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The reader will no doubt see ways of refining and extending this agenda, but our aim in providing it has been not to exhaust the possibilities but to illustrate them. The prospect of tackling such tasks is surely exciting, because the needs they represent bring us at one and the same time closer to the milieu of the New Testament and closer to our non-Christian neighbours in the present age. We have been retreating for too long. Trumpeter, sound the advance!

Dr Brian V. Hill is Professor of Education at Murdoch University, Western Australia. p. 97

The Use of Comics for Evangelism Among Female Factory Workers

Elena Chen

Reprinted with permission from Case Studies in Christian Communication in an Asian Context ed. by Ross W. James (Abridged)

Ross W. James writes, 'In 1986–87 the Communication and Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship co-sponsored a Master of Theology in Communications degree programme under the auspices of the Asian Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. The primary aim of the programme was to provide communications training for Christian leaders and theological educators, so they, in turn, could offer training and communications courses in their various institutions. Seventeen students from six Asian countries undertook the programme which consisted of coursework and a major field project.

A secondary aim of the programme was to develop and provide resources to promote the study of communications in theological seminaries and Bible schools in Asia. The resources would also assist curriculum planners of programmes similar to the THM or academic administrators planning communication courses to be integrated into existing seminary programmes at various academic levels. Hence this book which provides a Reader of case studies of communication theory and practice in an Asian context. The case studies were prepared by graduate students to meet the requirements of the major field project.'

Of the six case studies I am including excerpts from one, the use of comics in evangelism as a contribution to the witness of the Gospel in the market place of the lower working class. Female factory workers are a neglected 'peoples group' that need special focus. The author of this case study, Elena Chen states, 'Today the comic is the most influential mass medium among the semi-literate Filipinos'. This is sufficient justification for including this study in this issue of ERT.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Every generation has the responsibility to reach its own for Christ. Among the neglected members of our society are innumerable factory p. 98 workers who have as much right to hear the Gospel as anyone else, having been created by God. Since most factory workers

have had very little education, Christian literature in full textual form can never truly be appreciated nor read and understood extensively by most of them.

It is now commonplace for the electronic media, as well as the print media to be used extensively in evangelism. There is, however, among the less privileged masses a rather popular medium, that, to all appearances has not been fully availed of. This is the 'comic' medium, the illustrated literature conveyed through a series of pictures.

To be more specific, this study was designed with ten objectives:

1. To determine the comic reading habits of the female factory workers;
2. To determine the female factory workers' level of knowledge about the Christian Gospel;
3. To determine the female factory workers' attitude toward God;
4. To determine the female factory workers' attitude toward using comics as a medium of evangelism;
5. To determine the areas of the interest and needs in the lives of female factory workers;
6. To create a comic on evangelism for the purpose of testing its effectivity;
7. To determine the artwork's attractiveness to the intended audience;
8. To determine the level of message comprehension and retention through the use of the comic;
9. To determine the message relevance and believability of the comic;
10. To determine if some knowledge change occurs after reading the comic.

Unless the different assumptions held by a people are understood by the communicator, he is unlikely to bring about significant change. It is necessary to be aware of the influences that have contributed to the making of the people to whom a message is to be communicated. It is useful, then, to briefly outline the Filipino worldview prior to developing a communication strategy for Filipino factory workers.

FILIPINO WORLDVIEW

The Filipino in the past 25 years has emerged as the sum total of social strains and cultural elements that are cosmopolitan in nature. He is both Oriental and Occidental (Panopio et al., 1978). **P. 99**

The oriental nature of the Filipino is the core of his moral and social conscience and cultural identity centered on interpersonal and social relationships that revolve around 'blood ties', marriage and ritual kinship. The Spanish influenced the Filipino's religious, political, economic and educational life, his language, dress and diet. The Americans introduced the democratic system of government, popularized education and infused new ideals pertaining to the family, economy, government, education, religion, recreation and health and welfare. The years of Japanese occupation impressed upon the Filipino a rugged materialistic outlook. Although caught in a complicated web of conflicting values and engaged in a 'strain for consistency' among different value orientations, Filipinos have displayed remarkable adaptability resulting in a 'many-sided' cultural heritage.

The Filipino is a unique blend of an Asian and Western ethic. Thus his placement on the philosophical orientation continuum between an Asian pessimism about the future which results in immediate gratification and a Western optimism about the future which places faith in the future and is willing to withhold immediate gratification for the hope of increased future benefits should be considered (Hennig, 1983). The fatalistic view of the Filipinos concerning the future directs some to bank on luck (*suwerte*) to make life physically less difficult. This Asian ethic clashes dramatically with the Western ethic

which has been superimposed to a greater or lesser degree on the Filipino. The Filipino who leans toward the Western ethic is optimistic about life and is willing to defer immediate gratification to plan for a better life in the future.

Filipino worldview is supernaturalistic, based on myth, tradition, and mystical phenomena full of spirits, magic, and superstition (Andres, 1981). The Filipino views the world as one over which he has little or no control; success or failure is largely dependent upon the supernatural beings or spirits. This fatalistic outlook contributes to the Filipino's lack of foresight, his contentment with the past, his indolence and lack of initiative, self reliance, or pioneering spirit. In other words, the Filipino is less autonomous, more dependent, more oriented to authoritarian ways rather than to innovation or entrepreneurship (Rosario-Braid, 1983).

Given that, a bridge to reach Filipinos is necessary to meet this need: introducing Christ as someone who can meet their every need, who can be faithful in times of crises, a reliable source in major and minor decision making.

The total adoption of Christianity by Filipinos reflects the great and untiring deeds of the Spanish friars. To many Filipinos, Christianity is p. 100 already part of life and is deeply embedded in the inner recesses of their hearts. Thus, the Philippines has since been the only Christian nation in the Far East (Celis, 1974). Much of Christianity as practised by the Filipino is diluted with folk religion. More of rituals and traditions rather than practical application. Nevertheless, the Filipino is religious (Lynch & Makil, 1968). He is more open to things which concern the religious aspect. This only shows that the Filipino is not hostile to the preaching of the Gospel. He is an open field ready for sowing.

COMICS IN THE PHILIPPINES

This study is focused on the medium of comics for disseminating the Gospel among female factory workers. While comics seem properly to belong to the print medium, they may however be regarded as a special medium in themselves. Comics are audio-visual in print, (Ong, 1976) a film on paper, a movie which is not a succession of fleeting images but pictures and words one can read in a time sequence, examine and ponder again and again (Feuter, 1982).

However, a medium is only a means. Communication can only be effective when the medium matches the message and the audience, as well as the method of using the medium. To use the comic medium effectively requires a thorough study in the light of its relationship with the message, the audience and the usage as well.

The Message in Comics

The comics of the Philippines contain a variety of themes. There are the melodrama which are mostly love stories, triangles, and all their possible permutations; the fantasy stories with fantastic characters such as super heroes (usually the flying variety), super animals (from flying and talking horses to flying and talking birds), mythic characters, both heroes and villains (usually the variety with snakes on their head or shoulders), super things (from a flying car to a moving skeletal hand), human beings endowed with super or divine or demonic powers, interesting and mysterious freaks (from a flying elephant boy to a beautiful woman with two demonic creatures on her breast), and other fantasies that are limited only by the writer's and illustrator's imagination; adventure and action stories, set in the jungle or the hardcourt or the boxing ring. Besides all these novels, there are *katatawanan* (humour) pages, sex comics, the opinion moulding comics (utilized to disseminate information on health, farming, government policies and projects, etc.), documentary and biographical p. 101 comics (which illustrate historical events or lives

of well known historical figures), and religious comics (dealing with religious topics) (Del Mundo, 1986).

It has been objected that comics are associated with topics that are not taken seriously and therefore may not be suitable for catechetics. Ong (1976: 35) reacted to the objection by stating, 'This is like saying guitars should not be used for religious music'. He felt that the wide range of topics for which comics are used today should answer this objection. Feuter (1982) declares that the problem of combining factual and fantasy to recapture the specificity of the biblical writings in comics can be solved when Christians are delivered from their obsession with biblical knowledge. Therefore, Christians cannot turn their backs on comics if they want to reach their generation with the Gospel.

In the Philippines, the Communication Foundation of Asia produced a religious comic called 'Gospel Komiks'. The comics use biblical themes and apply them into Filipino's daily life situations. This type of comic has been widely circulated among Catholic institutions, schools and other organizations as a means of teaching catechetics. Aside from the 'Gospel Komiks', CFA also published a three volume 'Illustrated Bible' (Bible stories taken from the Old and New Testaments). The 'Illustrated Bible' was written in Tagalog and has been translated into Cebuano, one of the major dialects of the Philippines. Other Christian organizations and publishers such as the Alliance Publishers, OMF Literature Inc., OMNICOM, and CGM have produced comics intended for evangelism, but so far, CFA is the only organization which has been deeply involved in regular production of religious comics.

Commercial comics that merely entertain, without any effort to teach anything, are easier and cheaper to produce because entertaining stories can be woven out of pure fantasy without offering any positive values or providing them a systematic way. On the other hand, educational comics which ideally should be just as entertaining, require much more time, effort and expertise to prepare. Not only good story-telling and good artwork are needed here, behind the story and the artwork must go research into the audience.

The Audience for Comics

According to Reves' (1986) survey there are fifty comic magazines published in the Philippines, with a combined circulation of more than two million copies. It is estimated that there are 16 million regular readers of the comics from Aparri to Jolo (the northernmost tip of the p. 102 country to the southernmost point), if one counts those who borrow or lend their copies for a fee. When one considers that the total population of the Philippines is 44 million, the number of comics readers represents a diffusion rate of 1 to 4. Although most of the readers are not affluent, they spend an average of two million pesos a week—or more than 100 million pesos a year—on this popular medium.

While most of the comic readers and buyers are obviously children, teenagers and adults also read comics. A household survey of Greater Manila in 1973 showed that 46% of the respondents 14 years old and above had read one or more local comics within a week of the survey. Among the regular comic readers, the highest percentage belonged to the 20–29 age group, most of which had reached high school and belonged to the lower class homes. The survey also showed that female comic readers exceeded male readers by 7%.

Another study (Institute of Philippine Culture, 1980) on reading habits of Filipinos found that comics were one of the most popular print media together with newspapers which tended to be used between 1 to 15 times a month. Exposure to comics was higher among younger persons and to a lesser extent, among never-married respondents, persons with higher education, and respondents who lived in houses judged to be in good state of repair.

The study also found that the more affluent persons tend to devote slightly more time to reading of books and comics than do the less affluent. But reading assorted kinds of comic books does not differ substantially by socioeconomic status. However, the higher the level of education, the lower the preference for comics, as the best reading materials for entertainment.

How do readers receive evangelistic messages presented through the comics medium? The Gospel Ad Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ can testify to its effectiveness, through Gospel Ads, published in various secular magazines, comics, and newspapers (Gospel Ad Ministry, 1986).

In January–November 1985, 7,350 people responded to the ads. The messages which appear to be well received, dealt with adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, greed for wealth and power, loneliness, depression, love, hate, gambling, drug-addiction, horoscopes, fortune telling and many other areas of life which are contrary to what the Bible teaches.

In the Philippines, just as in other countries with pronounced language differences between regions or ethnic groups, comics form one medium of communication that can boast of reaching every [p.103](#) population group. The comics literature over half a century has reflected the changing position, tastes, and worldview of the Filipino masses. Today, the comic is unquestionably the most influential mass medium among the semi-literate Filipinos (Marcelo, 1980).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

This pilot study was intended to find out the receptivity towards comics used as a medium of evangelization among female factory workers. The study was divided into three main parts: *Part I* to determine the respondents' comic reading habits, level of knowledge about the Christian Gospel, their attitude toward God, attitude toward using comics as a tool of evangelism, and their main interests and felt needs in life; *Part II* the conceptualizing and creating of a comic book meant for evangelism; *Part III* the testing of the created comic book to determine its effectiveness in carrying out evangelistic messages.

The sampling method employed was the area cluster sample, which confines interviewing to reduce costs but still has an acceptable representative sample (Engel, 1977). Five garment-manufacturing companies were located in Quezon City. Three out of five companies belonged to the small-scale home industry category which employ a maximum of six workers, while the bigger companies employ around 20–30 workers. Respondents were chosen either on a voluntary basis from bigger companies or by special request from the smaller companies.

A total of 30 respondents were employed for survey 1, and 2–6 representatives per company. The same respondents were employed in both surveys in order to gauge accuracy of responses and at the same time to detect changes in their knowledge of the Gospel content.

All data was gathered through personal interviews, for the reason that the presence of the researcher permits greater ability to probe and clarify answers. All interviews were administered by the researcher herself, using two sets of questionnaires as a guide—one set for the first survey and another set for the second survey.

The respondents were females, working in garment manufacturing companies as sewers (20), shaders, cutters and packers (8) and in supervisory positions (2).

All data gathered from survey 1 regarding the respondents' background characteristics provided a basic framework for the creation of the comic book intended for evangelism. The procedure started with the conceptualization of the basic story and

transforming it into a script with captions and dialogue. Then the illustrator visualized p. 104 the script and put suitable illustrations into frames divided accordingly in every page of the comic book. After the artwork was completed, the comic book was reproduced and distributed to all 30 respondents before the second interview took place. This enabled the respondents to read the comic book. Then the comic was tested for effectiveness in carrying evangelistic messages.

In the presentation of findings that follows, a summary of the respondent's profile is provided, their comic reading habits, attitudes toward Biblical themes in comics, attitudes toward God, level of knowledge about Christian theological themes, and areas of interest and felt needs in life. The data was analyzed to help assess whether comics could be used as a communications medium to factory workers and to identify areas that could be used in the comic book story.

Profile of Respondents

Age: most respondents (40%) were in the age bracket of 26–34 and 33% were in the 19–25 group; 16% were under 18 years and 10% were over 35 years of age. *Civil status:* 18 (60%) of the 30 respondents were single, 11 (34%) married, and 1 divorced.

Education: 22 reached elementary and high school level and of the seven who attended college only two were able to finish.

Religion: only one respondent was Protestant, the others were Roman Catholic. Their responses regarding self-perceived religiosity indicated differences in perception. Only four regarded themselves as 'very religious', 23 as 'a little religious' and three as 'not religious'. Most of the respondents perceived religiosity as activities done in fulfilment of their religious obligations to a certain faith. For example, church attendance, prayer, Bible reading, obeying God's commandments. Only two people related their religiosity to personal faith in Christ.

The sample can then be described as urban, literate, working class, with a basic religious knowledge.

Comic Reading Habits/Practices

Sixteen (53%) read comics less than once a week and the others read comics only once a week. This was not because they lack interest in comics but mainly because of the lack of time, money and comic materials. Most preferred Tagalog language comics and eight liked English language comics, with one preferring Ilocano. Some cited a p. 105 preference for both English and Tagalog. When given a choice of different types of comics, most respondents selected educational comics followed by fantasy, humour, romance, horror, and, finally, drama. By selecting educational comics first, these respondents indicated they wanted to learn from their reading.

Interest in Comics with Bible Themes

Most respondents were either interested (43%) or fairly interested (46%) in comics with Bible themes. A number of respondents (43%) said that, during the past six months, they had read such comics, but could not recall the titles, apart from the more commonly known such as 'St John', 'Gospel Comics' and 'Kasaysayan ni Hesus'. Religious comics were rated as interesting, informative and believable. Respondents agreed that comics could be used as a medium to explain biblical truth. They said that complicated matters in the Bible can be made more understandable with interesting illustrations.

Bible Readership, Frequency and Reasons for not Reading it

Most respondents (76%) indicated they read the Bible but of these only two read it every day and the others said they read it less than once a week. Four of the seven who did not read the Bible said they had no Bible and others said they did not have time to read it. Of the respondents who read the Bible nearly all said it was inspired by God, but one said it was a product of man's imagination. This finding shows that respondents were not antagonistic to the Scripture but viewed it positively. Those not reading it also had positive attitudes toward the Bible but were not reading it because of other reasons.

Theological Concepts

All respondents believed in the existence of heaven but five did not believe in the existence of hell. Three believed God would not send anyone to hell and one did not know who could go to heaven. Only one person said that people needed to accept Christ as Saviour in order to gain entrance to heaven—the others believing good works and few sins will allow people into heaven. Sixty-six percent of respondents said hell would be punishment for those who commit major sins such as adultery and murder. Most (83%) believed that sin is some action which goes against the laws of man, such as disobeying traffic rules, stealing or murder etc. These laws dealt more with the [p. 106](#) relationship between man and man, rather than between man and God. Most believed everyone sinned, but three thought it was possible for some people to never commit any sin. Half of the respondents described Jesus as the Son of God, six described him as the Saviour of men's sins, two did not know who He was and most (83%) knew that Jesus had something to do with heaven or hell. All respondents believed there is a God, with 86% saying He is of central importance to their life, and 93% believing He is most powerful of all. A few did not know how powerful God was, or who would go to hell. Overall, these responses reveal the limited awareness of the real concept of sin and salvation.

Areas of Interest and Felt Needs

The need to know the real meaning of life and to have fulfilment in one's job were the two most strongly felt needs among the respondents, followed by knowing the right way to live, true love, and release from loneliness. The least felt area of need was the meaning of death, followed by the realization of who self is. The results from this question served as the guide in the process of creating the comic. Because the needs were identified by the respondents, they would be more likely to read meaning into the comic and find a solution relevant to their needs. Most said they would pray to God if they had a problem but nine said they would talk to a friend about it. These reactions revealed the importance of God in their lives, because they turn to Him for help.

Reactions to the Comic

The respondents had a positive response to the comic, with high ratings for an easy level of understanding, believability, interest, information, and entertainment.

The respondents were asked to cite parts of the comic book which they found confusing. Twenty-five (83%) said they understood everything; one could not understand the phrase on page 10 which said 'sin separated man from God'. Another could not understand [Titus 3:5](#) on page 11. Three other respondents found [Isaiah 64:6](#) on page 11 confusing because they see no wrong in doing good works. These have possibly learnt to do good works in order to gain salvation which is contradictory to what the Bible teaches.

Twenty-five (83%) respondents found no phrases or words in the comic book that is offensive to the readers and not appropriately used. [p. 107](#) But five respondents said that words such as *buwisit* (jinx), *tanga* (stupid), and *walang silbi* (good for nothing), should not

be used in a comic book intended to teach religion. The intention in using these words was to portray the emotion of a character in a certain situation, however it was felt the words should be discouraged so that the young will not learn to use them.

Message Relevance

Thirteen people (43%) said the message of the comic was speaking to themselves, because they saw some character traits in Delia as being similar to their own. Another 16 (53%) felt it was for someone else because they identified similar incidents which have happened to someone they knew, or which they have seen or heard on radio or television drama. One was not sure who the comic was referring to. All respondents agreed that they learnt something from the comic: teachings about God (40%), lessons on real life situations (36%), how to accept Christ as Saviour (10%), forgiveness for each other (10%), do not forsake one's family (3%). They stated they would readily buy such a comic if the price was reasonable, because they learned from it.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The field study found among female factory workers that

1. they have been well exposed to the comic medium;
2. they show great interest in religious comics;
3. their knowledge regarding the Gospel is very limited;
4. their attitude toward God is positive and open;
5. they want more changes in their lives.

The possibility of using comics as a medium of evangelism was also drawn from the reactions of the respondents to the comic book 'Muling Pagkikita' (Till We Meet Again). The main content of the story in this comic book is a typical life situation tie-up with the theme that salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Areas such as sin, good works, Jesus Christ, salvation, and forgiveness were discussed in the comic to help respondents understand the Gospel. Reactions from the second survey indicated that:

Media can either be a vehicle for redemption or condemnation. Moreover, God's communicational activities have provided man with principles to be guided by and even a model to pattern after. His main intent in communicating with man is that He wants to be understood and responded to. [p. 108](#)

1. respondents understood the message of the comic quite well and could recall certain parts which most impressed them;
2. respondents found messages of the comic believable and relevant to life;
3. realistic artwork is better understood than abstract drawings; and
4. some knowledge change occurred after the respondents read the comic in that their minds became enlightened and their belief or perception of God became more defined. They found that God is important but they did not know enough of Him.

This field project could be another contribution to the concrete implementation of evangelism. It will be helpful to pastors in their evangelism work among the economically limited sector of our society, most significantly those who have limited literacy. It will also challenge workers in evangelism to deliver God's word in concrete terms, using pictorial representations so that people who cannot be reached by abstract language can still be evangelized through simple pictures. Recommendations from this study include:

1. Further study on the use of comics for evangelism among sectors of the Philippine society with limited literacy such as male factory workers, labourers, helpers, vendors, etc.
2. A study on the use of comic production and marketing strategy of Christian comics for mass circulation in the secular market.
3. Research on Filipino perception of pictorial representations.
4. Ongoing training of artists, writers and research for a Christian ministry in comic production for the purpose of evangelizing people with limited literacy.
5. Compiling an instructional manual on comic production techniques for personal reference of people interested in this ministry.

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Elena Chen, a Chinese born and bred in Manila, regularly leads home Bible Studies among factory workers. p. 110

Coming Issues