

Leaning Towards China: Taiwanese Basketball Talent Migration to the PRC

Wan-Ching Cho^a, Chih-Fu Cheng^a, Alan Bairner^b & Tien-Chin Tan^{c*}

^aDepartment of Physical Education, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

^bLoughborough University, Loughborough, United Kingdom

^cGraduate Institute of Sport, Leisure and Hospitality Management, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

***Address for correspondence:**

Professor Tien-Chin TAN

Graduate Institute of Sport, Leisure and Hospitality Management

National Taiwan Normal University

No. 162, Ho-Ping E. Road , Sec.1, Taipei 106,

Taiwan . (R.O.C.)

Telephone: 886-2-77343234

Mobile: 886-(0)983150098

Email: tangtony60@ntnu.edu.tw

Abstract

This study aims to examine the different influences on Taiwanese basketball migration from 1999 to the present particularly in relation to the specific political relationship between Taiwan and China. Political influence on sports talent migration is well recognized, but has yet to be fully explored. This study contributes to our understanding of sport migration by providing in-depth empirical and analytical insights into the role of political influences, thereby adding to an understanding of the institutional factors that can either impede or facilitate sport labour migration and of the key networks involved in specific migratory processes.

Keywords: Taiwan, patron-client network, migratory flow, globalization, political institution

Introduction

While sports labour migration normally occurs either within nation-states or between nation-states located within the same or different continents,¹ nationhood, in the cross-strait context of Taiwan and China, is disputed. The Chinese government considers the two political entities to compose a single currently divided nation with Taiwan being “an inalienable part”² of its territory; hence, migration occurring across the Taiwan Strait is considered by China to be taking place within the nation-state rather than between nation-states. On the other hand, the Taiwan authorities are more inclined to view Taiwan and China as two sovereign countries. Therefore, the migration of Taiwanese sports labour to China is connected to Taiwan’s core political identity and its corresponding foreign policy which are often in conflict with its economic interests.³ Indeed, enforcing the political principle of a sovereign nation-state by prohibiting Taiwanese people from moving to China would put the country’s national economic interest in danger. This dilemma for policy formulation is reflected in the evolution of the laws and regulations governing Taiwanese basketball talent migration to China. Thus, examining the specific migratory process of Taiwanese male basketball players moving to the Chinese professional basketball league, the CBA, involves an understanding of the wider political context.

Following the conclusion of the civil war in China that centred on ideological differences, there was no direct contact between Taiwan and China from 1949. However, in 1979, the Chinese People’s Congress released “A Message to Compatriots in Taiwan” in which it expressed a willingness to initiate contact with Taiwan through establishing communications, referring specifically to the postal service, and transportation channels. The Taiwanese authorities responded with three noes, “no contact, no negotiation, and no compromise”.⁴ Thus, it was not until 1987, when Taiwan lifted restrictions on its residents visiting their relatives in China that the two sides started to have direct contact with each other. Sports-related interactions, such as

participating in events held by International Federations (IFs) either in China or Taiwan, began two years later in 1989 after an agreement was reached on the Chinese translation “zhōng huá tái běi” (Chinese Taipei) being used to describe sports teams and athletes competing for Taiwan.⁵ Although this agreement marked the actualization of cross-strait sports interactions, Taiwan remained more cautious about opening up to China than China to Taiwan.⁶

As Taiwan’s economic and cultural exchanges with China increased after the 1980s, the government’s cautiousness regarding cross-strait affairs, “prohibiting all except the approved exceptions”,⁷ was increasingly challenged by private entities and individuals in the 1990s.⁸ In 2001, the emigration of a high-profile basketball club, the Sina Lions, struck a raw nerve with the Taiwanese authorities, including the Sports Affairs Council (SAC), the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), which governs affairs between Taiwan and China, and the Chinese Taipei Basketball Association (CTBA). Although Sina Lions returned to Taiwan in 2003 after two seasons in the CBA, and then contributed to the establishment of a new league, the Super Basketball League (SBL), in 2004, the club had paved the way for subsequent basketball players to migrate to China through the relaxation of constraints imposed by the government. In 2007, after the first outflow of players to the CBA had paused for three seasons, another three players moved to the CBA in the 2007-08 season. The outflow of basketball talent to the CBA not only reoccurred but also continued to grow quite steadily with each passing season. In the 2015-16 season, there were nine players from Taiwan registered in the CBA, the second highest number of non-local players after players from the United States. Thus, basketball provides a salient sports context to study cross-strait sport migration because it largely complies with wider globalization trends in terms of players’ movement over the past twenty years.

Many consider the movement of people across borders to be a predominant feature of the globalizing world. This is particularly true in relation to the global movement of sports labour which is sometimes cast as an “inconvenient truth”⁹ by countries suffering from so-called “brawn drain”.¹⁰ One cannot deny that the phenomenon of sports labour migration is predominantly driven by highly motivated individuals seeking to fulfil their aspirations and to achieve social advancement – or simply put, “following the money”.¹¹ As a semi-peripheral place in the world system of sport, Taiwan has long adopted a participatory approach in the face of globalization. In fact, starting in the late 1980s, it became common for talented athletes from Taiwan, mostly elite baseball players, to travel across borders to pursue their professional careers.¹² In the world of basketball, in the late 1990s, when clubs from the Chinese professional basketball league (CBA) began to acquire a reputation for spending large amounts of money on the recruitment of elite foreign players, more and more qualified and eligible basketball talent from many countries, including elite players from Taiwan, looked for career opportunities in the PRC. However, we must avoid generalised and monocausal explanations for sport labour migration. Sociologists remind us not to neglect the complex interdependent processes that shape the experience of sports labour migration.¹³

This study is intended to reflect the different influences on Taiwanese basketball migration from 1999 to the present, particularly in relation to the specific political relationship between Taiwan and China.

Analytical Framework and Methodological Approach

The analytical framework utilized in the study is mainly derived from the three primary sets of determinants identified by Taylor, sourced from the historical pattern of the sport migratory flow, namely economic, cultural, and institutional or structural¹⁴. The first of these, understood as sport labour moving from the economic periphery to the core, is highly significant for the explanation of migration phenomena in sport, whereby monetary income and the fulfilment of social advancement and personal aspirations are also taken into account¹⁵. The second determinant refers to the cultural ties between the place of departure and arrival¹⁶ that can often facilitate the establishment of social networks through which information about recruitment and relocation is shared. Elliot and Maguire's study sheds light on how "the relational networks perpetuate the recruitment of migrants from particular locations and with specific occupational skills."¹⁷ Third, institutional or structural factors refer to the governing bodies inside the world of sports as well as external governmental agencies¹⁸ wherein the immigration policies are formed that largely shape the migration outcomes in terms of volume, timing, composition, and direction.¹⁹ A prominent example is 1995's far-reaching Bosman Case in European football, according to which the political hegemony of the European Union (EU) over the free movement of labour,²⁰ largely shaped subsequent football migration within EU countries.²¹ Furthermore, Carter's anthropological work documents the ways in which the Cuban state intervened in, and at the same time made possible, the migration of Cuban baseball players to serve the economic purposes of the regime.²² In addition to state authorities and economic and political processes, the influence of regulations enacted by sports governing bodies at both the national and international levels has also been acknowledged.²³ Overall, political considerations on the part of international or national institutions that assume the form of laws, regulations and measures (or their absence) can profoundly affect the outcomes of migration.

Alongside the process of exploring influential factors, some stakeholder groups such as the migrants themselves, clubs, sport governing bodies, and governments, from both the places of arrival and of departure, can be identified as constituent parts of the interdependency network.

This study focuses on Taiwan, because, from an historical point of view, resistance from Taiwan first shaped migration across the Taiwan Strait. Only later did the volume of movement from Taiwan to China increase, mainly due to strong economic inducements from China. In addition, Chinese policies and laws facilitated Taiwanese players' migration to the CBA with China granting socio-economic rights to people from the Taiwan Area similar to those accorded to Chinese people in Mainland China.²⁴ This strategy, aimed at winning over Taiwanese people,²⁵ has caused the migration structure to tilt more sharply in favour of China. In the CBA (China), Taiwanese players are categorized as "internal players" like those from Hong Kong and Macau, and similar to local Chinese players,²⁶ they are not subject to the quotas or playing time limits that apply to other foreign players.

To investigate these processes, data was collected using qualitative methods including a series of semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The interviews were analysed by adopting a thematic approach derived from the analytical framework. As regards the participants, we identified representatives from different stakeholder groups. First, we interviewed two senior government officials and two senior officers who worked in the relevant departments of the SAC and CTBA at different periods from 1999 to 2016 about the government's and the governing body's stance in relation to amendments in the law, the ban list and general policies. We also

interviewed ten migrant players from different periods about factors affecting their decision to migrate. In addition, we selected a senior manager and a head coach representing two different clubs, both of which have a significant number of players who have migrated to mainland China.

The selection criteria for these interviewees were twofold. First, we selected the government officials who held leading positions during the periods when major legal amendments or significant incidents took place, for instance, the Sina Lions' migration. Second, for migrant players and club representatives, we selected those who are more informed and connected to the basketball community by having experience of coaching in the domestic league or teaching in the collegiate system, or having graduated from well-known basketball schools.

With respect to the documentary sources, we utilized both official and unofficial documents to inform the historical background as well as to triangulate with the interview analysis. The official documents included policies, regulations, laws, internal meeting minutes, transcription of proceedings from the MAC, SAC, the Legislative Yuan, press releases from the CTBA, the regulations documents of the CBMC (China Basketball Management Centre) and the CBA (China), and the website of the International Federation of Basketball (FIBA). Unofficial papers, on the other hand, included reports from government-commissioned projects produced by academic research groups, media articles and academic journal articles.

Two Flows of Migration from Taiwan to Mainland China

To present the changes in relation to the ways in which various institutions influenced migration, we divided the era into two periods. During the first period, from 1999 to 2007, Taiwanese institutions first encountered athletes' border-crossing issues in an age of a globalizing world. The second period from 2007 to the present is characterized by adjustments these institutions have made to secure their own interests while coping with the issue more broadly.

The First Flow: 1999 to 2007

It was not until the second decade after Taiwan opened up to China in the 1980s that laws regulating Taiwan's cross-strait affairs started to lag behind reality.²⁷ 1998 was a dark period for Taiwanese basketball, one of the most popular sports in the country. Once praised as the number one professional league in Asia, the Chinese Basketball Alliance²⁸ (CBA, Taiwan) was suspended despite "a few last deathbed struggles"²⁹ because the clubs could no longer afford deficits that stemmed from the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. As a result, quite a few professional players had no choice but to return to the amateur level, where the pay was only half of that which they had previously been paid and very few people came to watch the games.³⁰

Given that there was no light at the end of the tunnel with regard to the CBA (Taiwan), Chi-Lung Cheng, one of the top players in Asia and certainly the best player in Taiwan, announced his affiliation with the Shanghai Sharks³¹ on 11 October 1999. Feng-Nian Chiang, who would later become the owner of the Sina Lions, was the matchmaker for this first player transfer to China. In the press conference, Cheng stated, "This movement is simply bowing to reality, nothing related to politics. Taiwan is still my top priority if the CBA (Taiwan) can be restored."³²

After one season as a Shark, Cheng returned to Taiwan in 2000 and joined the Da-Cin club, the owner of which, Ren-da Wang, was his patron and also the president of the CTBA at the time. In 2001, knowing that Cheng had never dismissed the idea of

playing in the CBA (China).³³ again, Wang assigned him, together with former national teammate Chin-Ching Chu, to another Chinese club, Shaanxi Dong-Cheng, for the relegation tournament.³⁴ When these two players retired after the tournament, Wang then further fixed up a player of his own, also a former national team member, Zhi-Chao XU, with Shaanxi for the next two seasons (2001-03). According to the player himself, the movement that allowed him to make more money in China was particularly reasonable because the CBA Taiwan had confirmed its shutdown by the end of 2000.³⁵ Furthermore, it was his own boss who had negotiated the move and had explicitly asked him to go. At that time, the Taiwanese authorities did not find the migration of these players problematic.

However, it appeared that the shutdown of the CBA Taiwan was only the first part of a double blow to these players. In February 2001, when preparing the national team roster for the East Asian Games, the CTBA decided to adopt a renewal policy that substituted the veterans in the national team with young teenage talents. The goal of the policy was to build a competitive team for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, but replacing all the veterans who were still in their prime was inevitably controversial. Sina Lions, to which four of the former national team members belonged, were most affected by this renewal policy. One of the players explained how he felt at that time, “I found the renewal policy deeply humiliating and it cast doubts upon my capability as a basketball player.” The leadership of the club, who had long expressed an inclination to seek opportunities in China after a shutdown of the CBA Taiwan,³⁶ decided to move the whole team to the CBA China. On 13 September 2001, the CTBA received written confirmation from the China Basketball Management Centre (CBMC) informing them of their decision to approve Taiwan (Suzhou) Sina Lions Basketball Club’s participation in the CBA (China) in the 2001-02 season. The news of an entire team joining the CBA (China) took the CTBA, the SAC, and the MAC by surprise with the CTBA responding on 20 September 2001 saying

Sina Lions is a registered club under the governance of the CTBA. Without the approval of the CTBA as well as the related authorities, the club is not allowed to participate in the CBA China under the proposed name.

In order to address their differences, Sina Lions’ owner Feng-Nian Chiang and CEO De-Yen Tu met with officers from the SAC and MAC, the CTBA and the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee on 28 September.³⁷ Apparently, *the proposed name* was a contested issue. CBA team names should begin with the province or city in which they are located. Sina Lions were going to locate in Suzhou City but, instead of beginning with Suzhou, a team name that began with the word Taiwan would strongly imply that Taiwan is one of the provinces or cities of China. All parties involved were fully aware that neither Taiwan nor Taipei was acceptable in the club's name. Despite that, no concrete decision could be reached at the meeting. However, Sina's leadership was also aware that this was a one-time chance to quickly join the CBA China.³⁸ The government utilized article 33.1 from the Act Governing Relations between the People of Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area to impose a red line, saying, “No individual or organization without approval is allowed to become a member or hold a position of any institute or organization in the mainland area”.³⁹ This would specifically affect the players who could receive fines because they would not be able to avoid being Taiwan residents. In contrast, the company, Sina could easily bypass the law by transferring the club to one of its overseas subsidiaries.⁴⁰ Seeing that a resolution had yet to be put

forward, Sina Lions' CEO De-Yen Tu expressed his discontent in the media, claiming that "Sina will muscle its way to China at all costs".⁴¹ The director of the MAC Ing-Wen Tsai, currently the President of Taiwan, responded and restated the government's stance:

Interactions with China in sports are not and should not be considered a highly sensitive political issue. Therefore, the government will put forward a rule regulating the movement of sports labour across the Strait to resolve this unlawful situation.⁴²

On 10 October 2001, taking advantage of the Asian Women's Basketball Championship being held in Bangkok, the officers from both the CTBA (Taiwan) and the CBMC (China) conducted a meeting to find common ground regarding the name of the club.⁴³ At the end, both sides of the Strait, the Mainland Affairs Council (Taiwan) and the State Department Taiwan Affairs Office (China), approved Sina Lions adopting Suzhou Sina Lions (Taiwan Corporate) Basketball Club as their registered name in the CBA.⁴⁴ However, while the political issue may have been settled momentarily, the CTBA did not appear to soften its attitude towards the players and required that they sign an affidavit saying that once they had opted for China, there would be no way that they could return to play for a club in Taiwan. One Sina player revealed, "I was intimidated and worried about my future career".⁴⁵ In total, Sina Lions eventually brought eleven players, one coach, and one athletic trainer from Taiwan to China.⁴⁶

Their first season was relatively successful but the aging of star players became an issue relatively soon. Moreover, the recruitment of new players from both Taiwan and China appeared to be challenging.⁴⁷ In the summer of 2002, the CTBA invited the Sina Lions back to Taiwan to take part in an international tournament, the William Jones Cup.⁴⁸ Having accepted the invitation, the Sina Lions not only achieved third place, but also defeated the young Chinese Taipei national team. In addition, the fans came to the games with signs protesting against the renewal policy and cheering for the Sina Lions while booing the national team.⁴⁹ Thus, the CTBA's renewal policy was again fiercely contested. However, public attention that had been drawn to basketball paved the way for the initiation of a new league. In April 2003, the director of the SAC, De-Fu Lin, set in motion the establishment of the Super Basketball League (SBL) under the governance of the CTBA. Most importantly, he promised to support the league with government funding⁵⁰. Meanwhile, the Sina Lions' standing in the CBA (China) declined rapidly and they ended up playing in the relegation tournament in order to secure their spot in the league. After season 2002-03, the Sina Lions decided to withdraw and return to Taiwan.⁵¹ Since the whole team had returned, the affidavits the players had signed were not applicable. Despite being only a semi-professional league, the SBL's first three seasons (2003-06) were quite successful. Moreover, no other Taiwanese players, except for two former Sina players who had stayed on, played in the CBA (China) during these three seasons.

The Second Flow: 2007 to 2016

The prosperity of the SBL did not last long and the league encountered a series of problems. The organizers could not secure a calendar with venues in big cities.⁵² Referees' integrity and ability were seriously questioned,⁵³ and some clubs were

dissatisfied with the CTBA's governance and wanted to establish their own league.⁵⁴ , Meanwhile, under the influence of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform, the CBA (China) evolved into a much more commercialized professional league in which players were allowed to be transferred, commodified and valued according to their performance levels.⁵⁵ The growth of the league is quite evident in the dramatic increase of the annual fixed revenue from sponsorship from 6 million (0.9 Million USD) in 2003 to 100 million RMB (14.7 million USD) in 2008, and to 600 million RMB (88.6 million USD) in 2012.⁵⁶

Consequently, the outflow of players to China reoccurred. Three players, all point guards, left Taiwan for the CBA China in season 2007-08. Before the next season, Sean Chen, a franchise player for both the national team and his club, reportedly accepted a generous offer from the CBA club Guangdong New Century which led to an immediate constraining measure being taken by the CTBA prohibiting 24 players from transferring to the CBA China. The purpose of this ban list was to prevent a potential outflow of players to China, which would undermine the attractiveness of the SBL.⁵⁷ Sean Chen reacted with fierce statements against the ban in the media,⁵⁸ but eventually none of the 24 players effectively challenged the CTBA's decision. Nevertheless, five players who were not on the list left for the CBA that season. Moreover, before the 2008-09 season even started, the SBL was hardly able to seal a media rights deal, thereby greatly shaking the players' confidence in the league's capacity to maintain its current revenue level.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, players involved in the second migratory flow expressed considerable resentment towards their league of departure, the SBL. One migrant player described the SBL as "not progressing at all" and full of "civil servants".⁶⁰ Another player decried the SBL as "an extension of Taiwan's High School Basketball League".⁶¹ In addition, a coach revealed that "Top players in the SBL don't need to practice hard. They are always the best for several years. Of course, their salaries will also be the same."⁶²

In season 2009-10, after the ban expired, the CTBA chose to change its position. The newly elected president of the CTBA, Shou-Chung Ting, did not regard the ban as any longer necessary.⁶³ Thus, it was lifted, but with one condition, that the players could not refuse selection for the national team; in such an eventuality, they would face a one-year suspension.⁶⁴ In order to protect the interests of the national team, the CTBA also reached an agreement with the CBMC in China, which agreed to assist in keeping track of those Taiwanese migrants who were members of the Chinese Taipei national team. An official of the SAC commented, "Playing in a more competitive league can improve our players. It is actually a positive thing, if these players can be recruited to the national team."⁶⁵ After the ban expired, another three players, including Sean Chen and another franchise player, Chi-Chien Lin, left for the CBA. In responding to the possible impact of the loss of franchise players from the SBL, the SAC reached the conclusion that "based on the demand and supply principle, the CBA China is a far more competitive league than the SBL, thus, a massive outflow of players is not likely in the near future."⁶⁶ With this in mind, the SAC did not see the need to address the issue of losing talent. Yet, it made a few recommendations to the CTBA. First, the CTBA should consider the possibility of employing foreign players to add to the attractiveness of SBL games. Second, they should urge the clubs to improve the players' conditions for example by arranging career pathways after retirement.⁶⁷ The SAC's recommendations indicate that the government had begun to see the issue of sports labour migration from an economic perspective with athletes recognized as commodified objects in the international market.

The SBL clubs made adjustments as well. They knew that the wage level provided by the CBA (China) clubs was unmatchable and they also recognized that keeping the players in Taiwan through terms of contract or higher compensation was no longer feasible, in particular during this second migratory flow. As a result, clubs began to add clauses to long-term contracts that allowed players to play abroad any time if they agreed that they would only return to their original club.⁶⁸ No matter how resistant Taiwan had been to fostering closer relations with China, the once impossible crossing of the Taiwan Strait has become fairly commonplace today. In the first decade after the opening-up to China (1990 to 1999), the number of Taiwanese people migrating to China rose rapidly with an average increase of 18% every year. The growth during the second decade (2000 to 2009) dropped but remained at a stable average annual increase of 6% every year.⁶⁹ In 2001, when President Chen Sui-Bian took office, the main public discussion concerning the volume of economic investment in China revolved around the question of whether to maintain the “no haste, be patient” policy pursued by the previous president Lee Teng-Hui, or instead, to adopt a “proactive liberalisation with effective management”.⁷⁰ Given the political relationship with China, this discussion symbolized a tug of war between protecting national security and dignity and facing economic reality. This was also apparent in the amendment to the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area. The principle was changed in 2003 from “prohibiting all except the approved exceptions” to “approving all except the prohibited exceptions”.⁷¹ The same trend can be discerned in basketball as well. Today, playing basketball in the CBA (China) is no longer a political issue but rather a common career choice, particularly for younger promising players.

Two Key Emerging Issues

The data collected from different groups of participants and from documents were analysed according to the three main migratory factors identified earlier. All interviewees agreed that the CBA clubs’ generous wage offers, constituting an increase up to four times higher, represented the main driving force behind their decision to play in the CBA. From the players’ perspectives, moving to China was also in line with the pathway that they had set for their own careers. One Sina Lion player elaborated,

I set two goals for myself. I have completed both by representing my country at the top level in Asia and by becoming a professional player. When I went to China, I felt I could still play a couple more years. If neither could be accomplished in Taiwan, I wanted to give it a shot in China.⁷²

A migrant from the second flow similarly expressed that he had reached the ceiling in the SBL in terms of basketball achievement; thus, going to the CBA allowed him to move up the career ladder.⁷³ The above examples demonstrate a common economic drive both from a personal perspective and in relation to the structural discrepancy between wages that exists in between the two places.

The findings from the institutional/structural determinant are, in our opinion, particularly interesting. First, the data collected from the documents that reveal the volume, timing and composition of the migration concerned indicate that the influence of the political institutions in the form of regulations or laws is prominent. Interviews with all the stakeholder groups, highlighted how the institutions’ perspectives impacted or conditioned migrants’ experience and, most of all, decisions. Second, despite the fact

that the migrants from either the first or second flow of migration described different formats of migration networks, the function of the networks is interestingly similar. Significantly, certain elements reflected in these formats are scarcely acknowledged in the existing literature.

The Institutional Influences to the Sport Migration

The role of the nation in sport migration can differ from one country to another. The Cuban state, for example, intervened in, but made possible, the migration of Cuban baseball players to serve its purposes.⁷⁴ China, on the other hand, responded with both an economic strategy and certain political mechanisms⁷⁵ to prevent its table tennis players from migrating to other countries. The Taiwanese government, for its part, may not have been able to openly support its elite athletes' migration to China, but it certainly does not view the matter in a completely negative light. What matters to the government is that the political red line is not crossed and that the recruitment of national team members is not compromised.

When it comes to the latter concern of the Taiwanese government, one cannot ignore the influence of the obligation for Taiwanese male nationals to serve in the military. Basically, all Taiwanese male nationals are required to serve in the military for between 10 to 14 months depending on which year they were born. Because this national obligation can be disruptive to training programmes and the career pathways of elite athletes, the government arranges a substitute training system through which military service and athletic training are merged or allows athletes who have reached a certain level to be exempted from serving for any more than a 12-days obligation.⁷⁶ Although not with the expressed intention of retaining sports talent, the impact of the military service obligation on the market value of the players, which crucially depends on their height, age, talent, and fit with the team, amongst other things,⁷⁷ is quite strong. Given that the CBA is relatively competitive, a player's value has a considerable influence on whether he can build a desirable career in the CBA. According to the FIBA migration report,⁷⁸ among international transfers, Taiwanese basketball migrants in the CBA are shorter in height and older in age than international averages. The impact of the military service obligation was particularly significant for migrants during the second flow because they have tended to be younger and less likely to have completed military service. As the influence of the nation is not completely absent, due to the existence of military obligation, unlike for Irish football migration to the English Premier League,⁷⁹ the fact that Taiwanese migrants are more likely to be approaching the end of their career will inevitably lessen their chances of enjoying a successful career in the CBA. China as well as the SBL's chance to benefit from returning talented players who have developed and augmented their skills in the PRC. Thus, the domestic league governed by CTBA and the local clubs suffer most from the "inconvenient truth" of "brawn drain".

As the general policy has increasingly leaned towards the side of economic reality, the once unlawful migration to China became legalized due initially to the Sina Lions' case, after which The Rule Regulating People from the Taiwan Area Becoming Members or Holding Positions in Sports Organisations in the Mainland Area was enacted in 2001. According to an SAC official, the Rule was introduced as a temporary solution put forward by the SAC to ensure compliance with the national policy pursued mainly by the MAC.⁸⁰ The Rule was abolished in 2004 because the parent law, the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area

was itself amended. The government now holds the attitude that it does not encourage yet neither does it forbid sports migration to China.⁸¹

The CTBA, as an extended arm of the government in the cross-strait context, stands in line with the SAC, particularly in terms of fostering the interests of the national team. Nonetheless, losing top players can potentially undermine the two core businesses of CTBA, the domestic league and the performance of the national team. Consequently, the CTBA appears to be more protective than the SAC in preventing players from moving to China. The required affidavit of not returning to a Taiwanese club in 2001 and the ban list of 24 players in 2008 are pertinent examples of this. At the international level, FIBA's structuring of the international transfer of players also grants power to the national federations that are responsible for issuing a Letter of Clearance for a transfer request.⁸² The request for this letter cannot be refused unless "the player is under contract to play for his club beyond the scheduled transfer date".⁸³ However, the matter of players' transfers still depends on the CTBA overseeing the process as the sole point of contact with China. In addition, even if FIBA can intervene, some obvious acts of misconduct by National Federations in relation to international legal processes, e.g. the Court of Arbitration for Sport, take years to resolve, and time is often not on the players' side. Therefore, the CTBA's power over the players remains strong.

Migration Networks: Players, Clubs, and Owners

As revealed in the work of Elliott and Maguire, studies of both highly skilled labour in general and of athletes in particular have emphasized the important role of friendship networks either between coaches or players or with previous migrants, as opposed to professional agent/agency networks, as the "bridgehead" that facilitates international recruitment.⁸⁴ By means of reducing the risk and cost of migration⁸⁵ and circulating knowledge regarding potential employers and the place of arrival,⁸⁶ migrant networks actually help to stabilize the migratory route. In the context of Taiwanese basketball migrants in China, having a licensed agent or agency to negotiate contract details with the clubs is relatively uncommon. Instead, recruiting messages are passed on at basketball events such as NIKE Asia camps, exhibition games or small off-season tournaments.⁸⁷

However, the interviews undertaken as part of this study of Taiwanese players' migration add new elements to the idea of migration networks. In addition to player friendship networks, it is the people at the higher end of the hierarchy of the basketball community who arrange transfers. This could be the boss or coach from a player's original club or Taiwanese coaches of CBA teams in China. These persons are often more senior than and have a direct or indirect influence over the players. The resultant relationships can be compared to those between patrons and clients, in that the patron provides the player with an offer that is beneficial to the player's career development in exchange for the player's loyalty. For example, one player accepted the arrangement put in place by his own boss that happened to meet his own financial needs after the CBA (Taiwan) shut down. His boss acted as his patron as well as his agent, not only taking care of contract details, but also sheltering him from potentially poor living conditions in mainland China.⁸⁸ He elaborated, "I donated my basketball capability. My boss took care of the rest. I felt I was protected the whole time." Thus, when the boss asked him to come back to Taiwan, he felt obligated to say yes.

A more recent example of the patron-client relationship is that between the

coach of Taiwan Beer, Chia-Hua Yen, and the national team's rising star Cheng Liu who acquired a two-year agreement with the CBA club Zhejiang Lions for the 2016-17 season.⁸⁹ Appointed as the national team head coach shortly afterwards, Yen revealed to the media that Taiwan Beer had promised that Cheng Liu would be free to play in the CBA, if he first won the title for his club in the SBL. Once Taiwan Beer had won the SBL title in season 2015-16, Yen had helped to negotiate Liu's contract with Zhejiang Lions, not only in order to keep his promise, but also in the hope that Cheng Liu's improvement would benefit the national team which he coached.⁹⁰

Some Taiwanese coaches also have relations with certain clubs in the CBA and take commission fees for placing their players with these clubs.⁹¹ In addition, more and more coaches from Taiwan now coach CBA (China) teams.⁹² They often face pressures to prove that their coaching skills are adequate in the CBA. Recruiting a few good players, whom they knew well in Taiwan, can help the careers of both the coaches and the players. The patron-agent relationship also facilitates the process of finding accommodation and resolving problems related to issues such as wages, thereby minimizing the risk and cost of migration.⁹³

Group migration, a rare and unusual case within international sports migration, offers similar advantages to those provided by the patron-agent model because decisions are made at the higher end of the hierarchy by the owners of the clubs. Sina players revealed that moving as a team made the adjustment to relocation easy, particularly the adjustment involved in adapting to a more competitive league.⁹⁴ In addition, group migration such as that experienced by the Sina Lions facilitates the process of breaking down institutional barriers. As a result of Sina Lions' migration, The Rule Regulating People from the Taiwan Area Becoming Members or Holding Positions in Sports Organisations in the Mainland Area took effect on 19 December 2001, enabling Taiwanese athletes to join sports clubs in China through a legitimate due-process procedure. These two types of migration networks, patron-client and group migration, are two alternative migrant networks that are perhaps specific, if not unique, to cross-strait basketball migration.

In short, the migration networks in the cross-strait basketball context tend to be characterized as vertical patron-client networks which differ from what Elliot and Maguire⁹⁵ described as horizontal "friends-of-friends' networks". However, they share similar functions such as minimizing costs and sharing information. It is noteworthy that, in the patron-client network, the players do not passively accept what is given to them or what they are told to do. Instead, a player's human capital, i.e. his basketball ability, is desirable and used in exchange for any benefit that the patron can give. The better the player is, the more leverage he has.

Conclusion

Looking back at the development of basketball migration from Taiwan to China, China's economic attraction for Taiwanese basketball players and clubs has been considerable since 1999. Indeed, if we were only to consider economic factors, together with the obvious cultural links between Taiwan and China, China would emerge as the obvious migratory destination for Taiwanese players. However, institutions such as Taiwanese government authorities (MAC and SAC) and the CTBA all have their own agendas and therefore play significant, albeit different, roles in influencing the character of this migration.

The government first loosened up the regulations thereby opening the way to mainland China and then allowing the Sina Lions' 11-person group migration. The legalization of Sina's cross-strait movement laid the groundwork for subsequent migrant players. Currently, Taiwanese athletes face almost no constraints at the national level when they want to move to China, except for the obligatory military service imposed on all Taiwanese male nationals.⁹⁶ From the perspective of the government, allowing basketball athletes to go to the CBA in China can facilitate the improvement of the national team's performance while not compromising its political interests. As the national governing body, the CTBA has always agreed with the government's position regarding the promotion of the national team. In fact, the absence of governmental influence in the context of cross-strait migration after the Sina Lions' case, together with the FIBA international transfer structure, actually empowered the CTBA to assume sole control over the migrants from Taiwan to China. To secure the interests of the domestic league and national team, the CTBA has even made proactive efforts such as setting up the ban list or reaching an agreement with China to serve its purposes. However, considering that the measure aimed at maintaining the competitiveness of the domestic league, the ban list, was temporary, the problem of the SBL being marginalized due to the loss of its stars has yet to be addressed. The players and the clubs have been the real driving forces behind this migration. They have established unique migration networks - the patron-client network and group migration - during this entire period in pursuit of their own interests and, in so doing, have stabilized the migratory route. This study echoes Elliot's argument for making sense of players' decisions in specific contexts. In this respect, although they are heavily influenced by different institutional levels, at the same time they are still capable of being "dynamic interlocutors"⁹⁷ particularly if they unite as a group or stand alongside influential persons, as is evident in the case of the Taiwan basketball players.

The main political influence on the evolution of this specific migratory route originated from the institutions on the Taiwan side of the Strait. This study seeks to contribute to our understanding of sport migration by providing in-depth empirical and analytical insights into the role of this political influence, thereby adding to an understanding of institutional factors that can either impede or facilitate sport labour migration and of the key networks involved in specific migratory processes.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated in the preceding analysis that, since 1999, the position of the political institutions in Taiwan with regard to basketball migration to China has evolved from highly resistant to relatively lenient. In addition, the wider implications of our findings for the study of sport labour migration should also be noted. While general principles, and even typologies, can go a long way towards establishing the reasons for and the contours of migratory flows, it is imperative that future studies take even more heed of cultural and, in particular, political specificities which can have a decisive effect on migration processes.

- ¹ J. A. Maguire and J. Bale, 'Sport Labour Migration in the Global Arena', in J. Bale and J. A. Maguire, eds., *The Global Sports Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World*, (London: Frank Cass, 1994), 1-22.
- ² Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council (PRC), *A Statement Regarding the Cross-Strait Relation*. Beijing: Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, 2000.
- ³ Y. F. Tseng and J. M. Wu, 'Bringing Politics Back In: Regulating Dual Citizenship of Taiwanese Migrants in China', *SOCIETAS: A Journal for Philosophical Study of Public Affairs* 32, no. March (2010), 93-142.
- ⁴ C. W. Lai, 'A Study of the Transformation and Adjustment of R.O.C.'s Cross-Strait Policy (2000-2011)', (Master's thesis, Tamkang University, 2012)
- ⁵ Hu Zheng, De-ji Zhan, Chia-Wen Hung, Chin-Ying Chen, Yi-chia Cheng, & Kuang-Hsien Huang., *The Study of Foreign and Cross-Strait*. Sports Affairs Council: Taipei, 1999.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Mainland Affairs Council, *A Demonstration of the Amendment: Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area*. Taipei: Mainland Affairs Council, 2002. <http://www.mac.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=44880&ctNode=5652&mp=1>
- ⁸ Zheng et al., *The Study of Foreign and Cross-Strait*.
- ⁹ L. Thibault, 'Globalization of Sport: An Inconvenient Truth', *Journal of Sport Management* 23, (2009), 4.
- ¹⁰ J. Bale. *The Brawn Drain: Foreign Student-Athletes in American Universities*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991, 43.
- ¹¹ J. Maguire and R. Pearton, 'The Impact of Elite Labour Migration on the Identification, Selection and Development of European Soccer Players' *Journal of Sports Sciences* 18, no. 9 (2000), 761.
- ¹² J. Yu and W. S. Wang, 'The Impact of Baseball Globalization and Talent Outflow on the Industrial Development of Baseball in Taiwan' *Physical Education Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2009), 10. <http://www1.sa.gov.tw/resource/annualreport/Quarterly159/p10.asp>
- ¹³ J. Maguire and M. Falcous, 'Introduction: Borders, Boundaries and Crossings –Sport, Migration and Identities', in J. Maguire and M. Falcous, eds., *Sport and Migration, Border, Boundaries, and Crossings*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 1-12.
- ¹⁴ M. Taylor. 'Football, migration and globalization: The perspective of history', <http://www.idrottsforum.org/articles/taylor/taylor070314.html> (Idrottsforum.org, 2007).
- ¹⁵ P. Horton, 'Pacific Islanders in Global Rugby: The Changing Currents of Sports Migration', *The International Journal of The History of Sport* 29, no. 17 (2012),
- ¹⁶ Taylor. 'Football, migration and globalization', Idrottsforum.org (2007).
- ¹⁷ R. Elliott and J. Maguire, "'Getting Caught in the Net": Examining the Recruitment of Canadian Players in British Professional Ice Hockey' *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 32, no. 2 (2008), 158-76.
- ¹⁸ Taylor. 'Football, migration and globalization', Idrottsforum.org (2007).
- ¹⁹ M. Czaika and H. De Haas, 'The Effectiveness of Immigration Policies', *Population and Development Review* 39, no. 3 (2013), 487-508.
- ²⁰ L. Barani, 'The Role of the European Court of Justice as a Political Actor in the Integration Process: The Case of Sport Regulation after the Bosman Ruling', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 1, no. 1 (2007), 42-58.
- ²¹ Taylor, 'Global Players?', 7-30.
- ²² T. F. Carter, 'Family Networks, State Interventions and the Experience of Cuban Transnational Sport Migration', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 42, no. 4 (2007), 371-89.
- ²³ M. Taylor, 'Global Players?: Football, Migration and Globalization, C. 1930-2000', *Historical Social Research* 31, no. 1 (2006), 7-30.
- ²⁴ Tseng and Wu, 'Bringing Politics Back In', 93-142.

-
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ China Basketball Management Centre, Chinese Basketball Association Clubs, Sport Team, Athletes and Coach Registration Regulation, Beijing: China Basketball Management Center 2014.
- ²⁷ Zheng et al., *The Study of Foreign and Cross-Strait*, 1999.
- ²⁸ There are two CBAs. One is Chinese Basketball Alliance in Taiwan existed from 1995 to 1998. The other is the Chinese Basketball Association in China exists from 1995 to date. In this article, CBA (Taiwan) refers to the former and CBA (China) refers to the later.
- ²⁹ L. X. Zhou, *CBA Taiwan in ICU Now*, Taipei: New Taiwan Weekly, 2000.
- ³⁰ This according to one player from Sina Lion, interviewed on 14 April 2010.
- ³¹ A basketball club in the CBA China owned by Yao Ming.
- ³² T. S. Gong, 'ID: Taiwanese Player Cheng Works Part-Time in CBA "Cheng Exception" Allows Him to Join Shanghai', *United Daily News*, 12 October 1999.
- ³³ Y. C. Lee, "Now Dacin, Cheng Plans to Go Back to China Give CBA Taiwan is Hopeless." *United Daily News*, 6 April 2000.
- ³⁴ Interview with a migrant from the first flow, interviewed on 13 April 2010.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ W. Y. Guang, "Taking over Hong-Guo: Sina Wants to Streamline the Cross-Strait Channels." *United Evening News*, 28 November 2000. 11 Sports section.
- ³⁷ Sports Affairs Council 'SAC Meeting minutes, meeting regarding Sina Lions joining the CBA China', 28 September 2001.
- ³⁸ X. Y. Huang, "Four New Proposals Rejected: Taiwan or Taipei in the Team Name Is a Must." *United Daily News*, 20 September 2001. 3 Focus Section.
- ³⁹ Sports Affairs Council 'SAC Meeting minutes', 2001.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ T. S. Gong, "Tu: Will Muscle Our Way to China at All Cost." *United Daily News*, 20 September 2001. 9 General Section.
- ⁴² Y. W. Yang, "Tsai: Bottom-Line Is National Dignity." *United Daily News*, 3 October 2001. 30 Sports section.
- ⁴³ "Neither Taiwan nor Taipei: The Consensus Reached between the Two Parties across the Strait." *United Daily News*, 10 October 2001. 10 Sports section.
- ⁴⁴ T. S. Gong, "China Agrees in Principal That Sina Can Have Other Options Than Titled Taiwan or Taipei." *United Daily News*, 1 October 2001. 12 General section.
- ⁴⁵ This according to one player from Sina Lion, interviewed on 24 April 2010.
- ⁴⁶ Government document, *Sina Lions apply for approval*, 4 March 2002.
- ⁴⁷ This according to players from Sina Lion, interviewed on 14 & 29 April 2010.
- ⁴⁸ In the 1970's when the Republic of China (Taiwan) lost the battle against the People's Republic of China over the legitimacy of representing China, the William Jones Cup has become an important occasion where basketball Team Chinese Taipei can participate in the international sport community.
- ⁴⁹ S. C. Wang, "Weird Battle: National Team Experience Fans Cheer for Their Opponent." *United Evening News*, 20 July 2002. 13 Sport Section.
- ⁵⁰ T. S. Gong, 'SAC Fund Will Cover the Salary and the Organization of the New League' *United Daily News*, 23 April 2001. D8 section.
- ⁵¹ Y. R. Xu, "Sina Lions are leaving for Taiwan." *Titan News, Suzhou*, 10 March 2003.
- ⁵² J. Y. Zhang, "Venues Are the Problems for SBL." *Sky Sports*, 16 June 2008.
- ⁵³ J. R. Huang, "Violence on the SBL Court: Suspend for 10 Games and Fined 10,000 Dollars." *Apple Daily*, 8 January 2008.
- ⁵⁴ Y. Z. Li, "SBL Break-Up: Opinion Diverse." *United Daily News*, 2006.
- ⁵⁵ T. C. Tan and A. Bairner, 'Managing Globalization: The Case of Elite Basketball Policy in the People's Republic of China' *Journal of Sport Management* 25, (2011), 408-22.
- ⁵⁶ Y. Hong, 'Sport Business Weekly News.' *Sport Business*, 27 October 2015.
- ⁵⁷ Government document, SAC replying quest of Legislature Shou-Chung Ting regarding lifting the ban and SBL, 2 November 2009.
- ⁵⁸ Y. L. Cai, "Sean Chen: I Don't Mind Being the Martyr." *Apple Daily*, 22 June 2008.

-
- ⁵⁹ C. R. Huang, "SBL New Season Facing No TV Broadcast." *Apple Daily*, 6 December 2008.
- ⁶⁰ This according to one player from Sina Lions, interviewed on 14 April 2010.
- ⁶¹ This according to one player of second-flow migrant, interviewed on 13 May 2010.
- ⁶² This according to a coach, interviewed on 23 March 2010.
- ⁶³ This according to an officer from CTBA, interviewed on 21 June 2016.
- ⁶⁴ Government document, SAC replying quest of Legislature, 2009.
- ⁶⁵ This according to an officer from SAC, interviewed on 15 June 2016.
- ⁶⁶ Legislature Yuan, *Transcription of parliament cross*. Taipei: Legislature Yuan, 2009.
- ⁶⁷ Government document, SAC replying quest of Legislature, 2009.
- ⁶⁸ This according to a club's senior manager, interviewed on 1 June 2016.
- ⁶⁹ Taiwan Affair Office of the State Council (PRC), *Annual statistics*. Beijing: Taiwan Affair Office of the State Council, 2014.
- ⁷⁰ Mainland Affair Council, *A Demonstration of "Proactive Liberalisation with Effective Management" Mainland Policy*. Taipei: Mainland Affair Council, 2001.
<http://www.mac.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=68176&ctNode=6621&mp=1>
- ⁷¹ Law and Regulation Database, Republic of China (Taiwan), accessed on 15 May 2016.
- ⁷² Interview with Sina Lion player, 23 March 2010.
- ⁷³ Interview with player, 21 May 2010.
- ⁷⁴ Carter, 'Family Networks' , 371-89.
- ⁷⁵ Y. W. Chen, T. C. Tan, and P. C. Lee, 'The Chinese Government and the Globalization of Table Tennis: A Case Study in Local Responses to the Globalization of Sport.' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 3 no.10, 1336-48.
- ⁷⁶ Y. G. Huang, 'A Study on the Current Substitutive Training System of the Substitutive Military Service Baseball Players' (Master's thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, 2007.)
- ⁷⁷ The Act of Military Service System permits Taiwanese male nationals who are taller than 1.95 meter, heavier than 100 kilogram exemption from induction; meanwhile, the draftees who have not yet performed their obligatory military service are under restriction of departing from Taiwan.
- ⁷⁸ International Basketball Migration Report 2015, CIES Sports Observatory, 2015.
- ⁷⁹ M. Patrick, 'The Irish Brawn Drain: English League Clubs and Irish Footballers, 1946-1995' *British journal of sociology* 51, no. 3 (2000), 401-18.
- ⁸⁰ Interview with SAC official, 27 June 2016.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² FIBA, 'Internal Regulations 2010', in *Book 3: International Federation of Basketball*, Switzerland: FIBA, 2014.
- ⁸³ FIBA, *2014 Internal Regulation Book 3*, Switzerland: FIBA, 2014, p12.
- ⁸⁴ Elliott and Maguire, 'Getting Caught in the Net', 158-76.
- ⁸⁵ D. S. Massey, J. Arango, G. Hugo, A. Kouaouci, A. Pellegrino, and J. E. Taylor, 'Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal' *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 3 (1993), 431-66.
- ⁸⁶ Elliott and Maguire, 'Getting Caught in the Net', 158-76.
- ⁸⁷ Interview with player, 13 May 2010.
- ⁸⁸ Interview with player, April 2010.
- ⁸⁹ Y. F. Lin, 'Liu Expects 5 M Contract', *Liberty Times*, Taipei, 27 May 2016.
- ⁹⁰ C. W. Lee, 'Taiwan Beers Release Liu to Boost National Team Performance', *Central News Agency* (CNA), 9 May 2016.
- ⁹¹ Interview with a senior manager of a SBL club, 1 June 2016.
- ⁹² Z. R. Ni, 'It Is Time to See the World: National Coach Xu Marches to CBA' *TSNA*, Taipei, 13 May 2015.
- ⁹³ B. A. Long, 'Hsu Did Not Get Paid in CBA' *Liberty Times*, Taipei, 2010.
- ⁹⁴ Interview with Sina Lions, 23 March & 28 April, 2010.
- ⁹⁵ Elliott and Maguire, 'Getting Caught in the Net', 158-76.
- ⁹⁶ Act of Military Service System Article 1, 'the male citizens of the Republic of China (Taiwan) are obligated to take military service'.

⁹⁷ R. Elliott, 'Football's Irish Exodus: Examining the Factors Influencing Irish Player Migration to English Professional Leagues' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 51, no. 2 (2016), 147-61.

Notes on contributors

Wan-Ching Cho is a Ph.D. candidate of the Department of Physical Education at the National Taiwan Normal University.

Chih-Fu Cheng is a distinguished professor of the Department of Physical Education at the National Taiwan Normal University.

Alan Bairner is Professor of Sport and Social Theory at Loughborough University, UK. He serves on the editorial boards of *the International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *the International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *Soccer and Society*, and *the Journal of sport for Development*.

Tien-Chin Tan is Professor of Sport Sociology and Policy at National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan. He is an editor of *Sport Studies* and a corresponding editor of *the International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. Dr. Tan is also an annual guest editor of *Sport in Society*.