

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Investigative Journalist On Big Donations

Knut Holdhus
February 13, 2024



Marble vase, similar to some of those that members sold in Japan

Investigative journalist interviews Japanese members about their big donations



Caption of front page of Monthly Hanada February 2024

In a series of four articles, [Bitter Winter](#), the online magazine for human rights and religious freedom, has published an in-depth report originally written in Japanese by investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda and published by the magazine Monthly Hanada in its February 2024 issue. The report by Fukuda, who is also an award-winning author, is titled "Dissolve the Anti-Cult Lawyer Group, Not the [Unification Church](#)." She is referring to a group of leftwing militant lawyers specializing in fabricating false "victims".

**BITTER
WINTER**

On 30th January 2024, [Bitter Winter](#) published the third of its four articles in English. It was headlined "[Current Believers Tell Their Donation Stories](#)".

On [part 1](#), [part 2](#) of Masumi Fukuda's report.



*Masumi Fukuda speaking in Tokyo
20th Jan. 2024*

As mentioned in part 2, Fukuda interviewed four persons who had made significant donations to the [Family Federation](#), formerly called the [Unification Church](#). The donation practices of the [movement](#) were a central factor in the request for its dissolution. Among these followers, three were women and one was a man. [Part 2](#) carries one of those interviews, part 3 the other three.

One of the individuals telling her story to investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda was Kazuko Asada (a pseudonym for a now 70-year-old woman), residing in Tokyo. She recounted her connection with the [Family Federation](#). It began when a believer visited her home to sell a set of three seals, which led to an invitation to an exhibition where she purchased a marble vase for approximately one million yen. There was no coercion involved.

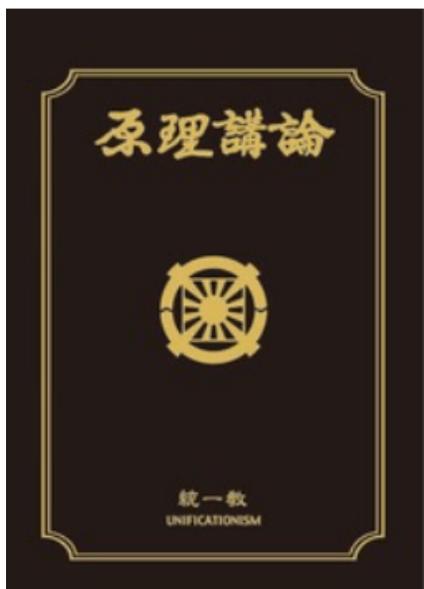
Asada's husband's family has a long and distinguished history spanning four hundred years. An ancestor, known for making substantial donations to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, emphasized the importance of collecting contributions from others and accumulating significant "virtue."

Raised in a family where the value of faith was deeply ingrained, Asada joined the [Family Federation](#) (then called the [Unification Church](#)) in 1987, getting her husband, a business owner, to become a believer six months later. Together, they have donated over 100 million yen, viewing it as a means of accumulating virtue rather than mere monetary contributions.

Reflecting on her involvement, Asada expressed her astonishment upon seeing court documents related to a lawsuit concerning refund requests from disgruntled former believers. One incident involved Asada personally delivering a desired ornament to a member's home, only for the story to be twisted by the plaintiff, alleging coercion and threats.

Despite such challenges, Asada maintains that donations are expressions of individual freedom, with the

church merely informing members of upcoming projects without coercion or threats. However, she acknowledges the frustration of being faced with false accusations in legal battles, where the plaintiff's claims often overshadow evidence presented by the church's members.



Front cover page of one version of [Unification Principles](#) in Japanese

Masumi Fukuda also interviewed Ryoko Shinoda (a pseudonym for a now 73-year-old woman) residing in Hiroshima City. Over the span of forty years, she donated an estimated 200 million yen to the [Family Federation](#). Her journey with the [federation](#) began in 1983, marked by a period of personal turmoil where she sought answers in various religions but found none. It was her elder sister, a member of the [Family Federation](#), who introduced Shinoda to the [Unification Principles](#), sparking a newfound sense of hope within her.

Determined to delve deeper into the teachings, Shinoda started attending the church in Hiroshima City and discovered a profound belief in [God's](#) desire to better the world. Inspired by [Reverend Moon's](#) life and sacrifices for humanity's salvation, she felt compelled to contribute to [God's](#) vision.

Despite initial discord with her husband, who doubted the teachings, he eventually became a believer after earnestly examining the [Unification Principles](#). Together, they became active members, even amidst financial challenges. Their donations, totaling around 200 million yen, were fueled by their conviction in the principles of the [Family Federation](#), rather than any form of coercion or manipulation.

Similarly, another member, a male staff member of the [Family Federation](#), shared his journey of financial strain due to significant donations exceeding 50 million yen. Despite hardships, his wife's unwavering enthusiasm for donations, coupled with their belief in contributing to [Reverend Moon's](#) mission, drove them to endure financial difficulties.



Central activist leftwing layers of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS). From left: Masaki Kito, Hiroshi Yamaguchi, Yasuo Kawai

Both Shinoda and the male staff member emphasized their belief in supporting [Reverend Moon's](#) battle against what they perceived as evil authoritarian regimes, even if it meant facing criticism or misunderstanding from organizations like National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS), which they viewed as unfairly labeling their beliefs as "cults" and accusing them of being

"brainwashed."

They lamented the prejudice and attacks faced by religions that deviate from secular norms and highlighted the importance of protecting religious freedom as a fundamental human right. They criticized the leftwing network of lawyers (NNLASS) for their approach, which they likened to fascism, in ostracizing believers and undermining their faith-based convictions.

On [part 1](#), [part 2](#) of Masumi Fukuda's report.

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Donations Issue: "God Does Indeed Need Money"

February 10, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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Masumi Fukuda, award-winning Japanese author and investigative journalist, has written an in-depth report titled "Dissolve the Anti-Cult Lawyer Group, Not the Unification Church." She is referring to a group of



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Church. She is referring to a group of leftwing activist lawyers who have specialized in fabricating false "victims".



In a series of four articles, [Bitter Winter](#), the online magazine for human rights and religious freedom, has published her report originally written in Japanese and published by the magazine *Monthly Hanada* in its February 2024 issue.

On 29th January 2024, [Bitter Winter](#) published the second of its four articles in English. It was headlined "Myth and Reality of the 'Spiritual Sales'".

On [part 1](#) of Masumi Fukuda's report, [part 3](#)

The current case where the Japanese authorities have requested Tokyo District Court to issue an order to dissolve the [Family Federation](#), is based on a media outcry surrounding "victims", **largely orchestrated by an organization of activist lawyers** of *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, an organization founded 37 years ago to eliminate the [Unification Church](#).



Masumi Fukuda speaking 20th January 2024 in Tokyo. Photo: Screenshot.

According to Masumi Fukuda, many individuals voluntarily donated to the [Family Federation](#), but later, due to a loss of faith or familial pressure, requested refunds. Historically, the [Family Federation](#) has typically **honored such refund requests**, which is uncommon for religious organizations and may inadvertently lead to unintended consequences.

The investigative journalist writes,

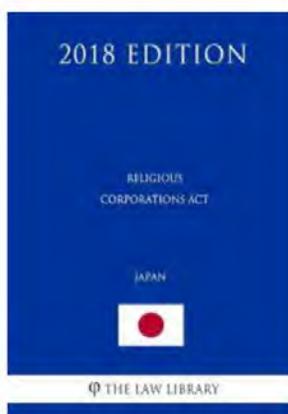
"National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS) is fabricating new "victims" by provoking individuals with statements like, "Let's negotiate for a refund. Let's sue. If you do that, you will get your money back." Thus, there are two types of plaintiffs: ex-believers who are instigated by NNLASS lawyers who say, "You can easily recover the money you donated," and those who are victims of deprogramming—ex-believers who were kidnapped and confined by their families and then persuaded to sue by the deprogrammers."

On the other hand, it's likely shocking for the [Family Federation](#) to hear that their "systematic solicitation of donations" is cited as grounds for a dissolution order, potentially violating Article 81, Paragraph 1, of the *Religious Corporations Act*. Critics argue that excessive donations to the [Family Federation](#), deemed unnecessary by some, contradict the true purpose of religious organizations. However, donations are crucial for fulfilling the fundamental purposes of religious groups such as spreading teachings, conducting ceremonies, and educating believers.



Facsimile from page 98 of the February 2024 issue of *Monthly Hanada*.

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Front page of 2018 English version of *Religious Corporations Act of Japan*.

Fukuda writes,

"Opponents often criticize the high donations to the **FFWPU**, claiming condescendingly that "God doesn't need money." However, for religious organizations to fulfill these purposes, donations are essential. Actually, **God** does indeed need money."

Additionally, donations are the primary income source for non-profit religious corporations. Despite this, the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT) views systematic donation solicitation as deviating significantly from a religious organization's purpose, a conclusion seen as shortsighted and lacking understanding of religious dynamics.

The **Family Federation** asserts that donations mainly support overseas missionary activities and educational expenses, aligning with the core purposes of religious corporations. They maintain that donation collection aims to support these activities rather than financial gain.

Masumi Fukuda maintains that in essence, soliciting donations for religious purposes should be acceptable as long as it's not coercive or extortionate. Unlike cases where dissolution orders were granted, such as the Myokaku-ji [temple near Osaka belonging to *Nichiren Buddhism*] case, the **Family Federation** hasn't faced criminal charges or fraud allegations under the Penal Code or Civil Code.



Front cover page of *Monthly Hanada* Feb. 2024.

Fukuda interviewed four individuals who had made significant donations to the **Family Federation**, formerly known as the **Unification Church**. The donation practices of the church were a central factor in the request for its dissolution. Among these followers, three were women and one was a man.

Michiko Tsuji, a 73-year-old woman residing in Tokyo, joined the **Family Federation** in August 1983. She recounted how a fellow believer visited her home that same year to sell a personal seal.

There were no coercive tactics used, and Tsuji, who was expecting a child at the time, was intrigued by the believer's fortune-telling and name analysis services. She ended up purchasing a set of seals for 240,000 yen, considering it a mysterious guidance. Subsequently, she and her husband attended **Family Federation** exhibitions and eventually purchased a pagoda.

Tsuji, who had been leading a prosperous life, often faced jests from acquaintances questioning her involvement with the **Unification Church**. However, she was searching for deeper meaning in her life since the age of 15. The **Unification Church** provided answers to her existential quest.

After acquiring the pagoda, Tsuji had several spiritual experiences, such as feeling a sensation of ascending from hell to heaven while climbing a historic temple staircase in Korea. She experienced "spiritual movement" and saw her maternal grandmother's face, which led her to pray for causes like the reunification of Korea and world peace.



Learning about Reverend **Sun Myung Moon's** sacrificial efforts to save humanity, Tsuji adopted the teaching to **live for the sake of others**. Over the forty years



Father Moon receiving an honorary doctorate from Bloomfield College, New Jersey, USA in the year 2000. Photo: FFWPU

the forty years of her membership, she and her husband have donated a total of 100 million yen.

While Tsuji emphasizes that donations are not compulsory, she believes that understanding the importance of **God's providence**, which is **God's** plan for humanity's salvation, naturally leads to contributions. **Providence**, as explained by the **Unification Church**, guides believers on how to act for humanity's salvation, particularly in the context of combating ideologies like communism. However, Tsuji acknowledges the potential issues if excessive donations lead to neglecting family responsibilities.

She reflects on how some early believers, driven by their zeal for achieving world peace and paradise on earth, neglected their families. This serves as a point of introspection for the **Family Federation** according to Tsuji.

Continued in [part 3](#)

Featured image above: *Miniature pagoda sold by members of the **Unification Church** in Japan. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)*

On [part 1](#) of Masumi Fukuda's report, [part 3](#)

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