

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Yuko Takeuchi - Our conversations deepen when we meet other religions

Knut Holdhus
November 4, 2024



Yuko Takeuchi and her family

Members of religious minority testifies how her faith allows her to have deeper conversations, even with persons of other religions, than by living an "ordinary" life

Tokyo, 4th November 2024 - Published as the 36th 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"

"Our encounters become deeper, even when we meet persons with a different religion"

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

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"I deeply feel how much my parents struggled to make donations. However, I also feel that the [Family Federation](#) today is a reformed organization that reflects on and has corrected its past excesses. I hope the media will report on it fairly."



The entrance of the headquarters of the Family Federation of Japan in Shibuya, Tokyo

Yuko Takeuchi (竹内祐子), a housewife in her 40s living in Kanagawa Prefecture, was four years old when her parents joined the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)).

Her mother is an active and devoted member, while her father, who once believed, gradually grew resentful toward the [church](#) and now merely tolerates his wife's faith. Due to her parents' differing attitudes towards the [religious organization](#), Takeuchi grew up without leaning towards either side. She says,

"I decided for myself whether to have faith after becoming an adult."

On the other hand, she says she can "somewhat understand" the feelings of former second-generation members who have repeatedly criticized the [organization](#) in the media. She says,

"When I was in vocational school, my parents couldn't pay my dorm fees because of the donations they were making, so I had to cover them with my part-time job earnings. I don't hold any grudge against my parents now, but at the time, I was unhappy. I think there are people who have let that sense of resentment toward their parents grow and intensify.



Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan

However, I couldn't see Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), who resorted to murder, as 'right' at all. While some former second-generation believers appeared in the media saying they 'understand his feelings', my opinion hasn't changed that the incident is unforgivable.

I also found posts on X (formerly Twitter) by a former second-generation member publicly talking about abusing his mother, who is a believer, and it angered me. I don't know if the post is true, but it's definitely wrong. I had heard that my mother was asked for donations by [church](#) staff in the past, but as an adult, I was never pressured to donate."

She points out,

"There were probably various problems in the past. But now, whether due to a generational change or the [church](#)'s compliance declaration, at least around me, I don't hear about donation-related issues."



Many [Family Federation](#) members in Japan are active on X. Here, the header of UnificationNews on X, which has many Japanese followers

She is puzzled by the stark difference between how she sees the [church](#) in her daily life and how the [organization](#) is portrayed in the media,

"I don't understand it. It feels like our [religious organization](#) has been recast into something far more 'outrageous' than it really is. We want society to see our true nature, and we need to make an effort to make that happen."

Takeuchi, who also has a child in middle school, explains that her child seems unsure of how to perceive the ongoing

controversies. Since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, her son has been less inclined to attend [church](#). Although Takeuchi has no intention of imposing her faith on him, she firmly states,



Japanese ladies talking about their faith

"I have had moving experiences through these teachings, and regardless of being labeled as part of an antisocial group by society, I will not leave the [church](#)."

One positive outcome of her faith, Takeuchi emphasizes, is that she has become able to genuinely accept people with other beliefs. At one point, she learned that a friend was a follower of another religion. After sharing her own faith, they were able to have deeper conversations than before,

"Before either of us embraced our faiths, we had both struggled to feel hope in society. And it was meaningful to share and empathize over those experiences. Just by living an ordinary life it's hard to find someone who understands you this well."

Through this encounter, Takeuchi experienced how her world could expand despite the religious differences. She asserts,

"I, too, want to work towards a world where people with religious values aren't subjected to discrimination or disdain and where ignoring human rights doesn't become the norm."

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State Prying Into Faith Passed To One's Children

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



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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Happy family going to church. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 2nd November 2024.

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.

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").



Shusaku Endo, photographed on 21st October 1966 at his home in Tamagawa Gakuen, Machida City, Japan. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#)

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

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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."

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.



The Catholic Shukugawa Church in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, where Shusaku Endo was baptized. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)



From the cover of a pamphlet used in Japanese schools. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

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&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.

Featured image above: Part of the Catholic Shukugawa Church in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, where Shusaku Endo was baptized. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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