

ORALITY AND 21st CENTURY ASIAN MISSION

Charles Madinger

ORALITY IN ASIA ADVANCES UNPRECEDENTED KINGDOM GROWTH.

A **Manila pastor** preaches on the Feeding of the 5,000 but this time uses all 5 senses to communicate it with more power. He builds to the point of the disciples astonishingly distributing their loaves . . . and unexpectedly calls the ushers in the auditorium to bring THEIR baskets of ensamadas (a packaged small sweet bun). Everyone sits together and discusses the sermon as they quiet their own growling stomachs.

A **church planter** among a tribal people in **Northern India** returns to his village after an intensive 2 weeks of learning a contextualized Bible story-telling strategy. Before, he was the one sharing the Gospel to his Hindu neighbors. Now he's training 20 people who are learning stories that match the needs of the people. They begin sharing these "God stories" and a new wave of life washes over the village.

A group of believers among an **Indonesian people group of only 2,000** scattered members *craves a Bible in their own language* that has no written texts. The most non-literate group is off the radar for most Bible translation organizations stretch to their limits with larger language groups. But these hungry believers find some people who do "oral to oral" Bible translation that can be done on a faster track. Is it perfect? No. Is it THEIR's? Yes. Can they improve it over time? Absolutely, just like the 5 revisions of the NIV!

Asia now leads the way in all these things and more. WE are the epicenter of God's mission in the 21st century. More believers. More strong churches. More wealth. More leaders being trained. More unreached and unreached-unengaged peoples. Now is our day. Now we must rise to the task!

Orality is changing the way we do mission. From theological education in formal and non-formal settings to grassroots bible storytelling methodologies, we share the models for communicating the Gospel in the business world and the world of the poor and oppressed. We're learning how to use the arts, media, and other orality-centric methods to meet the needs of thousands of languages without Christ, without a Bible, and without our hope (Eph. 2:12)

WHAT IS ORALITY?

Bottom line? It's what Jesus used to proclaim the Kingdom of heaven. You will see it in what follows. He was commanded by the Father "what to say" and "HOW to say it." (John 12:48-49 NLT).

Orality in its classical definition has to do with a

preference for the spoken word. Yet how might that word be spoken – aurally and audibly only? What about the deaf who also speak? What about "the picture that speaks a thousand words?" Orality is MUCH more than the early authors of the mid-20th century led us to believe.

As a term it is, quite frankly, *elusive*. It's kind of like the term "oncology." You know it's about the study and treatment of cancer. The term is here to stay even though you've probably never seen or studied an "onco." Wait. Yes, you have. You just didn't understand the term! "Onco" is Latin for "tumor." Orality is an emerging field of study launched in the 1950's and popularized by Walter Ong's work around 1980 – *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. It's not really about literacy and illiteracy, Bible Storytelling methods, or media and technology tools. It's about how we communicate. It's what Jesus in His human experience had to learn as he said His Father "commanded me what to say and *how to say it*" (John 12:48-49 NLT).

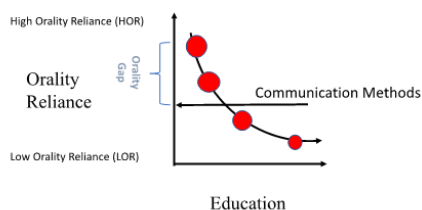
Orality is about a God who made us *communicators in His image!* He imagined a universe. He spoke every detail into existence. He communicated His mind and thoughts in so many ways and means. He audibly spoke with us. He spoke through dreams and visions, pillars of fire and smoke, the taste of bread, oil, and wine for His priesthood, prescribed incense ascending before the Throne, the touch of healing for lepers, the blind and deaf, and even a woman with an issue of blood. And as He prepared us for this world, **He gave us these same powers to communicate our "inner speech."**

Orality is just that simple. People as communicators in God's image. With learned expressions of our "inner speech. Using all 5 (or more) senses. We can't communicate through dreams, but we can make people dream. We cannot reveal ourselves in a non-incinerated burning bush, but we can draw pictures of it. We can't make handwriting appear on a wall, but we can digitize it. God made us able to communicate just like our Father!

We all start out as 100% reliant on what we call here our orality – learned expression of inner speech. That is High Orality Reliance. We see our mother's breast and want to eat and even make gestures or give non-verbal expressions (cry!) to get what we want. Later we learn to speak the words for eating or drinking, write the words, draw the thought, even create music, drama, or dance about it. With more education

and learnings, we move into other ways and means of expressing thought. With time and training we become more comfortable expressing ourselves through print text and other literacies that change the hardwiring of our brains.¹

The Orality Gap



A little later, we will look at how this plays out even in musical or dramatic expressions, how it affects what stories we tell from the Bible and how we tell them. The Spirit of God can use ANY effort we make to share our witness of the Kingdom, but God designed us to follow HIS design for communicating with ALL people, not just the ones that are like US in our Low Orality Reliance (LOR).

A challenge you and I face is that nearly 400 years of the Enlightenment convinced the “modern world” to overvalue the genius of print-text with the unexpected devaluation of all other “literacies.” Suddenly only the lettered were smart/intelligent. Only those who could understand the Word of God using the rules of grammar (in Greek and Hebrew if we are really being honest) could fully grasp the truth. Without high literacy (print-text) people must surely be deficient. Unable to function completely in this world. Need help to be sustainable or even satisfied in life.

But we were not entirely enlightened! In the process of jettisoning all unrelated to learning the art of reading and writing we lost sight of the other impressions of the God-imagined capacities for communication. We missed the obvious. 8 out of 10 people on the planet grow up with a framework that trained our brains

The Literacy Fallacy

“Literacy is something different from orality.” No. Literacies are simply different expressions of our oralities. Is a song oral or literate? Neither! It began with thought and impressions in someone’s inner speech. They expressed it through instrumentation and/or vocalization (singing rather than talking, which is also related to singing with pitch, modulation, volume, etc.).

A book, printed journal, or even a drama script is just as much related to our orality (learned expression of inner speech) as the song, story, or video! Someone expressed their inner speech. It came out using

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2HHRKpjiYM> how reading changes the brain
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2sqXbwlaWw> how music (and other literacies) changes the brain

spoken words in their heads that they learned how to express through an orthography (alphabet) that can be archived in the book or journal. The song also can be archived in an audio/video format as well as a different kind of literacy – sequential notes written on cleft with specific keys, time signatures, and all sorts of other printed symbols.

If you have some background in the field of orality you know of Walter Ong, a student of the communication guru Marshall McLuhan.² They identified people as being either oral or literate. While this makes a good initial image of what we’re talking about, it also confuses the matter. Yes, the brain gets hardwired differently when we develop any form of literacy and it’s especially evident with print-text literacies. Yet the same is true when you learn the literacies of sign language, braille, playing music from notes on a page, or using mathematical or digital programming symbols and sequences.

Jesus’ Model of Communication

Any student of the Bible when asked, “how did Jesus teach,” responds with: “He taught in parables.” But we need to dig deeper if we hope to teach like The Master as He showed us as He brought the message of the Kingdom to His disciples and the peoples of the region – including Samaritans and Greeks.

John’s Gospel tells us that on at least 4 occasions Jesus said that His message was not his own, but it came from the Father. In one of his final encounters with the Jewish religious leaders, (Jn 12:31-50) Jesus gets even more explicit in describing his message from the Father: “My message is not my own, for my Father commanded me what to say and how to say it.” (NLT). We normally focus on the “what” of Jesus’ message. Less often do we ask questions about his “how to say it.” It’s more that methods (parables). It’s as much how he frames the message, connects it with the people, gets people talking – creating a “buzz.” And how he made every message unforgettable.

The “How” of Jesus

He began by understanding and framing every message *through the lens of local cultures* – from fishing villagers to urbanites. From the “uneducated masses” to the Torah-trained elite of the synagogues and Sanhedrin. He made sure to use the language and dialect everyone related to in the area – especially those tribal, hillbilly, IP’s called Nazarenes. He used “code words” that every Jew understood, or every Greek related to (in the Gerasene): City set on a hill (within sight of the audience), or “offer your gift at the altar” (Matt. 5:23 as all knew his meaning of the “fellowship offering”). In fact, he used multiple literacies related to farming, fishing, gardening, and even their Biblical literacies (you have heard it said). He used social learning networks to make sure

2. Ong, W. J. (2013). *Orality and literacy*. Routledge.

everyone processed the Kingdom message together. His 3 disciples who shared the Transfiguration, the 12 who regularly argued about their place in the Kingdom, the masses gathered for a sermon and an unexpected and unexplainable Mosaic type meal while seated in groups of 50.

He drew on his 30 years of human experience to relate his message making them unforgettable through commonly shared metaphors and symbols (cross, land stewards, vineyards, Passover meal). And yes, he captured the attention of the masses and even the social elites using the arts – singing with the disciples enroute to Gethsemane, spontaneous proverbs, parables, and the culinary sensations of his day (bread, wine, feasts, and even drinking with sinners). He also demonstrated **mastery of all forms of media** – mass media, simple large gatherings (synagogues), and smaller gatherings in homes like Lazarus'. He used audio, visual and even print (writing in the dirt and reading in the Nazareth synagogue).

There are probably more ways that Jesus communicated, but you'll have to dig that out for yourself. These 7 find their roots in Scripture, but they also have been proven out in communication strategies throughout history. Martin Luther King, Jr, John Kennedy, Gandhi, Mao, Mandela, Steve Jobs all used these same 7 "Descriptive Disciplines of Orality." Research also demonstrates that simultaneously using ALL 7 multiplies the impact of a message.³ It's not magic. It's the Master! So, orality is critical not because of the communication principles, but because even the Son of God deemed all these things essential to delivering His message. *It does not guarantee people will accept your message. It does guarantee they will receive, understand, remember, and can pass it on to others.*

How to Find an Orality Sweet Spot for MY Audience?

Watch any sport played with a ball and the best players connect with the ball in a location that delivers maximum power – the sweet spot. It's the exact center of a badminton racquet, golf club or cricket bat, or the volley ball, football (the real one – soccer). It's what separates great play from astounding play. And the same is true in communication. When you find the sweet spot of driving home a message for a specific group its astounding! Lights go on. Eyes are opened. Minds explode with new possible worlds.

To find it is more than a casual pursuit. It takes discipline in the disciplines. Orality as a field of study or as a research discipline overlaps with multiple others. In fact, orality has at least 5 streams of influence in which practitioners and scholars lean on this communication phenomenon.⁴ It relates to

3. IOS Research: <https://i-ostrat.com/orality-research/>. Multiple projects using all 7 disciplines demonstrate an increase in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior changes from 20-40%.

4. Charles Madinger (2022). Transformative Learning through oral narrative in a participatory communication context: An inquiry

anthropology since inner speech finds its expression as it relates to other people in ways that all consider appropriate. It relates as well to educators interested in the scope of all learning as well as how to engage those with lower print-text literacy skills. **Psychology and cognitive sciences** help clarify how the brain functions and what is going on inside as we interpret our world. It relates to **Biblical scholars** who direct us to fathom how the message was delivered and passed on for generations and how we even have what we call a Bible today.⁵ It also relates to **the literary world** and its "oral literature," and to missiology with the resurgence of telling the stories of the Bible as a strategy for evangelism, discipleship, and leadership development. Yet orality is a phenomenon of communication beginning with God and then people created with His image and capacities.

All these fields magnify the details and intricacies of orality. Ong found 9 psychodynamics. William Parker saw 11 criteria, James Slack and other missiologists talked about characteristics, tendencies, and frameworks. In the past nearly all these characteristics of orality came from general observations, anecdotal evidence or stories, or popular theories.⁶ Now we can be more precise with studies from overlapping fields or disciplines.

The Global Orality Mapping Project (GO*Map) takes 15 *overlapping characteristics* or tendencies and clusters them on sliding scales from Very High Orality Reliance to Very Low Orality Reliance. Complete the survey for your people group. Each cluster is scored, and each characteristic is also scored to give a clearer picture of best strategies. You'll also find links to more resources to learn more and practice better.

These are not just "Western" outsider perspectives. They come from Asian, South Asian, Central Asian, and African leaders describing their communication preferences. They are also not merely anecdotal or what seems to be the stories from the ground. They all have solid objective research and publication to test them out.

Why are these critical? It's like checking for someone's heart pulse. You can tell if they are living if you can feel the surge of blood. But you can tell even more when you put on the stethoscope and listen closely. You can tell something about the pressure (high or low). You can tell if there is blockage in the carotid artery in the neck that might cause a stroke. You can hear if there is a leak in a heart valve. All this

into radio drama-based training among Zambian caregivers of abused and exploited children. University of Kentucky, pp. 62-65.

5. Especially relevant since the Old Testament canon was not "closed" until the Council of Nicaea (CE 326). During the life of Jesus the Sadducees believed only the first 5 books (Torah) were inspired. The book of Isaiah, Psalms, the historical books were put into written forms after the Babylonians and Medes held the Jews in captivity years before the earthly ministry of Jesus

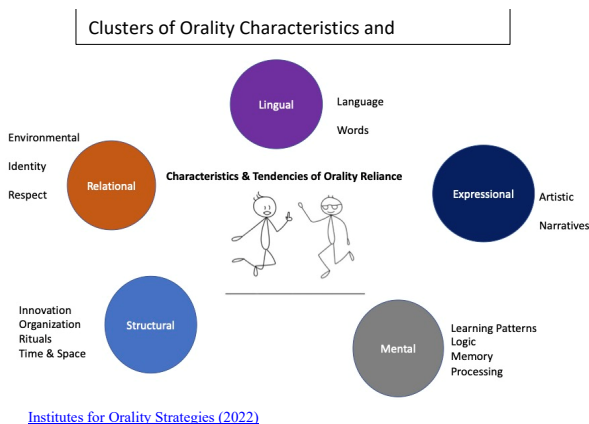
6. For example, right-brain/left-brain dominance or learning. A very popular notion that intrinsically sounds great. However, there is no empirical research that establishes it as a valid assumption. Yes, the brain does have those functions, but no, there is no such thing as an auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learner. Is it true? Yes, it MAY be. Is it proven? Not yet. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/right-brainleft-brain-right-2017082512222>

give more detail.

Likewise, you may intrinsically perceive some of these characteristics of orality. But when you dig deeper you may unearth a wealth of insights that prove the difference between someone clearly understanding your message or getting only part of it then drifting into syncretism, heresy, or eventual apostasy.

A Lingual Cluster – every target audience has its preferred **language** and even dialect that makes a message more inviting. It sounds like us, feels like us, and sets us at ease.

Language represents learned forms of communication, expressed through sounds, gestures, and behavior either orally, in written, visual or other forms. It is a unique articulation of ideas and views which varies from one cultural group to another.



[Institutes for Orality Strategies \(2022\)](#)

Language is passed from one generation to another generation through a proceeding called cultural transmission and is just how local people describe their world and everything that they need to talk about. So, no two groups are alike. Therefore, no two preaching/teaching strategies are alike – they are unique and require intentional efforts for higher impact.

The words they use may also range from very vague (HOR) to very specific use (LOR) depending on orality reliances. Words are an important component of a language in speech and other literacies. They can either be clearly spelled to their intended meaning or articulated to indirectly convey rhetoric to make an emphasis and/or avoid certain use of taboos.

An Expressional Cluster speak primarily of the innate creative capacity to express our inner speech through all our senses. The arts are not the message but a door opener to the heart. Traditionally, it has been defined as mastery but for our purposes it is a spectrum that ranges from a child’s simple expression to a masterpiece created by an artist. This cluster also elaborates creativity, beauty & aesthetics as well as how we design those in a story.

Arts. All this requires communicators to understand all the cultural art forms and use what local people use and love. Yes, we often must use **“Glocalization”** – the global artistic and narrative expressions like Hillsong or Bethel music, YouTube, and Tic Tock

translate them into local languages, but the sound and feel is still very much from “outsiders” - the “globals.” Most often we need **LOCALIZATION** of artistic expressions – the instruments, rhythms, tones, shapes, colors, textures, foods, and much, much more must be considered. A newer trend may be the increase of local to global use of the arts – **“LoGolization”** of reggae, Ethiopian Jazz, Bollywood, Korean melodramas all make their way into the more dominant mainstream powers artistic of influence.

All artistic expressions come out in the same kind of continuum from HOR to LOR. A song with higher orality reliance may be sung in unison in a minor key using “fifth intervals” or the pentatonic scale (*Amazing Grace* originally from Africa), or the often 8-part major key harmonies of Handel’s *Messiah*. It may be the dance/song of the Masai with rhythmic undercurrent droning (HOR) or the precision of the drums in Fanfare for the Common Man.

Narrative. Equally significant is **how we express our stories**. Even secular scholars insist that the art of storytelling and story-listening is what makes us distinctively human.⁷ The stories of HOR peoples often get handed down orally or in other visual art forms. Oral Histories, oral literature, and especially the Homeric poetry of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* originally sung as navigational guides for Mediterranean sailors. Who tells the story, what is the purpose of the story? When and how is the story told? All these may give meaning depending on an orality reliance.

A Mental Cluster helps identify how we think and make sense of things, best process, learn and remember important parts of our world.

Learning Patterns are pathways for people to construct knowledge and better understand their world. They include all domains of learning - cognitive, affective and behavioral that can be stimulated in different ways for different orality frameworks.

Memory tools vary from context to context. Sometimes the simple repetition of a story or song suffices for a group to remember the message and pass it on to others

Logic, while related to the era of Greek philosophers, is a term framed by later European linear minds and worldviews. However, not all reasoning fits that typology or even ways of knowing (epistemology). Higher orality reliant peoples can use a type of “circular thinking” unrelated to circular arguments.⁸ They can go beyond binary thinking and hold to what may seem like contradictions to outsiders.

A Structural Cluster looks at how we order our world. How do we classify and categorize? How do we view tradition, our rituals and rites, and even our sense of time and our (versus their) space.

Innovation looks for the value of new things or

7. Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communications Monographs*, 51(1), 1-22.

8. Circular arguments say: “Narendra always speaks with integrity. How do I know? Narendra is a tribal leader.”

processes. Some cling to the past traditions that have served the people well and even give them a degree of their identity. It could be a farming technique, a type of singing or dancing, or even what we do in our wedding rituals. This tendency on a continuum will also vary, but where a group lands on that continuum may affect how they respond to the Gospel and how we frame it as related to their willingness to innovate or cling to tradition.

Organization describes patterns in and by which we holistically arrange our world - physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. All of these patterns normally find meaning in part related to the physical world around us and how we live in our unique contexts. It also considers the spaces in which we appropriately live and move.

Some cultures tend to first think in terms of the **concrete real-life** experiences in their environment to organize their thoughts and categories. **Others** may prefer to begin **with abstract realities** and move backwards into the real-world realities (when necessary). The latter is satisfied to stay in the realm of the conceptual, and the former requires an immediate connection with real life. Hence, preaching in LOR settings can be satisfying when making conceptual points (love one another). Preaching in a HOR setting begins with real life events that move eventually to the truth to embrace and practice.

Rituals contribute to a variety of other orality characteristics linking artistic expressions together with narrative, they are loaded with meaning and tell a people's story, they are a memorable and emotion loaded way how groups pass on values and cultural norms, and often used as rites of passage that puts the participant into a new state, gives identity, or association with a group.

All cultures have rituals marking important points in life (birth, adulthood, marriage, death). Washing rituals are found in most religions and have a spiritual meaning making a natural bridge to the washing, cleansing, and purification needed as we share the Good News of what Jesus did for us.

Time and Space has to do with the created sequential dimension in which we experience life in the eternity of God. It is important because this is how people see themselves as part of history and the world. How do we measure time? Do we see it as simply what we are doing - worshipping, working in the farm, showing my child a new skill? Or, maybe we measure it out in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years. You are late when the clock says you are late. Or you are late if you do not show up when the rest of the group worriedly wonders "where might they be?" Space might be viewed as the specific neighborhood lot on which my house sits, or it could be the vast region that my tribe claims as their ancestral domain - a sacred space that ties them to the land where their fathers and mothers are buried.

A Relational Cluster forces us to look at how we view the most valued people in our community and how

we treat them and cater to their needs. It involves our relationship to the land and other forces at work in our environment. And it also helps us better perceive who we are as a community and how that relates to us as individuals.

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Environmental is EVERYTHING a group of people relate to in *their world*. That includes the sum of all the interacting living things (material and immaterial - physical and non-physical, like spirits) as well as non-living elements and how they affect the growth, health, progress, and meaning of human life.

For many animistic cultures, people believe that, for everything in the seen world, an invisible but real counterpart (twin) exists. Dreams are one way they interact with this immaterial reality. The term “dream ego” describes this invisible twin of oneself. It is important to understand that both worlds are both real to these people and mutually influence each other. They may also use hallucinogens, incantations, and mediums to connect at this “twin” level of reality.

Environment also looks to **Identity** as it refers to how individuals or groups perceive and define themselves, and how other individuals or groups perceive and define them. Identity is "concerned with sameness and difference at the level of social categorization, group affiliation, and intergroup relations, as well as at the level of individual consciousness or subjectivity."⁹ Others see identity in the dimensions of culture as related to the individual or the group. Individualistic peoples care most about individual rights, needs, and choices. Collectivistic peoples think first and foremost about their group, family, tribe, sometimes their religious block.¹⁰

Respect is a way admiration for another person or thing is shown. It is part of a value system or beliefs based on a esteem, role, or position conferred (mother, elder, chief, etc.), earned through education/title, achievement rite of passage, “sport,” and even

9. Hammack, P. L., & Toolis, E. E. (2015). Putting the Social into Personal Identity: The Master Narrative as Root Metaphor for Psychological and Developmental Science: Commentary on McLean and Syed. *Human Development*, 58(6), 350–364. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26765124>

10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHdqPqWle04>

pastoral training/ordination. Or respect may come from exemplary acts or worthiness to receive such elevated or demeaned status. Respect ascribed by the community and should be closely adhered to by all.

In many cultures no one would either interrupt or directly challenge an elder in public. Entering a community for missional activities should never be done without the express blessing and permission of the elder, chief, or other respected and recognized leader – whether that recognition is formal or non-formal.

So, Dig Deeper. The greatest wealth lies below the surface!

Each of these 5 Clusters and their composite characteristics must be given consideration if we hope to have the kind of impact Jesus demonstrated and that we are created for like himself. At first the process of digging this all out is painstakingly slow and challenging to figure out. With more experience it gets easier, like everything else you learned. Eventually those you lead or teach will catch it too, and without being directly taught each cluster characteristic by characteristic.

LEARNING ORALITY FROM OUR CHRISTIAN ROOTS

Orality oozes out of our historic church roots and its mission strategies as seen in the School/Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus (Acts 19). This was a rented hall where people came from all over to join in the “discussions” about Jesus, His resurrection, and the Good News of His kingdom. We can only speculate what was going on here, but the one thing we do know for sure is that “all of Asia heard the Word of the Lord.”

Ulphilas of Cappadocia – a bishop of the 4th century, took the Gothic language, gave it an alphabet, and one of the earliest translations of the Scriptures to share the Gospel with barbarians. They needed the Scriptures in the language those people understood, not Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He translated the Bible so that they might be transferred from their domains of darkness and into the Kingdom of God’s glorious Son.

The CHINESE Printing Press/Moveable Type, not



German, changed forever the way the world would precisely communicate and diffuse their thoughts as well as archiving them for

their generations and all to come. Inner speech to wood carvings to printing on scrolls to the minds of hearers, readers of text and pictures from their inner speech. The first use was probably Buddhist sayings, but soon the Manichaeian texts in the 700s promoted a Christian message..

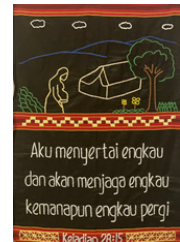
India’s Folk Art Narrative¹¹ Indians for centuries

11. Chatterji, R. (2020). *Speaking with pictures: Folk art and*



express their most important values and stories in a type of progressively framed images (left). Some are minute and others resemble large tapestries. When working among Hindus this familiar look draws attention and even a sense of familiarity even when it is the storyline of the Good Samaritan. Orality captures attention, draws a person into the story/message, and takes them into a new reality – the Kingdom of heaven.

Indonesians embroider the Word. Openwork embroidery gained world renown and can speak a message with creative beauty. Nearly every province owns its unique expression from the Batik of Java, to the Songket of Palembang, and the Ulos of Medan, the Bay of Tomini, or others from Sulawesi and Karawo from Gorontalo. They all share high artistic value. Kerawang has for generations been an embodiment of the culture and heritage of Gorontalo people.



*21st Century Innovations and Trends in Asia*¹²

Preaching: From Propositional Returning to The Story On the Philippine Island of Mindoro pastors normally have earned less than a high school diploma. They attempt to emulate the preaching of early missionaries who used propositional preaching as well as exegetical preaching tied to understanding the nuances of the printed text of Scripture. Yet lately they’ve learned to preach in a narrative form and the people of their churches are suddenly coming alive, remembering the messages for weeks (not minutes), and report passing the message on to friends and relatives!

OK, so that’s the “lower-literate” context again. But no. The Lighthouse Christian Community of Metro-Manila started digging deeper into orality, sent 7 pastors into a 2-year training, and now insist that all who preach or teach use the “ways” Jesus communicated. The opening vignettes of this article refer to one of these pastors using all five senses to communicate Jesus’ message when he fed the 5,000.

The Arts: From illustrational to Expressional and Inspirational

The church from its beginning used the arts as a means of proclaiming the Good News and building Kingdom communities. Peter and the 11 stood with tongues of fire and the sound of a mighty wind, he told the story of David, used the Psalms and prophets. Stephen addressed the Sanhedrin relating their common story of God and Israel, and it was that same sermon you can see in Paul’s latter sermons. They took the Lord’s Supper together weekly proclaiming

the narrative tradition in India. Routledge India.

12. Note: the author is not here endorsing any of the organizations, but demonstrating Asians are taking charge of evaluating how to best communicate the Kingdom message in the most culturally appropriate means and communicate in the way local people prefer to receive, process, remember and pass it on.

the death, burial, and resurrection as they awaited His return. The Revelation of John remains the best multi-modal communication of all times! Recorded in print-text, but stands replete with graphic images, metaphors, light, color, sounds, stories of conflict and resolution, and a garden of healing as all concludes with the saints in the very presence of God who illumines them.

The early church produced songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. It created symbols of its own as the Neronian persecution erupted (sign of the fish), produced visual arts in the catacombs, and eventually used architecture to communicate its message. The first buildings place the baptistry in the entryway – only those willing to die to themselves as they claim Jesus as Lord may freely enter.

PAYAP University in Chiang Mai, Thailand along with SIL offer multiple opportunities to understand ministry across cultures as well as how to engage cultures through their own arts for greater receptivity and ultimate fruitfulness.

Institutes for Orality Strategies (i-OS) is a source of orality training, collaboration, and research. The 4 modules bridge the gap of historic seminary and mission organizational training and build competencies in the application of Jesus’ model of communication. Collaboration involves working with mission organization and projects that needs competencies beyond a group’s current training and experience. Research digs into evaluating why oral strategies work and tools that help you maximize your impact.

Global Arts Network - sees every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions. GEN offers networking, training, and resources for the flourishing of biblical and culturally appropriate arts. This article, published January 2020 in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Vol. 56, no. 1), explains more: <https://tinyurl.com/GEN4EMQ>

Ethnoarts Philippines localizes these same kinds of works among the 172 ethnolinguistic groups of the Philippine archipelago’s thousands of islands. The Groups long subjugated to colonial interests for more than 400 years have been discovering the high value of embracing their own culture above the dominant cultures of the region. Even the national language of the Philippines (Tagalog) is not universally understood or spoken, yet all ethnic minorities must either directly or more subtly bow to the identity of the dominant defining forces. Groups like EAP give short and long-term training to tribal leaders who reframe their identity, teaching, and preaching through the local arts just as the early church did



Conferences with real outputs throughout Asia. The recent Asia 2022 is just one of many that focus on our unique message and the arts through which it must

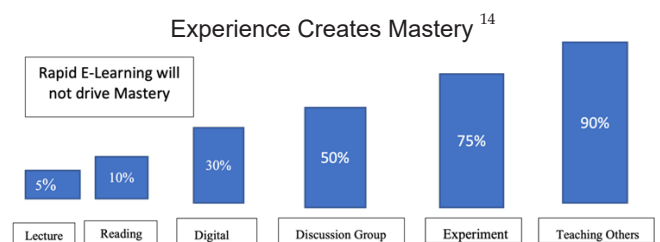
find expression if we are to disciple the nations in our region. In 2019 Jangkholsam Haokup and David W. Smith organized a conference in N.E. India to address our need to rediscover the power of orality through the use of myth and folklore. Their concerted efforts birthed a new resource published by Langham – *Voices from the Margins: Wisdom of Primal Peoples in the Era of Word Christianity*.¹³ We need more! The Evangelical Mission Society national conference now includes an annual track dealing with orality, and the American Mission Society annual meeting and papers scheduled for June 2023 likewise is dedicated to promoting better orality understanding and practice.

Education: From Informative Lecturing to Integrative Communication (orality-centric)

First, a word to our academics who dedicated their careers to the highest standards. Thank you. Your work is essential. We need more of it. Just as it began in in the technical literacies in which your band of brothers and sisters excel. We are not saying orality does not require “textuality.” Just the opposite. Orality education requires highly skilled expressions of inner speech in the realm of people like yourselves. Research it. Practice it. Teach it.

The best teachers have always used many of the principles and methods of orality. *They recognize not all instructional methods are equal*, even though this really isn’t acknowledged in most seminary classrooms. We continue believe that if we instruct in the way we were instructed, create projects and expressions that our instructors assigned us (long ago). Every teacher/professor aspires to attend the most prestigious school available to them, produce text-based resources (books and journal articles), and reward only those students who rise to the level of our guidelines and formats. We really believe that we graduate those who master the information.

But mastery of theology or any other subject (information) in our schools is not about the information. It’s about knowing God and experiencing God’s design for us. He told us all about it in every story, proverb, parable, song, dance, and vision recorded in what we eventually came to know as the Bible (AD/CE 326). How do we teach it for mastery? Some suggest the progressive effectiveness that only begins with the lecture and readings.



13. Haokin, Jangkholsam and David W. Smith (eds.) (2022). *Voices from the Margins: Wisdom of Primal People in the Era of World Christianity*. Carlisle: Langham Publishers.

14. www.worklearning.com

Orality competencies include them ALL. Now innovative educators around the world look to integrate orality into their classrooms and curricula. The first holistic program in orality was launched last year by the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST, Philippines) and the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, Philippines. Their program includes a ThM and PhD in Orality Studies¹⁵

Other movement likewise plan new programs for schools and seminaries that see the need for high quality research and the best of an orality theology, artistic theology, a biblical narrative theology, missiology, homiletics, and hermeneutics that return to our oral nature, and many more. Dr. Ezekiel Ajibade recently led a group of global theological educators to produce the first draft of an Africa-centric course on orality.¹⁶ In other developments, groups like the Asia Theological Association that oversees thousands of schools and seminaries is beginning to examine how orality must be included in 21st century theological education. One delegate at the recent General Assembly noted: "If we do not start promoting orality principles and methods we'll continue becoming irrelevant to the next generation of students."

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

Groups like SIL International historically trained people how to translate the Bible and encourage mother-tongue literacies and education. Lately they also pioneered on-line resources that help grassroots workers ensure that the "end users" *use the Scriptures*. This came about because dedicated translators gave their lives to bring the Bible to people who had none - **Bibleless peoples**.¹⁷ However, the local people did not use these translations they became *peopless Bibles*. This same spirit drives leaders in TAP (Translation Associates of the Philippines), Wycliffe Associates, and others in Wycliffe Global Alliance now practice Oral to Oral Bible translation and *Oral Bible Strategies (OBS - Studies, Bible storytelling, Bible schools)*. With literally thousands of languages with no Bible these orality savvy pioneers bring a process where the local people help create their own translations and produce them in oral platforms - from cassettes (yes, they are still used in many parts of the world!), CD's, SD cards (for phones), and apps. While some might dispute whether these fast-track products can claim the status of "Scriptures," the bottom line is that people who did not have the Word except in languages they could not fully understand now hear the message. Those who argue the point probably have dozens of variant translations in their own mother-tongue with the title:

15. Contact Dr. Cameron Armstrong, Director of Orality Studies (cameron@ats.ph)

16. revzikky@gmail.com. This program came about through the collective effort of the International Orality Network and Dr. Victor Madziakapita, the ION-Africa Director.

17. Quote from an SIL Country Director

"Holy Bible."

Amazing Bible apps like GRN's 5 Fish give tools for outreach in ways we never knew before! As I rode in a Grab taxi from my traveler's hotel in Bangkok, I could not speak a word of the local language. 5 Fish has the local dialect of my driver. I opened the app and began playing the story of Jesus encountering resurrection and encounter with the 2 on the Road to Emmaus. Did the driver receive Christ? I have no earthly idea. I gave my testimony. He understood. And the seed was either planted or cultivated. 5 Fish made it happen.

The whole point of using orality principles and methods is to communicate the Truth in ways HOR people can themselves receive, process & understand, remember, and pass them on to others. **Keep innovating!** Keep up with the needs of real people in the real world.

MEDIA

This generation in which we live leave the church in grievous numbers because we do not yet speak their mediated languages. Nearly 60% of Hindu, Buddhist, tribals, and even Muslims will never even HEAR the message of the Kingdom because we do not connect with them in their preferred ways and means of communication! The emerging generation is GREAT at YouTube, Tic Tock, and old school things like Instagram and Facebook.

Check out the hundreds of offerings through sites like EMDC and MediaLight. Seminaries like the Singapore Bible College and Professor Calvin Chong lead the way in Asia adapting to the needs of digital natives and training pastors, instructors, and church leaders how to go beyond the analog, and entry-level digitality into the power connectivity that comes with a little training and some hands-on experiences.

Then we have the digitally marginalized. The majority of the world who do not function as the digital affluent. The digitally affluents not only have knowledge, experience, and tools they also have the economic wealth and access that most of the digitally challenged or impoverished lack. The challenged/impooverished cannot consistently connect! They may have the apps. They may have the hardware, software, and platforms. But they do not have stable connections. The access is extremely expensive with telecom giants that exploit them with data-fees and out-of-reach subscriptions. The overpriced subscriptions provide a SMALL fraction of the advertised bandwidth and make extended meetings, courses, and even Zoom/Google calls erratic at best. Solutions? Believe it or not *radio may still be the best option*. It's low tech, fairly cheap (batteries DO cost). Can be accessed in a group - which is consistent with High Orality Reliance. Episodic radio drama may still be one of the most powerful media tools available to the masses.

For those digitally challenged by connectivity the

smart phone still can provide multiple options. Some people may be able to access and download content for those who cannot. Savvy developers can also create content flashed on to SD cards to upload to the memory of local users. Proprietary vendors like MegaVoice, FCBH, and Renew World Outreach.

Binging it home

Asians have forgotten more about orality that the West will ever know. Now is the time to look deeper into our OWN orality roots. Our own minimally valued treasures jettisoned to embrace the values and “textuality” of a Western Enlightenment. We need our own expressions of theology. We need our own culturally driven missiology. We need our own principles and methods of orality seen in the peoples of Asia. There is no only one expression. There are thousands! Therefore, we need hundreds of specialists that will take us to where the West and our colonizers could never go.

How will you be part of this movement? What do you need to bridge the orality gap in your own training and education? Educate yourself - it’s available through Google searches. Connect with those in your region who have begun practicing even if their practice is in one methodology. Get in touch with any of the people or sites listed in this article. And if all else fails, feel free to contact me personally.¹⁸ Unreached peoples remain unreached partly because we choose to use Low Orality Reliant principles and methods that our teachers used with us.

18. Charles.madinger@gmail.com



Charles B. Madinger
charles.madinger@gmail.com

Chuck and Roce his wife were called together as ministry partners and then partners in marriage in 2018. He is the founder and CEO of the Institutes for Orality Strategies. Chuck served twenty-seven years in congregational ministry, earned his D.Min. from Fuller Seminary, and is working on his dissertation for his PhD studies at the University of Kentucky College of Communication & Information. He helped launch three mission and consulting organizations helping reach the Oral Majority with programs and projects that bring transformation to broken children of our God and King. His experiences include designing oral strategies and instruction for issues ranging from discipleship and church planting to widow empowerment, HIV/AIDS awareness in Africa to civil society programs in places like Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan. Chuck also serves as the International Director of the International Orality Network (ION) and has published extensively in the field of orality and communication.

