

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Sacrilege: Japanese State Violates the Sacred

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May 22, 2025



Kayo Shiraishi (right) and her father Minoru Fukuda appeal for the cemetery's preservation in front of her mother's memorial portrait in the Oze Cemetery's columbarium - May 4, 2025, Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, Japan



[FFWPU] Dissolution order threatens sacred grounds: Believers regard likely move by authorities to erase cemeteries as sacrilege

Tokyo, 21st May 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

"My Mother Lives in the Afterlife"

The Request to Dissolve the Family Federation and the Cemetery Controversy (Part 2)

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

See part 1 [Japan: Even Dead Souls Face State Persecution](#)

Oze, the largest high-altitude marshland in Honshu and famously known as the setting for the classic song "Natsu no Omoide" (Summer Memories), attracts hikers from all over Japan each year who come to see the beautiful scenery with blooming Asian skunk cabbage (mizubashō), as mentioned in the lyrics. In Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture - the Kanto gateway to Oze National Park - a Western-style cemetery with blue lawns lies peacefully in harmony with the rich natural surroundings.



Oze Cemetery, owned by the [Family Federation](#), in Katashina Village, Gunma Prefecture, Japan

So says Kayo Shiraishi (白石佳代), 35, a second-generation believer who was interviewed at Oze Cemetery earlier this month. That day, Shiraishi helped host a barbecue event where bereaved second-generation believers could connect and share experiences. Within the [religious organization](#), the cemetery functions as a crucial community hub for believers.

Shiraishi's mother, Yukiko Fukuda (福田ゆき子), died of ovarian cancer in 2009 and now rests in the columbarium (room with niches for funeral urns) at Oze Cemetery. When her mother passed away, Shiraishi was 19 years old and had rejected the [Family Federation](#)'s teachings. She recalls, "I was in touch with people who opposed the [church](#), and I had prepared documents to officially leave."

But her view on life and death changed drastically with her mother's passing. Her mother, saying she "couldn't die and leave her children behind," endured a two-year-and-seven-month battle with cancer. When the cancer metastasized throughout her body, doctors advised the family that her final days would be better spent at home. Two weeks after being discharged, she passed away.

Shiraishi witnessed her mother's final moments. Just past midnight, her father, Minoru Fukuda (福田実) (69), held his wife in his arms on the bed. As Shiraishi and her siblings looked on, her father whispered,

"You've fought hard. You've done enough. It's okay to go now."

Her mother nodded slightly and passed away. Shiraishi described the moment as "moving."

"When I die, I want to die embraced by a loving husband like that. I want to be in a [marriage](#) like theirs."



The [Family Federation](#) has a crystal-clear teaching about life after death. Here, "Transfiguration", a photographic reproduction of painting from 1824 by Alexander Ivanov (1806-1858). It portrays the transfiguration of Jesus as he meets with the spirits of Moses and Elijah while three disciples are onlookers

Though she didn't fully understand the concept of [God](#) or religious doctrine, witnessing her parents together at the end made her feel this way naturally.

After placing her mother's ashes in Oze Cemetery, Shiraishi and her family visited every month on the monthly memorial day of the mother's death. The drive took about two hours each way, but to Shiraishi, who was deeply grieving, it never felt long.

"It was a mysterious feeling - even exciting. The car ride filled with memories and conversations about mom became a precious time for our family."

Upon arriving at the cemetery, the manager - who was also a believer - would unlock the columbarium (room with niches for funeral urns) for them. The whole family would touch the urn containing the mother's ashes. Their visits only lasted about 10 to 15 minutes, but they always ended by saying, "We'll come again." The manager would then offer them tea and sweets, and they'd enjoy some quiet, happy

family time - a monthly ritual.

Though Shiraishi once "hated the [church](#)," she eventually developed faith through these visits.

"The idea that we don't become nothing after death or reincarnate, but that we continue to exist forever in the [afterlife](#) as individuals - that was comforting to me."

Now married with a family of her own, she still gathers with her family for a meal on her mother's death anniversary.

Government Undermines Believers' Views on Life and Death



A demonstration by members of the [Family Federation](#) in Tottori, Japan March 19, 2025, against the blatant state persecution

If the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) is finalized, the fate of the [organization](#)'s land holdings remains uncertain. Despite the unclear future of Oze Cemetery, believers continue to request to be buried or have ashes interred there.

Minoru Fukuda (福田実), Shiraishi's father and a cemetery board member, expressed anger at the situation, saying the pressure to shut down even cemeteries goes beyond exclusion from society (ostracism):

"This isn't even mura hachibu (村八分 - a traditional form of social exclusion). Mura hachibu excluded people from village life except for emergencies like fires and funerals - that was part of Japanese tradition. Targeting cemeteries through dissolution is an act of cultural destruction."

While the government and courts claim that "freedom of religion will still be protected" after dissolution, removing churches as gathering spaces and cemeteries as places of spiritual refuge makes maintaining a religious community extremely difficult.

Shiraishi's monthly cemetery visits were possible only because the manager was a fellow believer who allowed frequent access to the columbarium. If that is no longer permitted, it would mean being cut off from "conversations" with her deceased mother - an unbearable thought for Shiraishi and her family.

Looking at her mother's portrait inside the columbarium, Shiraishi said:

"Losing this cemetery would be like having our home and hometown taken away. We'd lose sight of why we were born and why we live. I wonder - what kind of views on life and death do the people in government have?"

See part 1 [Japan: Even Dead Souls Face State Persecution](#)

[Editor's note: Murahachibu (村八分) means "Social Ostracism in a Village". 村八分 is a traditional Japanese practice of ostracism within a rural community. It literally means "eight parts out of ten", and refers to the act of excluding a person or family from most aspects of communal life as a form of social punishment.

In traditional Japanese villages, ten types of mutual assistance were essential for survival (e.g., help with house building, weddings, funerals, festivals, etc.).

If someone violated social norms or committed a serious offense (like betrayal, theft, or disrupting harmony), the community would cut off ties with them in eight out of those ten areas.

The two exceptions (the remaining "two parts") were typically firefighting assistance and funeral assistance. Even someone ostracized would still be helped if their house caught fire or someone died - because those were considered essential and sacred duties.

村八分 reflects Japan's traditional emphasis on group harmony (和, wa), collective responsibility, and social conformity. Being subjected to 村八分 was extremely serious - it meant social death within one's community, which in rural Japan could be more devastating than legal punishment.

While it's a historical concept, modern forms of social ostracism (e.g. bullying, workplace exclusion) are sometimes still described metaphorically as 村八分.

村八分 is a traditional Japanese form of social ostracism where a person is cut off from communal life in all but the most essential matters. It highlights the power of collective norms and the severe consequences of going against them in a tightly knit society.]

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Japan: Even Dead Souls Face State Persecution

- May 20, 2025
- Knut Holdhus



Japanese state persecution reaching new extremes as it seems certain that even members' dead souls may not escape inhuman treatment brought about by dissolution order




Logo of the Sekai Nippo

Tokyo, 20th May 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).


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If



It looks like not only living members of the [Family Federation](#) will be persecuted mercilessly by the Japanese state, but also dead ones. Here, from a [Family Federation](#) seong-hwa (burial) ceremony in 2015. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's request for the dissolution of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) is approved, a major social issue could arise concerning the management of cemeteries operated by the [organization](#).

There is no precedent in Japan of a religious corporation that owns cemeteries being ordered to dissolve by a court. With no prior example to follow, no one truly knows what will happen to these burial sites after dissolution. Could they lose not just the legal status as a religious corporation, but even the graves where their beloved family members rest? We spoke with bereaved family members who live with this fear.

In a mountain valley surrounded by rich nature in Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture, lies an orderly cemetery. This is the "Central Japan Cemetery", where followers of the [Family Federation](#) are buried.

During a joint memorial service held by the [religious organization](#) on 26th April, Mitsuo Ito (伊藤光夫) – 60 – and his wife Ryoko (伊藤良子) – 63 – placed their daughter's portrait on her gravestone and offered flowers and fruit.

"I can't possibly tell my daughter that we might have to leave this cemetery," said Mitsuo as they both looked distressed at the possibility that their daughter's grave could be lost due to the dissolution of the [religious organization](#).



Mitsuo Ito (伊藤光夫) during his 2020 attempt to climb Mount Ontake. Photo provided by himself.

Their eldest daughter, Kotomi, passed away at 18 while in her third year of high school. She was one of the 63 victims of the 2014 eruption of Mount Ontake on the border of Nagano and Gifu prefectures.

Mitsuo had been climbing Ontake with fellow followers of the [Family Federation](#) when the eruption occurred. Kotomi had reached the summit ahead of him and sent him a photo with the message, "I'm waiting for you." However, before Mitsuo could reach the top, the

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eruption occurred. Kotomi and several other members of the **religious organization** died.

Still burdened by guilt, Mitsuo said, "I can't help but think that if she hadn't been waiting for me at the summit, she might have survived."

Stricken with grief, he couldn't part with her ashes for three years. After finally interring them at the *Central Japan Cemetery*, he has made monthly trips from their home in Aichi Prefecture, driving about an hour on the expressway.

Despite the deep emotional wounds, the annual memorial service and the chance to connect with fellow believers have been a source of healing for the couple. Many visitors offered flowers and prayers at Kotomi's grave. The cemetery provided a space and time where members came together like one big family, easing their pain.



Front page of 2018 English version of *Religious Corporations Act of Japan*.

According to the *Religious Corporations Act*, once the dissolution is finalized, all operations run by the **organization** must be forcibly terminated. There are eight cemeteries nationwide under the names of the **organization** or its affiliates, holding over 3,200 graves. The *Central Japan Cemetery* is located on land owned by a Buddhist temple, which the **church** has leased under its name and entrusted management to volunteer members.

It remains unclear whether cemetery management can be smoothly transferred to another organization or whether it could lead to closure or even forced reburials. Anxiety is growing among the

bereaved families. During the joint memorial service, the bereaved families' association at *Central Japan Cemetery* issued a statement to the press expressing their concerns:

"If the **organization** is dissolved, the cemetery's management will be left without an operator, raising the possibility of it being irresponsibly abandoned. This would be unbearable for us and would severely damage the dignity of the souls of the deceased."

Fear of losing a place to mourn

In the beliefs of the **Family Federation**, the soul lives on eternally after death. Thus, the memorial gatherings have a warm, friendly atmosphere. Scenes could be seen of families enjoying meals picnic-style near the graves, and of bereaved families from across the country cheerfully saying, "It's been a while" and warmly reminiscing together.

But all of this could be lost if the **religious organization** is dissolved. Even if cemetery management is transferred to another religious or public-interest organization, religious services like the current memorials may be difficult to continue. If the transition is not smooth, there is a risk – just as the bereaved families fear – that the cemeteries may be neglected for long periods.



In the beliefs of the **Family Federation**, the soul lives on eternally after death. Here, a photographic reproduction of an oil painting from 1894 titled "Passage" by Finnish painter Anna Sahlsten (1859-1931). The painting presumably portrays the spirit of the person on the bed departing upon death. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. **Public domain** image.

Mitsuo Ito, seeing the ongoing media coverage about the potential dissolution of the **religious organization**, expressed his feelings plainly:

"Will politicians – all for their own convenience – really take

away even the resting place of our loved ones?"

In 2020, Mitsuo Ito climbed Mount Ontake once again and at last reached the summit.

"I wanted to see the scenery my daughter saw. I wanted to stand where she had stood. I felt like she was still waiting at the summit."

He said that seeing the scenery he was supposed to see with his daughter became a kind of closure [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) for him.

Now, standing before his daughter's grave, Mitsuo appeals to the Japanese government, which has pushed ahead with the dissolution request without hearing much from current followers:

"Please think about the bereaved families who see this place as their spiritual refuge (拠り所)." [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#)

[Editor's note 1: The sentence quietly conveys emotional resolution. The use of 区切り (kugiri – closure) suggests a personal chapter coming to an end – not forgetting it but reaching a meaningful point of acceptance or peace.]

[Editor's note 2: 拠り所 (yoridokoro) translated as "spiritual refuge" may also mean emotional support, source of spiritual or emotional grounding, a place or idea to lean on. 拠り所 (yoridokoro) is a powerful term. It doesn't just mean a physical location – it implies emotional or spiritual reliance, especially in the context of grief or trauma.

The sentence as a whole is a heartfelt plea – asking authorities (or society) not just to focus on legal or political matters, but to remember the emotional stakes for the families left behind.]

See part 2 [Sacilege: Japanese State Violating the Sacred](#)

Featured image above: Mitsuo Ito (伊藤光夫) – left – and Ryoko Ito (伊藤良子) visit the grave of their eldest daughter, Kotomi, at the Central Japan Cemetery — April 26, in Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

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