

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Holy Mother Han returns to S Korean Prison

Knut Holdhus  
February 21, 2026



Image showing how [Mother Han](#) may well appear now. Illustration

朝鮮日報

Chosun Ilbo

Mother Han's continued custody reflects hard line by left-leaning Lee administration on religious organizations perceived to champion conservative causes

Chosun Ilbo, a large South Korean daily, carried 21st February a news item headlined "[Han Hak-ja's Request to Extend Suspension of Detention Denied. Returns to Detention Center](#)".

The paper [reported](#) that a South Korean court has ordered 83-year-old religious leader [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) - also called [Mother Han](#) - to return to detention after denying her request to extend a temporary medical release. [Mother Han](#), the head of [Unificationism](#) - formally known as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - is currently on trial over allegations that her [organization](#) illegally funneled political donations and provided high-value gifts to influential political figures.

The decision was made by the 27th Criminal Division of the Seoul Central District Court, led by Presiding Judge Woo In-seong (우인성). [Mother Han](#) had been [temporarily released](#) on 12th February on [health grounds](#), after her lawyers argued that she had suffered three falls while in custody and was experiencing serious complications from high blood pressure and glaucoma. The court had [allowed her release](#) under conditions, enabling her to receive outside medical treatment. However, when her legal team sought to extend that suspension, the court rejected the request. She returned to the Seoul Detention Center at approximately 2 p.m. on 21st February.



Yoon Yeong-ho, Dec. 6, 2020

Under South Korea's Criminal Procedure Act, courts may suspend detention when there are compelling humanitarian reasons - such as serious illness, childbirth, or the need to attend a family funeral. In practice, such suspensions are temporary and subject to judicial discretion. [Mother Han](#) had previously received a [short medical suspension](#) in November 2025 for hospital treatment lasting three days. The court's latest decision indicates that judges concluded either that her medical needs no longer required outside release or that the legal criteria for continued suspension were not sufficiently met.

According to the [Chosun Ilbo report](#), the charges against [Mother Han](#) are significant. The prosecutors appointed by the current Lee administration, seen as leftwing, allege that in January 2022 she conspired with former senior [Federation](#) official [Yoon](#)

[Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) to deliver 100 million won (approximately USD \$75,000 at the time) to People Power Party lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동).



Former President Yoon Suk-yeol of the Republic of Korea April 25, 2023, in Maryland



Former First Lady of the Republic of Korea Kim Keon-hee posing for a photo, April 2023, in the White House

The alleged purpose was to secure favorable treatment from the administration of then-President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) for certain projects promoted by the [religious organization](#), one of which was to obtain government backing for a potential Asian UN office located in South Korea. It is primarily a project intended to create peace on the Korean peninsula, not to strengthen the [Family Federation](#).

Additional accusations claim that between April and July 2022, 144 million

won in funds from the [religious organization](#) while [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) served as its secretary-general, were divided into smaller donations and distributed to multiple ruling party lawmakers - a practice known in Korea as "split donations", which can violate campaign finance laws.

Further allegations involve luxury gifts. Prosecutors claim that through an intermediary religious figure known as "Geonjin Beopsa" (건진 법사), expensive items - including a Chanel handbag and a high-value Graff necklace - were delivered to First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) in July 2022 in connection with pending matters promoted by [Yoon Yeong-ho](#).

### FATES OF SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENTS

- Syngman Rhee (in office 1948-1960) - **Exile in Hawaii until death**
- Yun Bo-seon (1960-1962) - **Convicted of treason**
- Park Chung-hee (1963-1979) - **Assassinated**
- Choi Kyu-hah (1979-1980) - **Forced out by coup**
- Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988) - **Death sentence, pardoned**
- Roh Tae-woo (1988-1993) - **Jailed, pardoned**
- Kim Young-sam (1993-1998) - **Son jailed**
- Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) - **Aides investigated**
- Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) - **Suicide during probe**
- Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) - **Jailed, pardoned**
- Park Geun-hye (2013-2017) - **Impeached, jailed, pardoned**
- Moon Jae-in (2017-2022) - **Aides probed**
- Yoon Suk-yeol (2022-2025) - **Impeached, removed from office**

Now, also religious organizations having supported former presidents are in danger: South Korea has a long, almost uncanny pattern of post-presidency trouble - enough that some Koreans joke there's a "curse" on the Blue House. Each new administration often tries to "clean house" by prosecuting the previous one. The presidency in South Korea has immense influence, making both abuse and backlash more likely. This has created a cycle: leaders push legal or moral boundaries while in office, then political opponents pursue them once they step down

[Mother Han](#) also faces charges under the Political Parties Act for allegedly directing [Federation](#) members to collectively join the ruling People Power Party in order to influence its March 2023 leadership primary.

For international observers, the image of an octogenarian religious leader with [serious health concerns](#) being held in detention may simply appear outrageous. However, several political and legal factors help explain the situation.

First, South Korea has in recent decades developed a strong prosecutorial culture centered on political accountability. Former presidents, cabinet ministers, corporate conglomerate heads, and party leaders have all faced investigation,

imprisonment, or both. Pretrial detention is more commonly used in high-profile corruption cases than in many Western democracies, particularly where prosecutors argue there is risk of evidence tampering or coordination among co-defendants.

Second, there are powerful political forces actively campaigning against the [religious organization](#) currently led by [Mother Han](#). In Japan, the communist party leadership has publicly stated that they are

actively waging the "[final war](#)" against the [Family Federation](#). Lawyers from the far left of the political spectrum founded a network of activist lawyers that for decades has been demanding the dissolution of the [Federation](#).



*Declared the 'final war' against the [Unification Church](#): Kazuo Shii, chairman of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2000-2024, here March 30, 2023*

Recently, Lee Jae-myung (이재명), the left-leaning President of South Korea stated publicly that he wants to initiate a similar process, not just against [Mother Han's organization](#), but also Shincheonji [See editor's note below], another fairly large new religious movement regarded as conservative. In addition, even large Christian churches perceived to support conservative political causes have come under intense scrutiny from the Lee administration. Against this backdrop, courts may feel pressure to demonstrate that they are not taking lightly on the allegations - in [Mother Han's](#) case, in spite of her frailty, [poor health](#), old age, and absence of any previous criminal record.

Third, the case is unfolding in a polarized political climate. Allegations involve senior figures associated with the current or former ruling camp, making the matter politically charged. In such circumstances, judicial authorities may be especially cautious about appearing lenient.

At the same time, critics argue that humanitarian considerations should weigh more heavily when a defendant is elderly and [medically fragile](#). Korean law does allow for suspension in cases of serious illness, but the standard is not automatic; courts balance medical evidence against legal risks.

Ultimately, [Mother Han's](#) continued detention reflects the current administration's increasingly aggressive approach to cases involving religious bodies - one that is ready to punish and even dissolve large religious organizations, even when it is only a handful of individuals that may have broken laws, some of which apply to grey-zone areas in the relationship between religion and politics.

---

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

**[Editor's note:** Shincheonji, officially known as Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation. Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it.]

See also [In Tiny Solitary Cell: Irreversible Harm Caused](#)

See also [Mother Han Released 10 Days for Medical Reasons](#)

See also [Emotional Scenes as Mother Han Is Freed Briefly](#)

See also [Religious Freedom Threat: China-Led Alliance](#)

See also [Gingrich Warns Against State Control of Faith](#)

See also [Domino Effect of Religious Persecution in Asia](#)

See also [Unificationism, Industry, and Cold War Survival](#)

See also [Current Korean Situation: Context and Key Issues](#)

See also [Court: Prosecutors' Overreach in Politicized Case](#)

See also [S. Korea's Troubling Pattern of Selective Probes](#)

See also [Unificationism Emerging as a World Religion](#)

See also [Alarm Over State Interference in Religion](#)

Related to return to custody: [Mother Han's December Trial: Long Detention Ahead](#)

Also related to return to custody: [A 10-Minute Visit to Mother Han in Detention](#)

Also related to return to custody: [Denying Allegations: Hak Ja Han \(82\) in Inquiry](#)

Also related to return to custody: [SKorean Court's Sharp Criticism of Prosecutors](#)

And also related to return to custody: [Detention: Harsh Cell Conditions Spark Outcry](#)

More, related to return to custody: [Ugly: Arrest Warrant Sought for Hak Ja Han \(82\)](#)

And more, related to return to custody: [Critics Warn of "Authoritarian Drift" in SKorea](#)

Even more, related to return to custody: [Court Decision to Prolong Detention Condemned](#)

Still more, related to return to custody: [Co-Founder, 82, Questioned 9 Hours by Prosecutors](#)

Also related to return to custody: [Democratic Party's Assault on Family Federation](#)

And even more, related to return to custody: [Mother Han \(82\) in Poor Health in Damp, Cold Cell](#)

And still more, related to return to custody: [Korean Crisis: "True Democracy Must Serve Heaven"](#)

And yet more, related to return to custody: [Faith Leaders Protest State Assault on Religion](#)

Also related to return to custody: [News Release Blasts Indictment of Hak Ja Han, 82](#)

More, related to return to custody: [70 Years On: Detention History Repeats Itself](#)

And more, related to return to custody: [Trump Raises Alarm Over Church Raids in Korea](#)

Even more, related to return to custody: [Mike Pompeo Calls Probe of Co-Founder "Lawfare"](#)

Still more, related to return to custody: [Korean Faith Crackdown: USA Urged to Confront It](#)

Yet more, related to return to custody: [Korean Bribery Scandal: Media Clears Federation](#)

And also related to return to custody: [Raids Blur Line Between Justice and Politics](#)

More, related to return to custody: [Heavy-Handed Raid on Sacred Sites Condemned](#)



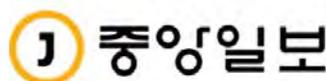
# Media On Succession: Who Leads After Mother Han?

- February 18, 2026
- Knut Holdhus



## A large South Korean daily takes a closer look at the question of succession in the Family Federation

An [article](#) published by the large South Korean daily *JoongAng Ilbo* on 17<sup>th</sup> February examines an issue that, to many outside Korea – and certainly to those unfamiliar with **Unificationism** (officially known today as the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**) – may seem complex, opaque, and even startling. At its core, according to [the newspaper](#), it is about succession: who will inherit leadership of a global religious movement and how deeply family structure, theology, and loyalty are intertwined in that process.



Logo of the large South Korean daily newspaper JoongAng Ilbo

- See also [Unificationism Emerging as a World Religion](#)
  - See also [Return to Custody as Court Rejects Health Plea](#)
  - See also [In Tiny Solitary Cell: Irreversible Harm Caused](#)
  - See also [When Conscience Dies: Global War on God](#)
- To understand the stakes, some background is necessary.



The Family Federation teaches that **Sun Myung Moon** (문선명) and his wife, **Hak Ja Han** (한학자), are the **"True Parents"** of humankind – a

Share:

More Posts

- Return To Custody As Court Rejects Health Plea  
February 21, 2026
- One Month In: Probe Into Faith, Funds, And Favors  
February 16, 2026
- Japan: "MEXT Fabrication" Storm Grows Online  
February 14, 2026
- Japan: Lawyers Accused Of Wilful Dehumanization  
February 13, 2026
- Emotional Scenes As Mother Han Is Freed Briefly  
February 12, 2026
- Mother Han Released 10 Days For Medical Reasons  
February 11, 2026
- Domino Effect Of Religious Persecution In Asia  
February 10, 2026

Search:

### Categories

Send us a message

First Name \*  Last Name

Email \*

Your Message \*



The True Parents – Father Moon and Mother Han. Photo: FFWPU

divinely appointed couple sent to complete the mission that Jesus, in their theology, had been unable to fulfill. Central to Unificationist doctrine is the idea that the Fall of Man corrupted

the human lineage. Restoration, therefore, requires the establishment of "true families" through blessed marriages that reconnect humanity to a sinless bloodline.

Reporter Baek Seong-ho (백성호), who penned the article, writes that unlike most Christian denominations, which separate ecclesiastical leadership from biological inheritance, the Family Federation integrates theology and family lineage into a single framework when it comes to determining the successors of Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012) and Hak Ja Han – by many called Father Moon and Mother Han. Bloodline is not symbolic – it is doctrinally decisive.

This is why succession within the Moon family has always carried both religious and institutional weight. When Father Moon died in 2012, leadership passed to Mother Han. Now 83 years old and reportedly facing legal troubles as well as multiple health problems, she presides over a movement that is at a crossroads. The JoongAng Ilbo article claims that the obvious question of who will ultimately lead the movement remains unsettled.

According to the writer, Hak Ja Han has indicated that her grandsons – Moon Shin-chul (문신출) and Moon Shin-heung (문신흥) – are to be the future standard-bearers. Both are in their twenties, which immediately raises practical concerns: youth implies vulnerability. As a result, experienced adults stand behind them. Chief among these is their mother, Choi Yeon-ah (최연아) – also known as Moon Yeon-ah (문연아) –



Moon Shin-chul, here speaking at a rally in Seoul October 2025. Screenshot from video by FFWPU



Moon Shin-heung 14th October 2025 in Gapyeong, South Korea. Screenshot from live transmission by FFWPU

who has held senior administrative positions within the movement and currently chairs Sunhak Academy, one of its major educational foundations. She is described as a close confidante of Mother Han and functions as a key organizational actor.

To grasp why this matters, one must step back a generation.

Moon Shin-chul and Moon Shin-heung are sons of Moon Hyo-jin (문효진 1961-2008), the eldest son of Father Moon. Within Unificationist theology, Moon Hyo-jin occupied a unique position. He was the first son born to the "True Parents", who were believed to be free from original sin. This made him, according to the JoongAng Ilbo, in the Family Federation's understanding, the first male of a restored, sinless lineage. In symbolic and theological terms, that is an immense burden. In institutional terms, it positioned him as the natural heir apparent.

But biography often complicates theology.

In his piece, reporter Baek points out that Moon Hyo-jin did not conform neatly to expectations of clerical or spiritual leadership. As a young man, he immersed himself in heavy metal and rock music. This was not a casual pastime; he recorded approximately fifteen albums and performed actively. The contrast between the son of a messianic religious leader and the aesthetics of heavy metal is striking, but the article notes that his music frequently expressed devotion to his parents – the "True Parents" – and themes of repentance and spiritual longing. His artistic life was not, in his view, necessarily rebellious.



Moon Hyo-jin, here 24th February 2007 in Gapyeong, South Korea. Photo: FFWPU

Still, his personal life was turbulent. His first marriage, to Hong Nan-sook (홍난숙), ended in divorce. A memoir, In the Shadow of the Moons, was published in her name, but was largely written by a ghostwriter, a journalist from the Boston Globe, Eileen McNamara, who had strong ties to the so-called anti-cult movement.

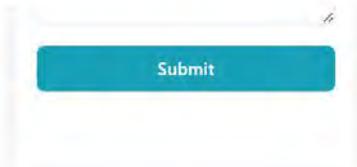


Moon (born Choi) Yeon-ah, October 2025. Screenshot from live transmission by FFWPU

The book contained allegations about the private life of Moon Hyo-jin, and the JoongAng Ilbo claims that the publicity apparently weakened his position within the movement's succession hierarchy. He later remarried Choi Yeon-ah – reportedly at his father's direction – and they had six children, including the two sons now identified as potential successors.

In 2008, at age 46, Moon Hyo-jin died suddenly of cardiac arrest at his home in Seoul. With his death, the most straightforward line of succession – father to eldest son – effectively collapsed.

The article then turns to the second son, Moon Heung-jin (문흥진 1966-1984), whose life and death are even more central to understanding the movement's internal logic



Understanding the movement's terminology:

Moon Heung-jin died at age 17 in a car accident in New York. A truck reportedly skidded across the center line on icy roads and collided with his vehicle. He was unmarried. The [JoongAng Ilbo](#) reports mentions that in most religious traditions, the death of a teenager is a tragedy but not a theological crisis. In [Unificationism](#), however, [marriage](#) is not merely a social milestone; it is a salvific requirement. The formation of a "true family" through the [marriage blessing](#) is essential to spiritual completion and entry into the [Kingdom of Heaven](#).



Moon Heung-jin, here in November 1983. Photo: FFWPU

According to the teachings, someone who dies unmarried has not fulfilled the necessary condition of establishing a [restored lineage](#). The [article](#) even notes that the [Family Federation](#) interprets Jesus' death in this light: Because the [Kingdom of Heaven](#) could not be established here on the earth during the lifetime of Jesus, it could not be erected in the eternal world either. Jesus was crucified before marrying and has since resided in the highest realm of paradise. Although it is extremely beautiful, it is not the [Kingdom of Heaven](#) that can only come into existence when a sufficient foundation has been made on the earth. A [blessed marriage](#), in [Unificationism](#), is not peripheral – it is essential for one's eternal life.

It was within this framework that one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of [Unificationism](#) occurred: the spirit marriage of Moon Heung-jin.

A spirit marriage, in this context, is a religious ceremony uniting a living person with a deceased individual. The practice reflects the [movement's](#) belief that earthly and spiritual realms remain interconnected and that marital bonds can be established across that boundary.



Bo Hi Pak (Pak Bo-hee) (1930-2019), here in 1974 in Birmingham, Alabama. Photo: Gary Fleisher

At the time of Moon Heung-jin's death, there had reportedly been discussions of engagement between him and Pak Hoon-sook (박훈숙), the daughter of Bo Hi Pak (박보희), a close aide to [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명). Pak was not a marginal figure. According to the [JoongAng Ilbo](#), he was a former military officer and diplomat who later became the founding president of the conservative American newspaper The Washington Times. He was fluent in English and was widely considered one of [Father Moon's](#) most trusted lieutenants.

After the fatal accident, [Sun Myung Moon](#) reportedly told Pak that the engagement should be considered void and that his daughter should be free to marry someone else. At the time, she was 21 years old and building a promising career as a ballerina. By all conventional reasoning, this would have been the compassionate path forward.

Instead, according to the [article](#), she ultimately chose to proceed with a spirit marriage to Moon Heung-jin who had already left this earthly world. Even more symbolically charged, the ceremony reportedly included another marriage on the same day: Moon In-jin (문인진) – one of [Father Moon's](#) daughters – married Pak's son Pak Jin-sung (박진성). In effect, two sibling pairs from the two families were united in a single ritual event, further binding the Moon and Pak families together.

For outside observers, the episode may appear bewildering or emotionally fraught. Within the internal logic of [Unificationist](#) theology, however, it can be seen as an effort to preserve the [heavenly lineage](#) originating in the [True Parents](#) as well as spiritual continuity despite death.

The [JoongAng](#) [article](#) situates all of these historical threads within the present issue of succession. With [Father Moon](#) gone and [Mother Han](#) aging and facing legal scrutiny, the [movement](#) is reorganizing. The [article](#) refers to a "two daughters-in-law system", suggesting that women married into the Moon family are now playing structurally significant roles in shaping institutional continuity.

In summary, what may initially read as a sensational narrative about "spirit marriage" is in fact part of a broader institutional story: a global religious organization whose theology fuses [lineage](#), [marriage](#), and salvation must resolve leadership questions through the same familial framework. For readers unfamiliar with Korean religious movements, it is crucial to understand that in [Unificationism](#), family is not metaphor. It is a key part not only of doctrine, but as we now see, of governance structure, and succession plan as well.

See also [Unificationism Emerging as a World Religion](#)

See also [In Tiny Solitary Cell: Irreversible Harm Caused](#)

See also [Return to Custody as Court Rejects Health Plea](#)

See also [When Conscience Dies: Global War on God](#)

See also [New S. Korean Laws Let State Police Religions](#)

See also [State Failure and Non-State Peace Projects](#)

**Text:** Knut Holdhus, editor

**Featured image** above: From the entrance ceremony into the Cheonwon Temple 13th



Pak Hoon-sook with photo of Moon Heung-jin at their wedding 20th February 1984. Photo: New Future Photos / FFWPU

**Related to question of succession:** [SKorea's Polarization Shapes Views of Mother Han](#)

Also related to question of succession: [Current Korean Situation: Context and Key Issues](#)

Also related to question of succession: [Large Daily on Family Federation and Politics](#)

And also related to question of succession: [At Issue: Religions Taking Reality Seriously](#)

Also related to question of succession: [Essence of God](#)

More, related to question of succession: [God and Human Beings](#)

Also related to question of succession: [The Kingdom of Heaven](#)

And also related to question of succession: [True Love](#)

More, related to question of succession: [The Value of the Family](#)

And more, related to question of succession: [God's ideal](#)

Still more, related to question of succession: [God's Sorrow](#)

Yet more, related to question of succession: [Suffering of God](#)

And yet more, related to question of succession: [Family values](#)

Also related to question of succession: [Meaningful Marriage](#)

More, related to question of succession: [Living for Others](#)

More, related to question of succession: [Family as School of Love](#)

More, related to question of succession: [Parents and Children](#)

More, related to question of succession: [Teachings Make Great Strides in New Version](#)

And more, related to question of succession: [In a Nutshell](#)

Yet more, related to question of succession: [Brief about the Teachings](#)

Still more, related to question of succession: [Relationships](#)

Even more, related to question of succession: [Gender-Balanced Understanding of God and Christ](#)

And yet more, related to question of succession: [God as Our Heavenly Parent \(Father and Mother\)](#)

And still more, related to question of succession: [History of God: From Yahweh to Father to Parent](#)

And even more, related to question of succession: [Religious Truth as Progressive Revelation](#)

Also related to question of succession: [Essential Motherly Part of Messianic Mission](#)

Also related to question of succession: [The 3 Blessings and the Process to Fulfil Them](#)

Also related to question of succession: [Unification Principles](#)

« Previous [One Month In: Probe Into Faith, Funds... Return To Custody As Court Rejects H...](#) Next »



GET STARTED

[Home](#) [Privacy Policy](#)

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

First Name  Last Name

Your Email Address

I agree to receive the newsletter from FFWPU

Follow us

