Taesunchillihoe: factors in the rapid rise of a Korean new religion

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Taesunchillihoe is one of the hundred plus groups of the Chûngsan faith known to have existed since their saviour-god Kang Ilsun, styled Chûngsan, died in 1909. According to a decennial survey by the **Chosôn ilbo**, in 1995 Taesunchillihoe had 67,632 believers, making it the sixth largest religion in South Korea after Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Confucianism and Wôn Buddhism, which had 84,918 followers. Taesunchillihoe was not mentioned in the 1985 survey, being included under "other religions" (**Chosôn ilbo** 11/9/1996). Founded in April 1969, Taesunchillihoe has shown phenomenal growth, and the survey is likely an undercount, especially given the problems of such survey questionnaires in Korea (Yoon 1997), its own claims of membership and the extent of its properties and financial wealth.

In 1975, it claimed 100.000 followers (Prunner 1976: 15, 25), in 1978 219,176 members (Yi 1992: 746), 3,615,437 at the end of 1991 (HMC 1992: 599; Kim 1996: 261) and most recently, a staggering 8 million (Mun 1997: 17-18; TH 5/1/1997 no 52: 8). Undoubtedly pious exaggerations which include former members, they do suggest a much greater strength than the **Chosôn ilbo** figures, especially when its wealth is measured. In 1983 it is said to have possessed total assets of 1,740 million Won, and it was the largest religious contributor to the Independence Commemoration Hall, donating 130,800,135 Won (T'ak 1991: 30; Yun Sûngyong 1997: 178). In 1983 it had 700 proselytization centres (T'ak 1991: 30), but by 1994 that had risen to 1,634 (HMC 1992: 600). Taesunchillihoe's current headquarters at Yôju is stated to be the largest religious centre (*sawôn*) in East Asia (Ch'oe 1998,:166) and can sleep over 10,000 people a night (Mun 1997: 105) There are similar massive centres (*tojang*) at the original headquarters in Chunggok-dong, Seoul, one at P'och'ôn and another at Sokcho (photographs in Mun 1997). In 1991 Taesunchillihoe had 53 halls or *hoegwan* (HMC 1992: 600), and by the late 1990s at least 70 (Mun 1997: 20), most of which are substantial buildings of at least five stories (various issues of TH plus personal observations). It has built a hospital of 450 beds in Sôngnam-si, opened in 1998 (TH nos 56, 60, 64) and is building another at Tongduchôn of 25 stories, with 1,480 beds planned, allegedly the biggest in East Asia (TH 58; Mun 1997: 31; personal observation 24/11/97). Taejin University was opened in 1992 and had 6,000 students enrolled in 1998, an intake of 1,956 in 1999 and is fed by six high schools (TH 60 and 63). It has over 50 buildings (Mun 1997: 20, 24-25). The religion has given scholarships to needy students since 1976, providing 6,694 students with 3,105,283,610 Won in 1998 (TH 64: 16) with the aim of producing future leaders for the religion and nation (Mun 1997: 23) It has also donated huge sums to assist disaster victims, giving 730 million Won in 1987 alone to flood relief, and runs various charitable institutions and participated in many campaigns for the public good (Kim 1996: 261; T'ak 1991: 30; Yi 1992: 746). Its relief and charity efforts have

"conspicuously bloomed more than those of other religious groups" (Mun 1997: 27, 29). It contrasts well with the longer established Wôn Buddhism, which has 380 halls (*kyodang*), a self-proclaimed million believers, a 716-bed hospital, a university and many charitable institutions (T'ak 1991: 70; Kim 1996: 270-271).

Such a rapid rise demands explanation. Gernot Prunner explained it within the historical context of unsettling change, modernisation and the sufferings of the Korean people that influenced the formation of Korean new religious movements (hereafter, NRM), and by the characteristic traits of Taesunchillihoe. Those he perceived were an emphasis on nativism, messianic ideas, concentration on the present, belief in magic, a concept of enlightenment, efficiency of organisation, hierarchical structure, elaborate ritual and an attitude of tolerance (Prunner 1976: 23-24). While most of these offer a partial explanation, as Prunner himself admits, "many of these traits have been shown to be common to most of the new religions in Korea" (Prunner 1976: 24). As many NRMs have not demonstrated such growth or influence, additional explanations need to be found, especially as Taesunchillihoe grew during a period of increasing prosperity.

The academic study of religion in Korea is limited, criticised for its reliance on dated, narrow methodologies, which are mostly reductionist and lacking consideration of the "overall context of the particular religious tradition" (Yoon 2000: 192, 210, 214, 232-235). Among the weaknesses of research on NRMs are lack of on-site investigation and participatory research, plus insufficient attention to history (Kim 1997: 178-181). There are few detailed sociological or ethnographic studies, and no comprehensive histories of the evolution of Korean NRMs, their interaction with other religions and the wider society. Explanations used are the historically specific and now inappropriate concepts such as anomie, crisis cult, social deviance, relative deprivation and difficulties of acculturation. Architecture, art and myth are neglected (Yoon 2000: 225), as is language. Most significantly, the political and financial dimensions have been almost absent from research on the Korean NRMs, with the possible exception of the Unification Church, and much controversial material has been ignored, possibly for fear of upsetting NRM members or because of the hesitation of most researchers to side with anti-religious modernisers such as the military, politicians, the mass media, psychologists and the anti-cult movements (Jorgensen 1999a and 2001). In recent years, this reluctance to criticise or speak out has probably been heightened by the unsolved murder of T'ak Myônghwan, a Christian researcher who regularly denounced NRMs for their abuses and as "heresies" (private communication, on T'ak's position see Kim 1997: 167 and T'ak's numerous publications).

Research is hampered on Taesunchillihoe because it provides limited access to external observers, and much information has to be gleaned from apostates, rival NRMs, written materials (not all readily available), media reports, and full participation, which can only be achieved by membership. Although it does not murder people who attempt to desert, as was the case with Aum Shinrikyô (Reader 2000), such allegations have been aired in the press against its precursor, T'aegûkdo, in March 1965, and against four Taesunchillihoe members for beating to death a member because he was drunk (CSD 1996: 44, 48, 58), and I have heard such rumours. A pattern of alleged extortion, theft, embezzlement and violence involving thugs against members and local residents opposed to the building of Taesunchillihoe halls in their area can be found in

the press and in attacks by its rival NRM, Chûngsando (CSD 1996: 53-79).

On 8th April 1984, the KBS programme "Pursuit (*ch'ujôk*) 60 Minutes" stated that Taesunchillihoe members believed that as the year was *kapja* in the 60-year cycle, the "apocalypse" or *kaebyôk* (for this idea, Jorgensen 1999) would arrive immediately, and so they abandoned study and jobs, extorted money, broke up families by leaving to join the order, and disappearing with the family savings. Believers reportedly made statements such as, "When the Latter Heaven arrives, body temperatures will rise to 3,600 degrees... and all will ride on clouds and fly up into heaven" (CSD 1996: 74-75). Similar apocalyptic events were predicted for 1988 or 1989, with a similar threat of a malicious *ki* descending to melt bodies, something avoidable only by joining Taesunchillihoe (Choi 2000: 85; Ch'oe 1998: 235). As with many of the allegations of criminality, these predictions and their failures were hushed up. Virtually no mentions of them were made in the religion's literature, and vague responses were given by leaders. The only information available was in the newspapers (Choi 2000: 85). Predictions of an imminent eschaton, coupled with allegations of linked extractions of donations, surfaced again on the MBC TV show, "PD Memorandum (*suchôp*)," the edition called "Taesunchillihoe rûl asimnikka" broadcast on 5th March 1996 (Ch'oe 1998: 249-250), though on this occasion the approach of the *kaebyôk* may have been related to the death of its founder, Pak Han'gyông on 23rd January 1996. Some followers could not accept his death. Others deserted the religion as a result, but leaders were told to inform worried followers that he would come again soon to direct the post-apocalypse utopia, and that Pak had just hidden his human body temporarily (CSD 2000: 33, 44-45, citing the MBC show).

Such secrecy and seeming deceit has made it difficult to trace the inner history of this NRM. Even the repetitive hagiography of Pak Han'gyông (1917-1996), the leader or *tojôn*, by Mun Ilsôk is devoid of much other than pious tales, supposedly due to Pak's "humble desire" not to make himself known outside of Taesunchillihoe circles. Mun, a reporter who has written other such religious "biographies," complained of insufficient materials (Mun 1997: introduction). Pak, who was supposedly charismatic, tabooed revelation of details of his life to the mass media, blocked publication of his photograph, the only one being published in December 1990 without permission in **T'oyo sinmun**, and so remained virtually unknown to the public, unlike the media manipulators Cho Yonggi of the Yoido Pure Gospel Church and Mun Sônmyông of the Unification Church (Mun 1997: 113, 19).

Such intimations of secrecy, violence, exploitation, predictions of an apocalypse, and fights with rivals continuously reappear as a pattern throughout the genealogy of Taesunchillihoe. Kang Ilsun (1871-1909), after a shamanic experience that apparently unsettled his mind, acted very strangely, claiming to be the god Okhwang Sangje who could control the spirit world, and so was considered mad by his neighbours. He was accused by the families of his disciples of using sorcery to lure them away, and the authorities suspected him of being a trouble-maker and of deluding the people, and so hauled he and some disciples off for questioning (Lee 1967: 33-39; Yi 1992: 188-192; JeungSanDo 1995: II 20.3-7 et passim). On one occasion, he laid his concubine, surnamed Ko, down and sat on her stomach, pointing an ornamental knife at her head (or throat), asking "Even if I die, will you serve me?) And will you change your mind during the great work of Heaven and Earth?" (JeungSanDo 1995:

VI 14.2-3; Chông 1989: 28 - texts vary slightly). When Kang died and was buried, some followers departed on the grounds that a god incarnate could not die, while others thought this was a docetic death, and that Kang would live on as a god or return again in the guise of Maitreya. Some scriptures claim he appeared again to the faithful after the burial, and as no successor had been appointed, many of the disciples, and concubine Ko, claimed the mantle and each established separate religions (Murayama 1935: 298; Lee 1967: 36-39; Yi 1992: 192; JeungSanDo 1995: X 26-36). Thus the scriptures of those Chûngsan NRMs mostly consist of chronological records of Kang Ilsun's sayings and deeds, each emphasising or deleting the roles of certain disciples in order to give their religious founders and leaders a legitimate genealogy. This is one major source of disputes.

As a consequence, the founders of Chûngsan NRMs strove to create tighter linkages with Kang Ilsun. For example, Ch'a Kyôngsôk (1880-1936), a disciple who brought Kang into his own home, married his young cousin, the concubine Ko, to Kang. When she fell into a trance on the second anniversary of Kang's death, and imitated his speech and mannerisms, it was believed Kang had possessed her. Ch'a then isolated her to control the followers, and when she and some believers left in 1919, he kept all the group's assets. By about 1920, Ch'a's P'ochôn'gyo claimed six million members and they were rumoured to possess 10% of Korea's wealth (Yi 1992: 237-242; No 1995: 201, 205; Murayama 1935: 299-300, 312-313). Stigmatised as a secret society that would make Ch'a emperor, P'ochôn'gyo eventually was forced to compromise with the Japanese colonial authorities to maintain its existence, and it managed to create a commercial company. Ch'a was extremely rich, and murderous attempts were made to gain his wealth (Kim 1989: 307-310; No 1995: 201-206; Yi 1992: 242-258).

Another aspirant, Cho Ch'ôlje (1895-1958), heard the Chûngsan teachings, and following instructions, practiced in the mountains until he was enlightened. Externally, he gave the impression of shamanic possession. In 1917, he led his followers to Anmyôn Island where they started to build an economic base. But as his connection with Kang Ilsun was only via revelation, he felt a compulsion to gain a more tangible link with the god incarnate. He made Kang's sister his concubine, shifted his base to the Chûngsan heartland around Mt. Moak, and took Kang's first wife, who had been made insane by religious fervour, into his care etc. But even this was not enough, so he instigated his followers to steal Kang's mysterious medicine cabinet from Ch'a Kyôngsôk's home. In 1919, he exhumed and made off with Kang's skeleton, but he was chased by Mun Kongsin, a pupil of Kang, to Taejôn Station. The police intervened in the resultant melee, and sent the skeleton, minus an arm bone, to Ch'a for reburial (Yi 1992: 1212-1214; Lee 1967: 58-60, 37 note 3). Cho's religion took the name Mugûkdo in 1921, later modified to Mugûktaedo in 1925 (Murayama 1935: 332-333). In 1928, Cho marshalled some members into the Chin'ôpdan, which was devoted to economic production via land reclamation, pioneering wasteland and irrigation in Anmyôn and Wônsan. In 1930, Cho sent a team to northern Manchuria and another to Musan to cut timber in the mountains. By 1926, Cho was being called Emperor Cho by believers, and he claimed to have 100,000 followers, although Murayama counted only 2,190 in 1934 (Murayama 1935: 340). These commercial activities expanded through the 1930s, opening up mines and irrigating land, until the religion was disbanded and its considerable wealth was

confiscated by the Japanese in 1936 (No 1995: 203-204; Kim 1989: 314-315).

Mugûktaedo and its offspring, Taesunchillihoe, differ from other Chûngsan NRMs because they are based on a claimed revelation from the god, Kang Ilsun (Mun 1997: 143; table in Lee 1967: 64-66). Cho asserted that he had received the Heavenly Mandate from Kang, as Okhwang Sangje, to direct the Latter Heaven of the Immortals that would emerge from the apocalypse, which meant he was called "emperor". In his lifetime, he was worshipped as the master of the Way (*toju*) and the tangible god-incarnate. Posthumously, his position on the pantheon altar was elevated to that of Okhwang Sangje, while Kang Ilsun, the essence, retreated as a *deus otiosus*. Symbolically, the *chông* or tripod of his style, Chôngsan, was the basis for the *chûng* or pot of Chûngsan, making Cho the operator and director of the magical revolution (Yi 1992: 1215-1216). This claim is vehemently rejected by other Chûngsan NRMs, with the exception of Taesunchillihoe.

In 1942 Cho secretly reactivated his religion (Kim 1989: 314-315; No 1995: 204). Now known as T'aegûkdo, in 1948 the headquarters was moved to Pusan, where it soon had 3,000 households as members. Moved to the outskirts of Pusan in 1955, the area was turned into a T'aegûkdo village. However, as Cho nominated no clear successor, on his death in 1958, the religion split into Old and New Factions, the former led by Cho's son, Cho Yôngnae as *tojôn*, the latter by Pak Han'gyông. This led to a series of violent struggles and charges of embezzlement (Yi 1992: 1213, 744-745; CSD 1996: 14-15). In 1965, Park violently chased out a former *tojôn*, Yi Yunsôp, and he was denounced for leading a terror campaign. Pak was questioned by police about the violence, the financial books were examined, and a few days later questions were asked about the death of 76 members. Pak was eventually released for lack of evidence or because corrupt politicians wanted his followers' votes. Again, Pak was denounced as leading a pro-communist group, was arrested, and released because he supposedly paid huge bribes, and the accusers were charged with libel. In 1961, Pak bought off the gendarmes of the new military regime with massive quantities of gold, and so his court-martial was suspended (CSD 1996: 25, 44, 48-50).

In 1968, Pak fled to Seoul, with 37.5 kgs of gold and 460,000 Won. Under the name of T'aegûkchillihoe, in 1969 he established a new religion, and bought a large property in Chunggok-dong on the rear side of Walker Hill (CSD 1996: 26-27). This marks the beginning of Taesunchillihoe, a name adopted in 1972. The T'aegûkdo charges are denied on the basis that a biography of Cho stated that the "bank books, seal, and cash box was given" to Pak by Cho, and that the police investigation resulted in a verdict of not guilty (Mun 1997: 71). A lasting resentment was held by the impoverished T'aegûkdo, and they wrote into their scripture a dramatic scene where Cho, as Sangje, casts Pak out with a wave of his hands and the shout of "thief" (CSD 1996: 14; T'aegûkdo 1989: 706). The T'aegûkdo gave the results of their investigation to the **Pusan ilbo**, which reported that every night Pak led a female believer to his rooms for illicit sex and then misappropriated the donations that were to be used for devotions (CSD 1996: 26). These allegations were repeated by T'aegûkdo leaders on the 1996 MBC TV program (CSD 2000: 42).

Possessing these substantial resources, the secessionist Taesunchillihoe was able to build a considerable base. It also gathered monthly contributions from members and

other funds gained by less honorable means. Its admirable charity work though, bought it increased respectability, and even when controversy flared in the media, the order declined to directly answer the charges, even those of the "Pursuit" TV show, despite its apparent hindrance to their proselytization. It claims to silently endure even the grossest of slurs made by its upstart arch-rival, Chûngsando, on the explicit orders of Pak, based on the principle of the faith "not to create enmity". Pak ordered there be no law suits, and that members, as religious, should pray instead (Mun 1997: 55, 115).

Despite this reticence, controversy and violence erupted after the demise of Pak in 1996, and the familiar pattern of internal leadership struggles and media condemnation resurfaced. The problem, again, was that Pak had not nominated a successor, leaving the various power-holders to fight for hegemony. The war began at 2.15am, 16th July 1999, when a group of 1,500 invaded the Yôju headquarters and drove out Yi Yujong and 100 of his followers, in order to sequester the contributions of the faithful and the bank accounts. By 4 pm, about 3,000 members formed two warring factions in a face-off, and 15 squads of riot police intervened. At dawn, 6th January 2000, the Yi Yujong faction tried to forcibly eject that of Kyông Sôkkyu, Pak's brother-in-law, from Yôju, after the failure of a court application for a temporary evacuation. Barricades were made with overturned buses and cranes, molotov cocktails were thrown. Shouting "thief," the invaders, armed with clubs, charged, but the riot police repelled them. The next day, both sides even rallied children, with the occupiers bringing 2,500 supporters into the compound. All the major TV and press networks covered these events (CSD 2000: photos, 26-28, 34).

The Chûngsando heresiography gives two more reasons for the dispute. The first, is that as Pak was considered to be the most venerated of men (*injon*), he was popularly thought immortal. The apocalypse had to arrive while he was alive so that he could lead the forthcoming utopia. Upon his death, the tale spread that he had merely ascended to Heaven (his death is called *hwachôn*), rationalising an uncomfortable fact. He was part of a trinity, with Kang Ilsun the Sangje of Heaven, Cho Ch'ôlje the Sangje of earth, and Pak the Sangje of humanity. Therefore, he was not expected to die before the *kaebyôk* (CSD 2000: 32-34). The other reason is the "mafia family"-like structure of Taesunchillihoe, which has a centralised pyramidal structure, with all the cells, parishes or chapters, separate and giving allegiance to their direct superiors. Moreover, some parishes (*pangmyôn*) have an overwhelming majority of women, others a majority of young people, etc. This further intensified divisions (CMD 2000: 29-30). Also, because of centralisation, all donations were first forwarded to the headquarters, which then distributed the funds (Mun 1997: 22, 81, 154).

Therefore, the struggles for power and wealth, and the failure to nominate successors, plus the disappointments and rationalisations of the death of presumably immortal leaders, has repeatedly caused splits and factional fights in this Chûngsan lineage of NRMs. The media presentations of the violence have possibly undone that patient creation of a respectable public image that began in the 1970s, and makes a mockery of those like Mun Ilsôk who asserted that one should not worry about a split (Mun 1997: 33-35). The internal clashes have other repercussions, for a division over the objects of worship has emerged, with the Kyông Sôkkyu faction worshipping as Sangje only Kang Ilsun and Cho Ch'ôlje, placing them beside Buddha, while the Yi

Yujong and An Yông'il factions venerate three Sangje; Kang, Cho and Pak. Yi Yujong has even been charged with apostasy, of following Ilgwando, another NRM (CSD 2000: 35-37).

One of the reasons for the success of Taesunchillihoe lies in its ability to obtain wealth, whether it was through appropriating the funds amassed by Cho and the T'aegûkdo believers, and later through the tithes on members, and possibly even by extortion. Some members live like monks or nuns, giving all their labour for free, working diligently for long hours on minimum sleep. Pak recommended the diminution of sleep in order to devote more time to practice, while encouraging frugality, supposedly by personal example. He stated that members should make donations to charity even when poor. The massive construction projects have been completed in extraordinarily short periods (Mun 1997: 51, 77, 83, 25) because the worker members lived on site, slept as little as two or three hours per night, and took hardly any breaks. I was told at Yôju that this was due to divine energy (*ki*) channeled from Heaven into the laborers. Even ordinary believers are expected to practice nightly chanting from 1.00 to 2.00 am, and at least at the Kunja chapter where I stayed, rise at 6.00 am to begin chanting again at 7.00am. At Tongduchôn I was told in February 1997 that the construction workers at the hospital were paid virtually nothing, and the area was strictly guarded.

Yet the wealth generated by this labour and appropriations, does not explain the zeal of the faithful or their motivation for joining. This prosperity has been achieved despite much negative publicity and hostility from rivals and modernisers. Some Chûngsan NRMs, such as P'ochôn'gyo, Mugûkdo and Taesunchillihoe, have achieved huge memberships and vast wealth, and yet most of the estimated 100 Chûngsan NRMs have had insignificant memberships (see study of one by Prunner 1988). Therefore, their shared religious features do not provide an explanation for success. The feature that stands out is the organisational capacities of the leaders of the successful groups, such as the intelligent selection of conversion targets, the operation of businesses and formation of a hierarchical structure. P'ochôn'gyo ran a newspaper and business corporation, and modernised by forming a nationwide bureaucracy, just like that of an empire Ch'a aimed to create. When threatened, he skilfully bribed the Japanese (Murayama 1935: 324-326; Kim 1989: 307-310; No 1995: 201-206; Yi 1992: 242-256). Cho operated a large corporation, which held 72 mining leases, and logging rights, and even in the poverty-stricken days after the Korean War somehow amassed 37.5 kg of gold. Pak also established a complex hierarchy (Prunner 1976: 15) and obtained huge sums of money. Even Taesunchillihoe's most powerful rival, Chûngsando, founded in 1974, has been active in conversion, expanding overseas, publishing extensively, translating scriptures into English, using modern technology and setting up university circles (Ch'oe 1998: 167-168; Lee 1988).

Similarly, Taesunchillihoe has changed the targets of its proselytizing. While Ch'a and Cho were rural based and appealed to the majority farmers and anti-Japanese sentiment, Pak moved his headquarters out of a village of believers on the margins of Pusan into the Seoul metropolis. Prunner, in 1976, had the impression that the majority of believers were rural and poorly educated, but noted the prestige of a headquarters on Walker Hill (Prunner 1976: 14, 23). Now the overwhelming majority of members seem to be under 30, many being high school and university

students. Propaganda methods include haunting places favoured by this demographic; the large bookstores, especially the Asian thought and religion sections, and the Seoul underground. The usual solicitation is to inquire if one is interested in Eastern thought or the Way, and then an invitation to a place that teaches such ideas, without mention of Taesunchillihoe. Occasionally, aggressive recruiters have caused problems for Chûngsando and the bookstore managers (Ch'oe 1998: 166; CSD 1996: 83-86).

Emphasis has been given to causes fashionable with the young such as the environment, organic farming, gender equality, political reunification and world peace, and since 1987 Taesunchillihoe has established many university circles (Mun 1997: 45, 48, 102, 111-112), although its enemies state it aims at the lowest levels of society, naïve women and young students without judgment (CSD 1996: 2), although the same could be said of its bitterest detractor, Chûngsando. This is evident from their fury at being lumped together in an attack by T'ak Myônghwan for their "encroachment" on students (CSD 1996: 81), which suggests they have been aiming at the same niche in the religious marketplace. Taesunchillihoe has learnt the organisational and propaganda techniques from its forbears, Christian missionaries and Wôn Buddhism. Among its methods are set practice times, quotas for conversions, sleep deprivation, intense periods of hard-sell proselytizing with two or more recruiters to one candidate, communal living, the combined threat of an apocalypse and utopia, and the proclaimed presence of a god incarnate or his saviour deputy. It plays upon nationalism and identity by asserting the saviour is Korean, and like its predecessors has built its centres in (Sino-)Korean temple and palace architectural styles with *tanchông* decoration, of which it seems inordinately proud (Mun 1997: 96, 100, 103, 155-157). Like some other NRMs, it uses Chinese characters to overawe those unversed in Classical Chinese with the seeming profundity and eternity of its teaching and the talent of its founders (cf. Mun 1997: 97; **Chôn'gyông**). It provides an appealing mixture of the familiar, "Korean" and shamanistic or ancient with the modern (pseudo)-scientific. Explications are made by compounding popular notions of *ki* together with science, and so the vaguely familiar symbols and half-understood science give verisimilitude for the young. Taoist immortals, figures from the Sino-Korean past, explanations of the 28 lunar mansions and five physical phases are found juxtaposed with modern medical facilities and computers. The spiritism and New Age theories found in Japanese NRMs surfaces here also (Young 1990: 29-33). Globalisation is resisted and native identity heightened by rules requiring the wearing of traditional Korean dress, which symbolises peace (Mun 1997: 95), for all major ceremonies and in the sanctums such as Yôju, where no cameras are permitted. Watches and glasses are forbidden here and at initiation rituals, for such items prevent the descent of correct *ki* from Heaven into the performers (personal observation). Like many NRMs, the spirits are very important, as is the use of incantations and the theory of the physical transformation of the body via these practices.

While it is a syncretic religion based on a chaotic jumble of the incoherent or symbolic aphorisms and deeds of Kang Ilsun, Taesunchillihoe has, unlike most of the Chûngsan NRMs whose scriptures follow the biographical and chronological collection of unconnected aphorisms, abandoned that approach in its **Chôn'gyông**. Rather, it retained the chronological approach in the first three chapters and then adopted a thematic approach in the last four. The text seems to have been a reworking of the

earlier works of Yi Sangho (1888-1966) by Chang Pyônggil (1919-), a professor of religious studies from Seoul National University who was allegedly recruited by Pak Han'gyông to head the compilation team. Chang had been a renowned authority on native NRMs until his retirement in 1974, publishing a number of standard references on the topic. Once retired, he headed a Taesunchillihoe research centre, published regularly in the **Taesun hoebo** (CSD 2000: 150-153) and wrote a book on Chûngsan thought that supports the Taesunchillihoe lineage and uses the **Chôn'gyông** as its only source (Chang 1976: 199 et passim). Taesunchillihoe has been clever in capturing such an academic expert, and it seems to have skilfully utilised academics, journalists and public figures who are sympathetic to support its cause, perhaps selectively quoting at times (cf. Mun 1997: 124-137). Such statements have given Taesunchillihoe added credibility and respectability, especially as a native Korean religion, and may also explain why in academia there has been little comment on its more questionable activities. Yet as the Aum Shinrikyô events proved, this lack of questioning of the actions of NRMs is undermining the authority of religious studies Watanabe 1997; Reader 2000a).

Taesunchillihoe's success then can partly be explained by its financial astuteness, the exploitation of the religious zeal of its members, the positive image it has cultivated by charitable works, the manipulation of academic prestige, the play on nationalism, the repeated promises of a coming utopia after an ever-imminent apocalypse, the refusal to reply to criticism in order to garner sympathy, and the reclusiveness of its leader who thereby cultivated an aura of sanctity. While it shares many features with other NRMs, it has been the clever targetting of the shifting demographics, the disguised hard-sell and the financial prowess that have combined to allow it to rapidly outpace nearly all its NRM rivals. It is not particularly due to some inherent religiosity that has given it such success, for that is shared by most religions. Researchers therefore cannot ignore the history and politics of, and even abuses committed by, religious groups.

Abbreviations
CSD: Chûngsando chôn'guk ch'ôngnyôn sindo yônhaphoe
HMC: Han'guk minjok chonggyo kyoûi hoe
TH: **Taesun hoebo**

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