

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Former Member Decries Wild Claims by Activists

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**In interview former second-generation member denounces outrageous claims by activists given ample space by media**



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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 5: The Distorted Image of the "Second-Generation"

Feeling Uneasy about Being Labeled as "Victims" After Leaving the Faith

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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"I felt that society was swirling with prejudice and discrimination against members and associates of the [Family Federation](#). It didn't seem normal at all, and although we're a small voice, I want it to be heard."

That's what Ryosuke Kiyama (26, pseudonym), says. He lives in Tokyo and explains why he agreed to be interviewed. Kiyama is a "second-generation quitter" who left the faith of the [religious organization](#). While he couldn't talk about the circumstances leading to him quitting, he spoke seriously, saying,

"I have lived forgetting that I was related to the [church](#), but as the [Family Federation](#) has been targeted, I have no choice but to get involved."

The assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had a significant impact on Kiyama. When he heard about the incident and checked the online news, he came across the term

"#ReligiousOrganization" among the hashtags. He said he felt a chill run down his spine.

Subsequently, the "former [Unification Church](#)" began being named directly in the reports. Imagining how both current and former believers would be treated by society from then on, he said, "It was a huge shock."



*Making wild claims against religious minority: Masaki Kito, leading activist leftwing lawyer of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS)*

The more the media reported critically about the [Family Federation](#), calling it an "anti-social organization," the more he feared he would be treated as a former member of an "anti-social group" and suffer disadvantages, even if he had left the faith. "The topic of the [religious organization](#) came up at work, and it was painful to listen to. I was worried about what would happen if I was found out," he said, lowering his voice. The faces of his family and acquaintances who were second-generation believers also came to mind. He was so worried that they might be deeply hurt that he eventually developed insomnia and couldn't go to work.

In fact, some of the second-generation believers he knew also experienced health issues or insomnia. He expressed concern, saying,

"I often hear claims that even if the [religious organization](#) is dissolved, it won't change much because it will only lose its status as religious corporation, but I don't think that's all there is

to it."



*Lawmaker for the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) and hostile activist against [Family Federation](#): Yoshifu Arita, former House of Councilors member for CDP, the party professional faith-breaker Miyamura was advisor to. Before that, Arita was a communist politician 1990-2007*

What shocked him was the response from opposition party members, including those from the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP). "Before the incident, I leaned somewhat toward liberal views and was somehow sympathetic to the arguments of the opposition parties." However, he was disheartened to see politicians, who he thought prioritized human rights, labeling members of the [Family Federation](#) as "anti-Japanese" and sometimes mocking them as "tsubos" ("pots" - a derogatory reference to members of the former [Unification Church](#) selling marble vases).

Gradually, reports on "second-generation religious followers" increased, and those who had left the faith were seen as victims by the public. However, Kiyama is not satisfied with these reports. He explains,

"The media has yet to address the complex positions and feelings held by the majority of second-generation religious followers."

"Most second-generation members have family and friends within the [church](#). Their positions cannot be simply categorized into pro-church or anti-church. Society might think they should vent their anger at the [religious organization](#), but we have lived within it for a long time until we faded out. We inevitably concluded that there were both good and bad aspects. It is actually painful to vent all of our feelings on the [religious organization](#)."

"What I hate the most is the lack of freedom," he confessed, adding that lawyers and journalists often seen in the media argue that

second-generation members are "mind-controlled". The same lawyers and journalists

"completely refuse to acknowledge the existence of second-generation members who have chosen to believe of their own free will. In fact, those lawyers and journalists argue that such believers shouldn't be acknowledged, and that feels suffocating."

If second-generation believers do not fit into the predefined role of "victim" created for them, society brands them as being "still on the [church](#)'s side" or "not having broken free from brainwashing". Kiyama himself has experienced such treatment. He says with a deep sigh,

"I know many second-generation members who have left the faith but still have good relationships with their parents, but I feel pressured to not even mention this."

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# Not In Media: 2nd-Generation Faith Freely Chosen

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• October 11, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



**Challenging negative media narrative on 2nd-generation faith: A young Japanese lady tells her story, how she of her own free will chose her faith.**



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat – Part 5: **The Distorted Image of the “Second-Generation”**

**Reconciliation with Parents and the Path of Faith**

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

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When parents are devout believers of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** (formerly the Unification Church), society often perceives their children as being in a miserable situation. While the media has widely covered the experiences of second-generation members who have left the church, such as Sayuri Ogawa (a pseudonym), whose father was a local church leader, the existence of second-generation members who have chosen faith of their own free will has been ignored.



Front page book cover of Sayuri Ogawa's book in Japanese.

"The very relationship with my parents was what determined whether I stayed in the church or left."

So says Mieko Ōshita (a pseudonym), a woman in her 30s living in Chiba Prefecture. As a child, she lived in Gunma Prefecture, where her father, a church leader, was so busy with his work that he only came home once every one to two months. Despite his hard work, his pay was low, and her mother supported the family. She couldn't buy the clothes she wanted, and they used second-hand furniture. Her mother, who single-handedly supported the family, sometimes became hysterically angry.

Oshita says with a wry smile,

"Up until elementary school, I thought that life was normal, but as I reached adolescence, I started comparing my home with those of my school friends and realized how different my family was."

Feeling uncomfortable due to the lack of a relaxing space at home, Ms. Oshita gradually immersed herself in club activities and socializing with school friends. She began coming home late, and sometimes she even sneaked out at night, causing her parents to worry. However, she couldn't understand why staying out late was such a problem.

The teachings of the religious organization required both men and women to maintain "purity" in their relationships in preparation for future marriage. However, the strict guidance on chastity made her feel like she had no freedom, and this stirred feelings of rebellion in her. She said,

"At home, I often clashed with my parents, and there were even times when I threw away food right in front of them."



Front cover page of one version of Unification Principles in Japanese – 原理講論

This led to constant conflicts. Not knowing how to deal with her pent-up emotions, she began planning to "stop being a second-generation believer and run away from home" after graduating high school. She packed her favorite clothes into a bag and confided in her friends about her family's faith, asking them for help.

A turning point came just before graduation. While talking on the phone with her sister, who was living away from home, her sister revealed that she too had struggled with their parents and faith during high school, to the point where she became so stressed that she lost the ability to speak and even considered suicide.

When Mieko Oshita confided her own feelings, her sister revealed that she too had once thought about leaving the church. She recalled,

"My sister told me, 'How can you deny the faith our parents have dedicated their lives to without even understanding it?' That made me decide to learn about the church properly before making a choice."



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Studying the [teachings](#). Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 11th October 2024.

Ōshita had the chance to talk with an instructor who was an old acquaintance of her parents. The instructor shared stories about how her parents had been in the past. Hearing about her parents' lives from a third-party perspective, she gradually understood her true, hidden feelings:

"I wanted to be loved by my parents, and I rebelled against them because I was lonely."

Later, when Ōshita had the opportunity to talk things over with her parents, she expressed everything she had been feeling. Her parents apologized, saying, "We are truly sorry."

Although there were times when she felt emotionally unstable, each time, her parents were there to listen and understand her feelings. She says with a smile,

"Not only did I change and grow, but my parents did too."

Regarding the second-generation believers who have left the [Family Federation](#) and appeared in the media, Ōshita shows understanding, saying, "There are probably second-generation members who have felt forced into the faith without genuine feelings, and their anger is completely justified." However, she also offers her perspective:

"It's painful to resent the parents who raised you. That's why, like me, some might question the [church](#) rather than blame their parents. Perhaps there's a desire to turn what is really a parent-child issue into a political or religious issue. Shouldn't we take such complicated feelings into consideration?"

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**Featured image** above: A photo of Mieko Ōshita (right) when she was a baby. On the left is her sister, who is one year older. Photo: Mieko Ōshita

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