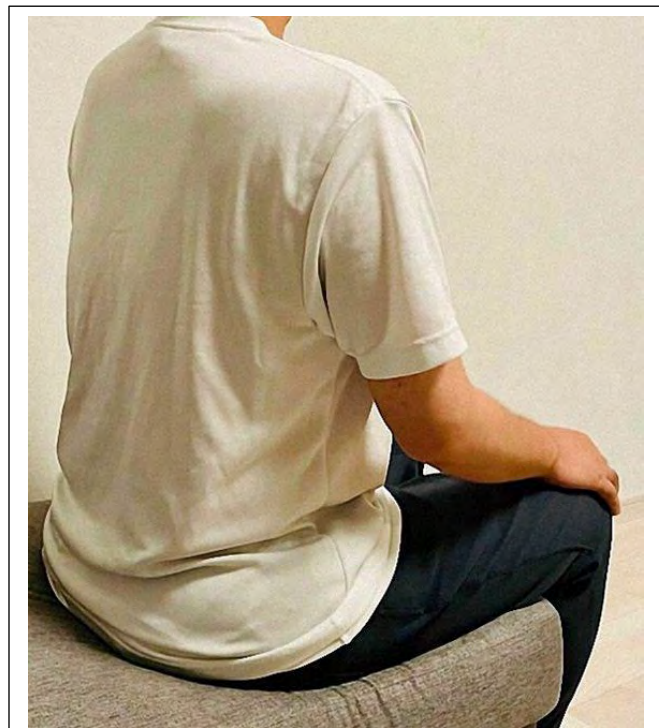


FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Parent-Child Value Gaps Not Only Among the Religious

Knut Holdhus
October 21, 2024



Yūji Suemori, a second-generation believer, interviewed for this article

Value gaps between parents and children are not only found in religious homes, like anti-religious activists seem to claim



[Sekai Nippo](#)

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

Current Second-Generation Believer Says, "The Religious Organization Suffers from 'Big Company Disease'."

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

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A second-generation member of the [Family Federation](#) appeals for the protection of religious freedom and human rights, afternoon September 16, 2024, Shibuya, Tokyo

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In media reports criticizing the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU, formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)), many testimonies from second-generation members who have left point out issues such as "poverty due to large donations" and "inhumane restrictions imposed by the doctrines". They claim that "the dissolution of the [religious organization](#)" is the only solution. How do second-generation believers view such steps?

Yūji Suemori (pseudonym), a company employee in his 30s living in the Chūgoku region, reflects on his experience. Both his parents are believers, but he has rarely clashed with them over their faith. He says,

"When people hear about families involved in new religious movements, they might imagine something strange, but even ordinary Japanese people are often involved in religion, such as visiting shrines or temples. The [Family Federation](#) felt no different from that."



Parents generally don't want their children to be fundamentally different from themselves. Parent-child value differences are not limited to the [Family Federation](#)

Suemori also mentions that he rarely experienced extreme restrictions from his parents. Therefore, when he sees criticism of second-generation believers on social media or in the media, he is bewildered, saying,

"It's so different from my own family that it seems more like a problem of individual families rather than the responsibility of the [organization](#)."

He also notes, "For parents, it's not just about religion; ideologically, they don't want their children to be fundamentally different from themselves." For that reason, he finds it "nonsensical" to limit discussions about parent-child value differences to the [Family Federation](#) alone.

On the other hand, Suemori currently keeps his distance from the [religious organization](#) and does not participate in its events or activities. One reason he cites is that he feels the [organization](#) suffers from "big company

disease". This term generally refers to the drawbacks of a hierarchical organization, such as slow decision-making, prioritizing superiors over customers, low employee motivation, and an inability to adapt to changes in the economic environment.

In the past, Yūji Suemori tried to independently organize an event within the [organization](#), but the head of his local [church](#) abruptly intervened, and it didn't go well. He laments,

"There is a tendency for those in charge to give one-sided instructions from a superior position. Even if you want to help the [church](#) through volunteer work, they tend to nitpick or escalate their demands, leading to situations where people 'drop out'. I've seen a few others besides myself go through this."

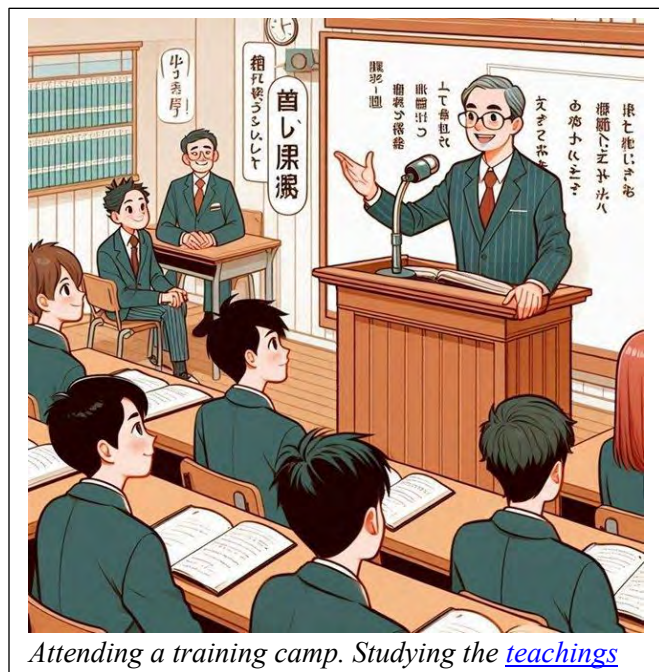
He also expressed concern, saying,

"In corporate terms, it's like the [Family Federation](#) succeeded through its early, relentless efforts but is now stuck repeating the same methods. Times have changed, and unless they flatten the hierarchy and treat each believer with care, the [organization](#) won't survive."

Nozomu Tsukahara (pseudonym), a man in his 20s living in Hyogo Prefecture, recalls how he drifted away from the [Unification Church](#) in middle school after attending a training camp of the [religious organization](#). He rebelled against the intense, fervent atmosphere of the training, and his desire to go to [church](#) waned. On top of that, he felt that the leader at his local place of worship was a "reckless type". As a teenager, Tsukahara increasingly felt, "I don't want to go to [church](#)."

However, he does not hide his anger at the one-sided criticism of the [organization](#) in the media and online. He asserts,

"It's true that there were some restrictions on my life, but I wasn't in an environment so isolated from the outside world that I could only think about the [Family Federation](#). I was never forced to practice my faith in any extreme way, nor was I ever coerced into religious practices. I have never felt that my constitutional freedoms were violated by the [church](#). Rather, it seems that the media is leading people to despise even related organizations that have no direct connection to the doctrine. And that might actually infringe on religious freedom."



Attending a training camp. Studying the [teachings](#)

He also expresses concern that the media's narrative

"is built on the assumption that 'second-generation believers are victims,' and instead of fostering sympathy, it exacerbates feelings of disgust and prejudice."

On the other hand, Tsukahara says,

"Many believers, regardless of age, have a strong sense of right and wrong. However, it's also true that they sometimes place too much emphasis on their religious perspective, neglecting to harmonize with society and those around them. That's something that needs to be improved."

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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

Tokyo, 1st October 2024 – Published as the **29th article** in a series in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article*

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*

See **part 1: The Kishida Administration’s Reckless Actions: 1st article, 2nd article, 3rd article, 4th article, 5th article, 6th article**


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
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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.

Ōshita 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. Ōshita 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 Ōshita 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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