

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Incomprehensible Judicial Process Erodes Trust in Japan's Judiciary

Knut Holdhus  
May 4, 2025



Haruhisa Nakagawa - After withdrawing from Waseda University's School of Letters, Arts and Sciences I, Haruhisa Nakagawa dedicated his life to church service. In 2007, he became the head pastor of the Christian Church of the Lord's Sheep. In 2008, he joined the Tokyo Franciscan Study Group (now the Tokyo Institute for Christian Theology). He is an editorial board member of the Christian opinion site SALTY, and president of the Japan Christian Theological Seminary



Raising alarms over fairness in Japan's judiciary, religious leader questions troubling dissolution verdict reached through opaque process behind closed doors against the Family Federation

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Instilling Hatred and Trauma Through "Deprogramming"

The Dark World of Deprogramming Spreading Amid the Move to Dissolve the Family Federation (7)

Contributed by Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久), Executive Secretary, Tokyo Institute for Christian Theology (Part 1)

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#)

What triggered the Tokyo subway sarin attack



Did the court apply the law objectively? Here, judges issuing their verdict. Illustration

The process from the request to the [court ruling for the dissolution](#) of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) was astoundingly opaque. Serious issues - such as [evidence fabrication](#) by the Ministry of Education, the reality of [harm caused by deprogramming](#) (anti-brainwashing programs), and the impact of political pressure - were all disregarded as the court delivered its [verdict](#). Such a closed process infringes upon the public's right to know and undermines trust in the judiciary.

The [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#) is more than just a matter concerning a single religious group - it is a litmus test for the transparency and fairness of

Japan's legal and political systems. As a constitutional state, Japan must apply the law objectively and fairly, not respond emotionally by targeting specific groups.

The Tokyo District Court's [decision](#) to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) was highly unusual, involving political pressure, [falsified evidence](#), neglect of [harm caused by deprogramming](#) (faith-breaking) [See editor's note below], and non-public hearings. Ignoring these issues not only erodes judicial trust but also has serious implications for religious freedom and human rights.

Although the doctrines and nature of Aum Shinrikyo (オウム真理教) and the [Family Federation](#) are completely different, both have been labeled as "cults" and targeted by the "deprogramming (faith-breaking) network".

The 1995 Tokyo subway sarin attack is remembered as a terrorist act by Aum Shinrikyo that has left deep scars on Japanese society. However, one of the complex factors believed to be involved in the background of this incident is the role of deprogramming (faith-breaking) [See editor's note below].

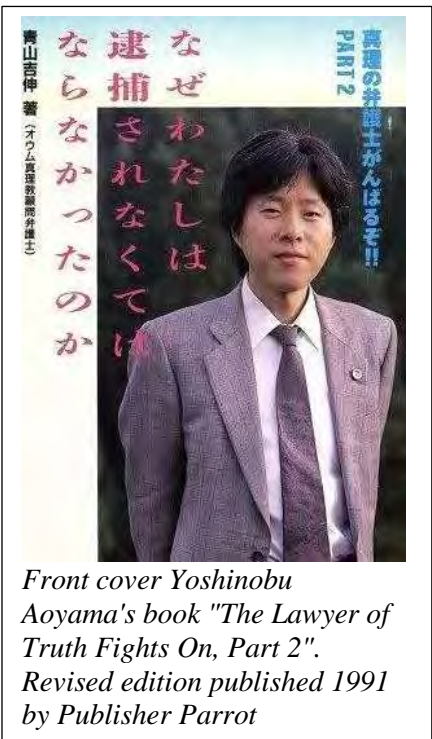


Religious scholar Toshihiro Ota (2025)

Religious scholar Toshihiro Ota (大田俊寛) has emphasized the need to investigate the "possibility" that deprogramming contributed to Aum's radicalization. Ota is also author of The Spiritual History of Aum Shinrikyo. While conducting interviews with people involved after the incident, he was concerned that no one had spoken about the deprogramming factor behind the Aum incident. Now that 30 years have passed since the incident, it is worth paying attention to once again.

Naturally, Aum Shinrikyo's escalation toward anti-state ideology and sarin attacks involved multiple intertwined factors. Nevertheless, the psychological trauma inflicted on Aum followers through deprogramming (faith-breaking) may have intensified their paranoia and aggression. This possibility cannot be ignored.

Attorney Yoshinobu Aoyama (青山吉伸), who served as Aum Shinrikyo's legal advisor, wrote in his books The Lawyer of Truth Fights On!! and Fascism Has Already Begun (published by Aum Publishing) that Aum followers were severely tormented by abduction, confinement, and forced renunciation of their faith.



Front cover Yoshinobu Aoyama's book "The Lawyer of Truth Fights On, Part 2". Revised edition published 1991 by Publisher Parrot

These reports reached Aum's leader Shoko Asahara (麻原彰晃). As someone who tended to overreact to external pressure, it is plausible that the forced indoctrination and trauma inflicted on followers planted deep hatred and paranoia in him, which could have worsened his delusions of persecution. This possibility warrants serious investigation.

That such a critical factor like deprogramming (faith-breaking) [See editor's note below] is missing from public debate, and the full picture of the incident remains unclear, raises questions about the role of scholars of religious studies. Reactions to deprogramming vary among individuals and don't necessarily lead to anti-social behavior. Therefore, while it is difficult to establish a direct causal link, examining its potential impact is essential.

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#)

[**Editor's note:** Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-

breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from

what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.



*Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001*

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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# Escapee Details Harrowing Faith-Breaking Trauma

• May 2, 2025  
• Knut Holdhus



Woman escapee still haunted by psychological scars recounts details of forcible detention as she was held locked up for a month by her own family who had been “brainwashed” by cynic faith-breaker to use any means to de-convert her

Tokyo, 1st May 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

Abducted, Detained, and Driven to a Disturbed Mental State



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

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 7](#)

Voices of victims shared on social  
media

“I am a current believer of the [Family Federation \(Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, formerly the Unification Church\)](#). In the past, I was [abducted, confined, and forcibly pressured](#) to renounce my faith.”

A woman in her 50s using the pseudonym “Murasakino Neko” on X (formerly Twitter) began this April sharing her experiences of [abduction](#) and [coercive faith-breaking](#) [[See editor’s note below](#)]. She revealed to [our paper](#) her motivation for going public:

“I had prepared a written statement to oppose the [dissolution order](#), but my message didn’t get through. I couldn’t let things end like that.”

She criticizes the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* for submitting past court rulings as evidence in which testimony from former believers who left the [Family Federation](#) through [deprogramming](#) [[See editor’s note below](#)] was heavily cited. She asserts,



“Statements from ex-believers who were forcibly brainwashed (to renounce their faith) while under [confinement](#) lack credibility.”

In 1987, Murasakino says she was [detained](#) in a room in an apartment in Kyoto by her family. Her father threatened her,

“We can stay here for years until this is resolved.”

Her parents bombarded her all day long with baseless slander about the [religious organization](#), saying things like “There are people who had been killed, buried under the [church](#).”

She recounts,

“The psychological pain became so intense that I ran to the bathroom, but they used a spare key to open the door and drag me out.”

After two weeks in this unimaginable situation, she and her family were pushed into an abnormal psychological state. She began to feel mentally cornered to the point of contemplating jumping out of the window.

Before this ordeal, her family had a good relationship – she often met them for meals. Her father, in particular, frequently visited the [church](#) and tried to understand her faith. So why did her parents suddenly change?

The turning point was when an acquaintance critical of the [church](#) introduced them to the late Pastor Takeo Funada (船田武雄), whose church they began attending. Funada implanted false information such as “You’ll stop caring about murder,” and “You’ll become a criminal,” convincing the parents that the [church](#) was dangerous.



Illustration of **professional faith-breaker and pastor Takeo Funada (船田武雄)**.  
Image: Grok xAI, 2025.

Later, the parents confessed how they felt at the time,

“We thought we had no choice but to ‘protect’ her (through [abduction and confinement](#)) to stop her from becoming a criminal.”

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They also told her, "The pastor scolded us."

When Pastor Funada visited the apartment, he found Murasakino resisting. She recalls:

"My father restrained me in a headlock, my mother grabbed my hair and forced my face upward, and sometimes my siblings kicked me in the stomach."

While she was being held down, Funada mocked, "Doesn't the [Unification Church](#) teach you to love everyone?" He shouted at her to make her renounce her faith.

The only way Murasakino could think to escape was by drinking detergent and be taken to hospital. After downing the liquid, she became violently ill and pleaded with her mother through tears to take her to the hospital. But her mother coldly replied, "The pastor told us things like this could happen." Even her cries, and she being prepared to risk her life, were anticipated in advance. It took an hour before she was hospitalized.



*In hospital, with nurses, supervised by her father. Illustration: Grok xAI, 2nd May 2025.*

Even in the hospital, she was constantly supervised by her family, unable to escape. Discussions even began about transferring her to a psychiatric hospital.

She says she was only able to escape because of a "miracle". One of the nurses happened to be a member of the [religious organization](#). She contacted the [church](#) and helped her escape. Murasakino ran barefoot down the emergency stairs and finally gained her freedom after about a month.

However, she lived in fear of being [abducted](#) again and had to hide her real name and stay out of public view. She developed severe PTSD [Post-traumatic stress disorder] and was unable to live a normal life for years.

## Intervention by hostile forces leads to family breakdown

After her escape from the hospital, her parents frantically searched for her. Under Funada's guidance, they were urged to try [confinement](#) again. A journalist from a news agency introduced by Funada kept feeding them information on Murasakino's whereabouts. The details were so precise that she suspected they had a special collaborator.

In notebooks kept by her parents, who documented Funada's instructions, there were notes such as:

- "Just send letters, items, or cash."
- "The [church](#) members have little personal money, so she will definitely accept it."
- "If we keep sending things, there may be a mistake in forwarding that reveals her address."

This shows how the [deprogramming](#) [See editor's note below] of the believers had been ingeniously systematized and was methodically instructed.







From a [Family Federation](#) seong-hwa ceremony in 2015. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Reconciliation with her parents came only after her eldest son died in an accident, and the [Family Federation](#) held a "seonghwa" ceremony (a funeral service). Her parents, seeing the sincerity of the members preparing the event, were moved.

As for why a second abduction never happened, her parents said, "We gradually realized that it's hard to change someone's mind through force." Reflecting on Funada, they said, "His determination was incredible, almost obsessive. Regardless of right or wrong, the will of someone with faith is powerful."

In her interview, Murasakino said,

"Because of the intervention of groups opposed to the [Family Federation](#), many families have been destroyed and are suffering. The 4,300 victims of [abduction and confinement](#) experienced hellish suffering, and the families who carried it out are burdened with guilt."

She also criticized recent media coverage, saying,

"Terms like 'cult', 'brainwashing group', and 'mind control' have taken on a life of their own, making believers seem like some kind of terrifying 'monsters.'"

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 7](#)

**Featured image** above: *Helped by nurse to escape.* Illustration: Grok xAI, 2nd May 2025.

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**Also subject to faith-breaking attempts:** *Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001.* Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp.](#) Cropped

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