

The Abe Assassination and the Use of Ex-Members in Japan in the Campaign Against the Unification Church: The Case of Sayuri Ogawa

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ABSTRACT: In the campaign against the Unification Church (now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) that followed in Japan the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022 (see Introvigne 2022), the sensational revelations of an ex-member of the movement who went under the pseudonym of “Sayuri Ogawa” played a prominent role. We offer a translation of an article published in the Japanese magazine *Hanada*, “The Truth About ‘Sayuri Ogawa’: A Subject That Influences National Politics. The Exclusive Confession of Her Parents” (Fukuda 2023) by well-known investigative journalist Masumi Fukuda (who also holds a degree in Sociology from Rikkyo University). The article casts doubts on the story told by “Sayuri Ogawa” based on the journalist’s interviews with the ex-member’s parents.

KEYWORDS: Unification Church, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Assassination of Shinzo Abe, Sayuri Ogawa, National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, Anti-Cult Movement in Japan.

The Birth of “Sayuri Ogawa”

Sayuri Ogawa (pseudonym, 27 years old), who claims to be “the daughter of a former head minister of the Unification Church,” attracted a lot of attention last year (and possibly this year too).

She appeared in a number of media, attended hearings organized by politicians from both the ruling and opposition parties, and held a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan. Not long after this press conference, Prime Minister Kishida decided to exercise the government’s right to pose questions to the former Unification Church [“former” since it is now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification]. He had previously been

reluctant to do so, since he believed the case of the former Unification Church did not meet the conditions prescribed by the law for such questioning. When the government exercises its right to pose questions to a religious organization, this is a measure that may anticipate a request for the legal dissolution of the group, in this case the former Unification Church.

At the same time, deliberations on the new Victims Relief Act, a law proposed in response to the problems of the former Unification Church, proceeded at an unusually fast pace, and on December 7, 2022, the ruling and opposition parties reached an agreement. On December 9, Ogawa was summoned as a witness to the Diet, and she tearfully said that, “I was called ‘a liar’ and ‘a hypocrite’ every day by the members of the former Unification Church and by some others, and I tried to accept their words as an opinion, but I could not stand them at the end. I was so ill that I would rather die. I am grateful to be allowed to speak today in the Diet as an official witness.”

On December 10, the next day, the Victims Relief Act was passed. Despite the slander she claimed to be a victim of, Ogawa made a great contribution to the government’s decision to exercise the right to pose questions to the former Unification Church and the enactment of the new law. Most of the public opinion supports the dissolution of the former Unification Church and regards Ogawa as a praiseworthy woman.

On the other hand, as she herself inadvertently mentioned in the Diet, there are some who strongly doubt the plausibility of her statements. Her statements change from time to time, and the timeline of her story is often inconsistent.

Needless to say, those who make statements in the public space have a serious responsibility. If false statements influence national politics, this will remain a stain on the political history of our country and will be remembered in the future.

At the end of last year, I met Sayuri Ogawa’s parents somewhere in Mie Prefecture. Her father is a tall, thin man with a smart look, and her mother a small woman with a kind smile. Their own daughter had denounced them for the religion-based abuse they allegedly submitted her to, and the poverty she claims she had been forced to endure because of their large donations to the former Unification Church.

The father said, “It is hard for parents to be criticized like this, but I cannot blame my daughter because it is also true that she has suffered, even though what she says is based on a misunderstanding.”

It was on July 20, 2022, that her parents learned that their eldest daughter, who was married and living in the Tokyo metropolitan area, was talking to the media, and claiming she had been victimized by the former Unification Church. Her father, whom I would call Yoshihiko (a pseudonym), told me that, “The head minister of our local church told us about it, and I watched the recording of Zero News [an evening news program on Nippon Television Network Corporation] on July 15. I do not remember the details clearly anymore. But my second son spoke to my daughter on the phone, and told us, ‘I think she is doing this to distract herself from the stress of raising her child.’ So, I did not take it too seriously at that time.”

“Later, however, on August 15, I watched the recording of the MBS (Mainichi Broadcasting System) News that aired on August 4, and realized that the situation was much more serious than I thought,” he said. “I did not understand why our parent-child relationship, which had been good until last time we had met on July 9, had changed so much, and I wondered why she was saying so many things that were not true. However, I reflected on what might have been my own shortcomings as a parent, and the next day, on August 16, after careful consideration, I wrote a message and sent it to my daughter via [the messaging application] LINE.”

“It was only after this message that I became aware of my daughter’s Twitter feed,” he continued. “Not only was she telling there many stories that were not true, I also felt her strong resentment and hostility toward the church, and I worried about my daughter’s state of mind.”

As Ogawa has disclosed herself, she had been examined by doctors and hospitalized several times in the past for mental disorders. Her parents were more worried about their daughter’s physical and mental health than about anything else.

But that was not all her parents worried about.

“What our daughter is saying about us is only a family matter, her father said, but the image of the church and the image of its second-generation members have been seriously damaged by our daughter’s statements. If this campaign will lead

to the dissolution of the church, then many church members will lose the spiritual support and other benefits that are important to them. When I think of their pain, I feel a deep sense of responsibility.”

Thorn between their daughter and their church, her parents are deeply concerned.

“The Daughter of the Former Head Minister of the Unification Church”

As her father pointed out, Ogawa first caught the attention of the public on Twitter.

She seems to have several Twitter accounts, but when the former Unification Church started being slandered after the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe, she started using an account called “The Daughter of the Former Head Minister of the Unification Church,” and going on and on about how vicious her parents, who are members of that church, and the church itself, are.

In a tweet of July 13, 2022, she wrote that, “Since I was a child, I was forced to live in poverty, and bullied at school, but my parents just went out to have lunch with other believers. When I started a part-time job, my parents took all my wages, and the money I had tried to hide and saved was withdrawn without my permission when I was first hospitalized in a psychiatric ward. The reason I was hospitalized was that my family was abusing my non-self-sufficient grandmother. Every day, my family shouted at my grandma, telling her they hoped she would die soon, and also used violence. Dad, who was the head minister of the church, pretended not to see it, saying to us children, ‘It is the fault of both of them, grandma and your mother.’ Mom was still working hard to meet her quota of donations, borrowing money to maintain her position as the head of the local women’s department of the church. At one stage, I found the courage to confess to my mother that I had been seriously bullied, and even undressed, but she just said, ‘God expected so much of you. It is a challenge of love.’ She explained everything with God, so I regretted I had told the story to her.

I just wanted them to genuinely look at me and say something to me as parents.

When I started a job, I did not fit in with my colleagues. I was depressed and became a shut-in. I would spend my days looking up at the ceiling.

Mom treated me kindly at home, and she looked like the only person who was trying to save me. However, I learned that she was complaining to my younger sister when I was not at home, ‘When is she going to work? I want her to bring home some money soon.’ So, I decided to leave the church and to run away from home.

I went to the police to complain that my parents were withdrawing money from my account without my permission, but they told me this was a family issue to be solved within the family.

I do not agree with what the criminal who killed Abe did, but at that time I also wanted to kill or set on fire and burn the church’s premises and top leaders, so I would have become a criminal if I had not met the man who is now my beloved husband.

Sorry I scribbled this quickly, so a correction is needed. In fact, my mental illness was triggered by the exploitation of my parents, whom I trusted at that time.”

She had also written on the same Twitter account the day before, July 12, “It is fun to see the Unification Church on fire, LOL [laughing out loud], Eog Manse!!!!” She was using a Korean expression. “Manse” means “ten thousand years” in Korean, and it is used to wish a long life, just as the Japanese “Banzai.” “Eog” reinforces “manse” with the two words indicating an even longer period of time, literally one hundred million years, as does “Banbanzai” (ten thousand and ten thousand years) in Japanese. So, she was shouting a loud “Hurrah,” and one got the impression that she was very happy to see that the former Unification Church was at the receiving end of intensive bashing.

The Suicide Note Waved in Front of the TV Cameras

Some readers may find it strange, but in a way it is true that the more extreme a story is, the easier it is for the media to jump on it without asking questions. On August 4, the young woman first appeared on the regional MBS News for the Kinki region using the pseudonym “Sayuri Ogawa.” The part of the interview where she discussed the situation with her family at home largely repeated the story she had told on Twitter, but some parts were more specific.

For example, when she talked about how poor she was as a child, she said: “My parents confiscated all the money gifts I received from other relatives for the New Year, and they never gave me gifts for Christmas or for my birthday.” The family had no money, she said, but there were pots and seals at home. These were artifacts normally given by the former Unification Church to donors, and implied that her parents had made large donations.

The reason Ogawa gave for her decision to leave the church was the family situation and the quarrels about how to care for her maternal grandmother. Ogawa’s mother, who was tired of taking care of her own mother, had become harsh with Ogawa, she claimed, and the stress had caused her to suffer from panic disorder.

However, I already see a contradiction here. In the Twitter account she used to criticize the church, Ogawa said, “I learned that she [my mother] was complaining to my younger sister when I was not at home, ‘When is she going to work? I want her to bring home some money soon.’ So, I decided to leave the church and to run away from home.”

In addition, she initially stated on Twitter that the reason she became psychotic (and the reason why she was hospitalized at a mental hospital) was that her family “was abusing my non-self-sufficient grandmother.” However, at the end of the same Twitter thread she corrected herself: “Sorry I scribbled this quickly, so a correction is needed. In fact, my mental illness was triggered by the exploitation of my parents, whom I trusted at that time.”

But in the interview with MBS News she went largely back to her original Twitter statement, the one she had later corrected. She claimed in the interview that “My mom, who was tired of taking care of her own mother, had become harsh with me, and the stress had caused me to suffer from panic disorder.”

According to the interview, Ogawa became suicidal around the age of 19, both before and after she left the church, and she even wrote a suicide note. She kept it in a clear file folder. The TV program was glad to show part of the suicide note: “I still cannot digest the mistakes of my dad and mom. It is your fault that I died. But it is not a lie that I loved you. I regret it. I regret it. I wished I had lived. I wanted to love and be loved.”

As I noted at the beginning of this article, Ogawa is now 27 years old. The TV camera showed a message she allegedly wrote when she was nineteen. The paper

the message was written on, however, looked new. Moreover, the paper had no line of folding, and there was no sign it had ever been folded. Normally, suicide notes are folded and hidden somewhere. Furthermore, she claimed she had also written shocking words in this suicide note: “First, I wanted to kill my grandma. Then, someone from my family. I did not care who it was, but I wanted one of them to die.”

But wasn't she heartbroken that her family was abusing her non-self-sufficient grandmother?

Eventually, Politicians Also Approached Her

Eventually, Ogawa was approached by various media outlets. In one YouTube program, she testified that when she participated in a training session at a church event, she was sexually harassed by a male group leader. She was told that this had happened because she was possessed by an evil spirit. She said she was sent to the church's facility where evil spirits can be exorcized located in Cheongpyeong, Korea, where she had a mental breakdown and had to be hospitalized.

She also claimed that three of her six siblings were adopted by other church members, but the eldest among her three younger sisters eventually returned home. Adoption practices in the former Unification Church later became an issue in the media. In later interviews, Ogawa criticized the practice harshly. “It is almost like human trafficking,” she said. However, at the time of the early YouTube video, she reported that she had been “glad that my sisters were adopted. Each of them became the only child in her adoptive family, they were so well cared for.”

Politicians who wanted to understand the reality of the former Unification Church started approaching her too. On August 23, she attended a hearing organized by the Constitutional Democratic Party and shared with the politicians what she claimed had been her sad experience.

“Because my parents made large donations to the church, just as it happened in the case of Abe's assassin, I was born poor and was always poor. I was bullied for a long time at school because of it. Since childhood, I was forced to attend church events and religious services, and if there were church events on a weekday, I was forced to be absent from school to attend. I was told that romance was evil. My

parents did not allow anything that was against the doctrines of the church, such as TV, comic magazines, etc., and romance novels. My life has been like this.

One of the reasons why I decided to leave the church was money. I started a part-time job when I was a high school student, but all the money was confiscated by my parents since they had a tough time making a living. After graduating from high school, I earned about 100,000 yen a month from my part-time job, but my parents confiscated all my wages. They claimed they needed the money for the family's living expenses, but they actually spent it for their donations to the church. When I was hospitalized in a psychiatric ward, my mom withdrew all my hidden savings without my permission.

The second reason why I left the church was psychological. My parents became verbally abusive and violent toward my non-self-sufficient grandma during my high school days. They told her 'You should die!' and repeatedly beat and kicked her. These violent words and actions were totally inconsistent with the doctrines of 'the family is all-important' and 'true love' that I heard proclaimed every day. Faced with these contradictions, I started asking myself questions.

During a 21-day training session that I had to attend before I could participate in a collective wedding, I was sexually harassed by a male group leader. Later, when I attended three training sessions at the training center in Cheongpyeong, Korea, where my evil spirits should have been expelled, I saw many believers who suffered from mental breakdowns. I myself became mentally unstable and developed a mental illness.

The doctor did not give me a specific name for my disease, but it was like panic disorder, depression, or schizophrenia.”

She concluded that “I, like the suspect of the Abe assassination, Yamagami, have been victimized by the former Unification Church.”

During the press conference held at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan on October 7, something unexpected happened. Fifty minutes after it had started, when Ogawa had almost concluded her speech, the foreign woman who served as chair of the event suddenly started talking to Ogawa's husband, who was also present, while looking at some documents. Immediately after that, her husband spoke up on behalf of Ogawa.

“I am going to speak on her behalf, he said. I just received a message from a member of the former Unification Church. Her parents' signatures are here. To

summarize it, she is, they say, mentally disturbed. ‘And since the shooting of former Prime Minister Abe, her condition has worsened, and she has been telling many lies. For this reason, we request you to cancel this press conference immediately.’”

Ogawa, who was sitting next to her husband, was clearly upset by these words. Then, she said in tears that her personality disorder had been cured several years before, and she was now healthy. She concluded, “I think many people who have seen this will understand who is the worst between those who continue to insist that they are right and myself.”

Thus, the image of the former Unification Church as a despicable organization that was manipulating the parents of a former member to shut down their daughters’ press conference was spread throughout the world.

“Sayuri Ogawa”: The Story of Her Parents

What follows is the story of Sayuri Ogawa’s parents. Although they have shared a parent-child relationship for a long period, there is now a hopeless gap between the respective perceptions of the same facts by the parents and by their daughter.

Her father, Yoshihiko, is in his late fifties and graduated from a well-known national university. He later studied at a graduate school affiliated with the former Unification Church in the U.S. Her mother, Masako (a pseudonym), is in her early 60s. She started working at a local supermarket after graduating from high school. After that, Masako’s elder sister joined the former Unification Church. Masako also learned about the Unification Church’s “Divine Principle” through her sister’s invitation, and ended up joining the church.

Yoshihiko and Masako were part of one of the church’s international mass weddings in Seoul, Korea in October 1988, and started their married life in the Ibaraki prefecture in 1992. Since then, they had six children: an eldest son, a second son, an eldest daughter, Sayuri, a second, a third, and a fourth daughter. The third and fourth daughters were adopted by other families.

Sayuri’s father, Yoshihiko, currently works for a company not connected with any religious organization but, from November 2003 to the end of January 2010, he served as head minister of Family Federation churches in various places.

The eldest daughter, Sayuri, was born in October 1995. Sayuri had excellent grades and leadership skills since she was a child. She loved being in public, and “had rather a show-off character,” Masako said.

Sayuri was well-known among the local second-generation members of the Unification Church. The church holds cultural festivals for junior high and high school students called the Chuwa Cultural Festivals. For three years in a row, during her high school years, Sayuri won the second prize in the high school speech category of one of these cultural festivals, which is held for the Aichi and Mie prefectures.

In her third year of high school, she lectured on the Unification Church’s “Divine Principle” and won the first prize in the Western Japan competition, and the second prize in the nationwide competition. She also won several other awards.

“She is extremely intelligent and hardworking. My husband had the highest expectations for her,” Masako said.

The parents could not believe their ears when they heard such a proud daughter repeatedly telling the media that she and her siblings were bullied at elementary school because they were poorly dressed, were called “stinky,” and were excluded from their peer groups on their way to and from school, all this because their parents had made large donations to the church and their family was poor.

“Our family was not financially able to make large donations, Masako said, because Sayuri’s father had spent a long time studying in the U.S. when our children were small. We were not able to tithe, i.e., donate one-tenth of our income. My daughter may think that we made large donations because we had pots, a two-stories pagoda, and a Maitreya statue at our home, and these are items normally given to church members who had made important donations. However, we had received these artifacts from deceased members of our congregation. My husband was requested from a bereaved family to take over these objects, and another co-religionist donated the Maitreya statue to us.

My husband thought that our daughter had misunderstood the reason why we had the artifacts in our home, and on September 11, 2022, he explained to her why this had happened via LINE.

Our daughter, however, did not respond to his message, but posted on Twitter on September 16 that, ‘My parents seem to be completely unaware that they made large donations.

Now, let’s assume this, at the very least.

Even if my two parents’ salaries are 300,000 yen a month and they have been tithing for 30 years, this makes 30,000 (one tenth of 300,000) x 12 (months every year) x 30 years = 10.8 million yen.

Easily more than 10 million yen, and my parents said we were paying three tenths, so they donated more. This is what brainwashing is all about,’ she said. But we were never able to pay one-tenth, so there was no way we could donate three tenths of our salaries,” Masako insisted.

She shook her head when she was asked about Sayuri’s claim of being bullied and “excluded.”

“I asked Sayuri’s closest younger sister. She said she has never heard that Sayuri had been bullied. Even my eldest and second sons have never been bullied or excluded from their peer groups. What once happened was that Sayuri had been naughty with a friend, and her teacher at junior high school had warned her.”

In addition, Sayuri said she was forced to attend church events and religious activities since childhood, but her father, Yoshihiko, set the record straight. “Every three or four years or so, if there was a big convention or event at church on weekdays, I had my children absent themselves from school. When school club activities on Saturdays and Sundays overlapped with church services or events, I sometimes encouraged my children to prioritize the church activities. On the other hand, I prioritized their sport matches and other activities, including mini-basketball games, when they were at elementary school, over church events. And I have accompanied my children several times to matches held far away from home.”

Sayuri’s mother, Masako, also reported: “We have never taken away or banned television, music, books, or comics from our children. Sayuri loves singing and playing guitar, and performed in various live events. My husband and I took leave from our work to go and cheer her several times. Sayuri did not marry in one of the international mass marriages that are recommended by our church’s teachings, but my husband and I have never fought her about it. In the first place,

we never told her ‘You will go to hell if you fall in love.’ We have been to our daughter’s wedding, and sincerely celebrated their marriage. We were also really happy about her pregnancy and delivery. We even went to take care of her immediately after the baby was born.”

Masako also emphasized that it would have been impossible for Sayuri to win the second prize and awards at the Family Federation contests if she had been forced to participate against her will. She won the awards because she wanted to participate in these contests, and even asked to go there. In her high school days, Sayuri did not question or worry about the church’s doctrine. She rather enjoyed the liberal school life. “I heard she was popular because her face was a little male-looking and handsome. I also heard she discussed with her friends the fact that she attended the church openly,” Yoshihiko said.

According to Yoshihiko, it is also not true that the family verbally abused Masako’s non-self-sufficient mother, telling her “You should die,” or beat and kicked her. It is true that there was a long-standing feud between Masako and her mother, and there were some heated arguments, but there was never any violence or “death wish” at all. And the quarrel between mother and daughter started since when Masako was old enough to remember, and was not caused by the Unification Church.

Emergency Transport to Hospital in Cheongpyeong

In February 2014, Sayuri participated in a 21-day training session at the Chiba Central Training Center of the Family Federation during her spring break, just before graduating from high school. She claimed in the media that she was sexually harassed during this training session, for example by being caressed on the head and hugged by a male group leader. She also said that she had reported the incident to her mother, but Masako claims she never heard of it.

In fact, at that time, Sayuri told a church staff that she had received an e-mail from this male group leader after returning home from a training session. But Sayuri did not tell the church staff that she had been sexually harassed. However, since the Family Federation teaches a strict sexual morality as part of its doctrine, the staff thought there was a problem even if the male group leader had just sent an e-mail to a female believer. The staff reported the e-mail issue to the chief of

the Chiba Central Training Center. After receiving the report, the chief questioned the male group leader, and found out that in fact she had talked to him often, so he did not feel there was anything wrong in writing a message, and they had exchanged a few e-mails only.

At that time, she also sent an e-mail to another church staff, where she said, “I felt the male group leader’s gaze,” but again, she did not mention sexual harassment. In other words, she suddenly “remembered” the sexual harassment incident only after she had started talking to the media.

Sayuri then participated three times in 40-day training sessions at the Cheongpyeong Training Center at the headquarters of the Family Federation in Korea. However, during these training sessions, she talked strangely with the Korean male staff, and they were embarrassed.

In mid-September 2014, during the third training session that had started on July 30 of the same year, something unusual happened to her body. Suddenly, Sayuri felt as if her voice had changed to that of an aggressive woman, and she began to go out of control. Several male staff restrained her and transported her to a hospital adjacent to the Cheongpyeong Training Center.

Her mother Masako went to Korea immediately, arriving on September 16. Seeing her mother’s face, Sayuri was relieved and calmed down, and left the hospital on the following day, September 17. The doctor told Masako about her daughter’s condition, “Be careful, she tends to get stressed easily.” Sayuri loved the Cheongpyeong Training Center, and wanted to return there for the training session. But the staff was concerned about her physical and mental condition, and recommended she should go back home as soon as possible. She and her mother went home on September 30.

She Was Very Close to Her Father

In January 2015, the following year, Sayuri enrolled in a vocational school in Nagoya to be trained as a counselor. However, she quitted after four or five lessons, claiming that, “I could not go there because I was chased by a stalker.”

In August and October, she participated in a church’s training session in Korea again. Around this time, she sang as a vocalist in a band formed by her

father, Yoshihiko, and at the end of that year, she participated in a Family Federation event and sang.

In 2016, Sayuri became mentally unstable again. She went to mental clinics and was transferred to a hospital because of her hyperventilating. In 2017, Sayuri began living by herself in an apartment, although her mental condition had not improved. Before and after she left her parents' home, she was hospitalized at a national medical center for a few days.

Masako said, "There are several cases of depression or manic depression (bipolar disorder) on my side of the family. Some even committed suicide. I think that Sayuri's mental disorder is genetic. My daughter says that the Unification Church caused her mental illness, but I do not think it has anything to do with it. I myself have not heard the name of the disease directly from the doctor, but my daughter says she has been diagnosed with depression, panic disorder, and so on."

Sayuri, on the other hand, was very enthusiastic about her musical activities. She sang at events held by local churches with Yoshihiko, and also played guitar on her own. She was also very close to her father.

A Puzzling Incident

In February 2018, Sayuri witnessed a staff abusing a patient at a facility for the mentally disabled where she had worked part-time since she was a high school student. She filmed the abuse and reported it to the police and the public administration. She also mentioned this incident on Twitter, insisting that the patients should be separated from the staff. She also claimed that she herself was being abused by her supervisor. Probably because of this, she quit the facility in March. The incident was featured on the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) news for the Tokai region on July 2 of the same year.

It was a puzzling case. I watched the video she uploaded at that time, but it did not look like it documented such a terrible abuse. Mentally disabled people often scream and go out of control, and those who care for them may have to hold them down strongly. This appeared to be such a case. Is it true that she was abused by her supervisor? First it was "sexual harassment," then it was "abuse by her supervisor."

“I was chased by a stalker.”

“I was sexually harassed.”

“I was abused by my supervisor.”

“I felt a man’s gaze.”

“Staff abuse disabled people at a specialized facility.”

“My family abused my grandmother.”

Although the truth is of course impossible to determine, considering the whole series of her statements, Sayuri appears as very self-conscious and paranoid. This is also admitted by her parents.

After Sayuri quit her part-time job at the disabled facility, she became more active in music, performing at live events and on the street.

On the less bright side, she also suffered from depression, and in mid-April 2018 she moved out of her apartment and back to her parents’ home.

At home, she stopped working and began sleeping all the time, which irritated her younger sister. So, she said to Sayuri, “Mom says behind your back, ‘When is she going to work? I want her to bring home some money soon.’” Masako does not remember saying this, but Sayuri was so upset with her sister’s words that she decided to leave her parents’ home again.

“Give Me My Money Back”: An E-mail Request Repeated Several Times

On May 24 of the same year 2018, Sayuri left home. She left a note where she said, “I’m a little tired, so I’m going to rest,” and went to stay with her current husband, with whom she was already in a relationship at that time. She seems to have met her future husband during her musical performances.

After running away from home, money troubles surfaced between Sayuri and her parents. Around June 2018, Sayuri repeatedly send text messages to her father, saying “Give me my money back,” as well as informing him that she wanted to leave the church.

“‘I gave you 100,000 yen every month from year this to year that, and I want them back.’ I was surprised to read that. It was not only about money, she also said, ‘You people have destroyed my life,’” the father recalls.

She testified that she left the church when she was twenty, around 2016, but she attended several church events in 2016 and beyond, so this does not make sense.

About the money, her mother Masako, explained, “It is true that I borrowed 160,000 yen from my daughter, when she was a high school student, and did not return it, because it was hard for us to pay for the tuition fees for our two elder sons. But I only borrowed those 160,000 yen from my daughter. In fact, on the day my daughter ran away from home, 220,000 yen were withdrawn from my husband’s Japan Agricultural Bank account at an ATM. Since nobody else in our family withdrew the money, we thought Sayuri had taken it, but we did not say anything because of the 160,000 yen.”

In addition, Sayuri often asked Yoshihiko to send money to her. Each time, Yoshihiko remitted several tens of thousands yen several times, totaling about 100,000 yen.

Again, in January 2021, Yoshihiko remitted 80,000 yen in response to Sayuri’s request. Then, he received a long message from Sayuri saying, “Thank you, I’m sorry, as I know you are in a difficult situation.” Along with these words of appreciation, she sent a long message, starting “I need to talk to you about something.” In summary, the message was as follows. “When I was 18-20 years old, my mom took all of my wages, around 100,000 yen every month, for my brothers’ tuition fees. I want you also to tell my brothers about this and ask them to help me. I told her I did not want to give her my money, but mom came to the place where I worked to get the money. I was really scared. I have had mental problems since I was eighteen, and I still have them. Now I am twenty-five, and I am still depressed and cannot keep a job. I think it is my family that robbed me of my future back then.”

Her parents were surprised. They were told a story they knew nothing about. However, since it was true that her two elder brothers had been helped by their sister Sayuri, the parents told her brothers this, and both transferred a sum of money to Sayuri’s account. In March, Sayuri returned the 80,000 yen that she had borrowed from her father.

Since then, the relationship between Sayuri and her parents has been good. Her parents frequently sent sweets and vegetables from their garden to Sayuri, and she also sent food and other items. In July, her parents and her second eldest

brother visited Sayuri at her apartment, and in November, Yoshihiko and Sayuri kept in touch via LINE. In December 2021, Sayuri and her husband were married at Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura, and her parents and second eldest brother attended.

The following April 2022, when Sayuri gave birth to a baby boy, Masako stayed at her apartment to help her. Later, the parents visited the apartment and took pictures of everyone smiling around their newborn grandson.

She Changed After the Assassination of Former Prime Minister Abe

The dark cloud now hanging over what had once been a good parent-child relationship was triggered by the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022, More exactly, immediately after the shooting there was still no significant change.

Shortly before this incident, Sayuri's family had decided to move from an apartment to a house. She contacted Yoshihiko via LINE to tell him that they needed a car that she had purchased and left at her parents' home. Therefore, on July 9, her parents delivered the car from Mie Prefecture to their daughter's new home in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

On that evening, Sayuri sent a message via LINE to Masako saying, "Thank you for today. I am really sad that Mr. Abe was shot. The suspect Yamagami is from the Unification Church, right?" On July 11, she sent another message to Masako and asked, "Mom and others, are you okay? It seems the media are flooding to the church in Nara. Are you still going to the church? Please be careful." She was concerned for her parents. On the same day, the Family Federation President Tomihiro Tanaka held a press conference, and admitted that the mother of the suspect Yamagami was a member of the Family Federation.

On July 13, however, Sayuri's behavior changed drastically. As if she had become a completely different person, she started attacking both her parents and the church (see the paragraph "The Daughter of the Former Head Minister of the Unification Church" above).

On July 16, she sent this message via LINE to Yoshihiko: "As for the former Unification Church, it is very hard to believe that God would want the devotees to make large donations or to buy a book that costs 30 million yen, as the news say

recently. If they had a legitimate reason for this, I think they should disclose how all the donations they are collecting are spent.”

The reason why Sayuri had changed might have been the press conference held on July 12 by the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, an anti-Unification-Church organization. This press conference started with a moment of silence for the late former Prime Minister Abe, prefaced by the words, “Such acts should never be allowed for any reason whatsoever,” but what followed was a fierce criticism of the former Unification Church.

They waved a book, saying that the price for a volume with Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s words was a whopping 30 million yen. Addressing the problems connected with the former Unification Church, the lawyers said that Abe’s assassin Tetsuya Yamagami and his mother were “100% victims of the former Unification Church,” and that the church was “100% the perpetrator,” describing it as a “terrible evil.”

Sayuri might have been greatly shocked by this press conference. In fact, she was showing in public an attitude distancing herself from the church since around 2017. Yoshihiko asked Sayuri’s sister for details, believing she might know more. She said that around that year, Sayuri might have been in contact with an ex-member who had left the former Unification Church to join a Christian denomination and might have been exposed to some criticism of her parents’ religion. However, she never openly criticized the church at that time.

People of Sayuri’s age do not know from direct experience that the church has been severely slandered by the media in the past. It was impossible for her not to be influenced when she saw the church suddenly attacked by the media, with statement such as “The church is 100% evil and a terrible evil.” As evidence, on the day of the press conference, she had already posted on Twitter, “It is fun to see the Unification Church on fire, LOL. Eog Manse!!!!”

After this, Sayuri must have waited for a contact from the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. At the Constitutional Democratic Party’s hearing, she stated emphatically, “The Unification Church is a cult that calls itself a religion. It is an antisocial organization that drives its believers’ families to collapse. I would like Japan to adopt the anti-cult law that already exists in France.” At the end of the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan press conference, she said in a strong tone, “Please dissolve this organization.”

These statements are an exact copy of the claims of the members the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, such as attorney Masaki Kito. In particular, “Dissolve the former Unification Church” is a kind of slogan that the Network has been using since its foundation in 1987. It is reasonable to assume that the Network coached Sayuri before her media and public appearances, and she was under their influence.

We have already described how Sayuri began to appear in the media in August 2022. At a hearing held by the Constitutional Democratic Party on August 23, her statements were already far away from the truth. Her parents spent many sleepless nights, worrying that more and more Japanese would misunderstand their church.

“We Have Been Trying to Communicate with Her via LINE”

Late at night on August 25, Masako worried and sent a message via LINE to Sayuri, saying that she wanted to visit her daughter’s home the next day. On August 26, however, Sayuri replied “No one from the church is allowed in our house now. If you would come, come, but be prepared. I take videos of everything and broadcast them on YouTube, social media, and TV.” At that time, Masako was already close to Sayuri’s house, but decided to turn back.

Yoshihiko tried to communicate with his daughter via LINE. He felt guilty that as a father he had not helped his daughter, who said she had become mentally disturbed after she had seen her mother abuse her grandmother. But he could not admit what was not true. See the following excerpts from LINE conversations:

Father: “I do not know in what kind of media you, X (Sayuri’s real name), have appeared, but are you okay? Aren’t you still taking medicine and pushing yourself too hard? I know you are probably breastfeeding, and your mom is very worried about that. I know you think this is none of our business, but isn’t now the most important time to concentrate on raising your child? I just wish we could have time together as a family again.”

Daughter: “Thanks for ruining my life, causing me trauma and mental illness, and taking nearly two million yen of my wages. If you pay me three million yen as consolation, I will listen to you. But otherwise, please don’t get involved with me any more in the future.”

Father: “Dad just wants to apologize to X. I really should have discussed with your mom about your grandma. Dad believed he should give up. Your mother said that she just could not stop quarreling with grandma because of the intense scars that were carved on her from birth. I am really sorry. I had to find a solution no matter what it was. But I was not able to do that. I sacrificed the most sensitive person, X [Sayuri], because of it. If money is the solution for X, I would do anything to find it. But I do not understand some parts of the story that your father and your family took your money, so I am hoping you will talk to me.”

Daughter: “Mom took my entire wages every month after I graduated from high school. Though she was saying, ‘I am sure I will pay you back,’ never once she paid me back, Nearly two million yen in two years.”

“How can you eat quietly without paying me back my money? I despise you from the bottom of my heart.”

Father: “Your mom does remember that she borrowed 160,000 yen at a difficult time and could not pay you back. I am really sorry. I wonder how you made a living when you were living alone in the apartment. It must have been so hard. I wonder if you gave your wages directly to your mom in cash. Or did your mom have your bank passbook or cash card and withdrew the money? I would appreciate it if you could tell me more about this.”

Daughter: “When I was hospitalized in Cheongpyeong, mom withdrew all my savings without my permission. She did not borrow them, but rather withdrew them without asking me and never returned the money. I got my part-time pay in cash, and every month mom said, ‘It is so hard right now, I am sure I will pay you back,’ so I gave the money to her. When I turned her down, she came to Y (the facility for the disabled where I worked) to pick it up directly on payday.”

Father: “Thanks for telling me. You say that your mom withdrew all the money from your account in Japan, when you came back from Cheongpyeong and found out that there was no money left in the account. But you did not say anything about it at that time: was it because you put up with it? How much money did you hand over to your mom every month?”

I know that by October 2014, you had been to Cheongpyeong three times. And when you returned to Japan, all your savings were withdrawn, and all your wages were taken every month. Does it mean that you got the money you needed from your mom? I think you paid for the driving school, the car, the car repairs,

the apartment's rent, and other things since around January 2016—but where did all this money come from?

In case you did not know, we did not purchase the two-storied pagoda and the Maitreya statue, but took them over because the owner had passed away and they were donated to us.

You might think we made large donations because of the two-storied pagoda or the Maitreya statue. When you were a small girl, we experienced financial difficulties, but it was not because of the donations. I think a lot of misconceptions and misunderstandings are at work here.

You said that your mom withdrew your savings while you were hospitalized in Cheongpyeong. If you still have your bank passbook, could you please take a picture of it and send it to me? Because your mom is very worried about it. If you no longer have the passbook, could you ask your bank to provide the transaction history?”

However, Sayuri did not answer.

When her father asked her to submit her bank passbook or transaction history to corroborate her story, Sayuri either did not respond or dodged the question.

Why Her Claims Are Totally Unbelievable

First, let us examine her statement, “Mom took my entire wages every month after I graduated from high school. Nearly two million yen in two years.” Actually, the periods when Sayuri claimed she had her wages taken change often in her statements, but let's assume it was after she graduated from high school. In this year (2014), she attended training sessions from March 15 to April 24, April 26 to June 4, July 30 to September 30, as she did from December 29 to January 2 of the following year.

And since January 2015 she attended a vocational school for training as a counselor in Nagoya for a short period, so she was able to work for a limited time only. It is hard to believe that she earned two million yen in two years.

Besides, she said that at the facility for disabled where she worked, she received her wages in cash until around April 2015, and that her mother was taking money from her every month until that time. If so, this would have been from March

2014, when she graduated from high school, to around April 2015, which makes little more than a year, not two years. She said, “I received my wages in cash, and therefore there is no record in my bank’s passbook.” But when her father asked her to disclose the passbook, she refused it.

Her claim that “Mom withdrew all my savings without my permission when I was hospitalized in Cheongpyeong” seems similar to her statement at the hearing of the Constitutional Democratic Party, that “When I was hospitalized in a psychiatric ward, my mom withdrew all my hidden savings without my permission.” Note that she mentioned this story for the first time in August 2022.

Her mother Masako said, “I had no way to know about her hidden account, and even if I knew, I, not being the account owner, would not have been able to withdraw the money without her permission.” As for the claim that she took her daughter’s wages directly from her employer, she wondered, “I didn’t even know the payday and the amount due to my daughter. Then how could I go and get it?”

Thus, clearly Sayuri’s claim that her mother took her money has no plausibility at all.

The Press Conference at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan

The true story of the press conference at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan on October 7, 2022, is as follows.

On October 6, Sayuri’s parents were informed from a local church staff that Sayuri would hold a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan the following day. They were surprised and thought they had to do something. The church staff seemed to have seen Sayuri’s post on Twitter announcing the press conference for the following day.

However, her parents were informed only after 9pm on October 6. Since Yoshihiko starts to work very early, at 4am, they did not have enough time to consider the matter. Even so, firstly, Sayuri’s brother called her. However, she did not answer. So, in the morning of the press conference day, Yoshihiko sent the following message via LINE: “You hold a press conference today. Your dad and your family are very concerned because a lot of your memories of the past are so different from what we remember. Before speaking to a large audience, I would

like you to first check your past e-mails and messages via LINE with your dad and your family, and check the records of your bank passbook. Even if now you believe that your memories are correct, I am afraid that my daughter will be hurt if she will find out later that her memories were wrong.”

Yoshihiko said that “I knew it would be difficult to stop the press conference, but I wanted to do anything possible to stop the circulation of fake news. However, my message via LINE was never read.”

Later, a local head minister of the church suggested that he might send a fax to the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan. However, Yoshihiko did not have enough time to prepare the document. Therefore, Sayuri’s parents asked a church headquarters’ staff who spoke English to prepare the document in both Japanese and English, and send it to them by e-mail. Yoshihiko read and understood it. He thought that the English text was good enough and the translation was not needed; therefore both the father and the mother signed the document in English. Yoshihiko asked Masako to send it by fax. Sayuri later posted on Twitter that the fax arrived at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan at 10:40 am:

“Urgent.

We are the parents of Sayuri Ogawa (real name XX), a former member of the Unification Church, who is going to hold a press conference today at your press club.

As XX admits at the top of her Twitter page, she suffers from a serious mental illness known as ‘dissociative identity disorder.’ According to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare website, this mental disease is a neurosis, in which several personalities with completely different characters, memories, and genders appear in one person. XX has been showing the disease’s symptoms for a long time, but after the media started reporting about the shooting of former Prime Minister Abe, her symptoms became worse. And she began to speak in the media and at political party meetings describing facts that were completely different from those that really happened in the past.

We are very concerned that if she continues these activities, her mental disorder may become much worse, or she may commit a crime such as defamation. Therefore, we are currently considering legal procedures to prevent her from telling any more untrue stories.

As such, we sincerely ask you to cancel her press conference today [...].

Best regards,

[Signatures of the parents].”

Around 1pm, another document requesting the cancellation of the press conference was sent by the church’s lawyer to the club. When the press conference began at 2pm, the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan should have been aware of these faxes. However, as mentioned earlier, the press conference started as scheduled, and after about 50 minutes had passed, the foreign lady chairing the event looked panicked as if she had just received those faxes, and showed Sayuri’s husband the English document requesting the cancellation of the press conference and the Japanese document sent by the church’s lawyer. The husband said that according to the parents’ fax his wife Sayuri was “mentally abnormal” and was “telling a lot of lies,” but this harsh language was not in the original document.

Her parents could not imagine that the organizers would publicly read their fax asking to cancel the event during the press conference. Even more, Sayuri’s husband used an inaccurate Japanese translation.

It is not clear whether the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan made a summary on the spot and handed it to Sayuri’s husband, and he merely read it aloud. However, as I mentioned earlier, many in the audience had the impression that the church was trying to derail the press conference. In the end, it was a great success for those who manipulated the reality and managed to put the church in an even worse light.

Furthermore, the parents were also accused of disclosing their daughter’s undetermined mental illness and violate her right to privacy. However, her parents thought that, because their daughter had clearly posted the name of her disease on Twitter, she had been officially diagnosed and did not want to keep her diagnosis private. They also considered that their daughter’s symptoms of telling false stories were indeed similar to those typical of the dissociative identity disorder. The parents felt that their daughter was now a different person, as if another personality was possessing her body.

Besides, if you blame the parents for their breach of privacy, Sayuri herself is even more problematic. She tried an incomprehensible defense on YouTube,

saying “I consulted people who are familiar with the disease, and posted its name on Twitter in my profile section to improve my symptoms.”

The Terrible Evil That Uses “Sayuri Ogawa”

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.

You Do Not Care if It Is a Lie

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 especially 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.

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.

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 such 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.”

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