

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan: Parents Struggle Under Japanese Religious Intimidation

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Heiji Suzuki (pseudonym) talks about passing faith on to his children

Members of religious minority share how they manage to combine an active life of faith and parenting, and how they struggled with it

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

Faith and Parenting, Parents Also Struggle

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



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Praying together before bed

Just as children born to religious parents struggle, parents of faith also grapple with the challenges of raising their children. Amid recent discussions on the "second-generation" issue within the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), this article delves into the inner struggles of parents as they watch their religiously-raised children grow up.

"It was difficult to raise the second generation."

Heiji Suzuki (pseudonym), who lives in Tokyo, confides this. He had participated in a wedding ceremony based on faith and assumed that children born would naturally understand [God](#) and faith. However, as his children grew, he realized, "That is not the case."

The family had maintained a routine of praying together before bed, but as the children grew older and became more self-aware, they gradually started to resist it. Heiji began to feel increasingly troubled by the idea of instilling faith in his children. He tells us,

"When I looked at various families, their educational approaches were all over the place. But during Sunday services, when I saw children being forced to come to church, I felt that this kind of compulsion only bred resentment towards the parents. So, we decided not to force our faith upon them."

In fact, his daughter Harune (26, pseudonym) shared that she grew up through elementary school much like any other child, with almost no discussions about religion or faith. "My parents never once told me I had to go to [church](#)," she says.

Harune began attending [church](#) after joining a [church](#) sports event. In 2020, she participated in a [mass wedding](#) ceremony organized by the [Family Federation](#). When she shared this with close friends, she recalls,



Japanese parents with high-school-age daughters

"They asked, 'Are you really happy with this? Are you just following your parents' faith without thinking for yourself?' Although I tried to explain that it was my own choice, they couldn't understand. That left me feeling quite shocked," she says with a cheerless expression.

In Japan, even when parents of faith respect their children's autonomy, society often suspects that any choice to adopt faith by the child is due to parental pressure. This is the current situation in Japanese society.

On the other hand, Kayo (pseudonym), the mother, talks about seeing many second-generation members leave the [church](#). She points out that the [church](#) lacked an attitude of accepting the genuine feelings of second-generation members who did not choose faith. Expressing the inner thoughts of parents with

faith, she explains,

"Regardless of whether they choose our faith, my child is still my precious child. However, some parents feel that if their child rejects the faith, it's as if they've failed as parents. Accepting the child's decision to leave can feel like a complete rejection of their parenting efforts. I understand that this makes it difficult for some parents to fully accept."

Some families have realized that their strong faith and love for their children weren't in harmony and have since worked to repair those relationships.

About 20 years ago, Katsumi Oshita (pseudonym), a [church](#) leader in Gunma Prefecture, was so busy with [church](#) duties that he rarely returned home, often staying at the church. Though he thought he was being dedicated in his work, his high-school-aged daughters rebelled, saying they wanted to stop being "second-generation members". This led him to realize, "I wasn't fulfilling my responsibility as a parent. I needed to be more attuned to my children's feelings."

Reflecting on his actions, Oshita and his wife committed themselves to rebuilding their relationship with their children. Even if he could only stay home for 30 minutes, he would make the one-hour drive without hesitation. Whenever his daughters called, he would answer, regardless of the hour, and would talk with them as long as they needed. As they began focusing on connecting with their children, the dynamic between him and his wife, who had often clashed due to their different personalities, also began to improve.

Today, all his children have embraced faith, and he is now a grandfather. "I'm not exaggerating - my kids are the best in the world," Oshita says proudly. However, he adds, bowing his head, "But I'm truly sorry for how things were for about 20 years."

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"I Can Have Deeper Conversations Than Before"

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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



Logo of the Sekai Nippo

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

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial

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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."



Sign at the entrance of the headquarters of the Family Federation of Japan in Shibuya, Tokyo. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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.

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.



Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan. Photo: [Andrew2592009 / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

I also found posts on X



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

(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

Send us a message

First Name * Last Name

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Submit

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.”

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,

“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,



*Two Japanese ladies talking about their faiths.
Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator,
4th November 2024.*

“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.”

Featured image above: Yuko Takeuchi and her family. Photo: Yuko Takeuchi

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