

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Coercive Psychiatry and Faith-Breaking in Japan

Knut Holdhus
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Tomoyasu Yoneda delivering his lecture at the SeNichi Club



[Sekai Nippo](#)

The dark side of psychiatry: The hidden human rights abuses and coercion in Japan's psychiatric system compared to coercive deprogramming of members of new religious movements

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Justifying Human Rights Violations in Psychiatric Care

Lecture by Tomoyasu Yoneda, National Representative of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights Japan, at the SeNichi Club

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

The SeNichi Club, an association of [Sekai Nippo](#) readers, held its regular lecture online on the 23rd. Tomoyasu Yoneda (米田倫康), National Representative of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights

(Japan chapter), gave a talk titled "The Archipelago of Asylums: The Dark Side of Psychiatry Without Human Rights."



Citizens Commission on Human Rights on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, California, USA

Yoneda stressed the reality of psychiatric care in Japan:

"Patients can be forcibly hospitalized on the basis of mere suspicion. There are 180,000 such cases annually, about 500 per day. This is a figure that shocks the international community."

He pointed out that modern psychology and psychiatry, grounded in materialism, are based on the assumption that "mental illness stems from problems in the brain or genes." As an efficient means of isolating the genes of the

mentally ill from society, psychiatric wards have proliferated. Yoneda warned,

"In the first place, psychiatric diagnoses largely depend on the subjective judgment of doctors. Despite lacking clear evidence, they hold excessive power that enables them to justify human rights violations."



Professional faith-breaker and victim. Illustration: Grok xAI

Yoneda further argued that psychiatrists in Japan have historically instilled the belief that "mental patients are dangerous, and that forced hospitalization is the only option." He cited cases where healthy individuals were forcibly admitted to psychiatric wards due to abuse of the system. Yoneda asserted,

"The issue is not merely to condemn discriminatory values of the past, but that laws and systems based on those values are still in place today. Psychiatry must be brought back under the rule of

law."

He also touched on the connection with the issue of coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note below] targeting members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification](#)

[Church](#)). He suggested that the process of labeling new religious believers as "brainwashed", disregarding their personal will, and restraining them bears similarities to the process of forcibly hospitalizing psychiatric patients.

[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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Media Speculations: Federation Role In 2022 Vote

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Korea Herald echoes speculations by Christian media outlet that Federation campaigned for one of the presidential candidates in 2022 vote, in violation of election laws


See also [Religious Liberty Under Fire in South Korea](#)

On 20th August 2025, *The Korea Herald* reported allegations that the *Family Federation* engaged in illicit electoral activity during the 2022 South Korean presidential election, purportedly campaigning for then-candidate Yoon Suk-yeol. The article was headlined “[Unification Church campaigned for Yoon Suk Yeol in 2022 presidential election; report](#)”.


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followers on 3rd March 2022 – just ahead of pre-voting – and encouraged them to support Yoon and to heed “the words of the heavens”.

Additionally, **Hak Ja Han**, the **Federation**'s co-founder and current leader, is said to have addressed high-level officials of the **religious organization** on 2nd March, criticizing then-President Moon Jae-in and invoking divine will in the election.

This, combined with reports that funds were funneled to **Federation** branches to assist Yoon's party, has prompted suspicions of a breach of Article 85 of the *Public Official Election Act*, which bans religious groups from using their influence to sway votes. The **Family Federation**, however, denies any illegal support for specific individuals, acknowledging only that it did not sponsor “a certain individual” in an improper way. The article also notes allegations of luxury gifts – bags and a necklace – given to Yoon's wife.



Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea 2017-2022. Photo: The White House, Washington DC / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped



Logo of the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS)

The *Korea Herald* article by reporter Yoon Min-shik is almost entirely based on suspicions and allegations originating in a daily belonging to the *Christian Broadcasting System* (CBS), representing a Christianity that for more than 70 years has persecuted the **Family Federation**.

CBS is not a neutral actor. Its Protestant identity and history of vocal opposition to the **Family Federation / Unification Church** color the credibility and framing of its reports. While this does not invalidate facts, it does raise questions about motive, timing, and emphasis.

By surfacing the allegations during an ongoing probe into Kim Keon-hee, CBS is both amplifying the legal stakes and reinforcing a longstanding narrative of the **Family Federation** and its political involvement.

South Korean media is deeply polarized along political and religious lines. Conservative vs. progressive papers, and Protestant vs. new religious movement outlets, often report the same facts differently. This case illustrates how allegations about electioneering can double as instruments of religious competition.

Elections are of course important for the direction a nation chooses. Therefore, it is easy to understand that concerned religious leaders will always encourage adherents to choose political leaders who align with moral, faith-based principles. The reference to one who could “hear the words of the heavens” may well reflect a desire for righteous governance rather than explicit political endorsement.

The **Federation**'s statement that it “has not illegally sponsored a certain individual” suggests careful navigation within legal parameters. This phrasing acknowledges concern while not explicitly admitting wrongdoing.

In many societies, religious institutions have historically influenced civic life. Supporters may argue that encouraging morally aligned leadership is part of religious participation in societal well-being. This does not necessarily violate laws if done transparently and without undue coercion or financial manipulation.

At present, these remain allegations from media and the special counsel's ongoing probes – not legal findings. Supporters might stress

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The former First Lady of the Republic of Korea Kim Keon-hee (김건희). Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int

the presumption of innocence and the need for robust evidence before drawing conclusions. The [Federation](#) has yet to be formally found in violation; investigations are ongoing.

As for the allegations of the [religious organization](#) being involved in bribery involving the former First Lady Kim Keon-hee, another media

outlet – the Monthly Chosun – has [effectively cleared](#) the [Family Federation](#) of involvement. The magazine writes that the alleged bribes from a former leader of the [Federation](#) are about individual overreach, not institutional corruption. See [Korean Bribery Scandal: Media Clears Federation](#)



The logo of the Monthly Chosun

The [Family Federation](#) has faced intense scrutiny – from raids to travel bans – amid broader corruption probes involving former South Korean President Yoon’s inner circle and his wife, Kim Keon-hee. Critical voices perceive this as politically motivated targeting, given the [Federation’s](#) socio-political beliefs, rather than fair legal scrutiny. See [Korean Faith Crackdown: USA Urged to Confront It](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at a meeting at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., April 27, 2023. DoD photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Alexander Kubitza / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 2.0 Gen](#)

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