

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: The Vision of the Korea - Japan Tunnel

Knut Holdhus
November 27, 2025



A proposed tunnel project between the Japanese island of Kyushu and South Korea



A far broader vision behind tunnel linking South Korea and Japan beyond media claims of religion-politics collusion in current polarized climate

"[Are They Even Trying to Frame the Push for the Korea-Japan Tunnel as Collusion Between Politics and Religion? \[Religion Column\]](#)" was the headline in English of an article published 27th November by the South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) - an opinion piece by religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수).



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)



The [article](#) addresses the growing public debate surrounding the Korea-Japan Undersea Tunnel and the recent coverage of the issue in the investigative program PD Notebook (PD수첩) by MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation), one of South Korea's major national broadcasting networks.

According to Jeong, PD Notebook - known for exposing political and corporate scandals - framed the [Family Federation's](#) involvement in the long-standing tunnel initiative as an example of "collusion between politics and religion" (정교유착), implying that the megaproject exists primarily as a tool to expand the political power of the [religious organization](#). The [article](#) strongly disputes this interpretation, arguing that such a portrayal both

narrows the historical context of the tunnel initiative and misrepresents the institutional realities of cross-border infrastructure development.



Countering the narrative presented by PD Notebook, the author offers a multi-layered defense of the Korea-Japan Tunnel project, drawing on historical records, academic analyses, prior political discussions between South Korea and Japan, and the inherent nature of ultra-large infrastructure projects. The [article](#) situates the tunnel concept within a broader vision of international connectivity and peace originally articulated by [Family Federation](#) co-founder [Sun Myung Moon](#) - also called [Father Moon](#) - in the early 1980s, depicting the project not as a sectarian agenda but as a long-term

strategic proposal that has periodically attracted interest from governments, scholars, and localities.



The entrance to the exploratory shaft in Karatsu on the southern island of Kyushu, Japan

The Segye Ilbo [article](#) mentions that [Father Moon](#) did not stop at visionary rhetoric. He moved directly into action to realize the ambitious undersea tunnel concept. A site for the prospective entrance was obtained in Karatsu, located in Japan's Saga Prefecture. With privately raised funds, engineers excavated an exploratory shaft reaching roughly 600 meters beneath the ocean floor. For a private organization to undertake a project of such scale was virtually unheard of, marking the initiative as an exceptional experiment in mega-infrastructure development.

According to religious reporter Jeong, [Hak Ja Han](#) - by many called [Mother Han](#) - designated the tunnel initiative as a "founder's legacy project" after [Father Moon](#)'s passing in 2012. She emphasized how it was meant to be part of a far larger transnational vision - the World Peace Highway. Under this expanded framework, the idea extended from the Bering Strait across the Eurasian landmass, oriented toward fostering international connectivity. Central to this vision were aims such as promoting cross-border interaction, encouraging peaceful cooperation, and establishing broader economic zones - objectives that emphasized global exchange rather than any religious profit.

[Jeong's article](#) also mentions that academic evaluations further underscore this framing. Heo Jae-wan (허재완), an emeritus professor at Chung-Ang University, identifies the Korea-Japan Tunnel as a pivotal segment of the proposed "BeSeTo Highway", a transportation corridor linking Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo. He interprets it as an essential piece of strategic infrastructure capable of integrating Northeast Asian logistics networks and enhancing South Korea's position as a regional economic hub.

Former Environment Minister Gwak Gyeol-ho (곽결호) - also a past president of the Korean Society of Civil Engineers - similarly characterizes the project as "the greatest creative endeavor of the century". In his view, it could initiate Busan and the broader southeastern region's transformation into an international metropolis, facilitate the expansion of environmentally friendly rail systems, and anchor an expansive economic corridor running through the Korean Peninsula, China, Russia, and eventually Europe. These analyses reflect professional assessments in urban planning, economics, and environmental policy rather than advocacy on behalf of any religious body.



Roh Tae-woo (1932-2021), President of South Korea from 1987 to 1993 (1989)

Discussions surrounding the tunnel have also persisted at the highest political levels. President Roh Tae-woo (노태우) publicly expressed support for joint exploration of the project during an address to Japan's Diet, a sentiment echoed by Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu (海部 俊樹). Comparable conversations occurred between President Kim Dae-jung (김대중) and Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (森 喜朗), as well as between President Roh Moo-hyun (노무현) and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (小泉 純一郎).

In Japan, a bipartisan parliamentary association was even established to study the proposal, while Busan Metropolitan City and various national research institutes have repeatedly carried out technical and economic analyses. Such sustained governmental and academic attention shows that the Korea-Japan Tunnel should be understood as a long-range strategic undertaking rather than an

initiative confined to a religious organization.

At its core, the [Segye Ilbo piece](#) argues that PD Notebook's conclusion - that political outreach on the part of the [Family Federation](#) constitutes evidence of improper religious-political entanglement - is based on a misunderstanding of how cross-border megaprojects function. The author insists that because such projects can only proceed with interstate agreements and governmental participation, private actors must inevitably seek political collaboration. Therefore, political engagement around the tunnel should not automatically be interpreted as religious interference in state affairs.

The [article](#) ultimately calls for a more mature, long-term, and national-interest-oriented public discourse

about the Korea-Japan Tunnel, warning against emotional or ideologically driven interpretations that reduce complex geopolitical and infrastructural considerations to simplistic narratives of religious overreach.



From the science conference in Seoul in November 1981 where [Father Moon](#) suggested the Japan-Korea tunnel

A key point of [Jeong's article](#) is reframing the Korea-Japan Tunnel not as a religious or political controversy but as a visionary infrastructure proposal with far-reaching implications. The author criticizes PD Notebook for positioning the tunnel project as an extension of [Family Federation](#) political ambitions, arguing instead that its origins lie in a public, global vision introduced over four decades ago. The piece highlights [Sun Myung Moon's](#) 1981 presentation at an international scientific conference, emphasizing that the audience and context were global and academic, not sectarian.

By showing that the tunnel was first presented in an international forum and supported by studies and discussions over several decades, the author aims to detach the concept from the [Family Federation's](#) internal religious narrative.



Eurotunnel-Terminal in Dover England

By comparing the Korea-Japan Tunnel to other cross-border megaprojects, such as the Channel Tunnel between the U.K. and France, the [article](#) situates the initiative within the realm of national strategy rather than religious propagation.

The author uses this reframing to argue that even if the [Family Federation](#) has been a prominent private advocate for the tunnel, the project's significance extends beyond any single organization.

One of the [article's](#) strong points is its appeal to external authorities. It cites prominent scholars, including a well-known emeritus professor of

urban planning and a former environment minister. Their evaluations of the tunnel as a strategically beneficial infrastructure project help bolster the claim that the initiative is widely recognized outside the [Family Federation's](#) circle.

Likewise, the mention of discussions at the presidential and prime ministerial levels across multiple administrations further illustrates that the Korea-Japan Tunnel has periodically been a legitimate diplomatic consideration. By invoking bipartisan and multiparty interest in both countries, the author argues that it is simply inaccurate to reduce the project to religious advocacy.

A particularly important analytical point in the [opinion piece](#) concerns the institutional requirements of cross-border megaprojects. The author argues that PD Notebook misunderstood or ignored the structural nature of such projects, which require government cooperation by definition. Projects that span sovereign borders need legal frameworks, environmental studies, diplomatic agreements, jurisdictional arrangements, and financing structures that only states can provide.

Thus, the author contends, it is neither unusual nor suspicious that the [Family Federation](#) - or any private entity seeking to advance such a project - would request cooperation from government officials or members of parliament. The argument here is that political engagement is a functional necessity, not proof of religious-political misconduct.

This is arguably the most substantial point in the [article](#), and it challenges a broader social trend in South Korea: heightened sensitivity to the political involvement of religious groups, due in part to historical precedents and contemporary scandals. Yet the author pushes back on what he views as an overly

simplistic tendency to interpret any political contact by a religious organization as inherently problematic.

The latter part of the Jeong's [opinion piece](#) shifts from critique to a positive argument for why the Korea-Japan Tunnel is in South Korea's national interest. The author emphasizes potential benefits such as positioning Korea as a logistics hub in Northeast Asia, expanding rail-based green transportation, stimulating balanced national development centered on Busan and the southeastern region, creating a gateway to a trans-Eurasian economic corridor.

By framing the tunnel as a transformative infrastructure project with environmental, economic, and geopolitical advantages, the author again widens the scope of the conversation beyond the religious dimension. The tunnel is portrayed as part of a broader peace and integration strategy for Northeast Asia - an outlook that resonates with long-standing academic and diplomatic discussions about regional community-building.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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SKorea’s Polarization Shapes Views Of Mother Han

- November 26, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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Amid South Korea’s political polarization, media and authorities often view Mother Han through partisan lenses, despite her public mission extending far beyond politics



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수).

The South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) published 25th November an opinion piece which in English would be titled “President Hak Ja Han’s path beyond political factions [Religion Column]”. The article written by religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수) examines how political polarization in South Korea shapes public perceptions of religious figures, specifically [Hak Ja Han](#) (하하자).



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religious figures – specifically **Hak Ja Han** (한국자) – by many referred to as **Mother Han** – the current leader and Co-Founder of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**, also known as the **Unification Church**.

See also **Mother Han: Prosecutors' Narrative Hard to Prove**

See also **Gingrich Pressures Seoul to Free Mother Han (82)**

The author argues that contemporary debates about **Mother Han's** political position, motives, and alleged misconduct risk collapsing a complex historical record into simplistic partisan narratives. For Western readers unfamiliar with South Korean political culture and the institutions referenced in the **article**, several contextual elements are important to fully understand the author's point.

One of the central examples the **article** uses is the "Jeong Yun-hoe (정윤희) document" scandal of 2014. To appreciate its significance, one must recognize the institutional environment of South Korea at that time. South Korea's executive branch operates from the **Blue House** (Cheong Wa Dae), the former presidential office and residence analogous to the White House in the United States. Under then-President Park Geun-hye (박근혜), a conservative leader whose administration would later collapse amid a major corruption scandal, internal discipline and control within the Blue House were notoriously tight, and accusations of behind-the-scenes influence carried heavy political weight.



Park Geun-hye (박근혜) – President of South Korea 2013–2017). Photo (2013): Foreign and Commonwealth Office / Wikimedia Commons. License: **OGL v1.0**. Cropped

Against this backdrop, **Segye Ilbo** – a newspaper affiliated with the **Family Federation** – published a leaked internal government document alleging that Jeong Yun-hoe (정윤희), a former aide to Park, was improperly exerting influence over state affairs through an informal network. In Western terms, this was akin to a major newspaper revealing that a personal friend of the president was secretly shaping governmental decision-making without holding any official position. The report ignited a political firestorm and placed the newspaper in direct confrontation with the highest levels of the sitting conservative government.

The significance of this episode in the **article's** argument cannot be overstated. For critics who today portray **Mother Han** as having consistently aligned with or supported certain political factions, the 2014 report represents a counterexample that defies easy categorization. Rather than serving the interests of the ruling party, the **Family Federation**-aligned newspaper published an exposé that embarrassed and provoked the conservative administration, raising questions about internal power struggles and the abuse of state authority. According to contemporaneous reporting, **Mother Han** herself endorsed the newspaper's decision on the grounds that "the media must fulfill its public responsibility."

The Segye Ilbo **article** uses this history to challenge the notion that **Hak Ja Han** or the **Family Federation's** institutions have operated merely as extensions of any political camp. The author suggests that **Mother Han's** leadership has been motivated more by religious, ethical, and peace-oriented principles than by partisan objectives. Journalist Jeong Seong-su points to decades of initiatives pursued by the **Family**



Mother Han motivated by religious, ethical, and peace-oriented principles rather than by politics. Here, speaking in Harare, Zimbabwe 21st November 2018. Screenshot from live transmission by PeaceTV.

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Federation – interfaith dialogue, North-South Korean engagement, and international peace projects – to argue that such activities are not readily reducible to conventional left-right political metrics.

For Western readers, it is important to recognize that South Korea's political polarization is intense and often deeply personal. Allegations of political favoritism or ideological allegiance can become powerful rhetorical weapons. Religious movements, especially those as publicly visible as the **Family Federation**, often find themselves scrutinized through the lens of political loyalty rather than through their broader civic or spiritual missions. The article therefore positions itself as a corrective to these tendencies, contending that one cannot fairly assess **Mother Han**'s past without situating it within the full complexity of South Korea's shifting political landscape.

The **article** also touches on the legal charges currently facing **Hak Ja Han**, noting that any judgment on their validity should be determined through judicial processes rather than public speculation. While it refrains from discussing the specifics of the case, the author warns against reducing a leader's decades-long public activities to the narrow frame of contemporary legal disputes. This argument rests on a broader theme: that historical context and long-term patterns of action must be evaluated alongside present controversies.

From a Western analytical standpoint, the article exemplifies a common tension in societies marked by deep partisan divides. Leaders – whether political, religious, or civic – are frequently assessed not on the full arc of their actions but on how they appear to align with the immediate concerns of the moment. The author pushes back against such reductionism, urging readers to examine the documentary record, to acknowledge episodes like the 2014 exposé that complicate easy narratives, and to judge **Mother Han**'s leadership in light of stated values such as public responsibility, interfaith collaboration, and peacebuilding.

Ultimately, the article is less a defense of **Mother Han** in a narrow sense and more an argument about how public memory and perception should operate in a polarized society. It urges a more nuanced and historically grounded approach – one that considers not only accusations or political climates, but also evidence, consistency of values, and the broader public impact of a leader's actions.

See also [Mother Han: Prosecutors' Narrative Hard to Prove](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: **Mother Han** addressing a large prayer rally for the salvation of Korea and a unified Korean peninsula, 9th January 2022 in Cheonshim Peace World Center, Gapyeong, South Korea. Screenshot from live transmission by PeaceLink TV.

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