

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan's State Encroaching on Faith's Domain

Knut Holdhus
November 28, 2024



Independent YouTuber Pastor Tatsuhiro Iwamoto delivering a speech September 23, 2024 in Chuo Ward, Chiba City, Japan

Christian pastor warns against Japanese authorities joining leftist campaign to control domain of faith



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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 6: Voices of Religious Leaders

Independent YouTuber Pastor Tatsuhiro Iwamoto

United Church of Christ in Japan: Systematic Faith-Breaking Activities

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

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Tatsuhiro Iwamoto (岩本龍弘), a former pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan) and currently an independent YouTuber pastor residing in Aichi Prefecture, released a video on YouTube six years ago titled 'The United Church of Christ in Japan: A Hotbed of Leftists'. In the video, he exposed the church as a breeding ground for leftist activists.



Tatsuhiro Iwamoto introducing his 2018-video on YouTube called 'The United Church of Christ in Japan: A Hotbed of Leftists'

At the time of its release, the video received no response. However, in mid-March this year, Iwamoto received a request to edit and post the video on social media. The request came from someone active in defending religious freedom, who mentioned that they were affiliated with the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) and wanted permission to use the video.

"This video became a turning point," Iwamoto explained. "Many members of the [Family Federation](#) began following me on X (formerly Twitter) and subscribing to my video channel.

In particular, members of the [Family Federation](#) whom I just had become acquainted with named my channel 'Dragon Pastor'. I have developed friendly interactions with them. Through sharing Bible teachings and other content, I hope to offer even a little comfort and encouragement."

Reflecting on his connections with the [Family Federation](#), Iwamoto recalled his time as a pastor in the United Church of Christ in Japan, during which he viewed the former [Unification Church](#), Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormon Church as heretical groups. He was also familiar with [faith-breaking](#) activities targeting these groups.

Iwamoto explains,

"One of the instructors at an orientation for new pastors was Sadao Asami (浅見定雄), a prominent anti-[Unification Church](#) advocate, so I heard the full spectrum of lectures on [faith-breaking](#) activities targeting [Family Federation](#) members."

At the time, Tatsuhiro Iwamoto regarded these efforts as "protective persuasion", believing that pastors volunteered for the cause without compensation.



Toru Goto, member of [Family Federation](#) held captive for 12 years and 5 months by his own family and professional faith-breakers who attempted to break his faith

However, after meeting [Family Federation](#) members, Iwamoto learned about cases where believers were confined for long periods - up to [12 years and 5 months](#) - and that pastors received substantial compensation for their involvement.

He remarked,

"Through my own research, I became convinced that most of the negative claims about the [Family Federation](#) were fabrications."

Iwamoto expressed concern that the activities of so-called "[faith-breaking](#) activists" have already led to an increase in religious hatred and violence against Jehovah's Witnesses, among others. He warned that such trends risk cementing religious hatred and discrimination in society.

He also became aware that many [Family Federation](#) members suffered severe consequences, such as complex PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), depression, or even suicide, due to abduction,

confinement, and [forced renunciation](#) of their faith. Iwamoto emphasized,

"This is an extremely grave and serious issue. We must not allow pastors or lawyers who incite such acts of abduction and [forced renunciation](#) to go unchecked."

For Iwamoto, both the severing of ties between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the [Family Federation](#) and the government's request to dissolve the organization constitute "religious persecution". He pointed out,

"The principle of separation of religion and state is meant to prohibit specific religious organizations from receiving special privileges from the government, not to prevent religious groups from lobbying politicians."



He further criticized the dissolution request as overreach, arguing,

"The government encroaches on the domain of faith, where it should not tread."

Iwamoto decided to leave the United Church of Christ in Japan upon realizing it was a hotbed of leftist ideologies,

"In 2015, when the Peace and Security Legislation was being debated in the National Diet, a Christian student group called SEALDs

gained media attention. At the time, I witnessed not only socially active pastors but also church-affiliated pastors praising this student movement. I also noticed that those opposing the Peace and Security Legislation were deliberately spreading false information to criticize the Abe administration."

Iwamoto argues that the same leftist pastors now support the government's dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#). He highlights this issue through his video broadcasts and lectures organized by [Family Federation](#) members, urging people not to turn a blind eye to these realities.

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Mistrust Of Religion: State Persecuting Minority

• November 27, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



Buddhist chief priest points to the Japanese government's handling of religious minority as evidence of current authorities' general mistrust of religion



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat – Part 6: **Voices of Religious Leaders**

Chief Priest of Chogyoan (聴行庵) Buddhist Temple, Wako Higashi (東和空)

Freedom of religion tying together state and individual

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First, as a Buddhist, I have been mindful not to irresponsibly voice opinions on matters without fully understanding the facts. In a sense, I have questioned the veracity of reporting that, in its approach, seems to belittle the personal faith of individuals and opportunistically broadens issues related to certain organizations without due consideration.



Chief Priest Wako Higashi.
Photo: *Sekai Nippo*

Against this backdrop, I cannot help but feel a tinge of unease at the prospect that this series of government procedures may reveal political motives targeting religious corporations. It raises a concern that this might well run counter to the lofty divine or spiritual intention behind the concept of "freedom", which is a profound blessing bestowed upon human society.

For example, I sensed **political motives** behind the timing of the government's request [[Editor's note: request for a court order to dissolve the Family Federation](#)], which coincided with an upcoming extraordinary Diet session and by-elections for the *House of Representatives* [[Editor's note: Lower house in the national parliament](#)] and the *House of Councillors* (upper house), as well as in their apparent intent to show a firm stance toward the **religious organization** in question.

Additionally, one approach to determining whether to issue a dissolution order considered the existence of criminal cases as a criterion. But it seems there now also exists a theoretical framework to justify the request for a dissolution order by directly **applying civil law** in order to highlight unlawful actions by the **organization**.



The Council of Religious Corporations discussing the use of the questioning rights by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) against the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (previously known as the *Unification Church*) – 14th December 2022, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo. Photo: *Sekai Nippo*

Furthermore, it was decided not to open the *Religious Corporation Council* [[Editor's note: The Religious Corporations Council in Japan is an advisory body to the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology \(MEXT\). It plays a role in overseeing and advising on matters related to religious corporations. The council is composed of experts, academics, and representatives from diverse fields, including legal scholars, sociologists, and individuals familiar with religious practices. Its members are appointed by the Minister of MEXT. The Council is meant to ensure that any government intervention respects the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom while maintaining public welfare.](#)] to the public and not to disclose the minutes of the meetings.

This could be seen as a political disregard for religion. Therefore, it is essential to clarify the process and reasoning for calling into question – based on an arguably naive assumption of innate goodwill – the suitability of a religious corporation. Unless this is clarified to the roughly

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sanctuary of a religious corporation, unless this is claimed to the roughly 650,000 religious instructors in Japan, the impression of mistrust of religion will be difficult to erase in the future.

For this reason, I sincerely hope that this series of deliberations and the public's interest in them will adhere to the fundamental principle of "freedom of religion" and be conducted with full democratic control and transparency.

In Buddhist teachings, 'freedom' means relying on oneself. It refers to a way of living that maintains relationships with the external social environment without being swayed by it – a state in which one's personal convictions are firmly established. While we are inherently free, we become trapped, biased, and fixated on ourselves, others, and our surroundings, which causes suffering.



Japanese Buddhist praying. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 27th Nov. 2024

In this context, the government's recent handling of religion in contemporary society has left a significant message about our freedom to pursue happiness. As we reflect on whether religion, which has historically served as a bridge between the nation and the individual, has upheld the spiritual freedom of human beings, we must also ask whether the state has truly respected freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Additionally, has the press refrained from overreaching into matters of free expression and academic freedom?

Understanding that human ideals and happiness rely on the ability of free individuals to maximize their potential within society, I, as a Buddhist monk, feel deeply the need to reconcile the enormous gap between these ideals and the current reality. This disparity significantly impacts the happiness of the Japanese people.

If this sense of stagnation or unease could be alleviated through the influence of religion, it would involve enhancing happiness through means beyond income or material wealth. Factors such as societal freedom, tolerance, and the absence of corruption play significant roles in this endeavor. Observing the ongoing individualization of society and the evolving personal nature of religious practice, it becomes clear that a warm-hearted freedom is increasingly intertwined with personal happiness.

When considering individual freedom, we must ask whether it is a freedom recognized by others, a freedom that does not harm either party, or a freedom that contributes to national interests. At the same time, it is crucial for society and organizations to recognize that the freedom of individual consciousness is inherently linked to the broader social freedom in parallel worlds [Editor's note: In Buddhism, "parallel worlds" can be understood as multiple coexisting realms of existence, infinite world-systems in the cosmos, or subjective realities created by karma and perception], and to be aware of the interdependent nature (interconnectedness) of all living beings.

To comprehend the true freedom and order that the divine and Buddha espouse amidst the chaos (entropy) of conflicting interests and impermanent activities, we pray not only to win by majority rule. Instead, we should aim for gradual reconciliation, where both sides stand on equal footing, respecting essential order and national interest with dignity. May this process lead to a harmonious resolution.

Sincerely, with hands joined in prayer,

Wako Higashi (東和空), Chief Priest of Chogyoan (聴行庵) Temple.

Featured image above: Wako Higashi in January 2024. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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