

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Experts Doubt Japan's Basis for Dissolution of Family Fed

Knut Holdhus
March 30, 2026



Eitaro Ogawa, here during a [symposium in Nagoya](#) October 19, 2025

Experts' association, established by Japanese lawyers and academics seeking fair and impartial trials, issues "emergency statement" warning of grave legal deficiencies in predetermined decision



From the [press conference](#) in Tokyo on March 26, 2026 held by the Association of Experts Calling for Fair and Impartial Trials and the "[Second-Generation Association for the Protection of Believers' Human Rights](#)"

A statement by "Association of Experts Calling for Fair and Impartial Trials" (Experts' Association), established by Japanese lawyers and academics, concerning the [Tokyo High Court decision](#) on 4th March to dissolve the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)). The statement was issued at a [press conference](#) in Tokyo on 26th March held by the association.

See also [Japan: "Death Penalty" Without Proof of Illegality](#)

See also [Experts: "Collapse of Justice" in Dissolution Case](#)

See also [Shocked Author: "Japan Ignores Basics of Justice"](#)

See also [Scholar Questions Secrecy in Dissolution Case](#)

I am Eitaro Ogawa (小川栄太郎), a literary critic, as just introduced. I will now read the emergency statement from the "Association of Experts Seeking Fair and Impartial Trials".

On 4th March, at the Tokyo High Court, a [dissolution order](#) was issued against the religious corporation formerly known as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), and [enforcement procedures](#) began immediately.

A dissolution order is not merely the execution of law; it constitutes a fundamental judgment on the social credibility of a [religious organization](#). For approximately 100,000 believers, their lives and dignity - rooted in their core faith - will be denied.

Furthermore, as a result of the dissolution order, 1,933 staff members of the [religious organization](#) and their 2,441 dependent family members, totaling 4,374 people, will lose their means of livelihood.

All assets, including religious facilities, have been seized. However, these assets consist of donations made by believers. Each individual donation - whether money, land, or buildings - falls under property rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Should not such compulsory confiscation require evidence of extremely serious criminal conduct by the [religious organization](#) and its followers?

As a comparable example of a dissolution order against a religious corporation based on extreme antisocial behavior, one may cite the case of Aum Shinrikyo [See editor's note 1 below]. In that series of incidents, a staggering 29 people were killed (28 by murder and 1 by death resulting from kidnapping and confinement), and approximately 6,000 were injured. Within the group itself, five members were also murdered, and the total number of dead or missing exceeded 30.

As a result, 13 core members including the leader Asahara were sentenced to death, and five received life imprisonment.

In contrast, the [Family Federation](#) has not even caused a single criminal case. Nevertheless, despite the absence of any recognized criminal acts that would justify a "social death penalty" such as dissolution, the order has been issued.

We issued a statement on 25th March of last year as well, pointing out how unjust the [initial decision](#) was. In that statement, we identified the following serious [legal deficiencies](#):



Constitutionally highly problematic proceedings against [Family Federation](#) were held behind closed doors in the joint building of the Tokyo High Court, Tokyo District Court, and Tokyo Summary Court in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan

The dissolution is based on civil cases concerning donations that began on average 32 years ago.

There have been zero illegal donations in the past 11 years, yet continuity is being assumed without evidence, violating the principle of evidence-based adjudication.

Despite evidence of [alteration](#) and [fabrication](#) in documents submitted by the government, these issues were overlooked.

Furthermore, a fundamental problem is that the government's request for the dissolution of the [religious corporation](#) has been treated as a non-contentious case [See editor's note 2 below] and kept non-public.

We strongly object to the fact that a legal process effectively declaring the social death of an [organization](#) is conducted entirely behind closed doors. It cannot be said to differ in any meaningful way from secret trials in authoritarian states.

Moreover, the grounds cited by the Tokyo High Court for the [dissolution decision](#) are even more irrational.

First, the High Court stepped into doctrinal matters of the [Family Federation](#) and made subjective judgments about its beliefs, treating doctrine itself as one of the key reasons for dissolution. For the state to judge the merits of religious doctrine violates the principle of separation of religion and state and is impermissible in a modern nation.

Second, while the lower court based [its decision](#) on civil cases prior to the [organization's](#) 2009 compliance declaration [See editor's note 3 below], the [High Court](#) placed primary emphasis on alleged unlawful acts

after that declaration.

However, according to the [High Court](#), only four individuals were definitively found liable for unlawful acts, with total damages of 18,681,600 yen [ca. \$122,000 USD in March 2026]. Meanwhile, 138 individuals - accounting for 915,486,469 yen [ca. \$6.0 million USD in March 2026], or 95.6% of the total amount - were merely deemed as cases where "the possibility of unlawfulness cannot be denied."

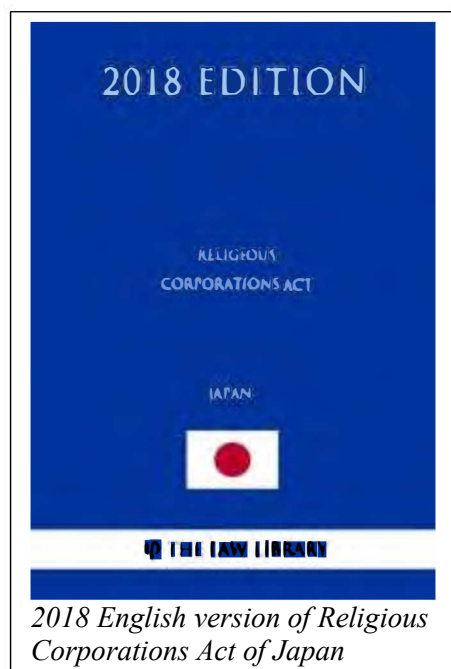
What does it mean to say "the possibility cannot be denied" without presenting concrete evidence? If such reasoning is accepted, almost anything in the world could be treated as potentially culpable. In essence, the court issued a [dissolution order](#) based on cases where wrongdoing could not be proven.

The decisions of both courts are built on the predetermined conclusion of dissolution, forcing reasoning to fit that outcome.

If a [Supreme Court decision](#) were to follow along these lines, it could become a catastrophic trigger that undermines the very foundation of a rule-of-law society and a free society. We are deeply concerned about this possibility.

Many people may feel that such a warning is exaggerated. That is precisely why we must speak out. We urge the [Supreme Court](#) to pause before making its decision.

This is because most citizens are entirely unaware of the facts of this case or the irrationality of the courts' reasoning.



What should be questioned in this dissolution order is not whether the [Family Federation](#) is a good or bad religion. The real question is whether it has violated laws and committed acts clearly recognized as seriously harming the public welfare, as required under the Religious Corporations Act.

The two judicial decisions have failed to prove any illegality on the part of the [organization](#).

The core issue is this: is it acceptable to declare "social death" when illegality has not been proven?

This is not a matter limited to a single religious corporation. If such a precedent is established by the [Supreme Court](#), there will be no stopping who might face the same fate in the future.

That is how weighty a [Supreme Court](#) precedent is.

Finally, we reaffirm the gravity of this matter and present this statement.

26th March 2026.

English text translated from transcription of original Japanese text as read by Eitaro Ogawa (小川栄太郎) in video recording by "[Second-Generation Association for the Protection of Believers' Human Rights](#)".

See also [Japan: "Death Penalty" Without Proof of Illegality](#)

See also [Experts: "Collapse of Justice" in Dissolution Case](#)

See also [Shocked Author: "Japan Ignores Basics of Justice"](#)

See also [Scholar Questions Secrecy in Dissolution Case](#)

[Editor's note 1: Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist new religious movement founded in 1984 by Shoko Asahara, preaching apocalyptic prophecies. It was dissolved in 1996 due to its leaders' criminal acts, including the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 and the Matsumoto sarin incident in 1994.]

[Editor's note 2: A non-contentious case refers to a legal matter where there is no dispute between parties. These cases typically involve administrative, procedural, or uncontested legal actions, such as probate (handling a deceased person's estate), uncontested divorces, adoption, or registering a trademark. Since there are no opposing parties or legal conflicts, these cases usually proceed smoothly through the legal system without litigation.]

[Editor's note 3: The 2009 compliance declaration of the [Unification Church](#) of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the [organization](#) to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The [Unification Church](#) in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the [organization](#) to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The [Unification Church](#) stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#) - since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#). The [religious organization](#) has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to [dissolution](#).]

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raising the alarm over human rights and judicial overreach

Tokyo, 26th March 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Dissolution of the Family Federation: “Will they be made to suffer even more than Iwao Hakamada?”

Experts hold press conference

by the editorial department of the *Sekai Nippo*

Regarding the dissolution of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the *Unification Church*), a group of second-generation active believers called the “Association of Second-Generation Believers Protecting Religious Freedom,” together with lawyers and academics who formed the “Experts’ Association Seeking Fair and Just Trials,” held a [press conference](#) in Tokyo on 26th March. Below are summaries of statements made by the experts.

See also [Japan: “Death Penalty” Without Proof of Illegality](#)

See also [Experts Question Legal Basis for Dissolution](#)



Attorney Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹). Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda

“The High Court made a forced conclusion without basis”

Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹), International Lawyer, Representative Organizer

Since the *Family Federation's* compliance declaration in 2009 [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#), cases establishing unlawful acts have been extremely rare – reduced

to 1 in 397. However, in the *Tokyo High Court decision*, although it initially states that unlawful acts “cannot be definitively recognized,” it later shifts to saying they “should be considered unlawful acts,” making a forced conclusion without basis.

I thought of Iwao Hakamada (袴田巖), who suffered for 58 years before being found innocent in a case of wrongful conviction. It makes me wonder whether the *Family Federation* will be made to suffer even more than that – and whether that is acceptable.

See also [Lawyer Quests Open Hearings in Dissolution Case](#)

See also [Invented Harm, Lawfare, and Dissolution Order](#)

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“A deception based on Ministry of Education propaganda”



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Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永 信一), Lawyer

The biggest trick in the [High Court decision](#) lies in the deceptive framework based on the

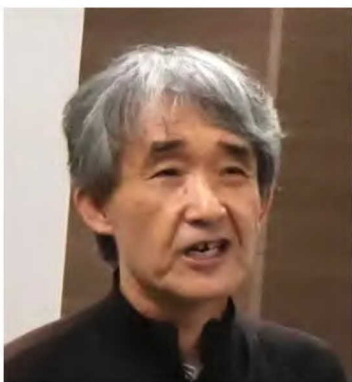
Ministry of Education's claim that revoking the [organization's](#) legal status does not infringe on the religious freedom of believers.

However, religious freedom is not limited to inner belief. It is often described as the starting point of human rights. The ability to gather together and reaffirm faith as a community is a fundamental premise of religious freedom.

Karl Marx, in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, criticized religion as "opium", reflecting an ideological strategy to socially contain religion. The [High Court decision](#) is influenced by such values.

The dissolution request was treated merely as revocation of legal status and handled as a non-contentious case [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#) behind closed doors. Even if there were [fabricated](#) or [falsified](#) statements submitted by the Ministry, the non-public process prevented any scrutiny. This constitutes a collapse of justice and a violation of human rights, evident even under international human rights covenants.

Even the most sophisticated theories of human rights and procedural guarantees can collapse due to a single flaw – like "a seemingly insignificant hole made by an ant". There is an unbelievable constitutional defect caused by legislative inaction.



"The High Court intruded into doctrine"

Masaki Nakamasa (仲正 昌樹), Professor at Kanazawa University

What surprised me when reading the [Tokyo High Court decision](#) was that it offered its own interpretation of the

[Family Federation's](#) doctrine and used that to justify the dissolution order.

How doctrine is understood and practiced is something only believers themselves can truly know. Modern legal principles require neutrality and prohibit stepping into doctrinal evaluation.

Even in cases such as the Soka Gakkai mandala dispute (1981) [\[See editor's note 3 below\]](#) and the Aum Shinrikyo [\[See editor's note 4 below\]](#) subway sarin attack (1996), courts did not interfere with doctrine.

For the state to independently interpret a religious group's doctrine – without hearing from the parties – and then make decisions that have serious consequences for believers resembles the logic of pre-modern European inquisitions.

In the past, the Omoto religion [\[See editor's note 5 below\]](#) was ordered to dissolve, and there is concern that arbitrary interpretations could again lead to actions such as destruction of facilities.

See also [Unconstitutional: Civil Code Use for Dissolution](#)

See also [Japan: Fighting Larger Battle Than Own](#)



"Use imagination about what this leads to"

Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎), Literary Critic

It has been said that dissolving a religious corporation does not infringe on the religious freedom of individual believers – but aren't these harms suffered by

believers themselves the answer?

Behind these voices, there are likely tens of thousands more.

If such rhetoric is allowed, it would be like saying a company can be destroyed while still protecting the rights of each employee – something that is clearly impossible.

People should think beyond just one organization and imagine what could happen if this kind of reasoning is permitted.

See also ["Media Deliberately Killed 2 Birds with 1 Stone"](#)

See also [Japan: "Death Penalty" Without Proof of Illegality](#)



Masumi Fukuda. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda

"Those who have interacted with believers are sympathetic"

Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ), Nonfiction Writer

After the [High Court decision](#) and the start of [liquidation](#) of the [religious organization](#), I interviewed its staff. One staff member said that when they were unable to even use their own parking lot to remove

personal belongings, a landlord who had long rented parking space to the [church](#) offered them space at an apartment he managed. At that time, the landlord said:

"You haven't done anything wrong – how did it come to this? Stay strong."

At other churches as well, people who have had long-term contact with believers tend to be sympathetic. That is the answer.

See also ["Politically Driven Dissolution at Any Cost"](#)

See also [Japan: Lawyers Accused of Wilful Dehumanization](#)

See also [A Dissolution Built on Fabrications, Speculation](#)

See also [Dissolution, System of Faith-Breaking, Lawsuits](#)



"At its root: discrimination and social exclusion"

Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏), Author



Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏),
author. Photo: Tsuyoshi
Toyoda

The origin of the issue surrounding the [Family Federation](#) lies in media coverage following the assassination of Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三). A narrative was constructed portraying the suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上哲也), as a “tragic second-generation believer”.

Reports of “deep ties” between politicians and the [religious organization](#) continued for over two months, stirring intense hatred among the public.

However, what was perceived as the “mood of society” was in reality driven by the fervor of only a small portion of the population, amplified by aggressive media coverage.

The Kishida administration and the *Liberal Democratic Party*, pressured by this atmosphere, may have shifted focus by moving toward dissolving the [Family Federation](#).

This resembles past attitudes of media, politicians, and society toward Hansen's disease [\[See editor's note 6 below\]](#) patients, the enactment of the *Eugenic Protection Law* [\[See editor's note 7 below\]](#), and the continued justification of forced sterilizations of people with disabilities.

At its core, this is about discrimination and [social exclusion](#). Abduction, confinement, [forced renunciation of faith](#) (coercive faith-breaking) [\[See editor's note 8 below\]](#), and ideological re-education [\[See editor's note 9 below\]](#) of believers have been justified, and thousands have suffered in the past. There is a high likelihood that such actions will be further justified in the future.

See also [Shocked Author: “Japan Ignores Basics of Justice”](#)

See also [Media Study: Lie Told 100 Times Becomes Truth](#)

See also [Author: Japan's “Apartheid-Style Social Exclusion”](#)

See also [Main Target of Hounding Not Church, but LDP](#)

Featured image above: From the press conference in Tokyo 26th March 2026. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

See also [Experts Question Legal Basis for Dissolution](#)

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[Editor’s note 3: The 1981 Soka Gakkai mandala dispute was a key moment in the growing conflict between the Buddhist organizations Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū.

At the center was the **Gohonzon**, a sacred mandala in Nichiren Buddhism, a Japanese branch of Mahayana Buddhism. The **Gohonzon mandala** is a calligraphic scroll inscribed by Nichiren (1222-1282). It centers on the phrase *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, the title of the Lotus Sutra, surrounded by names of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protective deities. Rather than an image, it is a symbolic representation of enlightenment and the interconnected nature of reality. Practitioners chant to the Gohonzon as a focus for devotion and self-transformation, aiming to awaken inherent Buddha-nature and harmonize their lives with the universal law expressed in the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Shōshū insisted that only its high priest could authorize or reproduce valid Gohonzon, emphasizing strict clerical authority. Soka Gakkai, however, argued that spiritual power comes from faith and practice, not exclusive priestly control.

Around 1981, disputes intensified over who had the authority to issue Gohonzon and interpret doctrine. Tensions also involved leadership conflicts, especially around Daisaku Ikeda (池田 大作 – 1928-2023), the third president of the Soka Gakkai movement.

In essence, the dispute was less about the mandala itself and more about **authority and independence** – whether a lay movement could function without priestly control. It set the stage for the final split between the two groups in 1991.]

[Editor’s note 4: Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist new religious movement founded in 1984 by Shoko Asahara, preaching apocalyptic prophecies. It was dissolved in 1996 due to its leaders' criminal acts, including the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 and the Matsumoto sarin incident in 1994.]

[Editor’s note 5: The Ōmoto (Oomoto) religious movement – Omotokyo (大本教). It is a Japanese new religious movement



religious movement that originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was founded by Nao Deguchi (1836–1918), a peasant woman who claimed to have received divine revelations, and her successor Onisaburo Deguchi (1871–1948), who played a significant role in shaping the religion's teachings and structure.



Nao Deguchi (出口なお) in 1916.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons.
Public domain image

Omotokyo emphasizes universal salvation, spiritual purification, and the ultimate unity of all religions. The religion stresses the importance of living in harmony with divine will and nature.

The **Ōmoto Incident** (大本事件 *Ōmoto jiken*) refers to two major crackdowns by the prewar Japanese government against Omotokyo. There were **two incidents**. The **first Ōmoto Incident (1921)** was triggered by government suspicion that Ōmoto teachings were socially disruptive. Authorities raided Ōmoto facilities, arrested leaders, and charged them with *lèse-majesté* (insulting the emperor) for certain religious texts. This was part of a broader pattern of suppressing new religions seen as politically or ideologically threatening.

The second Ōmoto Incident (1935) was far more severe, and is usually what people mean by “the Ōmoto Incident”. The military and police launched a large-scale crackdown. Temples and buildings were destroyed (including with explosives). Leaders and many followers were arrested. The state accused the group of subversion, criticizing the emperor system, and spreading dangerous ideas. Essentially, it was an attempt to eliminate Ōmoto as a movement.

It is considered one of the most extreme examples of **state suppression of religion** in prewar Japan. It's often referenced today in discussions about **religious freedom**, **state control**, and **the role of new religious movements in Japan**.

Today, Omotokyo remains a small but active religious group in Japan. It has also inspired the foundation of Aikido, the martial art developed by Morihei Ueshiba, who was a follower of Omotokyo.

Omotokyo holds a significant place in the history of Japanese religion, not only as a spiritual movement but also as a symbol of resistance to religious persecution during Japan's militaristic period.]

[Editor's note 6: Hansen's disease is the medical term for what was historically called **leprosy**. It's a chronic infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae* (and in some cases *M. lepromatosis*).

The term “Hansen's disease” comes from Gerhard Armauer Hansen, the Norwegian scientist who identified the causative bacterium in 1873. The modern name is preferred to reduce the stigma historically associated with “leprosy.”

In the above article, Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) references Hansen's disease because of its **social and historical impact**, especially in countries like Japan, where patients were once **isolated in sanatoria** due to fear and misunderstanding, even after effective treatments existed.]

[Editor's note 7: The Eugenic Protection Law (優生保護法), enacted in Japan in 1948, was a postwar law that combined population control with eugenic ideology – the idea of preventing the birth of people deemed “unfit.” The law allowed forced sterilization of individuals with intellectual disabilities, mental illnesses, certain hereditary conditions (as defined at the time). It also legalized abortion under broader conditions than before, including economic hardship.

In practice, the law justified involuntary sterilizations. Thousands of people were sterilized without genuine consent. In many cases, consent procedures were coercive or bypassed entirely. The law especially targeted marginalized groups. Those most affected included people with disabilities, psychiatric patients, and notably patients with Hansen's disease, who were already segregated in sanatoria.

Decisions were often made by medical boards or authorities rather than the individuals themselves, reinforcing a system where personal autonomy was severely limited. Roughly 16,000-25,000 people were forcibly sterilized under the law (estimates vary). The law remained in force until 1996, when it was finally repealed and replaced with a law that removed eugenic provisions.

In recent decades, the Japanese government has formally apologized and established compensation programs for victims. Court rulings in the 2010s-2020s increasingly recognized these practices as violations of human rights.]

[Editor's note 8: Coercive faith-breaking

(“deprogramming”) in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: *Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped*

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to “rescue” the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as

negative influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

[Editor's note 9: Ideological re-education. The Japanese term 思想改造 (shisō kaizō) is best translated as "thought reform" or "ideological re-education".

It refers to the deliberate effort to change someone's beliefs, ideology, or worldview – often through coercive or manipulative means. The term has strong historical and political connotations, especially associated with authoritarian regimes (e.g., Communist China under Mao or Xi Jinping), where it has been used to describe systematic campaigns to reshape people's thinking to align with state ideology.]

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