a world leader was set for basketball competition in China. In 2005, *Sina Sport* section has series of report to memorialize the 110th anniversary for basketball getting into China. One of the article mentioned that at the National Basketball Training Work Conference held in December 1972, the Chinese experience was summarized, with an emphasis on grasping the laws and development tendencies of basketball, and proceeding from China's realities. The basketball training guiding ideologies of "activeness and pro-activeness", "braveness and tenacity", "rapidity and alertness", and "comprehensiveness and accuracy" were comprehensively and completely affirmed, and the scientific training principles of "Three Requirements and Heavy Load" were implemented. By this means, basketball rapidly recovered and developed. The men's and women's basketball teams of China were active on the international stage again.

In 1975, the Chinese Basketball Association became recognized again in

the Asian Amateur Basketball Federation; in 1976, the Chinese Basketball Association resumed its seat in the International Federation of Amateur Basketball, according to a resolution that acknowledged the Chinese Basketball Association as the sole legal basketball organization of China.

When entering the Asian competition for the first time, Chinese basketball teams took part in the 7th Asian Games, the 8th Asian Championship, and the 6th Asian Women's Basketball Championship. As it was the first time that Chinese basketball teams had participated in such large-scale and multilateral competitions in the basketball history of China; they undertook important missions and faced a number of challenges.

From September 1 to September 16, 1974, Chinese men's and women's basketball teams took part in the basketball competition of the 7th Asian Games, held in Tehran, the capital of Iran. The men's groups included teams from Korea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Bahrain, Japan, Kuwait, the Philippines, China, South Korea, and Israel. Finally, Israel ranked in first place, South Korea second, and China third. The women's basketball team competed against teams from Korea, South Korea, Japan, Iran, etc. in the Games, and finally got third place, after being defeated by the Japanese team and the South Korean team with scores of 80:84 and 71:84.

By 1978, basketball had established its legitimacy in China. The coercive isomorphic process has taken place in the past forty-one years. It was

an important historical period for basketball development in China.

After 1978, China initiated a reforming and opening policy, and the first NBA team, the Washington Bullets (now known as the Wizards) went to China in 1979 to play two exhibition games against the Chinese National Team. Ever since then, the NBA has secured its foothold in this land, and Chinese basketball development has involved a history of the NBA in China. The history of basketball from 1978 was a mimetic isomorphic process affected by the market economy and by learning from the NBA. From 1994, the Chinese Basketball Association led the reform, tried to push the league into the market, and absorbed advanced management concepts from NBA.

Insert Table 1 about here

The NBA and Chinese Adaptation Since 1978

The relationship between the NBA and Chinese basketball dates back to 1979, when the Washington Bullets (now known as Wizards) went to China to play two exhibition games against the Chinese National Team. Ever since then, the NBA has secured its foothold in this new land. Today, NBA games are watched by more than 30 million viewers per week in China, and 83% of Chinese males ages 15-24 say they are NBA fans (Chinese fortune: Yao Ming's influence in China undeniable, 2004). Further, more than 40% stated that basketball is their favorite sport to play, and four of their top five athletes are NBA players

(Chinese fortune: Yao Ming's influence in China undeniable, 2004). In this section, the NBA's development in China will be discussed from five angles: broadcasting and media, NBA players, marketing partnerships, NBA China, and the NBA Junior Leagues and NBA in the Community and Grassroots Program. At the end of this section, I generate Table Two to feature the key events of NBA development in China.

Broadcasting and media.

The first appearance of NBA programming in China happened in 1987 with the broadcast of the NBA All Star Game on China Central Television (CCTV). In 1989, during his trip to Beijing, NBA commissioner David Stern signed the NBA's first formal television deal in China. However, it wasn't until 1994 that every game of the NBA finals was broadcast live on Chinese television. The network broadcast all seven games of the NBA finals, with Houston and New York's June 8 game being the first ever live broadcast of an NBA final on CCTV-China. Ever since then, CCTV has televised all 96 regular games, the NBA All-Star Game, NBA playoff games, and the finals, plus special programs like "NBA Daily Highlights" and "NBA Time". Print media have also accommodated basketball popularity, and the first publication of NBA Shi Kong (NBA Space & Time) occurred in May of 1999; this magazine is the Chinese version of *Hoop* magazine, and has a circulation of more than 100,000. It marked the NBA's first publishing licensing agreement in Asia. During the

2004-2005 season there were 14 Chinese print media members and eight TV media members attending the NBA playoffs; in 2005, the NBA was also broadcast on many local city-based stations, including Anhui TV, Beijing TV, Shanghai TV, and Guangdong TV. The 2005-2006 season saw an increase in the NBA's broadcasters in China to a whopping 24, and it also gained radio and Internet presence. In 2012 January, Chinese New Year festival, there are around 96 million people watched NBA game broadcast by Chinese TV stations and internet. Additionally, there was a customized version of the NBA lifestyle show *NBA Jam* available on five different local television stations. With the help of media and broadcasting organizations throughout China, the marketing strategies were, and continue to be, carried out more easily, and have resulted in a strong NBA presence in the Chinese market.

NBA players.

Yao Ming, the most successful Chinese basketball player in the NBA, was selected by the Houston Rockets as the number one pick in the 2002 NBA Draft. While Ming is the most popular, he is not the first Chinese player in the NBA. Back in 1987, Sung Tao from China, who was the first Asian player drafted, was selected by the Atlanta Hawks as the 67th pick of the 3rd Round of the 1987 NBA draft. Although he was drafted, he did not play in a NBA game. Shortly thereafter, the Chinese born Ma Jian played for the University of Utah, and attended the Los Angeles clippers training camp. He never made it to the NBA

either. It was not until Wang Zhizhi was signed by the Dallas Mavericks in 2001 that the NBA had its first Chinese player. He played for around one year as a Los Angeles Clipper, and then signed a two-year contract with the Miami Heat. At almost the same time, Mengke Bateer, another Chinese player, became the second Chinese player in the NBA when he joined the Denver Nuggets. Bateer signed with 5 different NBA teams, but did not reach the same star status as Yao Ming. Ming was selected as the starting center in 2005 All-Star Game for the third consecutive year. He has become a national treasure to Chinese basketball fans, and many of the NBA China sponsors hail Yao Ming as good fortune himself: he has brought lots of benefits to the market. Even David Stern said: “I think it’s fair to say Yao Ming is the most important thing in the world for the development of the NBA in China that has ever occurred. These games represent to us, the NBA, a historic occasion” (Chinese fortune: Yao Ming’s influence in China undeniable, 2004). Ming, profiled in a *Businessweek* cover story, was described as having “the potential to gross 300 million dollars in his first ten years in the league” (2004). There is no doubt that the success of Ming’s NBA career has been one of the greatest contributors for the NBA in China.

Marketing partnerships.

NBA marketing partners were heavily active in China from 2003 to 2006; multiple channels were used, including retail and packaging promotions, event sponsorship, and customized media programming. Key partners included Adidas,

Budweiser, China Mobile, Coca-Cola, Li-Ning, Nike, Nokia, and Red Bull, among other leading brands. The partnerships with local corporations and Chinese regional companies were launched after 2003, correlating with the influence of Yao Ming on the Chinese market. For example, Reebok's sneaker sales in China in 2004 were at 30 million dollars, and have increased steadily since. Kodak, McDonalds, Pepsi, and Walt Disney have all claimed that Yao Ming is the most significant character in their Chinese markets.

NBA China.

With the spread of the NBA in China, a new entity, NBA China, was developed. This organization, which came into being on January 14, 2008, conducts all league business in Greater China. Five strategic partners invested 253 million dollars to acquire 11% of the company in preferred equity. David Stern indicated that the league may play in “eight or ten or twelve arenas throughout China” (Stern, 2008). Mr. Li Yuanwei, Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) Executive Vice President and Secretary General, congratulated the NBA on forming NBA China, stating that he thinks this will help to expand and further develop basketball in China. The cooperation between the NBA and the CBA began in summer 2004 when the NBA teamed up with the CBA to stage the first joint coaching camp. The camp was designed to help improve the level of basketball in China by training the nation's leading coaches. Yao Ming, Wang Zhizhi, and Mengke Bateer all played in the CBA

before they were drafted into the NBA, and therefore, in terms of player delivery, the cooperation of the two leagues is quite important if the NBA expects further development in China. In October 2009, the NBA and the CBA announced a comprehensive multi-year collaboration to foster coaching development in China. According to David Stern, the NBA will be hosting visits of Chinese coaches at training camps in the United States, where techniques will be shared. In addition, after the initial training camp, a select number of coaches will be invited to stay in the United States for a full season, where they can observe and visit with NBA and NBA Development League teams, allowing for a complete level of cooperation. For the CBA and Chinese basketball development, the cooperation helps to improve the level of Chinese professional basketball by learning from the NBA coaching experience. For the NBA, the better coaches the CBA has, the greater possibility another Yao Ming may emerge. One effective way of keeping a strong Chinese market is to have Chinese players doing well in the NBA. This win-win cooperation ensures the development of both leagues.

The NBA junior leagues and NBA in the community and grassroots program.

The 2005 Junior NBA China launched in 15 cities in September 2005 and ran through December 2005. The national champion – Nanjing No.9 Middle School – represented China at the 2006 NBA All-Star weekend held in Houston, Texas in February.

Promoting the NBA is not only about the partnerships with corporations

on the business side, but also about familiarizing common people in the market with the sport of basketball. The NBA management team has a good understanding of this topic. Developing the sport among Chinese youth cultivates potential fans and players. Hence, Junior NBA China developed the grassroots basketball development program, which aims to develop a life-long passion for the game of basketball by providing a support structure that not only encourages participation, but also makes the game fun and rewarding for players, coaches, officials, and parents.

In 2004, the Walt Disney Company and Hong Kong Disneyland worked together with the NBA to help promote literacy and the importance of reading in Beijing and Shanghai. The promotion was named *Read to Achieve*, and it was also a part of the NBA Games in 2004. The first event of Read to Achieve took place in October, 2004 at the No. 1 Gao'an Road Primary School in Shanghai – Houston Rockets Center Yao Ming's alma mater. Yao Ming, together with his teammate Dikembe Mutombo and NBA Hall of Famer Bob Lanier, led a Reading Time Out. The second Read to Achieve event took place at the Beijing No. 2 Experimental Primary School. Chris Webber, Bobby Jackson, and Liu Wei from the Sacramento Kings, and WNBA stars Alana Beard and Kara Lawson, were guests at the Reading Time Out. NBA Commissioner David Stern attended both events.

Basketball without Borders

Developed by the NBA and FIBA, is a basketball instructional camp for young people that also promotes leadership, education, sportsmanship, and healthy living. It was held in China for the first time in 2009, and was led by Yao Ming. The first Basketball without Borders Asia took place July 14 to 17 at the Beijing Olympic Training Facility in Beijing, China. Numerous NBA players were in attendance, including San Antonio Spurs' Tony Parker (France), Philadelphia 76ers teammates Samuel Dalembert (Haiti) and Kyle Korver, and New Orleans Hornets Bostjan Nachbar (Slovenia). Several other Basketball without Borders events took place in the following years at Shanghai University of Sports.

The program held seminars on important social issues, such as HIV/AIDS education and prevention. This kind of promotion shows the social responsibility of the NBA, and has helped the NBA build a better brand image in China. Like many other companies, the NBA has formed its brand by being local and responsible. This helped to spread the concept that basketball is not just an American sport; it belongs to the Chinese as well. Today there are over 300 million people that play basketball throughout China, and NBA merchandise can be purchased in more than 20,000 locations all throughout China

Insert Table 2 about here

History of Baseball Development

In this section, a rich history of baseball's development in China is generated similarly as basketball. I organize Table Three at the end of this section to present the key features in this period of history.

1881-1942.

Mei-Yun Weng graduated from National Central University Institutional Repository with master degree on Chinese literature. Her master thesis is titled *Taiwan Athlete Autobiography Sport* (Weng, 2009). She believed that Zhan Tianyou is an important figure in developing baseball in China (Weng, 2009). He once organized some foreign students to form a baseball team while studying at Yale University in America. In 1881, students brought the baseball movement back to China when they returned from their study in America and Japan. The church schools and the YMCA in the concession at that time also exerted some influence on the popularization of the baseball movement. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine how people in the Qing Dynasty played baseball with their pigtailed and long gowns.

Yet, in 1895, Beijing Huiwen Academy formed the first baseball team in Chinese sports history, at which time there was not even a railway (Chen, 1991). In 1903, the baseball movement, named *Yakyuu*, spread to Hunan. It was evidently a pro-Japan school, different from Zhan Tianyou's pro-Europe school or pro-America school. The earliest baseball team in Hunan, named the Yangtze

Yakyuu Team, was organized by Huang Xing, a patriot of the Revolution of 1911, when he was teaching in Mingde Middle School. In 1911, Hunan Tong Meng Hui (a Chinese revolutionary league) established a Yakyuu Club in Changsha City. In 1912 and 1913, Hunan Education Review serialized *Lectures on Yakyuu*, thus making the baseball movement popular among some schools of Changsha.

China's first official intercollegiate game was played in Beijing between Tongzhou and Huiwen. That is to say, the birth of baseball matches in China is earlier than that of the Republic of China (which was established on October 10, 1911). It was only in September 1909, two years later, that the Jing-Zhang Railway, which was designed, managed and explored by Zhan Tianyou, opened to traffic. Morris (2004: 13) in his book recorded that in November 1910, the First National Games was hosted on the premises of the Nanyang Industrial Exposition in Nanjing. However, baseball wasn't included in the national games until 1914. The first competition in international baseball matches happened at the Second Shanghai Far East Sports Meeting in 1915. In the 1930s, before the Sino-Japanese War, Shanghai Baseball Club once held a friendly match with Minami Club in Japan at Pingliang Road, Shanghai.

When look at the baseball movement in universities, the baseball team of Tsinghua University was the acknowledged leader which dominated the baseball games in North China in 1914. *Tsinghua Weekly* in 1914 began to publish baseball matches among teachers' teams and students' teams. Even in the hard

times, Kunming Southwest Union University (which was made up of Tsinghua University, Peking University, and Nankai University during the Chinese Anti-Japanese War), the three sports clubs of Tsinghua University, i.e. Tiema, Jingang, and Heitao, did not fail to have their own baseball teams. Until Tsinghua University moved back to Beijing after the Anti-Japanese War, its baseball teams were still quite active.

Similar to the situation in Taiwan, the earliest promotion of the baseball movement in China was attributed to Chinese nationals residing in Japan. Zheng & Guan (2008) wrote in their article that Liang Fuchu was born in Zhongshan, Guangdong, residing in Yokohama, Japan. What a coincidence that he was a fellow provincial of Sun Yat-sen, father of the Republic of China! (Sun Yat-sen, was a Chinese revolutionary and president. Sun was the first provisional president when the Republic of China was founded in 1912 and later co-founded the Kuomintang, serving as its first leader.) George Gmelch in his book *Baseball without borders: the international pastime* (2006) said that Sun Yat-sen saw baseball as a convenient revolutionary tool and formed a baseball club to "took in young students to learn baseball techniques to improve their physical qualities" (2006 : 53). Back to Liang Fuchu, he was a catcher of his middle school team, and upon graduation from the middle school, was enrolled by Meiji University to serve as its first baseman. In the 1920s, some Chinese nationals residing in Yokohama formed a Chinese baseball team, and took the first place in Yokohama

League Amateur Baseball Championship twice in 1922 and 1930.

It is clear that Liang Fuchu organized the Chinese Youth Baseball League to win the championship in the Hong Kong International Baseball League, and was credited as “Father of Baseball in the Divine Land” by Hong Kong newspapers in 1942. Liang Fuchu, also named Liang Chengshu, born in 1891 and died in 1968, spent his youth in baseball in Yokohama, Japan, but after returning to China in 1932, he spared no effort to promote baseball and softball movements.

At first, he participated in a baseball team in Shanghai. At that time, Shanghai was a relatively developed place for the baseball movement in China, and as early as in 1925, the First Shanghai Junior Baseball League was held. The Shanghai Baseball Federation was founded in April 1926. In May of the same year, the First Baseball Championship was held. Liang Fuchu led his team to compete in the Fifth and Sixth National Baseball Games, and won the championship in the Sixth National Baseball Games in 1933.

1943-1959.

Zhan Tianyou, a famous railway engineer, played baseball during his study in America. Liang Dunyan, once the envoy of the Qing Imperial Court to America, was also a baseball player at Phillips Academy, Massachusetts. Nevertheless, these two persons did not fully devote themselves to the promotion of baseball in China after their return. Who did? The first Chinese who

introduced baseball in China, the team organizer who guided the team to win the championship, or the promoter who influenced and pushed forward baseball development? Zhan Tainyou, Feng Enci, or Liang Fuchu? It is hard to judge. Both *Historical Records of Chinese Baseball* by Jian Yongchang and *Rising Sun in the East: The History of the Development of Chinese Baseball* by Gao Zhengyuan mention that Feng Enci, a Chinese residing abroad, organized a baseball team in 1911 and even defeated the San Francisco Giants; but he still did not contribute to the promotion of baseball movement in China. What is more, it was in 1958 that the Giants moved from New York to San Francisco; thus it is unknown which Giants team Feng Enci's team contended with.

Baseball became the unofficial sport of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) during the civil war from 1947 to 1949. A photo in Liang Youde (Son of Liang Fuchu) and Du Kehe's (Kehe used to be an assistant coach of China's national baseball team) and Chen Xianming's book, *A History of Chinese Baseball*, shows members of a baseball team formed by 511 Unit of the PLA, with the caption: "Baseball is one of the most loved sporting activities of the People's Liberation Army. In the past, baseball was known as junqiu or 'army ball.'" After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, baseball experienced a surge in popularity, and was recognized as an official sport at the first National Games in 1959, which featured 23 teams (Chen, Liang & Du, 1990).

Liang Fuchu's profound contribution to baseball development can be

attributed to the fact that his baseball career was never interrupted. By the end of the Sino-Japanese War (1945), 54-year-old Liang Fuchu returned to Shanghai from Hong Kong. Still, he refused to give up his baseball career. He held the post of the head coach of the Shanghai Panda Baseball and Softball Team, and all his four sons were members of the team.

The Panda Team came to Taiwan to play a match in 1947, and Taiwan's veteran team, the Taitan Team, also went to Shanghai to pay a return visit. To promote the Chinese baseball movement vigorously, Liang Fuchu even came to the middle schools and universities in Shanghai, such as Fudan University, to instruct baseball movement. He also published baseball and softball guides at his own cost, and gave them out to the schools and universities. At the same time, he hosted a "Panda Cup" of Baseball and Softball Games, which made Shanghai's baseball and softball movements flourish before the Communist Party of China built its political power.

After the Communist Party became the ruling party of China, Liang Fuchu left for the East China Public Security Force, the Navy and Military District of the South West, at their invitation to give instruction on baseball. He was widely praised for his "Death-defying Pursuit and Endless Persistence" sportsmanship (瘦橘子棒球梦, 2005). His son, Liang Youde, inherited his passion, and also devoted his life to Chinese baseball and softball. Liang Youde returned to China with his father in 1933. He served in the Panda Team and Beijing Baseball Team

as a second baseman in 1947 and in 1957 respectively, and coached the baseball and softball team of Beijing Foreign Studies University during the ten years from 1956 to 1966.

At the founding of the People's Republic of China, the baseball movement was not extinct in China. At that time, baseball was still played by the companies of the Chinese liberation army, particularly in the Military District of North China, which had its own baseball team. At the First Military Games in 1952, baseball was listed as a formal game, and eight military delegations competed in the baseball game for which the group single round-robin system was adopted. It turned out that the Military District of North China won the title. This game was also the first baseball game since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

In 1956, the Physical Culture and Sports Commission of the PRC held a national six-unit baseball exhibition match in Beijing, and began to promote the baseball movement officially. According to a baseball researcher's blog (瘦橘子 棒球, 2005), between 1957 and 1958 there were three national baseball games held. Still, the first formal national baseball games were the ones held in Chengdu, Wuhan, Shenyang and Xi'an in 1959, where the single round-robin system was adopted and the first and second place winners competed in the final match in Beijing. The eight teams that went to the final match were from Beijing, the Liberation Army, Shanghai, Hubei, Hebei, Jiangsu, Sichuan, and

Liaoning. The final winner was the Beijing Team.

The Beijing Team's victories over the other provinces and the Liberation Army were mainly credited to the participation, promotion and guidance of Li Minkuan, a player born and residing in Japan.

1960-1978.

Unlike basketball in China, baseball did not survive these two turbulent decades. Baseball, along with other Western influences, began a decline in the early 1960s, and virtually disappeared from Chinese popular culture during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Joseph A. Reaves, who spent 29 years in professional journalism wrote a book on baseball called *Taking in a Game* (2002). In this book, Reaves examines the development of baseball in Korea, the Philippines, Mainland China, and Taiwan, as well as the more widely known story of baseball in Japan. Reaves guides the reader through a history of Asian baseball, the cultures that surround it, and the future of what has become a great Asian game. Reaves (2002) stated that baseball disappeared from the regular national competition between 1961 and 1974. Some scholars said baseball was banned, but Xie Chaoquan – deputy secretary of the Chinese Baseball and Softball Federation in the late 1970s and early 1980s – blamed the disappearance of baseball in the early 1960s on the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap Forward caused severe economic problems for the nation's economic development. Du Kehe, who was an assistant coach of China's national baseball team, said that

“some of us still played baseball in countryside. We posted guards to whistle when someone came, then we hid the bats and gloves and pretended to be doing exercises” (P, 45). Marshal He Long, a legend in Red China’s army pantheon, saw baseball as an effective way to train the soldiers. He considered the sliding and sprinting between bases perfect speed training for assault troops, and batting the best method to develop aim. He built a special factory just to produce baseball equipment for the army, and used a Japanese coach to train the army baseball team. However, Marshal He was imprisoned and tortured for criticizing Mao Zedong’s economic errors, and reportedly starved to death in 1968 after gnawing through the padding of his old military overcoat. Zealous Red Guards across China attacked all sports, and baseball in particular, as unwanted extravagances of Western decadence. Baseball coaches were ridiculed and persecuted, and some were killed even by their own players.

Insert Table 3 about here

MLB Activities in China Since 1978

The history of the MLB in China is limited, since it started to get into the Chinese market only in 2003. However, when comparing the MLB to the NBA, numerous similarities and differences can be identified. Below is a description of MLB in China in the following categories: broadcasting and media, MLB players, MLB partnerships, and MLB China. A table featuring the key events is

also generated similarly as NBA at the end of this section.

Broadcasting and media.

In 2007, MLB's TV coverage was limited to China ESPN. At that time, ESPN Star Sports (ESS) selected regular-season MLB games to be broadcast nationwide, but few Chinese viewers tuned in; the domestic league was not covered at all. In 2008, Major League Baseball International (MLBI) signed a deal with Shanghai Media Group (SMG) for three years. This agreement was a landmark for MLB broadcasting in China, which was supposed to increase Chinese exposure to the MLB significantly. Great Sports, a leading cable sports channel in China, aired the MLB All-Star Game and World Series, and a weekly China-specific program, *This Week in Baseball*. This was the first time the World Series was aired on local cable television in China. In addition, the MLB launched a Mandarin website via MLB.com. This could complement the television and radio in the marketing strategy.

MLB players.

In November 2003, the MLB signed a development agreement with the Chinese Baseball League (CBL) allowing MLB clubs the right to scout and sign Chinese players. The MLB remains committed to providing development resources, including national team development, coaching development, umpire development, and youth initiatives. Since 2001, five Chinese players have signed contracts with Major League teams. Zhang Zhenwang and Liu Kai

signed with the Yankees as catcher and left-handed pitcher respectively; Wei Wang, Yu Bingjia, and Chao Wang signed with the Mariners as catcher, fielder and right-handed pitcher respectively.

MLB partnerships.

MLBI has partnered with Eversports Marketing to introduce the MLB brand across China. There are currently over 100 stores opened across the country in 2011. At the same time, WebBroadAsia cooperated with the MLB to build its Chinese website.

MLB China.

In January 2007, MLB opened its second Asian office in Beijing, the first being located in Hong Kong. The vice president, Jim Small, operated the Japanese branch of the MLB, and therefore has rich experience in the Asian market. In September of the same year, the Play Ball program was established as the grassroots youth baseball project, and it was launched in five cities across China. Play Ball is considered to be one of the most important actions for promoting baseball on a nationwide scale. Over 120 elementary schools in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Wuxi incorporated baseball into the physical education curriculum, and it involves more than 100,000 elementary school students (ages ten to twelve). In 2009, the MLB set up its first training center in Wuxi, which extended baseball education to an inaugural China baseball academy.

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion and Results

Sport management research has made good use of research on the institutional and organizational fields since the 1980s. Concepts such as legitimacy and isomorphism have been used to solve existing problems and present new research questions.

In this project, I extend sport management research using institutional theory as a theoretical lens. Historical data collected from books, web sites, and newspapers provided the evidence on basketball and baseball's development in China from the late 1800s. I argued that the Chinese government and its culture impacted the diffusion of baseball and the MLB. To help with the presentation of the results, Form 1 at the end of this section is produced from the data.

With a similar history track over the last 100 years, basketball and baseball shared nearly the same opportunities to get developed in China. However, baseball failed to develop during the Cultural Revolution, unlike basketball. Zealous Red Guards across China attacked all sports, and baseball in particular, as unwanted extravagances of Western decadence. Baseball coaches were ridiculed and persecuted, and some were killed even by their own players. However, basketball survived as a result of Mao Zedong's personal preference. As a matter

of fact, basketball was promoted in the army and soldiers were encouraged to play during the 1970s. If, as the documentary evidence suggests, it was overseas students who introduced baseball into Mainland China around 1880, then Chinese baseball would, up to now, have a history of nearly 120 years. Meanwhile, the introduction of baseball into Japan from America happened around 1873, and its introduction into Taiwan from Japan was about 1895. Accordingly, the introduction of baseball to Mainland China took place at almost at the same time as Japan, and earlier than Taiwan. However, today Chinese Mainland baseball lags behind Japan and Taiwan. The Chinese government strangled baseball in the Cultural Revolution, which led to a halt in baseball's development.

I have also argued that the techniques that led to the successful diffusion of the NBA also impacted the diffusion of the MLB. As can be seen in the data above, the MLB has made many similar moves to the NBA, but also some slightly different ones. This is supported by several aspects of the data: (a) the media exposure; (b) the players' cultivation and star-making training center, and (c) professionalization.

The NBA's exposure in China began with CCTV, the country's main television network with the coverage of 1.2 billion people across the mainland, and then extended to local television stations. Until 2009, there are 51 TV stations all over China had signed contract with NBA, including the CCTV. The MLB on the other hand, did not utilize CCTV to break into the media and broadcasting

market, but instead started with SMG, a local television station with limited coverage exclusively in the Shanghai area. While in 2009, there are only five TV stations signed contract with the MLB with a coverage around 250 million. This was due to the media and broadcasting strategy of MLB, which is to move up from local stations to the Central television station, CCTV, as baseball grows in popularity. The broadcasting industry in China is a bit different from the United States, in that the CCTV is the free national channel that covers most of the country. Under these circumstances, the local media exposure is not comparable with that of the CCTV. Using this strategy to popularize baseball and the MLB has little effect due to the lack of reach of SMG, even if it is in Shanghai.

According to an interview with Zhishi He (his sport promotion company is the partner of MLB in Shanghai area), there are only six professional baseball courses in Shanghai, and approximately 5000-8000 people are playing baseball. However, there are over ten indoor and outdoor basketball courts just in Shanghai University of Sport. Shanghai is a city with over 1700 middle schools, primary schools and universities, and each school has at least one basketball court.

There are many factors limiting baseball development in China, such as complex rules, the high-cost of equipment, a shortage of fields, and rare publicity, but the main problem is the unpopularity of baseball. It is conceivable that, since few people can understand it and fewer still people like it, professional coaches are difficult to attract, there are not enough referees, journalists who

know how to report baseball are rarer, it is natural that it is nearly impossible to gain publicity for baseball. If baseball fans become as widespread as basketball fans in China, the success of Chinese professional baseball will naturally follow. Besides, there is basically no problem with the framework of baseball promotion in China and the determination of leading departments to succeed, only the people's support (the cultivation and support of a broad mass of fans) is in short supply.

MLB should be patient in cultivating fans and spreading the baseball atmosphere, for there is a long way to go. Apart from the fact that more high-standard fields are needed, more players should be cultivated, more training camps should be set up, there should be more participation in competition abroad, top-ranking foreign baseball teams should be invited to visit and play matches, and the concern and focus from the public and the mass media should be encouraged. With Chinese baseball games increasingly booming, it is possible that one day China may compete against Taiwan for the Strait Professional Baseball Final Championship, which will be a remarkably grand occasion and may set the whole world on fire.

With the Eight-Power Allied Forces invasion, Sun Yat-sen's (father of the Republic of China) overthrow of Qing Governance, Yuan Shikai's Restoration of Monarchy, the Northern Expedition, the founding of the Nanjing Government, the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Communist Party's governance, the Great Leap

Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the Gang of Four, and so on, people in China were living in an invisible yet endless earthquake. All sports, including baseball, were difficult to develop. To view this from a different perspective, if America had been suffering from endless civil commotions ever since the Civil War, and had brought the battlefields of the Second World War, Vietnam War, Korean War, Cuban Missile Crisis, and Cold War into its own soil, there would not be such sports realms as MLB and the NBA today.

I generate Table five to summarize the relationships of NBA, MLB and Isomorphism. MLB mimic NBA in it's marketing strategy, considering media and broadcasting is important in penetrating Chinese market. Since NBA player Yao Ming plays a important role in Chinese market, MLB decision makers set up several baseball training center expecting to cultivate a baseball Yao Ming. NBA and MLB's development is related to basketball and baseball's history in China. Through out more that a hundred years of development, basketball seems to receive more attention and support from either the government or the public. Shu Hong as the first Olympic basketball referee, considered to change basketball from an western sport to a symbol of national glory. However, baseball has no special event. Even though there were several important role like Liang Fuchu, Du Kehe devoted themselves in developing baseball, nothing like winning Olympic games happened to make it become legitimate. Baseball remained as "evil western influence" in Culture Revolution, which led to the fact that baseball was banned

for a long period. Coercive mechanism offers an explanation for the contrary situation between basketball and baseball before 1978. Professionalization is an issue for baseball in recent twenty years in China. CBA has established a regular competition system and received a lot of attention, while CBL is experiencing difficulties moving along. One of the reason that CBL is not developing properly is the government has not being very supportive.

Implications

The MLB decision-makers should not only make full use of the media and broadcasting resources, for example, utilize CCTV to popularize baseball, but also consider spreading baseball in a broader way – school sport. In 2005, 170 million students participated in compulsory education in China. In addition, physical education is a required course in all grades. If baseball could become a part of the course curriculum, as basketball did, popularizing baseball should happen much more easily.

The news that MLB has opened its first training center in Wuxi shows its strategy of spreading the seeds of baseball to common people and expecting to harvest future fans and the baseball Yao Ming – the most successful Chinese basketball player in the NBA. Yao Ming played a crucial role in the growth of NBA China. Right now at the moment, due to the limited development of baseball in China, a baseball Yao Ming is unlikely to appear in less than a decade

or two. What is more, with a certain number of fans, the exposure will increase correspondingly.

It can be seen from the descriptions above that, in the Mainland, baseball publicity has been carried out through the group settings of land kitty ball, kid baseball, college and university baseball, and adult baseball in the provinces; the development of baseball teams comes through interest-based cultivation or special cultivation, so that the seeds of baseball are sown around the whole country, and the development of baseball is expanded from point to point with a very sound framework. The hardware, namely, baseball fields such as the Tianjin Daoqi Baseball Stadium and the newly-built fields in Beijing Fengtai and the site for the Olympic Games, reached international standard; the program was also updated and improved; for example, first-class coaches from Taiwan, Japan, and the United States gave lectures and guidance, and as a result, techniques were greatly improved and a bright future could be expected.

The increase in competition made Chinese adult baseball take on an entirely new look. The new league match system paved the way for the future professional seasons. In the past, Chinese Baseball League Matches consisted of two phases, so that each team could only take part in about 16 games each year, while the new competition system consists of three phases: a national baseball tournament in April, a national baseball championship in June, and a national baseball league match final in October, which provides each team with at least 28

opportunities to compete against each other per year.

Professionalization is a necessary stage for every kind of sports, not excepting Chinese baseball. In the past twenty years, China has encouraged baseball games, and made excellent achievements in kid baseball and college baseball, but as there were no professional baseball teams, many young players gave up playing baseball due to practical problems. It was a pity to lose such cultivated players.

Seeing the enthusiastic response to the home-and-away competitions in basketball, the Chinese Baseball Association also wanted to accelerate the professionalization of baseball. The original plan was to sign an agreement with a foreign sports company that would invest, but it was strange that it signed an agreement with Top Crown Investment Co., Ltd. (UK), a British company that was unrelated to professional baseball, for financing. In addition, in September 2000, the Chinese Baseball Association signed an agreement with seven baseball teams from Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangdong, Sichuan, Gansu, and Henan, and according to the agreement, each team was expected to set up clubs, cultivate baseball fans, and build stands and fields to prepare for the professional baseball league matches expected to be played in 2002. However, the plan was postponed due to such factors as the non-improved level of baseball teams, a shortage of fans, a lack of support from the media, and a limited market.

Limitation and Contribution

As previously indicated in methodology part, this study employs archival research method to collect data from newspapers, journals, website and archival centers. I could not interview any NBA, MLB, State General Administration for Sport officials. What's more, many of the resources dated back more than a hundred years, it is impossible to interview any of the key roles.

I use only baseball and basketball in study without considering more sports like soccer, volleyball etc.. This may lead to some limitations. As many of the resources are translated from Chinese, it is possible that the translations are not perfect. I employed a translation company to help me with translation in order to reduce the chances of mis-translation.

Chinese market is potential for growth for many sport leagues in the world. This study may offer explanations and solutions to the sport leagues in working on penetrating this market. It is also helpful for Chinese native sport leagues to gain legitimacy in their future development.

Conclusion

This study has discussed institutional isomorphism, and more specifically, has focused on the mimetic and coercive mechanisms of the isomorphic process. The resources came mainly from journals, reports, and online data, due to data collection limitations. As the NBA is seen as the “fashionable” foreign major

league sport in China, the MLB considers it to be the model through which it can be legitimated. Therefore, the imitation process of the NBA by the MLB is quite obvious after analyzing its development strategy in China. Fault can be found in that the mimetic process has not been promoted enough; the reason for this can potentially be attributed to the thus-far short life of the MLB in China. The mimetic process involved here could be what O’Neil, Poudel, and Buccholtz referred to as “the blind leading the blind” (1998, p. 100). This study may have the limitation of ruling out that possibility.

Insert Table 5 about here

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Appendix

Table 1

Key events happened in basketball's history in China from 1895 to 1978.

| Time | Features | Basketball |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|
| 08/14/1936 | Key Role/Event | Referee Shu Hong changed basketball from an imported sport to a symbol of national glory, which elevated basketball's position in national sports. |
| 1937-1948 | Government Support | In revolutionary base areas, basketball became popular with the broad masses of the people and officers and soldiers of the Red Army and the Eighth Army. |
| 1949-1978 | Government Support | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National Basketball Team was established in the 1950s. 2. There were 33 basketball teams all over China. China competed with the Former Soviet Union in 1950. 3. The Competent Department of China took measures to accelerate the establishment of teams further, and to gain advanced experience and learn advanced playing methods. 4. In December 1972, the National Basketball Training Work Conference was held to summarize past work and to make new goals for future development. |

Table 2

Key events or features happened in NBA's history in China from 1978 until now.

| Time | Features | NBA |
|------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1979 | First Team Plays in China | Washington Bullets (now Wizards) went to China to play two games. |
| 1987-Now | Media Broadcasting | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In 1987, the first NBA programming in China was the NBA All Star Game broadcast by CCTV. 2. In 1989, David Stern signed the NBA's formal television deal in China. 3. In 1994, every game of the NBA finals was broadcast live on Chinese television. 4. NBA started by using National broadcasting network – CCTV, and extended to local broadcast and print media. |
| 1987-Now | NBA Players | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In 1987, Sun Tao was the first Asian player drafted, but he didn't play in an NBA game. Similar things happened to Ma Jian. 2. In 2001, Wang ZhiZhi was the first Chinese player to play in the NBA. Mengke Bateer became the second around the same time. 3. Yao Ming was signed by Houston Rockets in 2002 and was selected as the starting center from 2003-2008. |
| 2003-2006 | Partnerships | NBA marketing partners were heavily active in China from 2003 to 2006. With various means of marketing and promotion, correlating with the influence |

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| | | of Yao Ming, they have made a significant difference. |
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Table 3

Key events happened in baseball's history in China from 1881 to 1978

| Time | Features | Basketball |
|-------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 08/14/1936 | Key Role/Event | Liang Fuchu – “Father of Chinese Baseball”, dedicated himself to promoting baseball in China. |
| 1947-1949 | Government Support | Baseball became the unofficial sport of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) during civil war from 1947 to 1949. |
| 1960-1978 | No Government Support | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The officer Marshal He Long who promoted baseball in the Army died due to criticizing Mao Zedong. 2. Baseball was banned during this period. 3. The coaches were killed by the Red Guards. |

Table 4

Key events happened in baseball's history in China from 1978 until now.

| Time | Key Features | MLB |
|------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 2007-2008 | Media Broadcasting | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In 2007, MLB's TV coverage was limited to China ESPN. 2. In 2008, MLBI signed a deal with a local Media network – SMG, covering only the Shanghai area. |
| 2001 | Star Player | <p>Since 2001, Zhang Zhenwang, Liu Kai, Wei Wang, Yu Bingjia, and Chao Wang have signed with MLB. There was no star player like Wang Jianmin from Taiwan.</p> |
| 2009 | Training Center | <p>In 2009, the MLB set up its first training center in Wuxi, which extended baseball education to an inaugural China baseball academy. MLB will try to cultivate star players in the next decade.</p> |

Table 5

A summary of the relationships of NBA, MLB, basketball, baseball and Isomorphism.

| Key Features | NBA | MLB | Isomorphism |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| Media Broadcasting | Using National broadcasting network – CCTV | Local media network – SMG, covering only the Shanghai area | Mimetic – MLB considered media and broadcasting use as an important marketing strategy, which is similar to the NBA’s strategy. However, the limited coverage does not work well. |
| Star Player | Yao Ming | No Chinese star player from Mainland | Mimetic – The MLB’s decision makers set up a baseball training center hoping to cultivate a baseball Yao Ming. |
| | Basketball | Baseball | |
| Key Role/Event | Referee Shu Hong changed basketball from an imported sport to a symbol of national glory. | No Special Event or Character | Coercive – Basketball has become a Chinese sport since the Shu Hong event. However, baseball has remained as a Western sport and was banned in the Cultural Revolution. |
| Government Support | Survived in the Cultural Revolution and supported by Mao Zedong | Banned | Coercive – Contrary to basketball, government policy towards baseball left a great hole in baseball’s development in last 50 years. |
| Professionalization | Professional and developed CBA | CBL not fully developed | Mimetic and Normative and Coercive – A fully developed professional league would help to develop the sport and the |

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|--|--|--|---|
| | | | competition level. After seeing basketball being successful in its professionalization, the state General Administration for Sports has been encouraging the professionalization of baseball. |
|--|--|--|---|