

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Social Activism Behind Government Oppression of Unification Church

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March 5, 2024



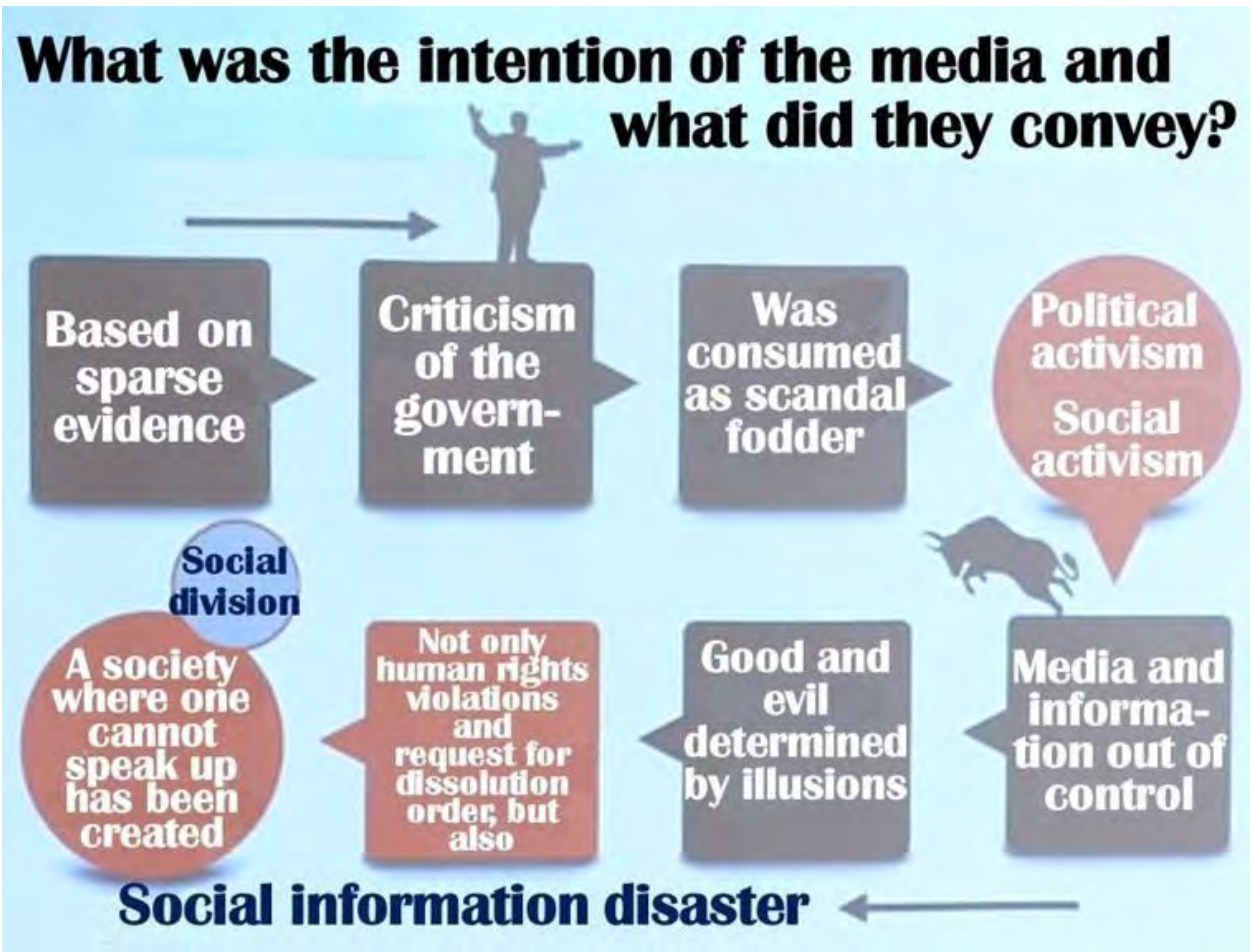
English reconstruction of one of the slides Fumihiro Kato used 20th Jan. 2024

Japanese author exposes how political and social activism aided by media are at the root of current wave of persecution against religious minority

What was the reporting intended to convey? Report with data on the hounding of the Unification Church

Part 5 of a presentation by Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏), writer, author and and photographer, at a symposium on the theme "Why Did Reporting Go Astray? Thorough Examination by Journalists on Reporting on the Former [Unification Church](#)", (organized by UPF-Japan) held 20th January 2024 in Tokyo to investigate the media's continued coverage persecuting the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)).

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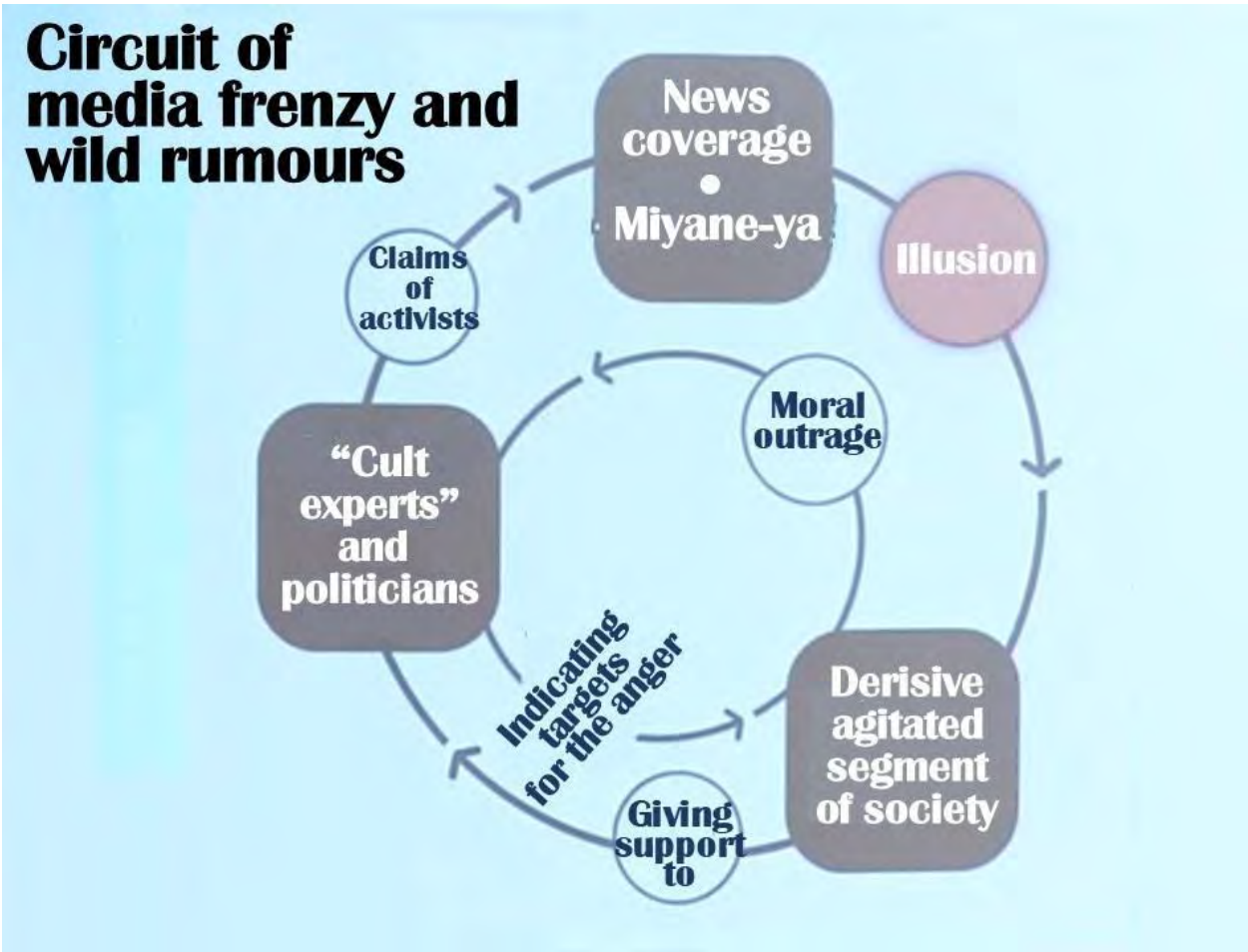
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Let's summarize what the media intended and conveyed.

The reporting on the [Unification Church](#) was a phenomenon where opinion leaders and mass media influenced the commotion by asserting, with little evidence, that "the [church](#) is controlling Japanese politics." Although the relationship between the [Unification Church](#) and politics was constantly brought up, the frenzy was limited to a very small segment of society.

Not only did it have strong political undertones, but it also assumed that it was natural to isolate believers from society and deprive them of their human rights. So, wasn't this social activism, an activism that works on society? In fact, the relationship between opinion leaders, the media, and a very small number of zealous people is exactly the same as the scenario where reputational damage caused by the nuclear plant accident occurred.

As you can see, before July 2022 the activities and claims of opinion leaders such as Eito Suzuki, Masaki Kito, and Yoshifu Arita [all of them leftwing activists vehemently opposed to the [Unification Church](#)] had only limited influence. Today at the symposium, we explained, based on data, how the media transformed their activities and assertions into a huge illusion.



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The image of the [Unification Church](#) that was depicted as an illusion (false image), stimulated the easily agitated segment of society, who repeatedly called out the words "tsubo" (壺 (ツボ) - pot, word used to mock followers) and "zubuzubu" ('corrupt relationships not easy to cut' or 'deeply involved'). Those easily agitated people came to eagerly support the opinion leaders. This triangular feedback loop between the illusion, the easily agitated segment, and the opinion leaders creates a circuit that fuels frenzy and wild rumours. Furthermore, within that relationship of the three parties involved, there is a structure in which opinion leaders indicate the targets for the anger of the agitated group.

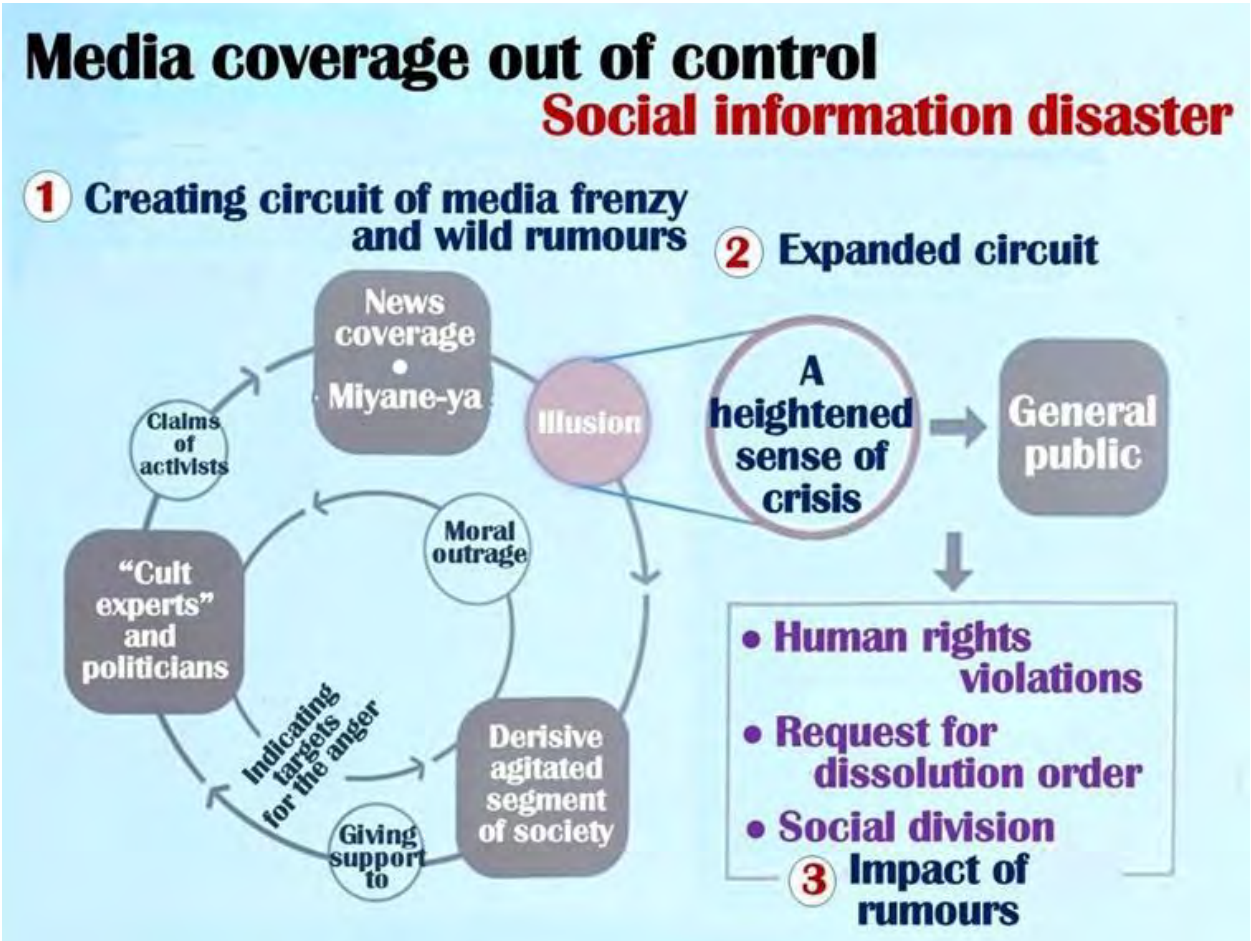
The targets of their anger were the [Unification Church](#) and the Liberal Democratic Party. It seems that the intentions of the so-called "cult experts" and politicians who participated in the commotion were intertwined here. This dual-loop structure not only affected the [Unification Church](#) and its believers, but also harmed religious freedom and led to social divisions. In other words, it was a circuit that caused an information disaster.

The hounding of the [Unification Church](#) is not just a problem for the [religious organization](#), but has also caused problems for society as a whole. In other words, just like in the case of the nuclear power plant accident, from this same dual-loop structure, demagoguery about nosebleeds and deformities and incitement of anger towards TEPCO [Tokyo Electric Power Company] and the government were created, thus creating a false narrative and having a negative impact on society.

The hounding of the [Unification Church](#) was both political and social activism. It is undeniable that the media also participated in this activism. The evidence for hounding the [Unification Church](#) was weak.



Testimonies were accepted only from those involved who could support the case for the hounding, and not from other believers. Data like the ones I have presented were also not addressed.



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Trends overseas and reports from the U.S. State Department are completely ignored. As a Buddhist, I was curious about how religions other than the [Unification Church](#) view the request for dissolution. Therefore, I spoke to clergy from traditional and new religions. They expressed concerns such as,

"We cannot openly talk about the [Unification Church](#)."

"If we say something, we are labeled as cult-like clergy who support the [church](#), or a cult-like religion, and are attacked."

"People who are incited do not understand reason."

"Some believers may say, 'I regret believing in this.' What then if one-sided claims like refunding donations are unilaterally accepted?"



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"Every religion has extreme believers, and there are donation problems and family problems, so if we are

targeted, we will be cornered in the same way as the [church](#) ([Unification Church](#)). We have realized it now."

They are in a state where they cannot speak freely.

Human rights are at stake. This situation is reminiscent of the circumstances during the nuclear power plant accident. I would like to reiterate one last time that the hounding of the [Unification Church](#) has had a detrimental effect on Japanese society, causing both discrimination- and non-discrimination-based divisions. The damage was inflicted not only on the believers of the [religious organization](#), but also on Japanese society as a whole.

I would like to conclude my presentation by discussing what constitutes both political and social activism, and what structures generate divisions. The hounding of the [Unification Church](#) was both political and social activism. I would be happy to provide further details about it if given the opportunity.

See [part 1](#) "[Author: Japan's 'Apartheid-Style Social Exclusion'](#)", see [part 2](#), [part 3](#), [part 4](#).

Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) has contributed to various media outlets, including opinion magazines. Under the pen name Fumi Kato (かとう ふみ), he has published works such as "Chushi Ruro" (厨師流浪 - Wandering Chef), "Kakai Fuki" (花開富貴 - Blossoming, Prosperous and Noble), and "Denko no Otoko" (電光の男 - Lightning Man). Last year, he contributed with an article titled "[Can News and Talk Shows Determine Good and Evil?](#)" in the February issue of Monthly Seiron (月刊正論), challenging the approach to reporting on the [Unification Church](#).

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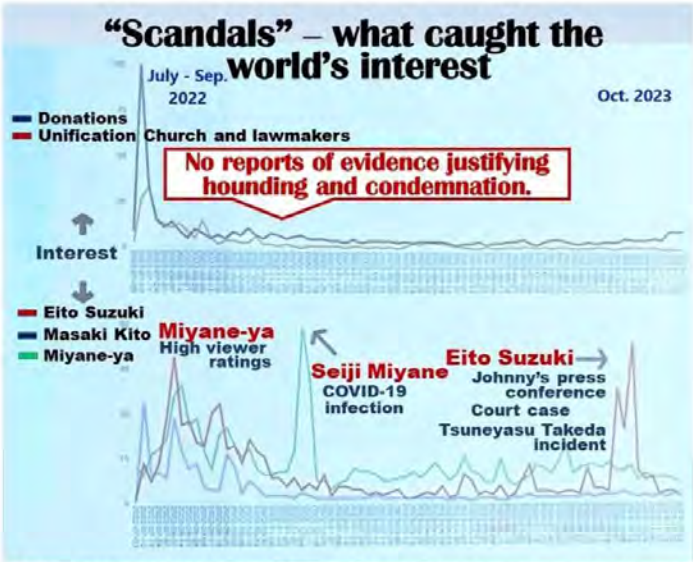
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... and a presentation by Fumihiro Kato (宮本浩行) (author and and photographer, at a symposium on the theme “Why Did Reporting Go Astray? Thorough Examination by Journalists on Reporting on the Former **Unification Church**”, (organized by UPF-Japan) held 20<sup>th</sup> January 2024 in Tokyo to investigate the media's continued coverage persecuting the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** (formerly known as the **Unification Church**).

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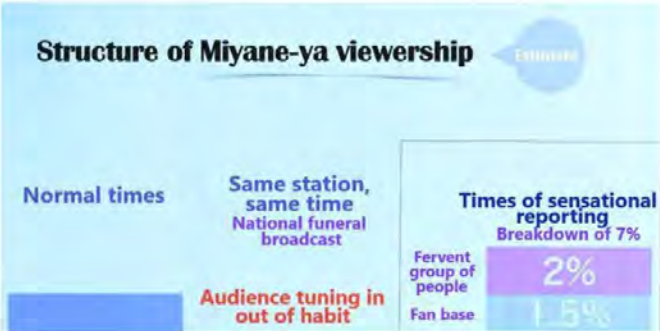
English reconstruction of one of the slides Fumihiro Kato used 20<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2024. Illustration: [FFWPU](#)

The upper graph shows that the interest in donations and the relationship between the **religious organisation** and politicians peaked in July 2022 and then subsided. Generally, people were initially satisfied with the information about donations up to July and the information about politicians. Therefore, the interest was expected to change to, “Donations? So what?” and “Connections to politicians? So what?”

However, as mentioned earlier the various news organisations did not report what happened to politics and society because of those connections. It could also be said that it was impossible to explain because there was no content to explain. Now, regarding the lower graph, it shows the trend of the number of searches related to the **news and talk show Miyane-ya** [ミヤネ屋 – a show on Yomiuri TV], which continuously featured Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) and Masaki Kito (紀藤正樹) [both leading anti-religious activists hostile to **Family Federation**]. Even though people already had their convictions [that the connections between the **Unification Church** and the LDP were not so scandalous], the program spent several months from the end of July building a **narrative that “the church controls Japanese politics.”**

From the end of July to September 2023, Miyane-ya achieved high viewership ratings. However, interest in Miyane-ya peaked in December when the host, Seiji Miyane (宮根誠司), contracted COVID-19. (Laughter)

As for the popular **Eito Suzuki**, he sparked strange speculations during a press conference of Johnny's [ジャニーズ – about a big scandal of sexual abuse of boys], faced lawsuits, and on a debate show on TV, he got into a clash with Tsuneyasu Takeda [竹田恒泰 – political commentator, author and businessman, male descendant of the imperial family]. The viewership ratings for Miyane-ya reached its highest peak in October 2023.



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Both are typical examples of how **interest is generated by scandal-driven events**. The **interest in scandalous matters can be seen as the true nature of the frenzy surrounding the story of “the church controlling Japan”**. It seems to reflect the essence of expectations towards the program and Suzuki. There was a tremendous commotion, and one could say it was a frenzy.

As for **Masaki Kito**, it seems that he was only expected to be a **narrator of scandalous topics**. **Moriyama**, the *Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology*, said that the **Unification Church** caused anxiety and confusion to many people, but the **reality was different**.

The small segment of society who was fervent about the **Unification Church** were, for example, those who improved the viewership ratings of **Miyane-ya, the producer of scandalous stories**, from a previous 5% to 7% during the period of sensationalist reporting.

In the example of Miyane-ya, it would be easier to understand if you consider that about 2 to 3.5% of all households were impassioned by it, as shown in the slide.



English reconstruction of one of the slides Fumihiro Kato used 20th Jan. 2024. Illustration: FFWPU

summarize it separately. This slide summarizes how a **media frenzy led to social division and human rights violations**.

As a result of a **minority's interests and fervor creating an illusion** of overwhelming consensus, **society has been perceived as shrouded in anxiety**, leading to the **dissolution order, violations of believers' human rights, and social division**. As is evident from this, it is natural to understand that the **religious organisation controlled neither the Liberal Democratic Party nor Japanese society**.

Recently, there have been voices expressing **concerns about the way the media operates**. Individuals such as Hikaru Ota (太田光さ), who criticized forced de-conversion and abduction in a TV program, and Rika Matsumoto (松本璃花), the third daughter of Shoko Asahara [麻原彰晃 – founder and leader of *Aum Shinrikyo*], are not believers, but they were involved as members of society.

Continued in [part 5](#).

See [part 1 “Author: Japan's ‘Apartheid-Style Social Exclusion’”](#), see [part 2](#), [part 3](#), [part 5](#)

Featured image above: Top: The logo of Miyane-ya. Bottom left: Masaki Kito, photo: Screenshot / *Bitter Winter*. Bottom right: Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka, photo: Mikkabie / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

“Media and Activists Creating False Narrative” – text: Fumihiro Kato

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