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New Religions in Kōshien

Religious Identity and High School Baseball

This article examines the holy ground of Kōshien, Japan's annual high school baseball tournament, and the national festival and cultic fever that accompanies it. Some of the most successful schools that participate in Kōshien were founded by new religious groups such as Tenrikyō, PL Kyōdan, and Bentenshū. I offer some suggestions why this is the case, since none of these religions espouse either sports or competition in their formal creed. Furthermore, I consider the success of these schools in a postwar Japanese social context that has changed substantially since their establishment. The article will also touch on the most recent criticism of Japanese collectivism and how this criticism may effect baseball culture.

KEYWORDS: Kōshien—high school baseball—Tenrikyō—PL Kyōdan—Bentenshū

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KŌSHIEN 甲子園 is an abbreviation of the Hanshin Kōshien Stadium in Nishinomiya 西宮 City, located between Osaka and Kobe. The stadium is home to the Hanshin Tigers, a professional baseball team. Kōshien is also the ground upon which national high school baseball tournaments have been held annually during spring and summer for almost a century. Select teams representing each region of Japan play in the spring, and the winning teams from tournaments held in each prefecture meet at Kōshien in the summer. The games are enormously popular with people from all walks of life and attract large crowds to the stadium as well as supporters who watch it on television or listen on the radio—NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai 日本放送協会) broadcasts all games nationally.¹

Beginning in 1915 and 1924 respectively, the summer and spring tournaments have continued with only two intermissions: during World War II, and in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally the tournaments were sponsored by newspaper companies that later became the *Asahi shinbun* 朝日新聞 and *Mainichi shinbun* 毎日新聞. After World War II, a national federation of high school baseball was created, and it began cosponsoring both the spring and summer tournaments in collaboration with these companies. In the early years, the games were held in various places, but have been held at Kōshien Stadium since it was built in 1924. The year 1924 fell on *kōshi* 甲子 in the Chinese zodiac calendar (*jikkan jūnishi* 十干十二支), and therefore the field was named Kōshien (literally, the ballpark [*en* 園] established in the year of *kōshi*).

As a result of the popularity of Kōshien as the site for high school baseball championships, the term “Kōshien” has become a metaphor for the ultimate level of competition, similar to the way “the Olympics of...” is commonly used in English. This metaphor has been applied to non-athletic competitions such as “Kagaku no Kōshien” (the Kōshien of Science), “Haiku Kōshien,” and “Manga Kōshien,” among many others.² Recent news coverage has reported that suspension of many school activities due to COVID-19 in 2020 led to a new online com-

1. An earlier incarnation of NHK began radio broadcasts in 1925, and nationwide radio network covered them two years later. TV broadcasts of Kōshien tournaments started in 1953 (Itō 2019).

2. Kagaku no Kōshien has been organized and managed by the Japan Science and Technology Agency since 2012 (koushien.jst.go.jp/koushien/). Haiku Kōshien has been organized and managed by local groups in Matsuyama 松山 City, Ehime Prefecture, since 1998 (haikukoushien.com/); Matsuyama is the birthplace of the haiku poet Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867–1902). Manga Kōshien has been organized and managed mainly by Kochi 高知 City since 1992 (manga-oukoku-tosa.jp/page.html?page_id=478289281950).

petition for students to introduce their school through creating a YouTube video under the title “YouTube Kōshien.”³ Thus, Kōshien has become an ubiquitous symbol of postwar Japanese youth culture.

The intense extracurricular activities of certain high school baseball teams and their dedication to the goal of playing in Kōshien are captured vividly in a recent documentary film directed by Ema Ryan Yamazaki entitled *Koshien: Japan’s Field of Dreams* (2020), which premiered at New York’s Documentary Festival in 2019. Yamazaki’s website characterizes this film as follows:

Baseball is life for the die-hard competitors in Koshien, Japan’s national high school baseball championship, whose alumni include U.S. baseball star Shohei Ohtani and former Yankee Hideki Matsui. As popular as America’s World Series, the stakes are beyond high in this single-elimination tournament. However, for Coach Mizutani, cleaning the grounds and greeting guests are equally important as honing baseball skills, demonstrating discipline, sacrifice and unwavering dedication. This documentary follows Mizutani and his team on their quest to win the 100th annual Koshien, and, in the process, goes beyond baseball to reveal the heart of the Japanese national character.⁴

The trailer for the documentary, subtitled in English, opens with the phrase “Kōshien is sacred.”⁵ The words “discipline,” “sacrifice,” and “dedication” in the blurb above further invoke the sanctity of the tournament. The association of terminology such as “sacred,” “sacrifice,” and “dedication” as well as the discipline and devotion to the game of baseball exemplified by the players and fans captured in the film cannot help but invite comparisons with religion.

KISHIMOTO Hideo (1961, 68), a pioneer of religious studies in Japan, emphasizes *shugyō* 修行 (spiritual exercises) as a fundamental element of religious practice or behavior. Although he claims that there is no suitable translation of the Japanese *shugyō* in English, “discipline” and “dedication” perhaps come close to having a similar nuance. If we consider the discipline and dedication required to win the annual Kōshien tournaments to be a form of *shugyō* and the grounds of Kōshien sacred in the eyes of players and devoted fans, then might we not likewise think of high school baseball as a religion in Japan?

The religious character of Kōshien is further amplified by the fact that a substantial number of religiously affiliated high schools in Japan regularly participate in, and often win, the Kōshien tournaments. In particular, several high schools established by new religious organizations have achieved remarkable

3. It is uncertain whether this initiative will continue in the coming years. The second event was held in 2021 and the third will be held in 2022 (schoolyoutube.jp/event/).

4. See www.emaexplorations.com/en/#works.

5. This phrase is spoken by Major League baseball player Ōtani Shōhei 大谷翔平 (b. 1994) (www.emaexplorations.com/en/).

success in high school baseball championships. Therefore, the religiosity of Kōshien is not merely a metaphor. For players and fans of these religiously affiliated high schools, the tournament is literally a part of their religion.

In this article, I examine the success of four high schools in their quests to enter the Kōshien tournaments. Each of these schools—Tenri 天理, PL Gakuen PL学園, Chiben Gakuen 智辯学園, and Chiben Wakayama 智辯和歌山—were founded by new religions and continue to play an important role in the social outreach efforts of these religious organizations. Using these four schools as examples, I argue that baseball, and especially the Kōshien tournaments, has contributed to the identity of these new religious organizations in postwar Japanese society.

Religious Affiliated High Schools in Japan

In 2021 thirty-two teams were selected to play in the spring tournament. These teams included high schools affiliated with religious organizations: Tenri Kōtō Gakkō 天理高等学校 (Tenrikyō 天理教), Chiben Gakuen Kōtō Gakkō 智辯学園高等学校 (Bentenshū 辯天宗), Kobe Kokusai Daigaku Fuzoku 神戸国際大学附属 (Anglican Episcopal Church of Japan), and Sei Katarina Gakuen 聖カタリナ学園 (Catholic). Four among thirty-two is a relatively high ratio, if we consider the low number of Japanese who profess themselves to be religious. In the summer of 2021, the tournament was held with forty-nine high schools participating, including seven schools founded by religious organizations: Hirosaki Gakuen Seiai 弘前学園聖愛 (Protestant), Morioka Daigaku Fuzoku 盛岡大学附属 (Protestant), Tohoku Gakuin 東北学院 (Protestant), Komatsu Ōtani 小松大谷 (Shinshū Ōtaniha), Kobe Kokusai Daigaku Fuzoku, Chiben Gakuen, and Chiben Wakayama. Seven among forty-nine is an even higher ratio compared to the previous spring tournament. This relatively high ratio is not particularly unique to the 2021 tournament.

According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), as of May 2021 there were approximately 3,008,000 high school students in Japan studying at 4,856 high schools nationwide. Among these schools, 15 are national high schools, 3,521 public (prefectural, municipal, or other local governmental), and 1,320 private.⁶ Among all high schools nationwide, the number of those that participated in the prefectural tournaments for Kōshien in the summer of 2019 was 3,730 (SHŪKAN ASAHI ZŌKAN 2020, 122–123).

Among the 1,320 private high schools, 310 are affiliated with Buddhism, Christianity, or Shinto. Under the current constitution, private schools in Japan are permitted to offer religious education, which is prohibited in national, pre-

6. See www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/chousao1/kihon/kekka/1268046.htm.

fectural, municipal, or any other public schools. There are questions as to how religious education is taught in private schools founded by religious organizations, or as to how religious education functions in these schools. While religious pedagogy is a highly debated topic among educators and politicians, the affiliation with a particular religious organization associates the school with the teachings and history of that religion. In other words, the high school—its students, faculty, and even its athletics and club activities—shares a religious identity with the parent organization.

For instance, among Buddhist high schools, there are two main groups, both in the Pure Land tradition: Ryūkoku 龍谷 (Nishi Hongwanji 西本願寺) and Ōtani 大谷 (Higashi Honganji 東本願寺). Ryūkoku has its own school network called Ryūkoku Sōgō Gakuen 龍谷総合学園 that includes twenty-four different school corporations, and there are a number of high schools nationwide in this network. Among them, three high schools participated in the tournament in Kōshien from 1989 to 2019: Asahikawa Ryūkoku 旭川龍谷, Ryūkoku Daigaku Fuzoku Heian 龍谷大学附属平安, and Ryūkoku 龍谷 (SHŪKAN ASAHI ZŌKAN 2020, 46–55, 114–123). Schools in the Ōtani tradition also have their own network that includes eighteen member schools, among which four high schools participated in the Kōshien tournament in the past thirty-one years: Obihiro Ōtani 帯広大谷, Sapporo Ōtani 札幌大谷, Aichi Keisei 愛知啓成, and Toyota Ōtani 豊田大谷.

In addition to the schools in the Ryūkoku and Ōtani networks, there are several other Buddhist-affiliated high schools enumerated by the Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai 全日本仏教会 (Japan Buddhist Federation, JBF).⁷ In sum, there are 24 Ryūkoku-related, 18 Ōtani-related, and 58 high schools related to other Buddhist organizations, for a total of 100 Buddhist high schools in Japan.

According to the Japan Federation of Catholic Schools, there are 112 Catholic high schools in Japan: 15 all-male, 58 all-female, and 39 coed schools.⁸ The Catholic schools that have participated in Kōshien in the past thirty-one years are

7. The JBF enumerates several Buddhist school corporations with one or more university, such as Aichi Gakuin 愛知学院, Bukkyō 佛教, Chikushi Jogakuen 筑紫女学園, Daijō Shukutoku Gakuen 大乘淑徳学園, Komazawa 駒澤, Kōyasan Gakuen 高野山学園, Kyōto Joshi 京都女子, Musashino 武蔵野, Ōtani Gakuen 大谷学園, Risshō 立正, Ryūkoku 龍谷, Sapporo Ōtani Gakuen 札幌大谷学園, Shinshū Ōtani Gakuen 真宗大谷学園, Shitennōji 四天王寺, Sōji Gakuen 總持学園, Taishō 大正, and Tōkai Gakuen 東海学園 (most of these school corporations include high schools). The JBF also enumerates other Buddhist school corporations that do not have a university, such as Hirata Gakuen 平田学園, Komagome Gakuen 駒込学園, Senshin Gakuen 宣真学園, Shiba Gakuen 芝学園, and Yokohama Seifū Kōkō 横浜清風高校 (all of these corporations have a high school).

8. For more details on the specific high schools belonging to this federation, see www.catholicschools.jp/member/schools.php.

Hachinohe Gakuin Kosei 八戸学院光星,⁹ Escolapios Gakuen Kaisei Kōtō Gakkō エスコラピオス学園海星高等学校, Nagasaki Nanzan 長崎南山, and Seishin Ursula 聖心ウルスラ.

According to the Association of Christian Schools in Japan, there are 94 Protestant high schools in Japan: 5 all-male, 33 all-female, and 56 coed schools.¹⁰ Protestant schools that have participated in Kōshien in the past thirty-one years include Morioka Daigaku Fuzoku, Seikō Gakuin 聖光学院, Seibō Gakuen 聖望学園, Ōmi Kyōdaisha 近江兄弟社, Kwansei Gakuin 関西学院, Kobe Kokusai Daigaku Fuzoku, Orio Aishin 折尾愛真, and Kyūshū Gakuin 九州学院.¹¹

There are a limited number of high schools related to Shinto. In Tochigi, there is Kokugakuin Daigaku Tochigi Kōtō Gakkō 國學院大學栃木高等学校. Kokugakuin Kōtō Gakkō 國學院高等学校 and Kokugakuin Daigaku Kugayama Kōtō Gakkō 國學院大學久我山高等学校 are located in Tokyo. In Ise, there is Kogakkan Kōtō Gakkō 皇學館高等学校. These four high schools are all coeducational. Kokugakuin Tochigi and Kokugakuin Kugayama participated in Kōshien in the years between 1989 and 2019.

Among 1,322 private high schools in Japan, 100 are Buddhist, 112 Catholic, 94 Protestant, and 4 Shinto for a total of 310 schools, which means that approximately 23 percent of all private high schools are affiliated with religious organizations. Nearly one quarter of all private high schools are managed by religiously affiliated corporations. Without the commitment of these institutions toward education, secondary education in Japan would be unsustainable.

The above statistics do not include high schools affiliated with new religions. TABLE 1 shows a comprehensive list of high schools established by new religious organizations that have participated in Kōshien since 1954 when Tenri High School first played in the tournament. From 1954 to 2019, there were only nine years in which high schools established by new religious organizations did not participate in the Kōshien tournaments: 1956–1958, 1960–1961, 1964, 1967, 1969, and 2013. Among the eight schools affiliated with new religions that have participated in the tournament, Chiben Gakuen and Chiben Wakayama are managed by the same school corporation (Chiben Gakuen) and were established by

9. A regular participant in Kōshien, Hachinohe Gakuin Kōsei identifies itself as a Catholic school but is not a member of the Japan Federation of Catholic Schools.

10. For information from the Association of Christian Schools, see www.k-doumei.or.jp/.

11. Among these Protestant high schools, some were not originally affiliated with Christianity at the time of their founding but only came under the administration of Protestant denominations later. Others were established by missionaries and have always been Christian affiliated: Omi Brotherhood can be traced back to the U.S. missionary William Merrell Vories (1880–1964), Kwansei Gakuin to the U.S. missionary Walter Russell Lambuth (1854–1921, American Southern Methodist Episcopal Mission), St. Michael's Senior High School to a Japanese Anglican priest, Yashiro Hinsuke 八代斌助 (1900–1970), and Ario Aishin to the Japanese Mukyōkai Christian, Masuda Takashi 増田 孝 (1904–1999).

Bentenshū in 1964. Sōka 創価 and Kansai Sōka 関西創価 are a part of the same school corporation (Sōka Gakuen 創価学園), established by Soka Gakkai in 1967.

Of these eight schools, Tenri, PL Gakuen, Chiben Gakuen, and Chiben Wakayama have participated in the Kōshien tournaments with higher frequency than the other four, or, for that matter, any other religiously affiliated high schools in Japan with the exception of Ryūkoku Daigaku Heian.¹² Furthermore, these four schools have all won the tournament. Therefore, it is worth considering the connection between the religious affiliation of these high schools (Tenrikyō, PL Kyōdan 教団, and Bentenshū) and success in the Kōshien tournaments.

Tenrikyō and Tenri High School

Tenrikyō was founded in 1838 when Nakayama Miki 中山みき (1798–1887) began to share her revelations of God the Parent (Oyagami 親神) and has since established approximately sixteen thousand churches nationwide for their two million members and extended its teaching to eighty countries abroad.¹³ The basic teaching of Tenrikyō is summarized in the following explanation posted on its website.

Tenrikyō teaches that God's purpose in creating human beings was to take delight in seeing their Joyous Life. The Joyous Life is a state of perfect bliss that comes about when people share the delight of living joyfully and happily while helping one another. In this connection, Tenrikyō teaches, "Through saving others, you will be saved." In order to realize that perfect world of the Joyous Life, it is of supreme importance to be free from selfish motivations and to awaken to the teaching that we are all brothers and sisters as equal children of God.¹⁴

Tenrikyō's official website in English lists three main areas of social outreach deemed essential for living a Joyous Life: healthcare, social welfare, and education. In the area of healthcare, in 1935 Tenrikyō started a counseling center that also provides medical treatment, which eventually grew into the establishment of Iko no Ie 戀の家 Hospital in 1966.¹⁵ Regarding social welfare, in 1910 Tenrikyō established a children's home called Yōtokuin 養徳院. Their social welfare

12. Among the other religious high schools, a few exceptions include Ryūkoku U. Heian, which participated 41 times in the spring tournament, winning once, and 34 times in the summer, winning three times until 2019. For data regarding select participants, see BESSATSU TAKARAJIMA HENSHŪBU (2020).

13. Regarding statistics for Tenrikyō membership, see www.tenrikyo.or.jp/jpn/about/.

14. See www.tenrikyo.or.jp/eng/teaching/. Shimazono Susumu explains the Tenrikyō notion of Joyous Life briefly, writing, "[Metaphorically speaking] by clearing away dust, and living a purified life, one will be able to live a healthy, cheerful, and human life, that is, 'Joyous Life'" (SHIMAZONO 2020, 198).

15. See www.tenrikyo.or.jp/eng/healthcare/.

TABLE 1. Participation in Kōshien tournaments by high schools affiliated with new religious organizations from 1954 to 2019. Tournament winners are indicated by ☆.

YEAR	SPRING OR SUMMER	NAME OF SCHOOL (AFFILIATED NEW RELIGION) [PREFECTURE]
1954	Spring	Tenri [Nara]
1955	Spring	Tenri
1959	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
1962	Spring	PL Gakuen [Osaka]
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
1963	Spring	PL Gakuen
1965	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
1966	Spring	Kōsei Gakuen 校成学園 (Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会) [Tokyo]
	Spring	PL Gakuen
1968	Spring	Kōsei Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen [Nara]
1970	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	PL Gakuen
1971	Summer	PL Gakuen
1972	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
1973	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
1974	Summer	Kōsei Gakuen
	Summer	PL Gakuen
1975	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
1976	Spring	Chiben Gakuen and Tenri
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
1977	Spring	Chiben Gakuen and Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
1978	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Summer	☆ PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
1979	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri

YEAR	SPRING OR SUMMER	NAME OF SCHOOL (RELATED NEW RELIGION) [PREFECTURE]
1980	Summer	Tenri
1981	Spring	☆ PL Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
1982	Spring	☆ PL Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
1983	Summer	Sōka [Tokyo]
	Summer	☆ PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
1984	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Spring	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
1985	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Spring	Tenri
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama [Wakayama]
	Summer	☆ PL Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
1986	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Spring	Chiben Gakuen and Tenri
	Summer	☆ Tenri
1987	Spring	☆ PL Gakuen
	Summer	☆ PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
1988	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
1989	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
1990	Spring	Chiben Gakuen and Tenri
	Summer	☆ Tenri
1991	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
1992	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Sōka
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama

YEAR	SPRING OR SUMMER	NAME OF SCHOOL (RELATED NEW RELIGION) [PREFECTURE]
1993	Spring	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
1994	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Spring	☆ Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Sōka
	Summer	Tenri
1995	Spring	Sōka
	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Sōka
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
1996	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
1997	Spring	☆ Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	☆ Chiben Wakayama
1998	Spring	Sōka
	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
1999	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2000	Spring	Sōka
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	☆ Chiben Wakayama
2001	Spring	Kansai Sōka [Osaka]
	Spring	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
2002	Spring	Konkō Ōsaka 金光大阪 (Konkōkyō 金光教) [Osaka]
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama

YEAR	SPRING OR SUMMER	NAME OF SCHOOL (RELATED NEW RELIGION) [PREFECTURE]
2003	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2004	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
2005	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2006	Spring	PL Gakuen
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2007	Summer	Sōka
	Summer	Konkō Ōsaka
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2008	Spring	Tenri
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2009	Spring	Konkō Ōsaka and PL Gakuen
	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	PL Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2010	Spring	Tenri
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2011	Spring	Tenri
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2012	Spring	Chiben Gakuen and Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama

YEAR	SPRING OR SUMMER	NAME OF SCHOOL (RELATED NEW RELIGION) [PREFECTURE]
2014	Spring	Chiben Gakuen
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
2015	Spring	Tenri
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2016	Spring	☆ Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
2017	Spring	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Tenri
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2018	Spring	Chiben Gakuen
	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama
2019	Spring	Chiben Wakayama
	Summer	Chiben Gakuen
	Summer	Chiben Wakayama

activities have expanded to include the management of facilities for the disabled, for children in need of developmental support, and for foster families, among others.¹⁶

The area of outreach most pertinent to this article is Tenrikyō's development of educational institutions. They have established institutions ranging from a kindergarten to a university, in addition to Tenri Seminary and Tenri Language Institute. The main purpose of these institutions is "Nurturing people to realize the Joyous Life World."¹⁷

Tenri University was established in 1949 and has become famous for its success in sports. After the establishment of the Faculty of Budo and Sport Studies in 1955, some students and graduates of this university have excelled at both the national and international level. For example, olympic gold medalists in Judo, such as Nomura Tadahiro 野村忠宏 (graduated in 1997, winner at the 1996 Atlanta, 2000 Sydney, and 2004 Athens games) and Ōno Shōhei 大野将平 (graduated in 2014, winner at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro and 2020 Tokyo games), were students or graduates of Tenri University.

16. See tenriyoutokuin.com.

17. See www.tenrikyo.or.jp/eng/education/.

In 1908, Tenri High School was established, Tenri Girls' High School was founded in 1920, and in 1948 the schools were merged to become the coeducational Tenri High School. The school currently accepts 480 students annually from Tenrikyō families and offers three courses:¹⁸ (1) for students who want to go to a regular university; (2) for students who want to go to a top-level university; and (3) for students who want to develop their talent in sports or music. Those students who have enrolled in the third course must participate in an extracurricular activity such as baseball, Judo, or a brass or string band.

After winning for the second time at Kōshien in 1990, a Tenrikyō-related publisher published a graphic mook featuring “Tenri sports” (TENRIKYŌ DŌYŪSHA 1991), which explains some of the religious aspects of athletics for members of Tenrikyō. A basic idea is to be thankful for the functions of the body that God the Parent has lent them, and to make the most of their athleticism to celebrate a Joyous Life. The publication emphasizes the phrase *itte hitotsu* 一手一ツ, meaning “one action or one step by all the members of a group in unison.” This slogan is comparable to the English phrase “all for one, and one for all.” Therefore, team sports such as baseball and rugby, for which Tenri educational institutions likewise excel, are an important part of student life for members of Tenrikyō. In the case of Tenri High School, sports, especially baseball, are understood as a realization of the religious ideal of the Joyous Life.

PL Kyōdan and PL Gakuen

The history of PL Kyōdan (The Church of Perfect Liberty) traces back to a religious leader in the Taisho era (1912–1926) named Kanada Tokumitsu 金田徳光 (1863–1919). Based on his teachings, a number of new religious groups emerged, one of which was Hito no Michi 人の道 (the Way of Humankind). The founder of Hito no Michi, Miki Tokuharu 御木徳一 (1871–1938) was one of Kanada's disciples. He started his own religious group in 1924, which was initially affiliated with a Shinto sect called Fusōkyō 扶桑教 but later became Hito no Michi. Suppressed by the military regime of the Japanese wartime government, it was dissolved in 1937 due to *lèse majesté*. Miki's son, Miki Tokuchika 御木徳近 (1900–1983), began a new organization called PL Kyōdan in 1946.¹⁹

The main deity of PL Kyōdan is called Mioya ōkami 大元靈 (Great God the Parent), and their members learn that “life is art.” This is the first precept among twenty-one in total, and the English website of PL Kyōdan explains:

18. A student must be the child of a Tenrikyō member in order to take Tenri High School's entrance examination (www.tenri-h.ed.jp/1bu/admission-information/enrollment-recruitment-guidelines-2021-reiwa-3/).

19. See www.perfect-liberty.or.jp/html/name-pl/kyouso.html.

Like a painter or sculptor who strives to create an exquisite work of art, or a musician who strives to perform a beautiful piece of music, treat your life as if it is a work of art. Always be true to yourself and express yourself with sincerity.²⁰

In an earlier survey conducted by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Matsuno Junko characterizes PL Kyōdan in this way: “Holding that man is essentially one with the divine, this sect urges men to express and develop their endowments and to live freely and creatively as individuals” (MATSUNO 1972, 229).

When Miki Tokuchika died in 1983, Miki Takahito 御木貴日止 (1957–2020), Tokuchika’s adopted son, became the head of PL Kyōdan. According to the religious almanac published by the governmental Agency for Cultural Affairs, PL Kyōdan has 187 churches nationwide, and 678,567 members as of the end of 2020.²¹

Similar to Tenrikyō, PL Kyōdan has established medical and educational facilities as a part of their mission. A medical facility was built by Hito no Michi as early as 1933. After World War II, PL Kyōdan opened a clinic in 1948, and then in 1956 founded Hōshōkai 宝生会 Hospital. The hospital was initially affiliated with PL Kyōdan, but was later opened to the public.²²

PL Kyōdan manages its own school corporation (PL Gakuen), which began with a high school in 1955 followed by a junior high school in 1959, an elementary school in 1964, a kindergarten in 1965, and a nursing school in 1977. They also ran an all-female junior college from 1974 to 2009. PL Gakuen High School currently accepts 120 students annually from families who are members of the religious organization.²³

PL Gakuen High School’s baseball club started in 1956 and was selected to play in the spring tournament at Kōshien for the first time in 1962. PL Gakuen fans organized mass cheering performances called *hitomoji* 人文字 whereby students in the cheering seats at Kōshien held up colored boards to make letters or designs.²⁴ Thus, the national baseball tournaments became an opportunity to make an impression on viewers regarding group activities of the school.

Aside from the year 1980, PL Gakuen participated in the tournament for ten years from 1978 through 1987, either in spring or summer, or both. In particular, from the summer of 1983 through the spring of 1986, PL Gakuen participated in Kōshien six times in a row. First-year students who entered the school in the

20. See perfectliberty.org/who-we-are/does-pl-have-a-holy-scripture/.

21. See e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00401101&tstat=000001018471&cycle=0&class1=000001160766&stat_infid=000032148047&class2val=0.

22. See www.plhospital.or.jp/contents/gNavi4/enkaku.html.

23. To qualify to take the entrance examination for PL Gakuen High School a student must be the child of a member of PL Kyōdan, and students must revere the divine spirit (*shinrei* or *mitama* 神霊) of PL Kyōdan (web.pl-Gakuen.ac.jp/sc/wp-content/uploads/boshu-youkou.pdf).

24. For an image of these colored boards, see www.asahi.com/gallery/10okai_stand/067.html.

spring of 1983 went to Kōshien five times in a row from the summer of 1983 to the summer of 1985. Kuwata Masumi 桑田真澄 (b. 1968), who later played for the Yomiuri Giants and Pittsburgh Pirates, and Kiyohara Kazuhiro 清原和博 (b. 1967), who played for Seibu Lions (1986–1997), Yomiuri Giants (1997–2005), and Orix Buffaloes (2006–2008), are two notable examples of PL Gakuen baseball players who enjoyed this chance.²⁵ From 1978 to 1987, PL Gakuen won the tournament seven times out of twenty. Even before that, PL Gakuen had been a regular participant in Kōshien but their achievements around 1980 in particular were unparalleled, to the extent that most people in Japan would have been familiar with the name of this high school.

In 1983, when Miki Tokuchika died, PL Kyōdan's membership was at its peak with over 2.6 million followers.²⁶ The success of PL Gakuen at Kōshien was of course due to its students, manager, and coaches. However, Miki's support must have been indispensable during these years of success. In his autobiography, Miki documented his impression when he was watching the final game of the summer tournament of 1978 on television:

Their [the students'] passion for the game is beauty itself. Baseball, among other things, has transformed into a sublime art and beauty, which I have been seeking throughout my entire life. This spiritual work of art has resulted in victories [on the baseball field]. This makes me appreciate how wonderful and precious human beings are as well as respecting their integrity and sincerity. I likewise feel moved by the representational capacity of imagery and arts, which is a sense that only human beings hold. I deeply appreciate these things.

(MIKI 1979, 10–14)

Thus, PL Gakuen baseball was, in Miki's view, the realization of the essence of his ideal that "life is art."

PL Gakuen made history by participating in the Kōshien tournaments thirty-seven times from 1962 through 2009, winning seven times. Among their graduates, eighty-two became professional baseball players in Japan, and some went on to play in MLB in the U.S., including Maeda Kenta 前田健太 (b. 1988).

25. The URL of Kuwata's website is reminiscent of the PL teaching: life-is-art-18.com/. Kiyohara was arrested for illegal drug use in 2016 and was given a suspended sentence from 2016 to 2020. In an interview following his release, he mentioned that he still remembers his coach Nakamura's instructions, "Don't play baseball with the purpose of winning a victory," and "The way of baseball equals the way of humankind." Apparently, the PL Kyōdan teachings stayed with him even while in prison (*Asahi shinbun dejitaru* 朝日新聞デジタル, "Kiyohara Kazuhiro san, shidōsha e no michi e, musuko futari ga tsumaide kureta" 清原和博さん、指導者の道へ息子2人がつないでくれた).

26. See the governmental religious almanac for 1983: bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/tokeichosa/shumu/pdf/s53kekka.pdf. The data are reported to the Agency for Cultural Affairs by each religious organization.

After participating in Kōshien in 2009, however, the glorious history of PL Gakuen's baseball team came to an end. It was widely reported in the media that there were cases of physical violence among students on the team, and after another case occurred in 2013, PL Kyōdan withdrew their support for the team in 2014. World peace is one of the primary aims of the religious organization, and the repeated cases of violence clearly betrayed their ideals. The club was disbanded in 2016 (YANAGAWA 2019).

The players on the PL Gakuen baseball team were expected to learn the PL Kyōdan teachings. Nakamura Junji 中村順司 (b. 1946),²⁷ the head coach of the team from 1980 to 1998, published a book in 2014 in which he explains how he led the team. Nakamura conveyed his motto to his players, which he received from Miki Tokuchika: "The way of baseball equals the way of humankind." As per their religious custom, the students of PL Gakuen were encouraged to accumulate virtue through their physical dedication and by serving others. They prayed when they awoke, as well as before and after meals. They bowed to the field before and after the game. According to Nakamura's account, the players should feel gratitude when they play baseball, think about the team before themselves, and have respect for the other teams.

In addition, Nakamura felt that high school clubs should avoid burnout among student athletes by demanding too much from them. He was concerned that doing so might have negative effects on their post-graduate aspirations (NAKAMURA 2014, 131–132). The result was that a great number of those who graduated from PL Gakuen would play in professional teams, because they continued to enjoy the game of baseball. Some of Nakamura's players even went on to become coaches or staff for Japanese professional or amateur teams, such as Tatsunami Kazuyoshi 立浪和義 (b. 1969), the head coach of Chunichi Dragons.

Bentenshū and its Two High Schools

Bentenshū was founded by Ōmori Chishō 大森智祥 (1900–1987) and his wife Kiyoko 清子 (later renamed Chiben 智辯, 1909–1967) in 1951. When they married in 1929, Chishō was a priest at a Shingon temple. In 1934, Kiyoko received a revelation from Benten 弁天 (Sarasvatī), which later became the basis for the name of the religious organization. After Chishō's death in December of 1987, their first son Jishō 慈祥 (1930–2018) succeeded him as the second chief priest beginning in 1988. After Jishō's death, his first son, Kōshō 光祥 (b. 1956), succeeded as the third chief priest. According to the religious almanac published by

27. Nakamura was a member of the PL Gakuen team that participated in the Kōshien tournament in 1962.

the Agency for Cultural Affairs, they have approximately 66,565 members as of the end of 2020.²⁸

Similar to Tenrikyō, education has been a major component of the teachings and social activities of Bentenshū. The Bentenshū school corporation, Chiben Gakuen, was established in 1965 with the opening of Chiben Gakuen High School in Gojō 五條, Nara. A junior high school was added two years later. In 1978, Chiben Gakuen Wakayama Junior and Senior High School opened in Wakayama City after they were asked to do so by the governor of Wakayama Prefecture, Kariya Shirō 仮谷志良 (1922–1997), a strong proponent of education and sports.

Baseball has been central to the identity of Bentenshū high schools since their inception. Chiben Gakuen High School participated in the Kōshien tournament for the first time in 1968, and Chiben Wakayama later entered the tournament in 1985. Currently, Chiben Gakuen accepts 120 junior high school students and eighty senior high school students every year. Among the latter, admissions reserve twenty positions for baseball players, while all the other first-year admissions are coeducational. Chiben Wakayama admits 135 junior high school students and fifty-five senior high school students every year. Among the latter, ten are for baseball players.²⁹ Perhaps because Bentenshū has a much smaller membership compared to Tenrikyō or PL Kyōdan, their high schools are open to non-members.

Unfortunately for Chiben Gakuen, the school is located in Nara Prefecture, where Tenri High School, a regular participant in Kōshien, is also located. Chiben Gakuen began to compete with Tenri for entry into the tournament under coach Takashima Hitoshi 高嶋 仁 (b. 1946). Takashima participated in Kōshien in high school at Kaisei 海星, a Catholic high school in Nagasaki. After graduating from Nippon Sports Science University, he was hired by Chiben Gakuen in 1970 as a physical education teacher and became a coach of the baseball team (TANIGAMI 2019). It took Takashima several years to lead the team to Kōshien, but in spring 1976 Tenri and Chiben were both selected to play in the tournament. Chiben has since been the main rival of Tenri in Nara Prefecture.

Takashima moved to Chiben Wakayama in 1980. Just as Tenri was an obstacle to entering the tournament in Nara, Minoshima Kōtō Gakkō 箕島高等学校 in Wakayama was at that time a regular participant in Kōshien. Takashima again had to overcome the dominance of a regional powerhouse, but Chiben Wakayama was eventually selected to go to the spring tournament in 1985.

28. See e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00401101&tstat=000001018471&cycle=0&tclass1=000001160766&tstat_infid=000032148047&tclass2val=0.

29. Regarding details on Chiben Gakuen, see chiben.ac.jp/gojo/about/normal/, and for Chiben Wakayama see chiben.ac.jp/wakayama/about/sports/.

However, for the first several years they lost all their games in the Kōshien tournaments. They won for the first time in summer 1993, and the following year Chiben Wakayama won the spring tournament. In the years since, Chiben Wakayama has become a regular participant in Kōshien. Over the course of Takashima's career as the head coach before his retirement in 2018, he participated in Kōshien 38 times with 68 wins (a Kōshien record), winning the tournament three times and finishing second four times.

A couple of books have been published about Takashima's career, but interestingly enough, neither show any connection between Takashima and Bentenshū. Regarding Takashima's personal connection to religion, Tanigami refers to his experience on a pilgrimage to Shikoku in 2008. Takashima traveled to these Shingon-related sacred sites over the course of forty-one days while he was refraining from coaching due to accusations of corporal punishment. After this experience, Takashima vowed to climb Mt. Kōya 108 times, after which he continued his visit to the mountain for over five years (TANIGAMI 2019, 193–201). Although he never discussed his Bentenshū faith, his personality clearly reflected these religious sentiments, which in turn influences his thinking as an educator and coach. Tajiri Masataka enumerates the characteristics that made Takashima the most successful coach in Kōshien history, which he explains in five chapters such as “How to make a team,” “preparations and ingenuity,” “how to raise players,” “tactics and strategies,” and “attitudes as a leader” to demonstrate how a good leader leads a team to victory (TAJIRI 2019). Although there is no explicit religious message, we can surmise that Takashima's biography and personal experience of pilgrimage must have had an impact on the way he coached the team.

Two points should be mentioned as to the relation of Bentenshū and the Chiben Gakuen corporation. One conspicuous characteristic that the general public often attribute to new religious groups is “their forceful propagation” (NIWANO HEIWA ZAIDAN 2019). By not emphasizing their teachings as a part of the curriculum at Chiben Gakuen, Bentenshū may have avoided this negative perception of new religious groups. That said, however, by not actively publicizing their relation to Chiben Gakuen, Bentenshū may have nonetheless sparked curiosity among members of the general public who are interested to know more about this organization with two successful baseball teams. Curiosity does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the teachings of Bentenshū, but, at the very least, it can spread the name of the religion.

Baseball and Identity

High school baseball has become an extracurricular activity that has attracted attention nationwide for over a century. It has become a passion for high school

students themselves. For high schools that send their baseball team to Kōshien, it is a major event that draws national attention. High school baseball in Japan is also a spectacle for fans who support their local or favorite teams, and, perhaps most significantly, a commercialized media event for the organizers and sponsors.

No studies have been conducted regarding the effects that advertising and media coverage have had on high schools participating in the Kōshien tournaments. However, it is reasonable to imagine that exposure in the media brings substantial attention and notoriety to high schools such as Tenri, PL Gakuen, and the two schools of the Chiben Gakuen corporation who have made frequent appearances in the tournaments. Tenri has been a regular participant in the tournament for nearly seventy years, PL Gakuen was at its peak in the 1970s and 1980s, and then came the glory years for the two Chiben schools. These high school baseball teams have greatly contributed to making the name of their respective religious organizations known nationwide.

For readers familiar with high school and college sports in North America, the involvement and high performance of religiously affiliated schools in sports activities may remind one of Catholic schools in the United States. Sports allowed Catholic schools—and, by extension, their Catholic students—to elevate their social position within a dominant Protestant culture and society. In comparison, the three Japanese cases highlighted in this article illustrate the peculiar position of new religious organizations in modern Japan.

Tenrikyō started its own social welfare activities just after the group was officially approved as an independent organization of a sect of Shinto in 1908. Their development in the early twentieth century through the post-World War II era occurred within the drastically shifting social changes of modern Japan. This history was rather severe for Miki Tokuchika, who experienced religious persecution. When he established PL Kyōdan in 1946, social recognition of the organization was a necessity in order for them to continue their religious activities. Their social outreach in medicine and education can be understood as attempts to garner acceptance in a society that had, up to that point, persecuted them.

When Chiben Gakuen first participated in Kōshien in 1968, postwar Japanese society had already witnessed the rapid growth of various new religious groups including Soka Gakkai and Risshō Kōseikai. Since the political activity of Soka Gakkai was controversial at that time, social—but apolitical—commitments of religious organizations were considered more acceptable. A role in education was a viable possibility for Bentenshū.

The development of social programs within new religions occurred alongside changes in popular culture. The late 1960s was a time when *supokon* スポ根 (a contraction of *supo-tsu* スポーツ [“sports”] and *konjō* 根性 [“guts”]) became a popular theme in Japanese manga, animation, and TV dramas, as illustrated

by *Star of the Giants* (*Kyojin no hoshi* 巨人の星; 1966–1971 manga, 1968 animation) and *School Wars* (*Sukūru uōzu* スクール・ウォーズ; 1984 TV drama). Personal effort and perseverance on the one hand, and harmonious cooperation in collective activities on the other, were common themes in popular culture in general during the economic growth that peaked in the “bubble” of 1980s Japan. Such ideals and values were also encouraged among workers in Japanese companies. Therefore, the cultural values of devotion and dedication transmitted via the notion of *supokon* reflect a shared identity between sports—especially baseball—and the work ethic of Japanese corporate life.

Although to some extent the *supokon* mentality remains a fundamental component of sports culture in Japan, general attitudes regarding extracurricular activities have been changing in the last decade. This change has come in response to broader critiques of Japanese society, workplaces, and labor practices that have been restructured since the collapse of the bubble economy. Since the early part of the first decade of the twenty-first century, companies known as “black businesses” (*burakku kigyō* ブラック企業) have been increasingly criticized for their harsh working conditions such as illegal overtime, harassment in the workplace, and even suicide by employees due to work-related stress.

This criticism has also been directed toward schools, and more attention has recently been paid to similar problems in school activities. This label “black” is applied to schools because of too many working hours for teachers, which often includes overtime spent guiding extracurricular club activities. The label also denotes the oppressive atmosphere of some schools that force finicky rules upon students.

Some school teachers and university professors have begun to study and discuss “black extracurricular activities” (*burakku bukatsu* ブラック部活), meaning activities that are severely oppressing and exhausting both teachers and students. In 2016, NHK aired a TV program that featured such activities.³⁰ Some of the so-called “black” characteristics resulted from group-oriented conformism and loyalty in which hierarchical authoritarian attitudes prevail. In these clubs, the teacher or coach controls the group as the authoritative leader, sometimes resorting to physical violence. In turn, the older students dominate the younger ones in a similar fashion, following the example set by the authority figure. This pseudo-militarist groupism functions quite well if the aim is to continuously win sports events, which has been the case for a number of high schools that have strong baseball teams.

When the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture was restructured into MEXT in 2001, sports was one part of its administrative structure.

30. The program series entitled “Close-up Gendai” took up the problem on 1 August 2016 (www.nhk.or.jp/gendai/articles/3847/index.html).

Then, in 2015, the Japan Sports Agency was established as an external bureau of MEXT to administer national sports policy. The Japan Sports Agency immediately started reviewing school-based extracurricular sports activities and issued guidelines for school sports in 2018. The foci of this review include (a) to situate extracurricular sports activities into general school education in a more suitable way; (b) to reduce the responsibility and obligation of school teachers in charge of sports clubs and to reduce the involvement of students and their families; and (c) to abolish any physical discipline using violent measures, such as beating or kicking.³¹ Thus, the current situation surrounding extracurricular sports activities is under critical review. High school baseball teams, and those of religious high schools in particular, are now having to rethink their ways.

As this article shows, there are many high schools affiliated with religions in Japan. The education they offer has contributed greatly to Japanese society. The recent reconsideration of Japanese school culture offers an occasion for these schools to reflect seriously on their educational contribution in postwar Japan. In particular, the schools that have been active in promoting extracurricular sports activities must now be compelled to rethink how their club activities should respond to this general backlash to club activities.

Conclusion

One can reasonably wonder why high schools affiliated with Tenrikyō, ƆL Kyōdan, and Bentenshū have been successful in their participation in the Kōshien tournaments. It is difficult to give a definitive answer. In the case of ƆL Kyōdan, it may be that their religious leader's strong support for high school baseball was an indispensable foundation for the team. In the cases of Tenri and Chiben, Tenrikyō has attempted to give a religious explanation for their students' success in their extracurricular club activities, whereas Bentenshū does not appear to have any interest in giving a religious explanation for the achievements of their high school students. In the case of Tenri High School, students generally have faith in Tenrikyō, or rather, their parent(s) must at least be members of Tenrikyō, and therefore making sense of their achievements in terms of its teachings must be a good way of justifying their club activities. In the case of Chiben Gakuen Corporation, the students are not necessarily members of Bentenshū, and their extracurricular activities are not conducted within the religious framework of Bentenshū but within the framework of an educational institution. The various achievements of the Chiben Gakuen students do not need any religious interpretation, but victories at Kōshien may, at least, inform

31. See mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/sports/mcatetopo4/list/1405720_00002.htm.

the general public of the presence of its parent religious organization, Benten-shū, as the sponsor of Chiben Gakuen.

The success of these four high schools in the Kōshien tournaments can be contextualized in postwar Japanese society. For high schools in postwar Japan, extracurricular club activities have unquestionably been an important part of students' lives. Discipline, sacrifice, and dedication—to borrow these words once again from Ema Ryan Yamazaki's documentary on Kōshien—are virtues to be inculcated in students through club activities. Fans of Kōshien tournaments have been moved to watch baseball games played by those students instilled with these virtues. These elements can be regarded as components of a Japanese collective identity, which have been shared nationally. Kōshien has been a symbol that embodies such collective identity.

Recently, the culture of high school extracurricular activities, especially sports activities, has been changing drastically. The *supokon* mentality, with a hierarchical and authoritarian structure imposed on a team, are becoming outdated. It appears that PL Gakuen has not accommodated itself to this change. Their failure to adjust may have been exacerbated by the loss of their religious leader, Miki Tokuchika.

The reexamination of sports culture has continued since the early part of the first decade of the twenty-first century, questioning authoritative and hierarchical group conformism that has long been a component of Japanese society and education. High school club activities are not off-limits to such criticism. Kōshien has maintained a sacred status for decades. Whether its figurative sacredness can be safely preserved under the current criticism of “black extracurricular activities” is yet to be seen. Kōshien can still be seen as a symbolic center of the Japanese collective identity and as the ultimate achievement of high school group sports, that is, baseball. However, Japanese people may gradually put more importance on individual identity rather than allowing themselves to be absorbed into the collective identity.

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