

**Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau, eds. *Reading Ruth in Asia.*
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This collection of essays had its origins in the 2012 meeting of the Society for Asian Biblical Studies in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, at which the Book of Ruth ran as an undercurrent through the conference. In an introductory essay, the two editors, Jione Havea and Peter Lau, engage not only with the experience of reading Ruth *again* in Asia, indicating something that will be old and new, but also more generally with complex issues associated with reading the Bible in the context of Asia. They confront at the outset the vexing question of Asia and its borders or boundaries, noting the many factors that render them porous. This is the context, with all its multiplicities, in which they locate the authors and essays contained in this volume, not in numbered order but according to the complexities of issues and insights with which they engage. In the concluding paragraphs, they situate their approach within more traditional parameters.

In the first essay beyond the introduction, “Another Postcolonial Reading of the Book of Ruth,” co-editor Peter Lau focuses on the “world of the text” and those intertexts that shape characterization in the text. In his careful study of characterization, he turns a postcolonial lens on Ruth refracted through the notion of ‘hybridity’. Lau includes YHWH among the characters, noting the brevity of YHWH’s appearances in the narrative compared with the providence of this character that traverses the entire narrative. Lau then reads either the world behind or world in front of the text, depending on when one dates the text, bringing to this a postcolonial lens. He argues finally that such a reading not be imposed on the text, a challenge for all engaged hermeneutists.

Sin-lung Tong, brings Homi Bhabha’s theory of mimicry into dialogue with Ruth’s confession in her article, “The Key to Successful Migration? Rereading Ruth’s Confession (1:16-17) through the Lens of Bhabha’s Mimicry”. She calls readers caught in a colonial web to gaze back at the colonizer, a form of mimicry that can begin to shatter that web. This call is succinct but clear and resounding and enables Tong to bring a ‘freshness’ to her rereading of Ruth’s confession. She then turns that lens on contemporary Hong Kong.

Another new lens facilitates the reading of the relationship between Naomi and Ruth in Jan Lin’s article “‘Who Is More to You than Seven Sons’: A Cross-Textual Reading between the Book of Ruth and *A Pair of Peacocks to the Southeast Fly*.” Through the poem, Lin engages the complexity of family relationships, especially mothers and sons and the daughter-in-law who joins a family through marriage. This enables her to read Naomi in a new way.

The complexity hidden beneath the seemingly simple designation ‘Asia’ becomes visible as this volume unfolds and Roi Nu takes readers into the lives of the Kachin, an ethnic group constituting only around 2% of Myanmar’s population. In his article “A Reinterpretation of Levirate Marriage in Ruth 4:1-12 for Kachin Society”, Nu demonstrates by way of careful analysis his claim that the marriage of Boaz and Ruth is not according to the Levirate custom but is more like the *hpunau gaida hta ai*, the “picking up the widow of a lineage brother” in his Kachin culture. This article further demonstrates the rich diversity of contextual interpretation contained within this volume as well as alerting readers to ethical dimensions associated with it.

Elaine W. F. Goh undertakes an intertextual reading of Ruth 3:11 and Proverbs 31:10 with a focus on the *Eshet Hayil* or Woman of Strength who appears in both texts. She asks how her interpretation of these two texts might be presented to Chinese women answering her own query with her reading of ancient Israelite women and personified wisdom. She names her reading lens a ‘hermeneutic of consent’ adding further to the rich diversity of Asian readings that populate this volume.

The subsequent essay shifts the context of reading from China to India as Surekha Nelavala undertakes a reading of the Book of Ruth through the lens of Indian marriage and family structures (her subtitle) in an article whose main title is “Patriarchy: a Threat to Human Bonding”. She makes her focus the relationship between Naomi and Ruth read through the lens of household structures, both those of ancient Israel and of contemporary India, as she wants to engage the text beyond patriarchy and/or feminism as interpretive lenses. Her article offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between Ruth and Naomi as well as on methodological issues.

At the beginning of his article, “The Boaz Solution: Reading Ruth in Light of Australian Asylum Seeker Discourse”, Anthony Rees grapples with the question of whether Australia can be considered a part of Asia, opting for the notion of ‘fluidity’ of boundaries as a way of addressing the issue. Against this background, he takes up one of the most vexing issues currently facing Australia in the context of Asia and indeed the world, namely asylum seeking and brings this into dialogue with the Book of Ruth. This provides another new lens for reading to complement the unfolding collection.

The final article in the collection is that of Jione Havea, the co-editor (the volume is framed by the two co-editors’ articles), namely “Stirring Naomi: Another Gleaning at the Edges of Ruth 1”. He reads Naomi and her narrative through the lens of his Tongan culture, raising or stirring up new questions, ones that are challenging to readers in their newness, their edgy-ness. He invites consideration of and conversation with those absent even from the narrative.

This volume makes manifest the rich diversity that characterizes contemporary Asian biblical interpretation—it is rich in methodological diversity but even more so hermeneutically as well as being broad in its location/s. This should not surprise us given the complexity of both contemporary biblical scholarship and of the context we name as Asia. The Society of Asian Biblical Scholarship (SABS) has, however, made these features visible in a new way. This volume continues that process both in relation to the scholars and their scholarship as well as their context in ways that both

enrich and challenge international biblical scholarship. We in the various associations of such scholars are grateful for this volume and the challenge into the future to which it invites us.



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