

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Masumi Fukuda on Political Origins of Japan's Family Fed Smear Campaign

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Masumi Fukuda speaking at the [press conference](#) in Brussels on 29th June 2026. Screenshot from live transmission by [HRWF](#)

Investigative journalist exposes the hidden political agenda behind decades long smear campaign against the Family Federation and how the media created a villain

Part 3 of a speech given by Japanese investigative journalist and prize-winning author Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ) at a [press conference](#) on the theme "Japan: The Hidden Story Behind the Eradication of a Religion", held at the Brussels Press Club in Brussels, Belgium on 29th June 2026, organized by [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#) (HRWF), an independent non-profit NGO. Translated from the transcription of the original Japanese, slightly edited.



The headtable of speakers at the [press conference](#) at the Press Club in Brussels on June 29, 2026

Continued from part 1: [The Hidden Story Japan Doesn't Want You to Hear](#)

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In the 1980s, companies operated by members of the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] imported products from South Korea - including multi-level pagodas and large stone urns - and sold them at prices far above their market value. These sales practices became the subject of widespread public criticism. They came to be known as "spiritual sales" (靈感商法 - reikan shōhō).



A miniature pagoda similar to ones sold in Japan

A group calling itself the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales was established, claiming that its purpose was to help "victims" of these practices. This organization, commonly known as the National Network of Lawyers (全国弁連 - Zenkoku Benren), consisted of more than 300 lawyers, many of whom were politically left-leaning, including members of the far left.

Founded in May 1987, the network worked closely with the media to portray "spiritual sales" as a massive fraudulent enterprise. Their campaign was so successful that the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] itself came to be seen as the villain.

However, the companies importing and selling these products were not operated by the [church](#) [See editor's note below] itself. They were businesses run by individual [church](#) members.

Moreover, both the number of alleged "victims" and the amount of financial "damage" were, in my opinion, greatly exaggerated by the National Network of Lawyers. Not a single one of these cases ever resulted in criminal fraud charges. In fact, I interviewed several believers who had purchased these products and who told me they had experienced what they regarded as genuine miracles afterward.

The media adopted a policy of completely ignoring such testimonies. As a result, the public was presented with a highly distorted picture of what had actually happened.

Meanwhile, the companies involved stopped importing and selling stone urns, pagodas, and similar products in March 1987. From that point onward, the number of complaints steadily declined.

By the time former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) was assassinated, the type of sales activity referred to as "spiritual sales" had virtually disappeared.



Hiroshi Yamaguchi, activist leftwing lawyer and founder and leading member of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS)

Nevertheless, investigations continue to be conducted as though the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] were still engaged in such practices.

However, I believe the true purpose behind the creation of the National Network of Lawyers lay elsewhere. Its real objective was to block the enactment of Japan's proposed Anti-Espionage Law (スパイ防止法).

In 1987, organizations affiliated with the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] were conducting a nationwide campaign supporting the passage of anti-espionage legislation. The Japanese Communist Party, left-wing media organizations, labor unions, and teachers' unions strongly opposed the proposal.

Because many members of the National Network of Lawyers were themselves affiliated with the Communist movement, they likewise opposed the Anti-Espionage Law.

One of the network's leading figures at the time, attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi (山口博), stated quite openly that the real issue was not simply "spiritual sales". He argued that the movement

surrounding the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] was closely tied to conservative political activities, and that those activities needed to be stopped.

In other words, from its very beginning, the campaign against the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note below] was not solely about consumer protection. It was also deeply connected with political conflict in Japan.

For many years, however, the campaign made only limited progress.

To be continued. Part 4 coming soon.

Continued from part 1: [The Hidden Story Japan Doesn't Want You to Hear](#)

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[Editor's note: Although Masumi Fukuda uses the name "[Unification Church](#)" and also the word "church", please be aware that the [Unification Church](#) in Japan in 2015 changed its name to [Family Federation for World peace and Unification](#).]

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Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수). Photo (2025): Segye Ilbo

On 1st July 2026, religion



correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수) of the South Korean daily Segye Ilbo published an [opinion column](#) examining an enduring constitutional question: what does genuine religious freedom require of a democratic state? His [discussion](#) focuses not on legal prohibitions against religion, but on the more subtle ways in which

governments may appear to privilege certain faiths through longstanding public customs and ceremonial practices. The [article](#) argues that the true test of religious liberty is found not in the treatment of large, socially influential religious traditions, but in the extent to which minority religions enjoy equal protection and recognition under the constitutional order.

See also [“Church Closure” Risks in South Korea’s New Bill](#)

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President Syngman Rhee (이승만) looking at the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Korea in 1948. It was first adopted in 1948 and amended several times. It establishes the country as a democratic republic founded on popular sovereignty, the rule of law, and the separation of powers. It guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, provides for a directly elected president, a unicameral National Assembly, and an independent judiciary headed by the Constitutional Court of Korea. Photo: Unknown author / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image

The starting point for the [discussion](#) is the Constitution of the Republic of Korea. It guarantees every citizen freedom of religion while simultaneously declaring that there shall be no state religion and that religion and government are institutionally separate. Together, these provisions establish a principle of governmental neutrality toward matters of faith. Rather than endorsing or opposing particular religious traditions, the state is expected to maintain an equal relationship with all religions, allowing individuals to determine their own beliefs without official preference or discrimination.

The [column](#) observes, however, that constitutional principles and public practice do not always coincide. In South Korea’s public life, the country’s largest religious communities – especially Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity – frequently occupy a prominent place in official ceremonies. Presidents and other senior government officials regularly attend important commemorative events organized by these traditions, while national occasions often include representatives from these major faiths. Such participation may be understandable given their historical development, membership, and social influence. but it nevertheless raises questions about



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whether repeated state engagement with a limited number of religious organizations creates an appearance of unequal treatment.

To explain this phenomenon, Jeong refers to an academic concept sometimes described as a “recognized religion” (공인교 – 公認敎 – gongin-gyo) structure. The term does not suggest that South Korea has legally established religions comparable to those found in countries with official churches or state-supported faiths. Instead, it describes a sociological situation in which certain religious organizations acquire an unofficial public status because they are repeatedly treated as the primary representatives of religion in national life. Through government protocol, ceremonial participation, and institutional practice, these communities may come to enjoy symbolic authority that exceeds their formal legal position.

From this perspective, constitutional equality may coexist with informal hierarchies in everyday governance. The law itself may treat all religions equally, yet social and political customs can nevertheless communicate that some faiths possess greater legitimacy or representativeness than others. The concern is therefore not one of explicit legal discrimination but of accumulated symbolic preference that gradually shapes public expectations about which religions belong at the center of civic life.

The [article](#) places this discussion within a broader historical framework by recalling religious policy during Japan’s colonial administration of Korea between 1910 and 1945. Colonial authorities did not adopt a policy of unrestricted religious freedom.

Instead, they distinguished among religious groups according to political considerations, incorporating some into administrative structures while closely monitoring or suppressing others, particularly those associated with Korean nationalism and the independence movement.

Indigenous religious traditions, including Daejonggyo (대종교 – also rendered as Daejongism), experienced especially severe restrictions because of their connection to resistance against colonial rule. In his 1st July [article](#), Jeong writes,

“This colonial method of rule left behind a way of thinking in which the state classified and managed religions. Although, after liberation, the Republic of Korea declared the separation of religion and state through its Constitution, social practices did not change overnight. Some scholars invoke the concept of a “recognized religion” precisely to explain this historical continuity.”



The flag of **Daejongism** (대종교), a modern Korean nationalist religion founded by Na Cheol (나철 – 羅喆) in 1909 that venerates the legendary progenitor Dangun (단군) as a divine ancestor, emphasizing Korean identity, ethical living, reverence for Korea’s divine origins, and spiritual renewal rooted in indigenous traditions. Image: Baeksanseonin / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#). Cropped



Japanese infantry marching through the main street of Seoul in 1905. Korea was under Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945. Already in 1905, however, after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War, Korea was forced to accept the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905, becoming a Japanese protectorate. While annexation did not occur until 1910, Korea had already lost most of its effective sovereignty by 1905. Photo: Hare, James H., 1856-1946. ed., taken from Russo-Japanese war, 1904-1905 Publisher: New York, P. F. Collier & son 1905 p.39. [Public domain](#) image

Jeong does not argue that contemporary South Korea simply reproduces colonial religious policy. Rather, he notes that some scholars view present-day patterns through the lens of historical continuity, suggesting that habits of classifying and managing religious organizations may have left lasting institutional influences. At the same time, he acknowledges that existing historical evidence does not permit definitive conclusions about direct continuity between colonial administration and current governmental practice. The reference to history therefore serves primarily as a context for understanding how institutional traditions sometimes outlive the political systems that first created them.

The [column](#) ultimately returns to constitutional principles rather than historical causation. If the state is committed to religious neutrality, it must avoid both hostility toward religion and symbolic favoritism. Equal treatment requires more than the absence of discriminatory laws; it also demands that official conduct consistently reflect impartiality. Repeated ceremonial preferences, even when well intentioned, may influence public perception by suggesting that certain religions enjoy a closer relationship with the state than others.

This issue becomes particularly significant when considering minority religions. Large, well-established religious organizations generally possess sufficient social acceptance and institutional resources to participate confidently in public life. Smaller or newer religious communities, by contrast, often lack comparable visibility and may already face social suspicion or misunderstanding. According to the argument advanced in the [column](#), constitutional guarantees demonstrate their greatest value precisely when they protect those groups whose beliefs or practices fall outside the mainstream.

Such protection, however, should not be misunderstood as immunity from legal accountability. Religious freedom does not exempt any organization or individual from compliance with criminal law or other legal obligations. Allegations of fraud, abuse, violence, or other unlawful conduct must be investigated and prosecuted regardless of the religious identity of those involved. The crucial principle is that legal judgments should rest on objective violations of law rather than on the popularity, size, or public reputation of a particular religious movement.

Jeong concludes that the health of a democratic society can be measured by the extent to which it preserves genuine neutrality among competing religious traditions. Government institutions should neither establish official religions nor create informal systems in which only a small number of faiths receive consistent public recognition. Instead, constitutional equality should extend equally to majority and minority religions, old and new religious movements alike. Jeong emphasizes,

“Korea is a country with no established state religion. It should now become a country that also avoids creating a ‘recognized religion’ structure – that is, an ‘invisible state religion’. That is what the Constitution means by religious freedom, and it is, ultimately, the form of society that comes closest to the essence of democracy.”

See also [“Church Closure” Risks in South Korea’s New Bill](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Religion becoming preference in democracies like South Korea. Illustration: ChatGPT, 3rd July 2026

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