

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japanese State Persecuting Legit Journalists

Knut Holdhus
January 13, 2025



Japanese state meddling in the work of journalists and editors



September 2023 issue of
Monthly Hanada

Japanese magazine publishes findings of investigative journalist about use of threats and state meddling in work of reporters and editors

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Investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda, here speaking in Tokyo Dec. 25, 2024

The September 2023 issue of the Japanese magazine Monthly Hanada featured a report by award-winning investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ). Fukuda highlights a stark media bias and aggressive censorship enforced by authorities, specifically exposing how the Agency for Cultural Affairs reprimanded and threatened media outlets that dared to publish perspectives from the [Family Federation](#) amid a government campaign targeting the [religious minority](#).

Her in-depth report, titled "Dissolution Request Push - Censorship of Speech by Tetsuo Goda (合田哲雄), Deputy Director-General of the Agency for Cultural Affairs," sheds light on the suppression of free speech. It is particularly relevant given the ongoing persecution of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan. This marks the first

time these findings published by Monthly Hanada are being shared outside Japan, bringing international attention to the issue.

Yomiuri reporter prohibited from access to the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW)



Yomiuri Shimbun, Japanese national daily, the largest in circulation of the country's "big 3" dailies

One case Masumi Fukuda mentions, involves a reporter from Yomiuri Shimbun which highlights tensions between journalistic reporting and government institutions. This case, which centers on reporting related to the [Family Federation](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)), diverges from previous controversies involving the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT).

The Yomiuri article

On 1st February 2023, Yomiuri Shimbun published an article titled, "[Adoption Brokerage by Former Unification Church](#): Criminal Complaint Likely to Be Dropped - Unable to Secure Testimonies from Involved Parties."



The article detailed that the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) had found it difficult to file a criminal complaint against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) for violations of the Adoption Brokerage Act. As a result, it seems the complaint will not proceed. Some cases have surpassed the statute of limitations (three years), and testimonies from individuals involved in adoptions during the relevant period remain unavailable. Additionally, the ministry

considered the church's response to administrative guidance.

The Yomiuri Shimbun article mentioned that the Adoption Brokerage Act, implemented in April 2018, prohibits unlicensed intermediary activities. While the [Family Federation](#) lacks a license, numerous adoptions have taken place within its community. In November of 2022, the ministry began investigating suspected unauthorized brokerage activities by the [federation](#), which disclosed that 31 adoptions had occurred since the law's enactment.

The newspaper also explained that the ministry requested personal information, such as the names and birthdates of the 31 adoptive parents, but the [religious organization](#) declined to provide these details. Although the [federation](#) admitted to requesting "adoption application forms" from its members, it denied involvement in organized brokerage activities.

The Yomiuri piece claimed that some adoptees submitted statements alleging they were "used as tools for religious doctrine". However, the ministry was unable to secure testimony from adoptive or biological parents involved during the relevant period. With little chance of obtaining further evidence, pursuing a criminal complaint seems unfeasible.

Although the ministry sought guidance from investigative authorities, concerns were raised, according to the large newspaper, including the inability to identify parties involved and the absence of concrete evidence of brokerage activities. Authorities also questioned the severity of the alleged misconduct.

The reporter's defense



Attorney Nobuya Fukumoto, at press conference Sep. 8, 2023

The article was a collaborative effort by several reporters, including Reporter B, who had been conducting in-depth investigations with lawyer Nobuya Fukumoto (福本修也) and began engaging with the [Family Federation](#)'s public relations office around April.

Masumi Fukuda writes that shortly after the article's release, B was summoned by a section chief of the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW). He challenged the article's claim that "the criminal complaint will be dropped," asserting that no such decision had been made.

However, B had uncovered evidence suggesting the ministry had submitted a draft complaint to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, which rejected it on the grounds that prosecution was not viable. This informed the article's conclusion regarding the ministry's unwillingness to proceed.

According to Fukuda, B retorted, "You can't prosecute in this case, can you? That would be nothing but a dishonest scheme." The official then responded by barring B from entering the ministry.

(Note: The Japanese expression translated as "nothing but a dishonest scheme" is often used to describe scenarios in which an entity repeatedly claims it will take action but fails to follow through, fostering a perception of dishonesty.)

The aftermath

Investigative journalist Fukuda explains that frustrated by the restriction, B reportedly told the [Family Federation](#)'s public relations officer, "That's why I'm still pursuing stories about the [Family Federation](#)."

Subsequently, the ministry issued a statement emphasizing that it had not ruled out the possibility of filing

a criminal complaint and that investigations were ongoing.

Government influence on media

Fukuda concludes that the broader implications of this incident touch on concerns about government interference in journalistic activities, particularly regarding reporting on the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). These developments raise questions about press freedom and the state's role in influencing media narratives.

The reporter's perspective



When contacted regarding the alleged prohibition from the MHLW, Reporter B responded cautiously:

"The article was a team effort, and the content speaks for itself - there is nothing to add or subtract. I've heard rumors about similar issues involving the Agency for Cultural Affairs, but it seems these cases may be getting conflated. As for the claim that I was banned, I deny it."

This denial contradicts statements from the [Family Federation's](#) public relations officer, who asserts that B explicitly acknowledged being banned. The reporter's reserved remarks suggest heightened sensitivity surrounding the matter.

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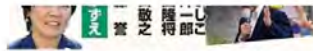
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The front cover page of the September 2023 issue of *Monthly Hanada*

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.

A Scoop That Stirred Controversy

The flag of NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai), the state-owned Japan Broadcasting Corporation, [Public domain image](#). Cropped

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".



Symbol of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. Photo: 文部科学省 (MEXT Japan) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#)

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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**.

- 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.
- Continuity:** They assert that no civil lawsuits have been filed against the [organization](#) in the past seven years.
- Organizational Structure:** The petitions contend that court rulings citing illegal actions by the [federation](#) do not include evidence implicating its leadership.



Authored 4 petitions to MEXT: Attorney **Tatsuki Nakayama**. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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 (中川達樹), a lawyer representing

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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.



*From the header of the official website of the **Family Federation of Japan***

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



*Tokyo headquarters of the **Family Federation of Japan**. Photo: Asanagi / Wikimedia Commons. **Public domain** image. Cropped*

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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Featured image above: Investigative journalist and award-winning author Masumi Fukuda, here speaking in Tokyo 20th January 2024. Photo: Screenshot from video recording by [FFWPU](#)

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