

Ruth and Marriage Migrant Women in Korea¹⁾

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Reading Ruth in the multicultural society of Korea

Globalization has increased the exchange of people among nations; according to a UN report, there are more than 200 million estimated international migrants²⁾ in the world today. Migrants comprise 3.1 percent of the global population in 2010³⁾ and female migrants are 49.0 percent of all international migrants. Korea has also now become a multicultural and multiracial society since the 1990s when migrants from all over the

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- 1) The paper is a revision of presentation at the 3rd Conference of the Society of Asian Bible Studies 2012, held in June 14th, 2012, at Sabah Theological Seminary, Malaysia.
- 2) Migration refers to the movement of people from one country to another; immigration the movement of people from their country to settle permanently in another. Cath Senker, *Immigration: Ethical Debates* (London: Wayland, 2011), 6. The term migration is, however, used to describe both cases of movement in this paper.

countries of Asia flowed into the nation. The population of migrants in Korea now mainly consists of foreign workers and women who have made international marriages. In the 1960s, Korea sent nurses and miners to Germany; in the 70-80s, construction workers to the Middle East. But in the late 1980s, Korea changed to be a country importing laborers from other nations. The numbers of migrants in Korea is as follows:⁴⁾

Indicator	1990	2000	2010
Population (thousands)	42,983	46,429	48,501
Estimated number of international migrants	572,053	568,071	534,817
Estimated number of female migrants	264,807	284,542	281,620
Estimated number of male migrants	307,246	283,529	253,197
International migrants as a percentage of population	1.3	1.2	1.1
Female migrants as percentage of all international migrants	46.3	50.1	52.7

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Justice in September 30th, 2008, foreign workers with working permits were about 700,000, 50% of which consisted of Koreans in China. Foreign workers are divided into three categories: the first are those from Islamic countries such as from Pakistan, Indonesia, and Bangladesh; the second from Buddhist countries, such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Cambodia; the third from communist countries such as Mongolia, Mainland China, and Vietnam. The channel for labor migration in Korea has been centralized to an employment approval system based on inter-government, the risk of labor migration turning into human trafficking was relatively reduced.⁵⁾ Among the migrants are about 300,000 female migrant women from Asian countries, which include 140,000 migrant labors, and 6000 women in the adult entertainment business.

3) United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2009). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2008). Cited from <http://esa.un.org/migration/> on June 6, 2012.

4) Ibid.

5) UN, 2006; Quoted from Bok Hyun-nam, *Understanding the Multicultural Families of International Marriage between Korean and Vietnamese* (Seoul: Jansowon Publisher), 2010, 103. (한국과 베트남 국제결혼을 통해 본 다문화 가족의 이해)

Reading the story of Ruth in the context of Korea's multicultural society, this paper aims at exploring the cultural discrimination against migrants by means of silence and segregation and also hopes to provoke Korean Christians to speak for the rights of migrants and to integrate with them by embracing them as neighbors in the community. Some analogies between those stories are found: First, in both cases, poverty is the main reason for the migration to a foreign land. The form of migration is intermarriage. Second, the migrant women in both societies experience cultural discrimination and segregation from the natives. Third, the life of migrant women is a struggle of survival.

Migration and Intermarriage

There are many different reasons why people migrate to another country for a time or permanently for a better life. The decision to migrate is difficult and painful, as it means leaving behind family and friends and travelling to an often-unknown destination. One of the basic reasons for migration is poverty. The ring structure of the first six verses of the Book of Ruth introduces a family who migrated from the poverty and who engaged with the native society through intermarriage:

- A Famine occurred in the land of Bethlehem (1:1a)
- B Migration (*halak*, *lagur*) of Elimelech's family to Moab (1:1b-2)
- C Death of Elimelech (1:3)
- D The two sons' marriage to Moabite women (1:4)
- C' Death of the two sons (1:5)
- B' Naomi's return (*halak lasub*) from Moab (1:6a)
- A' YHWH gave food to his people (1:6b)

The emptiness of food, a famine, in the land of Judah motivates a migration to the land of Moab (A); The fullness of food in the land of Judah motivates a return to the hometown (A'). AA' introduces the emptiness and fullness of food as the main reason for the movement of Elimelech's family between the homeland and the land of Moab. In BB,' the verb *halak* (go) is repeated to describe the movement of the family. The following infinitive verb, *lagur* (to migrant), in 1b is translated as "migrant," following Jack M. Sasson.⁶⁾ It specifically describes the movement as migration. Elimelech's

family lived in Moab as *gerim* (migrants). In the Old Testament, those who left Israel to become *gerim* (migrants) invariably sought escape from hunger (Gen 12:10; 26:3; 47:4; 2 Kgs 8:1) or war (2 Sam 4:3).⁷⁾ CC' share two verbs, *mut* (die) and *tisha'mer* (was left). They depict the isolation and desolation of women who are left after the death of male supporters. At the center (D), the narrator reports the intermarriage of Naomi's two sons to Moabite women. The introduction (vv. 1-6) illustrates how the themes of land, food, and family have contrasted, crisscrossed, and coalesced as they alternate between life and death.⁸⁾

By placing the intermarriage between Judahite men and Moabite women at the center of the chiasmic structure (4), the text shows that intermarriage is at issue. Most intermarriages between Israelites and foreigners are mentioned without any judgmental notes in Deuteronomic history. Gideon had a concubine in Shechem (Judg 8:30-31), Absalom's mother was the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur (2 Sam 3:3, 1 Chron 3:2), and Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonite (1 Kgs 14:2, 2 Chron 12:13). Foreign men who married Israelite women include Ithra the Ishmaelite (2 Sam 17:25) and the Phoenician father of Hiram the artisan (1 Kgs 7:13-14). Uriah the Hittite was married to Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:3). None of these intermarriages is condemned, either explicitly or implicitly.

There are also three passages in Deuteronomic history however where intermarriage is condemned (Judg 3:5-6, 1 Kgs 11:1-10, and 1 Kgs 16:31). Judges 3:5-6 states that the Israelites failed to exterminate the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan. They intermarried with the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites and as a result worshipped foreign gods and incurred the wrath of God.⁹⁾ Deuteronomy 7:1-4 (cf. Exod 34:14-16) prohibits intermarriage to Canaanites because it inevitably leads to idolatry. The list of nations prohibited for intermarriage in Deuteronomy 7:3-4 and Judges 3:5-6 does not include Moab.

6) The translation is cited from Jack M. Sassons' *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 14.

7) Sasson, *Ruth*, 16.

8) Phyllis Trible, "A Human Comedy," *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 168.

9) Deuteronomy 20:14 and 21:10-14 allow intermarriage to Canaanites in special circumstances.

The Moabite appears in the nationalities in the condemnation of Solomon's marriage to foreign women in 1 Kings 11:1-2. This condemnation seems to be based on Deuteronomy 23:4-9, which prohibits members of four nations - Egypt, Moab, Ammon, and Edom - from entering the congregation of the Lord.¹⁰⁾ The different list of the nations prohibited to intermarry implies different strata of the biblical texts in its assessment of intermarriage and reveals changes in the view on intermarriage. Shaye Cohen sees that intermarriage is hailed as an achievement in the earliest strata but gradually is seen not only as potentially dangerous but eventually as inherently sinful.¹¹⁾ Proverbs 2 and Ezra-Nehemiah show the postexilic laws against intermarriage (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 10:30; 13:23-29).

Migration through intermarriage has a long history and is a worldwide phenomenon, Korea being no exception. The dominant form of female migration in modern Korea is intermarriage. Recently, several social factors have increased the number of intermarriages in Korea. First is the need of brides in rural areas since men living in the country have difficulty in finding wives. Men with low incomes in urban areas also have difficulty in finding wives. Second, the numbers of brokers has increased as the Korean government changed the policy governing marriage brokers so that they can be established by permit to report. Third, Korean women tend to avoid early marriage as they began to live as career women with high education.

Asian women from less developed countries decide to marry Korean men to escape poverty and to support their family. Most intermarriages are arranged by international marriage brokers.¹²⁾ The serious problem for

10) Shaye Cohen, "Solomon and the Daughter of Pharaoh," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 16-17(1984-85), 23-24.

11) Cohen, "Solomon and the Daughter of Pharaoh," 37.

12) Despite slight differences country by country, the general procedure of international match making by marriage agencies is as follows: A marriage agency arranges a group visit to the country. In cooperation with local brokers, they set a meeting with prospective wives of the country. After the Korean man chooses his future wife, he marries her next day and fills out the documents at the local Korean embassy or consular office. After spending the first night together, the Korean husband leaves the country and invites her to Korea. About 45 days after she receives the spouse invitation from Korea, the bride comes to Korea. Employment fraud or sexual exploitation of women who enter

women who migrate for marriage, especially from less developed countries, is that they easily are the victim of human trafficking, deceived by international marriage brokers. As international marriage agencies pursue high profits from successful marriages, they often provide false information about the future bridegroom, such as occupation, drinking problem, mental disability, and promise a rich and comfortable life in Korea.

Cultural Discrimination against Women who Migrate for Marriage

Ruth is repeatedly introduced as a Moabite; her identity as a Moabite is important in the narrative. Fewell and Gunn explain the meaning of the literary allusion of 'Moab' in the Book of Ruth. Recalling the story of Lot in Genesis 19, they see that the attitude of Israelites toward Moabites shows righteous chauvinism and a moral superiority.¹³⁾ The tale of the sin of Baal-Peor also associates Moab with sexual perversity: "When Israel dwelt in Shittim the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab." The land is also associated with hostility (Num 22-24; Judg 3:12-30). The people of Moab invited the Israelites to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods (Num 25:1-5).

Amy-Jill Levine also points that Ruth's Gentile background remains a stigma: her Moabite ancestry associates her with an aggressive form of seduction and with the taint of idolatry.¹⁴⁾ Levine sees two reasons why Ruth could not fully mingle/incorporate with the women of Bethlehem; Ruth, the foreign woman, is sexually manipulative and therefore dangerous.

the country under entertainer visas represents the practical inexistence of distinction between migration and human trafficking. Kook Yum Han, "Importance of a Transactional Network in Asia to Prevent Marriage Migration of Human Trafficking Nature," in Byung Chul Hyun, *Seoul International Conference Against Human Trafficking in Migrant Women* (Seoul: Hanhak Munwha, 2010), 127.

- 13) Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "'A Son is Born to Naomi!': Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth," Alice Bach ed. *Women in the Hebrew Bible* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 236.
- 14) Amy-Jill Levine, "Ruth," in Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe eds., *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1992), 78-79.

Moreover, her unconventional actions are acceptable in this book only because she is a Moabite. Her Gentile associations prevent her from being fully incorporated into the covenant community. Ruth remains “Ruth, the Moabite.”

Deuteronomy 23:3-6 (cf. Neh 13:1; Num 20:14-21; 21:21-24) excludes both Moabites and Ammonites from the “Assembly of God,” and the context of this legislation reinforces the association of Moab with improper sexuality. Moabites, along with Ammonites, cannot enter into the Assembly of YHWH, because they are *mamzer*. The Hebrew, *mamzer*, appears twice - here and Zechariah 9:6. In Zechariah, the word refers to the future people living in Ashdod. It refers to the children, born between Judahites and Ashdodites. The emphasis of Ruth’s identity as Moabite implies biblical prejudice against the nation, an aggressive form of seduction, the taint of idolatry, and the mixture of races. It also reveals the superiority of Israelites over Moabites.

Moving from Moab to Bethlehem with her Judean mother in law, Ruth faces various forms of cultural discrimination. Here exclusion among people by means of silence is an obvious form of discrimination. The silence ignores, if not denies, her presence on two occasions: One is when Ruth enters into the city of Bethlehem and the other is when Ruth bears a son. These two texts correspond to each other.¹⁵⁾

A Ties of kinship are at issue (1:8-18)

B The women of Bethlehem speak to Naomi; the afflictions received by Naomi from the Lord are spoken of; Naomi gives herself a name (1:19-21)

A’ Ties of kinship are at issue (4:1-12)

B’ The women of Bethlehem speak to Naomi; the blessings received by Naomi from the Lord are told; the women of Bethlehem give Naomi’s nursing a name (4:14-17)

In both units, the women of Bethlehem do not engage in conversation with Ruth but ignore her. In chapter 1, when Ruth comes to Bethlehem,

15) Bertman also found a symmetry between these two units. S. Bertman, “Symmetrical Design in the Book of Ruth,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84(1965): 167.

neither the women of Bethlehem nor Naomi, pays attention to Ruth. Donna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, unlike Phyllis Trible who finds Naomi to be a model of selflessness and supportive of Ruth, read the character of Naomi as less sanguine. They point out five notable silences in the book of Ruth: 1. Naomi's silence at Ruth's final determination to go on with her to Bethlehem; 2. Naomi's silence about Ruth on her arrival in Bethlehem; 3. Naomi's silence about her kinsman Boaz, until prompted by Ruth's story of success at gleaning; 4. Ruth's silence about her own part in the threshing floor scene when she returns to Naomi the next morning; 5. Naomi's silence about Ruth at the birth of Obed. From these five silences in the book of Ruth, Fewell and Gunn find Naomi to be selfish, a woman of her own self-interest.

If Fewell and Gunn find the selfishness of Naomi in these five notable silences, a Korean reader may notice cultural discrimination of natives against foreigners through the silence of Naomi. It is like a black woman who comes to the United States after marrying to a white man. Or it can be compared to a migrant woman from a less developed country who comes to Korea after marrying a Korean man. In the scene of arrival among the women of Bethlehem, Naomi cried out that she had gone away full but returned empty. She speaks as though Ruth were invisible. Trible interprets it as "this aged widow is overpowered by her sadness of divinely inspired calamity."¹⁶ Athalya Brenner also perceives that "foreign workers are invisible to the dominant culture."¹⁷ Fewell and Gunn see that Naomi is silent about Ruth because "at the heart of Naomi's speech is Naomi."¹⁸ Naomi's conversation with Ruth in chapter 1 shows that she is the woman of tradition. She believes that a woman's happiness and fulfillment require men, a husband or sons. She seems to share the traditional Israelite view on foreign daughters-in-law such as Rebekah who was displeased with Esau's Hittite wives (Genesis 27:46). She insisted that her daughters in law return to their mother's house. The silence of Naomi is rooted in her internalized cultural discrimination or prejudice against the Moabites. She might be even

16) Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 174.

17) A. Brenner, "Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the politics of Exogamy," in A. Brenner ed. *A Feminist Companion to the Bible: Ruth and Esther* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 160.

18) Fewell and Gunn, "A Son is Born to Naomi!" 234.

humiliated by the company of her Moabite daughter in law. Like Naomi, the women of the town speak as though Ruth were invisible. The silence turns down the existence of a woman in the midst of other people.

Again in chapter 4, Ruth appears invisible. The women of Bethlehem acclaimed the mother of Obed as Naomi, not Ruth (4:17). Fewell and Gunn interpret that “Naomi’s perception of the event is again mirrored through the speech of others.”¹⁹⁾ She sees the baby as her own. Levine interprets it as an ambivalent attitude toward foreigners.²⁰⁾ The silence about Ruth in the celebration of Obed’s birth and the attributing of him as Naomi’s son indicate that Ruth is socially excluded by claiming the legitimacy of social tradition and the laws. According to the Levirate law in the Bible, the son whom Ruth bore is the heir of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi and the father in law of Ruth, because Boaz is the *go’el* of Elimelech. Although the tradition lists Obed as the son of Ruth in later genealogy, the custom behind the book regards the son as the son of Naomi, which is proper according to the ancient law.

If the town women ignored Ruth through silence, the town elders devalued her by referring to her as “the woman” and “this young woman” (4:12). Ruth was never called by her own name in their speech, while the ancestral mothers of Israel, Rachel, Leah, and Tamar were compared to Ruth by names (4:11-12). Also, the speech of the elders shows that these men see Ruth as fulfilling the traditional values of fertility and the continuation of a male lineage.

In the Book of Ruth the narrator’s view on intermarriage between Judahite men and Moab women is ambiguous. The narrator is the only one to notice Ruth at the end of chapter 1, the homecoming scene. The placement of Ruth between the book of Judges and Samuel-Kings implies a great achievement by this marriage that produced the forefather of David’s family.²¹⁾ Still, the narrator ends the book with the genealogy in which only

19) Fewell and Gunn, “A Son is Born to Naomi!,” 235.

20) Levine, “Ruth,” 79.

21) The book of Ruth is found in the Hebrew Bible in the writings, among the five Megillot, which is taken to indicate that the book was written later than the prophetic writings. Leon Morris, however, asserts that there is nothing to indicate that this arrangement was primitive. In the LXX, the oldest ancient version of the Hebrew Scriptures, the book of Ruth is placed among the historical books. Josephus counted twenty two books in the Canon, and

the names of male ancestors appear in the list. Unlike in chapter 1, the narrator does not acknowledge the name of Ruth in chapter 4.

Like Ruth, women who have migrated through marriage in Korea suffer from cultural discrimination by native Koreans. Those who buy the conventional prejudices of a society are also those who will impute these to others and who will adhere to the fundamental value systems of the social structure. The dominant system in our present concern is nationalism, xenophobia, and exclusivism in Korea. Living in a uni-racial society for thousands of years, Koreans tend to be exclusive towards foreigners. Under Confucian influence, a Korean family tends to be oppressive and enforces daughters-in-law to be modest and submissive to their in-laws. Those who fail to survive in marriage enter the sex industry and suffer from economic as well as mental and social oppression.

Heavily influenced by Confucianism, the Korean family expects a daughter in law to be modest and diligent and serve her in-laws. This patriarchal view of wives and daughters-in-law enforces migrant women to be submissive to their husbands and in-laws. International marriage brokers advertise Vietnamese women as being “young, beautiful, modest, and obedient,” the ideal girl figure of Confucianism. A Vietnamese migrant woman, named Han Huin who met her husband in the factory in Vietnam and came to Korea in 1996, explains the cultural differences of gender role division within the family. She states that while there is no discrimination between men and women in sharing the work of household in Vietnam, the wife is forced to do all the housework in Korea. In Vietnam, whoever is available, both works for money and does housework together.²²⁾ Many

numbered Ruth together with Judges. The very old Hebrew-Aramaic list of the books of the Old Testament given in MS. 54 of the library of the Greek patriarchate in Jerusalem arranges the books in the order of “Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Ruth, Job, Judges. These early evidences show that the book of Ruth is read among the books reckoned as historical, not among the Writings. Leon Morris, *Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1968), 229-31. Cf. J. P. Audet, “A Hebrew-Aramaic List of Books of the Old Testament in Greek Transcription,” *Journal of Theological Studies* I(1950): 135-154.

22) Kim, Hyun-mi, “Migration of Love?: Marriage Migration Process of Vietnamese Women through International Marriage,” in *Asian Women Who Cross the Borders* (Seoul: Ewha Woman’s University Press, 2009), 32-33. 김

women who have migrated for marriage complain that their in-laws and husband do not accept them as who they are or what kind of vision they have. They are instead treated simply as “the ignorant from a poor country” or “the one who married for money.” They often called the migrant woman as “this.” And a migrant woman witnesses that whenever a poor country is shown in television, her mother-in-law points it out to her, saying, “Look, there is your country.”²³⁾ The family also power by controlling her visa.

The Life of Marriage Migrant Women: Humiliation & Survival

The story of Ruth is not a beautiful folktale, although it seems to have a happy ending. Even despite this happy ending, Brenner questions whom the happiness is for.²⁴⁾ The life of Ruth in Bethlehem was harsh. Tribble explains her story, saying “Chapter two portrays Ruth’s struggle to survive physically, chapter three represents her struggle to survive culturally.”²⁵⁾ She gleaned in the field to support her mother in law and herself. The biblical laws or customs to make gleaning of agricultural products accessible to the poor are codified in Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19. Ruth was a self-employed worker who supported herself and her mother in law by it. Moreover, she was about to be abused by the men from the town. The field was a place of some menace for an unattached young foreign woman, as the constant reference to the risk of unwelcome attention and molestation makes clear, and this is something of which Naomi herself should have been aware. And Ruth had to seduce an old man and marry him.

She brought herself to the place of humility, the threshing floor, to restore the covenant responsibility of Boaz as *go’el*. The threshing floor represented a place of humility in Hosea 9:1 where it says, “You have loved a harlot’s hire, upon all threshing floors.” The Levite woman in Judges 19

현미. “사랑의 이주?: 국제결혼 베트남 여성의 결혼 이주 과정.” 김영옥 외. “국경을 넘는 아시아 여성들: 다문화 사회를 만들다” (서울: 이화여자대학교 출판부, 2009), 32-33.

23) Kim, “Migration of Love?” 34.

24) Brenner, “Ruth as a Foreign Worker,” 161.

25) Phyllis Tribble, “Ruth,” in Carol Meyers et al ed., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 146.

was found at the threshing floor after being molested by the men of the town overnight. Ruth is directed to make herself attractive and go down to the threshing floor to “sleep” (*shakab*) with the man (3:4). She is to uncover his “feet,” a euphemism for genitals, and then he will tell her what to do.

The use of Hebrew words that contrast Boaz and Ruth in chapters two and three show Ruth’s wisdom of survival. In chapter two, Boaz invokes a blessing upon Ruth from YHWH under whose protective “wings” (*kenapayim*) she has taken refuge (2:12). In answering Boaz Ruth tells him, “Spread your wing (*kanap*) over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.” By a wordplay on wing, Ruth challenges Boaz to heed his earlier prayer for her blessing. This foreign woman calls an Israelite man to responsibility.²⁶⁾ Ruth is a woman of *chesed* (1:8; 2:20; 3:10) in the sense that she provides a corrective to Boaz’s initial passivity for being a *go’el* of Elimelek. She arranges their meeting, motivates his willingness to serve as a redeemer, and provides him with a rationale to make his relationship with the Gentile widow socially acceptable.

The Hebrew word, *chail*, is also applied to both Ruth and Boaz. Boaz is called a man of worth, *ish gibbor chail* in 2:1 and in 3:11, Boaz calls Ruth a woman of worth, *’eset chail*, the same phrase that Proverbs uses to depict the “capable woman” (NRSV; Prov 31:10). However, after being loyal to her family and restoring the house of her in-laws, Ruth received no credit but Naomi was applauded. The genealogy accredited Boaz as great grandfather of David.

The social status of migrant women in Korea is insecure and unstable. Their status is vulnerable especially during the first two years of their marriage. Marriage migrants hold an F-2 visa which allows the visa holder to reside in Korea for a year. But a foreigner can then apply for a green card (F-5) two years after the marriage, which means that marriage migrants have to renew their F-2 visa in the first year after their marriage; also, if they travel outside Korea, they have to renew their F-2 visa. Because of the unstable visa status, migrant women depend upon their spouse. Some marriage migrant women end up in the sex industry. Those deceived by international marriage brokers and those who divorced before earning a green card through marriage flow into the local Korean sex industry and the so-called red-light districts near US military bases. Since mid-1990, some

26) Trible, “Ruth,” 147.

three to four thousand women per year have come to Korea under entertainment visas. Most are from the Philippines. From early 2000, a large number of migrant women have come from the former Soviet countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, and Far East Russia.²⁷⁾ The foreign women in the sex industry, especially the red-light district in the areas around US military camps, suffer from the delayed payment of salary, confiscation of passport, and forced prostitution.²⁸⁾

The human rights of migrant women are often threatened by their own husbands. Among the counseling cases, the three main concerns are domestic violence, visa status, and conflict with in-laws. The divorce rate of migrant women has increased from 2,382 (2005) to 8,300 (2009).²⁹⁾ Many migrant women live under poor conditions. Even though they want to divorce, they have not much choice but to stay in the marriage because if they divorce, they have to reimburse all the expenses for the marriage or pay a penalty for the termination of marriage within one or two years.

The Korean government changed its policy of supporting migrant families in 2005-6. The program includes the prohibition of illegal intermarriage brokerage, support to adjust to Korean society, support for the victims of domestic violence, support of children from international marriage, support programs to change cultural prejudice of foreigners, etc.³⁰⁾ However, the program shows a limitation in that it does not focus on developing migrant women's potentiality and help them to manage their subjective life but attempts to adjust them into a patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Reading the book of Ruth within the multicultural context of Korean

27) 2,022 people in 2008; 2,095 in 2009 came to Korea with E-6 visa. Cited from "International Standards on Human Trafficking: Implementation Strategy of Korea," 33.

28) Durebang, a Christian center for women in the sex-industry of US camps in Gyeonggi Province, Korea, surveys migrant women who work in the clubs around the US military camps. They responded that these three concerns are the main exploitation they suffer. "International Standards on Human Trafficking: implementation Strategy of Korea," 34.

29) Nam, *Understanding of Multicultural Family*, 112.

30) Nam, *Understanding of Multicultural Family*," 108.

society, this paper highlights the similarities in three categories: 1) Migration comes from the suffering of poverty and through intermarriage. 2) Both Ruth and modern migrants suffer from cultural discrimination by the natives. Ruth is ignored by the silence of her own mother in law and by the town women. She is devalued by the town elders who named her “this young woman” instead of calling her by name. 3) The life is exposed to humility and danger. Ruth was exposed to the dangerous place of threshing field and slept with Boaz. She gained no credit for her sincerity to her family and society. Yet the biblical tradition and the narrator paid her attention through memory.

As Brenner observes, Ruth might be a prime example that represents the reality of marriage migrant woman: “a low-class migrant woman, a worker without property, will become invisible in the host community. She will be absorbed rather than integrated.”³¹⁾ Although the life of Ruth is blessed and she was applauded as a capable woman, her action may offer no means for improving the social system of Bethlehem and her story may offer no prescriptions for changing the circumstances of women, impoverished and unprotected. Although Ruth was like Tamar who is more righteous than Judah, she gained no credit or blessing in the Book. Yet, outside the book of Ruth, the Gospel of Matthew claims Ruth as the mother of her child. Moreover, it places her alongside Tamar, the wife of Uriah, and Mary as the only women in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:3, 5, 6, 16). Her various actions of the covenant love toward her mother in law and God, which contravene social expectations, locate Ruth not only among David’s ancestors but also among the other unconventional women who appear in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, (Matt 1:5).

Like the biblical tradition that remembered the name Ruth and recovered her place as the mother of her child, Obed, we may acknowledge migrants in our society as who they are and what they vision in life. Church mission centers for migrant workers, such as Sungseongwon, Galilee Church and Jubilee Church, began their activities in the 1990s. The Korean Church Mission Council for Foreign Workers was organized in 1993. Korean mission centers for marriage migrant women include Durebang, Seoul Migrant Women Center, Chungbuk Migrant Women Center. In the early stage of mission, the churches acted upon the protection of their human

31) Brenner, “Ruth as a Foreign Worker,” 162.

rights. Now the centers are actively involved in helping them to integrate with society, living as a member of Korean society, and not as foreigners. We need to see them as members of our community and not as foreigners. Xenophobia is another thing to overcome in our society. As Christians, we need to remember that God reminds Israelites that they were *ger* (migrant) in the land of Egypt (Exod 23:9; Lev 19:33-34) and asks us to be *ger* in this world and to embrace the foreigners of the land as neighbors and even as families.

Abstract

The present article reads the biblical story of a marriage migrant woman, Ruth, in the context of multi-cultural modern Korean society. An exegetical reading of the book of Ruth reveals the similarities in the story of Ruth and modern Korean migrant women through international marriage. In both cases, poverty is the main reason for the family migration to a foreign land. The life of migrant women in Korea and Ruth is a struggle to survive for her family. And in both contexts, the migrant women in both societies experience cultural discrimination by means of silence. Although the town elders and women in Bethlehem neglected the presence of Ruth, the narrator reminded the readers of divine providence in her life. Some Korean churches and migrant centers showed solidarity with migrant women in Korea. This study may contribute to raise consciousness to see the violent feature that lies behind the silence against foreigners and invite Christians to speak for the marginalized in the society, overcoming the prejudice against them.

Key Words

Ruth, migration, international marriage, multi-culture

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