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### Reflections on Experiences Abroad

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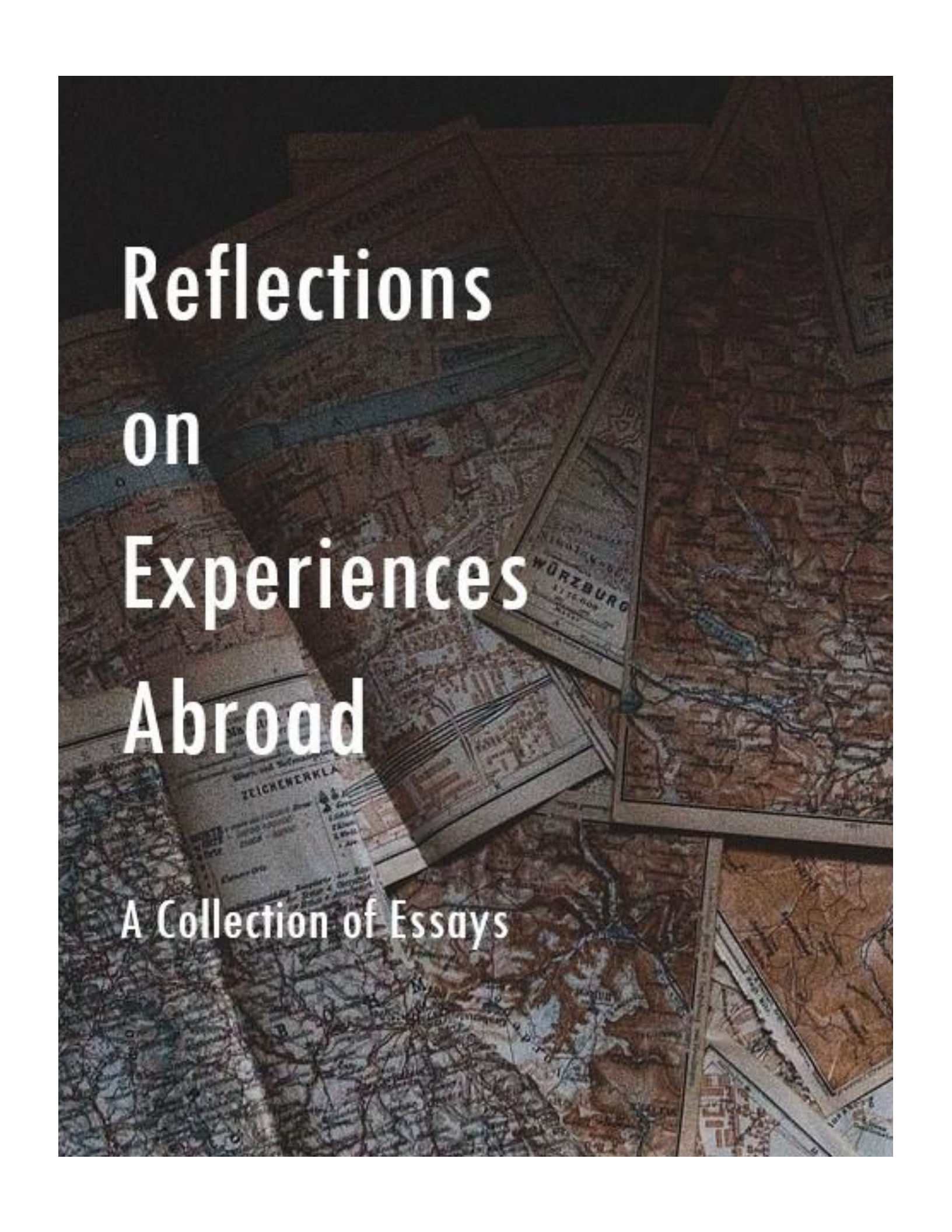
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**Authors**

Myra Ann Houser, Benjamin Utter, Monica Hardin, Ray Franklin, Donald Allen Copeland Jr., and Susan Monroe

The background of the cover is a collage of vintage maps and documents. The maps are sepia-toned and show various geographical features like rivers, roads, and buildings. One prominent map in the center-right shows the city of Würzburg, with the name 'WÜRZBURG' clearly visible. Another document in the lower-left corner has the word 'ZEICHNERKLA' printed on it. The overall aesthetic is historical and scholarly.

# Reflections on Experiences Abroad

A Collection of Essays



# Reflections on Experiences Abroad

## A Collection of Essays

Edited by

Darby Jones  
Sydney Motl  
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Ouachita Baptist University  
Arkadelphia, Arkansas



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# Introduction

**R**eflections on Experiences Abroad is a collection of essays authored by Ouachita Baptist University faculty and staff who have resided outside the United States. As the capstone project in the inaugural offering of a new course, ENGL 3383 Editing, this publication provided opportunities for students to sharpen their copyediting skills, establish a rapport with authors, and participate in the publishing process. Not only did students gain practical experience; they recognized how each essay contributes to Ouachita's rich legacy of international education.

Spanning seven countries, the essays feature a particular facet of living abroad and convey a passion for genuine growth that comes from experiencing other cultures. Ranging from the humorous and creative to the poignant and intellectual, each piece tells a unique story, but all focus on a personal connection with our remarkable world and its people.

## **Botswana and Namibia**

In "On the Trans-Kalahari Highway: Caught in the Middle of Two Spaces," Myra Houser shares her childhood experience of being uprooted from the only home she had known – Botswana – and relocating to Namibia. Houser eloquently reflects on how the Trans-Kalahari Highway served as both a literal and figurative connection between the two countries.

## **China**

Benjamin Utter's "American Dumpling Warrior" is a delightful recollection of his attempt to study martial arts while teaching in China. With wit and linguistic flair, Utter illustrates how long-lasting and meaningful such memories can be.

## **Columbia**

Short, funny, and forthright, Monica Hardin's "Of Course, I Live in a Tree House" recounts her experience as a missionary kid returning to the United States to explain her life and her family's impact to curious and uninformed youth groups. Her frustration got the better of her and a childish instinct led her to spin a tale of rainforests and jungles, much to the obliviousness of her young American audience.

## **Japan**

Ray Franklin's "The Land of Eight Million Gods: Communicating Christian Concepts of God into the Japanese Worldview" navigates a Japanese language barrier where the term *God* in English did not translate correctly. Based on his experience as a missionary to Japan, Franklin provides an insightful and instructive explanation of what he learned from native speakers on communicating the concept of *God* accurately to the Japanese people.

## **Nigeria**

Donnie Copeland's "Patient Long Enough: The Benin Bronzes and the Repatriation of Looted Art and Artifacts" is a stark contrast to the childhood anecdotes and wistful memories presented in the other essays. It takes an objective stance, carefully chronicling the debate over Western colonial powers' seizing Nigerian works of art. His lilting prose underscores the impact of Nigeria losing such powerful representations from its history.

## **Zimbabwe**

"Christmas Collage" by Susan Monroe highlights some of her most positive memories as a missionary kid in Zimbabwe. With warmth and grace, she reflects her family's Christian values and recalls safe, joyful moments during Zimbabwe's time at war.

Collectively, these essays advance an important aspect of Ouachita's mission – fostering a learning community of reasoned engagement with the world, not just the world at our fingertips but the realm beyond that teaches us about the unusual, the unknown, and the uncommon.

Darby Jones, Sydney Motl, and Addie Woods

*Associate Editors and Course Students*

Margaret Reed

*Editor-in-Chief and Course Instructor*

# 1

## On the Trans-Kalahari Highway: Caught in the Middle of Two Spaces

Myra Houser

**T**he biggest meltdown may have come when my parents told us we were going. We'd just finished lunch, and one parent—my mother?—said, “Girls, we're moving to Namibia.” I ran outside, threw sticks against a pepper tree, and cried about leaving Francistown, the only home that I really remembered. I could not imagine any space more beautiful than the tiny town in which I had grown up, any place where the stars could be bigger and brighter, or any space where people would be warmer and more loving. In all of my long, nine years I had never wished for another home, and certainly did not want one now.

I grew up with parents who served as missionaries, beginning when I was three months old (technically, appointed before I was born). Living in Francistown, Botswana, my dad was a church planter, while my mom served as treasurer for the International Missions Board, or IMB, in Botswana. When we moved to Windhoek, Namibia, they switched jobs. Dad served as mission administrator, and Mom worked to help establish and maintain various children's ministries. The move precipitated re-asking of a familiar and much-hated question for third-culture kids: “But which place do you like better?” I also hate(d) the “But do you feel more American or more \_\_\_\_?” version. But I really, really hated the “Did you like Botswana or Namibia better” version. That is why I have decided to cheat whilst writing this essay.

I was meant to write on a special element of a country in which I have lived. But if I know one thing from studying African history, it is of the artificial and historically recent nature of nation-state-boundary lines. There are places in which people recognize

these. In many ways, Botswana and Namibia could not be more different culturally, demographically, historically. But they also share a large border and much common history, and in places there is little discernment between the two. One of those places is in traveling along the Trans-Kalahari Highway that connects the two. It is a unique space, and it cannot be understood as part of just one country, so I might as well cheat and write about two.

For many Americans, the TKH is a study in barren boringness. For many more, it is deadly. A combination of rented cars, over confident automatic car enthusiasts trying their hand at manual cars, driving on the left side of the road, and wild animals has led to one of the highest road fatality rates in the world. That has abated a little now, as the road is mostly paved and even has luxury passenger trains and more stopovers running through it. But my memories of it are far from barren and far from boring. Much of this may be due to associating it with the angst of driving back and forth across two places that I love, lost in my own thoughts and anticipation.

But it is also much, much more than that. It is a point of connection between two of the world's least densely populated countries. As such, it is a place where it is easy to feel alone, to become lost in your thoughts, to see the stars (at night they are bigger and brighter than those in Texas, which makes sense because both countries are, gasp, bigger than Texas). The remoteness that makes the space so dangerous is the same quality that makes it so magical. Those 1,300 miles and miles of dirt (and now mostly paved) road make it possible to not see a car or another soul for many hours. As long as you are not looking for a quick ambulance ride, that can be a great thing. On a practical level, those miles connect several land-locked spaces to a major shipping port—Walvis Bay—with plans to expand to another—Maputo.

While the highway does feature a lot of the quaint towns, small rest areas, and accommodations that self-describe as 'rustic' and cater to folks on such a route, the spaces where people reside are pretty disparate. The places where animals reside, though, are many. Many of southern Africa's larger game animals live along the route, so it is not unusual to see a giraffe grazing on the side of the road, an elephant crossing it, or a troop of obstructionist baboons sitting in the midst of it. The ability to go from 120km to 0 comes in very handy in these circumstances. So does the ability to suspend or not worry about time. Of course, many folks trucking goods across the southern part of the continent do not have the luxury of lengthy baboon-imposed stops, but many people traveling at slower paces—as my family did on holiday—have the ability to

enjoy one of the world's most empty roads. In those instances, running on the timeline of a baboon troop or pulling over to watch a herd or individual something makes for a great break. There is something very unexpected and thrilling about working on a wild timeframe and not knowing what will result.

By far one of the best features of this particular road is the ability to be so off schedule, so lost in a sense. Despite the many differences between Botswana and Namibia, the landscape in this part of the countries is pretty similar. You could be in one space. You could be in the other. You could forget. There is a melding of these disparate parts of life that the highway makes really comforting. In reality, of course, it is funded through the cooperative effort of four nation-states, and so it is kind of a liminal, space-less space. This does not erase those boundaries or the very different lived experiences of people within them, but it does let them meld together in your mind. It lets you be in one long, continuous space rather than having to think about where you are and answer the dreaded question of which space you like best. Maybe, in retrospect, "Girls, we're moving to Namibia" was not such a scary phrase so much as an opportunity to connect with more.

**About the Author**

Dr. Myra Houser is a faculty member in the Sutton School of Social Sciences at Ouachita Baptist University. She is chair of the school's Department of History.

# 2

## American Dumpling Warrior

Benjamin D. Utter

**L**ife humbles us in many ways. Some are allotted chronic illness; some, poverty; others, toupees. Anyone spared such instructive gifts should consider giving international travel a whirl. Bewildering ignorance is, as travel writer Bill Bryson has described, one of the harrowing glories of going abroad: “Suddenly you are five years old again. You can't read anything, you have only the most rudimentary sense of how things work, you can't even reliably cross a street without endangering your life. Your whole existence becomes a series of interesting guesses” (Bryson 36).

Existence in China, where I taught English for a year at Yantai University after graduating from Ouachita, granted me many such opportunities to reconnect with my bewildered inner child. Anyone who has made the sudden shift from college student to teacher will know that the cognitive whiplash is stunning. Projecting confidence in the classroom is paramount and maintaining a “competent teacher” face isn't easy against the relentless firehose of your own inexperience. This is not made easier when conducted across a language barrier and in an unfamiliar culture. I recall well the student who greeted me one morning with, “You are getting a little fat.” She didn't mean it unkindly, and such matter-of-fact observations were not considered particularly offensive in China, but it didn't exactly focus my mind as I tried to prepare for the start of class. To be fair, I had become a great patron of a restaurant near campus called the *Da Da Jiaozi Wang*, or “Big Big Dumpling King,” and perhaps I *was* beginning to emanate a certain rotund aura of big big dumpling royalty myself.

These unsought mortifications of the ego were as nothing to one that I invited into my own life in the form of a twenty-year-old Physical Education major named Li Jiao. Jiao's folks had sent him to a Shandong province martial arts boarding school in the hopes that he would be the next Jackie Chan. Hong Kong movie stardom failed to

call, and so Jiao proceeded glumly along to college, instead, where he *did* get the honor of serving as martial arts tutor to a certain American dumpling king!

Every morning at precisely five o'clock, my alarm clock cleared its digital throat and announced to my dream-self that the time for flying, falling, playing Legos with Mr. Rogers, or what have you, was over, and the time for my morning dose of sweaty pain had once again arrived. I was not the only one to have chosen this daily destiny. Waiting in the dim hallway outside my apartment door were Nick and Akiko—a fellow teacher from Wisconsin and a Japanese exchange student, respectively. The main doors of the building housing foreign teachers and students were locked from the outside (for our “protection”) until six-thirty in the morning, so the three of us got a daily fire escape drill, easing ourselves out a side window like dyslexic cat burglars to drop with sibilant grunts onto grass aglitter with frost. Panting already, we skirted the building to where Jiao Li was waiting in the parking lot, our own little frosty tenth circle of Hell.

I had met Jiao on a snowy morning three weekends earlier, at what I had thought was to be a martial arts demonstration. A poor translation, as it turned out, for this was in fact a martial arts *class*, one at which there were to be no bystanders, but only participants. Fine, except that this particular bystander hadn't been doing too much in the way of exercise between trotting to and from the *Da Da Jiaozi Wang* since the weather had grown too cold (I thought) to continue my morning runs along the beach. And whatever coordination and elasticity of limb I might have begun to develop during an all-too-brief semester of the Tai Kwon Do class my senior year had long since wandered away, leaving me with all the flexibility of a Chinese Communist Party official. But it wouldn't do to be the only one in the square merely standing around taking pictures, so I dropped my coat beside that of the insufferably athletic and enthusiastic Nick, who was already doing warmup sprints, and wandered over to a shivering group of students under the direction of Jiao.

Life is sudden and cruel, and I wonder sometimes how words like “vicissitude” and “anomaly” ever entered into language, so routine are they. How comforting, therefore, are the little consistencies of existence: goldfish will always die within the week; keys are always in the wrong pocket when one is carrying groceries to the car; and, it turned out, coaches sound the same even on the other side of the world. Back in the days before the soft fabrics of athleisure wear, coaches could never sneak up on you. You could always hear their approach, thanks to their nylon wind pants. As a runner, I had never much cared for track suits myself—the “zip-zop zip-zop” of every step was



maddening. But there in China, I finally discovered their greater purpose. Need a little snap in your snap kick? Is your “hi-ya!” a little low? Pop on a pair of “zip-zop” pants and hear the power! WHOOSH!! WHAAPHH!!

Even without the sound effects, Jiao’s demonstration of Wushu techniques would have been nothing short of amazing, and I found myself applauding as wildly as the first-year girls standing beside me. Unfortunately, his performance was to be followed by an assessment of our abilities. Nick, who had been studying a variety of martial arts forms since childhood and had a decade’s worth of confidence and grace in his movements, soundly pummeled a sophomore in the sparring ring and so began to make a name for himself among the students. I did, too, by failing to pivot correctly while attempting a turning side kick and falling right over. Thankfully, due to my quick reflexes, I landed gracefully on my ear. Later, after weeks of pre-dawn practice with Jiao, I would mark my improvement by the fact that I hadn’t done that again. Beyond that, it was hard to see much progress. Jiao didn’t seem too impressed, either.

He had agreed to train us privately in the mornings out of sheer friendliness. Plenty of other students spent time with visiting teachers in order to practice their English, but this seemed of little interest to Jiao, whose English, so far as I could tell, did not seem to consist of much beyond “leg,” “kick,” and “Oh, no!” This last he whinnied every two minutes or so while waving his hands in front of me as if trying to stop a horrible traffic accident from occurring. This wouldn’t have bothered me so much if he didn’t accompany his every exclamation with such a startled look, as if amazed that anyone could bungle such simple maneuvers as he had just demonstrated.

Akiko, whose English was only marginally better than Jiao’s, appointed herself interpreter, which meant that she got a breather whenever she wanted to, usually so that she could squeal, “No, Ben! You . . . no this. Quick!” and similarly helpful things. I wasn’t sure what brought Akiko out to be chewed on by the wind each morning, but suspected it had more to do with our instructor than with what he was instructing. Jiao was solid and lean, with square, handsome features under boyishly curly hair. Akiko cracked easily under my interrogation, cheerfully squeaking, “Yes, I very like him!” Then, after a moment, “Oh, I very like you too!” Well, who knows?

From where we stood in the parking lot, we could look east through a line of trees and just see the morning white caps atop the dark waves of the Yellow Sea, which scorned our gaze and hurled back an eviscerating wind. Eyes and noses streamed as Jiao put us through our paces, and the very air seemed flecked with shrapnel as I

choked it down in great, gulping breaths. Even Nick, who was usually positive beyond all reason, was sometimes hard-pressed to enjoy himself during those mornings. “Look at it this way,” he panted helpfully to me as we set off on our post-workout jog, “if you get pneumonia you can sleep in tomorrow.”

Why did I subject myself to this? I certainly didn’t harbor any illusions that I’d ever be much more than a kicker of trees where martial arts were concerned. (That particular exercise, which even I could manage, was finally denied to us one morning when an old gentleman broke off from his Tai Chi regimen to come over and give us a stern lecture about kindness to plants.) Perhaps those exhausting, demoralizing mornings served as a sort of long-delayed penance. When I was about seven years old, I saw part of *Karate Kid* at a friend’s house and immediately became inspired to instruct my then five-year-old little brother in the ancient and mysterious ways of the martial arts using techniques I made up on the spot. Now, fifteen years later, I knew how he must have felt as I patiently kicked him around the living room, clucking disapprovingly over his disability to stop bruising.

And now another sharp blow, as I am confronted with the fact that a further twenty years have passed since my days of teaching at Yantai. I wish I could report that those grueling exertions in the pre-dawn serve as the origin story for the finely-tuned fighting machine I’ve since become, but it isn’t so. The intervening years have shaped me into a more confident professor, but it’s been a long time since I kicked so much as a tree, preferring these days to hug them. I hope that Jiao Li would be proud, though, that the speed and fury of his protegee’s chopsticks before a bowl of dumplings remains breathtaking to behold.

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**About the Author**

Dr. Benjamin D. Utter is a faculty member in the School of Humanities at Ouachita Baptist University. He teaches in the school's Department of Language and Literature.

# 3

## Of Course, I Live in a Tree House

Monica Hardin

**I**t turns out that I was a bit of jerk as a teenager. But I have solid reasons for it. My fear, though, is that my personal amusements may have led to people living into adulthood believing what I told them. I grew up as a missionary kid in Colombia, and the reality of that life was distinctly different from what people, particularly people of my age cohort, back in U.S. churches perceived. In a time when Colombia was known internationally by depictions in movies like “Romancing the Stone” and coffee commercials starting the fictional Juan Valdez, not to mention the illicit drug trade, people made assumptions. In most situations, I would work to kindly dispel them of their incorrect notions, but other times, I was less patient.

The baseline for my reality as a missionary kid in Colombia is that my life was very similar to the lives of teenagers in the cities in the U.S. We lived in large cities (because that’s where the people are), and I attended a private school that taught AP classes and had sports teams and fine arts programs. We went to church, got together with friends, ate out at restaurants, watched movies, and had pretty regular day-to-day lives.

As a young person, I was bothered by the assumptions that American kids had about my life. I once received a letter from a young girl working on a *Girls in Action* badge in which she asked me if I knew what stickers were. It’s possible that was when my snobbery emerged.

When we were back in the U.S. on furloughs, we would regularly speak at churches, and I was charged with talking to the youth about what it was like to be a missionary kid. Most of the time, it was benign. People were vaguely interested, might ask a couple of questions (e.g. what do you do for fun?), then quickly lose interest, and we’d go outside to play volleyball or something. But there was one place where no

matter how I tried to explain it, the youth simply wouldn't believe that we lived in a big city, etc. I was trying to be patient, but when one kid said, "I just don't know how you survive without tv," that was my last straw. And I spun a tale.

The tale involved my life living in a tree house. Daily, my sister and I would get up in the morning and climb down (no elevators in tree houses) to begin our daily ablutions. We would then step into our sturdy banana leaf canoe to paddle down the piranha-infested waters of the Amazon River to meet up with Juan Valdez for our daily coffee picking. The listeners nodded knowingly as this story fit their assumptions.

As I have aged, I have come to regret that sassiness and snark. My experience overseas gave me a unique perspective on the world, and, as an adult, I have fine-tuned my messaging in an attempt to help people see beyond stereotypes and assumptions. There are probably adults in Texas and Arkansas who still think I actually knew Juan Valdez and that coffee grows in the rainforests of Colombia. But I hope that the first part of my conversation with them maybe supplanted the vivid tale, and they realize that while there are differences among countries and cultures, there is actually a lot more that we have in common when it comes right down to it. And that is likely the most significant understanding that I carry with me from my time out of the U.S.

### **About the Author**

Dr. Monica Hardin is the Associate Vice President for Graduate and Online Education at Ouachita Baptist University. She also is a faculty member in the Department of History of the Sutton School of Social Sciences.

# 4

## The Land of Eight Million Gods: Communicating Christian Concepts of God into the Japanese Worldview

Ray Franklin

**E**ffective communication across cultural landscapes requires the utilization of thematic bridges – themes in one culture that resonate with corresponding themes in another culture. Nowhere is this truer than when communicating Christian concepts about God into the Japanese worldview. After years of study and reflection, this is something I am just now beginning to understand.

### **When “Yes” Means “Yes, Maybe”**

One of my earliest opportunities to share Jesus in Japan came at the Tokyo Olympic Center. Located near Yoyogi station, this sprawling complex contained recreational facilities built during the 1967 Olympics. On this day, I was leaving the pool area after a workout when a businessman struck up a conversation in English – a good thing since I had just started language study. Being a passionate missionary, I soon pulled from my gym bag a bilingual copy of an evangelistic brochure and began to go through it with the man step by step. He seemed keenly interested as he followed along. At every step I would ask if he understood and each time he replied with an enthusiastic “yes” – or so I thought.

Upon reaching the end of the brochure, I asked this new friend if he would like to receive Jesus as his “Lord and Savior.” To this he replied with astonishment, “Why would I want to do that?” I was confused. He seemed to have been so receptive. How could he now appear to be so far from making the most important decision of his life?

I later realized that I had failed to understand two important things about communication in the Japanese culture. First, the Japanese word for “yes” is “*hai*.” “*Hai*” does not mean yes in the common English sense. It could mean “Yes, I think I understand you,” or “Yes, I hear the words coming out of your mouth,” or, “Yes, I am here simply being polite to you.” It almost never means, “Yes, I agree with what you are saying.”

My second communication failure had begun with my opening sentence, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” I had lost this man at the word, “God.” The Japanese word for god is *kami* (神), a word steeped in the religious tradition of Shinto (神道, The Way of the Gods.) *Kami* refers, not to the creator-God of the universe, but to the myriads of spirit-gods inhabiting the Japanese worldview. Though I was speaking in English, this man was understanding in Japanese. Accepting a *kami* as Lord and Savior made little to no sense for him.

### **A God of Love?**

Years later, I encountered another language barrier. My family and I had returned for stateside assignment during my oldest daughter’s freshmen year at Ouachita Baptist University. Several Japanese exchange students attended OBU in the year 1999 to 2000, and I was given the wonderful opportunity of leading them in a weekly Bible study. During one of these sessions, a young lady questioned my use of the Japanese word, *ai* (愛), for love. “Don’t tell me God loves me,” she said, “It makes me feel creepy.” By this time in missionary career, I felt comfortable speaking in the Japanese language and had directly quoted *ai* from a well-respected Japanese Bible translation of John 3:16.

She explained that *ai* can communicate sexual connotations and could even be the kind of love a dog can have. I realized why its use with God made this student feel uneasy.

“So, what should I say?” I asked her.

“Tell me God protects me,” she replied.

The Japanese verb for protect is *mamoru* (守る). It is written in Kanji, or Chinese ideographs, with a character that pictures a father’s arms holding his child. Since then, I have always made it a point to heed this student’s advice. But my communication misadventures in Japanese did not end there.



### The Lord of Middle Heaven

One day, toward the end of my time in Japan, a retired missionary by the name of Tom Masaki came all the way from his home in Hawaii to see me in my Tokyo office. (By that time, I had been given a leadership role that included an office in the Japan Baptist Mission's national headquarters.) Tom informed me that extensive research had convinced him traditional Japanese Bible translations use of the word *Kami* for God had been a huge mistake. The Japanese language contained a much better word for the Creator-God of the Bible. This indigenous word, *Ama-no-Naka-Nushi-Kami* (天之中主神, The Lord of Central Heaven God) had existed for centuries. In the ancient city of Kyoto, a Shinto courtyard housed a special place where this God was enshrined. By the time of Tom Masaki's visit, however, *Kami* had been the accepted word for God (אֱלֹהִים 'ēlō·hîm in Hebrew; θεός theos in Greek) since the earliest Bible translations of the 1800s.

To my knowledge, no Japanese Bible publisher ever accepted Tom's recommendation to change the word for God. However, our conversation that day further confirmed in my mind that the concept of a supreme, creator-God does exist in Japanese culture, whether the typical Japanese person is aware of it or not.

### Like a Fish Out of Water

Back in the 1980s, during my time as a church planter on the island of Okinawa, Japan, a dear friend and colleague, Pastor Asato shared with me stories of the one true God handed down through Japanese oral tradition. Japanese who knew of these stories were aware of this God's existence. However, their culture taught that this God was so high above humans in rank that, according to an ancient proverb, "A person has no more business dealing with this God than a fish has being out of water." Instead, Japanese concerned themselves with the millions of spirit-gods inhabiting their religious thought world. For them, there were spirit-gods in the home, in the neighborhoods, on the mountains, among the trees, in ancient castles, family tombs (the ancestors), in Shinto shrines, and almost anywhere else one could imagine. The Japanese have an expression, *Yaonorozu no Kami* (八百万の神) that literally translates as "eight million gods." Even so, they know, or should know, that their own cultural traditions recognize the existence of a creator-God reigning supreme above all.

### Guiding Principles for Communicating God to the Japanese

So, what is the best way to speak to the Japanese worldview concerning the God of the Bible? Here are some guiding principles based on the above observations:

- *Kami* alone can never adequately communicate the concept of the supreme God of the Bible.
- If *Kami* is to be used, it must be accompanied by modifiers such as *Zennou* (全能 all knowing), *Chichi-naru* (父なる Father), or *Ten-no* (天の Heavenly).
- That this God exists in their own cultural traditions must be clearly stated to the Japanese.
- Though the term *Ama-no-Naka-Nushi-Kami* may be helpful as a cultural bridge, it is too unwieldy and not widely recognized enough to have significant impact.
- The God of the Bible is a God of love, who protects use with divine agape love.
- This God is not to be ignored or manipulated. He in fact demands our attention and allegiance.
- To ignore this God is to dishonor him through unfaithfulness and shameful neglect.
- This God is the ultimate giver of life, breath, health, and everything good.
- We owe this God our dutiful allegiance for eternity.
- Jesus, through his work on the cross, has made the way for us to reach this God.

Faith in this God frees us from the unrealistic and overwhelming burden of placating so many so-called gods. Fear of Him alone replaces fear of retribution from these godlings with peace, joy, and assurance.

### God in the Japanese Thought-World

- *Kami* (God)
- *Hito* (People, humans)
- *Rei* (Spirit-gods, often referred to as kami)
- *Jyuuutaki* (住宅 Traditional Japanese home)
- *Butsudan* (仏壇 Place for ancestor worship)
- *Hinukan* (火抜かん Kitchen fire god, Okinawa dialect)
- *Shiro* (城 Castle ruins, site for spirit worship)

- *Jinja* (神社 Shinto Shrine, in this case a graveyard)
- *Toori* (通り Entrance to Shinto Shrine)
- *Ohaka* (お墓 Family tomb, Buddhist)
- *Uganju* (拝所 Site for spirit worship, Okinawan dialect)
- *Ohaka* (お墓 Family tomb, Okinawa Shinto)
- *Jyujika* (十字架 Cross, representing Jesus the way to God)

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# 5

## Patient Long Enough: The Benin Bronzes and the Repatriation of Looted Art and Artifacts

Donnie Copeland

**T**he modern West African nation of Nigeria is a bustling, thriving cultural power that has made a lasting mark on literature, cinema, and the arts for many decades now. The country also has a rich history of art and culture making dating back centuries. Though its time as a colonial subject of the British Empire, independence from Britain, followed by civil war and economic turmoil may have diminished its shine on the global stage, the nation today offers more and more to contemporary world culture than ever before. However, Nigerians also want their historical treasures back, the art taken by their colonial masters more than a century ago. The call to return African works that have been enjoyed now for generations in major and minor collections throughout the West is growing ever louder, and it is my hope that this return of cultural treasures will be delayed no longer.

I had the pleasure of growing up in Nigeria and lived there on and off over 16 years between 1980 and 1996. The last time I visited was in 1998. To say the least, that was a long time ago, yet those years have shaped much of who I am and how I think about much of life. I was there as a child, my parents were teachers and professors at a seminary in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, in the southwest part of the country. This is Yorubaland, not too far from Lagos, the largest city in Africa and one of the largest on the globe. Later on, I went to school in Jos, Plateau State, among the Hausa and many other cultures, in north-central Nigeria.

At the time we moved to Nigeria in 1980, the country was experiencing an oil boom (Onuoha and Elegbede 2017). That money never really made it around to improve roads and infrastructure in Ogbomoso or really any other cities and towns

outside of the capital city of Lagos. The inability of the military government to convert its oil wealth to improve the lives of the citizens of Nigeria is the central, dominant story of my time living there. We often say of such countries that they are emerging economies, building and growing, becoming important. People used to say such places were part of the Third World, now we say the Global South. Of course, much has changed for Nigeria; the new capital city of Abuja is developing into a western, suburban style city in the heart of Nigeria.

Nigeria was then and has become prominent in terms of global culture with artistic, musical, and literary accomplishments to be noted (Falola 2022). There is also a dynamic diaspora of Nigerian culture embedded throughout the globe. In the time I lived in the country, I didn't experience Nigeria as an actor on the global stage. Some of that can be attributed to being a child, sure. I learned later on, after having returned to the United States, that El Anatsui, a prominent, globally important artist, was at work in his studio just an hour drive from where I lived in Oyo state, a missed opportunity for myself as an aspiring artist. Rather, I experienced the material culture of Nigeria at the market, observing goods such as woven blankets and other textiles. There were carvings and batiks, leather working and metal working. There was a bronze working tradition and a strong ceramic tradition which dated back centuries. We had a variety of these sorts of goods in our home.

To say the least, there is much more to the art of Nigeria. It turns out that those bronze and ceramics traditions are major contributors to global culture and heritage. However, much of what I experienced was informed by the tourism industry as goods generally made to sell to expatriates. While much of the work may have been really excellent, was it really representative of the artistic soul of the country? There is a long history of artmaking in different regions of what is now called Nigeria; the Nok, Ife and Benin cultures all occurred within its modern-day borders. I only became aware of these details after I lived in Nigeria as I was studying art in college. As I became aware of these historical examples, much of the art I observed in books was not artwork housed in Africa. These works, though African in origin, were housed in European and other museums around the globe. I learned about how these works made their way from places like the Kingdom of Benin to museums in London, Paris and elsewhere. Even the Kimbell Museum of Art in Fort Worth has on display a wonderful royal Yoruba portrait made of terracotta; it is excellent.

Part of the legacy of colonialism is that people around the globe, though mostly Europeans, have had the privilege of enjoying these works for themselves in places like the British Museum, which has approximately 6 million visitors per year (British Museum 2021). Even major 20th century artists like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse are indebted to learning from examples of African art in the museums and cafes of Paris. And now, as many readers will know, there is a great push to return many of these works to their countries of origin. Many believe doing so would be good. Critics of this movement maintain that most places, like Nigeria and other former colonial subjects, are not ready for these works to be returned. Critics say that the works are best cared for in European institutions, often implying a sort of benevolent relationship to the objects and the locations from where they came. And sometimes this point of view may have some good support - look no farther than the recent destruction of Assyrian monuments and art in modern-day Iraq, now lost forever (Shaheen 2015). The most famous examples of this question of repatriation of artworks are probably the marbles at the British Museum from the Parthenon in Athens, the Elgin Marbles; and from Nigeria, the famous Benin Bronzes (and others from Ife), which are on display in many institutions throughout Europe. Please note that at the time of the looting of these works by the British in 1897, photos of the works made by British soldiers were labeled as pictures of "loot" (Marshall 2020). You can look these photos up online for yourselves. One does not call a gift from a friend, or something rightfully purchased, "loot".

There is no question of who the artworks belong to in most of these disputes. The works belong to the cultures and countries of origin. Yet the question remains, should the works be returned? If ownership is not a question, they why not return the work to their rightful owners? In fact, many institutions like London's Horniman Museum are taking steps to return the works to their owners (Katz 2022).

So why not? Wouldn't repatriation of artworks would be of real benefit to countries like Nigeria and its citizens? European governments should do all they can to return looted works. To not do so is to continue to act as colonial master. The first benefit of doing so would be to those Nigerians who do not have the privilege of travelling to Europe in order to see the artifacts of their ancestry. Having the works in Nigeria would allow the citizens of Nigeria to enjoy their own history and boost their travel industries. Undoubtedly, returning works would improve visibility of these locations and make them destinations. Important to note is the development of a new

museum to be built in Benin City. The Edo Museum of West African Art would house any returned works returned the kingdom from western institutions and will incorporate the ruins of the old Benin City (Gershon 2020). Infrastructure and payment systems in places like Nigeria need major investment and the challenge of getting around may deter some who would want to visit, however many tourists are more and more likely to travel to Nigeria, as they have to the UK, to enjoy this cultural heritage (Ward, n.d.).

Above all, the best reason to return the artworks to their original context would be just that, to return the work to their original owners and witness the power that context gives to the works. This is akin to seeing a great cathedral as a whole, having travelled many miles to get there, as a pilgrim would have centuries ago, rather than seeing a piece of a cathedral scattered here and there throughout a museum. A random stained-glass window or sculpture of a gargoyle is not sufficient to convey what visiting an intact gothic cathedral is actually like, how beautiful and emotionally engaging such a place can be. Seeing the Benin Bronzes as a complete group, as they once were in the Oba's Palace at Benin City, would be just such an experience.

Returning these and other artworks to their original owners would have benefits and be a righting of a long-standing wrong that would serve all of us well. For those who hold out and maintain that the works should remain in their current situation, the main reason to resist returning the works must lie in the fact that an immense transfer of wealth would occur that most institutions have not yet come to terms with, and their hesitation and realization of what a great loss such a transfer would be simply underscores the real value of the works, to all of us, as part of our shared history, but most especially to those who would see their treasures returned.



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# 6

## Christmas Collage

Susan Monroe

**E**very year I get excited as the humid Arkansas summer gives way to the cooler months of autumn. The leaves turn different shades of the sun and wistfully drop off their branches, readying the trees to be dark gray silhouettes against the soft white snows of winter. When I was growing up in southern Africa, October was called suicide month. In the bush where my parents lived, temperatures could top one hundred and twenty degrees even under the nearest shade tree. The humidity was low, which made the heat more bearable, but added to the cracked, parched condition of that remote area. In November the dryness would be broken by the plummeting rain which signaled the start of the rainy season, and with just enough, but not too much rain, the velvet bugs would come out of the ground. These pinto-bean-sized spiders had backs that looked and felt like bright red velvet and legs that retracted as soon as you picked them up—only to shortly reappear as they crawled around on your hand. Christmastime would not be far behind.

I've always loved Christmas—the music, the decorations, the food. I think when we honor what Christmas is really about—the birth of Jesus Christ—God enables us to enjoy all the festivities of the season. Because God gave His Greatest Gift at Christmas, we can join in the joy of giving. Growing up as a missionary kid who went to boarding school, Christmas also meant the end of the school year, a trip to the big city, and the excitement of going home.

My parents would pick me up, and we'd head off to Harare in our little R4. Since we lived in a war zone, nobody paid attention to speed limits—the faster you drove the less likely you were to be a successful target. We would go out to eat at The Bamboo Inn, snack on Cadbury chocolate, and maybe see a “new” movie on the big

screen. At least once we had to have morning tea-time at Barbours, the closest thing Zimbabwe had to an American department store. They made Danish pastries shaped like pinwheels and covered with luscious lemon sauce and served strong chicory coffee with hot milk. We would shop for Christmas presents for each other, maybe find a new *Peanuts* book from the States, always on the lookout for unique gifts and beautiful curios made within the country.

Home was Sanyati, a mission station sixty miles away from the nearest town. It sported a one hundred-bed hospital, elementary school, high school with dormitories, church, eight homes and six apartments for missionaries, and many Africans' homes. As my dad turned off the main dirt road into the station, the first thing I saw was the hospital chapel window. Lavender periwinkles bordered the front of our house, along with my mom's jalapeno pepper plants. There were beds of marigolds in the front yard, and a banana tree and vegetable garden in the back, right outside the bathroom window. We watered the garden with the bath water we saved in a big metal barrel. The water from the kitchen sink ran directly onto the rose bush that could be seen from the kitchen window. Our dog, Pat, came running to greet us. She had white fur, with a black and brown spot on her back and a dark ring around her naturally stubby tail. When she wanted attention, she limped on one of her paws. Simba, our cat, could be found in my room, rolled up in a ball between the sheet and the thin bedspread, a lump in the bed which meowed when poked.

We would set up our silver, aluminum Christmas tree in the living room, then decorate it with traditional round ornaments—silver, gold, red, and blue ones—with a few oblong bright green ones. A special tinsel ornament went on top. Over the fireplace we hung the felt banner of the manger scene my mom had made. The pie-shaped plastic candy holder with the Christmas mouse on top of it went on the coffee table and the kids' Christmas books were laid out. We had a Christmas card holder made of wire mesh and red velvet ribbon, with two green elves posed on top. Gifts from our American relatives went under the tree.

My mom would get busy in the kitchen making chocolate fudge loaded with pecans, creamy peanut butter fudge, divinity, date nut candy, and a big Texas fruit cake. We always shared homemade treats with the neighboring missionaries and they with us. My dad brought a big stereo system back from Vietnam after his year there during the war. It had a phonograph that could play five LPs one right after the other—

we could hear a pause and a click as one record finished and the next one dropped into position. It also had a large reel-to-reel tape player. We had sacred and secular Christmas music playing non-stop—from Marlene Dietrich singing “The Little Drummer Boy” to Mancini-sounding orchestral arrangements of traditional carols, from “Frosty the Snowman” to “Jesu Bambino.” You could hear the music welcoming you as you walked into our yard, way before you got near our open door.

One of the highlights of the season was going caroling on the lorry, the vehicle that was used to haul mail back and forth to town and pick up groceries twice a week for people on the station. All the missionary families would climb into this long, open-bed truck and go singing to our African neighbors. It was inevitable, since it was the rainy season, that the lorry would get weighted down and stuck in a big mud hole as it meandered down the narrow, dirt roads, and that we’d all have to jump off until the men could push it back out and we could resume our journey.

One year the MKs staged a modern-day version of the Christmas story. Jesus was laid in a cardboard box in the garage of the Holiday Inn. Joseph came in leading Mary on a bicycle, and Mary accidentally dropped Baby Jesus in the box, but we still had the angels, shepherds and wise men. One year the younger children sang “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” holding up my empty Avon partridge in a pear tree perfume bottle every time that bird was mentioned, and the youth sang “The Twelve Days After Christmas,” which hilariously told the story of what happened to all the gifts after the lovers had a quarrel.

I look back and realize that my happy childhood memories are blessings from God, and that He graciously gives us opportunities in each year to make new memories while we remember the old ones with joy. But I still miss the velvet bugs.

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