

Examination of Japanese Press Coverage on the Family Federation's Persecution

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Thank you for inviting me to this discussion.

It is a complex issue that involves individual human suffering and the broadest of geopolitics impacting the global balance of power.

For any newspaper editor the assassination of a charismatic national figure by a lone individual is a compelling story. Add to that the harboring a long-ago grievance about a politically connected religious organization you have a cocktail of intrigue that sells newspapers and hike ratings.

But underneath it lies a tapestry of stories which the media has so far barely brushed. They will, I hope, because it is important, and it is their job.

How is it, we must ask, that the needle of interest has so seamlessly shifted from the flawed gunman who killed Shinzo Abe to the Unification Church which he blamed for taking donations his mother could not afford decades ago.

An examination of the Japanese press coverage is telling on this.

A survey of some five thousand stories carried out by a highly experienced media company shows that first month's reporting focused on trouble between the Church and the killer's family. The story was placed mainly on what in Japan are known as the social pages, as opposed to the political ones.

In August, that emphasis shifted to the relationship between the Church and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Thus, it became political story and in the second week of August the cabinet reshuffle began.

Those moved were accused of using the Unification Church to campaign on their behalf.

The analysis of 4,238 stories from August through the November across the mainstream media – Yomiuri, Sankei, Asahi, Mainichi and Nihon Keizi, which is Nikkei -- found that not one gave a positive angle on the Unification Church.

The story was fueled by television reporting and interviews with those hostile to the Church, some of whom had links to the Japanese Communist Party, that left-right rivalry which is becoming more prominent again in national and international affairs.

It is time the needle of interest examined other strands of this story which is about the battle for the ideological heart of Japan, the Indo-Pacific's most successful democracy caught in the cross-hairs of change.