

## Ann Sherif

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**Ann Sherif teaches in the East Asian Studies and Environmental Studies Programs at Oberlin College, a liberal arts school in Ohio, USA. Since 2017, she has been co-director of Oberlin's Luce Initiative on Asian Studies and the Environment (LIASE) Grant, which energizes faculty and students to think in new ways about Asia and the environment; and builds bridges between the humanities, social sciences, physical and biological sciences, and policy and professional fields. Oberlin's LIASE grant supports faculty research and curricular development, environment-focused study trips in Asia, and Oberlin's Green Legacy initiatives. Sherif also serves as co-editor of Cornell University Press's new open-access book series *Environments of East Asia* (with Albert Park). Her publications include *Japan's Cold War: Literature, Media, and the Law* (Columbia University Press). Sherif's current research focuses on postwar culture circle movement and popular protest in Japan, including Hiroshima artist Shikoku Gorō 四國五郎.**



### *1. Please share with us your life trajectory and how you chose your career path?*

Even though my father immigrated to the U.S. from Turkey and married an American, we weren't exposed much to Turkish culture growing up. I hoped to learn more about Turkish heritage at university, but found many more courses on Japanese literature at my school. A visit to Hiroshima's Peace Park as a tourist and reading books like Ibuse's *Black Rain* 井伏鱒二の「黒い雨」 sparked my interest on nuclear issues. It was after I became a professor at Oberlin though, that I became a serious student of Environmental Studies as a scholarly discipline. Until then, my interest in the natural world had always been a personal pursuit (hiking, gardening, climbing trees).

### *2. How did you learn about GLH and what are your thoughts on its effort to promote peace through plants?*

When I was on a research trip to Hiroshima some years ago, Chugoku Shinbun journalist Tashiro Akira kindly introduced me to Watanabe Tomoko and Nassrine Azimi. I'll never forget my first walking tour with GLH to meet the survivor trees on the Hiroshima Castle grounds. Standing among the gnarled branches and slender green leaves of the yukari (eucalyptus) and hearing their stories opened my eyes to the ways nuclear

weapons and war damage the natural environment. Tomoko san and Nassrine's commitment to peace and clear vision inspired me to advance Oberlin College as a GLH institutional partner.

### *3. Has the ginkgo in Oberlin had any impact on the community? What more can we do, to raise awareness of its symbolic significance?*

Definitely! The hibaku jumoku ginkgo who live in our northeast Ohio community have brought community together to learn the lessons of history and to celebrate the beauty of nature. Since the Green Legacy Tree Dedication ceremony in 2017, Oberlin's Green Legacy team has organized annual events for students, faculty and community members.

One of my favorites is the annual Green Legacy Tree Tour. The tree tours introduce the stories of the GLH ginkgo trees and their histories in war and peace, but also highlight their neighbor trees in Tappan Square, a park that is their home. Volunteer tree guides each select their favorite tree to introduce on the tour. Because the tour was outdoors, it was a great pandemic activity! One year, a botany professor who introduced a sugar maple not far from the GLH ginkgos discussed the ways climate change might make northeast Ohio uninhabitable for these native trees. One student majoring in

History drew connections between the GLH trees and an oak tree planted in memory of American college students who died in World War II.

The community has come together for other GLH events, like the kamishibai reading of 「小さなアリと大きな木」 "A Small Ant and the Big Trees," by Watanabe Tomoko, with illustrations by Takayama Taiji, and screenings of documentary films featuring Numata Suzuko, a well-known hibakusha whose advocacy for peace and hope emphasized her relationship with the survivor trees of Hiroshima. Alumni Jenny Xin Luan's talk about her internship at GLH and UNITAR's Hiroshima Office inspired students to plan ways they can make a difference.

The ginkgos urge us to tell stories about human behavior that we would rather not remember—stories of inhumane and indiscriminate nuclear weapons and the violence of war. These silent partners provoke us to work across national boundaries for a more just and peaceful world. With vivid green in summer, vibrant yellow leaves in autumn, and persistence in surviving bitter cold Ohio winters, the ginkgos also bring beauty, hope, and life.

GLH does a great job of mentoring young people, like my students who have had the good fortune to intern at GLH, and of communicating in appealing ways about GLH initiatives and goals.

### *4. What are Oberlin's goals as a GLH institutional partner moving forward?*

Oberlin College is planning a study trip to Japan in Summer 2023. One question that faculty and students will explore is how botanical gardens and tree-centric NGOs like GLH promote environmental literacy. Environmental literacy encompasses not only awareness and knowledge of environmental issues and justice, and a person's emotional connections with the natural world, but also a commitment to act responsibly toward and care for the needs of the environment. The GLH ginkgos show us that nuclear weapons not only threaten human existence, but also natural environments that humans are part of and the earth itself.

I am so excited that Japan's borders have reopened, so my students and colleagues will have a chance to visit Hiroshima soon.



GLH ginkgo at Oberlin College