

FFWPU Europe and East: Scholar says Japan's Government is Mishandling FFWPU Dissolution

Knut Holdhus
April 29, 2025



A handful from the Kishida administration meeting behind closed doors



Rushed justice behind closed doors: Japanese scholar raises alarms on due process and religious rights as freedom of religion is undermined

Tokyo, 10th April 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

State Intervention as "Interference with Freedom of Religion"

Interview with Religious Scholar Toshihiro Ota (Part 1)

by Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田 剛)

I believe that a decision should have been made only after thoroughly examining the situation with as

much transparency as possible and through repeated discussion and careful deliberation. If the decision is not convincing to many people - including [Family Federation](#) believers - it won't lead to a true resolution of the issue and may leave future concerns unresolved. This decision might, in fact, backfire and lead to a broader and more complicated problem down the line.



Toshihiro Ota (- Japanese author and researcher in religious studies. Completed doctoral studies in Religious Studies and the History of Religion at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology. Holds a Doctorate in Literature. Currently a part-time lecturer at Saitama University



Head of government mishandling? He certainly changed the law overnight: Former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Here, at press conference 14th August 2024

- The court rendered its judgment behind closed doors and essentially assumed guilt. Was the process flawed?

Not just the trial - but also Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's (岸田文雄) [sudden reinterpretation of the law](#), the Agency for Cultural Affairs' internal [Religious Corporation Council deliberations](#), and the repeated use of the "[right to question](#)" - all of these steps were carried out in secrecy. I was honestly astonished by how little information was disclosed. As things stand, we're not even in a position to verify whether the government's actions were valid or rational.

The issues surrounding the [Unification Church](#) are extremely complex (multifaceted), but the government moved straight to a conclusion without thoroughly considering all aspects. That is deeply concerning.

Ideally, when dealing with religious issues, the state should first listen carefully to both victims and the religious group, issue appropriate recommendations for improvement, and if there's no change, apply some form of monitoring or oversight. Only when the problems persist should a dissolution order be considered - with care and flexibility. Sadly, the Japanese government's response this time seems to deviate significantly from that ideal.

- The court decision claims it does not prohibit or restrict freedom of religion. What's your view on that?

As I mentioned in my book *The Complete History of Monotheism*, the modern concept of freedom of religion was first clearly defined by the 17th-century British philosopher John Locke in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. In it, Locke argues that under normal conditions, the separation of church and state must be maintained, and the state should not intervene in religious matters. However, he also states that if public order is fundamentally threatened or citizens' lives and property are at risk, the state must intervene in religious issues.

Naturally, when such intervention happens, some infringement on religious freedom is inevitable. Therefore, the state must be fully aware and prepared for this and ensure its intervention is both reasonable and minimal.

In the case of the [Family Federation](#), interference with religious freedom had already occurred at the point the government began intervening. Despite that, the [court's verdict](#) document states at its conclusion that

the [dissolution order](#) was "not intended to infringe upon the spiritual or religious aspects of the [religious corporation](#) or its believers."



John Locke (1632-1704), English philosopher and physician. Early empiricist and influential Enlightenment thinker. His writings on fundamental rights and freedoms under the rule of law continue to have large influence even today

From the perspective of someone who has studied the history of religious thought, this statement is difficult to accept. It feels like a surgeon saying, "I performed major surgery with a scalpel, but I didn't harm the body or cause any pain." It just doesn't make sense.

Lowering the bar for dissolution of religious corporations

- Do you think this court decision could affect other religious organizations?

According to modern state principles, targeting a specific religious group alone is unacceptable. The standards applied to the [Family Federation](#) must be equally applied to all religious organizations. That said, this particular [dissolution order](#) was clearly influenced by public outcry following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三). So it's unlikely that other religious groups will be immediately affected.

However, it's undeniable that the government's actions have significantly lowered the threshold for dissolving religious corporations, and the criteria for doing so have become less clear. It will be necessary to eventually disclose all the currently undisclosed procedural details and seriously reconsider whether the steps taken were truly appropriate and what approach should be

followed in the future.

Toshihiro Ota (大田俊寛) - Born in 1974. Graduated from the Faculty of Sociology at Hitotsubashi University. Completed doctoral studies in Religious Studies and the History of Religion at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology. Holds a Doctorate in Literature. Currently a part-time lecturer at Saitama University. Specializes in religious studies. Major works include "The Complete History of Monotheism" (Vol. 1 and 2, Kawade Shobo Shinsha), "The Thought of Gnosticism" (Shunjusha), and "The Spiritual History of Aum Shinrikyo" (Shunjusha).

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Coerced Testimonies? Lawyers Under Scrutiny

- April 28, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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Activist lawyers under scrutiny for alleged coerced testimonies behind dissolution push

Tokyo, 29th April 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Court Rulings Crafted by Apostates

[See editor's note 1 below]


The Dark World of Deprogramming Spreading Amid the Move to Dissolve the Family Federation (4)

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




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Almost all of the 32 grounds for dissolution are from the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (NNLASS – Zenkoku Benren)

[Almost all of the 32 civil cases used as grounds for the dissolution (of the [Family Federation](#)) were **brought forward or based on lawsuits led by NNLASS (Zenkoku Benren).**]

“If active members properly assert their claims, it can be shown that their arguments will be recognized. I hope this will serve as some deterrent against unjust trials,”

said Kousuke Yamabe (a man in his 60s, pseudonym), a believer of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) living in Sapporo, Hokkaido.

In September 2019, Yamabe’s two sisters and brother filed a lawsuit at the *Sapporo District Court*, seeking damages on the grounds that Yamabe had “donated” their late father’s inheritance without permission.



Location of Sapporo on the northern island of Hokkaido. Illustration: Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumhwa) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#)



Arguing in court based on mind control theory: Activist attorney Masaki Goro (Gouro). Illustration: Grok xAI, 26th April 2025

Representing the plaintiffs was lawyer Masaki Goro ([郷路征記](#)) – also written “Gouro” – from *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (NNLASS – Zenkoku Benren).

Attorney Goro argued that Yamabe’s “beliefs had been implanted by the [Unification Church](#),” and therefore he lacked the awareness that his actions were unlawful, claiming that Yamabe’s donations were not made of his free will. Furthermore, he argued that the [religious organization](#) itself was the true perpetrator, naming not only

Yamabe, but also the [Family Federation](#) as defendants.

Yamabe strongly countered these claims, emphasizing that his donations were not due to “brainwashing” but were voluntary acts. He made similar statements during his court testimony. Ultimately, the court judged that there was “no sufficient evidence” to support Goro’s claims, and the claims against the [church](#) were dismissed.

Although Yamabe eventually reached a settlement with his sisters for 4 million yen, the plaintiffs proposed making his resignation from the [religious organization](#) a condition of the settlement, which Yamabe refused. This dismissive attitude toward his faith continued until the end.

Of the 32 civil cases used as



Issued scandalous dissolution order based on controversial unscientific mind control theory: Tokyo District Court, here a sign outside the court building. Photo: Screenshot from [FFWPU](#) video.

evidence by the *Tokyo District Court* to request the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#), four were cases previously handled by Attorney Goro (Gouro). In each case, he had promoted a similar “mind control theory” argument as in the case of Yamabe.

What significantly differentiates Yamabe’s case from the others is that many plaintiffs in those cases had left the [religious organization](#) after experiencing deprogramming – that is, being forcibly “deconverted” through confinement. For example, one of the four cases, the “Return My Youth” lawsuit held in Sapporo, revealed that, upon analysis of the testimonies of the 21 plaintiffs, more than **75% admitted to having**

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been physically restrained during the persuasion process. In total, 18 people (86%) had experienced some form of confinement against their will.

It is known that parents, under the direction of certain Christian pastors and activists opposing the [Family Federation](#), confined their believing sons or daughters and subjected them to a “fumi-e” (test of faith) [See editor’s note 2 below]. Even if a believer professed intent to leave the [religious organization](#), they were often forced to sue it to prove their expressed intent was genuine.

As a result, those who left the [organization](#) after being confined and subjected to one-sided critical information inevitably end up giving testimony in line with the intentions of the deprogrammers (faith-breakers) who pressured the believers to abandon their faith, regardless of whether or not they held hostility toward the [organization](#).

In civil cases, unlike in criminal cases, fact-finding is generally less stringent. Particularly in cases involving new religious movements, court judgments are often influenced not by objective evidence but by the voices of those who claim to be “victims” and the tone set by media coverage.

Another notable point is that not only Attorney Goro but also most of the lawyers in the 32 lawsuits were affiliated with *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (Zenkoku Benren), including lawyers such as Masaki Kito (紀藤正樹) and



Hiroshi Yamaguchi, activist leftwing lawyer and founder and leading member of *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (NNLASS). Photo: Screenshot / [Bitter Winter](#)

Hiroshi Yamaguchi (山口広). It can be said that people who left the [group](#) through deprogramming (faith-breaking) aligned their testimonies with the claims made by these anti-[Family Federation](#) lawyers, stating that their past donations were “not made of their own free will” or that they had been “deceived”, thereby contributing to the court rulings against the [organization](#).



One of the architects of new law against the [Family Federation](#) and advisor to the Japanese authorities: **Masaki Kito** (紀藤正樹), one of the hostile activist lawyers of *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (全国霊感商法被害対策弁連) and *Nation-wide Unification Church Damage Countermeasures Legal Team* (全国統一教会被害対策弁護団). Photo: Screenshot / [Bitter Winter](#)

If, as in Mr. Yamabe’s case, claims based on disregard for religious faith have become a routine tactic in court, then one cannot help but question whether it is truly a fair and impartial decision for the *Tokyo District Court* to use such accumulated case precedents as grounds for [ordering the organization’s](#) dissolution.

Testimonies by apostates feature not only in these 32 civil lawsuits but also in the court-related documents submitted by the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* (MEXT). It has also been found that among 159 former members who submitted testimonial evidence, 121 had experienced or were suspected of having experienced [kidnapping and confinement](#).

[Deprogramming \(faith-breaking\)](#) is considered illegal in places like the U.S. and Europe. Meanwhile, China – itself condemned by a UN report for committing “crimes against humanity” by forcing Muslims in Xinjiang into “re-education” camps to erase their faith – has welcomed the *Tokyo District Court’s* [dissolution verdict](#) via its anti-cult organization under the *Chinese Communist Party*, praising the NNLASS (Zenkoku Benren).

Effectively, the *Tokyo District Court’s* [decision](#) amounts to an endorsement of [deprogramming \(faith-breaking\)](#). There are concerns that going forward, the state may encourage efforts to “free” individuals from their faith and intensify state support for religious [de-conversion](#).

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 5](#)

Featured image above: The Sapporo High Court and Sapporo District Court, where the trial of Kousuke Yamabe (pseudonym), a member of the [Family Federation](#), was held. Photo: Takahide Ishii (石

[Editor's note 1: Apostate is the translation of the Japanese word 背教者 (はいきょうしゃ, *haikyōsha*) which is composed of the following elements:

背 (はい, *hai*): meaning "to turn one's back on" or "to betray"; 教 (きょう, *kyō*): meaning "religion", "teaching", or "doctrine"; 者 (しゃ, *sha*): common suffix meaning "person" or "someone who does".

So, 背教者 literally means: "A person who turns his/her back on his/her religion," or "an apostate" or "a religious defector".

It generally carries a negative or accusatory connotation, implying betrayal or abandonment of faith – especially from the perspective of the religious group being left.

In the above text, the article's tone implies that apostates (背教者 – *haikyōsha*) are not just someone who have left the religion, but who are now being used to **undermine** the group, so there is also a hint of *Judas-like* betrayal in the context. Of course, "Judas" refers to Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus to the authorities for 30 pieces of silver. The apostates in the text above are being used by hostile and cynical lawyers for malicious reasons to cause harm to the faith they were forced out of, when they had their faith broken coercively by so-called faith-breakers, working in league with activist lawyers.]

[Editor's note 2:

The illustration to the right depicts a **fumi-e** (踏み絵), which literally means "stepping-on picture" – typically an image of the Cross, Jesus Christ, or the Virgin Mary. The Tokugawa Shogunate used this practice to identify hidden Christians (known as *Kirishitan*) and their sympathizers during a time when Christianity was banned in Japan. While the act of stepping



This print shows Fumi-e (踏み絵: fumi "stepping-on" + e "picture"); step on a picture with the likeness of e.g. the Cross of Jesus or the Virgin Mary. Photo: Unknown author. [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

on these images was originally called **efumi** (絵踏), the term **fumi-e** is now commonly used to refer to both the practice and the object itself.

Those who hesitated or refused to step on the images were suspected of being Christians. They were taken to Nagasaki and ordered to renounce their faith. If they refused, they faced torture – and if they continued to resist, execution, often by burning at the stake.

This systematic persecution began in 1614 and was enforced by regional authorities. By the mid-17th century, the Tokugawa Shogunate had escalated its crackdown, ordering the expulsion of all European missionaries and the execution of Japanese converts. The suppression of Christianity continued for more than two centuries.]

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