

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Heavily Biased Japanese Reporting

Knut Holdhus
July 11, 2023



Heavily biased article by Kyodo News in Japan Times and Japan Today

The first anniversary of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe 8th July 2022 received extensive media coverage. Much of it focused on Abe's accomplishments as the longest serving premier, 2006-2007 and 2012-2020.



Kyodo, Japan's leading news agency, had however quite a different focus. It becomes apparent already in the headline: "One year on, Abe assassination

leaves controversial issues unresolved".

And the main "controversial issue" the news agency zooms in on, is Abe's and lawmakers' "ties" to the [Unification Church](#). And as Kyodo's bias dictates, the links are "dubious".

the japan times

The Japan Times was one of the papers that published the heavily biased Kyodo report. In an article 16th April this year, written by columnist Gearoid Reidy, the very same newspaper questioned the

existence of those "ties", writing,

"For months, Japan's front pages and TV shows were dominated by links between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the [Unification Church](#)."

There was virtually no mention of the connections to other religious movements, even though the LDP's government coalition partner Komeito have open links to the new Buddhist group Soka Gakkai and was founded by its members.

The Japan Times then pointed out that media reports on the connection between the [Unification Church](#) and the Liberal Democratic Party

"frequently used the language of 'ties' between the LDP and the [church](#), which often meant little more

than holding meetings or shaking hands.

A relentless barrage of stories focused on how senior politicians, including Abe, met with the church representatives, but failed to provide the context that politicians everywhere routinely associate with interest groups, particularly those with money."



Dr. Massimo Introvigne

The bias of the Kyodo piece is made obvious also by the word "cult" being used about the [Unification Church](#). Well-known Italian sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne, by many considered the world's leading expert on new religious movements, has this to say,

"A large majority of scholars of religions agree that there are no cults. 'Cult' is just a label used to discriminate against groups that powerful lobbies, for whatever reasons, do not like." (Quoted from the article [The Abe Assassination. The Word 'Cult' Is A Tool for Discrimination](#), published by [Bitter Winter](#), a magazine on religious liberty and human rights, 2nd Sept. 2022.)

The source of the heavily biased reporting becomes rather obvious when Kyodo mentions "lawyers", and one of them seemingly being opposed to "believers 'willingly' offering 'massive donations' to them [the [Unification Church](#)]."

The lawyers Kyodo is basing much of its content on, are of course National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, a network formed specifically by leftwing activist lawyers to destroy the [Unification Church](#).



Masumi Fukuda

Japanese award-winning investigative reporter Masumi Fukuda clearly reveals the origin of the activist lawyers' network,

"Almost all of the lawyers in the Network were affiliated with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party, who strongly opposed the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law, were connected with extremist groups and North Korea, and were ideologically leftists and self-styled atheists. In contrast, the former [Unification Church](#) is an anti-communist and conservative organization that opposes atheism. It is clear that this was an ideological battle between the two camps.

Attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi also clearly stated, 'We want to make a big public announcement [about 'spiritual sales'] because it will be good for containing right-wing activities, especially for preventing the passing of the Anti-Espionage Law.'" ([The Truth About the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales](#),

article by Masumi Fukuda in the monthly magazine Hanada, republished in English in [Bitter Winter](#) 30th March 2023)

Kyodo echoes many false allegations from the network of activist leftwing lawyers. Standard network expressions repeated by Kyodo in its article, are "victims of controversial religious groups", "maliciously soliciting donations", "people pressured into purchasing", "depriving the organization of its status as a

religious corporation", and "the [Unification Church](#) has violated laws and damaged public welfare".

Kyodo simply presents those activist lawyers out to destroy the [Unification Church](#), as "lawyers". Not a word is said about their origin, their extreme political views, their goal to have the [Unification Church](#), now called the [Family Federation](#), dissolved. Hiding such key facts puts Kyodo News in a really bad light. This is definitely not objective reporting, and looks suspiciously like heavily biased campaigning journalism to paint the [Unification Church](#) black.

Fukuda also writes,



"The Network would not hesitate to use all means to destroy the former [Unification Church](#). They are willing to tell all sort of stories, including lies, to achieve what they believe is a righteous purpose. They often throw the words 'anti-social' and 'cult' at the former [Unification Church](#), but considering their involvement in the abduction and confinement of believers, one may wonder whether they are not more deserving of these labels themselves." (['Sayuri Ogawa': When 'Apostates' Slander the Unification Church. 5. Why the Story Is Not Believable, Bitter Winter](#) 6th March 2023)

The heavily biased Kyodo article claims that the [Unification Church](#) puts pressure on members to make large donations. This is one of the standard allegations from the network of activist lawyers. Above-mentioned Dr. Massimo Introvigne criticizes such a claim, saying,

"In its general principles, the [Unification Church](#)'s theology of donations is surprisingly similar to its Catholic and Protestant counterparts. [...]"

Ultimately, the problem is theological and philosophical. For a believer, donations may be deep spiritual experiences. For an atheist, or somebody who believes that groups such as the [Unification Church](#) are not "real" religions, no caution would be good enough, and no donation would ever be recognized as the fruit of a free and reasonable choice." ([The Abe Assassination. Donations to the Unification Church: Separating Facts from Fiction, Bitter Winter](#) 3rd Sept. 2022)

Featured image above: Shidome Media Tower, located in Shiodome, Minato, Tokyo, Japan. Floors 1 - 24 are the headquarters of Kyodo News, Japan's largest news agency.

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"Sayuri Ogawa": When "Apostates" Slander the Unification Church. 5. Why the Story Is Not Believable

03/06/2023 MASUMI FUKUDA

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Her parents' testimony and the "Hanada" magazine's investigation clarified that what Sayuri told the media may not conceivably be true.

by Masumi Fukuda

Article 5 of 5. Read [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), and [article 4](#).



Ogawa (right) during a TV show with one of the leading anti-Unification-Church lawyers, Masaki Kito (center).

During my interview, Yoshihiko, Sayuri's father, tried his best to speak calmly, but there was only one moment when his face flushed and his voice became choked up. That was when he was talking about his daughter's criticism of the adoptions that had been conducted by the members of the Family Federation for a long time. She said, "It is almost like human trafficking."

"I assume that someone is making her say that. We have been talking to our daughter previously how we felt when we gave my daughters up for adoption, and I am sure she understands that... As for our second daughter, we once gave her up for adoption, but she came back after six months because the family were not confident enough they could raise her due to their difficult circumstances. We talked to our second daughter about this around September last year, before this issue hit the media, and she understood."

Sayuri testified, "I cannot forget my sister's expression when she cried and said, 'Mom, why did you give me up for adoption?'"

But Yoshihiko strongly denies this: "It's impossible. I asked my second daughter and she said she has no idea of this."

"My wife and I were lucky enough to have many children. We wanted to help families who were unable to have children. We decided that if we would have a fifth and a sixth child, we would give them to families who were in desperate need of children. None of this was mediated by the church."

"There is a strange criticism, he said, that 'Arranging the adoption before birth is treating the child as an object and violating human rights.' However, we have formed a trusting relationship based on faith with the future adoptive parents even before the birth of our children who were later adopted, and we cooperated with them until the day of the birth. The two families raise the child together for one month, then the child is adopted. What is the problem with that?"

After that, the two families continue to interact with each other, and the siblings have a good relationship with one another. In fact, our third daughter is particularly concerned about us and her sister [Sayuri] now."

Currently, Sayuri and her parents are communicating again via LINE, and the communication seems to work. The parents hope to meet their daughter in person to make sure of the facts and clear up any misunderstandings, as their memories of past events differ so much. And until then, they ask her to refrain from appearing in the media. Sayuri says, "Okay, let's talk about it." But she would like at least one of her parents to appear in a documentary that Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) is currently planning to feature her, and she says she would like to have a frank talk with them, to work out their misunderstandings.

Yoshihiko replied, "I do not want to have such an important talk in the public media to clear up misunderstandings between parents and child. Why do we need the media to repair a parent-child relationship?"

Her parents continue to ask Sayuri to send them her past bank transaction history but each time she refuses, claiming that she cannot send it because her lawyer would not allow her to do so or because the former Unification Church would misuse it.

Sayuri mentioned a lawyer. In fact, there is a trial she is involved in right now. Noriko Ishigaki, a member of the House of Councilors [the Upper house of the National Diet] for the Constitutional Democratic Party, posted a video of the hearing held by the party with Ogawa on her YouTube channel.

However, on November 2, 2022, the Family Federation requested a provisional injunction from the Tokyo District Court ordering the deletion of the contents, claiming that they were factually inaccurate and constituted defamation against the church.

The part of Ogawa's testimony that the Family Federation finds specially objectionable is the following: "During the collective wedding in which my parents were married, the founder Reverend Sun Myung Moon said, 'Even if you need to borrow money or sell your body, Japan, the country of Eve, must give donations to Korea, the country of Adam.' Echoing these words, dad, who was the head of his local church, said the same thing to his flock during the service."

According to the church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon was speaking in Korean to his male Korean believers at that time, and he did not say, "The Japanese who are from the country of Eve –" or anything like that. In particular, the phrase "even if you sell your body" is a literal translation from Korean. The original meaning is completely different. It means "even if you have to work very hard," and it is derived from the theological principle that "even if you work hard, it is always insufficient in the presence of Heaven." Therefore, Yoshihiko, who was the head minister of the church, would never give such a sermon to his believers.



Reverend Moon speaking in Japan in 1973. Source: FFWPU.

The response from Councilor Noriko Ishigaki to this provisional injunction was extremely insincere. The first trial hearing was scheduled on December 6, but prior to this, the court was contacted by Mr. Takashi Yamaguchi and other lawyers belonging to the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, representing Councilor Ishigaki. They asked to postpone the first hearing because Ogawa was suffering from irritable bowel syndrome and could not attend.

However, I checked Ogawa's Twitter feed and found out that she regularly posted on Twitter every day. She even posted a video featuring herself. On December 4, she announced that she would appear on a live webcast program of the Tokyo Broadcasting System, titled "Houdou 1930," scheduled to be aired on December 6. How can a sick person appear on a live program that requires mental and physical strength? In other words, she showed no signs of illness at all.

On the other hand, the court decided that waiting for too many days would be against the purpose of the provisional injunction, and the first hearing was held on December 6 as scheduled. At that time, Attorney Yamaguchi offered many weak excuses, such as "We only met with Ogawa a week ago, so we have yet to hear her story," and "It takes time to

listen to her."

What I can assume from this is that it is the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales itself that is using Ogawa to further its own agenda, even if they may be very much aware of the lack of plausibility of her statements. Therefore, they try as far as it is possible to avoid bringing her to the forefront.



Press conference against the Unification Church/Family Federation by lawyers of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales on July 29, 2022, featuring attorneys Yasuo Kawai, Hiroshi Yamaguchi, and Masaki Kito. Screenshot.

This can be assumed from another fact. I was eager to talk to Sayuri as well, so I requested an interview through Yoshihiko by e-mail. However, the reply came from Attorney Takashi Yamaguchi.

The answer was "no interviews," and he even refused to be interviewed himself about her. Therefore, I replied to him that, "I now understand that Attorney Yamaguchi and the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales do not care about the facts."

The Network would not hesitate to use all means to destroy the former Unification Church. They are willing to tell all sort of stories, including lies, to achieve what they believe is a righteous purpose. They often throw the words "anti-social" and "cult" at the former Unification Church, but considering their involvement in the abduction and confinement of believers, one may wonder whether they are not more deserving of these labels themselves.

The facts are quite simple. Sayuri Ogawa was not a victim of the former Unification Church, nor was she subjected to religious abuse by her parents, who were members of the church. Her parents raised her with sufficient love. If there was some trouble between parents and daughters, even if I accept most of their claims, it was purely a family problem.

In the first place, it is easy to notice that there are many contradictions in Sayuri's statements if you just listen a little bit carefully. However, the media and politicians did not verify her statements, did not pay any attention to the contradictions, and continued to use Ogawa as their convenient tool. As a result, misinformation was spread, and the honor of the parents and the Family Federation was severely offended. And the most serious problem is that national politics was distorted by her false statements.

Her father, Yoshihiko, said, "But I am sure that one day my daughter's misunderstandings will be cleared up and she will come back to herself. Then, my daughter might be criticized. That's what I worry about. And moreover, this is an important time for both my daughter and her baby in the postpartum period. We are capable of resisting slander thanks to the training we have undertaken as part of our life of faith, but it would be unbearable for us that our daughter will be spoken ill of. My daughter has been constantly saying lately that it is dangerous for her to see us, but who is it that makes her say arch things? Who says she can only speak in front of the media? I pray that my daughter will not be used any further by the media. 'Sayuri Ogawa' is not who she really is. I want to talk to X (Sayuri's real name). My daughter is, at heart, a good girl who loves her parents."

A banner with a blue background and a collage of images. The text reads "Three minutes to save independent information - and perhaps to save human lives". Below the text is a yellow button with the text "SUPPORT US". In the bottom right corner is a red logo with the text "BITTER WINTER".

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Masumi Fukuda



Masumi Fukuda was born in Yokohama in 1956. She graduated from the Department of Sociology of Rikkyo University. After working for a specialty magazine and a magazine production company, she became a freelance journalist. She has reported and written about crime, Russia, and other topics. Her books include "Stalin: A Portrait of His Family" (Bungei Shunju), "Russia, an Assassination State: In Search of a Missing Journalist" (Shinchosha), "The True Nature of Political Correctness" (Hojosha), and others. In 2007, she won the 6th Shincho Documentary Award for "Fabrication: The Truth About the 'Murder Teacher' in Fukuoka" (Shinchosha).

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“Do Not Dissolve the Unification Church!” 2. The Truth About the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales

03/30/2023 MASUMI FUKUDA

A+ | A-

The second part of the statement of an award-winning journalist requesting the competent Japanese Ministry not to dissolve the Unification Church.

by Masumi Fukuda

Article 2 of 4. Read [article 1](#).



TV campaign denouncing the “spiritual sale” of a miniature pagoda. Screenshot.

After reflecting about the controversies, I decided to first investigate whether the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales is really an organization that is purely concerned with consumer issues, and to trace back the reasons for its establishment. The July 12 press conference by the Network, as well as the statements by Attorney Masaki Kito, showed that they hold an unusual hatred toward the former Unification Church. I felt there was something beyond mere consumer issues.

What has happened since then is described in the January 2023 issue of “Monthly Hanada.” To put it simply, the Network, established in 1987, has never had as its ultimate purpose to help victims of the so-called “spiritual sales,” a word used by the opponents of the Unification Church to designate the sales by some church members of items such as seals, statues, vases, miniature pagodas and others at prices significantly higher than their intrinsic value. The Network was created to prevent the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law, which was being promoted at the time by the International Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC), an affiliate of the former Unification Church. At the time, Attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi, a key member of the Network, stated at its inauguration that “Money made from spiritual sales is being used to fund the Unification Church and the IFVOC’s efforts to enact the Anti-Espionage Law.”

In other words, the lawyers in the Network believed that money made from what they called “spiritual sales” was being diverted to fund the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law. Their purpose was to stop the “spiritual sales” to cut off the flow of money. At a symposium held at the Iwanami Seminar Hall in August 1986, Attorney Takeshi Ono of the Yokohama Bar Association, said that, “Originally, there was only one victim [of the ‘spiritual sales’], but we launched a legal defense team and got the media to cover the case, which led to the discovery of other victims.” Usually, when the number of victims of a certain practice increases, a relief organization is set up. In this case, the contrary happened: they first set up an organization and then started to look for people who would declare themselves victims.

Incidentally, the former Unification Church has never practiced any “spiritual sales,” either now or in the past. It is also

not true that money made from "spiritual sales" has been used to fund the activities of the IFVOC. At that time, it was a company owned by Unification Church believers as their private and individual business that had been responsible of the sales the lawyers regarded as objectionable.



Was it about consumer rights or politics? Attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi. Screenshot.

Almost all of the lawyers in the Network were affiliated with the former Socialist Party and the Communist Party, who strongly opposed the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law, were connected with extremist groups and North Korea, and were ideologically leftists and self-styled atheists. In contrast, the former Unification Church is an anti-communist and conservative organization that opposes atheism. It is clear that this was an ideological battle between the two camps. Attorney Hiroshi Yamaguchi also clearly stated, "We want to make a big public announcement [about 'spiritual sales'] because it will be good for containing right-wing activities, especially for preventing the passing of the Anti-Espionage Law."

The media's extensive coverage certainly helped "discovering the victims" of "spiritual sales." However, Masataka Ito, then chief editor of the "Asahi Shimbun," who was one of the first journalists to jump on the bandwagon of the "spiritual sales" campaign, revealed his true feelings at a meeting with his colleagues on October 23, 1987. "The newspapers and TV say they are victims, but 90% of the buyers of these goods we talked to said they were happy. Perhaps even 99% of the buyers, (...) but why do you report only about the 1% who are unhappy with the purchases? I have received many protests. They do have a point. In fact, less than 5% of the population claim to be victims of 'spiritual sales.' We took a kind of poll, and the majority of those who bought jars [one of the items sold in the 'spiritual sales'] said they are happy with their purchase."

From these words, coming from people opposed to the Unification Church, I became convinced that the "spiritual sales" campaign was, in the first place, a setup with a specific political agenda.

I was further surprised to learn that among those who claimed to have been "victims" of the "spiritual sales" were deprogrammed former believers who had been abducted and confined by their relatives and forced to leave their faith.

I had heard that former members of the Unification Church were abducted and confined by those who opposed the church, but I was shocked to learn the full picture through the investigation I decided to perform. Until now, more than 4,300 believers have been abducted by physical violence or deception, locked up for long periods of time in apartments or other places, and not released until they abandoned their faith. I interviewed Toru Goto, who was abducted and confined for twelve years and five months but did not give in to attempts to persuade him to leave the Unification Church. It was a horrible ordeal that I could not believe had happened in contemporary Japan. I was even more surprised to hear from Goto that this crime of abduction and confinement has been systematically perpetrated by the anti-Unification-Church camp as a routine deprogramming business.



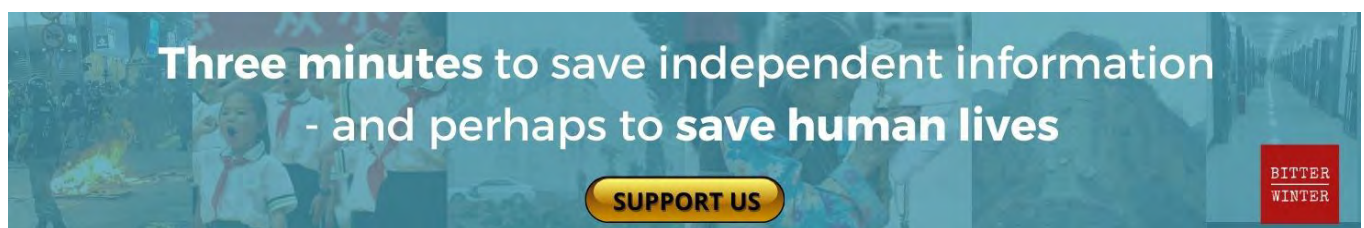
Toru Goto after his horrific experience of confinement. Source: [Forum for Religious Freedom Europe](#).

The deprogrammers and Christian pastors approached parents and persuaded them to organize the abduction and confinement of their adult daughters and sons, telling them that "Your child has joined an evil religion and must be protected and forced to leave it." Several believers, after long periods of confinement and deprogramming, accepted to leave the church, and were then told they should now sue the religion they used to believe in.

In the 17th century persecution of Christians in Japan, to save their life it was not enough for them to tell the authorities they had abandoned Christianity. They were asked to trample a painting of Jesus underfoot to prove they were no longer Christians. Similarly, now it was not enough for deprogrammed believers to state they were no longer members of the Unification Church. They should prove they had really left the church by claiming they had been "victims of spiritual sales," and filing lawsuits demanding that the church return the money they had paid for the items they had purchased, such as marble vases, two-stories pagodas, seals, and other items.

The Network was thus deeply involved in this abduction and confinement business because they were the attorneys in the subsequent lawsuits filed by former believers against the church. There were lawyers who became rich through these cases, as did deprogrammers and Christian pastors involved in the abductions, who received substantial amounts of money from the relatives of the believers they deprogrammed. When the lawyers were consulted by the believers' parents, they first introduced them to the deprogrammers. If and when deprogramming was successful, the lawyers took over from the deprogrammers as "handlers" of the former believers, made them plaintiffs, and filed lawsuits. The anti-Unification-Church group, including Attorney Kito and journalists Yoshio Arita and Eight Suzuki, still defends deprogramming to this very day, and claims it was performed to "protect" the former members of the Unification Church.

I wrote about the details of the abduction and confinement process in the December 2022 issue of "Monthly Hanada," but when I asked Attorney Kito for an interview about deprogramming, he was completely unwilling to respond. The Network has often called the former Unification Church an "anti-social organization" and a "cult," but I believe that these labels may be more appropriately used for an organization deeply involved in deprogramming and in illegal practices of abduction and confinement.



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Masumi Fukuda

Masumi Fukuda was born in Yokohama in 1956. She graduated from the Department of Sociology of Rikkyo University. After working for a specialty magazine and a magazine production company, she became a freelance journalist. She has reported and written about crime, Russia, and other topics. Her books include "Stalin: A Portrait of His Family" (Bungei Shunju), "Russia, an Assassination State: In Search of a Missing Journalist" (Shinchosha), "The True Nature of Political Correctness" (Hojosha), and others. In 2007, she won the 6th Shincho Documentary Award for "Fabrication: The Truth About the 'Murder Teacher' in Fukuoka" (Shinchosha).

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["Sayuri Ogawa": When "Apostates" Slander the Unification Church. 5. Why the Story Is Not Believable](#)

Her parents' testimony and the "Hanada" magazine's investigation clarified that what Sayuri told the media may not conceivably be true.



[Black Magic, False "Victims," and "Religious Fraud": Parallels Between the Cases of the Unification Church in Japan and Tai Ji Men in Taiwan](#)



While certain features of criticism against "cults" are international, others are typical of the Sinosphere and are present in both cases.



日本はなぜ統一教会・家庭連合に対して信教の自由を保障すべきなのか：日本政府に対する意見書

宗教・信教の自由の著名な専門家であるウイリー・フォートレ、ヤン・フィゲル、マシモ・イントロビーニエ、アーロン・ローズの4名が増大する魔女狩りの終焉を要求



« Sayuri Ogawa » : Quand les apostats calomnient l'Église de l'Unification 5. Pourquoi l'histoire n'est pas crédible.

Le témoignage de ses parents et l'enquête du magazine Hanada ont montré que le récit de Sayuri aux médias n'est pas vraisemblable.

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