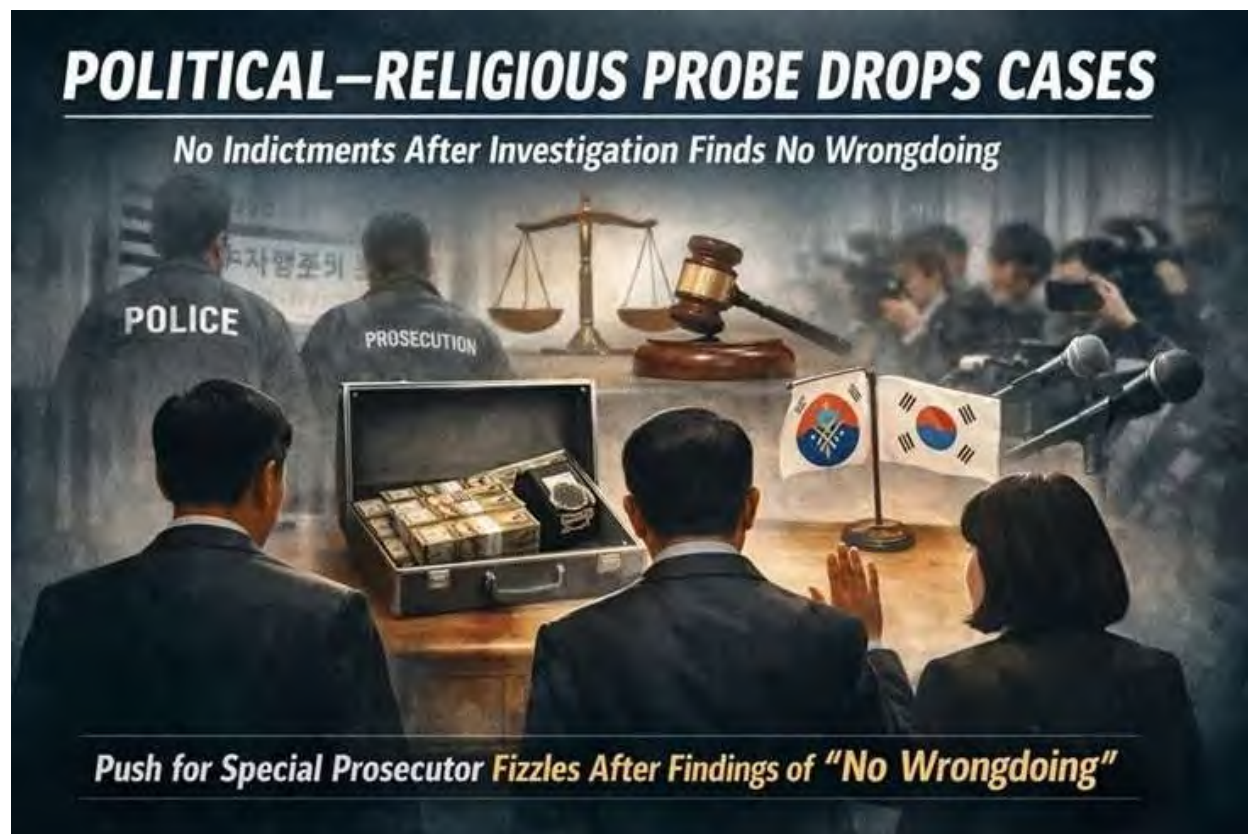


## FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Family Fed Influence Case - No Wrongdoing

Knut Holdhus  
April 11, 2026



Alleged [Unificationism](#) influence case collapses. Illustration: ChatGPT

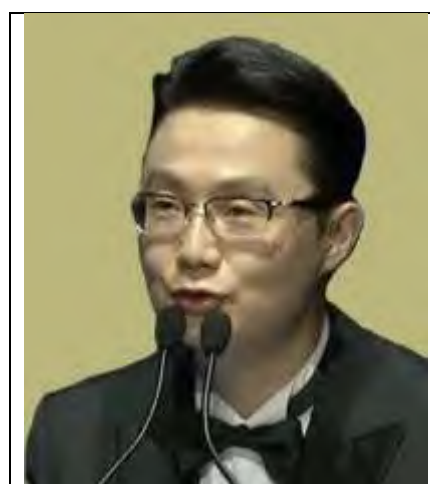


[Segye Ilbo](#)

No proof, no charges: South Korea closes high-profile investigation into Unificationism political ties and influence

The South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) published on 10th April an [article](#) by Kim Ju-yeong (김주영) about a significant development in the long-running investigations into alleged political - religious collusion involving officials of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - in Korea often called [Unificationism](#) (통일교).

See also [S. Korea's Troubling Pattern of Selective Probes](#)



Yoon Yeong-ho, August 9, 2020



Jeong Won-ju, January 19, 2025

The [paper](#) writes,

"The joint investigation team also decided not to indict [Unificationism](#) leader [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), former chief of staff [Jeong Won-ju](#) (정원주), and former director [Yoon](#) (윤영호), citing either lack of prosecutorial authority or insufficient evidence."

The [article](#) reports on the conclusion of a high-profile

investigation in South Korea into alleged financial ties between politicians and the [religious organization](#). At its core, the case revolved around accusations that several political figures across party lines had received money or valuables from representatives of [Unificationism](#) in exchange for influence or favorable treatment.

[Segye Ilbo](#) reporter Kim explains,

"Although it was acknowledged that they maintained some relationship with [Unificationism](#), such as attending its events, there was no evidence beyond Yoon's testimony to support the bribery allegations, and details such as the amount and circumstances of any transfer were unclear."

After an extended inquiry conducted by a joint prosecution-police task force, the authorities ultimately determined that the allegations could not be substantiated. This outcome - driven by insufficient evidence and the expiration of statutory time limits - has significant implications not only for the individuals directly involved but also for broader political and legal debates surrounding religion-state relations in South Korea.



*Jeon Jae-soo 2023*



*Former Democratic Party lawmaker Lim Jong-seong. (2019)*

The investigation centered on figures such as Democratic Party lawmaker Jeon Jae-soo ([전재수](#)), along with former lawmakers Lim Jong-seong ([임종성](#)) and Kim Gyu-hwan ([김규환](#)). These individuals had been accused of receiving illicit funds or gifts from [Unificationism](#) representatives, including cash payments and luxury items allegedly linked to lobbying efforts. One particularly prominent allegation involved claims that Jeon received 20 million won in cash and a high-end watch in connection with a proposed Korea - Japan [undersea tunnel project](#). Additional suspicions arose over payments framed as bulk purchases of his autobiography, which critics suggested might have been a disguised transfer of funds.

However, as the joint investigation progressed, the evidentiary basis for these claims weakened considerably. Testimony from key witnesses - including [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) ([윤영호](#)), a former senior [Family Federation](#) official - proved inconsistent or lacked firsthand verification. Crucially, investigators were unable to corroborate the precise amounts allegedly transferred or to establish a clear transactional link between any benefits received and specific political actions. In legal terms, this failure to meet the burden of proof meant that prosecutors could not demonstrate the essential elements of bribery or illegal political financing.

An equally decisive factor was the statute of limitations. Under South Korean criminal law, bribery cases involving sums below a certain threshold are subject to a seven-year limitation period. Because investigators could not conclusively show that the value of the alleged bribes exceeded that threshold, the applicable time window had already expired. As a result, even if suspicions lingered, the state no longer retained the authority to bring charges. This dual finding - insufficient evidence combined with procedural time bars - led to the formal closure of the case with a decision not to indict any of the investigated figures.

The political ramifications of this conclusion are substantial. For months, the investigation had fueled calls - particularly from segments of the ruling camp - for the appointment of a special prosecutor to examine what was framed as systemic "political-religious collusion". The narrative suggested a pattern of undue influence by religious organizations over elected officials, raising concerns about transparency, governance, and democratic accountability. With the central allegations now dismissed, momentum behind such proposals has significantly diminished. Critics argue that the case demonstrates the risks of politicizing unproven claims, while others maintain that structural concerns about church-state entanglement remain unresolved despite the lack of prosecutable evidence in this instance.

At the same time, the investigation did not end entirely without consequence. Four aides associated with Jeon Jae-soo were indicted - albeit without detention - on charges of destroying evidence. They are accused of wiping computer data in a local office after media reports surfaced and in anticipation of a search and seizure operation. While authorities have not established that Jeon himself ordered these actions, the episode underscores the sensitivity of the case and the degree of concern among those involved about potential legal exposure.

The [article](#) also references the broader scope of ongoing investigations into religious organizations, including allegations involving other groups such as Shincheonji [See editor's note below]. Authorities have indicated that they will continue to pursue cases involving unlawful political donations, coercive practices, tax evasion, and embezzlement where evidence supports such claims. This suggests that,

although the current case has been closed, scrutiny of religious institutions' interactions with political and financial systems is far from over.



*The Shincheonji (신천지) Peace Palace in Cheongpyeong-myeon, on the same lake where the [Family Federation](#) has large facilities, in Gapyeong, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea (2020)*

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See also [S. Korea's Troubling Pattern of Selective Probes](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

**[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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# Media's Role: Frenzy, Silence, And Consequences

April 10, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



*Selective outrage? Media double standards under scrutiny as reporting frenzy is seen as driving dissolution debate and social exclusion of believers from large religious minority*

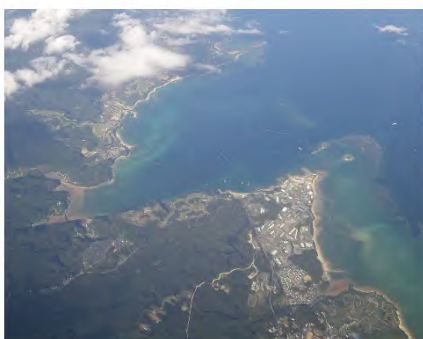
Tokyo, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).



Logo of the *Sekai Nippo*

## [Part 4 of a Series] In Search of a Spiritual Anchor – One Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

### Denouncing the Religious Organization Through the “Second-Generation Narrative”



Henoko District, Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan. Photo: Kugel-commonswiki / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

See part 1 of the series: [Beyond the Ban Believers Sustain Community](#)

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On 16<sup>th</sup> March, a tragic accident occurred off the coast of Henoko in Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan.

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Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, when a protest vessel operated by an anti-base group capsized, resulting in the deaths of high school students on a study tour. Despite the fact that neither the victims nor their parents were aware that they would be boarding a protest vessel, major media outlets have remained silent. Meanwhile, in the shooting of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), the relationship between the defendant Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也) and the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) was widely reported, causing a media frenzy. What accounts for this difference?

Writer Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) commented on X (formerly Twitter),

"Reporting began portraying the victim, former Prime Minister Abe, and the LDP as being at fault, with some outlets reporting on it several times a day for over two months. [...] In contrast, in the Henoko incident, certain circles have remained silent while shrewdly maneuvering, taking advantage of the media's deferential coverage."



**Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏)**, here delivering a lecture 14th Dec. 2024 in Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛).

Kato criticized the difference in media attitudes between the two incidents. On 26<sup>th</sup> March, speaking at a [press conference](#) co-hosted by the "Second Generation Association for Protecting the Human Rights of Believers" and the "Association of Experts Seeking Fair and Impartial Trials," he pointed out that a "narrative" quickly formed portraying Yamagami, who killed Abe, as a "tragic second-generation victim of religion".

He argued that exposure to such reporting stirred intense hatred among the public toward the "cozy relationship" between the [religious organization](#) and politics, which in turn led to "[discrimination and exclusion](#)" against the [organization](#). However, he reflected that "what felt like the mood of society was in fact nothing more than the [fervor of a very small segment](#) of the population." Kato condemned the situation, stating,

"It must be said that it was 'abnormal' for media coverage to create the trigger that led to the [dissolution order](#)."

The association of experts includes about 200 prominent figures from politics, law, academia, media, and religion in Japan and abroad, with over 1,000 supporters. At the [press conference](#), alongside Kato, speakers included international lawyer Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹 – representative organizer), attorney Shinichi Tokunaga (徳永信一), Professor Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹) of Kanazawa University, literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎), and nonfiction writer Masumi Fukuda (福田ますみ). They announced a [statement](#) opposing the [dissolution order](#). The statement included,

"A dissolution order is not merely an act of law enforcement; it constitutes a fundamental rejection of the social credibility of a [religious organization](#). For approximately 100,000 believers, life will be deprived of its dignity as their faith is the very core of their identity."

The decisions of both courts (the [Tokyo District Court](#) and the [Tokyo High Court](#)) have been forced through under the supreme directive of 'dissolution from the outset'. If a [Supreme Court decision](#) follows along these lines, we strongly fear that it could become a fatal trigger that shatters the very foundations of a state governed by the rule of law and a free society."

Professor Nakamasa expressed astonishment that, despite the fundamental principle of modern law being to refrain from evaluating doctrine and to maintain neutrality, "the [Tokyo High Court](#) conducted its own interpretation of the [Family Federation's](#) doctrine and used it to justify the [dissolution order](#)."



**Professor Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹)**, here on 26th March 2026. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda

He pointed out that even in the Soka Gakkai *Itamandala* case (1981) [[See editor's note 1 below](#)] and the Aum Shinrikyo [[See editor's note 2 below](#)] Tokyo subway sarin attack (1995), courts did not interfere with doctrine. He warned that "for the state to independently interpret a religious organization's doctrine without hearing from the parties involved, and to make decisions that have serious consequences for believers' futures based on that interpretation, is akin to the logic of pre-modern European inquisitions," and expressed concern that the [closure](#) of the [Family Federation's](#) facilities recalls the destruction of facilities belonging to Ōmoto [[See editor's note 3 below](#)], which was ordered dissolved before the war.

Nakayama stated,

"I thought of Iwao Hakamada, who suffered for 58 years before being acquitted in a wrongful conviction case. The [Family Federation](#) will be made to suffer even more – can that really be justified?"

After the press conference, attorney Tokunaga offered criticism in an interview with this paper:

"If the [Supreme Court](#) upholds the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#), it will become precedent, and any organization could be arbitrarily dissolved. Japan would become a laughingstock in the eyes of the world."

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**Featured image** above:

**[Editor's note 1:** The [1981 Soka Gakkai Itamandala dispute](#) was a key moment in the growing conflict between the Buddhist organizations Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū.

At the center was the [Gohonzon](#), a sacred mandala in Nichiren Buddhism, a Japanese branch of Mahayana Buddhism. The [Gohonzon mandala](#) is a calligraphic scroll inscribed by Nichiren (1222-1282). It centers on the phrase *Nam-myōhō-enge-kyō*, the title of the Lotus Sutra, surrounded by names of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protective deities. Rather than an image, it is a symbolic representation of enlightenment and the interconnected nature of reality. Practitioners chant to the Gohonzon as a focus for devotion and self-transformation, aiming to awaken inherent Buddha-nature and harmonize their lives with

the universal law expressed in the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Shōshū insisted that only its high priest could authorize or reproduce valid Gohonzon, emphasizing strict clerical authority. Soka Gakkai, however, argued that spiritual power comes from faith and practice, not exclusive priestly control.

Around 1981, disputes intensified over who had the authority to issue Gohonzon and interpret doctrine. Tensions also involved leadership conflicts, especially around Daisaku Ikeda (池田 大作 – 1928-2023), the third president of the Soka Gakkai movement.

In essence, the dispute was less about the mandala itself and more about **authority and independence** – whether a lay movement could function without priestly control. It set the stage for the final split between the two groups in 1991.]

**[Editor's note 2: Aum Shinrikyo**, a Buddhist new religious movement founded in 1984 by Shoko Asahara, preaching apocalyptic prophecies. It was dissolved in 1996 due to its leaders' criminal acts, including the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 and the Matsumoto sarin incident in 1994.]

**[Editor's note 3: The Ōmoto (Oomoto) religious movement – Omotokyo** (大本教). It is a Japanese new religious movement that originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was founded by Nao Deguchi (1836–1918), a peasant woman who claimed to have received divine revelations, and her successor Onisaburo Deguchi (1871–1948), who played a significant role in shaping the religion's teachings and structure.

Omotokyo emphasizes universal salvation, spiritual purification, and the ultimate unity of all religions. The religion stresses the importance of living in harmony with divine will and nature.

The **Ōmoto Incident** (大本事件 Ōmoto jiken) refers to two major crackdowns by the prewar Japanese government against Omotokyo. There were **two incidents. The first Ōmoto Incident (1921)** was triggered by government suspicion that Ōmoto teachings were socially disruptive. Authorities raided Ōmoto facilities, arrested leaders, and charged them with *lèse-majesté* (insulting the emperor) for certain religious texts. This was part of a broader pattern of suppressing new religions seen as politically or ideologically threatening.

The second Ōmoto Incident (1935) was far more severe, and is usually what people mean by "the Ōmoto Incident". The military and police launched a large-scale crackdown. Temples and buildings were destroyed (including with explosives). Leaders and many followers were arrested. The state accused the group of subversion, criticizing the emperor system, and spreading dangerous ideas. Essentially, it was an attempt to eliminate Ōmoto as a movement.

It is considered one of the most extreme examples of **state suppression of religion** in prewar Japan. It's often referenced today in discussions about **religious freedom, state control, and the role of new religious movements in Japan**.

Today, Omotokyo remains a small but active religious group in Japan. It has also inspired the foundation of Aikido, the martial art developed by Morihei Ueshiba, who was a follower of Omotokyo.

Omotokyo holds a significant place in the history of Japanese religion, not only as a spiritual movement but also as a symbol of resistance to religious persecution during Japan's militaristic period.]

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**Nao Deguchi** (出口なお) in 1916.  
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