

## ARTICLES

# Mongolian Migrants in a Korean Missional Church: The Case of Nasom Community

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### Abstract

Ever since Lesslie Newbigin's missional ecclesiology was introduced to South Korean churches in 2000, Korean scholars and pastors have been reaching beyond church growth theory to explore alternative and practical models. Missional ecclesiology led them to refine their ecclesiology and to restore the essence of the Korean church. This paper examines Nasom Community for Mongolian Migrants as a model of missional church in Korea. This study first describes the situation of Mongolian migrants in Korea. Secondly, the missionary vision and missionary strategies of Nasom Community, and how they are implemented in practice, are explored. Finally, the mission of Nasom Community is reviewed. This case shows the missionary potential of the Korean church for Asian mission.

**Keywords:** Missional ecclesiology; Nasom Community; Korean church; Mongolian migrants; Asian mission

### Introduction

The Korean church began as a missional church. While Western Protestant missions originated from mission societies, the Korean church was a missionary community from the beginning. Protestantism entered Korea through Western missionaries in 1885, and the Independent Korean Presbytery was organized in 1907 where Koreans were ordained as pastors (Moffett 1962: 55). Then in 1913 the Presbyterian General Assembly was organized and sent missionaries to Shandong, China. In only 30 years, the Korean church had become a missionary-sending church. At the time of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, the Korean church was still young. But in the 2000s it was sending more than 10,000 missionaries, and by the end of 2017 it was sending the second highest number of missionaries among all countries (Byun

2018: 317). Korean churches today play a central role in world mission, serving Asia, Africa and South America.

However, the Korean church's missionary work is not without problems. Korean church missions may be characterized as church-focused, self-expanding and individualistic (Han 2010: 77). Korean Christians are used to understanding mission as church-focused. This was naturally the influence of Western missionaries and their missiology since the nineteenth century. From the 1980s, missions conducted by single church units had great impact and Korean church missions acquired the tendency to focus on the local church's own self-expansion. This was influenced by the church growth movement that greatly influenced the Korean church at the time, the result being to reduce missions to an event of the church rather than the event of the Kingdom of God for the world. The church growth movement directed all the church's resources to numerical increase in visible church membership. This naturally also narrowed Christians' focus on individual spirituality.

Since the 2000s, the Korean church has faced a crisis of stagnation and loss of social influence. In this situation, some scholars and pastors have suggested that missional ecclesiology is a solution. That is why Lesslie Newbigin's missional ecclesiology that emerged in UK and then US academia in the 1980s and 90s gained attention in Korea in the 2000s (Korean Society of Mission Studies, 2015: 198). Newbigin's *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* showed us how to seek the missional nature of church facing secularization and Neopaganism in the Western World (Newbigin 1954). The missional church movement arose during the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. The movement seeks to rethink and redefine the nature of the Church and create a new paradigm in which churches are seen as missional in nature. A missional church is a Christian community that is focused on engaging with its surrounding community and actively participating in God's mission in the world (Han 2019: 45). This approach emphasizes the church's role in reaching out to the entire world outside the church and in local context.

Missional churches seek to break down the barriers between the church and the world by actively seeking to understand the needs and challenges facing their surrounding community. This involves building relationships with people in the community, engaging in acts of service and justice, and sharing the gospel in relevant and meaningful ways. Missional ecclesiology was a practical theology to overcome the dominant church growth perspective. It afforded an opportunity to again ask what the church is and to re-establish Korean ecclesiology. The missional church movement is a response to the changing cultural context in which churches operate. It seeks to provide a more relevant and effective approach to fulfilling the church's

mission in the world. Nasom Community is made up of several institutions including Nasom Church (<http://www.nasomchurch.com>). Nasom church, a local church, is a part of Nasom Community.

This study examines Nasom Community as a Korean church that practises this essential mission of the church. Nasom Community is a critical case to study for keeping the nature of missional church and reaching out to migrants who were excluded in Korean society. Nasom Community which is unique in sending migrants back their countries for mission, is a case of missional church in Korea. Nasom Community is involved in both local and overseas mission. This study first examines the situation of Korean migrants and the relationship between Korea and Mongolia to understand the context of Nasom Community's mission to Mongolians. Second, the ministry and activities of each segment of the community to identify the missionary vision and strategy of Nasom Community is investigated. Third, the findings from the perspective of missional ecclesiology is assessed. Finally, suggestions are made for the Korean church may become a missional church for Asia as a channel of *Missio Dei*.

## **Mongolian migrants in Korea**

### **The situation of immigrants in Korea**

The number of foreigners staying in Korea began to increase in the early 1990s with the influx of manufacturing workers from China, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. During this period, the need for foreign workers for domestic production increased due to rising wages, avoidance of 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult), low birth rate, aging population and high educational attainment. Therefore, an industrial trainee system, an employment permit system and a visiting employment system were implemented for foreign workers. Many of these workers are engaged in manufacturing or menial service, and most of their labour costs less than that of Korean citizens, which helps alleviate human resource shortages in these sectors. But the influx of foreigners is not just limited to blue collar industries. In the process of economic growth and transition to high-tech industries, the number of high-wage foreign workers is increasing, and foreign high-skilled people are entering various sectors in major corporations.

According to a report compiled by the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, the number of foreign residents living in Korea reached 2.13 million as of November 2021, increasing fourfold since 2006 (Newspower 2022). According to monthly statistics, the number decreased from 2,524,656 in 2019 to 2,135,689 by the end of June 2020 in the aftermath of Covid-19 (Christiandaily 2020). In 2022, the number of foreign residents was 2,245,921, of whom 849,804 were from China,

235,007 from Vietnam, 201,681 from Thailand, 156,562 from the United States, 79,136 from Uzbekistan, 57,452 from the Philippines, 56,995 from Russia, 53,038 from Mongolia, 50,841 from Indonesia, 49,240 from Cambodia etc. (seoul.go.kr). However, the number of migrants in Korea is expected to continue to increase in the future as Korea's population ages and birthrate falls.

The Ministry Data Institute (2022) shared the results of a self-reported survey report on the religious life of 445 foreigners living in Ansan and vicinity from 4 July to 22 August 2022. According to this survey, 8% of the participants are currently Protestant, and more are Buddhists at 12%. More people responded that they have become non-religious after migrating to Korea, and the proportion of people adhering to each religion also decreased after migration. In addition, when asked if they had been encouraged to join a religion in Korea, 71% responded that they had not. Meanwhile, a high proportion of foreign migrants are favourable to Protestantism.

Protestantism topped all categories when asked to identify "the religion that has affection for migrants", "the religion that best understands the difficulties of migrants", and "the religion that provides practical help to migrants". Of the non-religious migrants, 44.5 % responded that they may be open to Protestantism in the future, followed by Buddhism (31.1%), Catholicism (3.8%) and Islam (1.5%). Migrants who attended religious events had positive experiences because they "felt peace of mind" (41.9%) and were "welcomed warmly" (31.5%), suggesting that the Korean church should become a community of welcome and hospitality. As the number of migrants in Korea increases significantly, Korean churches must be attentive to missions and strategic ministry to migrants. Migrant missions are as important as overseas missions.

### Mongolian migrants in Korea

Mongolian people began entering Korea after diplomatic relations were established in 1990. They came pursuing the "Korean Dream" of economic prosperity. Especially with the implementation of the employment permit system and President Roh Moo Hyun's visit to Mongolia in May 2006, migration to Korea exploded (*Korea News* 2006). The Mongolian government asked the Korean government to accept more Mongolian workers, and the president and other government officials visited Mongolia and signed a memorandum of understanding to permit entry of Mongolian workers into Korea. The number of Mongolian migrants has already exceeded 53,038 in Korea, which is nearly 1.6% of the Mongolian population. Mongolia's most important source of national finance is Mongolian workers in Korea.

About 70% of Mongolian workers in Korea are highly educated people who graduated from community college or higher education. Many of them are also young people in their early thirties. This tells us that most of Mongolians visiting Korea are the elites in the upper-middle class or young and competent leaders with the potential to shape public opinion in the future. These are the people lining up outside the Korean Embassy in Ulaanbaatar to enter the small country called Korea. Mongolia was once at the centre of world history and geopolitically located next to the neighbouring countries of China and Russia at the heart of the central Asian Silk Road. Mongolia is also a museum of religions containing Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Buddhism and shamanism. Therefore, there is a potential place for Asian mission.

## The missionary vision and strategy of Nasom Community

### The missionary vision of Nasom Community

Nasom Church was established on 5 October 1997 in the basement of a building in Gwangjin District in Seoul. The church belongs to the Seoul Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), and naturally began with believers who shared a vision for migrant and multicultural ministry. In 2011, it became an organized church and formed the Nasom Community (Co.) that operates an International Mongolian School, Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Cultural Promotion Centre, Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, and Nasom Multi-culture Children Care Centre. The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, a branch of Nasom Community, was established on 28 January 1996 in Seongdong District of Seoul before Nasom Church was established.

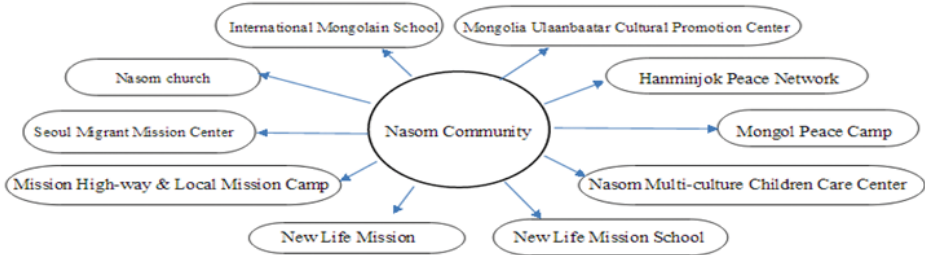


Figure 1 Organisation Chart of Nasom Community

The community motto is “serving the migrants, serving by giving, and serving by going forth”, expressing their identity as a community that welcomes Jesus Christ (Nasom Community website). The community aim is to support migrants and form a life-giving community. A large proportion of migrants Nasom Community serves are from Mongolia, so the scope of this study is limited to the Community’s mission

to Mongolian migrants. The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre is a missionary agency affiliated with the Seoul Presbytery of PCK. Currently, 2,500 migrant workers from 29 countries are registered to receive medical check-up services. Over 10,000 people participate in this ministry each year. Nasom Community is a missionary community founded to support the neighbouring foreign migrant workers.

For this article, an interview is conducted with Hae-geun Yoo, who is the president of Nasom Community. He graduated from Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary and studied social welfare policy at Soongsil University. He was the first General Secretary of the Korean Church Foreign Labourer Missions Council. His ministry philosophy is to follow God's will and stand with the socially marginalized, to incorporate diversity in the rapidly changing context of globalization and information exchange, and to reject a capitalist standard of success. His aim is qualitative, rather than quantitative, church growth, presenting an alternative model of doing church. He is building a migrant ministry and missions network for Nasom Church to practise faith by serving the migrants and the marginalized.

Yoo was full of resentment toward God due to his child's cognitive disability and the loss of vision caused by his disease. He had come to the end of his tether and decided to take his life, but met Jesus who more than empathizes with the poor and the marginalized and dwells among them (Yoo 2019b: 97–118). Yoo affirms that true mission and ministry is to love the marginalized neighbours and to live among them just as Jesus did. His vision for Nasom Church is for it to be a community that serves the migrants and to be the salt and light of the world. He refers to his ministry as "nomadic life and spirituality". Nomads are those who chart new paths and respond to the needs of the time with a constant pioneering spirit rather than building fortresses (Yoo 2006: 244–49). Especially as borders blur in the age of globalization and information and as modern Korean society becomes multicultural, sojourning migrant workers may be the seedbed of world mission. Yoo shares the gospel with migrant workers as he sees the potential for world mission through them.

Currently, about 2,000 migrant workers are registered with Nasom Community, and more than half of them are from Mongolia. In 1999 the Community established International Mongolian School for the children of Mongolian migrants. The school has currently enrolled 65 Mongolian students and about 50 Korean and Mongolian teachers. Some of them live in their two dormitories, House of Nasom and House of Joseph. There is also Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Culture Promotion Centre, which plays a role in civilian diplomacy between Mongolia and Korea. In addition, the International Mongolian School is essential to prepare for mission to Mongolia. Education is also the most thriving type of ministry to Mongolian migrants. The role of Nasom Commu-

nity serves the foreign migrants' urgent needs. Koreans' perspective may misinterpret the actual needs of the migrants but a true community is an open community that understands and accepts all migrants.

**The mission strategy of Nasom Community**

The number of foreigners staying in Korea grew rapidly from about 910,000 in 2006 to about 2.3 million in 2018. To respond to God's call to be the ark of salvation for the migrants coming to Korea, Nasom Community sends back migrants as missionaries to their hometown, operates missional businesses for financial self-sufficiency and trains retired seniors for missionary work.

**The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre**

The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, affiliated with PCK, was the first among Nasom Community branches to be established on 28 January 1996. It serves foreign migrants with the love of Jesus Christ and shares the gospel with them. There are currently more than 150 people worshipping at the Centre each week. It serves foreigners and migrant workers with human rights advice and medical support, and holds various gatherings and events.

There are regional worship services at the Mission Centre. Every week, 150 migrants attend services for Mongolian migrants, for others from Southwest Asia (mostly India), Islamic regions (Iran, Türkiye), China and Vietnam, as well as services in English for others from the Philippines and Africa. For Mongolian worship, 20 to 30 people gather every Sunday at 2 p.m. to worship in the library on the first floor of the International Mongolian School which also serves as the exhibition hall of the Mongol Cultural Centre. Most of the participants are Mongolian teachers at the International Mongolian School. The services encourage the teachers to share the gospel with the Mongolian students and educate them in the Christian worldview and values to fear God and love their neighbours.

Region	Worship time	Attendee
English-Speaking Region	Sunday 14:00	4 teams
Southwestern Region	Sunday 14:10	15 to 20 migrant workers
Islamic Region	Sunday 14:00	3 Koreans and 3 Iranians
Mongol Region	Sunday 14:00	2 to 30 Mongolian teachers
China Region	Sunday 13:00	8 to 10 Chinese students and worker
Vietnam Region	Sunday 14:00	7 to 8 Vietnamese Women & Workers

**Table 1 Regional worship by Seoul Migrant Mission Centre.**

In the Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, various counselling and medical services are provided to effectively help migrant workers solve various issues they encounter in their employment. Counselling is mainly on employment, wage, passport and visa problems and work-related injuries, to help them file reports and guide them to hospitals. The centre provides practical help for migrants in physically demanding working conditions and advocates for their rights. Medical service is provided on internal medicine, surgery and oriental acupuncture on Sunday afternoons by volunteers. Doctors and specialists provide medical services to migrant workers who have difficulty accessing medical care.

The Centre conducts a spiritual retreat programme for migrants during the Lunar New Year holiday every year at Nasom Multicultural Ecology Village in Yangpyeong. Nasom Church and Seoul Migrant Mission Centre also hold joint Easter and Thanksgiving services. In addition, a sporting event (May), cross-country pilgrimage (during Chuseok holiday) and Nasom Festival (December) are held annually. About 100 people attend the retreat, where on the first day they have prayer sessions and Bible reading and meet in regional groups. On the second day, there is an early morning worship service, breakfast, then the Pilgrim's Progress activity when they have time to commit to following Christ's footsteps. They finish the event on the Lunar New Year, baking and enjoying pizza and spaghetti and enjoying the local hot springs.

In Easter, members of Nasom Church and Seoul Migrant Mission Centre worship together to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. After worship, groups from each country present their dance and praise. The presentations are attended by the Nasom Church members, who serve the migrants. The sporting event promotes mental and physical fitness for the tired migrants and multicultural families and helps them adjust to Korean community life. The teams are divided into countries; there are recreation programmes for children and also for their parents. They also worship together for Thanksgiving in a gathering of brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ with different language and culture to offer true worship through praise and prayer. In December, several teams of people from Mongolia, Iran, India, the Philippines, Vietnam and China participate in the Nasom Festival to present their own ethnic song and dance. The groups experience unity and comfort as they take time out from difficult daily life in this foreign land and practise the songs and dances of the country they dearly miss. Homesickness deepens by the year end and the New Year holiday. These events facilitate the sharing of the love of Jesus Christ with those who came to Korea as migrants.



The Centre supports some migrants who accepted the faith in Korea to study theology and get ordained and be sent back for mission to their own country to preach the gospel in their own language. There are Pastor Borma of the Mongolian Blessed Church, Pastor L in Country A, Pastor Pangaz Kapila and Hye-jung Lee in India and Missionary Wentituha in Vietnam all work to expand the Kingdom of God by evangelizing people in their own language.

Borma came to Korea as a migrant worker and received Jesus Christ as her Saviour in Seoul Migrant Mission Centre. She studied theology at Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary and was ordained after graduation. Yoo tells her story as follows:

*A undocumented migrant woman who only wished for money had an encounter with God. Ever since then, she preferred to turn the pages of the Bible than count cash, and she much more enjoyed serving church members than serving at restaurants. The church pastor who observed her closely supported her theological studies. After three years of difficult ministry training, she is now heading hom to spread the gospel (Yoo 2008: 152).*

In June 2006, Pastor Borma was dispatched to Mongolian Blessed Church. The Blessed Church's Sunday 11 a.m. service is attended by 25 adults, 15 to 20 youths, and 20 to 30 children. There are morning prayer services from Easter Day to 1 September every year. Most of the morning prayer meetings are attended by 5–10 elderly ladies. About 10 young people gather to pray for Mongolia and for the Kingdom of God at 6 p.m. on Wednesdays.

### *Educational institutions and welfare programme for migrant children*

Nasom Community has added several programmes for the children of migrants responding to their need. Mongolian culture is a family-centred culture so the migrants bring their children to Korea. There are the International Mongolian School, the Nasom Multi-culture Children Care Centre and Free Meal Programme and the Good Samaritan Inn.

The International Mongolian School was established in 1999 with nine Mongolian migrant children to provide education opportunities for them when they did not have access to a Korean public school. Later in February 2005, the school was officially accredited by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. It was the first school for children of migrant workers to gain such accreditation. Today more than 200 students are enrolled from grades 1 to 12 and are being educated according to the Mongolian curriculum. They also receive training in adapting to Korean culture

and preparing for globalization so that they may grow into leaders to transform Mongolia and the world. About 40 students whose homes are far from school stay at dormitories, the House of Nasom and the House of Joseph.

Mongolian children are today permitted to attend Korean public schools, but it is not easy for them to adjust. They face numerous obstacles due to cultural differences, language gap and financial limitations. They are often bullied by others or suffer low self-esteem in Korean schools. The children forget the vast steppes of Mongolia and suffer through life in small cell-like rooms. They should be educated to live free as people of the steppes. Therefore, the International Mongolian School educates using the Mongolian curriculum and adds Korean language, English language and ICT education to prepare them for globalization and leadership in Mongolia. The school aims to nurture future leaders of Mongolian society (Yoo 2018a: 103–70).

Daycare centres for multicultural pre-schoolers are urgently needed. Every child has a right to be educated and protected. They should receive the same benefits regardless of their nationality and residential status. But the Korean society still has a long way to go in accepting multicultural families and their children. Nasom Multi-culture Children Care Centre was established to provide suitable daycare for children of migrant workers and multicultural families aged three to seven. Today the Centre cares for 20 infants and toddlers of Mongolian and other ethnicities.

In Nasom Community, 60,000 meals are served each year – about 100 to 200 each day. It has been more than a decade since Nasom Community started this ministry. Alongside the meal programme, the Good Samaritan Inn provides shelter for homeless and unemployed migrants. Unlike Korean homeless people, the migrant homeless really have nowhere to go. They are also ostracized from the Korean homeless community. They may be found dead in the streets or in forgotten places. Some who struggle for basic survival may fall into despair and mental illness. The Free Meal Programme and the Good Samaritan Inn are basic welfare programmes for migrants who have fallen into desperate circumstances. They gain hope for new life as they eat and sleep in Nasom Community.

### *Multi-cultural education programmes*

Seeing the need for education for multicultural understanding, Yangpyeong Nasom Multicultural Ecology Village was established in 2009 by Nasom Community as a multicultural learning centre. At this site visitors can experience cultures of various countries such as Mongolia, India, Iran, Turkey, China and Vietnam. In addition, it is a venue where urban dwellers can experience various wildflowers, plants and insects.

The Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Cultural Promotion Centre was founded in 2001 with the official support of the government of the city of Seoul and the city of Ulaanbaatar. It organizes the annual Nadam Festival for Mongolians in Korea, as well as other events. The purpose of the establishment is to introduce Mongolian culture through mutual cultural exchange between the two countries, promote friendly relations between the two countries and contribute to cultural development. Since its establishment in 2001, it has served as a bridge between Korea and Mongolia through various exchange activities such as Mongolian culture education, the Mongolian Peace Corps and the Mongolian Language Institute.

The New Life Vision School was launched in 2012 to serve as a bridge between foreign migrants and retired seniors willing to serve as missionaries in the next stage of their lives. It provides short-term mission programmes for lay seniors to learn the basics of different cultures and migrant missions and put it in practice in Korea and abroad. The 10-week course is provided twice a year in March and September. Participants are former teachers, CEOs, office workers, entrepreneurs and housewives, mostly in their early seventies.

The New Life Mission is a non-denominational missionary organization led by these graduates of New Life Vision School. People who trained in New Life Vision School draw from their their abundant life experience to serve migrant workers and multicultural families through medical service, legal counselling, Korean language education, hairdressing and computer education in Dongdaemun, where people of various ages and backgrounds gather (Yoo 2019a: 128–36).

The Mongol Peace Camps were built hoping for the day of Korean unification. Nasom Community established an Ivy School to support North Korean defector youths. The school provides a network to support them to start their own business and fosters leaders in preparation for unification. In 2016, a non-government organization was started with the youths to provide the defectors with a space of encounter and education. They are working to establish headquarters in Mongolia, Vladivostok in Russia, and Cambodia to serve as half-way stations on the road to unification. Mongol Peace Camp is at the heart of this effort. The Korean church must remember that East and West German unification was the result of persistent exchange between the East and the West German churches. Unfortunately, churches in the North and the South cannot interact, and today the relationship between the North and South Korea is at a critical point. But as more North Korean defectors arrive in the South, helping and serving them will pave the way to unification (Yoo 2018a: 214–23).

## **Missional evaluation of Nasom Community**

### **The implications of Nasom Community from the missional church perspective**

Seen from a missional church viewpoint, the case of Nasom Community has the following implications.

First, Nasom Community in conducting ministry to migrants presents an alternative model of church in the multicultural era. Members of the Nasom Community have contacted migrants in local society. They established educational institutions for Mongolian migrants and the migrants have worshipped together with Koreans. Migrants have been helped to set up their own worship service. Jesus came down among the lowly and the marginalized, and the mission of Nasom Community is to meet the needs of migrants in Korea. Nasom Church leads them to the gospel of life and sends the gospel back to their homeland in their language. This suggests that churches and their missionary strategies should be changed in step with changes in missions paradigm from the traditional model of sending cross-cultural missionaries overseas to the new model of sending the people back to their home cultures. This is the work of supporting the wandering nomads to become pilgrims with purpose and vision.

Second, Nasom Community aims for a balance between missions and pastoral ministry for the glory of God. Yoo asserts that the Korean church has a mission toward migrants, and this mission should be conducted by recognizing South Korea as a mission field and striving to live and love faithfully in our daily lives (Yoo 2019b: 210–13). Missions and church ministry are not far removed from each other. Mission is proclaiming the gospel and ministering to others in everyday spaces as an apostolic community. In the globalization that has blurred national borders since the end of the twentieth century, migrants who approach us as friendly neighbours should be recognized as seeds of mission sent by God.

Nasom Community is very different from Korean traditional churches. Most big churches are involved in cross-cultural mission, but small churches are not. However, Nasom Community was established for migrants in Korea. Only members of Nasom church who followed Yoo's vision remained in Nasom Community. The priority placed on migrants slows church growth even though Yoo seeks the balance between mission to migrants and the local ministry. Nasom Community members considered not only spiritual salvation but also social issues – discrimination, peace between South and North Korea, environmental problems – including migrant problems. Nasom church members are involved in social responsibility and this impacts the local community and Korean society.

Third, Nasom Community practises giving and serving in daily life. It aims for qualitative maturity based on missions rather than quantitative church growth. As national borders blur under globalization and people of various cultural backgrounds gather, church members primarily see themselves as temporary residents on earth with nomadic spirit, and as the light of hope that shines in darkness. The church description states that it is a community for Christians with nomadic consciousness. This community that dwells missionally among the marginalized is distinct from the majority of society steeped in capitalism and growthism.

Fourth, Nasom Community has limited financial and human resources. There are four types of missionary work in a multicultural society: planting, parallel, transition and special type (Korean Society of Mission Studies 2023: 370–76). Planting is when the church is started just for migrants. The parallel type is when church and multicultural centre or school manage it together. The transition type is the church that starts with Korean members and turns into ministry to migrants. The special type is when the church member is Korean in nationality but of a different culture; this type of church is for North Korean refugees. Nasom Community is the parallel type. The strength of this type is making points of contact with migrants, various ministries through institutions for migrants and an active connection between migrants and local society. However, there is a lack of human resources and finance for managing institutions. People working in the institutions need to share their vision to help migrants. Nasom Community struggles to manage the institutions rather than the ministry of the local church.

In sum, Nasom Community is a missionary community that shares with migrants the joy of becoming the people of God. It is also as a community of neighbours serving strangers in their midst. It is a missional church that understands God's will and plan and participates in God's mission to save by the power of the gospel. Nasom Community continues to be dedicated to establishing God's Kingdom in various countries with the missionary vision of sending migrants back to their countries.

### **Significance of Mongolian mission by Nasom Community**

The Asian continent has the lowest evangelization rate among the six continents. Western missionaries worked hard in Asian missions until the nineteenth century, but Christianity did not take root in Asia. Asia is multicultural, multireligious, and multi-ethnic, which means Asians who share such similarities should participate in Asian mission. Mongolia borders Russia and China. Genghis Khan in the early thirteenth century founded the largest empire in history. After the decline of the Mongol Empire, the remaining central region was subjugated under the Qing Dynasty and Outer Mongolia became today's Mongolia. The country gained autonomy after the

Revolution of 1911 but this was then abolished in 1920. Then, influenced by Russia's October Revolution, Mongolia launched the Revolution of 1921 and became independent.

Of the religious population, 53% identify as Buddhist, the majority of them Mahayana Buddhists, and 4% identify as Muslim (Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Culture Promotion Center). Mongolia is at the geographic centre of North Asia. In the past, it was an important passageway on the Silk Road, but today it has the potential to be the missionary starting point on the reverse Silk Road. Mongolia has had a communist system for more than 70 years since its socialist revolution that occurred alongside the Soviet Union. It was the second country to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea, before Mongolia established relations with South Korea. Mongolia may play an important role in the interaction and unification process between South and North Korea. Through missions in Mongolia, it may be possible in the future to maintain close relations with North Koreans and to solve the problem of North Korean defectors who flee China.

Nasom Community did not stop at ministering to Mongolians who came to Korea, but sent Mongolians back to their countries for mission work. Yoo believes training the migrants in Korea and sending them back to their home town is a sustainable missionary strategy (Yoo 2008: 144–59). Especially when many Korean missionaries had to return to Korea because of Covid-19, Mongolian migrants could be sent in the missionaries' place to continue the work. They have no problems with visa, language or cultural barriers. That is why Nasom Community has sent missionaries not only to Mongolia, but also to Turkey, India, Vietnam and Uzbekistan. This is a new and alternative model of mission.

## Conclusion

The Korean church has been zealous in overseas missions from the beginning. However, since the 1980s, church-centred and self-expansionary missions rather than God-centred missions have been recognized as problematic. As missional ecclesiology began to be discussed in the Korean context in the 2000s, it served as an opportunity to re-establish Korean church ecclesiology. There was a move to reflect on the missional nature of the church and to restore the essential mission of the church rather than simply pursuing quantitative growth. Although most churches in Korea are still not interested in missional ecclesiology, many scholars and pastors have come to suggest the missional church as a desirable alternative.

Nasom Community is one of the missional churches in Korea. Its mission is to serve foreign migrants, especially those from Mongolia. The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre was founded first; then Nasom Church was established for migrants who came to Korea. In addition, the International Mongolian School, Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Cultural Promotion Centre, Nasom Multiculture Children Care Centre, the Free Meal Programme, the Good Samaritan Inn, the Yangpyeong Nasom Multicultural Ecology Village, the New Life Vision School, New Life Mission and Mongolian Peace Camp are various branches with their own communities, ministries and purposes, yet they also form a coherent whole. Yoo writes, “More communities should be formed to turn migrants into pilgrims. Send them back home for mission to change the world” (Yoo 2018b: 67).

As a missional church, Nasom Community is a church that is responding to the essential call to mission. Nasom Community serves the migrants, presenting a new model of church in the multicultural era. It is a pioneering community that aims for a balance between missionary work and pastoral ministry. As a community of giving and service, it aims for qualitative maturity rather than quantitative expansion. The church and mission centre for migrants total about 500 in Korea (Korean Society of Mission Studies 2023: 378). This is less than 1% of Korean churches. Korean Christians should be more interested in migrants in a multicultural society. If the Korean church recovers its identity as a missionary community like Nasom Community, it may be used as a channel for Asian mission.

## About the author

Seonyi Lee has been teaching missiology as a professor at Honam Theological University and Seminary since 2018. She currently serves as Academic Dean of Korea IAMS (International Association for Mission Studies) Fellowship that incubates and encourages young scholars. She is also an editor of *Theology of Mission*, a periodical published by the Korea Society of Mission Studies. Her research interests include Asia, mission and gender. She has written numerous articles and books including *Models of Asian Missiology* (in Korean, 2019) and *No Handle on the Cross* (translation into Korean, 2020). Contact: seonyilee@gmail.com

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