FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Massimo Introvigne on 3-Nation Web Attacking the Family Federation

Knut Holdhus
October 30, 2026



Featured image above: Montage showing Dr. Massimo Introvigne portraying a 3-nation web attacking the Family Federation. Illustration: ChatGPT

Bitter Winter, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.



Assassination exploited by web of activists: Shinzo Abe, here in March 2022, few months before he was assassinated

Leading scholar traces a web of Japanese activist lawyers, professional Korean faith-breakers, and Chinese organizations all seeking coordinated attack on minority faiths

Part 3 of 4-part series

See part 1: Unlikely Alliance Against Religious Minorities

See part 2: Targeted by Hostile Network Close to China

Dr. Massimo Introvigne examines the international connections behind the campaign against the Family Federation in Japan, tracing contacts between Japanese lawyers and South Korean faith-breakers.

The dissolution of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Japan followed a campaign that intensified after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022. But according to Dr. Massimo Introvigne, the Japanese campaign cannot be fully understood without examining its international connections, particularly with so-called anti-cult activists in South Korea.

In an article published by Bitter Winter on 27th October, Introvigne argues that a network of Japanese lawyers, Korean pastors, and other campaigners helped turn opposition to the Family Federation into a broader regional movement.

At the centre of the Japanese network is the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales [See editor's note 1 below], established in 1987. Introvigne describes the organization as having longstanding connections to Japan's political left and argues that these relationships made cooperation with Chinese Communist Party-linked organizations easier than cooperation with some of the conservative evangelical activists in South Korea.

The assassination that changed the political climate

On 8th July 2022, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) was shot and killed. The perpetrator, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), said that he blamed Abe for his association with the Family Federation, to which Yamagami's mother belonged.

The assassination brought unprecedented public attention to the religious movement and its relationship with Japanese politicians. Introvigne argues that the lawyers' network [See editor's note 1 below] responded quickly, helping to transform the controversy into an international campaign.



Hiroshi Watanabe, the secretary-general of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales

On 22nd July, just two weeks after Abe's death, Japanese attorney Hiroshi Watanabe (渡辺 博), the secretary-general of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales [See editor's note 1 below], participated in a press conference in Seoul alongside South Korean pastor Oh Myeong-hyeon (오명현). They called for action against the Family Federation in South Korea.

Introvigne describes Oh as a prominent deprogrammer (faith-breaker) and refers to his involvement in an earlier case with tragic consequences. Before the 2022 Jeongeup double murder, Oh had persuaded a man that his former wife, a member of Shincheonji [See editor's note 2 below], needed deprogramming [See editor's note 3 below]. The man subsequently killed her and her sister-in-law.

The episode illustrates the potential dangers of campaigns that portray minority religious affiliation as a problem requiring coercive intervention. It also raises questions about the responsibility of those who encourage families to force adults to abandon their religious beliefs.

From Japan to South Korea

The international contacts continued in December 2022, when a conference in Seoul promoted the adoption of a French-style anti-cult law in South Korea.



Long-time communist and activist campaigning against the Family Federation, member of the National Diet for the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) until 2022: Yoshifu Arita here giving a speech on the street in front of Hachioji Station in Tokyo October 14, 2024

According to Introvigne, Watanabe again participated, alongside Yoshifu Arita (有田芳生), until 2026 a Japanese legislator and veteran campaigner against the Family Federation.

The cooperation subsequently expanded. On 13th May 2025, nine Japanese pastors, together with Japanese and South Korean deprogrammers (faith-breakers) [See editor's note 3 below], presented an agreement on cooperation against Korean-origin religious groups they regarded as heretical or pseudo-religious.

These meetings are important to Introvigne's argument because they suggest that the campaign was not confined to isolated national controversies. Instead, activists from different countries were discussing common strategies and seeking coordinated responses to religious movements they opposed.

However, the existence of international meetings does not, by itself, establish that every participant shared the same objectives or that the meetings directly determined subsequent government decisions. The significance of the contacts must of course be assessed alongside the evidence concerning their activities and influence.

The August 2025 conference in Daejeon

Introvigne identifies an international conference held at Mokwon University in the large South Korean city Daejeon in August 2025 as a particularly revealing episode.

Organized by the World Association Against Heresy, the event brought together Korean anti-cult

activists, Japanese participants, and representatives of Chinese organizations. Introvigne writes that the organizers appeared to intend the meeting to remain largely unnoticed: Korean media did not report it, and the university's website did not publish an account.

Chinese media, however, reported the conference and published photographs and lists of participants.



Sociologist with hostile view of the Family Federation: Yoshihide Sakurai

According to Introvigne, pastor and professional faith-breaker Jin Yong-sik (진용식) presided over the gathering. Japanese participants included scholar Hiroko Nakanishi (中西博子), who co-authored a book critical of the Family Federation with Professor Yoshihide Sakurai (櫻井義秀). Chinese attendees included Zhang Chunli (张纯俐), Chen Dequan (陈德权), and Xu Tao (徐弢), as well as Li Jinghu (李京虎) of the government-controlled Three-Self Church. A German evangelical anti-cult pastor also participated.

Introvigne states that the conference participants called for decisive action against the Family Federation in South Korea. The following month, in September 2025, the religious organization's co-founder Hak Ja Han (한학자) was detained.



Detained after call for "decisive action" against the Family Federation: Hak Ja Han, aka. Mother Han, here speaking in South Korea January 9, 2022

The sequence of events is central to his thesis, although chronological proximity alone does not prove that the conference caused the arrest. The original article presents the meeting as evidence of an organized campaign and raises questions about the extent to which international anti-cult networks influence political and legal developments.

A network with broader political implications

For Introvigne, the Japanese lawyers' network [See editor's note 1 below] represents the third corner of a wider triangle linking South Korean anti-cult activists and Chinese organizations.

The participants may disagree fundamentally about communism, Christianity, and political ideology. Nevertheless, their shared opposition to particular religious movements may provide sufficient common ground for cooperation.

The Japanese case also demonstrates how a domestic political crisis can become a catalyst for international mobilization. Abe's assassination created an atmosphere in which the Family Federation's activities became the subject of intense scrutiny. Activists from Japan and South Korea then appeared at one another's events, while other organizations became involved in discussions about anti-cult policy.

The critical question is whether these relationships remained expressions of legitimate public debate or helped promote measures that disproportionately restricted religious freedom.

Japan's dissolution proceedings were conducted through the country's legal institutions, and the court decisions must be evaluated on their own evidence and reasoning. At the same time, the international contacts described by Introvigne provide a reason to examine the wider political environment in which the campaign developed.

For religious liberty advocates, the case raises a broader concern: when campaigns against a minority religion become international movements, it becomes especially important to distinguish legitimate criticism and legal accountability from collective punishment or discrimination based on religious affiliation.

Source: Massimo Introvigne, "The Triple Alliance: The Chinese Communist Party, Japanese Anti-Cult Lawyers, and Korean Heresy Hunters", Bitter Winter, 27th October 2026.

The article is part 3 of 4-part series

See part 1: Unlikely Alliance Against Religious Minorities

See part 2: Targeted by Hostile Network Close to China

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note 1: The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren) presents itself to the Japanese public as a benevolent coalition of legal professionals fighting for consumer rights. Established in 1987, the network claims its sole mission is to protect vulnerable citizens from fraudulent business practices and what it terms "spiritual sales". However, an objective examination of their history, methods, and underlying political motivations reveals a far more sinister agenda. Scholars of religious liberty and investigative journalists have increasingly exposed the network as an ideological weapon designed not to protect consumers, but to systematically dismantle minority religious organizations - most notably the Family Federation.

Prominent critics, including Italian sociologist Massimo Introvigne and the human rights organization CESNUR, have documented how Zenkoku Benren acts as a primary instigator of religious intolerance in Japan. Rather than operating as an objective legal resource, the network has long been accused of actively facilitating, or turning a blind eye to, the brutal practice of "deprogramming" or coercive faith-breaking. For decades, thousands of faith believers were abducted, confined, and subjected to severe psychological duress by professional faith-breakers working hand-in-hand with hostile relatives and network-aligned activists.



Masumi Fukuda, Japanese investigative journalist and prize-winning author, here speaking at a press conference in Brussels, Belgium on June 29, 2026

Furthermore, acclaimed Japanese investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda has meticulously exposed the inner workings of the network, highlighting how it manufactures legal grievances. Fukuda's reporting reveals that many of the lawsuits championed by Zenkoku Benren involve former members who originally made voluntary, faith-driven donations but were later coerced by anti-cult lawyers into retroactively claiming they were defrauded. This predatory litigation strategy serves a dual purpose: it generates immense financial payouts for the lawyers involved while feeding a sensationalist media narrative designed to stoke public prejudice.

The network's ultimate objective has culminated in their aggressive push to strip the Family Federation of its religious corporation status. Critics argue this is a politically motivated campaign driven by an alliance of left-wing and communist activists seeking to purge religious voices from the public square. By weaponizing the concept of "spiritual sales", Zenkoku Benren has succeeded in manipulating public opinion and pressuring government authorities to violate fundamental constitutional rights to religious freedom.

To understand the ongoing religious liberty crisis in Japan, it is vital to look past the network's consumer-protection facade. Zenkoku Benren represents a dangerous precedent where activist legal networks can selectively target and destroy minority faiths under the guise of public interest.]

[Editor's note 2: Shincheonji, officially known as Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation.

Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it. He teaches that South Korea is the location where the prophecies of the Book of Revelation are actively playing out in real-time, making it the epicenter of the final harvest. Shincheonji focuses on filling the literal 144,000 slots of the 12 Tribes mentioned in Revelation. Once this number of truly sealed, flawless believers is completed, they believe they will rule as kings and priests over the rest of humanity.]

[Editor's note 3: 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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European scholar traces Chinese state interests behind an international network campaigning against minority faiths

Part 2 *of 4-part series*

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Dr. Massimo Introvigne, the world's leading scholar on minority religions, traces the development of South Korea's anti-heresy movement and examines why its activists may have found common cause with organizations

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Dr. Massimo Introvigne *speaking 12th October 2026 at an international conference in Taiwan on religious freedom and faith minorities. Screenshot from video by Bitter Winter.*

directly linked to China's Communist Party.

South Korea's anti-cult movement, described by the Italian scholar as "the most aggressive in East Asia", has developed into a significant force in controversies involving minority religious movements. According to Dr. Massimo Introvigne, its activities have also created opportunities for cooperation with Chinese organizations whose objectives extend beyond religious competition.

In an article published by Bitter Winter on 27th October, Introvigne argues that these relationships help explain how opposition to minority religions can become connected to wider political and geopolitical interests.

Logo of Bitter Winter, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

His account begins with the emergence of organized evangelical opposition to religious movements in South Korea during the late 1990s.

From doctrinal disputes to organized campaigns

In 1998, Protestant pastors, most of them Presbyterian, established the *Christian Heresy Research Council*. Their principal concern was what they described as "sheep stealing": members leaving established congregations to join movements such as the Unification Church, now known as the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*, and Shincheonji Church [See editor's note 1 below].

Religious competition of this kind is hardly unique to South Korea. What distinguished the movement described by Introvigne was the development of organized efforts to prevent people from joining or to coercively talk them into abandoning minority religions.

The council subsequently became the *Christian Heresy Countermeasures Association*, a name reflecting a more active approach. Introvigne identifies deprogramming or faith-breaking [See editor's note 2 below] as one particularly controversial element of this approach.

Deprogramming, as he defines it, involves abducting adult members of a religious movement and confining them until they renounce their beliefs. The practice emerged in the United States and later spread to Japan and South Korea.

In Japan, legal action brought against the captors of Family Federation member Toru Goto, who was confined for more than twelve years, helped bring the practice largely to an end. The *Tokyo High Court* held his captors liable in 2014, and the Supreme Court confirmed the decision in 2015.

See also Fear of Return of Coercive Faith-Breaking Abuse



Toru Goto, left, after winning the first instance case in Tokyo District Court on 28th January 2014. The poster held up says, "勝訴" – "Won the case." The verdict was upheld by Tokyo High Court on 13th November 2014, and finally by the Supreme Court on 29th September 2015. Photo: Toru Goto

South Korea, Introvigne argues, presents a different picture. He maintains that cases of coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note 2 below] have continued into the 2020s, with inconsistent legal consequences. According to his account, those responsible for overt physical violence may be punished, while parents who confine adult sons and daughters can encounter a more tolerant response from law enforcement.



The pattern of religious targeting also differs between the two countries. In Japan, the Family Federation was a principal target of faith-breaking [See editor's

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Victim of faith-breaking and strongly persecuted in South Korea *due to refusal of military service based on religious beliefs: The Jehovah's Witnesses. Thousands of believers have been imprisoned for conscientious objection to conscription. Here, their pamphlet stand in front of the Daeseongri station in South Korea 10th July 2016. Photo: Jhcbs1019 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped*

note 2 below]. In South Korea, Introvigne reports that the most prominent cases have involved Shincheonji [See editor's note 1 below], the *World Mission Society Church of God* [See editor's note 3 below], *Christian Gospel Mission*, also known as Providence [See editor's note 4 below], and *Jehovah's Witnesses*.

He attributes the difference partly to demographics: many young Family Federation members in South Korea are second-generation believers whose parents share their faith, whereas many Shincheonji members come from evangelical families opposed to the religious choices of their offspring.

An unexpected relationship with China

Introvigne traces contacts between South Korean anti-cult activists and Chinese organizations to at least 2007, when a Korean delegation attended an anti-cult symposium in Shenzhen, a large city close to Hong Kong.

He says that Chinese representatives subsequently participated in South Korean gatherings, Korean activists attended events in China, and Chinese media publicized Korean anti-cult activities.

The most striking aspect of this relationship is the ideological contradiction. South Korean evangelical anti-cult activists may regard communism as a threat to Christianity, while the *Chinese Communist Party* maintains an officially atheist political system and restricts severely religious movements it classifies as illegal.

Introvigne argues that a common opposition to certain religious groups has nevertheless created a basis for cooperation.

He identifies four possible reasons for China's interest.

First, Korean churches and new religious movements have conducted missionary activities in China, where many such activities are prohibited. Supporting campaigns against these movements abroad could, in Introvigne's interpretation, help Beijing address perceived challenges beyond its borders.

Second, the Family Federation's anti-communist activities have made it an ideological adversary of the *Chinese Communist Party*.

Third, China has an interest in the movement of religious refugees. Introvigne describes how Chinese citizens fleeing religious persecution entered South Korea through Jeju Island, where Chinese nationals can enter without a visa under special arrangements. Some subsequently sought asylum, reporting arrests and torture in China.

According to Introvigne, Korean anti-cult activists participated in demonstrations against these refugees. He argues that the resulting pressure contributed to a stricter South Korean asylum policy and the return of some refugees to China. He particularly highlights members of *The Church of Almighty God* [See editor's note 3 below], many of whom subsequently dispersed to other countries.



Logo of Church of Almighty God (Eastern Lightning). Author (2023): CAG. Public domain image. Cropped

Fourth, Introvigne points to intelligence gathering. He states that court decisions have established that some anti-cult activists acted as agents of Chinese intelligence services. A refugee-protection decision by an Italian court (Court of Rome) on 14th June 2024 identified South Korean O Myung-ok (오명옥) as a Chinese agent. In a separate article Introvigne writes that *Religion and Truth*, a Chinese-language "anti-cult research" platform led by O Myung-ok, published passport details and other personal information relating to more than 70 members living in South Korea from the Chinese underground *Church of Almighty God*. Such detailed information could only have come from the Chinese authorities, Introvigne points out.

The people behind the network

Among the Chinese figures identified by Introvigne are Xu Tao (徐弢) of the Hubei Anti-Xie-Jiao Association, Professor Chen Dequan (陈德权) of Northeastern University in Shenyang, and Zhang Chunli (张纯俐) of the *Chinese People's Public Security University*, who teaches police approaches to what the authorities classify as cults.

On the South Korean side, he highlights the above-mentioned O Myung-ok (오명옥), publisher of Religion and Truth and the website churchheresy.com. He alleges that her activities included support for campaigns against religious refugees and demonstrations against the Family Federation and Shincheonji [See editor's note 1 below].



From World Mission Society Church of God on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., USA. Photo (2016): Farragutful / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int

In his article, Introvigne also identifies Pastor Jin Yong-sik (진용식), a professional faith-breaker (deprogrammer) and president of the *World Association Against Heresy*, as a central figure. He notes that Jin was sentenced to ten months in prison, with two years of probation, in connection with the illegal placement of a member of the South Korean new religious movement *World Mission Society Church of God* (WMSCOG) [See editor's note 3 below] in a psychiatric institution in 2007. Introvigne also cites a 2012 investigation reporting substantial earnings from faith-breaking [See editor's note 2 below] activities.

The pastor's subsequent international tours and advocacy against several minority religious movements form another part of Introvigne's argument about the network's reach.

Massimo Introvigne also points out how closely connected Jin is to the Chinese authorities. In a 4th September 2025 article, Bitter Winter explains,

> "In 2024, he [Jin] traveled to Spain to conduct a seminar and deliver a statement urging the Spanish government to deport CAG [Church of Almighty God] members. Later, Chinese websites like 'Da Ai Wang', 'Awakener Alliance', and 'China Anti-Xie-Jiao Network' showed unified support, stating that Jin Yong-sik convinced a Spanish lawyer to cease helping CAG members with asylum requests.
>
> Jin Yong-sik also campaigned actively in Germany, Mongolia, and other nations to ask these countries to deport CAG members, denounce various groups as 'cults', and justify their repression in China."

A regional issue, not simply a theological dispute

The relationships described by Introvigne suggest that anti-cult activism can intersect with state interests, refugee policy, and international political networks.

Whether every connection supports the broader thesis remains a matter for careful examination. But the central question is important: when campaigns against minority religions cross national borders, do they remain limited to theological disagreement, or can they become instruments of wider political objectives?

For Introvigne, South Korea's anti-cult movement provides a revealing case study of how such interests may converge – and why the consequences for religious freedom warrant international attention.

Source: Massimo Introvigne, "The Triple Alliance: The Chinese Communist Party, Japanese Anti-Cult Lawyers, and Korean Heresy Hunters", Bitter Winter, 27th October 2026.

*The article is **part 2** of 4-part series*

See part 1: Unlikely Alliance Against Religious Minorities

See part 3: 3-Nation Web Attacking the Family Federation

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

Featured image *above: From a demonstration near Seoul City Hall on 16th November 2025 for religious freedom and the release of Mother Han from long-term pre-trial detention. Photo: FFWPU*

[***Editor's note 1***: **Shincheonji**, officially known as *Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony*, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation.

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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*

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.

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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 3***: The **World Mission Society Church of God** (WMSCOG) is a South Korean Christian movement founded in 1964 by Ahn Sahng-hong (1918–1985). Its distinctive teachings include the belief that Ahn Sahng-hong was Christ returned to Earth and that God exists as both God the Father and God the Mother. The church emphasizes the Bible, observance of the Saturday Sabbath and biblical festivals, particularly Passover, which it considers essential to salvation. Headquartered in South Korea, it has expanded internationally, establishing congregations in numerous countries. Its members also participate in volunteer activities, including environmental projects and community service.]

[***Editor's note 4***: The **Christian Gospel Mission** (CGM), also known as Providence or JMS (Jesus Morning Star), is a South Korean Christian new religious movement founded by Jung Myung-seok (Jeong Myeong-seok) in the late 1970s. It emphasizes Bible study, personal spiritual development and a distinctive

interpretation of Christian scripture, often taught through a series of 30 lessons. Jung has been regarded by followers as a specially chosen messianic figure. The movement has expanded internationally, particularly among young people and university students. It has attracted considerable controversy because of serious sexual abuse allegations against its founder, who was sentenced to 17 years in prison by South Korea's Supreme Court in January 2025.]

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