

Thousands gather for elaborate farewell to Moonie church founder known as their 'True Father'

Jill Reilly
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Rev. Sun Myung Moon died aged 92 on September 3 of complications due to pneumonia

Unification Church he founded is now run by his youngest son, while the business entities are run by another son

Ten of thousands of followers gathered today at the funeral of Sun Myung Moon, a self-proclaimed messiah who founded the Unification Church.

He was buried at a church-owned mansion modelled on the White House after a two-week mourning period.

His followers gathered at Gapyeong, an hour outside the capital Seoul, to say a final goodbye to Moon, a man who dubbed himself the 'True Parent' of those he married in mass ceremonies and who once proposed himself as 'supreme chairman' of a reunited Korea.



Family affair: Hyung-Jin Moon (front second right), International President of the Unification Church and youngest son of Evangelist Reverend Sun-Myung Moon, leads the honor guards in carrying the body of his father



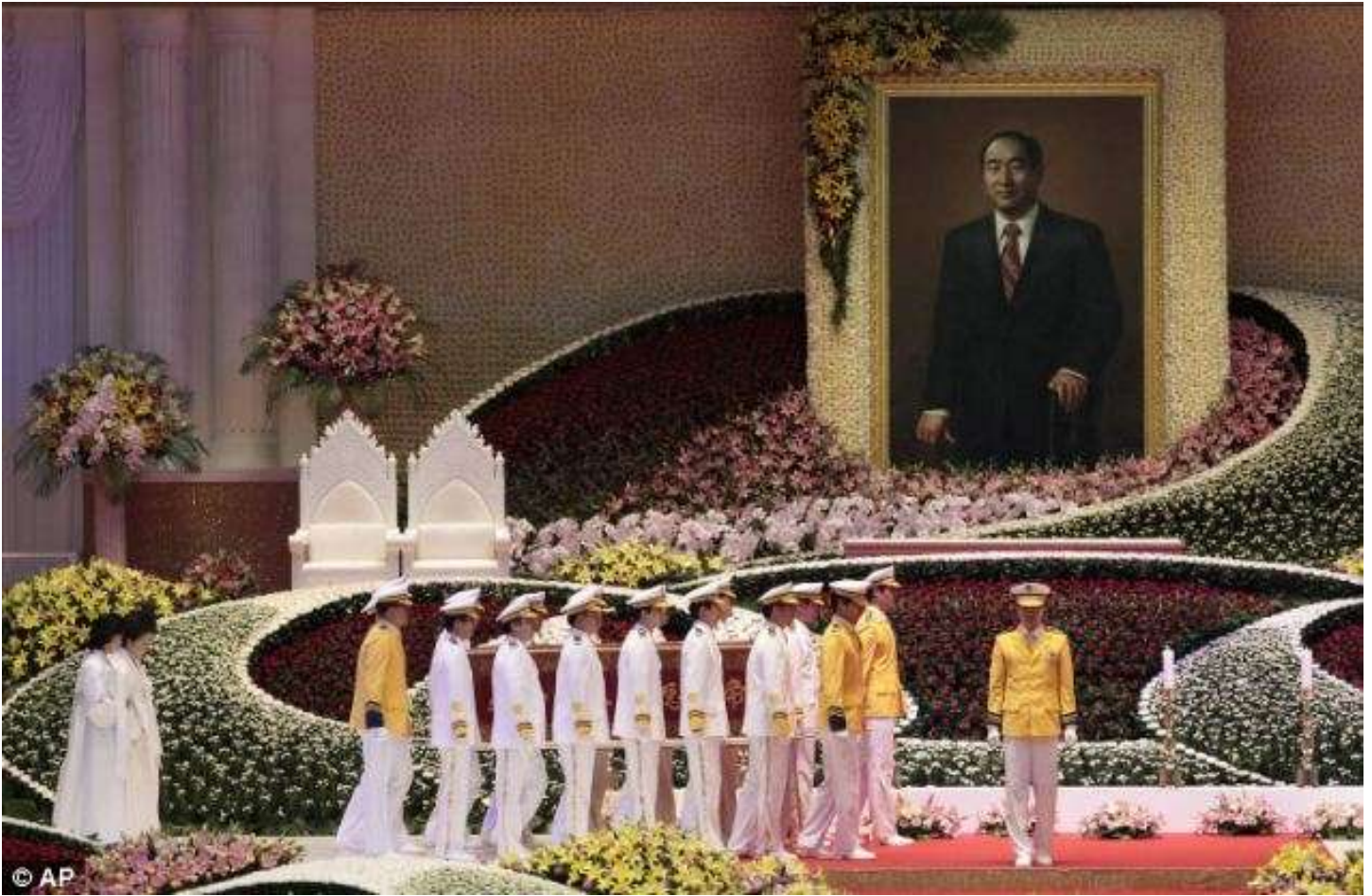
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Well-wishers: A packed crowd watched as the casket carrying Sun-Myung Moon, the late founder of the Unification Church, was carried at the CheongShim Peace World Center in Gapyeong, about 60 km (37 miles) northeast of Seoul



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United: Mourners raise arms after the funeral of the controversial founder



Ornate display: A giant image of the late founder was displayed at the service in front of hundreds of flowers

The church claimed that about 35,000 followers and mourners with some 15,000 from abroad attended the funeral service at the Cheongshim Peace World Center in Gapyeong, about 60 km east of Seoul.

The ceremony was officially titled 'Sun Myung Moon, the True Parent of Heaven and Earth, Memorial and Ascension Ceremony.'

Men dressed in black suits with white ties and women in white or ivory dresses for the ceremony.

Many sobbed quietly as the cortege carried Moon's red-and-gold casket to the altar inside a vast hall in the church complex.



Grieving: Han Hak Ja, wife of late Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon, weeps during his funeral ceremony. His wife remains the symbolic head of the mission that oversees the entire Tongil, Korean for Unification group



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Red roses: Flowers were a central theme of the service and single red roses encased in cellophane were handed out to mourners



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Procession: Moon is survived by his wife and 10 of their 13 children. But his eldest son Hyun Jin, the chairman of UCI, which owns the UPI news agency, did not attend the funeral. Church officials did not give details about why he was not there

Many mourners watched on live broadcasts around the campus.

Some offered roses and lilies, Moon's favourite flowers, and bowed before the portrait ringed with roses.

Church officials did not give details about why he was not there.

'His will is a divine will, different from normal people,' said 69-year-old office worker Jeong Hye-ok.

'I believe he will establish a foundation to build a heavenly world that unifies peace on earth.'

'He will be in our minds permanently,' said Lee Ok-su, a church choir member, her face flushed with emotion. 'He is our benevolent yet strict father.'



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Followers: Critics for years have vilified the church as a heretical and dangerous cult and questioned its murky finances and how it indoctrinates followers, described in derogatory terms as 'Moonies'



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Memorial: Believers of the Unification Church make a deep bow during the ceremony



Mourning: A family member carries a portrait of late Rev. Sun Myung Moon - he built a multibillion-dollar business empire stretching from the Korean Peninsula to the United States



Remembrance: More than 30,000 mourners, many weeping openly, attended the elaborate, flower-strewn funeral in South Korea

The funeral, which lasted more than two hours, began when men wearing military honor guard-style uniforms carried Moon's coffin into a multipurpose gymnasium.

They slowly carried it up red-carpeted steps decked with flowers and placed it in front of a large portrait of Moon.

Many mourners wept as a top church official said in a speech that Moon was moving into a spiritual world after completing the messianic role that God had asked of him.



Crowds: A funeral car loaded with a portrait of the late Sun Myung Moon drives past followers after his funeral ceremony



Weeping: Men dressed in black suits with white ties and women in white or ivory dresses for the ceremony. Many sobbed quietly as the cortege carried Moon's red-and-gold casket to the altar inside a vast hall in the church complex



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Flower-covered transport: A funeral car containing the body of late Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon drives past followers. He was buried at a church-owned mansion modeled on the White House today after a two-week mourning period

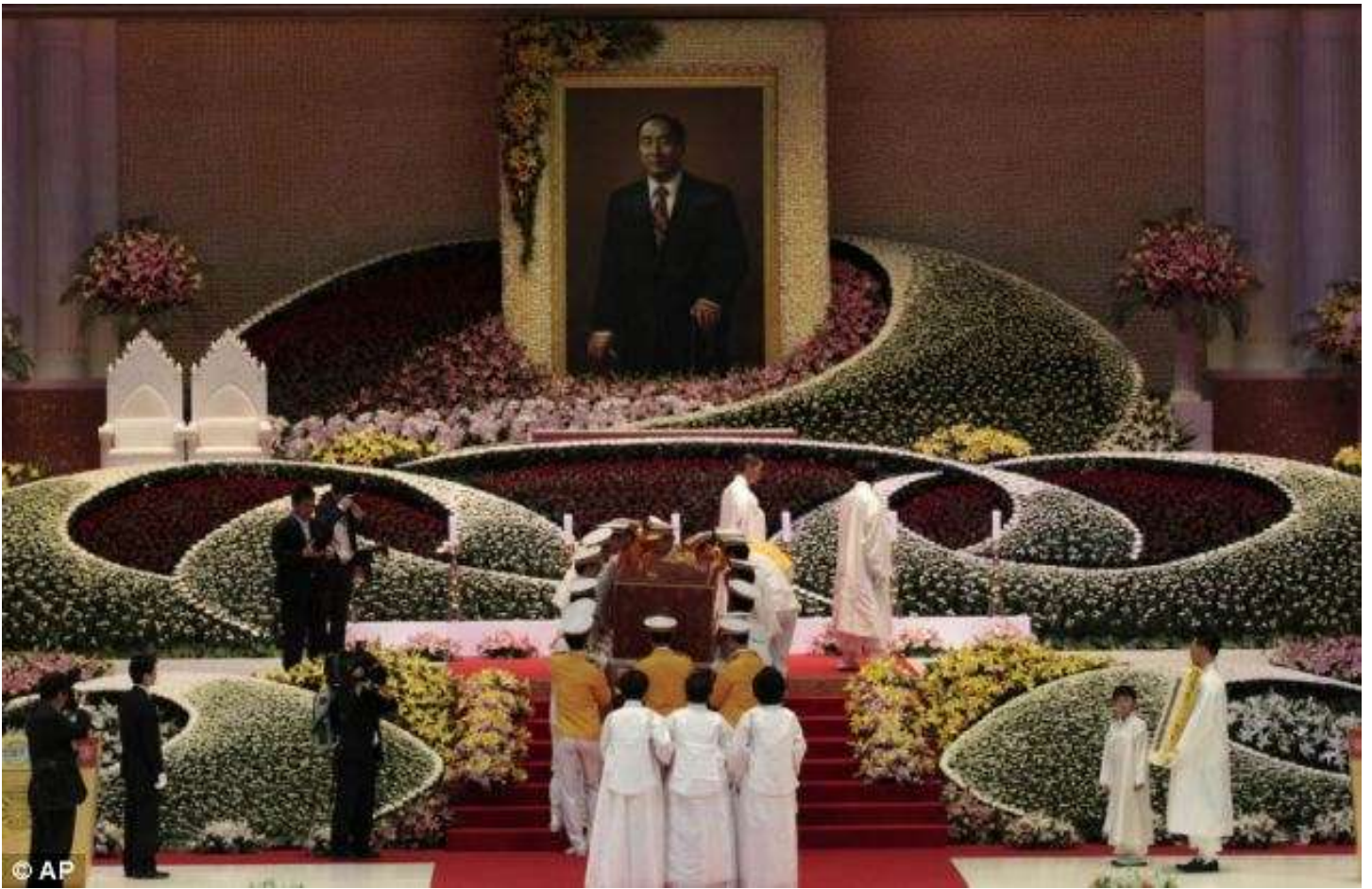


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Han Hak Ja (front), wife of late Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon, mourns her late husband while his the youngest son of the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, sings a hymn



Legacy: Rev. Sun Myung Moon died aged 92 on Sept. 3 of complications due to pneumonia. The church he founded is now run by his youngest son, while the business entities are run by another son



Popular: Those who could not get into the service watched on live broadcasts around the campus



Moon started the church after claiming Jesus appeared to him while he was praying as teenager

'God, why ... why did you call back our True Father so hurriedly?' Bo Hi Pak, chairman of the Unification Church-supported Korean Cultural Foundation, told the crowd.

'I'm so sad, and I just want to listen to his voice again,' said Jeon Myung-hu, a 43-year-old man who said he fasted for four days after hearing the news of Moon's death. 'His teachings about peace will remain forever.'

About 180,000 people visited Gapyeong during the mourning period before the funeral, according to church officials.

An estimated 7 million people paid homage at mourning sites around the world, they said.

The Unification Church claims to have 3 million followers around the world, though critics say the figure is no more than 100,000.

Moon, a staunch anti-communist who ran a business empire as well as a church and spent 30 years living in the United States, was born in what is now North Korea in 1920 and escaped to the South in 1950 after being sentenced to hard labour.

He died aged 92 on September 3 of complications due to pneumonia.

The church he founded is now run by his youngest son, while the business entities are run by another son.



Blessing: Moon and his wife bless the brides and the grooms in a mass wedding ceremony at Chamsil Olympic Stadium in Seoul in 2000



Mass nuptials: Couples from around the world participate in a mass wedding ceremony arranged by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church at Sun Moon University in Asan

His wife remains the symbolic head of the mission that oversees the entire Tongil, Korean for 'Unification' group.

Previously thousands of mourners had gathered for the ten-day as the founder lay in a glass-covered coffin at the headquarters of his Unification Church in South Korea.

Only senior church members and specially invited mourners were allowed to view the body. But that didn't stop the general public turning up in droves to pay their respects.

Critics for years have vilified the church as a heretical and dangerous cult and questioned its murky finances and how it indoctrinates followers, described in derogatory terms as 'Moonies.'

Moon is survived by his wife and 10 of their 13 children.

But his eldest son Hyun Jin, the chairman of UCI, which owns the UPI news agency, did not attend the funeral.

Church officials did not give details about why he was not there.