

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan's Anti-FFWPU Civil Case Ruling Shows Judiciary's Bigotry

Knut Holdhus
January 6, 2025



*Masumi Fukuda speaking at a conference in Japan
December 25, 2024*

Brewing huge scandal involving Japanese judges and authorities exposed by investigative journalist shocked by partiality of judiciary in Supreme court handling of civil case against Family Federation

See also [Judges Clearly Swayed by Media](#)

In a large 10-page report published in the December 2024 issue of the Japanese magazine *Monthly Hanada*, investigative journalist and award-winning author Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ), highlights a civil case fought by hostile lawyers against the [Family Federation](#) in Japan. She exposes how the

witch hunt against the [religious minority](#) after the July 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has swayed the legal institutions of Japan to issue verdicts that always are sympathetic to the arguments of hostile anti-[Family Federation](#) activists and disregard evidence presented by the persecuted [minority](#).



Fukuda's extensive report was headlined "The Day Japan's Judiciary Died - The Full Truth Behind the Former [Unification Church Memorandum \(念書\) Trial](#)".

The Impact of the Abe Assassination on Japan's Judiciary and Society



*Lacking impartiality? Japanese judges pronouncing
a verdict*

The investigative journalist describes how the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022 reverberated across Japan, reshaping political, social, and judicial dynamics. A striking example is the Supreme Court's ruling in a high-profile "memorandum trial" involving the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), where political, media, and public pressures seemingly influenced judicial impartiality. This regression in judicial independence mirrors South Korea's "emotional public sentiment law".

[Editor's note: South Korea's "emotional public sentiment law" is not an official legal term or codified piece of legislation. Instead, it is often used metaphorically to describe situations where public sentiment, emotions, or popular opinion exert a strong influence on legal and judicial decisions, potentially overriding

objective legal principles or evidence. This term reflects concerns that high-profile cases in South Korea sometimes involve significant public outcry or media pressure, which can lead to verdicts being swayed by societal emotions rather than strict adherence to the law.

The idea stems from instances where widespread public outrage or media campaigns influence prosecutors, judges, or lawmakers to take actions aligned with popular sentiment. Critics argue that such influence undermines judicial independence and can lead to verdicts or rulings that prioritize appeasing public emotions over upholding legal standards. In South Korea, controversial cases involving celebrities, politicians, or high-profile crimes often attract immense public and media attention. Cases such as child abuse or violent crimes have seen calls for harsher sentences due to public outrage, potentially impacting judicial outcomes.

The concept is relevant in discussions about balancing public accountability and maintaining the

impartiality of legal institutions. There is a concern that Japan's judicial processes, like South Korea's perceived challenges, might be becoming overly influenced by societal and media-driven emotional narratives.]

The Supreme Court's Memorandum Ruling



Elderly Japanese woman signing memorandum at a notary office

On 11th July 2024, Japan's Supreme Court invalidated a notarized pledge (memorandum) created by an elderly member of the [Family Federation](#), sparking public and legal controversy. The plaintiff - a woman and her late mother - had sued the federation for 180 million yen, alleging coercive solicitation of donations. While lower courts dismissed the claims based on the pledge's validity, the Supreme Court's reversal ruled the memorandum exploitative, violating public order and morals.

Masumi Fukuda explains how the ruling marked a precedent for scrutinizing solicitation practices of religious organizations, framed against the "witch hunt" of the [Family Federation](#) following Abe's assassination.

Case Background and Donations

The case centers on Hitomi Sugita (pseudonym), an elderly believer who joined the [Family Federation](#) through her third daughter and donated over 150 million yen to support the [religious organization's](#) peace initiatives.

Masumi Fukuda writes,

"Sugita became acquainted with the teachings of the [Family Federation](#) through her third daughter, also a member, and eventually joined the faith herself. She was deeply moved by the contributions of the founder, [Sun Myung Moon](#), to world peace and aspired to live a similar life. This led her to make substantial donations to the [church](#).

Sugita often spoke passionately about [Sun Myung Moon](#), saying, 'There's no one as extraordinary as him.' However, she later became a plaintiff alongside her eldest daughter, Iwata, in a lawsuit against the [church](#) and its members. It appears this was due to her inability to oppose Iwata, who was described as being 'obsessed' with reclaiming the donations her mother had made - a sentiment Sugita herself allegedly likened to that of a 'demon'."



Offering a donation at a Japanese Sunday worship service

Her financial contributions stemmed from a compensation payment for repurposed land. Sugita had spoken with passion about her faith and Reverend [Sun Myung Moon's](#) teachings. However, verbal hostility from her eldest daughter Kyoko Iwata (pseudonym) against the [federation](#) - largely echoing negative claims made by faith-breakers and activist lawyers - led Sugita to draft a notarized pledge affirming her voluntary donations and relinquishing any future claims against the [federation](#).

In 2017, Sugita and Iwata sued the church for damages. Despite Sugita's notarized affirmation, Iwata isolated her mother, obtained legal guardianship based on an Alzheimer's diagnosis, and contested the federation's practices as manipulative. Lower courts upheld Sugita's pledge (memorandum), but the Supreme Court's later ruling deemed it invalid.

Memorandum Context

Sugita created the memorandum in 2015 to defuse tensions with her family. At a notary public's office on 2nd November 2015, she affirmed her voluntary donations, even recording a video to confirm her intentions. Despite these steps, Iwata's subsequent actions - isolating Sugita, alleging diminished mental capacity, and petitioning for guardianship - raised questions about manipulation and coercion.

The Alzheimer's Diagnosis and Isolation

In 2016, a controversial Alzheimer's diagnosis stated Sugita could not perform basic calculations, paving the way for Iwata's guardianship. However, Sugita later displayed logical coherence and emotional clarity during a meeting with her third daughter. She expressed joy, reaffirmed her faith, and refuted allegations of coercion. Audio recordings contradicted claims in a subsequent document - purportedly written by Sugita - that denied her earlier statements. The discrepancies cast doubt on the authenticity of the diagnosis and Iwata's intentions.

Supreme Court's Overturning of Lower Court Rulings

The Supreme Court's judgment invalidated the memorandum on grounds that Sugita, under the "psychological influence" of the [Family Federation](#), could not make rational decisions. The court concluded that the pledge unfairly restricted her ability to seek redress and criticized the [federation's](#) solicitation methods as exploitative.



Pointing out that ruling undermines religious freedom: Investigative journalist and author Masumi Fukuda, here giving a talk Dec. 25, 2024 in Japan

Masumi Fukuda writes that critics, including the [Family Federation](#), argue this ruling undermines religious freedom and mischaracterizes faith-driven donations as coercive. Donations, they assert, are a longstanding religious practice, voluntary acts of faith seen in traditions worldwide. The court's framing of Sugita as "psychologically influenced" echoes the discredited concept of "mind control", further raising concerns about judicial bias influenced by activist lawyers, media narratives and public sentiment.

Family Federation's Defense

The [Family Federation](#) contended that:

1. Sugita made donations freely, with full mental capacity.
2. The notarized pledge was created voluntarily, under legal scrutiny by a notary public.
3. Iwata manipulated the legal process to isolate Sugita, exploiting her guardianship to reclaim funds contrary to Sugita's wishes.

Audio evidence and notarized documents supported their claims, but the Supreme Court's ruling dismissed these defenses, prioritizing allegations of undue influence and coercion.

Public Sentiment and Media Influence

The assassination of Abe drew attention to the [Family Federation](#) due to his alleged ties with the group. Media coverage amplified scrutiny of the [organization's](#) practices, casting a shadow over the judiciary's independence. The court's decision appeared to align with public outcry rather than legal precedents, eroding trust in the impartiality of Japan's legal system.

Contradictions and Ethical Questions

Several contradictions highlight the complexity of the case:

1. Cognitive abilities: Despite the Alzheimer's diagnosis, Sugita demonstrated mental acuity in interactions with her third daughter, contradicting claims of incapacity.
2. Conflicting documents: Sugita's notarized pledge and recorded statements refuted allegations of coercion, while subsequent documents appeared to be manipulated by Iwata.
3. Religious freedom vs. exploitation: The court's ruling challenges the boundary between protecting individuals from exploitation and respecting their religious autonomy.

Legal and Societal Implications

Masumi Fukuda explains that the ruling sets a controversial precedent, potentially enabling lawsuits against religious donations and undermining notarized agreements' legal reliability. Critics fear it disregards the personal agency of believers, conflating faith-based actions with coercion. The [Family Federation](#)'s argument - that such rulings foster distrust in the judicial system and infringe on religious rights - echoes broader concerns about the role of public sentiment in shaping legal outcomes.



A Cultural Perspective on Donations

In many cultures, large religious donations are viewed as virtuous expressions of faith. Sociologists and religious leaders argue that framing such acts as irrational diminishes their spiritual significance. The Supreme Court's decision challenges this perspective, suggesting Japan's judiciary struggles to balance secular law with religious practices.

Conclusion

The Abe assassination catalyzed profound societal and judicial shifts in Japan, exemplified by the Supreme Court's memorandum ruling. This case underscores the tensions between public sentiment, judicial independence, and religious freedom, raising critical questions about the judiciary's role in a rapidly evolving sociopolitical landscape. As debates continue,

the implications for Japan's legal system and religious liberties remain far-reaching and deeply contentious.

Text: Knut Holdhus

See also [Judges Clearly Swayed by Media](#)

See [official statement by Family Federation of Japan](#) on Supreme Court ruling. See [Japanese original version](#).

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Huge Bias: Judges Clearly Swayed By Media

• January 3, 2025 • Knut Holdhus



Large report in Japanese magazine: Investigative journalist exposes how judges are swayed by media on a large scale in cases against the Family Federation


See [Civil Case Ruling Shows Partiality of Judiciary](#)


The Japanese magazine Monthly Hanada published in its December 2024 issue a critical examination of Japanese courts by award-winning Japanese author Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ). She is known for her investigative journalism and exposes a judiciary swayed by external pressures, incapable of delivering impartial rulings based on evidence rather than societal biases.


She bases her analysis on a [civil case about claims for damages](#) against the Family Federation related to deceptions





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Family Federation related to donations.

The headline of the 10-page report (pp. 296-305) was "The Day Japan's Judiciary Died – The Full Truth Behind the Former [Unification Church Memorandum \(念書\) Trial](#)"

The front page of *Monthly Hanada* December 2024.

Judicial bias and media influence

Fukuda begins her article with two quotes from Attorney Yoshiro Ito (伊藤芳朗),

- "In civil lawsuits, there seems to be a framework in courts that says, 'If it's a cult, it loses.'"
- "Claims that would not normally be accepted in other cases are easily granted if the opposing party is a cult."

This striking assertion, highlighting the apparent judicial bias in cases involving the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), comes from Yoshiro Ito, a former member of the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, commonly referred to as the *Nationwide Lawyers' Network* (Zenkoku benren).

Ito's perspective shifted after he learned of numerous incidents where members of the [Family Federation](#) were abducted, confined, and coerced into renouncing their faith by faith-breakers, family members, and Christian pastors. Outraged by the deep involvement of the *Nationwide Lawyers' Network* in such actions, Ito left the organization in 2005.

Subsequently, Ito took a stand as a plaintiff's attorney in a civil lawsuit involving Toru Goto (後藤徹), who endured over 12 years of abduction and confinement. Ito's testimony in court included the statements quoted above, shedding light on the systemic bias faced by the [Family Federation](#).

As evidenced by numerous lawsuits, the [federation](#) faced repeated legal defeats, particularly in cases involving demands for monetary refunds. Court documents reveal that plaintiffs frequently alleged they were coerced into financial contributions through fear-based tactics – notably invoking "ancestral karma" and "the horrors of hell". These claims were framed as "intimidation-induced false beliefs".

Significantly, the legal representation for these plaintiffs was almost always provided by attorneys affiliated with the *Nationwide Lawyers' Network*.

A lopsided burden of proof

Under normal circumstances, plaintiffs in such cases bear the burden of proof to substantiate their claims. However, these lawsuits were notable for the minimal evidence presented by plaintiffs. Despite this lack of substantiation, courts routinely ruled in their favor.

Ito's observations underscore this pattern:

"Claims that would not normally be accepted in other cases are easily granted if the opposing party is a cult."

Masumi Fukuda explains,

"To clarify, the [Family Federation](#) is not a cult. The term 'cult' lacks a clear definition and has historically been used to exclude 'unpopular religions'. It is a discriminatory term that is no longer used by religious scholars in Europe and America."

The fight for justice

Faced with these challenges, the [Family Federation](#) made concerted efforts to refute the allegations leveled against it. Accused members presented substantial evidence to counter the claims, though initial successes were rare.

Norishige Kondo (近藤 則重), Deputy



Toru Goto in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years. Photo: Kazuhiro Yonemoto / Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion

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Director of the [federation's Legal Affairs Bureau](#), described the uphill battle:

"For example, on rare occasions, we feel that a presiding judge understands our arguments. This gives us hope for the outcome of the trial, but by the next hearing, that judge has been transferred – sometimes even outside of the usual spring transfer period. This has happened multiple times."



Norishige Kondo, here speaking in Tokyo 10th Sep. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

Kondo also recounted an incident during a settlement discussion held in a court clerk's office:

"A witness overheard a presiding judge blurt out, 'If I let the [church](#) win, I don't know what the media will say about me.' This clearly shows how excessively the courts are concerned about media and public opinion. While our [church](#) has been unjustly demonized by the media and the public, the courts seem to be swayed by this false image, operating under a compulsion to avoid rulings that might invite backlash against them for favoring the [church](#)."

Despite these challenges, the [Family Federation's](#) efforts were not entirely in vain. Kondo noted that prior to the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe ([安倍晋三](#)) the situation began improving. On 20th July 2020, the [federation's](#) success rate in lawsuits had risen to nearly 30%. Courts had begun to seriously consider the evidence presented and engage with the [federation's](#) arguments.

A significant setback

However, the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe marked a significant setback. The [Family Federation](#) faced heightened backlash, exacerbated by a media-generated public outrage and intensified political scrutiny. The declaration by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ([岸田文雄](#)) to sever ties with the [organization](#) further compounded the situation, as did the government's reinterpretation of the [Religious Corporations Act](#) to justify dissolution.

This chain of events culminated in the [Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology's](#) request for a dissolution order against the [religious organization](#). These actions effectively nullified the progress the [Family Federation](#) had achieved in the judicial arena, resetting their efforts to square one.

Conclusion

The [memorandum trial](#) against the [federation](#) reveals the complex interplay of media influence, public sentiment, and judicial decision-making. While the [religious organization](#) has made strides in advocating for fair treatment in the courts, the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe reignited widespread hostility, further complicating their struggle for justice. The trial's legacy underscores the need for a judiciary free from external pressures, capable of delivering impartial rulings based on evidence rather than societal biases.

Text: Knut Holdhus

See [Civil Case Ruling Shows Partiality of Judiciary](#)

Featured image above: Masumi Fukuda delivering a speech 23rd September 2024 in Chuo Ward, Chiba City, Japan. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda ([豊田剛](#))

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