

Advancing Christ: Understanding how Foreign Cultures Respond to Missionary Aviation

Aidan C. Van Pelt

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Mitchell Morrison, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Steven Brinly, MCA
Committee Member

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

After World War II, missionary aviation became a profound influence on the world of missions. The impacts of missionary aviation culture on the spread of the Gospel in foreign locations will be investigated to better understand how it influences Christianity. The effect of expediting the travel-time to remote locations is apparent, but missionary pilots have several other influences as well, such as, community development, education and discipling locals. These various cultural aspects will be explored by first defining the culture, discussing the history of missiological responses and the origin of missionary aviation, and then examining the effects of missionary aviation to the local groups. Finally, a conclusion will extrapolate on the positive and negative influences of aeronautical missions.

Keywords: Missionary, aviation, culture, westernization, anthropology, missions, and aeronautics.

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Wars always leave a plethora of legacies, continually shaping the culture and daily life of millions of people years after the final bombs are dropped. One such legacy is missionary aviation, which was spearheaded in the mid-1940s by several American, British, and Australian pilots who realized the massive potential for aviation in the world of evangelical missions. Founded originally as Christian Airmen's Missionary Fellowship (CAMF) in 1945, the original Missionary Aviation (MA) organization, now known as Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF), serves in "primitive airstrips carved in jungles and deserts or on mountainsides ... as a link to the outside world for missionaries, church workers, medical staff, refugee feeding volunteers, aid agencies and rural development workers" (Half-century of MAF, 1995, p. 1). Throughout the ensuing decades, MAF began to share the aviation ministry with dozens of other emerging MA organizations in order to advance the Gospel and serve isolated people groups across the world.

Research Background

Anthropological Overview of Culture

General operations within foreign contexts remains the beginning of how to understand effects of missionary aviation upon culture. History is rife with individuals traversing oceans and political barriers to experience, or influence, life in foreign environments. Missionaries stand at the forefront of this list, as they set out to influence the core beliefs of individuals in order to convert their lives. Though this thesis will not genuinely examine the religious mandate and content pertaining to the missionaries' message, as that is a rather extensive topic, the contents of their impact will be. The primary impact of missionaries tends to affect the nature of the environment that they adapt to in the foreign context. This environment is often referred to as *culture* and is commonly associated with the term *culture shock*.

Country and Culture Shock

Despite their ambiguity, upon examination it becomes clear that the terms *culture* and *culture shock* are core factors influencing missionaries' work. Culture is a weighty term that is overflowing with meaning and various implications, so its counterpart term, *culture shock* (CS), will be examined first. CS is excellently defined by one author, pen-named Matthew Collins for security purposes, who dwelled in Afghanistan for six years amongst the seventy nations he has visited while serving various people groups. Collins (2016) reports that "Many travelers confuse country shock with culture shock" (p. 57).

Collins depicts country shock as something that can be overcome rather quickly by learning to accept a new environment. In his example with Afghanistan, country shock is evident by a repulsion or disturbance of the dusty environment, peculiar foods, the war-mongering and weapons amongst the streets and the chaos ensuing the broken people from constant warring (Collins, 2016). On the other hand, culture shock is portrayed as something that is deeper and takes significantly longer to overcome, rooting itself in our very belief systems and core of our being (Collins, 2016). In essence, culture shock is the reason behind the country shock, the *why* of how different environments operate in their unique environments. However, culture shock can be further expounded upon by detailing the intricacies of the proper definition of culture.

Culture

While culture is something that can be commonly used in everyday conversation, few individuals tend to have a concrete definition of it. Howell and Paris (2011) define culture as "the total way of life that is learned, adaptive, shared, and integrated" (p. 36). This entails a dynamic setting covering a local entity that changes at various paces due to numerous influences. Further,

culture ultimately affects each detail of daily life, such as linguistics, marriage, economics, power, and sexuality” (Howell and Paris, 2011, p. v).

Culture can also be described as a four-layer system. Each of these areas has distinguishable behaviors demonstrated differently by each culture. These behaviors are the first layer, which are then grounded by the values of the people in their quest to portray what is best to them. Then, the culture digs further into the third layer, the belief system, which seeks what is true from the people’s understanding. Finally, all of these three layers are founded upon worldview, which is how the culture perceives what is real (Dent-Fitzsimmons and Harper, 2020).

Finally, due to culture’s dynamic nature, anthropologists typically use a variety of metaphors to teach it to others. Two of the primary examples of cultural metaphors stem from the iceberg and glasses metaphors. According to the iceberg analogy, culture is observed above the surface with unique behaviors that are specific to that culture, such as foods, dress, mannerisms, language and traditions. However, a gargantuan amount of ice lurks beneath the surface, representing the culture’s core values, beliefs, myths, and truths (Dent-Fitzsimmons, 2020). Secondly, culture is also comparable to a pair of glasses. This analogy is quite similar to one used to describe the concept of worldview and asserts that culture can be observed as a pair of colored lenses that everyone puts on and sees the world through. Thus, culture affects the way every human being perceives the reality and circumstances that they dwell in (Dent-Fitzsimmons, 2020).

Cultural Anthropology

The study of such sciences is properly referred to as cultural anthropology. In a broader view, anthropology (which involves the study of man) is divided into four subject areas:

archeology, linguistics, biological anthropology, and cultural / social anthropology (Howell and Paris, 2016). This study will specifically apply the subfield of cultural anthropology, which differs slightly from social anthropology in that it focuses on the *other* instead of the *self*, with a specific emphasis of understanding from the perspective of the people within the given *environment* (Chang, 2020). Thus, cultural anthropology is scholastically defined as the applied “description, interpretation, and analysis of similarities and analysis of similarities and differences in human creatures” (Howell and Paris, 2011, p. 4).

Historically, culture has been described and studied through various methods. The term “culture” derives from the German *Kultur*, which translates as *to develop* or *to grow* (Howell and Paris, 2011). Cultural anthropologists were first recorded studying this concept during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they sought to develop a comprehension of the underlying reason of unique behaviors between dissimilar environments (Howell and Paris, 2011). By the Victorian-era, cultural anthropology became much more pronounced. These original *armchair anthropologists* were infamous for gathering data and examining experiences merely from reading books and travel logs instead of conducting their own research due to the philosophy that their culture was superior; this philosophy was visibly reflected in early anthropological works, such as through the theory of unilinear cultural evolution (UCE), which states that all people have the same culture, but in lesser or greater extents (Howell and Paris, 2011). The theory of UCE was rather derogatory in nature, implying that anyone not in a Victorian-era culture was a lesser person due to dwelling in a less-evolved culture.

Unfortunately, Christians supported this view for a significant amount of time in an effort to sustain the belief that all cultures came from one original culture, in reference to the God creating the first man and woman, despite the fact that the theory of UCE supported racism and a

division of humanity in valuing others with a supposedly greater enlightenment as having more worth (Howell and Paris, 2011). Thankfully, the theory of UCE began to fade during the early 1900s as anthropologists began to utilize direct study methods in describing the influence of culture, which eventually led to the theory of historical particularism (HP), which argues that “each culture is a unique representation of its history and context” (Howell and Paris, 2011, p. 29). Thus, the theory of HP suggests that each culture is unique (thus alluding to a multitude of cultures and not a singular, overarching culture) within its particular timeframe and people group (Howell and Paris, 2011).

The theory of HP paved the way for the modern theory of culture, which is deemed cultural relativism (CR). The theory of CR ultimately states that the observed cultural behavior is properly understood only within its economic, historical, and religious context (Howell and Paris, 2011). Due to some confusion, Christians may be weary of such a theory due to the term *relativism*, which does not allude to relative truth, but rather to relative context in which the truth is perceived.

The final aspect of cultural anthropology to be explored in preparation for the following research is the concept of ethnocentrism. Defined, ethnocentrism is “the use of one’s own culture (ethno) at the center (centrism) of interpretation and typically devaluing the other culture” (Howell and Paris, 2011, p. 33). A simple demonstration of ethnocentrism is displayed through the Victorian armchair anthropologists, who suggested that their European culture was superior to assumingly undeveloped and unenlightened people groups. Ethnocentrism is divided into three subfields: xenophobia, the irrational and intense detesting of other cultures; cultural superiority, which is the idea that one specific culture (almost always the native culture) is more civilized,

intelligent, or advanced; and tacit ethnocentrism, described as the assumed belief that one's native environment is the norm (Howell and Paris, 2011).

Religion and Culture

Having examined culture within the context of its conception and study, it is time to observe its unique relationship between religion. While religion is categorically a sub-dimension of culture, it is perplexing in that it also is a defining cornerstone of culture. As mentioned previously, cultural behaviors are based upon values, which rest atop beliefs, which are rooted in worldview, which is typically applied as religion. Dr. Tim Chang (2020), a cultural anthropologist, describes the relationship between religion and culture as intertwined, and states that changing the religion is comparable to changing the culture. Thus, in order for missionaries to influence the religion of others, they must, to some degree, influence or alter the culture. This has caused a variety of responses to missionaries interacting with foreign cultures, which are amplified later in this study. Therefore, a brief examination of the interaction between religion and culture will be quite beneficial beforehand.

Anthropologically, religion has been defined by Clifford Geertz as "A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these concepts with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Howell and Paris, 2011, p. 177). This definition affirms that religion is affected by culture in that it is influenced by a general order (i.e., the people within the cultural context) and also influences the culture in return through elements such as moods, motivations, and legends. However, it is imperative to note for Christians that this definition does not account for what true religion is, but rather creates a broad definition in order to better understand belief systems within the contexts of

various people groups (Chang, 2020). By understanding religion anthropologically, one can begin to unpack some of the cultural baggage that has been embedded into individual worldviews of both oneself and within other people.

Geertz's modern definition of religion was centuries in the making, as early attempts to grasp this ideal were massively influenced by the theory of UCE. One of the earliest concepts of religion stemmed in the late 1800s from Edward Tylor, who defined religion as either animistic, polytheistic, monotheistic, or atheistic (Chang, 2020). This later sneaked into the theory of UCE with Sir Henry Lewis Morgan's theory that all civilizations evolved through stages of religion, growing from savagery to barbarism to civilized religion (Chang, 2020). Thankfully, this idea was later repulsed and replaced with the current theory that correlates with universal particularism.

The Gospel, Culture and Contextualization

Now that the foundation has been laid for culture and anthropological religion, it is time to inspect the interactions between the two. This study homes in on the interactions between missionary aviators and their striving to advance the Gospel to various people groups; therefore, a broader perspective will be first necessary in order to comprehend the results of the study. The relationship between the Gospel and culture is not novel, and missionaries have found that cross-cultural communication is rather complicated (Goheen, 2001). The first struggle with cross-cultural communication encompasses the penetration of the Gospel into a singular culture, which must battle both syncretism and irrelevance. If the message syncretistic, it garbles the content that the missionary intends to transfer, but if it is irrelevant and fails to attract the audience, it will lack impact (Goheen, 2001).

Secondly, missionaries must combat ethnocentrism and relativism in their endeavor to share the Gospel across any culture (Goheen, 2001). Regarding ethnocentrism, missionaries must be cautious in avoiding the incorporation of their native culture in the advancement of the Gospel in foreign people groups. Often, this is viewed as westernization, which will be discussed in the next section. This leaves the missionaries to deal with contextual relativism, which drastically differs from cultural relativism. This form of relativism removes accountability in the contextualization of the content being transferred, leaving no criteria for a faithful cross-cultural translation of the Gospel (Goheen, 2001). This is primarily solved by forming an *Archimedean point*, which is a cultural idea that connects the message of the Gospel to the specific culture while assuring faithfulness to the story, a relevant dialogue between the cultures, and unity between Christians from different cultures (Goheen, 2001).

History of Cultural Responses to Missions

While there has been a substantial amount of research conducted in the field of general missionaries, who typically portray a pastoral role, there has been a noticeable lack of study correlating to MA within its cultural role. Unfortunately, much of the published research pertaining to missionaries affecting foreign cultures is remarkably negative, as too often missionaries associated Christianity with Western culture and thus, sought to westernize foreign cultures in order to proselytize them. However, this trend has been substantially reversed in past years, with a heightened awareness of cultural intelligence (CQ). This dictates a necessity to reevaluate the modern influence of missionaries as they influence foreign cultures. Further, MA has an enhancement in this gap of research as it possesses a unique role in that the aviators are not seeking a pastoral role among the local people they serve, but rather seek to live godly lives while serving others through aviation. Additionally, MA has another unique challenge as it

introduces foreign cultures to several forms of modern technology, such as airplanes, computers and radios. Thus, this field is benefited by the increased knowledge of comprehending how missionary aviators influence others through their work and daily interactions instead of seeking to only evangelize.

Globalization and Westernization

First, the sibling concepts of globalization and westernization will be discussed in the examination of historical responses to missions. Howell and Paris define globalization as “the integration of local, regional, and/or national production, exchange, and culture into a global system” (2011, p. 205). Globalization has excelled with the increasing technologies allowing instantaneous virtual communication across the world. This has required corporate managers and leaders in a plethora of roles to increase their CQ as they learn to interact with other cultures:

In fact, 90 percent of leading executives from sixty-eight countries identified cross-cultural leadership as the top management challenge for the next century. It used to be that worldwide travel and cross-cultural interactions were largely reserved for state-leaders and high-level executives from massive multinational corporations such as IBM and Mitsubishi. Today, most every leader engages in myriad multicultural interactions. For some, that means traveling through passport control to the fascinating worlds of new foods and languages. For others, culturally diverse encounters are as close as their email in-box, the person on the other side of the cubicle, or the 6 a.m. conference call with a globally dispersed team. (Livermore, 2016, p. 13)

Further, globalization has exponentially grown in both size and depth. As underdeveloped countries have begun to integrate technologies into their infrastructure, there has been an increased connection across the world. Even in the early 2000s it was nearly unimaginable to

have a conference call from a village in the jungles of Papua, Indonesia, which now happens on a regular basis. Further, globalization not only affects business and personal life, but has spread to deeper areas of worldview and culture. This is demonstrated by the spread of Islam and Mormonism to isolated locations and by culture-shifters such as McDonald's in Asia. For example, anthropologist James Watson observed children telling their parents what they wanted to order at McDonalds in Hong Kong, which broke the cultural norm of the children not being allowed to choose what they were going to eat due to the parents age-hierarchy (Howell and Paris, 2011).

Thirdly, westernization has stemmed from early growth of globalization and ethnocentrism. Missionaries have had to learn how to adapt to differing cultures in order to contextualize the message of the Gospel to the locals. Unfortunately, a classic stereotype of this process involves a great deal of westernization instead of contextualization. These stereotypes often stem from a multitude of missionaries from the Victorian era that traveled to isolated areas with supplemental agendas: "Convinced that the gospel should be accompanied by the virtues of Western culture, the practitioners of this Christian model often sought to refashion the daily lives and customs of 'native' converts" (Eason, 2009, p. 7). The modern form of this culture embedding takes form in westernization, where missionaries attempt to influence the native culture through medicine, clothing, linguistics, technology and other various aspects.

Thankfully, there has been a change since this missiological era. Throughout the end of the twentieth and dawn of the twenty-first centuries, "[m]issionaries have become more aware of the western captivity of the gospel and have struggled fruitfully with the issues of gospel and culture" (Goheen, 2001, p. 178). This struggle has led to a contextualization approach, which involves missionaries investing months, or even years, to understand the culture they serve

before advancing the Gospel. One such example of this includes the contextualization of the Gospel to a Kyrgyz church. In doing this, a Kyrgyz woman performed an *Isachi* (a Kyrgyz epic), which was recited in the same form it was derived from in their legend of *Manaschi*. This performance contextualized the message of the Gospel into a format that not only was understood by the locals, but also contained deep meaning embedded in the culture; even American missionaries observing stated that it was an excellent form of contextualization (Pelkmans, 2007).

Historical Responses

The following phase of this review examines four historical responses to missions affecting culture, specifically in regard to westernization. First, the Nagas people of modern-day India and Myanmar are an unfortunate example of typical work, or rather, westernization, of indigenous locales that was covered by the term of missions during the 1800s (Thong, 2012). At the time, the British and Americans were caught in the enthusiasm of colonization, and sought to claim lands, westernize the people, and convert them to Christianity. The mindset carried over by both the colonizers and sadly, the missionaries, was to civilize the savage, which resulted in drastic changes in the culture that linger to this day (Thong, 2012).

Several results of such westernization by imposing American and British cultures upon the natives include new class divisions between the people (i.e., the haves and have-nots, the educated and illiterate, employed and unemployed, and government and traditional work) (Thong, 2012). In addition, Naga authority has been revised from respecting elders for their experience and wisdom to honoring the educated instead. Once the missionaries converted several Nagas to Christianity, they were immediately whisked away into new villages that the missionaries created in order to prevent them from falling back into old religious norms: “By

superimposing their own rules on the converts, missionaries created a microcosm of the Christian West” (Thong, 2012, p. 907). Nearly two centuries later, the Naga are still observed as a fully westernized people group, with little to no remnant of their previous culture. Unfortunately, the “Naga experience of westernization of their culture is not unique in the world;” their story is one of hundreds, and is a mere sample of the vast majority of anthropological studies correlating to mission work (Thong, 2012, p. 894).

However, there were a few select exceptions to the westernizing mentality of missions during the Colonial and Victorian periods. One such example was the Salvation Army missionaries to the Zulus of South Africa, who have retained the majority of their culture while accepting Christ during their proselytization in the 1800s to this day:

Arriving in South Africa with explicit orders to become Zulus to the Zulus, [the missionaries] lived in circular mud huts, ate indigenous food, accepted polygyny, and altered their dress to some degree...[which] represented a remarkable chapter in the colonial encounter between Christianity and African culture. (Eason, 2009, p. 7)

The only exception to their dwelling as natives was their abstinence from alcohol, which was a cultural staple at the time for the Zulus. By thriving in a native environment in a manner reflecting the culture of the locals, the missionaries broke the assumed chain of westernization that encompassed missions and demonstrated that African culture was a viable medium to use in the advancement of the Gospel (Eason, 2009).

The missionary movement bolstered a radical advance after World War II when thousands of soldiers returned home with experiences of helping isolated peoples and a desire to return to them with the Gospel. This third example demonstrates the wave that seemed to have the most success as missionaries, which also hosted the gradual, but firm, push to remove

westernization from proselytization. This was emphasized during the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization, which created the following statement:

The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. Missions have all too frequently exported with the gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture. (Hulsether, 2015, p. 108)

Finally, an example from post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan tells of several modern takes on ethnocentrism and receiving Scripture. In the early 2000s, an anthropologist investigated the utilization of culture in Kyrgyzstan in the advancement of the Gospel and found that missionaries had developed culture into a valuable tool (Pelkmans, 2007). For instance, missionaries found that in order to provide relevance to the culture, while avoiding syncretism, they employed Turkic and Arabic terms in translating Scriptures to frame old religious ideas tied to their previous culture and reinterpret them in Biblically-accurate ideals (Pelkmans, 2007). The missionaries had a unique situation in that they had to first de-westernize Christianity to the locals (due to their abhorring of western thought from previous Soviet influence), then de-Sovietizing religion to pave the way for a Kyrgyzifying of Christianity that proved relevant to their culture. In the end, one observer remarked, “I know that missionaries have often been accused of destroying culture. But if you look here, I would say that we are doing the exact opposite” (Pelkmans, 2007, p. 882).

Thus, past historical responses to Christianizing efforts have had a choppy history. Early attempts of proselytizing were packed with westernizing ideals that eventually spoiled scores of cultures during their efforts to advance the Gospel. While some change is imminent by the mere

arrival of a foreigner with new ideals, modern missionaries have grown into a new mentality of decomposing their ethnocentrism in order to advance a de-westernized Gospel to nationals across the world.

The Genesis of Aeronautical Missions

Finally, the last phase of the review will discuss the narrative of MA and how it is advancing the Gospel. Man has longed for over a millennium to somehow join the birds soaring in the heavens. This dream was fulfilled in the early twentieth century when two men conducted the first powered, controlled, manned flight in history. Aeronautical applications have become widespread, continually evolving throughout the decades, and often inspired by dreamers who foresaw unique aircraft opportunities. George Fisk, a 1930s missionary to Southeast Asia, recounts how he realized the aeronautical potential for missionaries:

With machetes we had been cutting trail through dense jungle all day. By the end of the day, we could stand on a slight rise and look back to see where we had begun. And about that time some flamingos flew overhead. We knew then that we too had to [be] over the jungle, not hack our way through it. (Baxter, 1994, p. 1)

At the end of World War II, several pilots grouped together to fulfill these dreams and created the CAMF, (now MAF) in three separate entities in the U.S., U.K., and Australia (Syelmoe, 1997). Since then, MAF has been used to “preach, certainly, but also perform medical evacuations, carry in medicines, and fly in doctors and other medical staff. They respond to disasters by transporting supplies, food, and personnel, and providing emergency communications and logistic expertise” (Hood, 2011, p. 1). As the age of MA developed, scores of other organizations blossomed, including Jungle Aviation And Radio Service (JAARS) and Ethnos 360 Aviation.

In today's culture, proper comprehension of MA is often associated with a project termed "Operation Auca," which encompassed a minute Piper aircraft flying over South America to attempt to reach a group of hostile natives with the Gospel in 1956 (Ward, 2009). History tells of the following legend: "Nate Saint ... launched a secret plan that he and four missionary buddies earnestly dubbed Operation Auca. Saint was flying for the Mission Aviation Fellowship in the eastern lowlands of Ecuador" (Ward, 2009, p. 2). This campaign became globally renowned after all five of the missionaries involved were martyred by several of the very tribal men that they were attempting to reach, eventually sparking a massive influx of missionaries across the world.

Missionary culture is not exclusive to tribal missionaries, but is also inclusive of missionary pilots, translators, IT, and a variety of other staff members who partner together. However, though there have been an overabundance of anthropological studies revolving around the cultural impact of tribal or linguistic missionaries, there has yet to be a thorough analysis of the impact of MA culture to foreign people groups and their cultures, specifically detailing how it affects their view of the Gospel. Thus, an investigation will be launched in order to provide an in-depth view of the culture of missionary aviators across the world to grasp more of the everyday life and impact of an aeronautical missionary.

Significance of Demographics

Isolated peoples still abound all over the earth, and a vast number of them can only be reached via MA. As pilots, mechanics, and other MA members serve to reach these groups, their influence will be spreading to a variety of sources wherever they operate. Thus, it is imperative to comprehend the cultural aspects of MA in how it seeks to serve others. With a proper understanding of the history of MA and the differences between westernization and

contextualization in culture, one will be better equipped to verify the positive (or negative) effects of aeronautical missions.

Hypothesis

Based off of the material review, which demonstrated the growth of missions in its acceptance of culture, a new hypothesis for this research states that missionary aviation will likewise demonstrate a positive advancement of the Gospel and a negative advancement of westernization. If the hypothesis is affirmed through the research, there will be indications supporting a non-westernizing form of positive discipleship, which is measured in two categories according to *Table 1*. This hypothesis is tested with mixed-methodology research that will integrate information from missionaries serving on the field and display their experiences in foreign regions. The results of the study will be compared with this hypothesis in the discussion of the data.

Table 1

Study Validity Variables

Positive Cultural Acceptance and Negative Westernization Influence	Positive Forms of Discipleship
Positive cultural relativism	Balance of syncretism / relevance and ethnocentrism / relativism in evangelism
Positive CQ	Positive initiative in discipling locals
Balance of globalization and westernization	Positive results from the discipleship
Balance of changing religion influencing the change of local culture	Application of Archimedean points

Method

Anthropologists have varied the study methods of their research throughout the centuries. As previously mentioned, armchair anthropologists from the Victorian Age were renown for creating firm conclusions of foreign cultures merely through reading books and journal logs (Howell and Paris, 2011). As time progressed, anthropology began to excel through qualitative research methods, that focused on interviews, observation, document analysis, and various other methods to interpret cultures (Howell and Paris, 2011). In the twenty-first century, anthropologists have utilized mixed-method approaches, alongside sociologists, to best explore research questions on a variety of scales (Howell and Paris, 2011).

The following study utilizes a mixed-method approach in accordance with current study methods. The base research conducted involved two phases: a ten-question survey and a virtual, recorded interview. Anthropology can be relied upon to better contemplate missions as a whole and the relationship between Gospel and culture (Howell and Paris, 2011). Thus, the above method was selected to understand the connection between MA and its effect on foreign cultures as it strives to advance the Gospel.

Subjects

As of 2020, there has been a noticeable lack of study in the MA field. There are a multitude of studies that observe the connection between missionaries in tribal groups or serving as pastors and local culture, though the majority of these studies focus namely on the negatives of westernization. The resulting gap can be filled by directly researching the missionary aviators themselves. The subjects selected serve across the world through MA organizations with the same purpose of advancing Christ through aviation technologies in foreign cultures. The organizations selected for the subject pool are Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF), JAARS,

and Ethnos-360 Aviation. The selected subjects fulfilled the following requirements in order to ensure safety, accuracy of information, and to avoid extraneous documentation:

- a) At least 18 years or older,
- b) Currently serving or have previously served in an MA role, and
- c) Not be in a geographic location that is restrictive to publicly sharing the Gospel.

Instruments

Two simple instruments were utilized throughout the study. First, all 30 participants completed a ten-question, mixed-method survey. The survey first ensured that the participants fulfilled the above requirements, and focused on the connection between the foreign missionary aviators and the changes in the culture they served in. See *Table 2* for the survey questions.

Secondly, participants were granted the opportunity to contact the researcher to conduct a fifteen to twenty minute recorded, virtual interview to further extrapolate upon the survey questions, of which nine volunteered for. The aim of the interviews was to emphasize the qualitative-method portion of the study in order to better understand the cultural impacts of the missionaries.

Procedures

The research was initiated through the acquisition of permission through three separate MA organizations. The representatives of each organization acted as relays to the participants of the study by forwarding them the consent forms with an embedded link to the survey. The participants who expressed interest in the virtual interview returned a signed consent form to the researcher. The participants were then able to complete the survey via internet-capable devices in their respective locations throughout the globe. The interviewees then were given the contact information of the researcher in order to schedule a time and agree on a communication method (i.e. Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, or FaceTime). The interviews were recorded and then

Table 2*Survey Questions and Response Options*

	Question Type	Question	Response Option	Question Emphasis
1	Consent	I have completed the applicable consent form, am at least 18 years of age, am currently involved in serving with MA (or retired from serving overseas), and do NOT serve in a location that is sensitive to the Gospel, has any religious restrictions that affect you, or have any inherit dangers relevant to you.	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	General
2	Quantitative	What is / was your role in MA?	<i>Short answer</i>	General
3	Qualitative	What are some ways that you and / or your organization benefited the locals in the city / cities that you are / were based out of?	<i>Long answer</i>	MA Work
4	Qualitative	What are some ways that you and / or your organization could have better benefited the locals in the city / cities that you are/were based out of?	<i>Long answer</i>	MA Work
5	Qualitative	What are some ways that you / your organization regularly interacted with locals near your base of operations?	<i>Long answer</i>	Westernization / Culture
6	Quantitative	How often do you or your organization share the Gospel or actively disciple locals in the area surrounding your base of operations?	<input type="radio"/> Never <input type="radio"/> Rarely <input type="radio"/> Occasionally <input type="radio"/> Often	Discipleship
7	Qualitative	What other commitments do you fulfill while not flying, performing maintenance, or otherwise serving your MA directly?	<i>Long answer</i>	Discipleship
8	Qualitative	If any, what are some examples of local peoples adapting to your previous cultures? (e.g. a local in Haiti begins eating hamburgers more often to adapt to the missionaries' American culture)	<i>Long answer</i>	Westernization / Culture
9	Quantitative	Have you or your partnering MA organization seen a prominent cultural change with the locals in the area that you are based out of, but who do not work with your organization?	<input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> A little <input type="radio"/> A moderate amount <input type="radio"/> A significant amount	Westernization / Culture
10	Qualitative	If any, what are some examples of significant transformation among the locals you serve?	<i>Long answer</i>	Westernization & Discipleship

aggregated by the researcher to observe similarities between interviews and key points throughout the process. Specific segments of the interviews, which were deemed most relevant by the researcher, were then transcribed in order to be properly synthesized into the study.

Results

The surveys reported that the thirty participants consisted of three mechanics, four pilots, eight pilot / mechanics, twelve business managers / administrative roles and three chief pilot or maintenance director roles, all of which are currently serving overseas or have had substantial experience overseas. All of the participants confirmed that they were established within the requirements for all subjects. Subjects from all three of the participating organizations volunteered for the virtual interview, who served in Asia, Africa, North America, and South America. The interview participants have had their names replaced by pseudonyms as follows: Matt, Sam, Angelo, Zac, Luke, Josh, Brent, Nico and Simeon.

General

The surveys provided a plethora of information regarding how MA serves people overseas. Basically, based on the survey responses, MA serves in three different ways: community development, aviation, and discipleship, which are displayed in *Table 3*. As for the flying aspect, Zac reported that it was 33% medical emergency flying, 33% church mission flying, and 33% community development flying.

The interviews reinforced the survey findings with MA's functioning with a plethora of related stories. Matt testified that missionary aviation ultimately "focuses to partner with people to advance the Gospel" and that his specific organization is willing to fly for a variety of unique purposes in order to further Christianity. Sam and Zac stated that their organizations were actually able to send a total of four nationals to the United States in order to gain a better

education, which will be later discussed. Several of the subjects stated that they were involved in their local churches, such as through church plants or speaking rotations. Amusingly, Luke reported that he even built relationships with his community by playing soccer with them on a regular basis.

Table 3

Participant Responses to MA Roles

Community Development	Aviation	Discipleship
Language assistance to locals, tribal and governments	Transportation to tribes and medical evacuations	Loved them
Education	Training national airmen	Local church involvement
Clean water wells and IDP aid	Work opportunities and aircraft maintenance for local communities	Gospel outreach (e.g., Jesus film)
Professional development (training nationals in maintenance / pilot)	Search and rescue and natural disaster relief	

On the other hand, the surveys displayed a rather specific trend on ways that MA could improve among the locals that they served from the perspective of the aviators. Ultimately, the missionaries desired to reach out to train the locals around them and be more intentional with those in the community instead of focusing just on those in the tribes. Other desired improvements include cost reduction of aeronautical services and better coordination with the local government or militia. One participant stated that “What our locals really want is relationships. But what we offer is a production based service... So... Sometimes priorities don't line up.” He further explained that the primary goal of MA is to serve entire regions through aviation, so it can be hard to balance the desire to spend more time with locals.

Westernization and Cultural Impacts

Throughout the study, various perspectives were presented regarding the cultural impacts of MA. The survey had four questions with an emphasis on westernization and culture (5, 8, 9, and 10), and each interview participant was asked about examples westernization and culture in their context. First, the local interactions were achieved primarily either through work or community living, but other examples include meals together, church, local sports and recreation, evangelism, and community development. In one specific area, scores of locals have been displaced due to unrest and fighting, so the missionary aviators provided some basic needs and counseling to those affected. Further, some of the aviators connected even deeper with the locals and stated that, “We were deeply connected with locals at every level. They were employed by us, they were missionary co-workers with us, advisors, friends, and beneficiaries of our services.”

Secondly, Question 8 addressed cultural changes within the local context. For this question specifically, eleven (11) of the respondents argued that the forms of westernization observed were factors of cultural momentum connected with outside factors such as television, internet and cell phones. As for specific examples of westernization, several aviators reported observing the following during their time overseas: an increase of promptness and timeliness, adoption of western foods and clothing, adoption of American accents and English, music, and utilizing new equipment such as tools, smart phones, and televisions. Further, a handful of the aviators explained how a positive safety culture has permeated the locals who work within the MA environment.

Third, Question 10 addressed specific examples of transformation among the locals, whether it is cultural, physical or spiritual. Specific areas of interest according to the survey-

takers involve technological gateways (more internet, social media and television), community improvement (improved hygiene and health) and spiritual (switch from guilt and shame mentality to primacy of grace). Unfortunately, the respondents testified that the introduction of western ideals, whether brought about by MA or not, also became the advent of pornography, substance abuse and consumerism. This facet of western ideals also led to the outward changes that one would suspect would arrive with westernization, such as adaptation of western food, dress, music, marketing and education. One respondent even testified to Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts opening in his local leading to dozens of nationals opening coffee shops in riding the wave of entrepreneurship.

As for the interviewees, Matt heavily emphasized the necessity of westernization in an aeronautical safety culture. He argued that the Gospel can permeate any culture and discussed how missionaries adapt to local environments, but MA necessitates a safety culture in order to safely conduct their operations. Thus, the missionaries do instruct the locals on a western safety culture when working within the airport environment. In contrast, Matt gave several examples of cultural adaptation, such as implementing the local coffee break into the eight-hour work schedule and granting employees every red letter holiday off of work.

Several other interviewees emphasized the presence of westernization, but usually attached it to the introduction of technology rather than attributing it to MA. Sam reinforced this mentality by stating that he was actually forced to have a cell phone when going overseas in 2006, and that the cultural shifts are “less a factor of Westernization and more a factor of ‘Well, we want that cool stuff too.’ ... It’s more of a factor of what’s going to make our lives better. And so it actually wasn’t specifically related to aviation.”

Other interview subjects further testified to the previous information regarding technology, clothing, and other attributes commonly associated with westernization. Josh and Brent, who are both nationals that became believers and have been working with MA as pilots and mechanics, have insight into the cultural shifts within their own culture. Josh left his homeland to study in the United States, and upon return he found himself in reverse culture shock. Josh also elaborated on his confusion with the local church not utilizing some western ideals, such as being loose with policy regarding the church fund. Further, Josh also told of how he has learned of how to differentiate between leadership styles of his culture and American upbringing. Brent also elaborated in the shift from his life in being a child playing in the propwash of the missionary airplanes to now becoming the pilot who warns the children to stay out of it, which has been a massive change for him.

Lastly, Nico stated during his time in Central America, he did not witness much Westernization. Instead, he actually observed more of a cultural push from the United States government when they emphasized the LGBTQ community within his country. This is also demonstrated by Figure 1, which displays the results of Question 9 on the survey.

Discipleship

Next, Questions 6, 7, and 10 on the survey investigated Christian impact described by discipleship. First, Question 6 indicated that 60% of the participants stated that they shared the Gospel “sometimes,” 30% stated that they shared the Gospel “often” and only ten (10) percent claimed to “rarely” share the Gospel. Meanwhile, of the thirty survey-takers, none reported that they “never” shared the Gospel. Secondly, Question 7 utilized a broad-method approach in asking what other ways the aviators serve others, seeking to see if the participants would reveal roles in pastoral or disciple-maker positions.

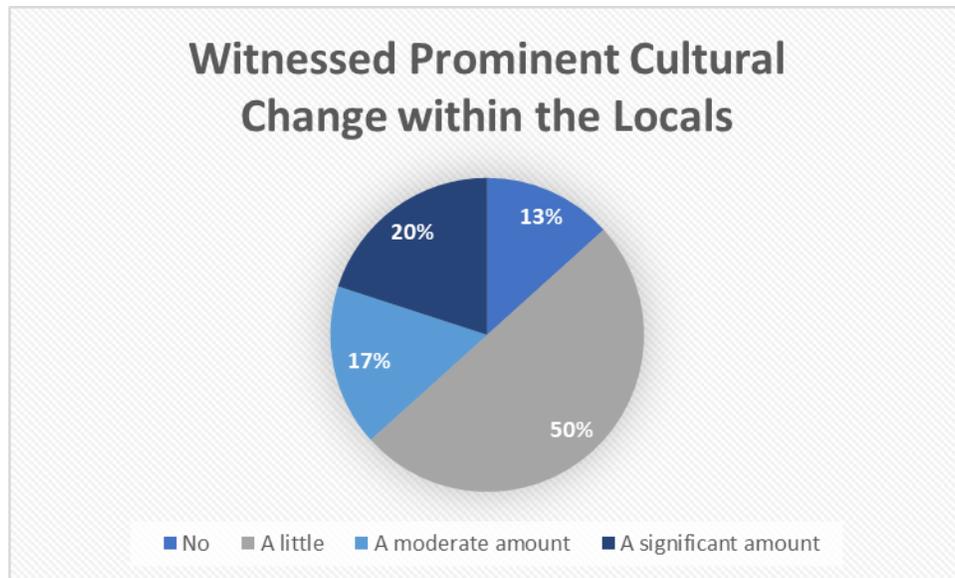


Figure 1

Observed Cultural Change

The missionary aviators reported that they served in various roles throughout their time overseas in support of the locals through discipleship, such as leading at national churches through speaking or music, church administrative and leadership roles, children's ministries, Bible studies, and teen discipleship. One particular survey-taker shared how he is involved in his local community:

Some expat aviation team members actively lead Bible Studies, VBS's, and are involved in local churches. ... I personally spend a lot of time fixing bicycles for locals and I've found that is a very good way for me to serve local people and build relationships without spending a lot of dedicated time. I'm not a huge extrovert, and I'm typically "people'd out" by the end of the workday. But I can go to my shop and work on a bicycle which really blesses a local, and that actually renews my energy because I don't get to work on airplanes at work anymore (I spend all day managing...). ... I believe that actual "sharing

the gospel" is much better done by local churches than by expats. And there are plenty of local churches here.

The interviews further elaborated on the discipleship from each of the organizations. Matt, who serves with MAF, described that in the previous ten to fifteen years, most people in MA struggled with focusing almost solely on the aeronautical aspect and aiding the tribal peoples that were isolated from the rest of the world. However, the focus has shifted towards utilizing opportunities with locals as well. For example, MAF has instituted their First Day initiative, where all of the members (expat and national) of each base take an entire specific first day of the month (e.g., the first Monday) off of work and come together for sermons, worship, and fellowship. Further, the MAF staff at Matt's base purchased extra headsets so that the pilots are now able to have conversations with their passengers on cross countries, which they have already been doing to share life stories and the Gospel.

Sam, an aviator with JAARS, stated that the discipleship from his team was similar to a mentoring relationship, which was backed by the majority of the other interviewees. As for the church relationship, Sam stated that he attended an international church that all of the local missionaries went to, which was also mirrored by several other missionaries. One exception was Simeon, who attended a church that was only for the missionaries so that the message was in the audience's mother tongue. Other forms of discipleship and evangelism were demonstrated by Zac, Luke, and Nico who had specific mentoring roles to individuals that evolved into spiritual and work-related enhancements.

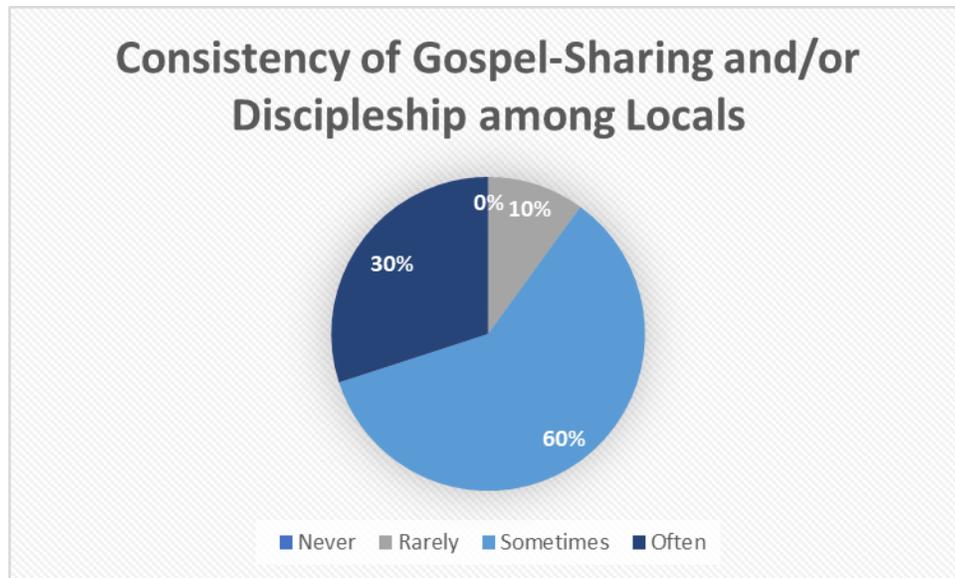


Figure 2

Observed Discipleship among Participants

Discussion

Westernization and Culture

Throughout the study, the results trended to avoid associating MA as an influencer of American ideals. Rather, MA served as a bridge between the oncoming wave of globalization that has brought technology, clothing, and such and the traditional culture. However, MA has introduced the western safety culture among locals in order to enhance the work environment of the locals and expats within aviation. Thus, there are some mixed results that are to be considered.

First, the results did emphasize positive CR among the locals they serve. This is specifically emphasized by Matt's statement that the Gospel can permeate and change every culture. Further, the MA organizations mentioned the years of training that they had their missionaries go through before beginning to serve as pilots, including months of culture training in the U.S. and one to two years of language school in their overseas environment. This

reinforced the idea that each culture is only best understood in its specific historical and geographical context. Thus, the MA organizations consider CR in the training and preparation of their candidates to the mission field.

Second, the missionary aviators exhibited positive CQ while dwelling among foreign environments. Matt affirmed that his organization integrated a coffee break into their workday, as well as giving all red letter holidays off to their employees. Luke also displayed this in his adaptation to his culture's ways of making connections such as playing soccer with the nationals. Further, positive CQ would entail the missionaries adapting to the local culture and thus reducing the amount of cultural change, which was affirmed through Question 9's responses claiming sixty-three percent little to no cultural changes.

Third, there were mixed results in the balance of globalization and westernization, specifically in the realm of inserting an American safety culture into the locals' society. At first glance, the majority of the respondents, both in the survey and with the interviewees upheld the belief that the western observations in foreign contexts are best attributed to globalization and not MA. This is backed by Sam's statement that most of the westernization was attributed to the locals wanting American items and seeking them on their own. However, this increase in technology and western concepts has also brought about negatives, such as some people being introduced to pornography from a projector that was originally given to share the Jesus film, according to Zac's interview. Therefore, Zac stated that MA is used to bridge the gap between the isolated and rural world and the new possibilities that technology brings.

Conversely, MA has brought about westernization in two primary ways: reverse culture shock and safety culture. Josh, a national in Asia, recalled how he endured reverse culture shock after going to the U.S. to study for his education before returning to work in MA in his original

locale. Several things that were challenging for him were to balance American ideals of communication, church leadership style and even driving differently. Further, both Matt and Luke emphasized the necessity of a safety culture in the aeronautical environment in order to enhance the wellbeing of the pilots and aircraft occupants. Thus, the MA organizations have westernized the locals to some extent in the introduction and implementation of an American safety culture, albeit for the purpose of best benefiting their operations and ministry.

Lastly, there tended to be positive discernment from the missionaries in the concern of changing religion causing a change in culture. Simeon confirmed that there were cultural shifts when individuals were saved, but these changes were associated with personal life rather than the culture as a whole. For example, he noted that as Christianity increased in his area, there was less spousal abuse and alcoholism, though there was “very little day to day change.” Further, the survey confirms that the vast majority of cultural evolutions observed detail things such as dress, technology, food and music, which were connected to globalization instead of MA influence.

Discipleship

Overall, the surveys and interviews significantly agreed that MA has enhanced the Gospel throughout its utilization. However, this is approached quite differently from each organization, such as through MAF’s First Day or through Ethnos 360’s emphasis on the mother tongue.

First, a balance of syncretism to relevance and ethnocentrism to relativism was detected in evangelism and discipleship. One example of the dual-balance was Nico and his family, who shared the Gospel through colored soccer balls and colored bracelets with locals. Each color represented an aspect of the Gospel message: black is sin, green is newness of life, gold is Heaven, and so forth. This evangelism method was relevant to the people, as soccer was an

aspect of daily life, but also held true to the core message of Scripture against syncretism by integrating key passages in the story-telling. Additionally, the methodology was not ethnocentric (which may have been supported by using footballs or American jewelry instead) and was also not relative solely to the missionary's message or interpretation.

Secondly, the study displayed a solid application of Archimedean points in evangelism. One of the most common Archimedean points is the *Jesus* film, which has locals orate the script, which is then integrated into the movie for the entire region to watch. This tool connects the culture by using the voices of their own people speaking their mother tongue while adhering to the original story of Scripture.

Lastly, the research indicated a positive initiative in discipling locals that included affirmed results from the discipleship. According to the survey, all of the respondents reporting sharing the Gospel or discipling locals in their context, with ninety (90) percent on a regular or occasional basis. This initiative has also proven to be effective, with multiple examples of discipleship where the disciplined local takes over work positions from MA mentors and begins discipling locals on his own. Luke and Zac both had specific individuals that ended up taking their positions due to mentoring and have gone out to make disciples themselves – a key indication of effective teaching. To add to that, Nico had multiple local individuals that became believers through the youth group in Central America he led that later went out to other isolated regions to share the Gospel themselves.

Conclusions

Overall, the original hypothesis, stating that MA will validate a positive advancement of the Gospel and a negative advancement of westernization has been eighty-seven (87) percent affirmed. MA demonstrated effective discipleship in the local context through intentional and

successful evangelism that resulted in the converts going to spread the Gospel themselves. Additionally, the research indicated that MA did not impose westernization among locals by forcing them to evolve into American cultural ideals, but rather acts as a bridge between the oncoming force of globalization and the emerging third world. However, MA has introduced and stimulated the growth of several particular ideals, such as an aeronautical safety culture and some reverse culture shock for locals who have spent time educating themselves in the United States. This particularly would not meet the criteria for balancing westernization and globalization, though the other seven of eight criteria from Table 1 were affirmed, which dictates the need for future research. Thus, the hypothesis has generally been affirmed by the research, with the modifier that it implements select aspects of westernization for the benefit of the occupation and ministry.

Future Research

MA is still a massively under-researched field and has a multitude of areas to be further researched. First, the above research could be expanded into a more comprehensive study that examines more participants and utilizes a longitudinal method to dive deeper into the cultural shifts that occur from missionary aviators. Secondly, research could be expanded into the connections of cultural change and the advent of MA within tribal groups that the pilots serve. Additionally, further study is necessitated by the implementation of aeronautical safety cultures within MA settings. Other possible studies should also be conducted to see how living as a missionary in a technical role overseas has affected the enhancement of the Gospel within the missionaries, both as a group and as individuals.

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