

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Photo Begs Question: Is Lefty Asahi Newspaper a Political Party Organ?

Knut Holdhus
September 21, 2024



Asahi Shimbun 17th September 2024

Publication of old photo begs question if left-wing Asahi Shimbun is party organ of left-wing party



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Tokyo, 20th September 2024 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

Asahi: Was there no dissent about the photo of Shinzo Abe and the former Unification Church?

by Tetsu Iwasaki (岩崎 哲)

My acquaintance said, "It felt like reading a party organ paper." It was the 17th September edition of the Asahi Shimbun. The headline read, "Did Abe meet with the leaders of the former [Unification Church](#)". The paper prominently featured a photo and article reporting that the then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) had met with senior officials of the former [Unification Church](#) ([Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) in the president's reception room in the Liberal Democratic Party's headquarters.



[Asahi Shimbun](#)

On this day, while most other newspapers had front-page articles like "Another Assassination Attempt on Trump" or "SHOGUN Wins Emmy Award", the Asahi Shimbun dedicated almost all of its front and second pages to this 11-year-old story from 2013. This decision clearly

indicates that the Asahi Shimbun strongly believed, as a news organization, that this was a story they wanted to highlight and report.

Although there are some differences depending on newspaper company, the layout of the morning (or evening) edition is decided in a meeting. Even though it is not as formal as a meeting, the editorial executives, especially the layout editor, gather with the desks responsible for submissions from each department, such as the political, economic, social, and international news departments, to decide which articles will be placed on the front page, whether to include photos, and whether to expand related articles in the inner pages. I don't know how Asahi Shimbun does it, but in any case, newspaper companies decide the layout in meetings.

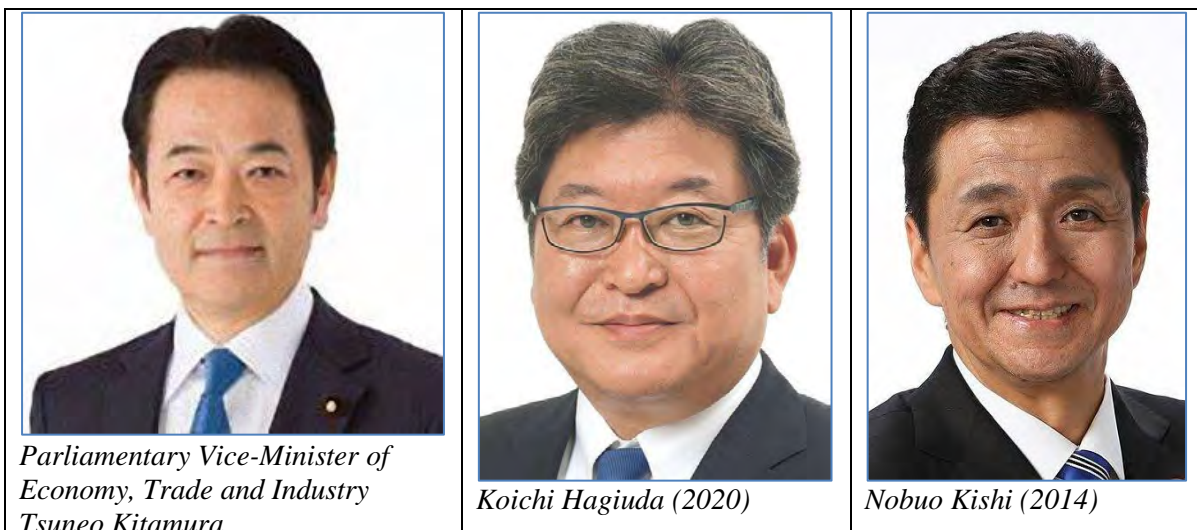


On days when there is no strong candidate for the front page top article, the desks from each department are reluctant to submit articles, yielding to each other, and in the end, pushing the responsibility onto one another. However, when they have an article they strongly recommend, they will push aside articles recommended by other departments to take the top spot. While consensus is the basic principle here, sometimes the top article is decided (or predetermined) somewhat forcefully based on the intentions of the higher-ups, depending on the company.

We have no way of knowing exactly how the layout of that day's Asahi Shimbun was decided. However, there must have been a discussion on "why we need to report this topic on the front page and the entire second page at this moment." And, because they reached an agreement in the meeting,

the next day's morning edition was produced. Furthermore, this will be recognized as a "corporate decision".

The article that day aimed to demonstrate that the "organizational relationship" between Abe's Liberal Democratic Party and the former [Unification Church](#) was "almost proven". As the LDP presidential election entered its final stages, they likely wanted to challenge the LDP, which had declared it would "cut ties", by saying, "What about this?"



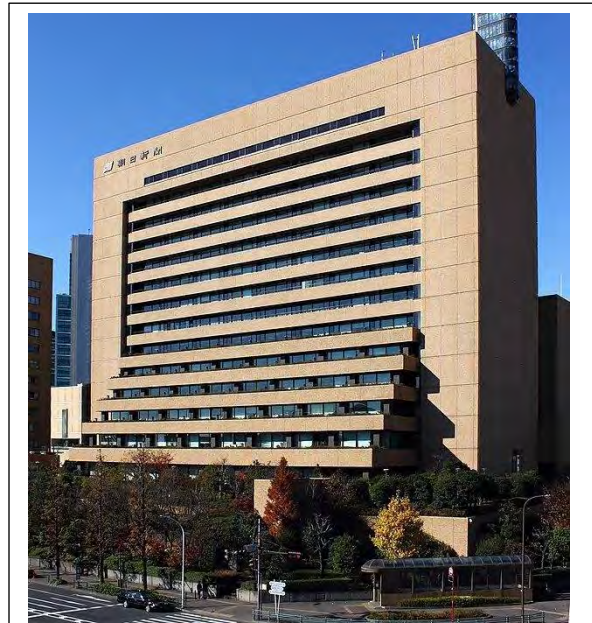
However, the article mentioned that at the time, before the House of Councillors (Upper House) election, there was talk of "supporting candidate Tsuneo Kitamura (北村経夫)", but it cannot be definitively said that the Liberal Democratic Party and the former [Unification Church](#) "exchanged an agreement document as organizations to cooperate in the election". Also present were former Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Koichi Hagiuda (萩生田光一) - then Special Assistant to the President - and former Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi (岸信夫元) - who had switched from the House of Councillors (Upper House) to the House of Representatives (Lower House) in the previous year's election. None of the top three party officials were there, however, so it cannot be said that the LDP members present were officially representing the 'party' as a whole.

In response to the Asahi Shimbun report, there were doubts on social media, with comments like, "Is this really a subject worth such coverage?" There was criticism such as, "We've had enough of the [Unification Church](#) stories already!"

While there is "freedom of the press", allowing them to report what they want, the question remains whether there was any "resistance" within the Asahi Shimbun itself to giving the article such prominence. If not a single person raised any objections, and if no one proposed other articles during the layout meeting, resulting in unanimous agreement, then I would be impressed by how unified the organization must be. Of course, that is putting it mildly.

The article covered almost the entire front page and the entire second page. With so much space being taken up by this, I wonder if there were any complaints from other departments that had prepared articles. This isn't just a matter of individual departments being concerned that their articles didn't make it into the

paper. Rather, as a newspaper, which should be delivering a variety of information to its readers, was everyone really satisfied with this decision?



The Tokyo head office of left-leaning Asahi Shimbun, one of the 3 largest daily national newspapers in Japan (2014)

Moreover, how did the photo end up in Asahi's hands in the first place? On the Asahi Shimbun video site Kaisetsu Jingo (解説人語), it was explained that the photo was sent to Asahi Shimbun Digital's "Investigative Reporting Team". This suggests it was provided as a tip-off.

The only people who know about the existence of this photo are those involved and the people in the photo, but it is unlikely that the Liberal Democratic Party would disclose it. Therefore, it is natural to think that it was leaked from someone associated with the former [Unification Church](#). This means it was provided to Asahi Shimbun. But it makes you wonder whether the [church](#) has been careful enough in managing the photo. This is yet another question.

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Media Helping Terrorist Reach His Goal

• February 19, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



Japanese media helping terrorist Yamagami accomplish his objectives

Tokyo, 16th February 2024 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper Sekai Nippo. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. *Original article*

Investigating the Request for an Order to Dissolve the Family Federation – Politics and Media out of Control

Part 3: Biased Media: “Information Disaster” Fueled by Terrorist

by the Editorial Department of Sekai Nippo

See [part 1](#), [part 2](#)

In the media coverage of the incident when former Prime Minister Abe was shot on 8th July 2022, there was extremely little criticism of the terrorist act itself committed by defendant Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也).



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On the contrary, the media outlets that had opposed Shinzo Abe's politics during his tenure as prime minister, rather focused on the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** (formerly the Unification Church). Those news channels were rather more critical of the **religious organisation**, **emphasizing Yamagami's feelings of being a victim** due to his mother's large donations to the **religious organisation**. The defendant claimed those feelings were his motive for committing the crime.

The press conferences of *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales*, which is in dispute with the **religious organisation**, have been widely reported. At the same time, the **claims of the religious organisation and individual believers have hardly ever been mentioned**. Amidst this, there was a **widespread one-sided discourse** demanding sanctions against the **Family Federation**. Naturally, this had a negative impact on the Kishida cabinet's approval rating in public opinion polls.

On 19th October 2022, Fumio Kishida without much effort and **without Cabinet approval**, made a change in the interpretation of the *Religious Corporations Act*. The move was criticized as "**changing one's mind like the wind**", yet both the ruling and opposition parties joined the Prime Minister in his **disregard for procedure**. At that time, the Japanese media stood by and watched as the **authorities readily violated the basic human right of "freedom of religion" guaranteed by the constitution**. This exposed a double standard that is in stark contrast to the openly opposing attitude of the media shown during the 2015 security legislation.



Jacinda Ardern, the Prime Minister of New Zealand 2017-2023. Photo: New Zealand Government, Office of the Governor-General / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int.](#) Cropped

Especially since the terror attacks on the United States 11th September 2001, terrorism has been regarded as one of the greatest threats to the security of modern society. Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, said of a terrorist [who was seeking notoriety], "We [...] will give him nothing, not even his name." However, the lessons learnt from that have not been heeded [in Japan]. By allowing the *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* to request a dissolution order – in other words, effectively giving the **religious organisation** a "death sentence" – the Japanese **media inadvertently has helped the terrorist accomplish his goals**.

At a public symposium held on 20th January 2024, author



Fumihiko Kato 20th Jan. 2024. Photo: Screenshot from video recording by UPF-Japan.

Fumihiko Kato (加藤文宏) analyzed big data using AI and announced that the huge amount of news coverage critical of the **religious organisation** was ultimately directed at the Kishida administration. In order to deflect this criticism, Fumio Kishida clearly demonstrated his stance by aiming to cut ties with the **Family Federation** and related organizations from then on, and by issuing a dissolution order against the **religious corporation** in an effort to avoid blame and regain support for his cabinet.

Under these circumstances, the **religious organisation** and ordinary believers have become targets of people's hatred. The above-mentioned Kato has **condemned the media's behavior**, which rather than checking the power, has allowed it to run amok. He calls this an "information disaster". At a press conference, the **religious organisation** revealed a number of **discriminatory incidents**, including members being fired at their workplace, cancellation of job offers, teachers criticizing the **religious organisation** during class, suicides, suicide attempts, and graffiti marking the facility as belonging to a "cult". Despite the Kishida Cabinet requesting a dissolution order, its support rate has decreased. Also, the opposition parties pursuing the matter, have been unable to escape from low approval ratings.

Some say that the one-sided media coverage bashing the **religious organisation** has led to a rift between executives and young reporters within major media outlets. 2nd-generation members of the **religious organisation** have held panel discussions with journalists and experts in open forums. In addition, meetings have been held steadily to denounce 4,300 members of the **religious organisation** being abducted and locked up in an attempt to forcibly break their faith. The **articles written by reporters who covered those events have not seen the light of day**.

However, it was reported that *Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology* Masahito Mori (森山正弘)



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technology Masahito Moriyama (森山正人), who filed a request for a dissolution order with Tokyo District Court, had exchanged an "endorsement-affirming form" with a Unification Church-related organization in Hyogo Prefecture ahead of the 2021 House of Representatives election. Believers had actively made phone calls to support his election.



Masahito Moriyama, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Photo (2023): 首相官邸ホームページ. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

As a result, **the very minister who received support from that organization ended up requesting a dissolution order.** That led to voices of discontent from employees and believers of related organizations being covered by various media outlets. In the future, it should be further examined whether his action violates the freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution. In addition, his action raises issues regarding governance.

See [part 1](#), [part 2](#)

Featured image above: Positional relationship between former prime minister Shinzo Abe and the shooter Tetsuya Yamagami on his assassination. Sourced from Nikkei.com. Photo: Asanagi / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC CC0 1.0 UPDD

"Media Helping Terrorist Reach His Goal" – text: Religion and politics covering team of the Editorial Department of Sekai Nippo.

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