

Hanayo Ito Fights for Fair Treatment of Unificationists at Chiba University

Luke Higuchi

April 1, 2013

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Abduction and forced confinement are not the only problems Unificationists face in Japan. Incoming university students sometimes face persecution or discrimination from bigoted faculty and administration employees. Many university authorities across Japan have made “cult counter-measure” presentations to show at student orientations for incoming freshmen. Posters titled “Beware of Cults” have a list of “dangerous cults” with the Unification Church included at the top of the list.

Second-generation Unificationists who apply for admission to a university have high hopes and dreams when they enter their desired college. However, because the image of the Unification Church is negative, many second generations hesitate to reveal their religious identities throughout their college life. They also have a difficult time searching for jobs due to their beliefs. University professors have threatened the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principle (CARP) students by saying they will not receive credits for their classes, have their grades dropped or will not find employment. There are even university authorities who introduce cult experts to students in order to persuade them to break their Unificationists faith. The cult experts often support faith breakings by abduction, confinements and forced conversions.

Unificationist Hanayo Ito, a 24-year-old college student and CARP president at Chiba University, has been one of the brave second-generation Japanese sisters who has stood up to religious prosecution. During the summer of 2012, she visited New York and Maryland, to inform fellow church members and to seek help on the issue from fellow second-generation members. (An article about her was posted on the Family Federation website)

She had filed for court-assisted arbitration with Chiba University on March 19, 2013. The following is a result of the arbitration hearing request Hanayo Ito sent to the court house against the Chiba University through a lawyer, posted on her Facebook wall:

“You may already know me from our university, and some of you may be surprised to read this post. I

was born into the Unification Church as a second-generation; and I am currently the CARP president at Chiba University where I am a student. Because I was born into this religion, I am still questioning whether the faith I believe in is 'right' and wonder how I should live my life.

"It is going to be a long post, but I would like to write my honest feelings and truth. I have recently filed arbitration at the court.

"Chiba University has regarded new religions, including the Unification Church, as dangerous without knowing the actual religious situations. This kind of criticism has been going on and has been affecting the CARP members who have been working diligently to contribute to society. Individuals have been bullied, called out and have been receiving disturbances and threatened with disruptions of their academic courses. Many of us have endured these treatments and have kept silent for too long. You may know more detailed contents, because we have been taking public actions to gain recognition and understanding from Chiba University. However, it is a very complicated issue to handle with only the power of students. Therefore, we decided to ask a third-party lawyer to help us file this arbitration.

"The effort at arbitration failed; Chiba University was not willing to discuss anything with their students.



Hanayo Ito, a 24-year-old college student and CARP President of Chiba University, filed for arbitration on March 19, 2013 against the university for cases of religious persecution against second-generation Unificationist students.

"Who and what are universities for? I am dreaming of becoming a university professor in the future. I believe universities are for people to explore and to gain higher understanding in academics, and to support the students' motivation and enthusiasms -- not to protect the fame of the universities and their professors. I did not ask for arbitration to protect my own faith, but instead to ask for guaranteed protection of the freedom of religion. I thought it would be the best for Japan.

"I do not know if what I have been doing is right or wrong. If I am wrong, I will have to look back and change the way I live my life. I may even be able to start off a new life. However, if the actions I have taken were the correct thing to do, I will try my best to pursue justice.

"I would like to give hope to those people who are struggling with the same problem by showing there is a student who is trying to make a change to this reality."

Ito asks for the understanding and support for her efforts from the American Unificationist members and other people of faith. The fight against religious persecution will continue until the day Japanese Unificationists can confidently witness on university campuses and pursue goals according to their religious beliefs.

Unificationist Student Reports Sex Harassment, Verbal Abuse on Japanese Campuses

Iris Quesada
August 1, 2012



Fellow Unificationists from the Lovin' Life Leadership Program show their support for Ito (center) during her visit to the Lovin' Life Learning Center.

Unificationist Hanayo Ito, a 24-year-old college student visiting the United States from Japan, tearfully told her story of persecution on her college campus to participants of the Lovin' Life Leadership Program at the Lovin' Life Learning Center in Manhattan on July 31, 2012. The following is Ito's testimony about the persecution she received at the hands of faculty and fellow students in Japan as a Unification Church member.

They say we are mind-controlling people. We are not. They say we are being mind controlled, that our absolute obedience is in line with slavery. When Rev. Sun Myung Moon says "jump," we jump, no questions asked. We do not. They do not see our freedom, our freedom to choose how to worship God, how to live and how to love. Just because you are born into a church doesn't mean it belongs to you. You have to take ownership of who you are. In high school, before going to college and working with the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP), I learned to love the Unification Church. I seriously studied the Divine Principle and the Bible to understand what the truth is. Intellectually, I realized there is no other truth. Everything just made sense to me.

In high school, after I told people about my faith, I lost my friends. My teacher spoke about the Unification Church in class, calling it a "cult." I felt sorry for them, and I did not want to become like them, so, out of a desire to share about how great is the Unification Church, I decided to go to Chiba University, because I had heard it was a university that was tolerant. I had heard it was a very peaceful and beautiful school with many foreign students, so I thought it would probably have a more worldly view on things. In reality, Chiba University is not tolerant: it is one of the universities that opposes our church most strongly. There are signs around campus to warn people about our church and its affiliated groups. CARP is not allowed. Anything organized that has to do with CARP is forbidden. It is an actual rule. If you try, you can be punished by the school.

CARP Battles Against Faith Breakers

Ten years ago, CARP at Chiba was dissolved because of faith breakers. Then, Unificationists brought CARP back seven years ago. When I enrolled at Chiba, there were only five Unificationists. Due to faith breaking and persecution, we lost friends. I couldn't believe it when I lost all my friends after they discovered my beliefs. It hurts to know that people are so shallow and are not willing to stand by me. I do have some friends left, but they do not understand my pain and do not support me. Only one friend does, but not publicly. But I understand. I do not want them to have any trouble.



Ito speaks with Luke Higuchi, president of Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE), an organization that aids victims of religious persecution and faith breaking.

I won't use names, but I will describe in detail some of what happened to us. People would make background checks to find out who the Unificationists at school were. Then, they would try to force faith breakers onto you and try to get you to leave the university. My best friend, a second-generation Unificationist, was asked to go home in her junior year. Because her friends found out she was an Unificationist, the office found out. They called her into the office to ask about the Blessing of marriage. She felt they were impersonal and rude, but answered their biased and harsh questions. She lost her trust in her friends and felt afraid to go back to school. I lost many friends like this. They even called her aunt; they told her that her niece was hanging out with a group of suspicious people. They told my friend that if she was in CARP, she could not graduate and become a teacher. She refused to leave CARP and was therefore forced to leave the school.

My father is a businessman, and my mother is a nurse. They were participants in the 6,000-couple Marriage-Blessing ceremony in Korea in 1982. They just celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. Are we so different that we cannot celebrate what we have accomplished publicly? Let's get our human rights back. Don't give up your dreams because of other people. Unificationist parents don't want their children to be hurt so they tell them to stay quiet. [Fact is] if you speak out, it is like you are fighting your whole country. You have to be willing to give up your aspirations and dreams, which is why so few people are willing to stand up. I understand how they feel, which is why I have to fight.



Ito said, "Chiba University is not tolerant... There are signs around [Chiba University's] campus to warn people about our church and its affiliated groups."

Families Standing Up to Demand Respect

There is a small group of three families who stand together on this. They got together and wrote to the university: "We are doing the right thing. You are the ones who are dangerous and causing problems." For two years I was representing CARP on this matter, and I approached my professor on this problem. He never replied to me. Then the university started causing us more problems. They started giving lectures about why CARP is bad and how to avoid it. Many students attended that lecture. The university would bring specialists, professors or authors who wrote books against the Unification Church. As a result of the climate of hatred, my car was broken into and vandalized. This situation has been going on for a very long time at Chiba University, and the university refuses to do anything about it.

Unificationists also have been persecuted at Saga University. Again, I will not say names. One student there was discovered to be a Unificationist and was called into the office, where she was verbally degraded. Administrators said the Blessing was like a marriage between a dog and a cat. Incredibly, her professor called her into his office and molested her. She is in the process of suing him. There is no result yet, but in Japan, cases like these aren't normally won because Japanese authorities have been trying to get rid of the Unification Church. Japanese police are taught that cults are bad. At the university we try to spread the truth, but it is hard, because there is nowhere for us to go [to report abuse]. In CARP, there is a representative in almost every university throughout Japan, and we have created a network of friendship and communication.

I'm studying modern art in college. One day, I began to pray in the CARP office at school. I prayed because I felt very sad for humankind and what we are doing to each other out of fear and hatred and misunderstanding. When I finished, I looked up and saw an apple that was on the offering table and suddenly began to hear God's voice. God asked me, "Isn't this apple great?" I did not understand at first, but then I realized something. Although people are sad in this world and this wounds God, I know God is also happy. Yes, human history has been filled with much sadness but it is important to see through that. There is also much beauty and happiness in this world. God's motivation is to be happy through love. God made the apple so people can enjoy it and be happy. Therefore, I can now bear any persecution, because I see God's heart. There are negative things happening to me, but I know God has a purpose for it and for me.



Higuchi confirms Ito's statement that Chiba University that "Japanese police are taught that cults are bad. At the university we try to spread the truth, but it is hard, because there is nowhere for us to go [to report abuse]."

I hope to one day be a professor at a university in Japan in order to be an agent of God. In Japan, Unification Church members will be able to speak freely and proudly about who they are without the fear of persecution, pain and fear of being shunned by friends, coworkers, or peers. I want people in Japan and around the world to know about our struggles and that we are willing to fight for our freedom and live our lives for God.