

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japanese Unification Church Kids Use TV to Challenge Stereotypes

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Live recording of Seisyun TV, a musical performance was also held on 29th September 2024 in Tokyo.



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Media initiative established by younger members as a platform for them to share their personal stories, promote dialogue, and challenge stereotypes

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Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 5: The Distorted Image of the "Second-Generation"

Young people expressing themselves as they are

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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Since its so-called 'Compliance Declaration' in 2009, the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) has worked on organizational reforms, one of which is making its organization more "visible" (transparent) by disseminating information.

Seisyun TV, a video series distributed via official LINE and other platforms, started in December 2021 and is one of these efforts. It is mainly led by young believers in the Kanto region. [Editor's note: The region includes the Greater Tokyo area and seven prefectures - Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Saitama, Tokyo,

Chiba, and Kanagawa.]



"We want to create content that can disseminate information through videos to viewers both inside and outside the [organization](#), from the perspective of second-generation and other young believers," says Toshiyuki Fujioka (藤岡俊之), the planning manager of Seisyun TV and the Director of Seiwa who is responsible for young believers in the metropolitan area.

The planning and production of the program are handled by volunteers from various parts of the metropolitan area. The program mainly consists of two types: 'special broadcasts' and 'regular broadcasts.' Initially, it was available only through limited release, but now it can be freely viewed on YouTube.

It was initially started to provide internal content for the [religious organization](#), but the focus of the content has shifted to more candid views of second-generation members and [church](#) reforms following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. Fujioka and his team thought,

"If one of the characteristics of an organization like a so-called cult is its closed nature, then we should communicate what kind of [organization](#) we are."

To achieve this, they are also working on addressing the "negative aspects" that have been avoided in the past.

The regular broadcasts feature comments on current news related to the [organization](#), such as fine trials, as well as personal stories told by second-generation believers, and appearances by second-generation members who grew up in families created through [international marriages](#) or through adoptions.



In the special broadcast, a project on the theme of [church](#) reform was featured. The program titled "Seiwa Department Renewal Conference", which has aired three times so far, collects feedback from second-generation members through surveys and shares the results publicly. In the episode aired in March this year, a survey asking for suggestions to improve local churches was conducted via the official LINE account, receiving 233 responses.

Among the responses, there were positive opinions such as "the [church](#) has a lively atmosphere." There were, however, also concerns like, "I feel that my value is not recognized unless I work hard in church activities." Critical views also appeared like, "The educational concepts are outdated and feel too restrictive."

Young staff members from various churches, invited as guests, expressed their own reflections, such as, "We may have created an uncomfortable atmosphere." Others said, "We'd like to learn from the atmosphere of other churches." These opinions have been fed back to local churches as materials for improvement.

Starting this year, the general public has gradually been granted access to the videos, leading to a doubling of subscribers to the official channel. Initially, they launched an official YouTube channel and then expanded to X (formerly Twitter), monitoring reactions as they progressed. A live recording was also held on 28th September this year, where members of the mainstream media were invited.

Fujioka commented,

"As we continue to open up to the public, I hope we can show that members of the [Family Federation](#) are just regular people. When people can't see us, they tend to feel afraid. If we don't want to be portrayed in a one-sided way, we must continue to engage in disseminating information."

Kana Imanaka (今中華奈), 28 years old, who appears as a host on the program, was invited to join as a production staff member around 2022. Reflecting on her experience, she says,

"Faith shouldn't be something you practice with suffering. If it is painful, we want to create a space to

share that experience with others."



Imanaka also added,

"There are things that are hard to talk about within the [church](#), like wanting to date or dressing fashionably. I'd like to create an environment where people can discuss these things openly through the program."

[Editor's note: The Seisyun TV project is a media initiative launched by second-generation believers of the [Family Federation](#). It was established as a platform for these younger members to share their personal stories, promote dialogue, and challenge stereotypes.

Seisyun TV offers young members an opportunity to explain their perspectives on faith, community, and societal challenges in an environment where they often face bias and misunderstanding. Through interviews, reflections, and testimonies, participants in Seisyun TV explore complex experiences, such as reconciling personal faith with public perception, confronting societal prejudice, and finding personal meaning within their community.

By sharing their experiences publicly, Seisyun TV aims to humanize the lives of [Family Federation](#) members, promoting understanding and reducing the prejudice they face due to media coverage and public misconceptions in Japan.]

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• October 26, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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From a press conference at the Japanese Family Federation headquarters in Shibuya, Tokyo 16th Oct. 2023. Photo: Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU Japan](#).

On 20th October 2022, three months after former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was shot, the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) held a press conference. As numerous television cameras lined up, twenty second-generation believers took the stage to report that they had been appointed as leaders of churches across the country. One of those who stood there was Kenryu Kageyama (影山権龍).

"It was truly a bolt from the blue. I never expected it."

He expressed his honest feelings that he felt utterly unqualified for the role. On 20th July this year, Kageyama took the stage at a symposium held in Niigata City on the theme of freedom of religion and shared his story:

"In my middle and high school years, I was rebellious. I opposed my parents' faith, disliked the word 'religion,' and did not believe in the [existence of God](#). I even found my parents' presence bothersome.

At that time, I witnessed people around me turning to alcohol and cigarettes to escape reality. Additionally, when I was in the second year of junior high school, a close senior, one year older than me, was beaten to death in a group assault on a field late at night. That cast a shadow over my heart.

The gap between the [church teachings](#) – like 'going to church is wonderful', '[God exists](#)', '[living for others](#) is beautiful', 'you are a child of [God](#)' – and reality was too large. So, as I entered university, I thought about cutting ties with my parents and abandoning my faith.

Even in such a situation, I was able to open my heart to a senior second-generation believer whom I looked up to as an 'older brother' in the [church](#). When I confided all my troubles to him, he unexpectedly responded, 'It must have been tough, it must have been painful, you endured well.' When I asked why he was crying, he said, 'Because Kenryu, you are my younger 'brother'. If my younger 'brother' is suffering, isn't it natural for us to share that feeling as 'siblings'?'

Feeling the warmth of my senior's heart, I recall, 'I felt a bit of love reach my heart, which had been frozen faith..'"

During the workshop, as he prayed in the mountains, he deeply realized, "I have suffered, but my parents have suffered too." In that



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moment, he felt what he called “the voice of **God**” saying, “I have loved you and always will.” It was the answer he had long sought.



Praying out in nature. Photo: [Aaron Burden / Unsplash](#). Cropped

Kageyama points out that there are many similar second-generation believers,

“The negative image of second-generation religious believers being forced into the faith and abused is ingrained – so it’s as if we’re all viewed as victims by society. However, I want to emphasize that there are many second-generation believers who positively and willingly practice their faith.”

Kageyama currently serves as a **church** leader for a wide range of age groups. The attack on former Prime Minister Abe highlighted the **church**’s structure, where voices from grassroots members were often not reflected in the organization. The 2nd-generation leader says,

“We haven’t been proactive or creative in our approach. We need church management that reflects the voices of grassroots believers. The **church** should be an organization that supports its members, and the main actors in **church** management should be each individual believer.”

With this conviction, he established a church management committee. An elderly believer who participated in the symposium lamented that, while church leadership had gotten younger, “there aren’t many people from the younger generation.” Japan faces a demographic shift toward an aging society, and the membership of the **Family Federation** is no exception. Kageyama has a strong awareness of the issue, saying,

“Religious communities across Japan are grappling with the issue of passing on faith. Our challenge is to build a **church** where we can pass the baton to second-generation members while preserving the traditions established by our elders.”

Featured image above: *Kenryu Kageyama talking about his struggles as a second-generation religious person – 20th July 2024, Chuo Ward, Niigata City. Photo: [Tsuyoshi Toyoda \(豊田剛\) / Sekai Nippo](#)*

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