

## **Redesigning Internationalisation with Beginner's Mind**

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I wrote the book *Internationalising the University: A Spiritual Approach* on an invitation from the editors of the Spirituality, Religion, and Education series of Palgrave Macmillan. As a scholar based in the global south, I felt that the time had come to stand up and say: “listen, we too have something to contribute to on-going discussions about the future of education. If years of teaching and practicing higher education internationalization in a part of the world that was perpetually dismissed as a “sending region” and as a passive recipient of “capacity building” is what it takes to find your voice and summon your courage, then so be it.” And so, I channeled Tagore’s message that it is not the parched desert that receives the bounty of the rain but the flowing river, dug deep into my training in political economy, international relations and global history, and got to it.

Since my foray into internationalization practice was owed to a passion for intercultural dialogue and understanding, the key motivation for me was to free up the practice to actually achieve that, rather than continue as an accessory to the hegemonic enterprise of knowledge creation. Within this broad framework, establishing the link between the politics of globalization and neo-imperialism on the one hand and the hegemonic and homogenizing stance of Eurocentric science on the other was imperative, as was demonstrating how internationalization of education was harnessed throughout the twentieth century to serve these agendas – something I attempted in the chapters called Anitya (the impermanence of joy and sorrow) and Jian’ai (universal love or impartial concern). One frequently falls into the trap of resurrecting episodes from history to support the claim that “it was in fact we who came up with these bright ideas,” all the while not realizing that we are undermining diversity and impoverishing thought. When I give the cultural exchanges between ancient China and ancient India their due place in the annals of internationalization, I try my best to avoid this pitfall. The jump from science to spirituality is slightly easier to make than it used to be but for me, ideas from religion and spirituality were really a proxy for “other ways of knowing.”

The chapter Ilm (knowledge) delves into the intersections of Science and Spirituality and outlines the overlap and divergence between varied understandings of the terms “Religion” and “Spirituality”: not to indulge in pedantic hair-splitting but to take stock of what is gained and what is lost when we sacrifice other ways of knowing at the altar of rational positivist science.

The final chapter of the book is titled Shoshin (beginners' mind) in the hope that those who see promise in the internationalization project will go back to the drawing board with a beginner's mind, recognizing that the significance of their mission demands intentionality and dynamism. I call on us to roundly jettison a superficial and instrumental view of intercultural competence which essentializes and stereotypes other cultures (and to the critical mind smacks of a deep-seated coloniality). I remind us that nurturing a pluriversal knowledge commons requires first and foremost that we take the trusteeship of our local particulars seriously, put to rest those tired associations of "global" which no longer serve us, and open up our practices to be suffused with the eccentricities of the glocal. The spiritual approach to internationalization cares more about self-discovery through study abroad and triggers the radical realization that we share so much though we may all value different things.

The book was published in 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic shocked the dominant model of the international education system, and for that reason is possibly receiving greater attention now. As tickled as my inner nerd is about having added to the world's stock of things to read, my hunch is that this work will help establish the great potential of practice to contribute to discourse, and in that spirit, I look forward to reactions and feedback from my fellow-practitioners.

## REFERENCES

Unkule, K. (2019). *Internationalising the University: A Spiritual Approach*. Springer.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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