

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Warning! Dangerous Inquisition Like Precedents in Japan

Knut Holdhus
May 7, 2025



Hiroshi Kurose: Born in 1951 in Hiroshima Prefecture. Completed a master's in legal philosophy at Waseda University in 1975. Graduated from Tokyo Theological Seminary in 1978 and the Advanced Theology Program at Seinan Gakuin University in 1979. Completed studies at Zurich Baptist Seminary in 1984. Currently pastor of Tokyo West Baptist Church. Major works include The Development of a New Christianity (Good Time Publishing)



Baptist pastor warns of dangerous precedent and maintains dissolution order is due to Family Federation being "Korean-based religion" and "Japanese money being sent to Korea"

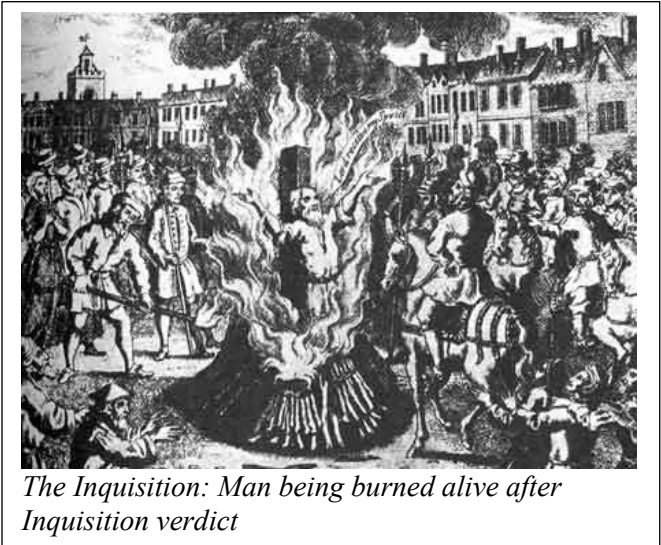
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Dissolution Order Against the Family Federation a "Stain on History"

Interview with Pastor Hiroshi Kurose of Tokyo West Baptist Church

by Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田 剛)

A religious organization must have self-awareness and reflect



The Inquisition: Man being burned alive after Inquisition verdict

The [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) appealed the Tokyo District Court's [dissolution order](#) issued on 25th March by filing an immediate [appeal](#) with the Tokyo High Court on 7th April. We spoke with Pastor Hiroshi Kurose (黒瀬博) of the Tokyo West Baptist Church about the validity of the [dissolution order](#), the outlook of the trial, and the state of religious freedom in Japan.

Interviewed by Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田 剛)

- The Family Federation has received a dissolution order.

It is an unjust decision from the standpoint of the Japanese Constitution, international law, and the

Religious Corporations Act. If such a [ruling](#) is allowed to stand, it will go down in history as a stain on the record of Japanese jurisprudence. The lawyers who forced this [order](#) through must be prepared to face judgment by history. What they are doing is no different from the inquisitors of the medieval era.



Mutsuhito, Emperor Meiji, the 122nd emperor of Japan, reigning from he was 15 years old in 1867 until his death in 1912. The portrait was drawn in 1888 by Eduardo Chiossone (1833-1898) during his employment by the Imperial Printing Bureau. Chiossone was ordered to covertly sketch the emperor and create the final portrait from those sketches. The completed work was then photographed and distributed under the tacit approval of the emperor to foreign governments and Japanese schools

As a pastor belonging to the Baptist denomination, I must say this: Baptist churches have historically been persecuted by other Christian denominations since their founding. They strongly oppose any government restriction on religious freedom.

- Why is religious freedom not respected in Japan?

One reason is the mistranslation and misuse of the term "religious freedom". In Japanese legal terminology, the term used is shinkyo no jiyū (信教の自由 - freedom of faith/belief). In English, this would be translated simply as "freedom of religion".

However, the Meiji government [Editor's note: 1868-1912] disliked the expression "freedom of religion" (literally translated to Japanese as 宗教の自由 - shūkyō no jiyū) and invented the alternative term shinkyo no jiyū [See editor's note below]. The continued use of this inaccurate translation even after the war shows that Japanese legal scholars have not seriously understood religious freedom. International law now translates this term as "freedom of religion", and so domestic Japanese law should also speak in terms of shūkyō no jiyū, not shinkyo no jiyū.

That legal scholars have said nothing about this mistranslation is, in itself, evidence of their negligence. I believe this negligence is one of the underlying causes of the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#).

- Could this dissolution order set a precedent for dissolving other political or religious groups?

Although some online outlets and a few media reports have already pointed out the injustice of this [dissolution order](#), even the

Japanese Communist Party (JCP) is not praising the verdict - rather, they fear it. Although Shimbun Akahata [Editor's note: the Communist party's newspaper] has repeatedly criticized the [Family Federation](#), it is cautious in how it discusses the [dissolution order](#). This is because they understand that the logic used here could be directly applied to dissolve the Communist Party itself.



The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) understands that logic behind dissolution order could be used to dissolve the communist party. Here, the Central Committee Building of the Japanese Communist Party (JPC) in Shibuya, Tokyo May 2006

Many religious groups are also hesitant to clearly oppose the [dissolution order](#), fearing backlash from society. But their careful wording reflects a concern that the same logic might one day be turned against them.

- Isn't the basis of the dissolution order unclear?

Many people already recognize that there are serious legal and practical problems with this [dissolution order](#). That said, we must also acknowledge that the [Family Federation](#) itself bears some responsibility. Whether they are unaware of it or simply unwilling to recognize it, the [Federation](#) must understand that without self-awareness and reflection, the [dissolution order](#) may be inevitable.

As for the courts, although their rulings are officially based on law, in reality, they consider public sentiment when making decisions - even if they can't explicitly state this in their rulings. You can't see the judges' feelings just by reading the judgment, but the conclusions usually align with national sentiment.

Avoiding dissolution through settlement

- Public sentiment toward the [Family Federation](#) is quite negative.

In fact, it's extremely bad. Unlike other religions, the reason public sentiment is so hostile toward the [Family Federation](#) is largely because it is a Korean-based religion, and it is believed that donations from Japanese members are being sent to Korea.

We should recall that the Protestant Reformation was also triggered by resentment over German money

being sent to the Vatican in Italy through the sale of indulgences. Money-related issues provoke strong public emotions. But just like in the Reformation, where indulgences were not the public focus, but the debate centered around Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith, the true root of the issue wasn't formally acknowledged.



German money being sent to the Vatican. Here, from the selling of indulgences. "A Question to a Mintmaker", circa 1530, woodcut by Jörg (Jeorg/Jan) Breu the Elder

Behind the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#) is public resentment over Japanese money flowing to Korea - but this will not be mentioned in the court's ruling. It is essential to realize that past "spiritual sales" tactics or doctrines are not the core of the issue.

- The case seems to be unfolding like a "national policy". Is there a way to prevent the dissolution order?

It will require compromise on both sides. A possible solution is for the court to refrain from issuing the [dissolution order](#), while the [Family Federation](#) agrees to certain conditions. A mutual settlement could postpone or avert the [order](#). This would both align with public sentiment and avoid issuing a legally

problematic [dissolution order](#).

Neither the Ministry of Education nor the judges actually want to issue such an [order](#). If this approach is feasible, it could help the court and Japanese government avoid international criticism and soothe public opinion. I believe this is the most realistic way forward.

[Editor's note: The distinction between 信教の自由 (shinkyo no jiyū) and 宗教の自由 (shūkyō no jiyū) that Pastor Hiroshi Kurose raises is nuanced but revealing - both linguistically and politically.

Literally, 信教の自由 (shinkyo no jiyū) means "freedom of belief/faith". It emphasizes the individual's inner conviction - the right to believe (or not believe) in a religion or faith of one's choosing. This is the term used in Japan's Constitution (Article 20) and legal codes.

宗教の自由 (shūkyō no jiyū) translates more directly to "freedom of religion". It encompasses not just internal belief but external practice - including public and institutional rights like organizing religious groups, conducting rituals, proselytizing, and maintaining institutions.



The Meiji Emperor among gods and emperors. This 1878 engraving by Toyohara Chikanobu (1838 - 1912) visually presents the central tenet of State Shinto (1871-1946). This Shinto variant asserted and promoted belief in the divinity of the Emperor, which arose from a genealogical family tree extending back to the first emperor and to the most important deities of Japanese mythology. Emperor Meiji in a Western chair with his wife, Empress Shōken, is seated in the foreground

Kurose claims that the Meiji government (1868-1912) deliberately avoided shūkyō no jiyū to limit the broader implications of religious liberty (especially concerning public practice or institutional autonomy). The Meiji government maintained strict control over religion, especially fearing Christianity and new religious movements. Religious freedom was nominally granted but heavily constrained by policies that aimed to preserve social order and loyalty to the emperor.

The Meiji authorities also created State Shinto - a system where Shinto shrines were managed by the state and tied to nationalism, while Buddhism and Christianity were regulated or discouraged to varying degrees.

The continued use of shinkyo no jiyū reflects a narrow and possibly outdated understanding of religious freedom. Japan's legal culture may be overly focused on private belief, while still viewing public religious expression or institutional activity with suspicion - especially when foreign-origin religions like the [Family Federation](#) are involved.

If freedom is defined only as belief, the state can more easily regulate action (e.g., missionary work, financial activities, gatherings), claiming it's not violating constitutional protections.

Japanese society, shaped by historical suspicion of "new religions" (新宗教), may tacitly accept restrictions on practice if "freedom of belief" remains untouched.



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Globally, freedom of religion - as per international standards like International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) - includes belief and practice. Pastor Kurose is effectively arguing that Japan falls short of this international norm.

Pastor Kurose sees Japan's reliance on shinkyo no jiyū as a reflection of legal and cultural reluctance to fully embrace religious pluralism, especially when political sensitivities or foreign religious movements are involved.]

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Calling For End To Japan's Silent Complicity

• May 6, 2025

• Knut Holdhus



Religious leader takes close look at Japan's silent complicity in huge "deprogramming" scandal: How faith-breaking was allowed to flourish

Tokyo, 5th May 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article.*

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the Move to Dissolve the Family Federation (8)

Contributed by Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久), Executive Secretary, Tokyo Institute for Christian Theology (Part 2)

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#), [article 7](#)

Family Federation Believers Are Victims of Prejudice

The issue of deprogramming (faith-breaking) [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) is deeply tied to the structural distortions of Japan's mental health care system. We have sources such as

- *The Dark Side of Mental Health Care* by Mitsunobu Sato (佐藤光展) published in Japanese on *Kodansha Gendai Shinsho*, and
- *The Dark Side of the Mental Health Business* by Noriyasu Yoneda (米田倫康), published in Japanese on *Kitashinjuku Publishing*.

According to such sources, the practice of [abducting, detaining, and confining](#) individuals deemed “problematic” by society has long been tacitly permitted due to a lack of legal oversight.

This structural gap created an environment where deprogrammers (faith-breakers) could justify forcibly “reforming” the thoughts of religious believers. There are cases where privately run detention facilities, such as *Busshō-in*, owned by the Buddhist sect *Butsuren-shū* (佛蓮宗), served as the stage for such acts.

Even more concerning is how the media, police, prosecutors, and courts turned a blind eye to deprogramming (faith-breaking) [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) while regarding Aum Shinrikyo as a terrorist group. As the Aum case was given status of a national crisis, those involved in [abductions and confinement](#) faced no legal or ethical accountability. This tacit approval likely emboldened practitioners by giving them a sort of “license to act”. It is also possible that there were unspoken cooperative ties with public security authorities.

Aum Shinrikyo's publication *Ideal Society No. 12* (released 5th November 1992) included numerous claims of victimization by deprogramming [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) and also accused lawyers and media outlets of supporting illegal actions.

Chronologically, it appears that deprogramming [\[See editor's note 1 below\]](#) networks initially targeting the [Unification Church](#) applied the same methods to Aum followers. Amid rising public anxiety over Aum, propaganda began equating the [Family Federation](#) with Aum, which exacerbated prejudice against the [Family Federation](#).

While Aum Shinrikyo committed destructive acts such as the 1989 murder of lawyer Tsutsumi Sakamoto (坂本堤) [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#) and the sarin gas attacks, the [Family Federation](#) has not been involved in any criminal cases over the past 60 years and has responded peacefully despite facing persecution.

Since its “Compliance Declaration” in 2009 [\[See editor's note 3 below\]](#), the [Family Federation](#) has actively sought to improve. Despite the essential differences between Aum and the [Family Federation](#), deprogrammers (faith-breakers) have continued to spread the narrative that “Aum and the [Family Federation](#) are the same,” using this to justify their actions. This propaganda leans on the illogical reasoning that “the [Unification Church](#) is even worse than Aum because they are skilled at avoiding arrest.” Believers of the [Family Federation](#) have suffered unjust persecution as victims of such prejudice. It is suspected that this kind of widespread propaganda may have influenced court decisions as well.



Those who practiced deprogramming (faith-breaking) [\[See editor's note 1\]](#)



The reality of faith-breaking: Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#), in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for **more than 12 years**. Photo: Kazuhiro Yonemoto / [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

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Professional faith-breaker **Takashi Miyamura** (宮村 峻), responsible for hundreds of deprogrammings based on abduction and forcible detention. He is said to have been advisor to the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP). Photo: [FFWPU](#)

[below](#)] should have reflected, especially after witnessing the Tokyo subway sarin attack, on whether their actions might have provoked extreme responses from the groups they targeted. [Abduction, confinement](#), and forced ideological re-education (思想改造) [[See editor's note 4 below](#)] can cause deep trauma and trigger unpredictable backlash. Recognizing this risk, there should have been an ethical decision to renounce such methods as unacceptable. However, with tacit approval in the wake of the Aum incident, deprogrammers continued their activities without reflection, justifying actions that overstepped legal and ethical boundaries.

Thirty years after the Aum incident, the problem of deprogramming [[See editor's note 1 below](#)] remains buried in darkness. While some tolerance for actions taken during a national crisis may be understandable, the continued tolerance of lawless conduct afterward is inexcusable. Deprogramming [[See editor's note 1 below](#)] not only violates individual freedom and dignity but also has grave consequences for society as a whole. The unfair propaganda against the [Family Federation](#) is an extension of this broader issue.

To prevent a repeat of the tragedies of 30 years ago, we must have the courage to shine a light on the dark world of deprogramming [[See editor's note 1 below](#)]. Silent complicity without scrutiny breeds further injustice. Now is the time to take action, drawing on the lessons of the past for the sake of the future.

(End)

See [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#), [article 7](#)

Featured image above: Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久), Secretary of the Tokyo Christian Theological Institute. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

[Editor's note 1: 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.



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

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.

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.]

[Editor's note 2: Tsutsumi Sakamoto (坂本堤, 1956–1989) was a Japanese lawyer and a key member of the notorious "anti-cult" organization *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会, Zenkoku Reikan Shōhō Taisaku Bengoshi Renraku-kai). He was especially known for his work against the Aum Shinrikyo group, which later carried out the 1995 Tokyo subway sarin gas attack.

Sakamoto's legal efforts were seen as a significant threat to Aum Shinrikyo. This led its leader, Shoko Asahara, to order Sakamoto's assassination in 1989. In November 1989, Sakamoto, his wife Satoko, and their one-year-old son Tatsuhiko were murdered by Aum Shinrikyo members. The attackers entered the Sakamoto's home in Yokohama at night, drugged the family, and strangled them before disposing of their bodies in three different prefectures.

The case remained unsolved until 1995, when Aum Shinrikyo members confessed after being arrested for the sarin gas attack. The murders shocked Japan.

Tsutsumi Sakamoto is known for his activism pursuing legal action against Aum Shinrikyo based on the use of consumer protection law to reclaim donations to the organization. He represented so-called apostates, members who had left the group and become hostile to it. Sakamoto claimed that the Aum Shinrikyo were involved in unlawful activities years before the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway.]

[Editor's note 3: The 2009 compliance declaration of the *Unification Church of Japan* (now the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*) was a formal commitment by the organization to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

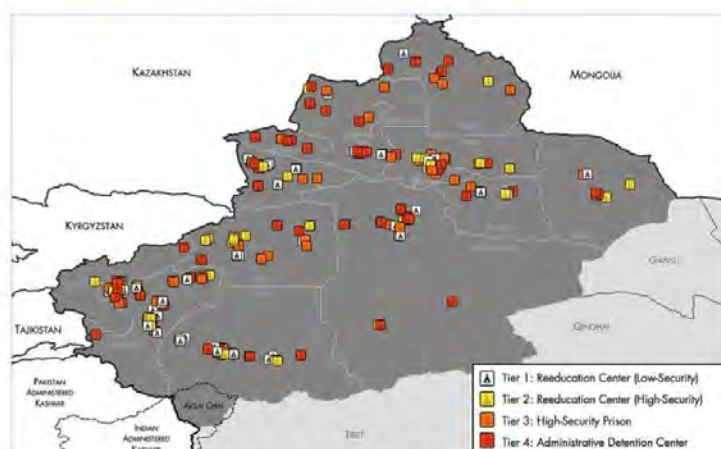
The *Unification Church* in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (霊感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the religious organization an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the organization to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The religious organization pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The *Unification Church* stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the *Unification Church* – since 2015 called the *Family Federation*. The religious organization has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to dissolution.]



Ideological re-education on large scale in the Chinese province of Xinjiang: Map of the Xinjiang Internment Camps created by the RAND Corporation based on data collected by the US National Geospatial Intelligence Agency and the Australian Strategic Policy

[Editor's note 4: Ideological re-education. The Japanese term 思想改造 (shisō kaizō) is best translated as "thought reform" or "ideological re-education".

It refers to the deliberate effort to change someone's beliefs, ideology, or worldview – often through coercive or manipulative means. The term has strong historical and political connotations, especially associated with authoritarian regimes (e.g., Communist China under Mao or Xi Jinping), where it has been used to describe systematic campaigns to reshape people's thinking to align with state ideology.]

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