

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japanese Government scolds the state-owned Japan Broadcasting Corp for truthful reporting

Knut Holdhus
January 12, 2025



Investigative journalist and award-winning author Masumi Fukuda, here speaking in Tokyo January 20, 2024



Japan's national broadcaster reprimanded for reporting other side's viewpoints that authorities do its best to hide from the public

See also [Reports Disputing Government Narrative Censored](#)

In its September 2023 issue, the Japanese magazine Monthly Hanada featured an investigative report by acclaimed journalist Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ), known for her award-winning exposés. Fukuda uncovers significant media bias and aggressive censorship orchestrated by Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs. She details how the agency reprimanded and intimidated media outlets that diverged from the official narrative, particularly those publishing perspectives from the [Family Federation](#) amid the government's campaign against the [religious minority](#).

The report, titled "Dissolution Request Push - Censorship of Speech by Tetsuo Goda, Deputy Director-General of the Agency for Cultural Affairs," sheds light on these troubling practices. We share these comments on it now due to its critical relevance to the ongoing persecution of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan. Notably, this report has never been published outside Japan until now, offering new insights into this pressing issue.



The front cover page of the September 2023 issue of Monthly Hanada

A Scoop That Stirred Controversy

NHK

NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai), the state-owned Japan Broadcasting Corporation

One of the cases Masumi Fukuda reveals, is an NHK investigative report aired on News 7 on 16th March 2023 regarding the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)). The news item appears to have angered Deputy Director-General Tetsuo Goda (合田哲雄) of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Below is a summarized account of the report, titled "Former [Unification Church](#): [Church](#) Requests Ministry of Education Not to File Dissolution Order."



The report revealed that lawyers for the [Family Federation](#) had repeatedly submitted written petitions to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), urging it to refrain from filing a dissolution order against the [organization](#). These petitions cited legal precedents involving other religious organizations. In response, MEXT maintained that the petitions would not influence their decision, which would be based on a comprehensive examination of responses obtained under the "right to question".

MEXT is currently investigating the management and financial activities of the [Family Federation](#) to determine whether a dissolution order is warranted. Meanwhile, it emerged that between December of last year (2022) and February of this year (2023), the [federation](#)'s legal representatives sent four petitions to MEXT urging them not to pursue the dissolution order.

The petitions challenge all three conditions typically required to justify a dissolution order: organizational structure, malicious intent, and continuity of violations.

1. **Malicious Intent:** The petitions argue that in numerous cases involving other religious organizations where members committed severe acts of violence, including incidents resulting in fatalities, the organizations were not dissolved despite criminal convictions. The petitions highlight that the [Family Federation](#) has not engaged in such crimes.
2. **Continuity:** They assert that no civil lawsuits have been filed against the [organization](#) in the past seven years.
3. **Organizational Structure:** The petitions contend that court rulings citing illegal actions by the [federation](#) do not include evidence implicating its leadership.



Investigative journalist Fukuda points out that this report marked the first time that the [Family Federation](#)'s specific arguments against a dissolution order were made public. MEXT, however, responded that its decision would be informed by prior assessments of similar cases, court rulings identifying the [federation](#)'s unlawful activities, and recent complaints submitted to government offices. The petitions, MEXT emphasized, would not sway its judgment.

The petitions were authored by Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), a lawyer representing the [Family Federation](#). They make a robust case, referencing various precedents where other religious organizations were not dissolved even in the face of severe criminal activity. The [Family Federation](#) maintains that it does not meet the conditions for dissolution.

The petitions were later shared with multiple media outlets by the [Family Federation](#)'s public relations team.

NHK's Exclusive Coverage Sparks Reactions

Among the media outlets, only NHK chose to report on the petitions. On 17th March 2023, the day after the broadcast, the [Family Federation](#) published an article on its official website titled "NHK Reports on Petition to MEXT Opposing Dissolution Request for the [Family Federation](#)". That same day, the NHK journalist responsible for the coverage contacted the [religious organization](#)'s public relations officer.



According to the public relations officer, the NHK journalist inquired, "Why was only our news highlighted on your official website?" The officer responded, "Does this cause an issue for NHK? Does mentioning NHK imply that it supports the [Family Federation](#)?" To which the journalist replied, "Yes, something like that."

Shortly after, the [Family Federation](#)'s public relations officer surmised that NHK had been reprimanded

directly by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The NHK journalist concluded the call with a caution: "In the future, please avoid exclusively featuring our coverage on your website."

Speculated Motives Behind NHK's Coverage



Fukuda writes that the [Family Federation](#) believes NHK's intent was not to show support for the [organization](#) but rather to inform the public about its actions. NHK likely wanted to underscore the discrepancy between the [federation](#)'s public commitment to "cooperate sincerely" with the questioning process and its behind-the-scenes efforts to resist a dissolution order.

Nevertheless, the detailed reporting of the petition's contents - highlighting how it refuted the conditions for dissolution - may have led some viewers to believe that the repeated questioning had failed to yield results because of the [federation](#)'s persistent legal maneuvering. This interpretation, coupled with the detailed discussion of the petition's arguments, may

have displeased MEXT.

The [Family Federation](#)'s website further noted that NHK's reporting went beyond mere mention of the petitions, delving into their content in depth. This level of detail might have given the impression that NHK was sympathetic to the [Family Federation](#)'s position, potentially aggravating MEXT.

Attempts to Clarify Allegations of Interference

When contacted by Masumi Fukuda, the NHK journalist was asked whether Deputy Director-General Goda had reprimanded the broadcaster for its coverage of the [Family Federation](#)'s petitions. The journalist neither confirmed nor denied the claim, instead advising that questions be directed to NHK's public relations department.

An email was subsequently sent to NHK's public relations team, asking whether interference from MEXT had occurred, whether it could influence NHK's future reporting on the [Family Federation](#), and how NHK viewed the matter. To date, no response has been received, though NHK appears to retain its access to information, unlike some other outlets.

Fukuda made an effort to gain Deputy Director-General Goda's perspective, and MEXT was also contacted. However, direct communication was not permitted, and an email was requested instead. The email asked whether MEXT had contacted NHK or other media outlets and whether such actions could undermine impartial reporting on the [Family Federation](#). Investigative journalist Fukuda had received no reply as of September 2023, when her article was published by Monthly Hanada.

Text: Knut Holdhus

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Reports Disputing Government Narrative Censored

• January 10, 2025 • Knut Holdhus



Investigative journalist: Reporting contrary to government narrative is blocked on editorial level or censored by Japanese authorities

See also [State Scolds Big NHK for Reporting Other Side](#)

The Japanese magazine Monthly Hanada published in its September 2023 issue a report by award-winning Japanese author Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ), who is known for her investigative journalism. She exposes a blatant media bias as well as an aggressive censorship imposed by the authorities. She reveals how a government body – Agency for Cultural Affairs – reprimanded and threatened some media outlets that went against the grain and dared to publish viewpoints expressed by the [Family Federation](#) in the middle of the authorities' campaign against the [religious minority](#).

Her extensive report was headlined "Dissolution Request Push – Censorship of Speech by Tetsuo



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Goda, Deputy Director-General of the Agency for Cultural Affairs". We publish it now because of its high relevance in the ongoing witch hunt against the [Family Federation](#) in Japan. In addition, the content has never before been published outside the land of the rising sun.

The Inability to Report Truth

The investigative journalist points out that since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022, the relentless criticism of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)) shows no sign of abating, even after more than a year. A troubling narrative persists in which the actual victim, Abe, along with the [Family Federation](#), is misrepresented as a perpetrator, while the perpetrator, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上哲也), is painted as a victim. This distortion of public perception continues to take hold in a manner that reflects deliberate manipulation.

An invisible barrier appears to dominate media coverage, prohibiting any reporting that might present the [Family Federation](#) in a positive or even neutral light. This phenomenon bears resemblance to a kind of modern "press code," where content favorable to the [federation](#) is suppressed outright.

Historical Context of Media Control



GHQ (General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) around 1950. After World War II, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), a role held by General Douglas MacArthur from 1945 to 1951, was responsible for overseeing the occupation and reconstruction of Japan. The SCAP had broad authority and was tasked with implementing the terms of Japan's surrender and facilitating its transition into a peaceful, democratic nation. Key responsibilities included demilitarization, democratization, economic reconstruction, war crime trials, social reforms, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The occupation formally ended in 1952 with the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco, which restored Japan's sovereignty. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#)

democratic values while restricting speech – was largely hidden from public awareness.

Today, a similar situation seems to exist, particularly regarding coverage of the [Family Federation](#). Major media outlets, including television networks, newspapers, and magazines, avoid providing balanced or fact-based commentary on the [organization](#). Only a few niche publications make an effort to present a different perspective.

The Breakdown of Media Neutrality

A journalist from a prominent media outlet who has covered the [Family Federation](#) reveals a troubling reality. He confesses,

"I've spoken with members and found them to be kind-hearted people. I've also realized that the Nationwide Lawyers' Network's claims lack credibility. Despite my desire to report the truth, any content even slightly favorable to the [Family Federation](#) is blocked at the editorial level."

The societal narrative of "[Family Federation](#) = evil" has effectively created a chilling effect on objective journalism.

This self-censorship among media professionals suggests the existence of an unwritten rule that restricts fair reporting on the [organization](#). But is the media's silence solely a matter of following societal expectations?

The Case of FNN's Report



Facsimile from the first page of Masumi Fukuda's report in *Monthly Hanada* September 2023.

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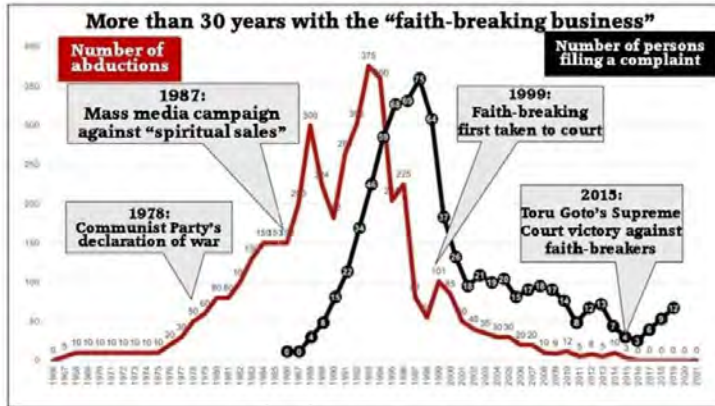
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Fuji News Network (FNN)
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Fukuda writes that an illustrative example of the media's reluctance to report openly on the Family Federation comes from a news segment aired by Fuji News Network (FNN) on 6th January 2023. The broadcast reported on a response document submitted by the Family Federation to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). The document addressed issues of abduction and confinement aimed at coercing members to leave the organization.



The segment attempted to highlight a graph included in the federation's submission. This graph demonstrated a correlation between the number of abduction and confinement cases and the number of plaintiffs involved in civil lawsuits against the religious organization. However, the report's presentation was confusing and lacked critical context, making it difficult for viewers to grasp its significance. Without prior knowledge, phrases such as "abduction and confinement aimed at forcing individuals to leave the church" were likely incomprehensible to the average audience. Moreover, the lack of explanation for why abduction cases corresponded to lawsuits left the report's message unclear.

The Graph and Its Implications

The Family Federation's graph showed a striking pattern: as abduction and confinement incidents increased, so did the number of plaintiffs in lawsuits against the federation. Conversely, when such incidents decreased, the number of plaintiffs also declined. The organization attributed this correlation to incidents in which parents, influenced by professional faith-breakers or pastors, forcibly confined their own family members to pressure them into leaving the religious organization. According to the federation, over 4,700 such cases have occurred, with nearly 70% of victims renouncing their faith under duress.

Fukuda mentions that despite the critical insights provided by this data, FNN omitted necessary explanations, rendering the broadcast ineffective in conveying the gravity of the issue. This omission underscores the media's broader unwillingness to tackle the subject with the depth and clarity it deserves.

Institutional Backlash



Pressuring media outlets not to publish viewpoints of the Family Federation: the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Public domain image

Following the broadcast, FNN faced immediate repercussions. Deputy Director-General Tetsuo Goda (合田哲雄) of the Agency for Cultural Affairs summoned FNN executives and explicitly instructed them to avoid airing "one-sided claims from the church." This intervention extended to banning a journalist who happened to be reporting at the Agency for Cultural Affairs at the time, further illustrating the institutional resistance to open discourse on the Family Federation.

Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也), a legal representative for the Family Federation, shared this account with the author. Fukumoto confirmed that FNN's journalist who covered the story had fully understood the implications of the graph when preparing the report. However, editorial decisions diluted the content to the point of incoherence. Efforts to verify these claims directly with the journalist met with evasive responses, underscoring the pressures reporters face when navigating sensitive topics.



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto at press conference 8th Sep. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by

The phrase “abduction and confinement of [Family Federation](#) members” has become a taboo across media platforms. Even prominent figures like comedian Hikari Ota (太田光) have faced backlash for broaching the subject. When Ota mentioned it on the TBS program *Sunday Japan*, he was met with intense criticism, reflecting the pervasive stigma surrounding the issue.

FNN's January 2023 broadcast appears to have inadvertently crossed a line by using the term during a sensitive period when the *Agency for Cultural Affairs* was gathering evidence to potentially dissolve the [Family Federation](#). The agency's response to the broadcast suggests a coordinated effort to suppress discussions that could challenge the dominant narrative.

The Broader Implications

The



Some Japanese media outlets. Photo: Knut Holdhus

reluctance to openly discuss the [Family Federation](#)'s issues points to a troubling erosion of journalistic principles. In theory, media outlets are tasked with providing balanced, factual reporting that serves the public interest. Yet in practice, societal pressure and institutional intervention have created an environment where certain topics are effectively off-limits. This dynamic not only undermines freedom of expression but also deprives the public of the information needed to form nuanced opinions.

Conclusion

The ongoing vilification of the [Family Federation](#) and the suppression of alternative narratives reflect a deeper malaise within Japan's media landscape. The parallels to the postwar “press code” are striking: just as the GHQ's censorship disguised itself as a champion of free speech, today's media restrictions operate under the guise of preserving societal harmony.

Addressing this issue requires a commitment to upholding journalistic integrity, even in the face of societal and institutional resistance. Only by fostering an open and honest discourse can the media fulfill its role as a watchdog for truth and accountability. For now, however, the truth remains an elusive commodity, buried beneath layers of silence and suppression.

Text: Knut Holdhus

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Featured image above: *Censorship*. Illustration: [Censorship Vectors](#) by Vecteezy

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