

# The Abe Assassination, the Unification Church, and Local Media: A Case Study of Journalism in Toyama Prefecture

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**Abstract:** *This article chronicles how two commercial TV stations in Toyama Prefecture exposed deep links between politicians and the Unification Church. It discusses how a local community of investigative journalists with close ties to adherents and politicians revealed ways the church and lawmakers cooperated on electioneering and policymaking, and it analyzes how their exposés were taken up in national-level coverage. Through a self-reflexive consideration of complex relationships between broadcasters, church representatives, and elected officials in Toyama, I affirm that attending to local media is vital for understanding ways religion and politics are narrated.*

**Keywords:** *Media, Politics, Unification Church, Gender, Toyama*

## Introduction: How Local Journalism Propelled a National Upheaval

On July 8, 2022, former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō was shot and killed while on a campaign tour in Nara prefecture in western Japan. The suspect, forty-one-year-old Yamagami Tetsuya, was immediately arrested. Reports on broadcast, print, and social media emphasized that Yamagami held a grudge against a “specific religious group” later revealed to be the Korea-based Unification Church (UC); its official title is the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU). Yamagami was motivated by Abe’s connection with the UC, which he learned about via a video message the former PM delivered in September 2021 to an event hosted by a UC-related organization, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Media outlets reported that Yamagami’s mother had made ruinously large donations to the UC, which he blamed for the downfall of his personal fortunes. Following initial media reactions to



**Local journalists and videographers at a press conference by the Toyama branch of the UC-related Peace Ambassadors Council after a court session in Toyama City, May 22, 2024. Photo by the author.**

Abe’s murder, there was a flurry of reports on the UC, ranging from its history of problematic recruitment practices and forcible “spiritual sales” to its connections with former Prime Minister Abe and his grandfather, former Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke (Gaitanidis 2024; McLaughlin 2023; Kingston 2023). These reports also uncovered a wide-ranging history of the UC’s relationship with other politicians, particularly those within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in Japan’s National Diet and local assemblies. Weekly magazines, television, radio, newspapers, and social media outlets publicized

links between conservative politicians and the UC and uncovered the church's involvement in supporting their elections (McLaughlin 2023).

Coverage was not limited to the national media. Local outlets, especially local television stations, gained national attention for their reporting. One place where local media contributed significantly to the national-level narrative on the UC and its political ties was Toyama Prefecture. I live in Toyama, where I carry out research on media and social movements. Toyama is a mostly rural prefecture on the Japan Sea that is accessible in a few hours by express train from Tokyo. Politically, the prefecture is known as a “conservative kingdom,” in part because it is a strong base for the LDP.<sup>1</sup> Toyama's media gained a national reputation for reports on the UC and conservative politicians, which proliferated immediately after the Abe assassination, especially in evening news programs broadcast on commercial TV stations. The Toyama stations Chūrippu Terebi, “Tulip TV,” and Kitanihon Hōsō, the “North Japan Broadcasting Corporation” (KNB), distinguished themselves through numerous scoops. National programs such as TBS's “Hōdō Tokushū” (Special News Report) and NTV/Yomiuri TV's “Jōhō Raibu Miyaneya” (Information Live Miyaneya) used clips produced by Toyama TV stations.<sup>2</sup> Some segments were posted on stations' websites and YouTube, and viewers across Japan communicated via social media about Toyama's TV coverage.

Media professionals praised coverage of the UC by Tulip TV and KNB. Journalist Takase Tsuyoshi wrote that “commercial TV stations in Toyama Prefecture are going to great efforts” in an article for *GALAC* magazine (published by the Association of Broadcast Critics), a periodical that is read widely by media creators and critics (Takase 2022b, 36–37). Thanks to their intense scrutiny of longstanding ties between the UC and politicians, Tulip TV and KNB

<sup>1</sup> At time of writing, the LDP accounts for five of the six members of the Diet (House of Representatives and House of Councillors) elected in Toyama Prefecture. Of the forty members of the Toyama Prefectural Assembly, thirty-five are LDP members.

<sup>2</sup> “Information Live Miyaneya” is a daytime talk show produced by Yomiuri TV in Osaka that is broadcast nationwide by the Nippon Television Network (NTV).



**Fig. 1 Tulip TV's anchor Keda Chiyomaru receiving a Galaxy Award (photo from Keda's Instagram account, used with permission).**

received highly acclaimed Galaxy Awards, which are given by the Association of Broadcast Critics. These Toyama-based stations were the only local outlets that received Galaxy Awards for coverage of the UC.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> According to Nishihata Taizō, who was on the selection committee for the Galaxy Awards television category, Tulip TV won for excellence in press activities in 2022 because it “promptly acknowledged the direct link between the UC issue and the local community and delved into the reality of the UC's endeavors to expand in local areas,” and because it stepped in “unhesitatingly to address vague responses by political leaders in Toyama to resolve this issue” (Nishihata 2023, 78). In the TV category, Tulip TV won an honorable mention for its program “Tricky Machinery: Politicians, Toyama, and the Unification Church” (Tulip TV 2022d), and KNB also won an honorable mention for its news special “Hand of Salvation: The Unification Church and Toyama's Political Circle” (KNB 2023). In the radio category, KNB's news special “The Unification Church and the Toyama Political Circle” received a runner-up award for the best radio show category and an award for excellence in the radio journalism category. KNB's coverage of the UC and sex education and other movements related to gender issues were evaluated as providing important perspectives (Nishihata 2023, 79).

This article offers a local-level view of media engagement with one of the most significant national-level events in Japan's recent history. It addresses questions such as: why did television stations in Toyama Prefecture deliver detailed coverage of the UC? And how were they capable of carrying out investigations that gained nationwide attention? I demonstrate how understanding the dynamics of local media helps us to comprehend the ways in which national-level narratives take shape. Here, I examine interactions between Toyama's two most prominent TV stations, their journalists, prefectural and municipal politicians, and Unification Church representatives. I argue that local commercial broadcasters in Toyama have succeeded in delving deeply into the relationship between religion and politics through community-based coverage without flinching from political pressure. These journalists revealed that UC and conservative politicians in Toyama shared many commitments to traditional family values and ideals regarding gender and sexual conventions, and that these shared ideals led local politicians to participate in policy study groups and events organized by the UC. The Toyama stations' history of investigative reporting on political injustice and their careful attention to the UC's local activities, combined with their intimate access to local politicians and the church, significantly influenced their reporting on how the church has influenced municipal and prefectural politics.

In my analysis, I inquire into ways local TV stations uncovered the UC's involvement in electoral support and its routine lobbying of conservative politicians to advance policies of interest to the church, particularly those concerning gender and sexuality, and how this coverage was minimized and at times edited out of national-level broadcasts. I am part of the dynamics I analyze, and throughout this article I attend to the fact that I participate in the mediascape that I bring to light here. As a feminist sociologist and media studies scholar who was born and resides in Toyama, I have researched the UC and its gender- and sexuality-relevant activities in Toyama, and elsewhere in Japan, since 2009 (Yamaguchi, Saitō

and Ogiue 2012; Saitō 2017; Saitō 2023; Yamaguchi and Saitō 2023). Since the Abe assassination, I have closely followed local and national media coverage of the UC, and I have been interviewed on local TV news regarding my work on the UC in Japan. Since July 2022, I have gathered ethnographic data on church representatives and reporters who attend press conferences held by organizations linked to the UC's Toyama branch. In order to provide an insider's take on how Tulip TV has been reporting on the UC, I interviewed Keda Chiyomaru,<sup>4</sup> anchor at Tulip TV, and Kamono Mamoru,<sup>5</sup> a long-time adherent of the Unification Church in Japan and currently a representative of an organization connected to the religion.

By combining insights drawn from key participants in Toyama media with attention to how the prefecture's commercial TV stations informed Japan's political and public responses to the Unification Church after the murder of Abe Shinzō, this article reveals how local media gains traction at the national level and contributes thereby to global understandings of religion and politics in Japan.

### Media Coverage of the Unification Church in Japan

The Unification Church, which adopted the title Family Federation for World Peace and Unification from 2015 in Japan, is a religious organization that was founded by Moon Sun Myung in South Korea in 1954 as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity. The church registered as a religious corporation with the Japanese government in 1964, establishing its headquarters next to the home of former Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke in Shibuya, central Tokyo (McGill 2022; Kingston 2023). In 1968, Moon founded the International

4 Keda Chiyomaru works as an anchor of the evening Program "News 6" at Tulip TV. I conducted an interview with Keda on October 10, 2023, at Tulip TV headquarters in Toyama City.

5 Kamono Mamoru was Secretary General of the UC's Ambassadors Council Toyama Headquarters. He was a journalist for *Seikai Nippō* and was director of the UC's public relations department at its Japan Headquarters. I have known him since March 2009, when I began research on the anti-feminist backlash of the 2000s, and we have stayed in touch ever since. I conducted an online interview with Kamono on April 16, 2024.

Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC), basing it in South Korea and Japan (Asahi Shimbun 2023a; Asahi Shimbun 2023b). This political outreach organization, which enjoyed patronage from Kishi and other prominent conservatives, forged ties with the broader anti-communist movement (Shimazono 2023b, 185-187).

It did not take long for criticism of this new religious group to appear. Shortly after the UC's official founding in Japan, the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* reported on parents who claimed that their children who joined the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP, est. 1964), a university-based UC wing, had left home and not returned (Asahi Shimbun 1967). The magazine *Asahi Journal* subsequently featured coverage of students who became CARP devotees by journalist Chamoto Shigemasa, who published several books in 1977 that criticized CARP and the UC (Chamoto 1977a; 1977b). From 1986 to 1987, the magazine investigated damage caused by the church's "spiritual sales" (Fukui 2022; Gaitanidis 2024). From this time, lawsuits were brought against the Unification Church in Japan. A series of what came to be known as the "Give Me Back My Youth" lawsuits were launched from 1987 by former adherents and their families.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, the National Association of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales was formed to address the problem of "spiritual sales," a practice in which members sell religious items at extraordinary prices to generate revenue for the church (See Gaitanidis 2024).

Coverage in Japan of the UC surged in 1992, when the church held a mass wedding ceremony in Seoul for 30,000 couples. Japanese celebrities, including singer/actor Sakurada Junko and Olympic rhythmic gymnast Yamasaki Hiroko, were among the be-

trothed (Shūkan Bunshun Henshūbu 2022b).<sup>7</sup> Former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro reportedly sent a congratulatory message (Shimazono 2023a, 80). Television talk shows and weekly magazines covered the event and the UC extensively, treating Sakurada and Yamasaki's conversions and participation in the mass wedding as entertaining celebrity scandals of a type that features regularly in the popular press (Fukui 2022). Because the UC was treated at this point as entertainment news its place within politics and religion was not scrutinized in widely read coverage.

Media reports on the UC largely disappeared as public attention switched to the religion Aum Shinrikyō after its deadly terrorist attack on the Tokyo subways in March 1995 (Shimazono 2023a, 80). This lack of coverage from the mid-1990s has been dubbed "thirty years of no media reports" by journalist and former member of Japan's House of Councilors Arita Yoshifu, who has been following the UC for decades (Fukui 2022). The UC's anti-communist activities also lost media appeal with the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. As the church fell off Japan's national-level media radar, it moved aggressively against sex education in Japan (Asai ed. 1993). The UC was a major contributor to anti-feminist backlash that gained momentum in the early 2000s and otherwise worked closely with other conservative groups and local politicians to oppose gender equality policies and ordinances that recognized LGBTQ+ rights (Saitō 2017; Saitō 2023; Yamaguchi 2022; Matsuoka 2023).<sup>8</sup> The UC thus grew as a potent political influence, especially in local regions, while Japan's media focused elsewhere (Asai et al. 2006; Yamaguchi, Saitō, and Ogiue 2012; Yamaguchi 2018; Yamaguchi 2022; Saitō 2023; Yamaguchi and Saitō 2023). For decades, anti-feminist, homopho-

6 Approximately 160 former UC members were plaintiffs in the most prominent "Give Me Back My Youth" lawsuit in Tokyo. They claimed that they had been solicited by the UC, which hid its true nature as a religious group and deprived them of their youthful years. The trial ended in 1999 when the UC paid thirty-nine million yen to thirty-nine plaintiffs (Seishun o Kaese Saiban (Tokyo) Genkokudan Bengodan eds. 2000). In 2003, Japan's Supreme Court ruled that the UC's recruiting activities had been illegal and infringed on constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion (Tanaka 2022).

7 Sakurada Junko, who debuted in 1973 as a teenage idol, was a widely known singer and actor in Japan when her participation in the mass wedding gained media attention. After her marriage she largely stepped back from the entertainment industry, though she does perform from time to time, and she is reportedly still a member of the UC. Yamasaki Hiroko participated in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. She joined the UC in 1988 and left in 1993. Her ex-husband from the mass wedding, Teshigawara Hideyuki, currently works as the head of the church reform promotion department at the UC's Japan headquarters. He frequently represents the church in press conferences.

8 On anti-feminist backlash in the early 2000s, see Kimura ed. 2005; Wakakuwa et al. 2006; Kano 2016.



**Fig. 2 Tulip TV headquarters in Toyama City (photo by the author).**



**Fig. 3 KNB headquarters in Toyama City (photo by the author).**

bic, and transphobic backlash propelled by cooperation between the UC and politicians did not receive major media attention.<sup>9</sup>

After July 8, 2022, the UC was thrust into the spotlight and abruptly gained intense media scrutiny. Weekly magazines (*Shūkan Bunshun* in particular) and television stations stood out for their reporting. As early as July 13, 2022, *Shūkan Bunshun* reported that Abe and those close to him, including his grandfather Kishi Nobusuke, his father Abe Shintarō, and his former executive secretary Inoue Yoshiyuki (a member of the House of Councilors from 2022), benefited from close ties to the UC (*Shūkan Bunshun* 2022a). Television programs with stand-out coverage of this story included BS-TBS’s “Hōdō

1930”<sup>10</sup> and TBS’s “Hōdō Tokushū,”<sup>11</sup> both of which won Galaxy awards for their reports on the UC and politics in 2022, as well as TBS’s late night news show “News 23” and Yomiuri TV’s daytime talk show “Jōhō Raibu Miyaneya.” Miyaneya’s audience rating rose from 4% in June 2022 to 7% in July, when the show started its daily broadcast on the church (*Shūkan Bunshun* 2022c). NHK, Japan’s public broadcaster, did not report in depth on UC’s political involvement in late July 2022, but in late August it produced a program on “Kurōzuappu

9 Homophobia and transphobia are widespread in Japan. See Iino 2020; Endo 2023.

10 BS-TBS is a broadcast satellite channel of the Tokyo Broadcasting System. Its “Hōdō 1930” (News Report 1930), a prime-time news show aired on weekdays, reported on the UC and politics. The show received a Galaxy Award for a program titled “Distance between the Former Unification Church and Politics Questioned: Major Shock, The Former Unification Church and Japanese Politics” (*Hōsō Hihyō Kondankai* 2022: BS-TBS 2022).

11 TBS’s “Hōdō Tokushū” is a Saturday evening program that combines news broadcasts with documentaries based on investigative journalism. In 2021, it won the Galaxy Award Grand Prize, thanks to its commitment to investigative reporting and broadening the impact of local affiliates through national broadcasts (TBS 2021). It also received a prize in 2022 in the Galaxy’s journalism division for its reports on the UC and the church’s connection to politics (*Hōsō Hihyō Kondankai* 2022).

Gendai” (Close-Up Today) that featured interviews with UC representatives and politicians.<sup>12</sup>

### Investigative Reporting by Toyama’s Commercial TV Stations

The state-funded broadcaster NHK maintains comprehensive TV and radio coverage across Japan, including a prefecture-level station in Toyama. Otherwise, there are three private TV stations in Toyama that generate revenue through commercials: Kitanihon Broadcasting Corporation, or KNB (affiliated with the national-level private broadcaster NTV, established in 1952), Toyama TV (a Fuji TV affiliate, established in 1968), and Tulip TV (a TBS affiliate, established in 1990). Of these, Tulip TV and KNB provided extensive coverage of the UC immediately after Abe’s assassination.

Tulip TV was founded in 1990 as the newest station among Toyama’s commercial broadcasters.<sup>13</sup> As a latecomer, Tulip TV aimed to be community-based at its inception and was not known for its news coverage or political critique. It was pursuit of a 2016 political fraud case involving the Toyama City Council that transformed the station’s stance. That year, councilor compensation in Toyama City rose abruptly to 700,000 yen, a much higher rate than that in municipalities with similarly sized populations. Tulip TV made a public record request for information about the deliberation process that led to the pay hike, and the station showed footage of dozing city councilors (Tulip TV Reporting Team 2017, 142–156). Rival station KNB, which was established in 1952 as an affiliate of Nippon Television Network Corporation (NTV) and has long held Toyama’s largest TV and radio audiences (KNB 2022d), also played a significant role in reporting on the Toyama City fraud issue in 2016. Reporting by both stations, as well as other media outlets in the prefecture, revealed that ten or more LDP Toyama City Council Members fraudulently received taxpayer-funded

“political activity fees” by falsifying receipts and other documents to claim reimbursement for their expenses. As a result of these exposés, fourteen Toyama lawmakers were forced to resign.

Keda Chiyomaru, anchor at Tulip TV’s weekday evening “News 6” program, told me that the fraud issue motivated people at Tulip to continue with investigative reporting. Tulip TV thereafter fostered a culture of revealing the fraud of local politicians.<sup>14</sup> Tulip TV’s and KNB’s coverage of the Unification Church in Toyama that they produced after the Abe murder thus emerged from a journalistic environment that supported local investigative reporting. The stations also benefit from coverage by journalists who establish long-term ties because they tend not to be transferred between locales; in contrast to NHK and other national-level outlets, commercial broadcasters in Toyama retain established reporters who stay in Toyama for extended periods of time. The journalists who broke news about ties between the UC and the prefecture’s politicians were immersed in an institutional culture that encouraged investigation of local lawmakers’ misdeeds. This local journalistic standard contributed to the influence of Toyama TV stations on national-level media coverage of the UC and its connections to politics.

### Distinctive Aspects of Unification Church Coverage by Tulip TV and KNB

On July 11, 2022, three days after the shooting, the Unification Church held a press conference in Tokyo at which its Japanese leaders admitted that Yamagami’s mother was a member of the church. Tulip TV began its coverage of the UC on that day. It reported extensively on financial damage caused by the church’s excessive demands for donations, showing that Yamagami family members were not the only victims of the organization by highlighting testimonials from former adherents.

<sup>12</sup> “Close-Up Today” broadcasts on the UC are listed at <https://www.nhk.or.jp/gendai/tag/kyutoitsukyokai/>

<sup>13</sup> I served as a member of the station’s broadcast programming advisory committee from October 1990 to September 2000, and I have paid close attention to the station’s broadcasting from that time to the present.

<sup>14</sup> KNB has received numerous awards from the Japan Broadcasting Union and the Hōsō Bunka Foundation for its TV and radio news reports, commercials, documentaries, and other broadcasts.

Initially, Toyama’s TV broadcasters focused on the alarming scale of financial costs borne by former believers. Soon after the assassination, national TV stations began to report that Abe and other LDP politicians fostered close relationships with the UC by receiving electoral support, attending UC-related events, sending congratulatory messages, and through other compromising ties to the church. TBS’s “Hōdō Tokushū” reported that Inoue Yoshiyuki, who served as secretary to former Prime Minister Abe, received campaign support from the UC and spoke out against same-sex marriage in a campaign speech that accorded with the UC’s stance on this issue. The program showed a video of his appearance at a gathering of UC followers during his campaign where organizers declared that Inoue had become a “member” of the UC (TBS 2022). BS-TBS’s “Hōdō 1930” aired testimony by Aoyama Shigeharu, an LDP Diet member, attesting that Abe Shinzō, while he was Prime Minister, determined which candidates for the Diet’s Upper House should receive votes from Unification Church supporters (BS-TBS 2022).<sup>15</sup>

Later in July, Toyama stations reported on how the UC offered Toyama politicians electoral support. On July 21, Tulip TV interviewed thirty-two LDP members in the prefectural assembly and several municipal mayors in the prefecture (Tulip TV 2022a). It reported that Toyama Governor Nitta Hachirō, Toyama Mayor Fujii Hirohisa, Takaoka Mayor Kakuda Yūki, and four members of the Toyama Prefectural Assembly had received campaign support from the church.<sup>16</sup> On July 20, KNB reported in its early evening news show “KNB Every” that Governor Nitta had received campaign support from the UC in the 2020 gubernatorial election (KNB 2022a). Tulip TV aired further testimony on July 28 by a Toyama City Council member who had won his seat by a margin of only 237 votes. He stated that “without those

15 The episode of “Hōdō 1930” on BS-TBS aired on July 22, 2022 also featured six politicians, including Toyama governor Nitta Hachiro, Toyama mayor Fujii Hirohisa, and Toyama prefectural assembly member Hienae Seikichi. The report centered on their roles as local politicians and Diet members with close ties with the UC (BS-TBS 2022).

16 The Mayors of Toyama City and Takaoka City were interviewed by the UC newspaper *Sekai Nippō*. Articles that included these interviews were removed from the paper’s website (Sekai Nippō 2022a; Sekai Nippō 2022b).



**Fig. 4 The front page of a Peace Road Toyama pamphlet introduces its bike-riding event: “Peace Road Toyama, cheered by the governor and mayors” (image used with permission from Kamono Mamoru).**

people [of the UC]’s help, I might not have been elected” (Tulip TV 2022a). At the end of July, KNB reported the results of its survey on connections to the UC among ninety-six politicians, including Toyama’s Diet members, prefectural assembly members, municipal assembly members, and mayors of all municipalities in the prefecture (KNB 2022a). It reported that nearly 40% of LDP members in the Toyama Prefectural Assembly confirmed they were affiliated in some way.

The media’s primary focus then moved to links between politicians and the UC’s affiliated groups, including the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), the Association of Ambassadors for Peace, and the Peace Road Planning Committee.<sup>17</sup> Tulip TV showed

17 The Universal Peace Federation (UPF) was founded in September 2005 by then-Unification Church leader Moon Sun Myung and his wife Han Hak Ja, who is the church’s current leader. The UPF, headquartered in New York, is an NGO with General Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Ambassadors for Peace is a project under the UPF, launched in 2001 as what the organization calls “the largest and most diverse network of peace leaders” who are appointed in over 160 countries. It “works to realize a peaceful world in cooperation with the Universal Peace Federation” (<https://www.upf.org/core-program/ambassadors-for-peace>). The Association for Ambassadors of Peace has prefectural branches in Japan and appoints numerous politicians to its posts. Peace Road is a “global goodwill project” by the UPF that began in 1981. Its activities center on two projects, both of which have been critiqued for most likely being unfeasible: a proposed undersea tunnel between Korea and Japan and a Bering Strait Project to connect Japan to

that the UC had continuously approached politicians in capacities beyond electoral support, appointing them as “peace ambassadors” and to similar positions in church-connected organizations. On July 21, Tulip TV aired an interview with Hienae Seikichi, a veteran LDP Toyama prefectural assembly representative, who was filmed working in his rice paddies in the mountains of Toyama (Tulip TV 2022a). The interview revealed that Hienae had maintained a long relationship with the church’s Association of Ambassadors for Peace. Hienae said that through the organization, he and other politicians “established a close relationship” with the UC, and that “UC people also went to municipal councils in the prefecture to seek support for various policy-related issues and to initiate movements to submit petitions on problems such as constitutional revision, gender equality, and LGBT [matters].” His remarks indicate that conservative politicians share some of the UC’s ideological commitments and are willing to cooperate with them on policy matters. Tulip TV used clips from this interview multiple times in their reporting on the UC.

Media reports on connections between politicians and the UC sparked heavy criticism, nationally and locally. On July 26, the Toyama Branches of the Constitutional Democratic Party and Japanese Communist Party announced investigations that targeted the governor, mayors, and prefectural and city assembly members. Many Toyama politicians who had initially responded to media requests for interviews began turning them down. They deleted photos of meetings with UC representatives from their websites and Facebook pages. Those who still agreed to interviews denied having answered in the affirmative about their connections to the church, saying that they had no memory of these meetings or records to confirm them.

Toyama’s TV stations, especially Tulip TV, reached out to local politicians in Toyama immediately after

Siberia. The Peace Road Planning Committee is an organization under the UPF that works “in hopes of peace and unification of the Korean Peninsula” (<https://www.upf.org/core-program/peace-road>). In addition to promoting the proposed Korea-Japan tunnel, Peace Road organizes bicycle rides to encourage friendly relations between South Korea and Japan, along with other events.

the Abe murder. Tulip TV was able to report on the UC promptly thanks in large part to the work of Takeishi Hiroaki, director general of Tulip TV’s news production bureau, who transferred from TBS just prior to the assassination. This was a significant factor for the station: while at TBS, Takeishi had reported on the UC’s notorious “spiritual sales” from as early as 1992 (Takeishi 2023). Under his direction, Tulip TV responded quickly to revelations about UC connections. At first, the politicians the station interviewed apparently did not imagine their connections to the church would explode into a major issue. They had never experienced any serious social reprimands for these associations, which were implicitly approved by LDP leaders, including Abe Shinzō.

Tulip TV, and then KNB, quickly made the UC’s and its related organizations’ ties to politicians a staple feature of their broadcasts. Both stations used interviews with politicians, conducted surveys, and carried out public record requests to reveal that the UC’s involvement with government extended beyond elections to participation in workshops and other events that indicated attempts by the church to influence policymaking at the prefectural and municipal levels. They revealed that politicians deepened their relationships with the UC through attendance at events promoting conservative family values and criticizing the legalization of same-sex marriage.

### **Local Relations: Journalists from the Unification Church and Tulip TV**

Tulip TV and KNB devoted a considerable amount of airtime to the UC’s side of the story (Tulip TV 2022c; KNB 2022b). Of particular significance were contributions by Kamono Mamoru, Secretary General of the Peace Ambassadors Council Toyama Headquarters and a devoted UC adherent. Because Kamono facilitated relations between the UC and local lawmakers, he had firsthand knowledge of the UC and its political engagements.





**Fig. 5 Kamono Mamoru speaking at a press conference by the Toyama branch of the Peace Ambassadors Council after a court session in Toyama City, May 22, 2024. (Photo by the author).**

Kamono was born in 1955 in a rural area of Toyama prefecture; he graduated from the same high school I attended, which is in the area of Toyama where I grew up. After high school, he went to Kanazawa University in neighboring Ishikawa Prefecture. That was where he converted to the Unification Church. Kamono spent many years as a journalist for *Sekai Nippō*, and he continues to contribute regularly to church-related publications, such as *Sekai Shisō* (World Thought). He served as director of public relations at the UC headquarters in Tokyo from 2009 to 2017 (Kamono 2022c, 280). News reports often mention Kamono as a central figure linking the church to politicians in Toyama.<sup>18</sup> Though he has

<sup>18</sup> Kamono has been the Secretary General of the Toyama Prefectural Division of the Association of Ambassadors for Peace. He has attended meetings, campaign rallies, and luncheons with the region's politicians to report on prefectural and municipal politics (Kamono 2022b).

retired from his full-time post as a journalist for the church's Japanese newspaper, Kamono continues to deal with the media as a locally based spokesperson for the UC.

Kamono told me that he agreed to be interviewed by the Toyama media for two reasons.<sup>19</sup> Firstly, he felt that he should answer questions on the UC's political activities because the media had been hounding politicians for this information. Secondly, Kamono thought it was necessary to agree to media interviews because Toyama Governor Nitta, whom Kamono had supported in his electoral campaign, revealed to the press that he had received UC support and that Kamono was his contact person in the church. Kamono said that "until then, if there was an interview request to the UC from the media, the UC headquarters was the point of contact." However, "Toyama was made an exception." Leaders at the UC headquarters relied on Kamono's ability to deal with the media thanks to his long career as a journalist and his tenure as head of public relations for the church in Japan. Because the UC headquarters did not respond proactively to media requests, Kamono's interviews with Toyama media outlets served as rare examples of a UC representative engaging with local-level journalists.

In his work as a journalist, Kamono acts as an outspoken critic of national and local media coverage of the UC, including that of KNB and the Toyama branch of NHK. He made his views apparent in UC-related publications such as *Sekai Shisō* (Kamono 2022a) and the right-wing monthly magazine *Hanada* (Kamono 2022c), in which he lambasted "witch hunt reporting." He went so far as to send a letter to NHK to protest a program that featured an interview with him (Kamono 2022a).<sup>20</sup> He told me that because he had not watched all its broadcasts,

<sup>19</sup> Online interview with Kamono Mamoru, April 16, 2024.

<sup>20</sup> The interview with him by NHK's Toyama bureau was used in NHK's "Kurōzuappu Gendai" (Close-Up Today) program in an episode titled "The Unification Church and Politics: Overlooked Relationships," which aired on August 29, 2022 (NHK 2022). It was also used in the morning show "Ohayo Nippon" (Good Morning Japan) on September 2, 2022. This program featured politicians in Toyama receiving election support and participating in events organized by church-affiliated groups and aired interviews with people involved in the church, including Kamono.



**Fig. 6 Kamono distributing a document to journalists at a press conference, May 22, 2024 (photo by the author).**

he could not evaluate Tulip TV’s programming as a whole, but he understood that the station’s reporting was overly critical of the UC. However, he spoke highly of the Tulip TV programs for which he was interviewed. He appreciated that the station took his and the church’s sides of the story into consideration and tried to convey a well-rounded story that did not present information in bits and pieces.

Though they stand at opposite ends of a mediascape, Kamono refers to Tulip TV’s anchor Keda Chiyomaru as “Keda-*chan*,” using the suffix that denotes an affectionate bond. Born in 1985, Keda is three decades younger but has a similar background to Kamono, having also grown up in rural Toyama.<sup>21</sup> After graduating from Niigata University, he worked for approximately three years as a reporter for *Toyama Shimibun*, a paper known for its conservative stance. He moved to Tulip TV in 2012, where he joined the reporting team on the 2016 Toyama city council’s fraud issue.<sup>22</sup>

21 At Tulip TV, anchors are not limited to reading news from the studio, which is the norm at many other stations. They attend press conferences and conduct interviews.

22 *Toyama Shimibun* is a local paper published by the Toyama Head Office of *Hokkoku Shimibun*, which is based in Ishikawa Prefecture. *Hokkoku Shimibun* is also known for its conservative stance.



**Fig. 7 Tulip TV’s Keda Chiyomaru at his news program studio (photo provided by Keda).**

While Kamono spoke fondly of the Tulip TV crew, Keda remembered that there was a heated exchange. Keda said that he grew angry when Kamono blamed the media for attacks against the UC after the Abe assassination; Keda asserted that the UC was to blame for causing the destruction of families such as Yamagami’s.<sup>23</sup> Still, Keda agreed that he and Kamono share an identity as journalists. “I report critically about the UC because I want to protect and support former believers and victims of the church,” Keda told me. “I think Kamono-san understands my stance. Perhaps in that sense, our roots as journalists are connected.” Kamono confirmed that “Keda-chan is the most approachable reporter in Toyama.” He expressed admiration for his fellow journalist: “He calls me every time he has something to say, follows and pesters me, which is admirable for a reporter. I appreciate his persistence.”

Toyama’s commercial stations therefore had an advantage in covering the UC for three reasons. They have: 1) local reporters with investigative experience who did not hesitate to go after public authorities, 2) an experienced journalist who had been a PR representative for the UC headquarters acting as a media contact, and 3) ties across divides between fellow

23 Interview with Keda Chiyomaru on October 10, 2023, at Tulip TV headquarters in Toyama City.

journalists. These factors, as well as a healthy rivalry between Toyama’s commercial stations, allowed stations to air varied reporting that incorporated contrasting viewpoints from politicians and the UC that highlighted the significance of local politics for the church.<sup>24</sup>

### The Unification Church, Family Values, Abortion, and Same-Sex Marriage

Toyama prefectural council member Hienae Seichi revealed to Tulip TV that UC adherents sought support for anti-gender equality and anti-same sex marriage measures from local politicians. These issues have been extremely important for the church. A scoop by the *Asahi Shimbun* in October 2022 revealed that the UC’s affiliated organizations Federation for World Peace and Association of Ambassadors for Peace presented LDP lawmakers with a “confirmation of endorsement,” a de facto policy agreement, for the 2021 Lower House election (*Asahi Shimbun* 2022). The UC asked politicians to sign an agreement on policies the UC promotes, including proposed constitutional revision, the enactment of the Family Education Support Law, “careful handling of LGBT issues,” and opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage. Policies written in the agreement are in line with what Hienae described in his much-repeated Tulip TV interview.

What stood out in news stories by Tulip TV and KNB was their attention to policies on gender and sexuality. These matters were either ignored or minimized in national-level TV coverage.<sup>25</sup> On

<sup>24</sup> Since NHK is a national network, its staff members are transferred regularly between regional outlets. This inhibited NHK’s ability to set up a system to sustain coverage of the activities of politicians and the UC in Toyama, in contrast to the approach taken by the prefecture’s commercial broadcasters. For Ellis Krauss’s commentary on transfer patterns of NHK reporters, See Krauss 2000, 155–161.

<sup>25</sup> There are some national broadcasters, such as TBS, BS-TBS, and TBS radio that covered the UC and its involvement in laws and policies regarding gender and sexuality. Tomomi Yamaguchi and I were interviewed by these outlets (TBS 2022; BS-TBS 2022; TBS Radio 2022; Saito and Yamaguchi 2023). For the most part, however, gender and sexuality are issues national broadcasters have ignored. This absence does not necessarily indicate a lack of public interest: the Youtube program Politas TV, for example, aired a show for two days focusing on religious right-wing forces, including the UC, pertaining to gender issues, featuring Yamaguchi and me as guest speakers. The show attracted extensive attention on social media (Tsuda in Yamaguchi and Saito 2023).

July 25, 2022, Tulip TV broadcast a scoop on study meetings that included Toyama city councilors and an instructor from the International Federation for Victory Over Communism. The station reported that the lectures by the instructor were critical of same-sex marriage and sexual minorities. Tulip TV aired a follow-up story on July 28, highlighting the close connection of the city councilors and the church through election support and attendance at lectures critical of same-sex partnerships and marriage. On August 5, 2022, KNB aired an interview with me in which I stated that the UC may have influenced the direction of Toyama’s prefectural-level policies on gender and sexuality. On August 18 and 19, KNB reported that the Peace Road Planning Committee held a “lecture that considered the declining birthrate and aging population,” which was in fact an anti-abortion event co-sponsored by Toyama municipalities. KNB aired a follow-up on the scoop by Tulip TV on August 24 and 25 reporting on members of city councils in Toyama who participated in seminars hosted by UC-related groups devoted to family and same-sex marriage. On September 2, KNB reported on the UC’s involvement in the movement against sex education, claiming that the church’s ties to politicians have resulted in setbacks in sex education.

In an interview with KNB, Kamono Mamoru emphasized that his involvement with local politicians was driven by a desire to better the community. Kamono said that he supported LDP politicians who shared his traditional family values of “marriage, childbearing, and women keeping house.” He laid out the Association of Ambassadors for Peace policy of opposing legal recognition of same-sex partnerships and marriage, saying that he lobbied politicians because he thought “LGBT [ordinances] and [the legalization of] same-sex marriage should be blocked in Japan” (KNB 2022b).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The LGBT ordinance refers to a same-sex partnership system that has been adopted by numerous sub-national governments in Japan. The Shibuya Ward Ordinance for the Promotion of a Diverse and Gender Equal Society was first enacted in 2015. For more information, see Carland-Echavarría 2022. It is currently being promoted by many local governments in Japan. See also <https://www.marriageforall.jp/en/marriage-equality/japan/>

Tulip TV and KNB repeatedly reported on ways the UC organized training sessions and lectures for politicians in Toyama on gender and sexuality policies based in church ideology. The reports highlighted the fact that the UC has a doctrine that emphasizes conservative family values and a heteronormative imperative for men and women to marry and have children.<sup>27</sup> These shows also revealed that the UC was trying to block a same-sex partnership system under consideration by politicians in Toyama prefecture and the Toyama city government.<sup>28</sup> Related to this, KNB reported on the UC-related Peace Road, which invited many politicians to an event on anti-abortion activism. The program informed viewers about the UC's opposition to women's reproductive rights and demonstrated that the UC places local politics at the core of its activities.

Tulip TV's Keda Chiyomaru told me that the station "delves deeply into the horror of the connection between the UC and politicians" but that he regrets that it was unable to fully pursue how cooperation between the UC and politicians has influenced local policies on gender equality and same-sex partnerships. Keda admitted that "we tended to treat these issues as ones of secondary importance." KNB dealt more extensively with gender-related issues, but the station largely attributed backlash against gender equality, sex education, LGBTQ+ rights, and the promotion of traditional family values only to the UC, ignoring all other conservative activists who collaborated on these matters. These included

27 Heterosexual marriages and their resulting families are fundamentally important in UC doctrine. The church asserts that its realization of a "peaceful world" begins with a "peaceful family." Families that begin in "blessed marriages" are to build a unified society centered on God (<https://ffwpu.jp/marriage-family/invite/what>). UC adherents are expected to remain "pure" (*junketsu*), meaning abstinent, until marriage. Abstinent partners are arranged through the church's marriage introduction system, which encourages their participation in mass wedding ceremonies, mostly held in Korea or online. Children born to parents united in "blessed marriages" are cherished as the "blessed second generation" (*shukufuku nisei*) and are believed to be born without original sin. Couples who are already married when they join the UC can also become "blessed families" by participating in a mass wedding ceremony.

28 Toyama Prefecture launched a "partnership oath" system in March 2023 under which same-sex couples and other couples who are not legally married can have their relationships certified. As of May 2024, 457 municipalities in Japan have introduced a partnership system (Marriage for All Japan <https://www.marriageforall.jp/marriage-equality/japan/>). No cities, towns, or villages in Toyama prefecture have introduced a comparable system as of June 2024.

Nippon Kaigi, Japan's most prominent conservative organization, and the Association of Shinto Shrines.<sup>29</sup>

Coverage of gender- and sexuality-related matters also suffered because of the stations' choices in commentators. Tulip TV and KNB broadcasts on the UC often featured commentators who are specialists on the church but not based in Toyama. These included the well-known anti-UC activist lawyer Yamaguchi Hiroshi, the journalist Suzuki Eito, and Hokkaido University professor of religion Sakurai Yoshihide (see also Gaitanidis 2024). While these figures have specialist knowledge about the UC's activities, they are not familiar with Toyama's political specifics. In the broadcasts, they did not discuss the kind of grassroots work the UC has been doing in Toyama's communities regarding gender and sexuality. When it came to the church's local priorities, namely putting local politics first and focusing on politics related to gender and sexuality, these commentators largely remained silent. According to Keda Chiyomaru, these issues received secondary treatment because it was difficult to see the real harm in gender and sexuality issues and that it was difficult to gain public sympathy through these discussions, given that they are often seen as the concerns of minorities.

### Tulip TV vs. the Toyama Governor

At a talk held on November 5, 2023 in Toyama City, Iokibe Yukio, Keda's predecessor as Tulip TV's

29 Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference), a national movement organization with branches all over Japan, was founded in 1997 by the merger of Nihon o Mamoru Kokumin Kaigi (National Conference to Protect Japan), a rightwing organization that emerged out of the movement to legalize imperial era names, and Nihon o Mamoru Kai (Association to Protect Japan), a religion-affiliated conservative group (Tawara 2017). Nippon Kaigi, its women's branch Nihon Josei no Kai (Japan Women's Association), and religious organizations that support Nippon Kaigi, such as the Yamaguchi Prefecture-based group Shinsei Bukkyō Kyōdan, engaged in extensive backlash against gender equality measures, rights for married couples to maintain separate surnames, reproductive rights, and sex education (Tawara 2017; Yamaguchi, Saitō and Ogiue 2012; Yamaguchi 2018). The Association of Shinto Shrines and its political wing, the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership, have consistently lobbied against gender equality measures, LGBTQ+ rights, the legalization of same-sex marriage, and transgender rights (Rich and Hida 2023). The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership distributed a pamphlet with homophobic content at a 2022 gathering which many LDP politicians attended (Ito 2022) and the organization also sent a "pledge" document to candidates for unified local elections in 2023 to oppose a proposed LGBT Bill (Nonaka 2023). Coverage by KNB on these issues did not refer to activities by organizations other than the UC.

anchor, said that it was easier to interview local politicians than national politicians.<sup>30</sup> In Toyama, local politicians are close at hand and are easy to interview at home or at work. He characterized local press conferences as less controlled than events for the national government. “From my point of view as a local reporter, press conferences at the Prime Minister’s Office are really unusual,” Iokibe asserted.<sup>31</sup> “As for free questions [at press conferences for local leaders], there are actually quite intense exchanges.”

While the tradition of open questioning by local media continued in press conferences on UC-related issues in Toyama, tensions rose between the media and Toyama Governor Nitta Hachirō. From late August to December 2022, Toyama outlets focused on support Governor Nitta had received from the UC for his 2020 election; they reported that UC’s Kamo-no Mamoru was at Nitta’s campaign office celebrating when the election results came in. One reason the UC became heavily involved in Nitta’s campaign was that he could not receive LDP endorsement. He ran as an independent candidate with the support of Mori Masashi, then mayor of Toyama City, some LDP prefectural assembly members, and the conservative Japan Innovation Party.<sup>32</sup> After Governor Nitta admitted that he had received campaign support from the UC, Tulip TV’s attention turned to the fact that the governor refused to say he was severing his ties with the church.

Nitta’s press conferences became a media battleground, especially from August to October 2022. The governor used these occasions to criticize Tulip TV. **On August 25, Keda asked Governor Nitta why**

30 Iokibe Yukio convened the event for the screening of the Indian documentary *Writing the Fire* (2021). He is one of the directors of “Haribote” (Paper Tiger), a documentary by Tulip TV on the Toyama city fraud issue (Iokibe and Sunazawa dir. 2020) and is now head of documentary production and news at Ishikawa Television.

31 At press conferences at the Prime Minister’s Office, reporters submit questions in advance and the Prime Minister’s Office decides which reporters can ask questions (Abe 2020).

32 Two conservative candidates and one progressive ran in the 2020 gubernatorial election. Nitta’s failure to secure the endorsement of the LDP divided conservative supporters. He ran with the backing of the Japan Innovation Party and some breakaway LDP politicians against the incumbent Ishii Takakazu, who was officially endorsed by the LDP. This marked the first time in fifty years that the Toyama conservative bloc was split. The UC has often been involved in campaigns where conservative candidates face a heightened risk of not winning their seats, and this election was no exception in that regard.

he would not cut ties with the UC, given that “the UC had already caused social problems in the past, such as spiritual sales and the breakdown of families due to large donations.” The governor responded that “I think that if no compliance issue exists with an organization or company currently under investigation by the government, there should be no problem in associating with them.” He criticized Tulip TV, saying the station “is broadcasting videos that manipulate perceptions” (Tulip TV 2022b; Toyama Prefectural Government 2022).

Reactions by other outlets were divided. KNB immediately demanded an explanation from the governor for his critique, charging that his comments did not “indicate specifically which part of the story was biased” (KNB 2022c). The newspaper *Toyama Shimbun* meanwhile supported Governor Nitta in an editorial, stating that “it is necessary to take a firm stand and block questions that miss the point or are too persistent” (Toyama Shimbun 2022). At a press conference on September 2, the governor questioned why Keda had not convened “a program advisory council [to address your biased reporting]?” In subsequent press conferences, he continued to call on Keda to have program advisory council meetings. Keda responded with further critique of the governor, and Tulip TV continued investigating Nitta’s relationship with the UC more critically than other outlets in Toyama. Regarding the governor’s reaction and responses by other media outlets, Keda recalled that “at that time, I was the only one to ask the governor about the UC at press conferences.” He explained that “we at Tulip TV were determined to convey the story about the governor without reading between the lines and self-censoring our reports. Still, it was really quite tough for me at the time.” Interviewed in the *Asahi Shimbun*, the director general of Tulip TV’s news production bureau, Takeishi Hiroaki, stated that “I felt that the governor was trying to use the program council to contain criticism against him” (Tadama 2022). Clearly, Tulip TV felt threatened by pressure from the governor. Governor Nitta’s repeated suggestion could have infringed on freedom of expression as guaranteed by the Broad-

casting Law, which asserts that the Broadcasting Program Advisory Council is established solely to “avoid regulation by administrative authority and to ensure the autonomy of broadcasters” (Murakami 2019, 121).<sup>33</sup>

Tense relations between broadcasters and politicians are not limited to Toyama. Control of press conferences by the Abe administration has been discussed extensively (Kingston 2015; Kingston ed. 2017), and similar situations have prevailed recently in local politics. The governor of Yamanashi Prefecture, Nagasaki Kōtarō, excluded a TBS-affiliated broadcaster from his press conference in February 2024 when the station sought information about slush funds received when the governor was a LDP member in the National Diet’s House of Representatives (Kyōdo 2024). The Governor of Ishikawa prefecture, Hase Hiroshi, also canceled press conferences in 2024 because he was unhappy with a broadcaster that produced a critical documentary (Uematsu 2024; Puchi Kashima 2024). In the immediate aftermath of the Abe assassination, Tulip TV stood out nationally for its confrontation with the prefecture’s political establishment.

### News from Toyama on National TV

When the UC and local politics were discussed by national broadcasters, they often used footage from Toyama stations rather than producing their own segments.<sup>34</sup> News from local TV was also posted on the national station’s websites in text and video reports. As a result, the relationship between the UC and politicians in Toyama became known nationally. Tulip anchorperson Keda Chiyomaru recalled that the more the station reported on political ties to the church the bigger the response he received from viewers, not only locally but nationwide. “There

was a real response. We received a lot of supportive emails and phone calls from all over the country,” he told me.

While national broadcasts broadened the impact of Toyama’s TV stations, national-level coverage tended to sideline evidence in Toyama broadcasts that the UC was trying to change politics from the local level. For example, on August 8, 2022, Yomiuri TV/NTV’s talk show “Information Live Miyaneya” used a news clip produced three days earlier by the program “KNB News Every.” The Miyaneya report focused on how the prefectural governor and the mayor of Toyama City had received election support from church-affiliated groups, including phone banking. The show also used a two-minute video interview with me about how the UC opposes same-sex marriage and the same-sex partnership system. The clip made my point about the potential for church advocacy to influence politicians and their policies through UC involvement in elections and other activities.

On the Miyaneya show, the discussion by studio commentators after the footage went in a different, and heated, direction. Two high-profile lawyers appeared as the studio guests: Hashimoto Tōru, former leader of the conservative Osaka Ishin Party and former Governor of Osaka and Mayor of Osaka City, and Kitō Masaki, affiliate of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales who specializes in prosecuting the UC. He features prominently as a critic of the church on TV and other media. After the clip from Toyama was aired, they discussed whether a law should be enacted in Japan to crack down on cults. Topics such as the relationship between the UC and politicians in Toyama and the impact of the UC’s lobbying of politicians on gender and sexuality were sidelined.

On October 29, 2022, TBS’s “Hōdō Tokushū” reported that the UC was linked to members of the Toyama prefectural assembly, city assemblies, mayors, and even the governor of Toyama Prefecture through its support for elections. A video interview

33 The Broadcasting Program Advisory Council was established under the Broadcasting Act to ensure the autonomy of broadcasters so that the freedom to edit broadcasts is not infringed upon by the government or others, and to hold discussions necessary to ensure that programs are appropriate (Murakami 2019, 42–46).

34 The back of the KNB reporter’s business card handed to me during our interview states that “recorded video and audio may be used for secondary purposes on KNB TV and radio, as well as on the Internet. It may also be used in terrestrial and satellite broadcasts by NTV and other affiliated stations.”

with me, originally done with Tulip TV, was used in the report. The interview was shortened significantly; what remained was my statement that there were a number of people from Toyama who had held important positions in the church, including the former Japanese president of the UC. My discussion about the UC possibly influencing local policies was not included in the TBS show.

While national broadcasters focused on close connections between the UC and local politicians, they tended to ignore how these relationships affect local policies and how the UC's involvement in local policymaking is significant for national politics. As a result, the pivotal point that the UC attached importance to local politics was relegated to the background in national-level coverage. National news programs on the UC thus relied on selective use of local news reports that dropped discussion of topics deemed secondarily important, most notably in regard to gender and sexuality. Why the national broadcaster made these editorial decisions remains unclear.

## Conclusion

What is certain is the key role played by Kamono Mamoru in Toyama's coverage of the church after the Abe assassination. His role as a link between UC and politicians allowed local TV stations in Toyama to report on their joint struggle on common political issues related to the family and gender norms. In addition, his former position as an executive at the UC Japan headquarters and his experience as a journalist allowed him to speak relatively freely. This article confirms that local news is produced by a tight-knit community. As is evident in the relationship between the Unification Church representative Kamono and Tulip TV's Keda, journalists in Toyama live and work in a small area and have much in common. Thanks to shared experiences, they are able to communicate over what might appear to be vast divides. At times, the line between journalist and interviewee is blurred. Close relationships between media producers enables reporters to sustain close ties, and

working for a regional TV station also means that one is unlikely to be transferred to another region or to change departments, ensuring close relationships with fellow journalists and interviewees over the long term.

However, broadcasters overall, and national broadcasters in particular, have tended to overlook advocacy for conservative family policies that vilify sexual minorities and gender equality. These policy platforms have served as the basis of UC ties to local politicians. Media outlets have chosen to focus instead on moral panic over cults. The lack of focus on gender and sexuality issues at Japanese TV stations is probably due in part to the fact that only 9% of TV editorial executives and top program production staff are women.<sup>35</sup>

Though coverage of the church has diminished in Japan's national-level media coverage since the middle of 2023, Tulip and KNB continue to report on the UC. Recently, they have covered court cases brought against Toyama City and its mayor by the Toyama branch of the Association of Ambassadors for Peace and an individual UC follower claiming constitutional violations occasioned by the city government cutting ties with the church. The plaintiffs claim that political participation is essential to realizing a world where families are cherished, but that the Toyama City Council's resolution to sever all ties with the former Unification Church and related organizations prevented them from participating in politics. They argue that cutting these ties is a case of religious discrimination that infringes on the adherents' freedom of expression. Reporters from Tulip TV and KNB have attended court hearings on this case and press conferences convened by church representatives in Toyama, and the stations have dedicated significant time in their evening news programs to claims by the church and responses by the government.

We can expect Toyama's journalists to persist in their coverage of the Unification Church. This paper reaffirms the significance of local journalism by

<sup>35</sup> Regarding the paucity of top female editors at Japanese broadcasters, see <https://minpo.online/article/post-164.html>

showing that enduring narratives about religion and politics rely on local processes.

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