

Calling A Stag a Horse: Fake News on the Abe Assassination

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When new religious movements are victims of violence, “it is their fault” campaigns are immediately started by their opponents.

by Massimo Introvigne



The vicinity of Kintetsu Yamato-Saidaiji station northern entrance in Nara, Japan, where Abe was assassinated on July 8, 2022, several hours after the crime. Credits.

Article 1 of 7.

“Calling a stag a horse” is a proverbial expression in Chinese. Zhao Gao was the corrupt prime minister of the second emperor of unified China, who reigned at the end of the third century BCE. Zhao planned to usurp the throne but needed to know who in the court would support him. So, he presented the emperor with a stag and called it a horse. When the emperor objected it was indeed a stag, he asked the courtiers to confirm it was a horse. Many did, as they were afraid of Zhao. He had those who insisted the stag was a stag beheaded, and proceeded with his coup.

“Calling a stag a horse,” or turning the meaning of the words upside down for evil purposes, is often done today to discriminate against religious minorities. When they become victims of crimes, it is suggested that it is their fault. The victims are called aggressors, and vice versa. It is reminiscent of an old strategy of shyster lawyers who defend rapists. They invariably blame the raped woman, who perhaps did not dress modestly enough.

On June 16, 2022, in South Korea a man killed his ex-wife and the wife of his ex-brother-in-law, seriously wounding the latter. Although personal reasons might have been his main motivation, he claimed he had committed the crime because the wife was a member of a

new religious movement called Shincheonji. 24 hours before the crime, the assassin had consulted with the Heresy Research Center, an organization specialized in fighting groups it regards as heretic "cults."

The Center did not suggest that the man commit murder, but excited his hatred against Shincheonji. After the crime, the Center called a press conference claiming that the murderer was indeed the victim, and Shincheonji was responsible: had his wife not joined Shincheonji, they said, the poor man would not have had to spend the rest of his life in jail, a likely outcome of his case.



Shincheonji devotees protest after the June 16 assassination in South Korea.

On January 3, 2019, a teenager entered the premises of the Church of Scientology, of which his mother was a member, in Sydney, Australia, and fatally wounded a Scientologist with a knife. At trial, he was later recognized not criminally responsible as two experts pronounced him schizophrenic, but real paranoids have real enemies. Although he had quarreled with his mother for different reasons, propaganda depicting Scientology as evil may also have excited his feeble mind. Again, anti-Scientologists told the media, without shedding a tear for the victim, that Scientology was to blame for having allegedly created hostility between mother and son.

Whatever one may think of Shincheonji or Scientology, these are egregious cases of turning the victims into perpetrators. And now we have the most spectacular case of this twisted logic of them all, the murder of Shinzo Abe. Let's consider five basic facts. First, the assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, was not and had never been a member of the Unification Church, now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

Second, his mother did join the Unification Church in 1998, and is still there. She declared bankruptcy in 2002, a fact both Abe's killer and her brother-in-law blamed on the excessive donations she made to the Church. After the brother-in-law complained, two Church members returned in installments 50% of the donations.

Third, Shinzo Abe was not a member of the Unification Church either. He participated through video to a 2021 event, and send a message to another event in 2022, of the Universal Peace Federation, a NGO founded by the leaders of the Unification Church. So did Donald Trump, former European Commission presidents José Manuel Barroso and Romano Prodi, and dozens of other politicians of all persuasions.

Fourth, his mother's bankruptcy, as he reported himself, caused Yamagami's hatred for the Unification Church. However, the bankruptcy occurred in 2002 and Yamagami killed Abe in 2022, twenty years later. What triggered Yamagami's killing frenzy in 2022, and not before? We know for a fact that Yamagami followed the hate campaigns against the Unification Church prevailing in Japan. He interacted on social media with fellow enemies of the Church.

The day before killing Abe, Yamagami wrote a letter to Kazuhiro Yonemoto. Although Yonemoto deserves credit for having opposed in the past the practice of kidnapping members of the Unification Church for the purposes of deprogramming or "de-converting" them, he remains an opponent of the Church. Yamagami interacted with the anti-Unification-Church milieu, and was exposed to the hate speech against the Church, which may easily have turned his weak head.

Fifth, before killing Abe, Yamagami had planned to assassinate Mrs. Moon, the leader of the Family Federation, and he tested his weapon by shooting at a building that had once been used as a Family Federation church.



Ms. Hak Ja Han Moon: Yamagami wanted to assassinate her too.

Yamagami hated the Church, and this hate was fueled by the hate speech of the anti-Unification-Church activists. To hide their responsibility, they blamed the Unification Church, which was clearly a victim, as if it were the perpetrator.

Twisting words has dire consequences. After calling a stag a horse, Zhao Gao had an ephemeral success but ended up causing the ruin of the Qin dynasty and being killed himself. Calling the victims perpetrators and the perpetrators victims has a similar destructive social potential—one those who manipulate the facts of the Abe assassination to advance their anti-Unification-Church agenda should perhaps pause to consider.

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Massimo Introvigne

Massimo Introvigne (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](http://www.cesnur.org/)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books and more than 100 articles in the field of sociology of religion. He was the main author of the [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion](#) and of the executive board of University of California Press' [Nova Religio](#). From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the "Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions" of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE). From 2012 to 2015 he served as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty, instituted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

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