

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Young Mother Fears for Child's Safety During Japan's Witch Hunts

Knut Holdhus
October 23, 2024



Nayo Tobita holding the hand of her child on 7th October 2024 in Chiba Prefecture

Young mother from persecuted religious minority in Japan fears that her child may be harmed by witch hunt



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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 5: The Distorted Image of the "Second-Generation"

"Keeping distance from the religious organization, but happy with the marriage"

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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In response to the media coverage of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), there are voices from current believers claiming "biased reporting". Concerns are also being raised by second-generation believers who are not actively practicing their faith.

Nayo Tobita (pseudonym), a woman in her 30s living in Chiba Prefecture, is currently married to a man she met at a so-called [mass wedding](#), and they have one child. However, she rarely attends [church](#) and has hardly practiced offerings or home prayer meetings since getting [married](#). When asked about the reason, she explained, "I'm not comfortable with the [church](#)." She says,

"Everyday life and hobbies are more important than [God](#), [church](#) teachings, or the founders. It's a hassle to go to [church](#), and I often decline invitations."

She has few good memories from childhood. During her elementary, middle, and high school years, [church](#) training sessions were held during school vacations, but she was uncomfortable with these retreats, known as "training camps",

"The gap between those who were enthusiastic and those who weren't was large, and I often found myself isolated. Although many people there were meeting for the first time, there wasn't a sense of building friendships, and once the training was over, the relationships ended."

She couldn't fit in with the more enthusiastic group, and it was also very stressful when it was her turn to lead prayers in front of many people at mealtimes.



Japanese parents and daughter

She also harbors deep resentment towards her parents. She criticizes them, saying, "From a child's perspective, it seemed like they turned a blind eye to family issues and instead focused their energy on the [church](#)'s work." She further expresses her distrust, saying,

"During the difficult times in my life, they didn't really step in to face things with me. It felt like their own position and reputation were more important, and they didn't want to disrupt their own lives."

Tobita emphasizes that there haven't been many times where she felt glad to have been born as a second-generation member of a religion." However, she also reveals her complex feelings, saying, "I can't bring myself to betray my parents. Leaving the [church](#) would mean severing ties with them, and I don't want to

become that lonely." She continues,

"I don't think the [teachings](#) or the [organization](#) are wrong, but it's hard to keep pretending to be interested in faith and the [church](#) when I'm not. I think there are quite a few believers like that."

For Tobita, what mattered more than whether to remain in the faith or leave was "whether I could feel a sense of security." Despite her lack of interest in the [church](#) or faith, she still chose to participate in the [church](#)'s [mass wedding ceremony](#) because she thought, "Maybe I'll feel happier after getting [married](#)." She adds that she is currently happy with her [married](#) life.

However, regarding the request for the dissolution order of the [church](#), she firmly states, "If possible, I don't want it to be dissolved." She fears that if the dissolution is finalized, hatred towards the [religious organization](#) and its believers will increase, leading to more slander on social media and even direct violence or attacks. "I worry that my child might also be subjected to violence," she says, expressing her worst fears.



Press conference in Tokyo 7th Nov. 2023

Regarding the continuous media coverage of the [Family Federation](#) following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe, she acknowledges, "There are victims, and the argument that this should be rectified is not wrong." However, she reflects,

"I felt that all the press conferences and supportive statements from the [church](#) side were shut down with the single phrase 'People from the [Unification Church](#) are crazy.' The media concluded everything with their own claims."

She recalls feeling a sense of futility and even nausea, thinking that no matter what was said, no one would listen.

Regarding the faith of second-generation religious adherents, Tobita pointed out, "What matters is what the individual wants." While the dissolution of the [religious organization](#) has become a popular topic, she suggests,

"Some just want their parents to apologize or to be acknowledged. If we truly want to solve the issues faced by second-generation religious adherents, we should first create a space where they can talk with their parents."

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Parent-Child Value Gaps Not Only In Religions

• October 21, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



Value gaps between parents and children are not only found in religious homes, like anti-religious activists seem to claim



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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Current Second-Generation Believer Says, "The Religious Organization Suffers from 'Big Company Disease'."

Knut Holdhus, Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial

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A second-generation member of the *Family Federation* appeals for the protection of religious freedom and human rights, afternoon 16th September 2024, Shibuya, Tokyo. Photo: Reika Kato (加藤玲和) / *Sekai Nippo*

In media reports criticizing the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU, formerly known as the *Unification Church*), many testimonies from second-generation members who have left point out issues such as “poverty due to large donations” and “inhumane restrictions imposed by the doctrines”. They claim that “the dissolution of the *religious organization*” is the only solution. How do second-generation believers view such steps?

Yūji Suemori (pseudonym), a company employee in his 30s living in the Chūgoku region, reflects on his experience. **Both his parents are believers, but he has rarely clashed with them over their faith.** He says,

“When people hear about families involved in new religious movements, they might imagine something strange, but **even ordinary Japanese people are often involved in religion, such as visiting shrines or temples.** The *Family Federation* felt no different from that.”



Parents generally don't want their children to be fundamentally different from themselves. Parent-child value differences are not limited to the *Family Federation*. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 21st October 2024.

of the *organization*.”

He also notes, “For parents, it's not just about religion; **ideologically, they don't want their children to be fundamentally different from themselves.**” For that reason, he finds it “**nonsensical**” to limit discussions about parent-child value differences to the *Family*

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Federation alone.

On the other hand, Suemori currently keeps his distance from the **religious organization** and does not participate in its events or activities. One reason he cites is that he feels the **organization** suffers from “big company disease”. This term generally refers to the drawbacks of a hierarchical organization, such as slow decision-making, prioritizing superiors over customers, low employee motivation, and an inability to adapt to changes in the economic environment.

In the past, Yūji Suemori tried to independently organize an event within the **organization**, but the head of his local **church** abruptly intervened, and it didn't go well. He laments,

“There is a tendency for those in charge to give one-sided instructions from a superior position. Even if you want to help the **church** through volunteer work, they tend to nitpick or escalate their demands, leading to situations where people 'drop out'. I've seen a few others besides myself go through this.”

He also expressed concern, saying,

“In corporate terms, it's like the **Family Federation** succeeded through its early, relentless efforts but is now stuck repeating the same methods. Times have changed, and unless they flatten the hierarchy and treat each believer with care, the **organization** won't survive.”

Nozomu Tsukahara (pseudonym), a man in his 20s living in Hyogo Prefecture, recalls how he drifted away from the **Unification Church** in middle school after attending a training camp of the **religious organization**. He rebelled against the intense, fervent atmosphere of the training, and his desire to go to **church** waned. On top of that, he felt that the leader at his



Attending a training camp. Studying the **teachings**. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 11th October 2024.

local place of worship was a “reckless type”. As a teenager, Tsukahara increasingly felt, “I don't want to go to **church**.”

However, he does not hide **his anger at the one-sided criticism of the organization in the media and online**. He asserts,

“It's true that there were some restrictions on my life, but I wasn't in an environment so isolated from the outside world that I could only think about the **Family Federation**. **I was never forced to practice my faith in any extreme way, nor was I ever coerced into religious practices.** I have never felt that my constitutional freedoms were violated by the **church**. Rather, it seems that the **media is leading people to despise even related organizations** that have no direct connection to the doctrine. And that might actually **infringe on religious freedom.**”

He also expresses concern that the **media's narrative**

“is **built on the assumption that 'second-generation believers are victims,' and instead of fostering sympathy, it exacerbates feelings of disgust and prejudice.**”

On the other hand, Tsukahara says,

“Many believers, regardless of age, have a strong sense of right and wrong. However, it's also true that they sometimes place too much emphasis on their religious perspective, neglecting to harmonize with society and those around them. That's something that needs to be improved.”

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Featured image above: Yūji Suemori, a second-generation believer, interviewed for this article. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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