

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Banning Family Fed Based on 19th Century Pseudoscience

Knut Holdhus
June 27, 2026



Concepts of pseudoscience like "eugenics" and "mind control theory" easily gaining broad acceptance. The top image depicts the Warsaw Ghetto uprising during World War II. The bottom image depicts Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#) abducted, forcibly detained for 12 years and 5 months, while exposed to coercive faith-breaking at the hands of his own family and professional faith-breakers. Illustration: ChatGPT



The Family Federation dissolution case illustrates how concepts from pseudoscience can gain broad acceptance, influencing Japan's media, judiciary, public authorities, educational institutions, and public opinion

Tokyo, 25th June 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Editorial]

A Decision That Violates the Human Rights of Believers

Dissolution of the Family Federation

by the editorial board of [Sekai Nippo](#)

The Supreme Court has [dismissed](#) the [special appeal](#) filed by the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) regarding the [court order](#) to dissolve it as a religious corporation, thereby making the loss of its legal religious status final.

See also [Ruling Leaves Serious Questions on Due Process](#)

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The dissolution proceedings began under the administration of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) in response to criticism following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), over the [religious organization](#)'s solicitation of large donations on the grounds that "victims" should be compensated. Nearly four years have passed since those proceedings began. Yet the possibility that the human rights of tens of thousands of believers could be disregarded represents a blind spot in Japanese society and will leave a lasting negative legacy.

A Judgment Based on Speculation



Former prime minister Fumio Kishida delivering a speech at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) 2nd Nov. 2, 2021

As in the decisions of the lower courts, the [Supreme Court's ruling](#) is based on conjecture despite the absence of evidence showing the continued commission of civil-law torts by the [religious organization](#).

To issue such a momentous decision on uncertain grounds suggests that, beyond distrust and prejudice toward the [religious organization](#), the influence of criticism based on concepts such as "mind control" [See editor's note 1 below] can be discerned.

The ruling states:

"The appellant (the [religious organization](#)) has failed to take effective measures to prevent believers from engaging in inappropriate solicitation of donations. There is a risk that, in the future, it will continue to require believers to solicit donations by setting numerical targets that cannot be achieved through methods and manners of solicitation that remain within socially acceptable bounds. In that event, there is a high likelihood that believers will engage in the aforementioned solicitation activities.



A Japanese woman offering a donation at a meeting. A hostile group of lawyers used consumer laws and coined the term "spiritual sales" on donations given to religious organizations and try every trick to label donors as "victims". Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator

Therefore, in order to address such conduct by the appellant, it is necessary and appropriate to dissolve the [appellant](#) and deprive it of its corporate status, and it cannot be said that there exist any other effective means, including measures under the Act on the Prevention of Improper Solicitation of Donations by Corporations and Other Entities."

This is what the decision says.

First, considering the fact that lawsuits concerning large donations virtually disappeared after the [religious organization's](#) 2009 "Compliance Declaration" [See editor's note 2 below], it is reasonable to conclude that effective preventive measures had in fact been implemented.

Nevertheless, the [Court](#) refused to acknowledge this and instead ordered dissolution based on hypothetical assumptions expressed in phrases such as "there is a risk", "in that event", and "there is a high likelihood". This can only be described as careless. It is tantamount to saying that believers are "brainwashed" and beyond

help, so the [religious organization](#) should simply be dissolved. What underlies this fixed idea are rumors and labels such as "destructive cult" (破壊のカルト).

Justice Masami Okino (沖野真巳), who reportedly did not participate in this decision, stated at a consumer law seminar hosted by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations two years ago that:

"The acts described as evangelism or religious instruction [by the [Family Federation](#)] are themselves fundamentally problematic conduct," and " they can be understood as conduct that can lead to violations of religious freedom or even violations affecting the person's entire autonomy and personhood." [See editor's note 3 below]

Every religion seeks to increase its membership through missionary work and evangelism. However, the view that the [Family Federation's](#) evangelism amounts to an infringement upon the "entire autonomy" [See editor's note 3 below]of its believers aligns with arguments such as "mind control" employed by [faith-breaking](#) (deprogramming) specialists who forcibly induce [Family Federation](#) members to renounce their faith and who use such reasoning to justify the abduction and confinement of believers.

Do Not Repeat the Mistakes of Eugenics



AI-illustration of Justice Masami Okino

In the United States, the concept of "mind control" has been rejected in court as unscientific.

However, the precedent established in Japan through the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) could lend momentum to claims based on this kind of pseudoscience.

Japan must not repeat the mistake made in Germany, where eugenics [See editor's note 4 below] once became intertwined with discriminatory antisemitism [See editor's note 5 below].

See also [Ruling Leaves Serious Questions on Due Process](#)

See also [Japan's Treatment of Faith Minority Families](#)

[Editor's note 1: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept

suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "[deprogramming](#)" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Family Federation](#). A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

[Editor's note 2: The 2009 compliance declaration of the [Unification Church](#) of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the [organization](#) to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The [Unification Church](#) in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the [organization](#) to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The [Unification Church](#) stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#) - since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#). The [religious organization](#) has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to [dissolution](#).]

[Editor's note 3: "Violations affecting the person's entire autonomy and personhood" (全人格的な侵害 - zenjinkaku-teki na shingai) is a very strong expression and a key concept in the vocabulary of so-called [faith-breakers](#) (deprogrammers) and activist lawyers.

It does not refer to physical injury. Rather, it describes interference with someone's capacity to think, choose, and develop as an autonomous individual. The idea is that something affects not just one aspect of a person, but their entire psychological and moral agency.

In Japan, in the context of religious movements, this phrase often appears in discussions about alleged psychological coercion, "mind control", undue influence, coercive persuasion.

So-called "anti-cult activists" and activist lawyers argue that the methods of evangelism are so psychologically manipulative that they undermine an individual's independent judgment and identity. Such a characterization assumes the truth of the controversial "mind control" theory.

Its reasoning is essentially based on the hostile assumption that evangelism is said to produce "violations affecting the person's entire autonomy and personhood". Then converts are viewed as incapable of making free choices, which in turn can be used to justify extraordinary measures against the organization - such as dissolution - or even against believers themselves.

Such unreasonable reasoning can be linked to the claims of professional [faith-breakers](#) (deprogrammers who argue that members of religious organizations have been "brainwashed" and therefore could legitimately be subjected to [coercive faith-breaking](#) or forcible deconversion.

The Japanese expression "全人格的な侵害 - zenjinkaku-teki na shingai" may also be rendered as "an infringement upon a person's whole personhood" or "a profound violation of personal autonomy and identity", alternatively "an assault on a person's psychological autonomy". It may also be said to mean "an impairment of a person's capacity for independent judgment and self-determination".]

[Editor's note 4: In late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe and North America, eugenics began as a movement claiming that society could be improved by encouraging the reproduction of those deemed "fit" and discouraging or preventing the reproduction of those deemed "unfit". It presented itself as scientific, drawing on then-current ideas about heredity.



Francis Galton (1822-1911)

Charles Darwin's cousin Francis Galton (1822 - 1911) who coined the term eugenics in 1883, drew ideas from the materialistic worldview of Darwinism and applied them to human society.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin argued that humans evolved through the same natural processes as other species, including natural and sexual selection. He suggested that modern civilization weakened natural selection by allowing people with serious hereditary illnesses to survive and reproduce, though he also insisted that sympathy and care for the vulnerable were among humanity's highest moral instincts. Darwin himself did not advocate state-directed breeding programs. However, his discussion of heredity, fitness, and human variation was later reinterpreted and extended by others. Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin, developed eugenics from these ideas, promoting selective reproduction. Later, proponents of Social Darwinism and racial hygiene misapplied evolutionary concepts to justify inequality,

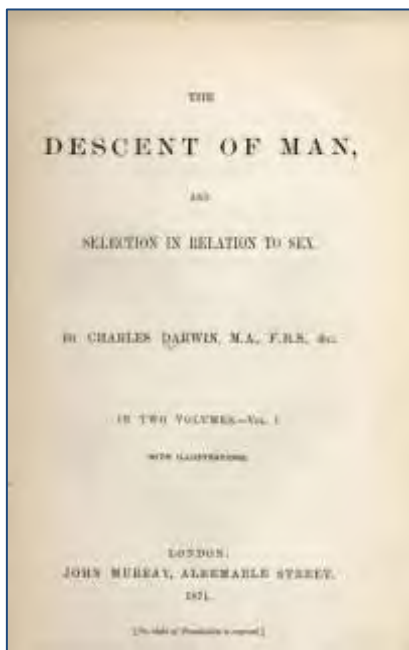
racism, forced sterilization, and discriminatory policies.

In Germany, these ideas became increasingly entangled with racial ideology, particularly antisemitism. Race was treated as a biological reality. Many eugenicists believed humanity consisted of biologically distinct races with inherited moral and intellectual characteristics. These claims are now understood to have been scientifically unfounded.

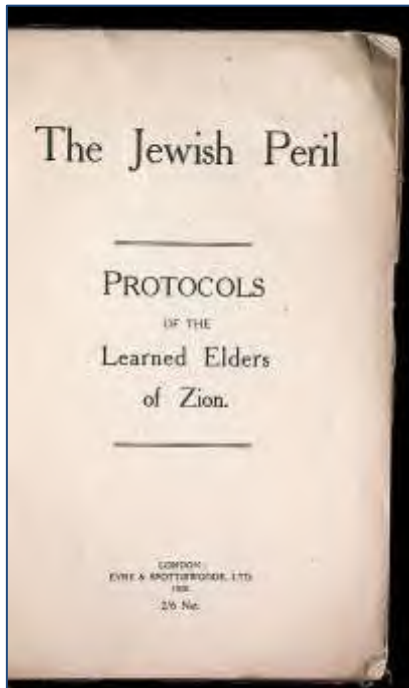
Long-standing religious and cultural antisemitism was reframed in pseudo-scientific terms. Rather than depicting Jews simply as followers of another religion, antisemitic writers increasingly described them as an inherently inferior or dangerous "race" and a biological threat. The Nazi regime fused eugenics with racial antisemitism.

After 1933, the Nazi government used eugenic language to justify policies aimed at protecting the supposed "racial health" of the German people. This included compulsory sterilization of people with certain disabilities or illnesses, restrictions on marriage, and the legal classification of Jews and other

groups as racially alien.



Cover page of Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871)



*The Japanese network of lawyers painting a black picture of the [Family Federation](#), uses similar rhetoric to what the Nazis used against the Jews. Here the title page of the 1920 British publication of the anonymous edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an antisemitic fraudulent publication describing an alleged Jewish conspiracy to take over the world.*

The same framework escalated to persecution and genocide. Once the state accepted the premise that some groups were biologically harmful, increasingly severe measures were justified in the name of protecting society. This culminated in the systematic murder of approximately six million Jews during The Holocaust, along with the persecution and murder of many other groups.

[Editor's note 5: The editorial argues that the concept of "mind control" is a form of pseudoscience and warns that accepting it in legal decisions could stigmatize an entire religious group. To reinforce that warning, it points to the historical example of eugenics, arguing that ideas presented as scientific can become intertwined with prejudice and lead to discrimination.

The comparison is rhetorical, not historical. It is not claiming that the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) is equivalent to Nazi policies. Rather, it is drawing the broader lesson that legal or governmental decisions should be cautious about relying on theories that critics regard as lacking scientific validity, because history shows that pseudoscientific concepts can be used to legitimize state persecution.]

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Part 1 of opinion
contribution by Dr.
Massimo Introvigne,
Founder and Managing
Director of the Center for
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Japan’s Supreme Court Finalizes Dissolution of the Family Federation

Serious Questions About Neutrality and Due Process

by Massimo Introvigne, Sociologist of Religion

The lawsuit has come to an end through a swift and remarkably concise ruling. Yet the judgment leaves serious questions regarding judicial neutrality, due process, and the future of religious freedom in Japan.

See also [Japan’s Treatment of Faith Minority Families](#)

See also [Dissolution Case: Pseudoscience Shaping Verdict](#)

On 23rd June, Japan’s Supreme Court finalized the Tokyo High Court’s [2026 decision](#) upholding the dissolution order against the [Unification Church](#) (the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)). The decision was issued with unusual speed, and its reasoning leaves many important questions unanswered.

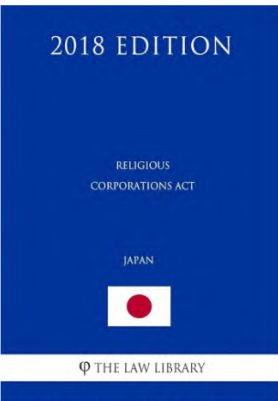
The ruling concludes a series of judicial proceedings that began after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍 晋三). Throughout the process, however, the case unfolded amid political pressure, a hostile media environment, and a [new interpretation](#) of the *Religious Corporations Act* that opened the door to a legal outcome previously regarded as impossible.



Logo of [Bitter Winter](#), the world’s leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

Corporations Act. It treated acts of civil wrongdoing (tortious acts) committed by individual believers as grounds for dissolving the [religious corporation](#) itself. Moreover, the conduct at issue consisted neither of criminal offenses nor of recent acts.

The [Tokyo High Court](#) further embraced the proposition that a religious organization may be dissolved if aspects of its internal culture or doctrinal characteristics are deemed likely to create a risk of future harm. This standard is extraordinarily vague and expansive and, if applied broadly,



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

Bitter Winter previously analyzed the [Tokyo High Court’s decision](#) in detail. That [ruling](#) relied primarily on civil lawsuits dating back several decades and adopted an expansive interpretation of Article 81 of the *Religious*



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substantiating legal and expertise and, applied broadly, could potentially be used against virtually any religion.

The Supreme Court has now fully endorsed that reasoning. Its decision is notably brief. While dismissing the appeal, it offers almost no additional analysis beyond affirming the [High Court's conclusions](#).

The core of the decision merely repeats the lower court's findings, accepting its factual determinations without substantial independent examination and adopting its legal framework without responding to concerns raised by scholars, human rights experts, and international observers.

The Supreme Court states that a dissolution order affects only the legal status of the [religious corporation](#) and does not restrict believers' freedom to practice their faith itself. Therefore, it concludes, the order does not violate the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion.



Forced to hold worship services at home: Members of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan gathering in someone's home on 5th April 2026. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

he Court also acknowledges that liquidation proceedings will result in the [disposal of property](#) that has been used for places of worship and religious activities. Nevertheless, it characterizes these consequences not as restrictions on religious life but merely as “indirect” effects.

This reasoning simply mirrors that of the [Tokyo High Court](#) without confronting the more fundamental issue: in Japan, **the loss of corporate legal status has an enormous practical impact on believers' religious lives. Losing legal personality directly affects the ability to own property, manage finances, employ staff, and maintain stable, ongoing religious activities.**

The Supreme Court characterizes these consequences as merely “indirect”, but that characterization fails to reflect the reality of how religious communities actually function.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

See also [Japan's Treatment of Faith Minority Families](#)

See also [Dissolution Case: Pseudoscience Shaping Verdict](#)

Featured image above: Massimo Introvigne was born in

Rome, Italy, in June 1955. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), an international network of scholars specializing in new religious movements. He has authored approximately 70 books and more than 100 academic articles in the field of sociology of religion and serves as editor-in-chief of the online magazine Bitter Winter. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

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