

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Faith-Breaking = Fascist Thought Reform

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Panel discussion participants February 11, 2025 in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture, Japan



Investigative journalist compares current faith-breaking in Japan to interwar thought reform and crackdown on communists and others

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"How to Stop the Cycle of Violence?"

A Gathering in Ehime to Protect Freedom of Religion and Human Rights

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

On 11th February 2025, the 2nd Ehime Symposium on Protecting Freedom of Religion and Human Rights was held in Matsuyama City, organized by the Ehime Association for the Protection of Freedom of Religion and Human Rights. The event gathered around 300 participants, including members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), to discuss the issue of [abduction and confinement](#) of believers aimed at forcing them to renounce their faith.



Masaki Kubota 2023

As a guest speaker, non-fiction writer Masaki Kubota (窪田順生), who has conducted extensive investigative reporting on the [Family Federation](#), took the stage. With a background as journalist in a major newspaper, Kubota shared his experiences of raising the issue of [abduction, confinement, and coercive faith-breaking](#) with fellow journalists from major media outlets. The response he often received was,

"If someone has been influenced by 'evil', then using violent means like [abduction and confinement](#) to convert them to 'justice' is unavoidable."

Feeling uneasy about this rationale, Kubota continued his research, eventually realizing that the methods used in [abduction and forced renunciation](#) today bear striking similarities to how so-called "thought criminals" [See editor's note below] were treated before

and during World War II.

During that era, communists were persecuted as thought criminals. Authorities attempted to persuade them using family bonds and religion, but when individuals refused to "convert" their ideology, confinement was used as a last resort.

According to judicial statistics published in 1943, among the 2,440 individuals prosecuted, most eventually renounced communism, while only 37 people remained steadfast in their beliefs.

Kubota speculated that when former communists later gained power, they may have used the same oppressive tactics they had once suffered - this time against [Family Federation](#) believers. Kubota hypothesized,

"By leveraging family love, they may have used [abduction and confinement](#) to force renunciation of faith in the [Family Federation](#)."

He further argued that "people tend to repeat the violence they once suffered, directing it toward those in weaker positions," citing child abuse within families as an example.

Kubota concluded by stating his belief that "the only force capable of stopping this cycle of violence is religion."



Tatsuhiko Iwamoto

The symposium also featured lectures by:

Tatsuhiko Iwamoto (岩本龍弘), a former pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan, who is now active as a YouTube pastor.

Nozomi Kojima (小嶋希晶), a second-generation [Family Federation](#) believer and representative of the Association of Second-Generation Believers for Human Rights, who advocates for the protection of believers' rights.

[Editor's note: The concept of thought crime (思想犯罪, shisō hanzai) in interwar Japan was primarily associated with the suppression of political dissent, particularly socialist, communist, and anarchist ideologies, by the state. The government sought to maintain social order and prevent the spread of radical ideas that could challenge the imperial system, especially after the Russian Revolution of 1917 inspired leftist movements worldwide.

The key legal mechanism for criminalizing thought crime was the Peace Preservation Law (治安維持法, Chian Iji Hō), first enacted in 1925. This law targeted anyone advocating for the abolition of private property or the rejection of the emperor system, which were seen as fundamental threats to Japan's national and social order. Over time, the law became more draconian, particularly after its 1928 revision, which introduced the death penalty for certain violations.

The Tokkō (Special Higher Police - 特高警察) was a secret police force established to monitor and suppress political dissent. The Tokkō aggressively arrested, interrogated, and tortured suspected leftists, labor activists, and intellectuals.

One key event was the 26th February incident in 1936. It was a failed coup by ultra-nationalist military officers, which led to an even stricter crackdown on ideological deviance, reinforcing the idea that any deviation from state-sanctioned thought was dangerous.

The state began using so-called thought reform programs. Instead of outright execution or life imprisonment, the state often employed tenkō (転向), a process where detainees were pressured - sometimes through coercion or torture - to renounce their radical beliefs and publicly affirm loyalty to the emperor.

By the late 1930s and into World War II, the concept of thought crime extended beyond communism to suppress any form of ideological opposition, including liberalism, pacifism, and even certain religious groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses. The thought control apparatus played a crucial role in enforcing wartime nationalism and militarism, creating an atmosphere where dissent was nearly impossible.

After Japan's defeat in 1945, the Allied occupation forces abolished the Peace Preservation Law and dismantled the Tokkō, but the legacy of ideological control persisted in various ways, influencing postwar political and legal debates on freedom of thought and speech.]

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Just two to three minutes from the apartment was a police box (koban). At the time of his release, Goto hoped the police would intervene, believing that if they acted quickly, they could collect evidence. He approached the police, pleading desperately for help, but was completely ignored.

Realizing that no help would come, he decided to walk all the way to the church headquarters in Shoto, Shibuya, even though he knew it was an extremely long journey.

As the group retraced his steps, they moved eastward along Oume Kaido Avenue toward Shoto. The bustling main road was lined with stores, including gyudon (beef bowl) restaurants, ramen shops, and convenience stores.

Back then, Goto had no money and was starving, yet he couldn't even enter these shops to buy food. He couldn't rely on passersby either. The isolation he felt at the time must have been unbearable. Yet, he recalled, "I was desperate to get to the church headquarters, no matter what."

When he passed Yoyogi-Hachiman Station on the Odakyu Line, he reached a point more than halfway through the journey. However, a pedestrian bridge stood in his way. There was no pedestrian crossing – the only way forward was to climb the bridge. His weakened body was near its limit, making even walking a struggle. Somehow, he forced himself up and down the bridge, step by step.

Finally, he reached the Shoto 2-chome intersection – a place he calls "the climax of the journey". Seventeen years ago, at this very spot, the pain in his knees had reached its limit. Exhausted, he crouched down. Desperate, he asked a random woman for help. Miraculously, she turned out to be a member of the Family Federation.

"It was truly a miracle," he recalled with excitement.

That woman handed him two 500-yen coins (about \$6-\$7 USD), which he used to hail a taxi. He finally arrived at the church headquarters – but even then, he was faced with one final obstacle.

The entrance was just five meters away, yet it felt impossibly distant. At last, he reached the guard at the entrance, who contacted church staff to take him in.

Severely malnourished and physically exhausted, Goto was given a plate of katsu curry, a red bean bun, and a meat bun by the church guard.

"I was so happy I could cry."

His eyes sparkled as he spoke, and his words conveyed everything.

Part 2 coming soon



Miraculously, a famished and exhausted Toru Goto met a female member who gave him money for a taxi ride.

Illustration: [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion](#).

Featured image above: Toru Goto smiles as he arrives at the Shoto 2-chome intersection – 10th February 2025, Tokyo. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

[Editor's note: A zashiki-rō (座敷牢) is a traditional Japanese confinement room used historically for restraining individuals, typically within a private household. Zashiki (座敷) refers to a Japanese-style tatami-matted room. Rō (牢) means a jail or cell.

Historically, these rooms were used for confining family members who were mentally ill, violent, or otherwise considered disruptive or dangerous to the household or community. The practice was more common in the Edo (1603–1868) and Meiji (1868–1912) periods, before modern mental health care systems were established.



The door was chained.
Photo: [National](#)

A Zashiki-rō was typically equipped with sturdy sliding doors reinforced with bars or locks, ensuring the person inside could not escape. It was located within a family home or a secluded part of the property, ensuring privacy. The confined individual was often left alone in this small, sparse room with minimal furnishings, and their basic needs were provided through a small opening or at designated times.

The term "zashiki-rō" today is often used metaphorically to describe situations of coercive confinement or control, as it

Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion" evokes the idea of being trapped in a restrictive, oppressive environment. Such imagery is sometimes applied to cases of forced detainment or isolation, like in the more than 4,300 instances of members of the [Family Federation](#) being abducted and confined.]

[*Editor's note:* The phrase "**denial of one's (legal) personality**" refers to an infringement on a person's fundamental (legal) rights and status as an individual under the law. Legal personality is the recognition by the law that an individual has certain rights and responsibilities and can exercise these rights within a legal framework. When someone is abducted or confined against their will, their basic autonomy and capacity to make legal decisions – such as freedom of movement, freedom of association, and the ability to express religious beliefs – are severely restricted or completely denied.

In this context, Toru Goto is emphasizing that his experience of abduction and confinement stripped him of these legal capacities, as he was deprived of the freedom to act as an autonomous legal subject. By calling it a "denial of one's (legal) personality", he underscores the severity of these actions, framing them as violations not just of personal freedom, but of the foundational rights guaranteed to individuals within a democratic society.]

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