

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan opposing children following parent's faith

Knut Holdhus  
November 2, 2024



*Part of the Catholic Shukugawa Church in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, where Shusaku Endo was baptized*

### Japan copying communist China: state prying into family matters and faith passed naturally from parents to children

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

“The ‘Ill-fitting Garment’ My Mother Made Me Wear”: The Achievements of Shusaku Endo, a “Second-Generation Religious Believer”



[Sekai Nippo](#)

### Overcoming Inner Conflicts to Portray a Unique Image of Christ

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

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*Happy family going to church*

As media coverage has increased around second-generation believers and former second-generation believers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), the term “second-generation religious adherent” has become widely used. This term often carries a negative connotation, typically applied to cases where individuals became believers not by their own choice or where they faced disadvantages due to their parents’ religious beliefs.

Religion is commonly passed down from parents to children. Family education forms the foundation of personal development, and at its core often includes, to varying degrees, religious values. The simplistic view that a parent’s strong faith leads to child abuse is far removed from global common sense.

Even when children are raised and educated in a faith before they fully understand it, they typically make their own choice as they mature - whether to adopt the faith as their own or to leave it. Such inner struggles contribute to personal growth.

Catholic author Shusaku Endo (遠藤周作) experienced such inner conflicts and deepened them through his literary work, ultimately establishing a literary world that gained high international acclaim.



*Shusaku Endo October 21, 1966 at his home in Tamagawa Gakuen, Machida City, Japan*

After his parents divorced in 1933, Endo returned to Japan from Dalian (大連), in former Manchuria, with his mother Ikuko (郁子), and they settled near a Catholic church in Shukugawa, Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture. Encouraged by his aunt, Endo's mother converted to Catholicism, leading Endo to attend church as well. He was baptized at the age of ten.

Reflecting on his baptism, Endo remarked,

“To be precise, rather than saying I ‘received’ baptism, it would be more accurate to say it was ‘given’ to me. It was not an act born from an irrepressible personal conviction” (“The Ill-Fitting Garment”).

Endo's wife, Junko Endo (遠藤順子), described his mother's strict approach to religious education in her book, “Speaking of My Husband, Shusaku Endo”. She wrote,

“Without his mother, I doubt the writer Shusaku Endo would have existed. She was a woman of profound faith, attending Mass every day

even during the war, though it sometimes drew the attention of the military police [...]. My husband wasn't given breakfast on Sundays unless he attended Mass.”



*The Catholic Shukugawa Church in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, where Shusaku Endo was baptized*

She also mentioned, “He was never scolded for mischief or poor grades, but it truly affected him as a child when he was told, ‘That's not holy.’” Endo felt Christianity was an “ill-fitting garment” that he hadn't chosen himself and often considered casting it off. Yet, he ultimately could not bring himself to do so. “I couldn't possibly throw away clothing that someone who loved me had given to me before I was confident enough in myself to fully embrace it.”

This internal struggle became a central theme in Endo's literature, leading to the creation of highly acclaimed works like \*Silence\*. In his essay, “My Literature,” he explained,

“In my novels, this single theme is almost always the core thread [...]. I wanted to tell of the struggle with something given to me by my mother that didn't quite fit.”

At one point, Endo resolved to stop trying to discard this “ill-fitting garment”, deciding instead to “tailor it into a kimono that would fit me”. This decision led him to explore the theme of Christianity through a

Japanese lens, which resulted in his distinctive portrayal of a maternal, companion-like Jesus, contrasting with the paternal image often associated with Christianity.



*From a pamphlet used in Japanese schools*

The upbringing based on Endo's mother's Catholic faith could be considered a form of abuse by some according to the guidelines hastily prepared by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), titled “[Q and A on Responding to Child Abuse Related to Religious Beliefs](#)”. Those guidelines have been criticized domestically and internationally for potentially leading to religious discrimination.

However, Endo recognized the love that motivated his mother's strict faith-based education.

When we reflect on Endo's achievements, it becomes clear that it is a mistake to view the

transmission of faith from parent to child negatively and to see so-called “second-generation religious adherents” solely as victims. We must not stifle the seeds of creativity that arise from genuine inner struggles.

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## Media Initiative Run By 2nd-Generation Members

• October 30, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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*Media initiative established by younger members as a platform for them to share their personal stories, promote dialogue, and challenge stereotypes*



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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

Young people expressing themselves as they are

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

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Since its so-called ‘Compliance Declaration’ in 2009, the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification Church](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) has worked on organizational reforms, one of which is making its organization more “visible” (transparent) by disseminating information.

Seisyun TV, a video series



The header of Seisyun TV's page on X.

distributed via official LINE and other platforms, started in December 2021 and is one of these efforts. It is mainly led by young believers in the Kanto region. [Editor's note: The region includes the Greater Tokyo area and seven prefectures – Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Saitama, Tokyo, Chiba, and Kanagawa.]

“We want to create content that can disseminate information through videos to viewers both inside and outside the [organization](#), from the perspective of second-generation and other young believers,” says Toshiyuki Fujioka (藤岡俊之), the planning manager of Seisyun TV and the Director of Seiwa who is responsible for young believers in the metropolitan area.

The planning and production of the program are handled by volunteers from various parts of the metropolitan area. The program mainly consists of two types: ‘special broadcasts’ and ‘regular broadcasts.’ Initially, it was available only through limited release, but now it can be freely viewed on YouTube.

It was initially started to provide internal content for the [religious organization](#), but the focus of the content has shifted to more candid views of second-generation members and [church](#) reforms following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. Fujioka and his team thought,

“If one of the characteristics of an organization like a so-called cult is its closed nature, then we should communicate what kind of [organization](#) we are.”

To achieve this, they are also working on addressing the “negative aspects” that have been avoided in the past.

The regular broadcasts feature comments on current news related to the [organization](#), such as fine trials, as well as personal stories told by second-generation believers, and appearances by second-generation members who grew up in families created through [international marriages](#) or through adoptions.



From one of Seisyun TV's special broadcasts. Photo: Screenshot

In the special broadcast, a project on the theme of [church](#) reform was featured. The program titled “Seiwa Department Renewal Conference”, which has aired three times so far, collects feedback from second-generation members through surveys and shares the results publicly. In the episode aired in March this year, a survey asking for suggestions to improve local churches was conducted via the official LINE account, receiving 233 responses.

Among the responses, there were positive opinions such as “the [church](#) has a lively atmosphere.” There were, however, also concerns like, “I feel that my value is not recognized unless I work hard in church activities.”

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Critical views also appeared like, "The educational concepts are outdated and feel too restrictive."

Young staff members from various churches, invited as guests, expressed their own reflections, such as, "We may have created an uncomfortable atmosphere." Others said, "We'd like to learn from the atmosphere of other churches." These opinions have been fed back to local churches as materials for improvement.

Starting this year, the general public has gradually been granted access to the videos, leading to a doubling of subscribers to the official channel. Initially, they launched an official YouTube channel and then expanded to X (formerly Twitter), monitoring reactions as they progressed. A live recording was also held on 28<sup>th</sup> September this year, where members of the mainstream media were invited.

Fujioka commented,

"As we continue to open up to the public, I hope we can show that members of the [Family Federation](#) are just regular people. When people can't see us, they tend to feel afraid. If we don't want to be portrayed in a one-sided way, we must continue to engage in disseminating information."

Kana Imanaka (今中華奈), 28 years old, who appears as a host on the program, was invited to join as a production staff member around 2022. Reflecting on her experience, she says,

"Faith shouldn't be something you practice with suffering. If it is painful, we want to create a space to share that experience with others."



Kana Imanaka. Photo: Screenshot from Seisyun TV October 2024.

Imanaka also added,

"There are things that are hard to talk about within the [church](#), like wanting to date or dressing fashionably. I'd like to create an environment where people can discuss these things openly through the program."

**Featured image** above: At the live recording of Seisyun TV, a musical performance was also held on 29th September 2024 in Tokyo. Photo: Arisa Takezawa (竹澤安李紗)

[*Editor's note:* The [Seisyun TV](#) project is a media initiative launched by second-generation believers of the [Family Federation](#). It was established as a platform for these younger members to share their personal stories, promote dialogue, and challenge stereotypes.

[Seisyun TV](#) offers young members an opportunity to explain their perspectives on faith, community, and societal challenges in an environment where they often face bias and misunderstanding. Through interviews, reflections, and testimonies, participants in [Seisyun TV](#) explore complex experiences, such as reconciling personal faith with public perception, confronting societal prejudice, and finding personal meaning within their community.

By sharing their experiences publicly, [Seisyun TV](#) aims to humanize the lives of [Family Federation](#) members, promoting understanding and reducing the prejudice they face due to media coverage and public misconceptions in Japan.]

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