

# The Trouble with Charisma: Religious Ecstasy in Ch'öndogyo

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*Religion both needs most, and suffers most, from institutionalization* – Thomas O'Dea

## Introduction

All religion is founded in a sense of awe and engagement with “the beyond”, yet with the formalisation of religious doctrine this direct, experiential dimension seems to invariably recede from view. Indeed, at the heart of all religions lies a core dilemma: how to reconcile the ecstatic, direct, and unmediated forms of religious experience with the necessity of establishing a stable institutional framework through which the religion can reproduce itself over time. These issues take on a particular salience in the context of new religious formations, where efforts to reconcile charisma and institutional structure are often in the process of being worked out, right before our very eyes. Through an examination of the Korean religion of Ch'öndogyo I intend to explore the tensions between charisma and institutionalisation as they manifest themselves in this particular religious context and the ways in which this movement has attempted to reconcile the gap between these two forces.

## Social Dramas and Failed Charisma

During my first period of ethnographic fieldwork in 1998 I attended a series of religious lectures run by Ch'öndogyo's Youth Association [*Chöngnyönhoe*] to improve young adherents' grasp of Ch'öndogyo theory – which is generally labelled elusive and difficult to grasp. This lecture series had been running for several weeks when a rather astonishing event occurred. I outline this event below in an excerpt from my fieldnotes.

*Religious Lecture 8pm, 7 May 1998.* About twenty people are gathered in the parish activities room for the lecture; most are young but a few older adherents are present

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amongst them. The oldest person in the room appears to be our teacher, who will tonight continue his discussion of Ch'öndogyo theory.

About half way through the lecture a most extraordinary thing happens. A newcomer enters the room and walks up to the podium. The teacher does not notice as he has his back turned to the audience in his efforts to scrawl impenetrable Chinese characters on the blackboard nearby. The intruder speaks loudly and is clearly emotional. At this relatively early stage in my fieldwork I am not able to understand everything he says, but he states several times, "I am *Hanüllum*, I am God".

The teacher remains frozen in his position at the blackboard as a parish official rises from his seat and takes the intruder's arm as if to restrain him. However, the man will not be deterred from his purpose. He continues talking and shrugs off the arm. The parish official takes his arm again and suddenly, shockingly, the intruder hits him in the face. The audience, including myself, gasp – stunned by this unexpected display of violence. At this point, four males in the audience jump to their feet, grab the intruder and forcibly drag him outside. After the men leave, the rest of the assembled audience look at each other in shock, and some smile nervously. Aware that the foreign anthropologist has witnessed this bizarre display, a woman leans over, embarrassed, and whispers that the man is "crazy". People make a few brief comments about the man's behaviour and then the lecture resumes as if nothing untoward has happened. The whole incident has taken no more than a couple of minutes.

In conversations that followed over the next week I was told by a number of people that the man had taken the "wrong course" during his religious training and now believed himself to be a "second God". This is what one informant, Mr Kim (a religious official), had to say about the incident. He pointed out that with the right training method – *chumun* – we may hear words in our mind, we may see what is not seen and we may know the future. This is evidence of *Hanüllum*: "some great power in the universe". It is his trace, as we cannot see him directly. However, in Mr Kim's view some people enjoy this feeling too much, and as a result they will think they are a "second God" – although others may see them as "mad". Mr Kim concluded, "Sometimes semi-believers will say 'I am God, I am *Hanüllum*'. This is a big problem. Man is man, even if he contains God".

Over the coming months of fieldwork and in subsequent trips, my impression that I witnessed something quite important has not diminished. The way in which this event unfolded and the mechanisms that were put in place to deal with it exemplify the characteristics of Victor Turner's "social drama" – an event that throws into relief the structural tensions underlying social systems (Turner, 1974, pp. 38–42). Turner advocated the study of the social drama as an important means of allowing ethnographers to explore the mechanics of larger social processes. In his words, "through the social drama one may sometimes look beneath the surface of social regularities into the hidden contradictions and conflicts in the social system" (Turner, 1996, p. xxv). Thus, as Kapferer (1996, p. ix) points out, social dramas illuminate the ways in which people are actively involved in constructing and shaping their own social and political realities.

To return to the incident, the "social drama" if you will, it is clear that the man believed himself to be divine, a "second god", although his proclamation was rejected by those who witnessed it. This incident seems to be a clear example of failed charisma: a belief in one's

own extraordinary powers that is not verified or confirmed by others.<sup>1</sup> Instead of producing awe, the intruder's revelation was treated with bewilderment and his behaviour was subsequently pathologised (unsurprising when it seems to be recognition alone that separates the mad man from the prophet). However, rather than merely dismissing the intruder as "crazy", I am interested in exposing the dynamics underlying his eruption, and the response it engendered. I believe this incident manifests an ongoing and perhaps even unresolvable tension in Ch'öndogyo between direct religious experience and institutional order – a tension first theorised in the writings of Max Weber. In this paper I hope to explain why the man believed himself to be divine, and how this is connected to ongoing dilemmas surrounding charismatic religious experience in Ch'öndogyo.

### Charisma Defined

In order to help illuminate the tension between direct religious experience and institutional structure central to Ch'öndogyo today, a brief discussion on the nature of charisma is required. I ask the reader to bear with me through this theoretical detour before I return to the Ch'öndogyo case study, as the ethnographic material only makes sense in light of the theoretical arguments that precede it.

Although Max Weber was not the first scholar to take up the idea of charisma, he was certainly responsible for its conceptual theorisation and academic dissemination. Weber (1968, p. 47) transplants the term charisma, "the gift of grace", from its roots in early Christianity. In its original sense, "charism" is the theological term for an extraordinary spiritual power given to Christians by the Holy Spirit; the common charisms include speaking in tongues and the gifts of prophecy and healing (Csordas, 1997, pp. 276–77).

In transforming charisma from a theological to a sociological concept, Weber defined it as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (1968, p. 48). However, while subsequent theorists have attempted to explain charisma in terms of personality attributions, Csordas (1997, p. 136) points out that these approaches entail a reification of charisma, and a misapplication of Weber's argument. For Csordas (1997, p. 136), the charismatic gift is essentially separable from the person who exercises it; to suggest otherwise is to be guilty of "misplaced concreteness". He therefore argues that it is time to "de-entify" charisma and "decentre" it from the personality of the leader (pp. 138–39).

Ultimately, for Csordas (and for Weber), charisma is a quality *imputed to* an individual, rather than a quality *of* an individual. The locus of charisma is not the leader himself but the perceptions of his followers (Csordas, 1997, p. 137). As Weber (1968, p. 48) notes, "how the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his 'followers' or 'disciples' ". Edward Shils (1975, p. 127) similarly recognises that "charisma... is the quality which is imputed to persons, actions, roles, institutions, symbols, and material objects because of their presumed connection with 'ultimate,' 'fundamental,' 'vital,' order-determining power". Indeed, for Robert Bellah, charisma is not merely legitimated in the recognition of followers: it is *only* the followers' recognition that brings charisma into existence *in the first place* (in Csordas, 1997, p. 137).

### **Charisma and Institution Building**

Weber's interest in charisma stemmed largely from its role in the legitimation of authority. Weber explicated three types of legitimate authority: charismatic authority, rational authority and traditional authority. The legitimacy of charismatic authority is based purely on the personal charisma of the prophet or leader, and is outside the realm of everyday routine and the profane sphere. It comes from outside social structure – it is anti-structural in Victor Turner's sense of the word.<sup>2</sup> Charismatic authority is therefore the direct antithesis of both rational and traditional authority.

As charisma comes from outside social structure, it can therefore act as both a creative and revolutionary power in the institutional sphere. As Eisenstadt (1968, p. xx) notes, "It is in the charismatic act that the potential creativity of the human spirit is manifest; . . . such creativity by its very nature and orientation tends to undermine and destroy existing institutions and to burst the limits set by them". However, charismatic authority is inherently unstable; in its pure form it exists only in the process of originating (Weber, 1968, p. 54). In order to survive, charismatic authority must be reconciled with institutional structures – it must be "routinised". Thus, if it is not to remain a purely transitory phenomenon, charismatic authority must give way to traditional or rational authority, or a mixture of both (Weber, 1968, p. 54). However, while institutionalisation ensures the ongoing life of a religion, it also has the effect of dampening the ecstatic and creative dimensions of religious experience.

Weber's insights regarding the conflict between charisma and institutionalisation were taken up in an important paper by Thomas O'Dea (1961). For O'Dea, institutionalisation involves a core paradox: in order to carry out any cultural motif, its content must be embedded in the stable expectations of human beings, thereby becoming diluted. However, these dilemmas are felt even more keenly in the context of religious institutionalisation, where the experience of the holy lies at the end of the continuum of human experience far removed from prosaic action. The process of embodying such "charismatic moments" in structural forms therefore raises the problems of institutionalisation in the sharpest way.

According to O'Dea (1961), religion both needs most, and suffers most, from institutionalisation. The achievement of necessary stability exacts a heavy price, because such processes invariably emasculate the basic content of religious experience or, at the very least, seriously curtail or distort it. Thus, each religion is faced with a fundamental dilemma: in order to survive its charismatic moment worship must become stabilised. However, in this context, worship becomes an objective reality imposing its own patterns upon the participants. Thus, institutionalisation involves reducing precisely those spontaneous and creative dimensions of religious experience which are the life bread of religion itself. In classic Weberian fashion, O'Dea (1961, p. 32) thus concludes that founded religions display a "fundamental antinomy" in their histories. They begin in charismatic moments and proceed in a direction of relative routinisation.

However, although it appears that a deep chasm exists between charisma and the more mundane and routine aspects of social institutions, Weber's work involves an attempt to combine the two and analyse how they are continuously related in the fabric of social life,<sup>3</sup> as well as in processes of social change (Eisenstadt, 1968; Edmonds, 2003, p. 7). Thus, it is not so much that charisma and institutionalisation are fundamentally

antithetical; rather, institutionalisation determines the flows or paths that creativity may take. Indeed, for Weberian scholars such as Shils (1975), the synergy between charisma and routine is *fundamental* to society. He argues that intense and concentrated charisma never evaporates entirely, but exists in a state of attenuation and dispersion in the context of routine actions.

Nevertheless, for Weber routinisation is an unavoidable social process. As Edmonds (2003, p. 23) points out, this treatment presents a charismatic movement with two options: institutionalisation or demise. However, Weber's "one becomes the other" model has been subject to a number of critiques, which point to the inability of this typology to adequately address the complexities of religious institutionalisation. This position seems particularly pertinent in the case of many new religious and social formations, as there are numerous examples of movements where religious institutionalisation and charismatic routinisation have not taken place in the way that Weber's model suggests. Indeed, I hope to demonstrate that even in Ch'öndogyo the forces at work are far more complex, although I would still endorse the ongoing merits of Weber's approach – especially his stress on the inherent tension between charisma and institutionalisation.<sup>4</sup> Following Edmonds (2003, p. 32), I would maintain that while criticisms identify weaknesses in Weber's theory, they do not invalidate it as a whole.

### **Ch'öndogyo: History and Doctrine**

On 5 April 1860 at the Yongdam pavilion on Kumi Mountain, a man named Ch'oe Che'u (religious title: Su'un Taesinsa) fell into a trance, where his body was racked by a great trembling, a strange coldness settled over him, and he was seized by the spirit of Heaven [*Hanüllum*]. Ch'oe would later describe his experience in the Ch'öndogyo Scriptures [*Kyöngjön*] as follows:

It was April, when I felt unexpectedly coldness and trembling of my body and mind, and could not express the reason. I then heard a mysterious voice, which startled me. Then I questioned (the voice), and it said, "Fear not; don't you know me, whom mankind calls God?" I asked him why he revealed himself to me. He replied, "I send you to this world to teach this precept; therefore, do not doubt" (in Kim, 1992, p. 7).

As a result of his revelation Ch'oe felt compelled to form a new religion which he named "Tonghak", or Eastern Learning.

Clearly, Tonghak provides a near perfect example of a movement based on the charismatic authority of its founder: an authority legitimated through Ch'oe's mandate from Heaven.<sup>5</sup> Thus, as Kim (1993, pp. 233–34) notes, the movement's origins lie not in artificial syncretism, but immediate revelation: "... The spiritual potentials of various traditional religions were coherently integrated into a new viable paradigm of salvation in terms of this revelation experience". Nevertheless, it is apparent that Ch'oe's vision of religious salvation borrowed Christian symbols, together with shamanistic, Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian elements (Chung, 1969, p. 125).

Propelled by the realisation of *si Ch'önju* [humans bear/serve Heaven<sup>6</sup>] Ch'oe envisioned a new world order that would pave the way for a heavenly paradise on earth [*Chisang Ch'önguk*]. Importantly, he provided Tonghak adherents with access to his

own charismatic powers, as he gave them two keys to unlocking the gate between the human and divine realms: *chumun*, a magical incantation, and *yongbu*, a magical talisman – both were gifts Ch’oe received from God during his original trance experience.

*Yongbu* took the form of a mystical diagram which was burned into ash, mixed with water and drunk by the adherent (see Bucknell and Beirne, 2001). For the faithful of heart, this concoction appears to have had remarkable efficacious and curing properties. Nevertheless, *yongbu* had fallen out of usage by the early twentieth century, prey to moves to rationalise the religion and purge it of anti-modern (i.e. “magical”) elements. *Chumun*, Ch’oe’s other gift from God, managed to survive the movement’s transition into a “modern” religion.<sup>7</sup>

*Chumun* consists of twenty-one Chinese characters: *chi ki kŭm chi wŏn wi tae kang si ch’ŏn chu cho hwa chŏng yŏng se pul mang man sa chi*. Although Ch’ondogyo adherents tend to eschew literal translations of the incantation, the philosopher Kim Yong Choon has translated *chumun* as follows: “Ultimate energy being here and now, I yearn for its great descent. Bearing God, I have naturally become. Eternally not forgetting, I become aware of all” (1977a, p. 21). Right from the beginning, *chumun* was considered to be essential to spiritual cultivation, facilitating the development of the physical and mental states necessary for salvation (Choi, 1982, p. 71).

The constant repetition of *chumun* over time helps to facilitate *kangnyŏng*, or ecstatic trance (literally, “descent of the spirit”). Indeed, although several variants exist, the standard version of *chumun* is known as *kangnyŏng chumun*. Thus, from the beginning, the incantation’s stated purpose was to facilitate union between the human and divine. Ch’oe Che’u endorsed the incantation as “the holy sentence that brings down the Heavenly spirit” and urged his followers to repeat it ceaselessly so that they too might experience communion with God (Choi, 1963, p. 15). Clearly, right from the movement’s inception all Tonghak adherents had access to charisms – extraordinary spiritual powers. From the earliest days, stories circulated about the miraculous qualities of *chumun*: men were said to be spontaneously cured of affliction from evil spirits; others in the grip of Divine possession acted as if mad, running around and stripping off their clothes (Hiraki, 1980, p. 77, p. 80).

Many scholars suggest that it was precisely such “ritualistic” and “superstitious” elements that made the movement attractive to the lower classes (e.g. Weems, 1964, p. 11; Choi, 1971, p. 32). Government reports from the period would seem to verify this, containing regular references to the religion’s “deceptive” promises regarding the efficacy of the incantation in curing disease, and its “dubious” holy amulet (Hiraki, 1980). Military commander Lee Wonjo seems to represent the general tenor of government opinion on Tonghak in his view that “recently evil-minded, eccentric fellows, with heads and faces strange covered, have initiated some diabolical religions and attracted the followers with magic sham-medical work by means of enactions and amulets. Many foolish people have been deluded by them into firm union” (in Hiraki, 1980, p. 80).

Unfortunately for Ch’oe, the government did not take kindly to this new and potentially subversive religious movement. Just five years after founding Tonghak, he was beheaded for spreading a false doctrine and attempting to poison the minds of the people (Weems, 1964, p. 12). According to Ch’ondogyo adherents, who have an elaborate mythology surrounding the circumstances of Ch’oe’s death, prior to his beheading he breathed into the mouth of his chosen successor, Ch’oe Sihyŏng, thereby transferring his charismatic

authority and initiating the process of charismatic routinisation (and proceeding in the direction of a movement based on traditional authority).

It was Ch'oe Sihyöng (religious title: Haewöl Sinsa) who set up the basic institutional framework of Tonghak, developing a system of local congregations [*p'o*] and district and provincial headquarters to oversee teaching and instruction. He also established rules of conduct and a regularly scheduled worship service (see Weems, 1964, pp. 16–19 and Kim, 1993, pp. 234–37). Today, it is generally recognised that Ch'oe's organisational skills were largely responsible for the continued existence of Tonghak in this turbulent early period, and many Ch'öndogyo adherents seem to hold a particular fondness for their religion's second founder.<sup>8</sup>

In his attempt to rationalise Tonghak, Ch'oe Sihyöng made his own contribution to the emerging religion's theology, with the concept *in si Ch'ön*: “humans in Heaven”. According to Haewöl Sinsa, “Man is Heaven (God) and Heaven is man. Therefore, outside man, there is no Heaven. And outside Heaven, there is no man” (Kim, 1977b, p. 43). From this exposition he developed a further concept which has become the basis for the Ch'öndogyo system of ethics: *sa in yö Ch'ön*, or “treat humans as if they were Heaven”.

Son Pyönghui [Üiam Songsa] took up the movement's leadership in 1898 after Ch'oe Sihyöng's execution at the hands of the state. It was Son who was responsible for Tonghak's name change in 1905 to Ch'öndogyo [“the Religion of the Heavenly Way”]. Son was also responsible for a massive modernisation push within the religion, and he established the basic framework of the vast bureaucratic structure that dominates Ch'öndogyo today: the *Chungang Ch'ongbu*. Clearly, then, it was with the third leader of the religion that Ch'öndogyo completed its transition to a movement based on bureaucratic authority. As Carl Young (in his article in this volume) demonstrates, this period in the movement's history represents a decisive break from the era preceding it, with Son Pyönghui instituting a number of changes with far-reaching implications for the religion. Son further rationalised Ch'öndogyo theology and was responsible for the concept which today lies at the heart of Ch'öndogyo doctrine: *in nae Ch'ön* (“humans and Heaven are one”).

### Charisms and Conceptions of God

At first glance, *in nae Ch'ön* seems little different to its theological forebears *in si ch'ön* and *si Ch'önju*; however, these terms are not synonymous. Upon closer examination it becomes apparent that theological rationalisation brought with it an increasingly radical conception of the relationship between the human and divine. A sense of unity between humans and God may be implicit in the original concept of *si Ch'önju*, but Ch'oe Che'u's God had many of the characteristics of a transcendent deity. As Beirne (1999, p. 168) notes, “[the] Lord of Heaven, as much as He may be immanent in the individual and in creation, is definitely ‘other’ at this point in Tonghak thought”. It is also significant that Ch'oe's designation for God was “*Ch'önju*” (today the preferred term is *Hanüllim*). The term *Ch'önju* is generally translated as “Supreme Being” or “Heavenly Lord”, clearly connoting some sort of personified deity.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, scholars such as Kim (1993, p. 238) argue that Tonghak's concept of God seemed to have been influenced most strongly by Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

Ch'oe Sihyöng, on the other hand, seems to stress the pantheistic dimensions of God: his writings evoke a universe where trees, mountains, stones, animals and humans are

part of God. These ideas are exemplified in his principle of *samgyōngsōl*: the doctrine of three respects (see Kim, 1977a, pp. 81–85). According to Ch'oe Sihyōng, humans are to respect God, each other and all “things” [*kyōngmul*]. Finally, Son Pyōnghŭi stresses an immanent God lying dormant within all human beings, emphasising the insoluble connection between humans and God and the inherent divinity of all humans.

All three dimensions are present in contemporary Ch'ōndogyo adherents' conceptions of God, as God is spoken of as a transcendent deity, as Ultimate Energy [*chigi*] and as immanent within us. Nevertheless, a clear distinction is made between our present mind, which is separate from God, and our potential God-mind. Thus, rather than describing our present condition, *in nae Ch'ōn* expresses the way we should be. In the words of Ch'ōndogyo theologian Yi Tonghwa:

The principle of *in nae Ch'ōn* [man and God are one] does not mean to imply that man's present mind and behavior are that of God. It means that man basically has the capacity to manifest the spirit of God. In other words, *in nae Ch'ōn* makes man a God. But this does not mean that man's present mind already possesses the mind of God. *In nae Ch'ōn* was conceived in order to make this world a paradise. But this does not mean that *in nae Ch'ōn* was created because this world has already become a paradise. Therefore, the prime task of *in nae Ch'ōn* is to achieve the original purpose of man by means of developing the quality of man.

Accordingly, there are two different elements in man. The one is the natural man, and the other the divine man which is buried deeply inside the natural man. What we call the natural man is the mind we now possess, and our present behavior is not man's true nature (cited in Weems, 1964, p. 11).

All humans possess the potential to recapture their original divine nature through religious training and moral cultivation.

Religious training [*suryōn*] in Ch'ōndogyo constitutes the original method of obtaining religious knowledge, although today it has been supplemented (and partly subsumed) by the introduction of a Sunday service [*siilsik*], complete with hymns, scriptural reading and sermon. In stark contrast to the Christian-style Sunday service, religious training is far more Buddhist in orientation. Training takes place under the lunar calendar and proceeds in forty-nine-day cycles, unlike the weekly Sunday services. Furthermore, there is little formal religious instruction, as training consists of the constant repetition of *chumun* [the incantation] over successive two-hour periods – in both loud [*hyōnsong*] and silent [*muksong*] forms.

As we have already seen, *chumun* was first promoted as a way to induce contact with the divine, and this characteristic has not diminished in the intervening 145 years. Today *chumun* is still notable for its ability to induce ecstatic trance, which generally manifests itself in convulsions and jumping (generally glossed as “shaking”) as well as crying, moaning and, occasionally, minor acts of self-mortification (such as pulling one's hair or punching some part of the body, such as the thighs, arms or head).

Trance continues to make an appearance in the contemporary context and is received with a great deal of ambivalence. The manifestations of trance, and the meanings attributed in any given context, differ greatly; there are multiple interpretations regarding what trance is. For example, many people agree that trance is “receiving God”. As I have already indicated, the Ch'ōndogyo term for ecstatic trance, *kangnyōng*, means “descent of



the spirit". Clearly, there is a strong feeling that people who experience *kangnyöng* are possessed by the spirit of God.<sup>11</sup> Although *kangnyöng* may be understood as a kind of possession by God, it can also be seen as a way of connecting with God. Through trance you plug into the universe and *ki*, or cosmic energy, is concentrated in your body. Finally, *kangnyöng* may also be seen as a manifestation of your inner God-mind. Ultimately, these varying interpretations of trance relate to the different representations of God in Ch'öndogyo: as a transcendent, pantheistic and immanent being.

However, *kangnyöng* is manifested in circumstances very different from those in which it was first promoted by Ch'oe Che'u. As I have briefly noted, Ch'öndogyo has undergone a process of institutionalisation, whereby a large bureaucratic body [*Chungang Ch'ongbu*] now oversees the religion and attends to orthodox practice. A process of theological rationalisation has also led to quite important transformations in the relationship between the human and divine. Today Ch'öndogyo theology contains two distinctive propositions, one of which seems to have been absent from the original doctrines espoused by the movement's first leader: God is transcendent *and* God is immanent.

While some people embrace such charisms as an expression of spiritual development, others are considerably less receptive, particularly members of the religion's governing body, the *Chungang Ch'ongbu*. On several occasions I have seen noticeable efforts to quell manifestations of ecstatic trance, or to condemn it *ex post facto*. In 1998 I saw one woman in trance physically restrained by a religious trainer, and during a period of religious training in 2002 I saw another woman's ecstatic trance condemned by two religious leaders in a single afternoon.<sup>12</sup> It was said that what this woman had experienced was not true *kangnyöng*, but rather a kind of fever (see Bell, 2003). On other occasions, ecstatic trance is readily compared with Korean shamanism – an insult rather than a compliment, given the general disdain with which shamanism is held among Ch'öndogyo adherents (who differ little from Korean Christians in their evaluations of this tradition).

Certain Ch'öndogyo adherents themselves are quite cognisant of the tension between ecstatic trance and institutional authority. One informant in his late thirties, Mr Lee, spoke with remarkable candour about this tension – although his criticisms of “the centre” seem rather anomalous, given that he holds several positions within Ch'öndogyo's central administration. However, this seeming anomaly may be partly explained by the fact that, according to Mr Lee, he has experienced *taegangnyöng* [“great descent of the spirit”], both as a child and more recently as an adult.

Mr Lee states that “the centre” [the *Chungang Ch'ongbu*] does not like *kangnyöng* [trance]. He points out that in this state, one has the “mind of God”; therefore, “some people don't like shaking”. They prefer the more quiet, meditative forms of religious training. When I ask him why the centre does not like *taegangnyöng* he responds, “*Taegangnyöng* changes the people's minds”. He confides that there are two kinds of people in Ch'öndogyo: those who like *taegangnyöng* and those who do not like it. He says that most Ch'öndogyo *kyogu* [parishes] do not like *taegangnyöng*. However, in his view *taegangnyöng* is “very, very important”. . . “it is like a bridge”. He says that officials do not like it because then “they don't control the man”. Thus, they say that “*kangnyöng* is crazy”. He says that “some people blame *taegangnyöng*. [They say] it is not [the] right way. [It] is a kind of *mudang* [shamanism]”. Thus, he clearly recognises the threat that charismatic religious experience poses to the authority of Ch'öndogyo officials.

### **The Routinisation of Charisma**

In many religious formations (notably Christian sects), charisms are not feared as subversive acts; rather, they are welcomed as expressions of methods of “upbuilding the community” (Csordas, 1997, p. 133). In these contexts, it appears that charisms are routinised along particular institutional paths that limit their capacity to contest the structure of the emerging religious institution.

An excellent example of such routinisation is provided by White and White (1996) in their discussion of issues relating to authenticity in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (more commonly known as Mormonism or LDS). LDS began with an explicit rejection of the idea that the scriptural canon was closed with the New Testament (a position which has led to numerous claims of heresy by mainstream Christian churches). As White and White (1996) point out, right from the beginning Mormonism endorsed the idea that individuals were to enjoy direct religious experience, to enjoy their own charismatic encounters with God much as the founder Joseph Smith had. This “democratic manifestation of charisma” was evident in the fact that charismatic gifts (including visions and revelation) were the privilege of everyone in the community. A logical consequence of such general access to charismatic religious experience is the presumption of an individual’s ability and right to discern truth. However, with the development of a religious hierarchy it becomes the prerogative of ecclesiastical authorities to determine what is true (1996, p. 94).

After several struggles with challengers to his privileged position, Smith eventually established his authority as *the* seer, translator, and prophet for the church; measures were instituted to place boundaries upon charisms. Today, revelation is available to everyone within limited boundaries (White and White, 1996, p. 97). Individuals can receive revelations within their official positions but not beyond them and the authenticity of these revelations must be established by their consistency with existing church policy and doctrine. Revelations that challenge or contradict official doctrine or practice are, by definition, considered inauthentic. They are not of God; they are of Satan.

In Pentecostal Christian formations such as the Assemblies of God, the potential conflict between charismatic revelation and established religious dogma is resolved in similar ways. Assemblies of God, of course, do not validate the idea of ongoing scriptural revelation, which simplifies matters somewhat. However, the potentially unsettling nature of charisms such as speaking in tongues and spiritual healing are dealt with in a like fashion. As the American Assemblies of God website notes (General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2004):

If the Holy Spirit has authentically inspired the interpretation, it will never contradict the teachings of the Bible. If the interpretation is contrary to Scripture, it is out of order and must be ruled so. The Bible is the measure by which all utterances must be judged . . . the Scriptures cannot be contradicted (Psalm 119:89; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25). They are complete and cannot be added to (Revelation 22:18, 19).

Furthermore, most Pentecostal religions make an important distinction between “receiving the Spirit” and “receiving the Fullness of the Spirit”, which seems to promote the established religious order (see Wood, 1980, pp. 11–17). According to the

Assemblies of God website, being filled with the Spirit does not ensure lifelong Grace. It is an ongoing process whereby our spiritual power continually runs low and requires us to return to “the Source” and be refilled with the Holy Spirit.

Even in charismatic movements with a “reticulate and acephalous organisation” (Csordas, 1997, p. 141) such as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Toronto Blessing,<sup>13</sup> similar processes can be witnessed. As both Csordas (1997) and Poloma (1997) point out in their respective works, in principle spiritual gifts are available to all charismatics. This therefore precludes their exclusive adherence to a single individual (Csordas, 1997, p. 133; Poloma, 1997, p. 260). People are exhorted to concentrate on the divine source of these charisms rather than on the personalities of individuals who exercise them (Csordas, 1997, p. 141) and there is an active discouragement of any cult of personality (Poloma, 1997, p. 260).

However, Poloma argues that although the Toronto Blessing was still very much in its “charismatic moment” during the period in which she witnessed it, certain efforts to contain charisma were apparent (see pp. 261–62). For example, leaders were careful not to endorse every manifestation as the work of God, testimonies helped to model appropriate behaviour for the audience, and a normative structure has developed to ensure the flow of worship. Csordas (1997, p. 16) similarly points out that within Catholic Charismatic Renewal communities there have been efforts (to varying degrees) to organise the exercise of prophecy. Thus, in groups such as the Word of God, prophecy has developed into an institution with a formal office of Prophet. In these cases charisma flows along institutional paths and helps to buttress them. Charisms are channelled and directed towards the realisation of institutional objectives.

### The De-Routinisation of Charisma

I would argue that in Ch'öndogyo charisms resist routinisation: each individual instance of charismatic experience is potentially threatening anew. The key issue is why. Where Ch'öndogyo differs from the other religions mentioned above is in the lack of widespread agreement on the implications of charisms (ecstatic trance), which can indicate divine possession, inherent divinity or fleeting contact with cosmic energy.<sup>14</sup> These contrasting meanings are related to the multiple perceptions of God in Ch'öndogyo. As I have noted, when Tonghak's founder fell into a trance he was possessed by a God resembling a transcendent, personified deity. Yet over time, as the doctrine of *in nae Ch'ön* was introduced, the idea of possession by a separate God has become increasingly problematic.

How then is trance to be understood? Trance as a manifestation of divine possession means something radically different from trance as a manifestation of inherent divinity: one implies a fleeting charism, the other implies a potentially permanent state of charisma. Yet, I would argue that both possibilities are contained in trance. It therefore seems to me that a curious situation exists whereby theological rationalisation has actually caused the current tension between charismatic experience and institutional authority. In other words, I think that charisms are a problem today in a way that they probably were not 145 years ago; Ch'oe Che'u's open embrace of *kangnyöng* therefore stands in stark contrast to the ambivalent and even hostile responses that ecstatic trance currently generates.

Trance is a problem for Ch'öndogyo today because its meanings are in flux; and it is precisely this fluidity that makes trance threatening. Unlike charisms in other religious movements, where extraordinary powers manifest in a context with very clear-cut

conceptions about the relation between the human and divine, in Ch'öndogyo these connections are far less clear-cut. If the meanings of trance could be fixed, it could be routinised and reconciled with institutional structure, but I would speculate that trance can be contained less effectively today than it could be 100 years ago, because its meanings are less fixed. In other words, religious rationalisation has ultimately de-routinised charisma and derailed attempts to normalise it.

### **Charisma as the War Machine**

It is here that the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) seems to provide a useful supplement to Weber's model – given the limitations of his arguments regarding the inevitable routinisation of charisma. Although they do not draw explicitly on Weber's work, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are similarly concerned with the relationship between radically different political apparatuses, as with their comparison of the war machine and the state. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the state dynamic of power refers to those formal organisations which are institutionalised, hierarchialised, regulated and encoded in a constitutional framework. Thus, they merely use the term “state” to describe a tree structure: a hierarchical system with a central organisational “automata”. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 351), the state formation manifests itself in two poles: exemplified by the magician–king and jurist–priest. I see these poles as directly analogous to Weber's discussion of the two institutional forms of authority: traditional and bureaucratic authority, respectively.

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the war machine, on the other hand, bears striking parallels to Weber's discussion of charismatic authority. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 354), the war machine is the shape of power as exterior to the state. They use the term to refer to those dynamics of power that are rhizomatic in structure (segmented, multipolar, deterritorialised and anti-hierarchical). It therefore seems valid to argue that charisma is rhizomatic in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the word<sup>15</sup> – it is the shape of power as exterior to the institution. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, like Weber, this power can be “captured” by the institution, despite its exteriority.

Where Deleuze and Guattari differ from Weber is in their supposition that the rhizome does not necessarily or inevitably entail capture by the state. Unlike Weber, they allow for the possibility of ongoing evasion – whereby the rhizome continually eludes the grasp of the state. Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (1998) similarly emphasise the ongoing opposition between charisma and the rationalised authority of the state. They argue that “sacred peripherality” is an intrinsic feature of charisma, especially in contexts where the state is perceived to be divorced from the core values of society (p. 16).

I would suggest that a focus on charisma as a rhizomatic force provides a useful way of conceptualising the current reception of “the gift of grace” in Ch'öndogyo, for contemporary charisms seem fundamentally rhizomatic in their deterritorialised, destabilising potential: they seem to come from outside the institution and elude its capture. While it is certainly true that charisms are met with censure, there has been no institutional effort to establish an orthodox stance on them. Thus, religious officials must attempt to contain each instance as it emerges. Indeed, it seems that the institutional authorities are caught in an insurmountable bind. To assert that ecstatic trance represents an inferior form of religiosity would be to deny the divine basis of their religion. To claim trance as a temporary possession by a separate God would contradict their present religious dogma

that God lies within. To declare that trance is about manifesting one's God-self raises the menace of managing a congregation of 26,000 self-proclaimed Gods.

So how does this help us to understand the behaviour of the man I described at the beginning of this paper? I am not attempting to suggest that this man was in trance when he stormed into the religious lecture and announced his divine nature. However, the slippage between charisms and charisma that epitomises contemporary Ch'ōndogyo theology seems to be at the root of his assertions. Although I did not see the man again following the incident, it became apparent that he had been led through his religious training to believe himself to be divine. As my informant, Mr Kim, pointed out, with religious training people come to hear words in their mind, see what is not seen and know the future. For Mr Kim, this is merely God's [*Hanūllim*'s] trace, although he recognises that some people come to believe themselves to be a "second God".

It seems that Mr Kim (*qua* Thomas Csordas) would accuse the interloper of misplaced concreteness: confusing fleeting charismatic gifts with permanent personal qualities. However, I would argue that this concreteness is not so misplaced, in the sense that its possibility is *prefigured* in the religion's own theology. Thus, if this is a case of individual pathology, it is a pathology borne of the religious conditions in which it was manifested: the potential outcome of following one strand of religious theology to its logical conclusion.

## Conclusions

The tension between charisma and institutionalisation, while faced by all religions, is particularly acute in the context of new religious formations. While some of these formations have wrestled successfully with this conflict, Ch'ōndogyo appears to have been less successful in its attempts to reconcile these two forces. Furthermore, I have tried to show that Ch'ōndogyo has been increasingly unsuccessful in combating "the trouble with charisma", as theological rationalisation has created unsettling possibilities that were not part of the original meaning of *kangnyōng*. Today charisms appear to be fundamentally rhizomatic in nature, and seem to threaten the cohesion and legitimacy of the religion's institutional structure, thus accounting for their ambivalent reception.

I have argued that this is due to religious authorities' inability to "fix" the meaning of charisma, which seems to contain a number of radically different and mutually contradictory possibilities. Indeed, despite the occasional outbursts by adherents claiming to be incarnations of Divinity (such as the man described at the beginning of this paper), it seems that for the very perpetuation of Ch'ōndogyo trance must remain fluid, without a fixed orthodox meaning. Ultimately, then, this tension between charismatic experience and institutional structure seems unresolvable in the context of Ch'ōndogyo – whether to the benefit or detriment of the religion remains to be seen.

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## Notes

1. I therefore recognise that “failed charisma” is an oxymoron. By definition, charisma exists through verification – which the intruder clearly did not obtain.
2. Indeed, there is considerable affinity between charisma and Turner’s discussion of *communitas*. According to Turner (1995, p. 139), “Life in ‘structure’ is filled with objective difficulties: decisions have to be made, inclinations sacrificed to the wishes and needs of the group, and physical and social obstacles overcome at some personal cost. Spontaneous *communitas* has something ‘magical’ about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power”. Turner appears to explicitly recognise this in his statement that “[i]n preindustrial and early industrial societies with multiplex social relations, spontaneous *communitas* appears to be very frequently associated with mystical power and to be regarded as a charisma or grace sent by the deities or ancestor” (1995, p. 138).
3. Indeed, Turner’s interest in structure and anti-structure seems also to have been heavily influenced by Weber here, as he spends considerable time discussing the creative tension between the two. For example, he writes “Subjectively there is in it [spontaneous *communitas*] the feeling of endless power. But this power untransformed cannot readily be applied to the organizational details of social existence. On the other hand, structural action swiftly becomes arid and mechanical if those involved in it are not periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of *communitas*” (p. 139). For Turner, anti-structural phenomena must be reconciled with structure: the liminal become liminoid and spontaneous *communitas* is transformed into normative *communitas*.
4. Werbner and Basu (1998, p. 15) would appear to agree, emphasising that in relation to Sufi cults in Muslim South Asia “the Weberian opposition still holds true.”
5. Ch’oe’s charismatic credentials have been further enhanced over time through the creation of a complex mythology surrounding his birth as well as his Divine epiphany. Thus, it is said that before Ch’oe was born Mt Kumi shook for three days, and a rainbow-coloured cloud engulfed his home, which was enveloped with a fragrant scent (Bierne, 1999, p. 161).
6. I have translated “Ch’ön” as “Heaven” throughout the paper for the sake of consistency. However, it is important to note that among scholars working on Ch’öndogyo and adherents themselves the word may also be translated as “God”. Given my arguments about the changing conceptions of the divine in Ch’öndogyo, I would argue that the term contains both meanings.
7. Choi Dong-hee (1973, p. 5), a scholar and Ch’öndogyo adherent, justifies the phasing out of *yongbu* and the ongoing centrality of *chumun* by arguing that while *yongbu* was a kind of *pujök* [magical charm], *chumun* was more fundamentally religious than magical. Therefore it was retained as the movement was transformed from a “naïve faith among the commoners to a religion” (p. 5).
8. One young informant I interviewed in 2002 confided that Haewöl Sinsa was her favourite “founder”, pointing out that he is like the mother of Ch’öndogyo.
9. Ch’önju was also the name given by Korean Catholics to God (the contemporary Korean name for Catholicism is Ch’önju-gyo) and this fact seems to have been partly responsible for the perception that Tonghak was actually a version of Catholicism. Indeed, there is little doubt that Ch’oe Che’u was heavily influenced by Catholicism – even if his response was reactive rather than inclusionary. Tonghak means “Eastern Learning” and the religion’s name was a clear response to Catholicism’s Korean name, which at the time was “Western Learning” [Söhak].
10. Other scholars such as Choi (1971, p. 21) go to considerable lengths to challenge this position, arguing that the Ch’önju of Tonghak was different from the Christian God, and that Chinese characters were merely a translation of the much older indigenous deity, Hanunim. However, scholars such as Baker (2002) dispute the assertion that Hanunim represents an indigenous, monotheistic deity that predates the introduction of Christianity to Korea.
11. Several scholars have likened Ch’oe’s trance at this time to a form of shamanic possession (see Choi, 1982; Kim Chongsuh, 1993; Jorgensen, 1999).
12. It is no coincidence that both of the adherents chastised were female. I have written elsewhere (see Bell, 2003) about the gender dimension of ecstatic trance.
13. The Toronto Blessing was a charismatic revival that reached its peak in the mid-1990s.
14. In more generous interpretations. It can also be interpreted as a form of bastardised and even dangerous religious experience akin to the perceived trance of Korean shamans.
15. Upon comparison with Weber’s discussion of charismatic authority, the similarities become clear. Weber (1968, pp. 51–53) writes, “Both rational and traditional authority are specifically forms of

every-day routine control of action; while the charismatic type is the direct antithesis of this . . . charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules . . . It repudiates any sort of involvement in the every-day routine world. It can only tolerate, with an attitude of complete emotional indifference, irregular, unsystematic, acquisitive acts”.

It seems that Deleuze and Guattari explicitly recognise this connection as they discuss the prophet as directing the movement by which religion becomes a war machine (1987, p. 383). They seem to utilise the category “prophet” here in much the same vein as Weber.

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