

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan Adopts Chinese Faith-Breaking

Knut Holdhus
November 3, 2024



Outrageous dehumanizing Japanese human rights violations: International human rights expert states that Japan risks invalidating members' free will and effectively labeling them as incapable of making their own religious decisions. Here, members of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan participating in a Happy Family seminar aimed at improving the relationships between husband and wife and parents and children



Patricia Duval, French attorney and expert on international human rights law. She has defended the rights of minorities of religion or belief in domestic and international fora, and before international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, and the United Nations. She has also published numerous scholarly articles on freedom of religion or belief

Japan embracing faith-breaking concepts of “undue influence” and “mental manipulation”, rejected in the free world, but embraced by totalitarian regimes like Russia and China

BITTER WINTER Patricia Duval, French attorney specialised in international human rights law, sent on 22nd September 2024, a 29-page report titled “Japan: A Witch Hunt to Eradicate the [Unification Church](#)” to several UN offices. [Bitter Winter](#), the leading international magazine on religious freedom and human rights published 3 days later, on 25th September, an [executive summary](#) of the report. The day after, the magazine started publishing a 5-part series where Duval gives a more detailed description of the content.

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Text: John Milton / Knut Holdhus

Japanese authorities have designed a whole legal apparatus forged on debunked concepts in order to eliminate new religious movements

Japan enacts law based on debunked concepts of “undue influence” and “mental manipulation” in order to make it impossible for large minority

faith to operate

Patricia Duval points out in her report to UN 22nd September 2024, how all the civil cases in Japan

against the [Family Federation](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) were based on the debunked concepts of “undue influence” and “mental manipulation”.



These outdated notions are also the basis for Japan’s recent legal actions against the [Family Federation](#). Critics naturally argue that this approach violates both scientific standards and international human rights principles, setting a concerning precedent for religious freedom. This has intensified global debates on religious freedom and state neutrality.

Mental manipulation thrown out as legal argument in Europe

In recent years, the Japanese government has heightened scrutiny over new religious movements, targeting especially the [Family Federation](#). Echoing leftwing activist lawyers who have campaigned against the [Family Federation](#) for more than 40 years, the authorities suddenly after the Abe assassination in July 2022, started to claim that the [federation](#) exerts undue influence on members, resulting in harm through solicited donations and proselytizing practices considered not “socially acceptable”. Legal experts and rights advocates have voiced concerns about the subjective and discriminatory nature of these claims, highlighting the lack of clear, scientific basis for the concept of mental manipulation.



Courtroom of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg

Japan’s reliance on these unproven claims aligns it with certain authoritarian governments, like Russia, which have taken steps to restrict minority religious groups under similar arguments. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) examined a similar issue in “Jehovah’s Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia” (IC-302/02) in 2010. The Russian government dissolved the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ community in Moscow, alleging the group employed psychological pressure and “mind control” techniques that compromised members’ freedom of choice.

However, the ECHR ruled against Russia, concluding that claims of mind control were unsubstantiated by scientific evidence and that no clear definition of the concept exists. The Court found that members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses voluntarily chose to practice their faith and ruled that Russia’s dissolution of the group violated members’ right to religious freedom.

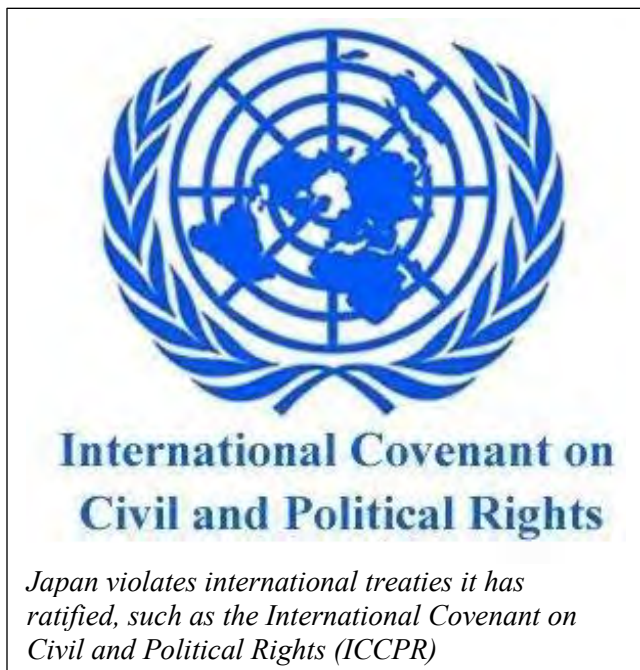
The ECHR underscored that it was legally and ethically flawed to discount members’ voluntary choices based on unproven psychological theories. As a result, Russia was found to have infringed on the rights of its citizens to practice their chosen religion. This ruling set an important precedent, clarifying that freedom of conscience cannot be compromised by unfounded claims of undue influence.

Japan’s framework targeting new religious movements

Duval emphasizes that Japan’s revival of the mental manipulation theory to justify actions against the [Family Federation](#) raises questions about state impartiality in religious matters. Recently, Japanese authorities implemented a legal framework explicitly targeting the [Family Federation](#). Critics believe this framework is designed to remove certain new religious movements from Japan’s religious landscape. The framework includes redefining “victims” to encompass potential future claimants who may not currently consider themselves victims but might later be persuaded to file complaints. By framing certain beliefs and practices as socially unacceptable, Japan risks invalidating members’ free will and effectively labeling them as incapable of making their own religious decisions. Nothing less!

This framework suggests that the state could intervene to determine what constitutes acceptable religious beliefs, invoking public welfare as justification. However, such intervention risks infringing upon individual liberties by assuming a paternalistic role in religious matters and deciding which beliefs are valid and who is competent to choose them.

Violations of international agreements on religious freedom



Critics argue that by targeting religious organizations based on mental manipulation, Japan risks undermining its commitment to international human rights standards, including the right to religious freedom. Under treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Japan is obligated to maintain religious neutrality and protect its citizens' freedom of belief. The current legal strategy of the Japanese authorities undermines these protections by setting a precedent in which the state questions the legitimacy of certain religious choices.

Broader implications for religious freedom

Japan's approach raises broader concerns about religious freedom within democratic societies. If courts continue to accept mental manipulation arguments without scientific support, minority

religious groups could face stigmatization and legal restrictions if deemed outside traditional norms. By employing unproven theories to dissolve religious groups, Japan could inadvertently embolden other nations to adopt similar tactics, raising global concerns about state intrusion on personal beliefs.

The case against the [Family Federation](#) marks a pivotal moment in balancing state authority with individual freedoms. The future of Japan's religious landscape - and that of other democracies - will hinge on governments' respect for religious autonomy amid growing social and legal pressures.

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A MAGAZINE ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Japan and the Unification Church: The Duval Report. 5. State-Sponsored Deprogramming

10/01/2024 PATRICIA DUVAL

A+ | A-

Children whose parents are NRMs members are dealt with by anti-cult "counselors" in their schools.

by Patricia Duval*

*A report sent to several United Nations offices on September 22, 2024.

Article 5 of 5. Read [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), and [article 4](#).



Pamphlets distributed in Japanese schools explain that children are abused by being "forced to participate in religious activities" and "threatened by words like "You will go to hell.""

Mental Manipulation

All the tort cases against the Unification Church are built on the concept of undue influence and mental manipulation.

In all these cases, the Courts assume that the UC has an undue influence and review the cases to find any elements to support their ruling that the soliciting of donations or proselytizing was not "socially acceptable" and thus tortious.

This theory of mental manipulation has no scientific basis and has been rejected by scholars internationally, as the European Court of Human Rights spelled out in its decision "Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia" on 10 June 2010 (IC-302/02, 10 June 2010).

In this case, the association Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow had referred to the European Court the decision of a Russian court to dissolve their community.

The Court specifically reviewed the validity of the accusation by the Russian authorities that the right of citizens to freedom of conscience was violated because they were submitted to psychological pressure and "mind control" techniques.

After noting that members of the religious denomination testified before the Russian courts that they had made a free and voluntary choice of their religion and therefore followed its precepts of their own will, the Court found that "there is no generally accepted and scientific definition of what constitutes 'mind control' and that no definition of that term was given in the domestic judgments" (§ 128 and 129).

Accordingly, the Court ruled that "the findings of the Russian courts on this point were based on conjecture uncorroborated by fact" and found a violation by Russia of the right to freedom of religion or belief of the Jehovah's Witnesses members.

In spite of this evolution in democratic countries, Japan brings back this debunked theory and, as Russia did against the Jehovah's Witnesses, uses it to seek dissolution of the Unification Church

Jehovah's witnesses, uses it to seek dissolution of the Unification Church.

The Japanese authorities have now designed a whole legal apparatus forged on this theory, in order to eliminate new religious movements from its religious landscape, starting with the dissolution of the Unification Church.

This includes the fact of including in the notion of "victims" the believers who might file complaints in the future—meaning implicitly when they are persuaded to do so—as they are deemed to not yet be aware of being victims.

Invalidating the free will of believers of new religious movements is equivalent to no less than denying them the freedom to choose to adopt new beliefs and considering them as mentally incompetent as concerns religious choices.

Using this theory, the State is then entitled to make choices for its citizens in their place in the name of protecting "public welfare."

This constitutes a violation of the right of Japanese citizens to freedom to adopt a new religion or belief, and a blatant violation by Japan of its obligation of neutrality in religious matters under the international treaties it has signed and ratified.

Family Break-ups

Under the same reasoning and the concept of undue influence, the families are entitled to rescind donations pursuant to the new donations law, in lieu of their kin believers. They are also entitled, according to the Chairman of the National Federation of Bar Associations, to sue for damages claiming that the UC broke down their family relationships.



The Japanese Unification Church's Happy Family Program is aimed at improving the relationships between husband and wife and parents and children. Source: Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

The European Court of Human Rights was faced with the same kind of accusation of family break-ups by the Russian government against the Jehovah's Witnesses in the above-mentioned case.

And the Court found: "Nevertheless, as long as self-dedication to religious matters is the product of the believer's independent and free decision and however unhappy his or her family members may be about that decision, the ensuing estrangement cannot be taken to mean that the religion caused the break-up in the family. Quite often, the opposite is true: it is the resistance and unwillingness of non-religious family members to accept and to respect their religious relative's freedom to manifest and practice his or her religion that is the source of conflict" (§111).

This was precisely the case for the thousands of Japanese believers who were abducted by their families, locked up, and forced to undergo anti-UC indoctrination until they would accept to recant their faith.

After letting this practice continue for decades, Japan is now providing the possibility for the families who committed such acts to sue for damages due to the family break-ups caused by the conversion of their kin to the Unification Church in the first place.

And all this is possible with Unification Church money since the damages will be paid by the assets seized when the dissolution is decided to pay the "creditors," i.e., all the potential claimants for the years to go.

This brings the following question: Do adult citizens have the right in Japan to convert to new religions if their families disagree?

The facts tell us that they do not, and this constitutes again a blatant violation of their right to choose and adopt the beliefs of their choice protected by international instruments.

State Organized Deprogramming

Article 18.2 of the Covenant provides: "No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice."

Coercion to recant one's beliefs is clearly forbidden under the commitments made by Japan.

After the **scandal** of illegal abductions and enforced persuasion and the publication of pictures of Toru Goto emaciated and ill after his release from a twelve year-confinement, it seems that the Japanese State is now trying to organize a new form of "deprogramming," without the embarrassing element of abduction.



Toru Goto after twelve years of deprogramming-oriented confinement.

However, the term "coercion" mentioned at Article 18.2 does not only refer to physical constraint but can also designate psychological pressure, such as in mandatory "counseling" against one's faith.

On January 18, 2024, "Nikkei Shinbun," one of the major newspapers in Japan, **reported** on a Cabinet meeting which took place on the same day entitled "Ministerial Conference on Supporting the Victims of the Former Unification Church."

During the conference, a support plan was finalized based on the Special Measures Law passed in December 2023 (Law 89). The new support measures focus on victim relief, beyond the asset transfer monitoring and legal assistance for damage claims already enshrined in the Law. Later, the government **announced** the main points of its support plan on its website.

The relief measures are expressly designed for the Unification Church and relate to the special "counseling" to be delivered to "victims" or potential victims not yet aware of being victims, like the second-generation believers or children of the Unification Church members. The government establishes a new system in which former followers of the Unification Church, critical apostates, serve as instructors to provide "advice and guidance" to government counselors.

This system is based on the idea that, "Many victims under mind control are often unaware of their distress. Former followers will share their insights based on their experiences during training sessions for counselors."

The training by apostates is supposed to "make it easier for counselors at child guidance centers and mental health and welfare centers to address these issues."

The plan is tailor-made to deliver counseling to the UC believers and their children—second-generation believers—to make them aware that they have been manipulated and turn them against their Church.

In particular, the government will "expand the number of counselors and social workers stationed in schools to make it easier for children and young people from second-generation believers to seek help."

According to the plan posted on the Government website, the Ministry of Justice is to "expand the number of schools where 'Human Rights Classes' are held (from elementary schools to junior high schools and high schools) and distribute the 'Children's Human Rights SOS Mini Letter' to elementary and junior high school students."

If the Human Rights Classes are held by counselors trained by apostates from the Unification Church, one can figure out their content. The **SOS Mini Letter** is an envelope distributed to the children to allow them to send an "SOS" to the authorities.



The "SOS Mini Letter." One example of abuse is "Because of my parents' religion I cannot participate in sport events."

After inciting a help demand from the kids/students, the Government plans to support them to leave home. The new measures provide that they will be offered "a temporary living space away from their parents or other believers, facilitating their path to rebuilding their lives."

Under the cover of helping problem children, the State is organizing an "exit counseling" at school to pressure second-generation believers to recant their beliefs and escape from their families; this is the new form of "deprogramming" that Japan has planned in January this year.

This institutionalized "counseling" to indoctrinate the children against their parents' faith represents not only an infringement of their right to freedom of belief pursuant to Article 18.1 of the ICCPR but also to Article 14.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): "States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

It also constitutes an outright violation of their parents' right to educate their children according to their own faith pursuant to Article 18.4 of the ICCPR: "The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."

And to Article 14.2 of the CRC: "States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child."

The plan tailor-made by the Government for the Unification Church also includes that the Children and Families Agency should provide support at child guidance centers, "based on the 'Q&A regarding responses to child abuse related to religious beliefs."

The Q&A they refer to are the Guidelines on child abuse related to religious beliefs, published on 27 December 2022 by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare.

We refer here to the [report made by the Jehovah's Witnesses](#) on those Guidelines and the [Special Rapporteurs' letter](#) to the Japanese Government expressing their concerns on the matter.



The report by the Jehovah's Witnesses on the religious liberty crisis in Japan.

Conclusion

"Brainwashing evangelism" is a concept that has been coined in Japan to discriminate against the Unification Church's faith-based activities.

The criterion of societal acceptability has been used and is being used by Japanese Courts to find its activities "anti-social" and tortious, including the spreading of the faith and soliciting of donations to maintain the Church institutions.

This in turn has been used by the Government to file for the dissolution of the Church in the name of "public welfare."

Pending dissolution, and through the enactment of two tailor-made laws, the Japanese authorities have endeavored to hinder its activities and organized the plundering of the Church's assets through fostering claims for damages from deprogrammed members.

Under the theory of undue influence, happy believers are stripped of their legal capacity in religious matters and their families are entitled to rescind their donations in their place, and to sue for damages for the alleged family break-up.

After endorsing the illegal deprogramming of the UC members for decades, the Japanese government is now organizing the reeducation of their children and the estrangement from their parents like in totalitarian States.

All these human rights violations result in a dramatic situation for the Unification Church believers and second-generation believers in Japan.

If nothing is done to stop this alarming trend of discriminatory repressive measures from the Japanese authorities, this

religious movement will disappear, and its members will have to either relocate to another country or accept to recant their faith under coercion.

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Patricia Duval

Patricia Duval is an attorney and a member of the Paris Bar. She has a degree in public law from La Sorbonne University, and specializes in international human rights law. She has defended the rights of minorities of religion or belief in domestic and international fora, and before international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, and the United Nations. She has also published numerous scholarly articles on freedom of

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Japan: A Witch Hunt to Eradicate the Unification Church

The executive summary of a report submitted to various United Nations personalities and institutions, presented in Geneva on September 25, 2024.



Mișcarea antisectă. 6. Ideologia antisectă.

Folosind ca dovadă relatările „apostaților”, „antisectarii” insistă că „sectele” nu sunt religii „autentice” și că își câștigă adepți prin „spălarea creierului”

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CESNUR

Via Confienza 19

10121 Torino

Italy

info@bitterwinter.org

