

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Media on Who Leads after Holy Mother Han?

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Featured image above: From the Cheonwon Temple's DScedripr April 13, 2025



JoongAng Ilbo S Korean daily

A large South Korean daily takes a closer look at the question of succession in the Family Federation

An [article](#) published by the large South Korean daily JoongAng Ilbo on 17th February examines an issue that, to many outside Korea - and certainly to those unfamiliar with [Unificationism](#) (officially known today as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) - may seem complex, opaque, and even startling. At its core, according to [the newspaper](#), it is about succession: who will inherit leadership of a global religious movement and how deeply family structure, theology, and loyalty are intertwined in that process.



The [True Parents](#) - [Father Moon](#) and [Mother Han](#)

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Moon Shin-heung 14th October 2025 in Gapyeong, South Korea



Moon Shin-chul, here speaking at a rally in Seoul October 2025



Moon Hyo-jin, here 24th February 2007 in Gapyeong, South Korea

To understand the stakes, some background is necessary.

The [Family Federation](#) teaches that [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명) and his wife, [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), are the "True Parents" of humankind - a divinely appointed couple sent to complete the mission that Jesus, in their theology, had been unable to fulfill. Central to [Unificationist](#) doctrine is the idea that the Fall of Man corrupted the human lineage. Restoration, therefore, requires the establishment of "true families" through [blessed marriages](#) that reconnect humanity to a [sinless bloodline](#).

Reporter Baek Seong-ho (백성호), who penned the [article](#), writes that unlike most Christian denominations, which separate ecclesiastical leadership from biological inheritance, the [Family Federation](#) integrates theology and family lineage into a single framework when it comes to determining the successors of [Sun Myung Moon](#) (1920-2012) and [Hak Ja Han](#) - by many called [Father Moon](#) and [Mother Han](#). [Bloodline](#) is not symbolic - it is doctrinally decisive.

This is why succession within the Moon family has always carried both religious and institutional weight. When [Father Moon](#) died in 2012, leadership passed to [Mother Han](#). Now 83 years old and reportedly facing legal troubles as well as multiple health problems, she presides over a [movement](#) that is at a crossroads. The [JoongAng Ilbo article](#) claims that the obvious question of who will ultimately lead the [movement](#) remains unsettled.

Moon Shin-heung 14th October 2025 in Gapyeong, South Korea. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

According to [the writer](#), [Hak Ja Han](#) has indicated that her grandsons - Moon Shin-chul (문신출) and Moon Shin-heung (문신흥) - are to be the future standard-bearers. Both are in their twenties, which immediately raises practical concerns: youth implies vulnerability. As a result, experienced adults stand behind them. Chief among these is their mother, Choi Yeon-ah (최연아) - also known as Moon Yeon-ah (문연아) - who has held senior administrative positions within the movement and currently chairs Sunhak Academy, one of its major educational foundations. She is described as a close confidante of [Mother Han](#) and functions as a key organizational actor.

To grasp why this matters, one must step back a generation.

Moon Shin-chul and Moon Shin-heung are sons of Moon Hyo-jin (문효진 - 1961-2008), the eldest son of [Father Moon](#). Within [Unificationist](#) theology, Moon Hyo-jin occupied a unique position. He was the first son born to the "True Parents", who were believed to be free from original sin. This made him, according to the

JoongAng Ilbo, in the [Family Federation](#)'s understanding, the first male of a restored, [sinless lineage](#). In symbolic and theological terms, that is an immense burden. In institutional terms, it positioned him as the natural heir apparent.

But biography often complicates theology.

In his [piece](#), reporter Baek points out that Moon Hyo-jin did not conform neatly to expectations of clerical or spiritual leadership. As a young man, he immersed himself in heavy metal and rock music. This was not a casual pastime; he recorded approximately fifteen albums and performed actively. The contrast

between the son of a messianic religious leader and the aesthetics of heavy metal is striking, but the [article](#) notes that his music frequently expressed devotion to his parents - the "[True Parents](#)" - and themes of repentance and spiritual longing. His artistic life was not, in his view, necessarily rebellious.



Moon (born Choi) Yeon-ah, October 2025



Moon Heung-jin, here in November 1983. Photo: [FFWPU](#)



Bo Hi Pak (Pak Bo-hee) (1930-2019), here in 1974 in Birmingham, Alabama

Still, his personal life was turbulent. His first marriage, to Hong Nan-sook (홍난숙), ended in divorce. A memoir, *In the Shadow of the Moons*, was published in her name, but was largely written by a ghostwriter, a journalist from the *Boston Globe*, Eileen McNamara, who had strong ties to the so-called anti-cult movement.

The book contained allegations about the private life of Moon Hyo-jin, and the *JoongAng Ilbo* claims that the publicity apparently weakened his position within the [movement's](#) succession hierarchy. He later remarried Choi Yeon-ah - reportedly at [his father's](#) direction - and they had six children, including the two sons now identified as potential successors.

In 2008, at age 46, Moon Hyo-jin died suddenly of cardiac arrest at his home in Seoul. With his death, the most straightforward line of succession - father to eldest son - effectively collapsed.

The [article](#) then turns to the second son, Moon Heung-jin (문흥진 - 1966-1984), whose life and death are even more central to understanding the movement's internal logic.

Moon Heung-jin died at age 17 in a car accident in New York. A truck reportedly skidded across the center line on icy roads and collided with his vehicle. He was unmarried. The *JoongAng Ilbo* reports mentions that in most religious traditions, the death of a teenager is a tragedy but not a theological crisis. In [Unificationism](#), however, [marriage](#) is not merely a social milestone; it is a salvific requirement. The formation of a "true family" through the [marriage blessing](#) is essential to spiritual completion and entry into the [Kingdom of Heaven](#).

According to the teachings, someone who dies unmarried has not fulfilled the necessary condition of establishing a [restored lineage](#). The [article](#) even notes that the [Family Federation](#) interprets Jesus' death in this light: Because the [Kingdom of Heaven](#) could not be established here on the earth during the lifetime of Jesus, it could not be erected in the eternal world either. Jesus was crucified before marrying and has since resided in the highest realm of paradise. Although it is extremely beautiful, it is not the [Kingdom of Heaven](#) that can only come into existence when a sufficient foundation has been made on the earth. A [blessed marriage](#), in [Unificationism](#), is not peripheral - it is essential for one's eternal life.

It was within this framework that one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of [Unificationism](#) occurred: the spirit marriage of Moon Heung-jin.

A spirit marriage, in this context, is a religious ceremony uniting a living person with a deceased individual. The practice reflects the [movement's](#) belief that earthly and spiritual realms remain interconnected and that marital bonds can be established across that boundary.

At the time of Moon Heung-jin's death, there had reportedly been discussions of engagement between him and Pak Hoon-sook (박훈숙), the daughter of Bo Hi Pak (박보희), a close aide to [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명). Pak was not a marginal figure. According to the *JoongAng Ilbo*, he was a former military officer and diplomat who later became the founding president of the conservative American newspaper *The Washington Times*. He was fluent in English and was widely considered one of [Father Moon's](#) most

trusted lieutenants.

After the fatal accident, [Sun Myung Moon](#) reportedly told Pak that the engagement should be considered void and that his daughter should be free to marry someone else. At the time, she was 21 years old and building a promising career as a ballerina. By all conventional reasoning, this would have been the compassionate path forward.



Instead, according to the [article](#), she ultimately chose to proceed with a spirit marriage to Moon Heung-jin who had already left this earthly world. Even more symbolically charged, the ceremony reportedly included another marriage on the same day: Moon In-jin (문인진) - one of [Father Moon](#)'s daughters - married Pak's son Pak Jin-sung (박진성). In effect, two sibling pairs from the two families were united in a single ritual event, further binding the Moon and Pak families together.

For outside observers, the episode may appear bewildering or emotionally fraught. Within the internal logic of [Unificationist](#) theology, however, it can be seen as an effort to preserve the [heavenly lineage](#) originating in the [True Parents](#) as well as spiritual continuity despite death.

The [JoongAng article](#) situates all of these historical threads within the present issue of succession. With [Father Moon](#) gone and [Mother Han](#) aging and facing legal scrutiny, the [movement](#) is reorganizing. The [article](#) refers to a "two daughters-in-law system", suggesting that women married into the Moon family are now playing structurally significant roles in shaping institutional continuity.

In summary, what may initially read as a sensational narrative about "spirit marriage" is in fact part of a broader institutional story: a global religious organization whose theology fuses [lineage](#), [marriage](#), and salvation must resolve leadership questions through the same familial framework. For readers unfamiliar with Korean religious movements, it is crucial to understand that in [Unificationism](#), family is not metaphor. It is a key part not only of doctrine, but as we now see, of governance structure, and succession plan as well.

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allegations already suggest potentially far-reaching consequences for politicians across party lines.

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According to [the Hankyoreh](#), the joint investigation headquarters – launched on 6th January – was created specifically to examine suspicions of “religion-politics collusion”. In South Korea, where religious groups can wield substantial social influence, the idea that organized religious bodies may have attempted to sway elections or curry favor with political elites has become a highly sensitive issue. Since its formation, the task force has carried out search and seizure operations and summoned numerous individuals for questioning. Investigators are attempting to reconstruct events in detail: who met whom, what money changed hands, and whether any of these transactions violated criminal law.

The inquiry into what is now called the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) – referred to by its former name the [Unification Church](#) in the [article](#) – focuses primarily on alleged financial lobbying of politicians from both the ruling and opposition parties. In fact, suspicion of bribery was the original trigger for the creation of the joint investigation unit.



Yoon Yeong-ho, 5th Dec. 2021. Screenshot from live transmission from an international rally by [FFWPU](#).

The controversy intensified after it became known that [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), a former senior official at the [Family Federation](#)’s world headquarters, reportedly told investigators that between 2018 and 2020 he delivered tens of millions of Korean won to several prominent political figures. These include Jeon Jae-soo (전재수), a lawmaker from the Democratic Party; Lim Jong-seong (임종성), a former *Democratic Party* legislator; and Kim Kyu-hwan (김규환), now head of the state-run Korea Coal Corporation and previously affiliated with the conservative *United Future Party*.

The [South Korean paper](#) writes that [Yoon](#) is also separately accused of giving luxury items – such as an expensive necklace and handbag – to former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희), which further heightened public scrutiny.

According to the allegations, one lawmaker received 20 million won (ca. \$13,900) in cash and a luxury watch worth 10 million won (ca. \$6,950) around 2018. Two other politicians are suspected of having received 30 million won (ca. \$20,850) each around the time of the April 2020 parliamentary elections. Internal documents of the [religious organization](#) reportedly include references to meetings with these figures, appearing in materials prepared for reporting to the [Federation](#)’s leader, [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) – known within the [organization](#) as “True Mother”. The politicians named in the reports have firmly denied accepting any illegal funds.

A central legal challenge for prosecutors is South Korea’s statute of limitations. For illegal political funding, the limitation period is seven years. If a payment occurred in 2018, prosecution for that specific offense may already be time-barred. Investigators may instead attempt to pursue bribery charges, but that requires proving a quid pro quo – that money was given in exchange for specific political favors.

Moreover, the applicable limitation period depends on the amount allegedly received. If the sum was under 30 million won (ca. \$20,850), the limit is seven years; if 30 million won or more but less than 100 million won (ca. \$69,500), the limit extends to ten years. As a result, investigators must not only establish that at least 30 million won was transferred, but also demonstrate a concrete exchange relationship between the payment and an official act.

The [Hankyoreh](#) mentions another aspect of the investigation into the [Family Federation](#), concerning so-called “split donations”. This refers to a tactic in which a large sum of money is divided into smaller contributions, often distributed under multiple names, in order to circumvent legal caps on political donations.

Prosecutors have already indicted Song Kwang-seok (송광석), a former head of the *Universal Peace Federation* – an organization affiliated with the [Family Federation](#) – on charges of violating the *Political Funds Act*. He allegedly arranged donations totaling 13 million won (ca. \$9,000) to 11 politicians from both major parties in January 2019. Investigators suspect that senior leadership of the [religious organization](#) may have been aware of or coordinated these actions, and further inquiries are ongoing.



Song Kwang-seok, here 26th April 2024. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

Parallel to the [Family Federation](#) case is a separate but related investigation into Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#), a new religious movement (NRM) that gained global attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. In early 2020, a major outbreak in the city of Daegu was linked to a Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) congregation, and the group faced intense criticism. At the time, Lee Jae-myung (이재명) – then governor of Gyeonggi Province and later the *Democratic Party*’s presidential candidate – took a particularly hard line against the organization, pursuing aggressive legal and administrative measures.



Aggressively promoting special counsel investigations: **Lee Jae-**

The [Hankyoreh](#) [article](#) points out that investigators are now examining allegations that, beginning in mid-to-late 2021, Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) systematically encouraged or organized its members to join the conservative *People Power Party*. The timing is politically significant. As Lee Jae-myung (이재명) emerged as the likely Democratic presidential nominee for the 2022 election, some former Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) officials claim the organization sought to align itself with the opposing party as a survival strategy. By building influence within the *People Power Party*’s membership base, they allegedly hoped to gain political leverage and cultivate a more favorable environment.

At that time, Yoon Suk-yeol

myung, President of South Korea since 4th June 2025. Photo: Jeonnam Provincial Government / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#). Cropped

(윤석열) – formerly South Korea’s Prosecutor General – was competing in the People Power Party’s presidential primary. During his tenure as Prosecutor General, he had reportedly rejected police requests for



Former President Yoon Suk-yeol of the Republic of Korea April 25, 2023, in Maryland, USA. Photo: NASA/Aubrey Gemignani. [Public domain image](#). Cropped

search warrants targeting Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) on two occasions. According to statements from former insiders, Shincheonji leaders believed that helping Yoon secure the party’s nomination might foster a friendlier relationship. Recordings of internal phone calls among Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) executives allegedly mention the names of senior party lawmakers in this context.

Based on these suspicions, the joint investigation headquarters recently carried out search and seizure operations on allegations that Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) may have coerced members into joining a political party against their free will, potentially violating the Political Parties Act. Authorities are also investigating whether the group interfered with the internal management of the party’s presidential primary process – an act that could constitute obstruction of business under Korean law.



Lee Man-hee (이만희), founder and chairman of Shincheonji (New Heaven and Earth). Photo: [MBC PD 수첩](#) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp

According to the [Hankyoreh](#), the scope of the Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) probe may extend further. Former officials have suggested that when the group’s leader, Lee Man-hee (이만희), was arrested and prosecuted for alleged violations of infectious disease control laws during the pandemic, funds were collected from regional branches for possible lobbying efforts aimed at political and legal institutions. A recorded phone call, made public in the media, captures Lee suggesting meetings with members of the National Assembly and officials at the presidential office (then known as the Blue House) to resolve the group’s legal troubles. Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#), for its part, strongly denies any coercion of party membership or illegal lobbying.

These investigations raise broader questions about transparency, political finance, and the influence of organized religious movements in South Korean democracy. Both the [Family Federation](#) and Shincheonji [\[See editor’s note below\]](#) deny wrongdoing, and no final judicial conclusions have yet been reached. Nevertheless, the inquiry has already generated significant political tension. Depending on the evidence uncovered – and whether prosecutors can overcome legal hurdles such as statutes of limitations – the case could have lasting ramifications for politicians, religious leaders, and public trust in the separation of religion and state in South Korea.

See also [Media on Succession: Who Leads after Mother Han?](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: South Korean investigation. Illustration: Chat GPT, February 2026, edited

[Editor’s note: Shincheonji], officially known as *Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony*, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible’s Book of Revelation. Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it.]

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