

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's treatment of the Unification Church Terrifies Young Members

Knut Holdhus  
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Yasumori Ikeda (left) and Koji Maki October 22, 2024, in Tokyo

### Dehumanizing view sold by hostile activist lawyers to Japanese authorities frightens young members of religious minority



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

**Have Second-Generation Followers of Religions Been Deprived of Their Freedom?**

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

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### Have second-generation followers of religions been deprived of their freedom?

"The so-called 'second-generation followers' of religious organizations have been deprived of freedom to choose their religion, the freedom to date and marry, the freedom to continue their education and find

employment. as a result, they have been deprived of their entire personality in all stages of life, including adulthood."

This paragraph, from a statement issued by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren) on 21st September 2024, calling for legal measures to aid victims of the former [Unification Church](#), can be said to succinctly capture the image of "second-generation followers" commonly portrayed in the media. But when parents of faith practice their beliefs together with their children, does it necessarily mean they are depriving their children of freedom and taking away their entire personality?



*Dictating Japan's hostile dehumanizing policy against new religious movements and maximizing their profits: 3 leading activist leftwing lawyers from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales - from left: Masaki Kito, Hiroshi Watanabe, Hiroshi Yamaguchi*

In his paper "The Rights of Children and 'Second-Generation Followers of Religions'" published in the academic journal Religious Studies (宗教研究 - September 2024), Professor Nobuyuki Kojima (小島伸之) of Joetsu University of Education [Editor's note: located in Joetsu, Niigata] notes that it would be "excessive if all such struggles, suffering, and hardships are viewed without qualification as 'human rights issues' or 'social issues'."

He warns that such an approach may "lead to serious conflicts between freedom of religion and parental rights" and "could also disrupt the delicate nuances of parent-child relationships and the process of human development."

He also touched on the media and political response to issues related to the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). Kojima expresses concern that "fundamental discussions about how to draw the limits of religious freedom and to what extent and how the state should mediate conflicts over religious freedom between parents and children have been obscured by the assumption that there must be a quick response to individual [Unification Church](#) issues."

How do current second-generation followers perceive these issues?



*Yasumori Ikeda*

Yasumori Ikeda (池田泰盛), a 26-year-old [church](#) staff member living in Saitama Prefecture, dropped out of vocational school six years ago. He says his current work was his own choice, with no one influencing him. He recalls,

"I originally liked training, so while I was in vocational school, I thought about becoming a sports trainer to help people with weight loss and fitness."

It was a career that offered economic stability and respect from clients if one was skilled. However, he shares,

"Part of me wanted to live for something bigger, not just for what I personally liked."

While he also had an interest in politics, he felt his faith could help improve a "distorted society" and serve as a guiding principle for his life. This belief ultimately influenced his choice of career.

There are other perspectives on the issues faced by second-generation believers.

Koji Maki (牧孝治), a 28-year-old second-generation believer and [church](#) staff member living in Tokyo, often interacts with various second-generation believers due to his position.

In one case, a second-generation follower resented being pressured into faith by his parents. Although he is already an adult, he continues to rely on his parents financially. The parents, having experienced salvation through their faith, are eager to pass it on to their children. The children, however, even while complaining, end up becoming more and more dependent.



*Koji Maki*

In such cases, Maki encourages parents to allow their children the freedom to decide for themselves whether to attend [church](#), saying,

"Faith is not something to be forced. If all they can do is criticize, maybe they should try experiencing freedom first."

However, he notes that there are cases where someone will threaten the parents, "If I live on my own, I'll stop going to church." That way the person makes faith a "weapon" to extract parental support, a situation Maki finds troubling.

In many cases, religious beliefs are passed down from parents to children, but in many cases they are not. The inner conflicts that arise are part of the parent-child relationship and can vary widely. Viewing second-generation followers purely as victims, as implied by the statement from the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, is an extreme view that is harmful.

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# Japan: Faith And Parenting, Parents Also Struggle

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• November 5, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



*Members of religious minority share how they manage to combine an active life of faith and parenting, and how they struggled with it*



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Tokyo, 5th November 2024 – Published as the **37th article** in a series in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article*







Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat – Part 5: **The Distorted Image of the “Second-Generation”**

## Faith and Parenting, Parents Also Struggle

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

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Just as children born to religious parents struggle, parents of faith also grapple with the challenges of raising their children. Amid recent discussions on the "second-generation" issue within the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), this article delves into the inner struggles of parents as they watch their religiously-raised children grow up.

"It was difficult to raise the second generation."

Heiji Suzuki (pseudonym), who lives in Tokyo, confides this. He had participated in a wedding ceremony based on faith and assumed that children born would naturally understand [God](#) and faith. However, as his children grew, he realized, "That is not the case."

The family had maintained a routine of praying together before bed, but as the children grew older and became more self-aware, they gradually started to resist it. Heiji began to feel increasingly troubled by the idea of instilling faith in his children. He tells us,



Praying together before bed. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 5th November 2024.

"When I looked at various families, their educational approaches were all over the place. But during Sunday services, when I saw children being forced to come to church, I felt that this kind of compulsion only bred resentment towards the parents. So, we decided not to force our faith upon them."

In fact, his daughter Harune (26, pseudonym) shared that she grew up through elementary school much like any other child, with almost no discussions about religion or faith. "My parents never once told me I had to go to [church](#)," she says.

Harune began attending [church](#) after joining a [church](#) sports event. In 2020, she participated in a [mass wedding](#) ceremony organized by the [Family Federation](#). When she shared this with close friends, she recalls,

"They asked, 'Are you really happy with this? Are you just following your parents' faith without thinking for yourself?' Although I tried to explain that it was my own choice, they couldn't understand. That left me feeling quite shocked," she says with a cheerless expression.

In Japan, even when parents of faith respect their children's autonomy, society often suspects that any choice to adopt faith by the child is due to parental pressure. This is the current situation in Japanese society.

On the other hand, Kayo (pseudonym), the mother, talks about seeing many second-generation members leave the [church](#). She points out that the [church](#) lacked an attitude of accepting the genuine feelings of second-generation members who did not choose faith. Expressing the inner thoughts of parents with faith, she explains,

"Regardless of whether they choose our faith, my child is still my precious child. However, some parents feel that if their child rejects the faith, it's as if they've failed as parents. Accepting the child's decision to leave can feel like a complete rejection of their parenting efforts. I understand that this makes it difficult for some parents to fully accept."

Some families have realized that their strong faith and love for their children weren't in harmony and have since worked to repair those relationships.

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relationships.

About 20 years ago, Katsumi Oshita (pseudonym), a church leader in Gunma Prefecture, was so busy with church duties that he rarely returned home, often staying at the church. Though he thought he was being dedicated in his work, his high-school-aged daughters rebelled, saying they wanted to stop being "second-generation members". This led him to realize, "I wasn't fulfilling my responsibility as a parent. I needed to be more attuned to my children's feelings."



Japanese parents with high-school-age daughters. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 5th November 2024.

Reflecting on his actions, Oshita and his wife committed themselves to rebuilding their relationship with their children. Even if he could only stay home for 30 minutes, he would make the one-hour drive without hesitation. Whenever his daughters called, he would answer, regardless of the hour, and would talk with them as long as they needed. As they began focusing on connecting with their children, the dynamic between him and his wife, who had often clashed due to their different personalities, also began to improve.

Today, all his children have embraced faith, and he is now a grandfather. "I'm not exaggerating – my kids are the best in the world," Oshita says proudly. However, he adds, bowing his head, "But I'm truly sorry for how things were for about 20 years."

**Featured image** above: Heiji Suzuki (pseudonym) talks about passing faith on to his children. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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