

Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale

Volume 46

Issue 2 *50 Years of Comparative and International Education: Looking Back and Envisioning Forward*

Article 2

September 2017

"No Stopping the Gift of Knowledge": Reflections on a Nālandā concept of international education

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Recommended Citation

Beck, Kumari (2017) "No Stopping the Gift of Knowledge": Reflections on a Nālandā concept of international education," *Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale*: Vol. 46 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol46/iss2/2>

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**“No stopping the gift of knowledge”:
Reflections on a Nālandā concept of international education
“Ne pas arrêter le don de la connaissance”: Réflexions sur un concept Nalanda d’éducation
internationale**

**Presidential Keynote Address, CIESC Conference 2017
Discours principal de la Présidente, Conférence SCÉCI 2017**

Kumari Beck, Simon Fraser University

I would like to acknowledge my presence here, as a guest, on the land which is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, and the territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, and express my gratitude for being able to present my talk here today.

It is an honour to deliver this presidential keynote address, especially on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada. Our Association is flourishing today, thanks to all of the scholars who have worked hard to fulfill the goals and purposes of the CIESC, primarily to promote comparative and international education through research, conferences, publications, among scholars, teachers, and other educators in institutions across Canada, and globally (Majhanovich & Zhang, 2008). It is important to honour the Elders in our field at this time of celebration, to remember them with gratitude, and we look forward to hearing from some of them later today.

An anniversary usually prompts us to look back in time, to savour accomplishments, to reflect on lessons learned and to identify directions for the future. My talk today is located in my own area of research and scholarship, international education and internationalization. It is informed by both the historical and the contemporary: I will look to the historic Nālandā Mahavihara (Great Monastery) in India, which is currently being upheld as an early example of international education, and reflect on whether it can be used as an exemplar to guide contemporary approaches to international education. What can we learn about international education from Nālandā? Rather than take a historical perspective, per se, I am interested in why Nālandā is inspiring a contemporary revival of a modern Nālandā International University, and whether the revival has lessons and insights for international education in a Canadian context. What does a ‘Nālandā concept’ have to offer? In advancing the latter discussion, I will be drawing on data from a study on critical internationalization at a Canadian university to illustrate the emerging line of thought.

The Nālandā revival

The idea that to be comprehensively educated means engaging with ideas and people beyond one’s own place is hardly new, as historians and scholars of international education have noted, citing examples such as Alexandria and Bologna, and European scholars Erasmus and Comenius (Gutek, 2004). Being disheartened by a predominance of Eurocentric/Western literature on this aspect of international education, I started looking for other non-European historical examples and came across Nālandā, an Indian university established in the fifth century. Nālandā had caught the attention of the international press because of a move to bring attention to its past glory. Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen was in the news outlining his role in a group of scholars, higher education administrators and politicians to establish a new, world-class,

international residential postgraduate university attracting top students and researchers from around the world. The university would be modeled on and located on a site close to the ruins of the ancient Buddhist monastery, the Nālandā Mahavihara in what is now the Indian state of Bihar. This was indeed an exciting ‘find’, and I continued with my inquiry on understanding Nālandā as a model for contemporary international education through the revival campaign.

Sen recounts his fascination with Nālandā University: “Ever since I saw Nālandā for the first time as a child - I was completely bowled over by the vision it offered to humanity. I dreamt of bringing the great institution back to life, some day” (Sen, cited in Sinha, 2011). That vision continued to haunt Sen throughout his teens and into adult years, and when he was approached by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who sought help to build a new university near the old site, the idea took on new life. There are also reports that Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam had spoken of this idea in 2006 (Chatterjee & Kumar, 2014). It is interesting that the commitment to proceed with the Nālandā International University was made outside of the Indian context at a meeting of the East Asian Summit¹ in 2007, and the university came into existence by a Special Act of Indian Parliament in 2010, designated as an “institution of national importance” (Nālandā University, 2017).

Using the ancient model of Nālandā for the new Nālandā University could be seen as politically strategic in many ways. “It is worth remembering” quips Sen “that when the oldest European university, the University of Bologna, was born, Nalanda as an educational establishment was already seven hundred years old” (Sinha, 2011), countering the narrative of the university as being a Western concept. What many analysts have concluded is that in addition to this pride of Asian accomplishment, the main objective of this initiative is to promote the notion of a ‘Pan-Asian’ collective as a symbol of Asian renaissance (Buncombe, 2010; Mishra, 2013; Pinkney, 2015). As the university website confirms, memorandums of understanding have been signed with 17 governments in the region, substantial funding contributed by China, Australia, Singapore, and Japan, and research and teaching partnerships launched with many universities in Asia (Nālandā University, 2017). Although mired in complications, including the sudden and controversial resignation of Professor Sen, Nālandā’s first Chancellor, and its most eminent champion, Chair of the Board of Governors, as a result of political interference by a new Indian government, the university opened its doors to its first students in August 2014 (Nālandā University, 2017).

The University presently offers programmes in the School of Historical Studies, the School of Ecology and Environment Studies and the School of Buddhist Studies, Philosophy and Comparative Religions, all emphasizing learning “to develop a nuanced understanding of real world problems” (Nālandā University, 2017). In the coming years Nālandā will establish five more Schools: Linguistics and Literature, International Relations and Peace Studies, Information Science and Technology, Economics and Management, and Public Health. The vision for the university states that “Nālandā will be Universalist in its outlook, open to currents of thought and practice from the globe. It will respond to the needs of a world, which has miles to travel before it can ensure peace & prosperity with equity & hope for all the people of the world” (Nālandā University, 2017). On the university website, as well as in speeches and statements from the university’s chancellors, members of the Board of Governors, politicians and even associated

¹ This is an annual meeting of 16 Asian countries, including the ten ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) and six dialogue partners (China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand), meeting to discuss trade, economics and other issues. (Ruwitch, 2009).

scholars from universities outside of India, there is a pattern of emphasizing the idea of ‘a universalist’ orientation, a commitment to peace, and the open-ness to diverse traditions and ideas from the rest of the world.

Alongside this rhetoric on the projected significance of Nālandā as a centre of excellence, there is another strong theme of what Pinkney (2015) identifies as a ‘Pan-Indo-Asianism’, an unabashedly romantic conjuring up of a united Asia with common cultural and historical links that once flourished and an ethos exemplified by the old Nālandā. A new Nālandā is expected to function to recover aspects of this glorious past: “Nālandā University is envisaged as an icon of this new Asian renaissance: a creative space that will be for future generations a centre of inter-civilizational dialogue” (Nālandā University, n.d.). When asked what impact Nālandā will have “on Asia’s influence on the world” (Sinha, 2011) Sen referred to the historic: “Old Nālandā was a remarkable example of pan-Asian cooperation in education and intellectual pursuits” adding that the new Nālandā would continue that tradition, with an emphasis on a Pan Asian cooperation on contemporary concerns such as environmental and ecological issues, and information technology (Sinha, 2011).

What do we know about the original Nālandā, and the claims made about its vision as a centre of higher learning, “fully dedicated to the pursuit of learning” and “committed to excellence” (Sen, cited in Sinha, 2011)?

The historic Nālandā

According to some sources, the ‘Great Nālandā Monastery’, Nālandā Mahāvihāra, was established by King Śākṛāditya of Magadha in the 2nd century (Keown, 2004) and according to others, in about 427 by Hindu King Kumaragupta (Pinkney, 2015), as a monastic centre of learning for the study of Mahayana Buddhism. The archaeological site and ruins of the monastery, now designated a UNESCO heritage site, speak to the scope and extent of its physical presence, confirming the accounts of Nālandā possibly being the first residential centre for higher learning, where student monks from other parts of Asia gathered to learn from senior monks. Travellers to the ancient centre have referred to the imposing nine-story library "soaring into the clouds" (Sharma, 2013), and an English scholar visiting the ruins some 50 years ago remarked, “one can easily imagine the intellectual and spiritual vitality that abounded there as recently as eight or nine hundred years ago” (Marshall, 1961, cited in Pinkney, 2015, p. 115). The golden years of Nālandā were said to have flourished from 427 to 1193, when it was burned and destroyed by Turkish invaders, with some accounts noting that the precious library and all its contents smoldered for over six months.

As Pinkney (2015) notes, much of what we know about Nālandā has come to us through former students at Nālandā, most importantly three Chinese monk-scholars. Xuanzang (circa 602 – 664) travelled to Nālandā to study under the famous main scholar Silabadhra and documented his time there from 629 – 645, producing what scholars claim to be the most detailed account of life and learning at Nālandā. Yijing (circa 645 – 713) followed, and was resident there from 675 – 685 and Huili (circa 7th century) who wrote a biography of his teacher, Xuanzang, presented more detail on the particulars of the education studied there (Pinkney, 2015). Scholars have also identified that much of what is Tibetan Buddhism was preserved by monks who spread Buddhism in Tibet after studying at Nālandā, further preserving important texts and practices.

Based on these accounts, it is estimated that Nālandā would have hosted some 10,000 residents. There were eight halls and 300 dormitories and students and their teachers lived and studied together. There was only a small number of monks who were advanced enough to teach

and show mastery of the more advanced scriptures and texts, and “[o]ne master, Śīlabhadra, revered for his unimpeachable conduct, was said to possess knowledge of them all” (Pinkney, 2015, p. 118). The fame of these teacher monks resulted in student monks travelling there from other countries such as Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia and Turkey.

The nature of what was studied at Nālandā has become somewhat contested especially following the campaign for the new Nālandā. In revivalist accounts of Nālandā’s curriculum and approach, Nālandā is presented as being something more than a Buddhist school. Sen remarks:

The institution was Buddhist in terms of its foundation, but Nālandā’s teaching and research were not confined to Buddhist studies. Indeed, it was well-known also for what it offered in secular subjects such as health care, linguistics and astronomy. Nalanda received patronage from Hindu kings (such as the Guptas) as well as from Buddhist kings (such as the Palas of Bengal). It was not, in any sense, a specifically Buddhist institution, but it was in the general Buddhist tradition of focusing on knowledge and understanding as ways of solving problems that pester humanity. It was also a "modern" institution — modern in relation to its time — in offering education that went well beyond religion, and included science (such as astronomy) and the pursuit of practically useful arts (such as public health care) (2011, cited in Sinha, 2011).

In a talk he delivered at the Asia Society in New York in September that year, he outlined in more detail his argument removing the religious (Buddhist) element of Nālandā. It was Takshila, he claims, that was more of a monks’ training school whereas Nālandā followed the pursuit of knowledge and what we can see is more of the modern university. He argued that when considering the tension between following “the path of knowledge and the path of devotion, Buddhism is clearly on the side of knowledge” (Sen, 2011) furthering his distancing of both Buddhism and Nālandā from a religious orientation. This, he claimed resulted in for example, the teaching of social knowledge such as health care and medicine, scientific knowledge such as astronomy, and cultural knowledge in architecture, sculpture and so on. There was no tension, he concludes, between religion and science, and there is considerable evidence of an academically tolerant culture (Sen, 2011). Furthermore, knowledge was sought in many different fields of study from across Asia, and this “migration of ideas and educational thought across nations resulted in the general intellectual animation” (Sen, 2011, p. #) that made Nālandā so sought after.

Pinkney (2015) and other scholars have argued otherwise. In a masterful analysis of the Nālandā revival, she demonstrates how these accounts of Nālandā are not bourn out by the writings of the Chinese scholars. Entrance to Nālandā was not easy (with a failure rate of seven or eight out of ten!) and required a familiarity with and knowledge of the Buddhist canon, the Tipitaka. There was a physical gate-keeper who kept out those who could not answer questions about basic Buddhist knowledge. The residents were expected to maintain a very strict code of conduct (the Buddhist Vinaya) and were expelled if they broke this conduct. Pinkney amasses evidence in support of her argument, including archaeological evidence of its monastic focus (not simply a foundation), the daily curriculum, and accounts of the piety of the resident monks. In fact, the revivalist accounts call the residents of Nālandā students, while there is little evidence that there were none other than monks attending the Mahavihara. One of the more compelling points made by Pinkney (2015) is that “[a]ccording to the Chinese records, Nalanda was a Buddhist institution in a world of competing worldviews. In some sense, its purpose was to provide a locus for a Buddhist outlook while it vied with others for ideological and political dominance” (p. 121). She continues, “[c]learly, the gap between historical and future Nalanda is vast and comparisons between the two must be made carefully in order to avoid stretching

historical fact in the service of present-day aspirations” (Pinkney, 2015, p. 122).

At this point I became disheartened at the parallels between the construction of Nālandā as the model for a modern-day international education, and the discourses of international education in our own institutions. In both cases, the presence of students from outside of the country, international students, is presented as what makes a university international, and what distinguishes international education. In the revival argument as well as the contemporary internationalization rhetoric, the imagined cross-fertilization of ideas and cultures across nations and beyond a nationalistic focus is used to promote the idea of an intercultural ‘animation’. Pinkney’s (2015) thought-provoking discussion throws doubt on whether students from afar brought their own ideas into Nālandā, when clearly it was the reputation of the renowned Buddhist monk-scholars who attracted the students to learn from them. None of the Chinese accounts described ‘international’ monk students influencing the dharma texts.

Should I abandon the idea of a Nālandā concept for international education? Are we back to square one where the presence of international students is the most significant and valuable element of what is considered international education? Raised as a Buddhist, I was somewhat familiar with Sanskrit and Pali as they appear in Buddhist terminology, and I remembered one of my teachers from high school demonstrating how to de-construct a Sanskrit word in order to understand its meaning. That was the next step. What does Nālandā mean?

Another path of inquiry

Xuanzang provided two possible meanings of the word. The meaning he accepted as being true to Nālandā’s vision as a Centre of learning, was that Shakyamuni Buddha located his capital city on the site, and gave ‘alms without intermission’. The second meaning was related to the word ‘Nāga’, meaning semi-divine serpent or snake, also related to knowledge and wisdom. Xuanzang reported that Nālandā was named after a Nāga who lived in a tank (man-made lake) in the middle of a mango grove (Sensagent, n.d.; New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). The New World Encyclopedia reports that the origin and meaning of the name is contested. It may be derived from the word “nalam” meaning ‘lotus’, which is a symbol of knowledge or wisdom, and “da” which means “to give” or “alms”.

Other explanations of the word, break the word down to its roots ‘Na al’ ‘Illam’ ‘Da’ meaning ‘no end in gifts’ or ‘charity without intermission’; ‘insatiable in giving’ ‘giver of knowledge’ and a colloquial literal translation, ‘no stopping the gift of knowledge’. Across these many explanations or translations, the notion of gift, giving, and knowledge, predominate in my selection of the meaning of Nālandā, ‘insatiable in giving’ and ‘no stopping the gift of knowledge’.

Riffing off these ideas, the notion of ‘gift’ in Nālandā expresses the idea of something freely given, an act of generosity, the latter emerging from the idea of charity or the giving of alms. Some gifts are planned, and others arise spontaneously. We commonly conceive of gifts as material things, and also speak metaphorically or symbolically as the intangible gift of love, or generosity, kindness and so on. Many of the gifts we receive bear somewhat of the nature of a surprise, a discovery. Mirroring ideas in the ethics of care (Noddings, 1984), there is the giver and the receiver of gifts, and the entire act is relational, involving a giving and receiving. Is the act of giving only complete when the receiver of the gift acknowledges the gift? A gift given could be an expression of the regard, honour, respect, gratitude, love, and consideration that the giver of gifts expresses towards the receiver of her gift. And then, gift giving could be simply a

matter of obligation - something that is expected, a following of protocol, and devoid of much meaning beyond the gesture. In this exchange, is there such a thing as a sincere or 'true' gift?

And then there is a Trojan horse kind of gift, one that causes unexpected harm.

What constitutes a gift of knowledge? Does there have to be a giver, and a recipient, or can one find a gift in one's own investigations and inquiries? Can there be an unexpected quality about this process, in that the gift only becomes one when it is discovered? Can a gift of knowledge be imagined, or aspired to? Is a gift of knowledge apparent only in the eye of the beholder, or is it freely visible and available to all who seek it? What knowledge is considered worthy enough to be a gift, and is all knowledge considered a gift? If so, at what stage is knowledge a gift, and is it possible for all who participate in its construction to receive that gift, and will that be different for each person who receives it? And finally, can we conceive of international education as being guided by the notion 'no stopping the gift of knowledge'?

Illustrations from the Field

I am currently winding down a study on critical internationalization, where we are investigating the experiences of faculty, students, staff and administrators at a university in Canada on how they are engaging with internationalization, what they understand by it and how it is impacting their daily work and studies. I will illustrate some of the complexity of my new-found Nalanda notion of international education, 'insatiable in giving' through the stories of Peter, a faculty member, Ian and Jenny, two students, the former a 'domestic' and the latter an international student, and Samantha, a member of the staff at Mountain University (MU), the setting of my study. In the interests of time, I apologize for not providing methodological details of the study, as I am simply drawing on some narratives from the data to expand on the idea of international education as a gift of knowledge. Lets begin with the students.

Samantha

Samantha is from Mainland China. Her father decided that it would be a good idea for her to study at an international high school in China that had Canadian connections. Her high school hosted an education fair, and she represented Mountain University, helping the MU team with translations and on the ground support. She was also impressed with the rankings of MU, stating that Chinese parents usually pay attention to the rankings. "I never thought I would go to an international high school and [that] I [would] go abroad." Inevitably, she applied to MU and was accepted. She began her undergraduate degree in Economics and then moved to Business because it would offer more possibilities for work, both in Canada and in China. Samantha lived in residence for a semester and then moved out because she didn't like the food, and more importantly, she was isolated. She explained, "I don't know it's like because [of my] Chinese culture, I think a lot of reason is due to the Chinese culture .. [that] people don't like to speak [to us] 'cause we are ESL. I know a lot of students just don't like to speak foreigners."

In an effort to integrate more into campus life, Samantha joined the Mentor program:

I become a mentee and I was with a Canadian girl as a mentor. The purpose of it is really great and it could be [going] well, but the only thing is sometimes if we don't pair up with them, and really like not matched to each other, ... we will just lose touch. ... I think she's good but she is very shy as well so we don't talk that much.

Samantha kept referring many times to the 'trouble with English'. She reports feeling shy, and uncomfortable and self-conscious about speaking in public because of her perceived weakness in

speaking good English. She didn't like participating in class discussions because of this. "Sometimes you can't express yourself clearly and then people will misunderstand," she explained, "so I am too embarrassed to speak sometimes."

Samantha also emphasized that learning was very much about understanding culture. So if one could not understand, or worse, misunderstand cultural practices, it was a barrier to learning:

You must learn the culture. Sometimes you have to learn the history for sure. And you really have to talk to people because the culture is always changing I have to say. Sometimes maybe a new word comes out, then the people just say like, "Oh, we won't work that way at all, we will just change it to another way," so you have to really talk to people to follow-up all the culture difference.

Learning for Samantha was more of a lonely struggle – "you have to learn by yourself"

Samantha reluctantly spoke about what was not working out for her in her education at MU. In addition to the embarrassment and degradation of feeling deficient, there were the stories of racism, and exclusion. Canadian students in her group projects would openly tell her that they wouldn't talk to her or include her because her English 'sucked'. "A lot of Chinese student will say, 'I will just quickly finish school and go back to China, I really don't want to stay here ... they just suffer from the pressure here.'"

At the end of her interview, when asked for further comments, she spoke at length about using our research interviews to educate international students like herself to think about how "to adapt to this environment, this situation, this culture." Samantha offered many recommendations as to how to support first year international students, because through her experience, international education is not quite the gift she imagined she would be receiving and students like herself have to work harder, and improve themselves to survive the experience.

Are there any gifts for Samantha? There is the promise of an international credential, of escaping a competitive high school and university system in China, of gaining what she asserts as "valuable knowledge" in a Canadian university. But at what cost does this come and does the imagined gift of international education materialize? And does Samantha, like many other international students, discover other forms of truth in her experience - truths that name the discrimination, racism even, the shaming power of English, and the difficulty of understanding cultural difference.

Ian

Ian is a Canadian born Masters student in Public Health His background (his mother volunteered with Medicin sans Frontier, and his father too was well educated and worked in the public sector) has given him the capacity and the perspective to be able to analyze what is going on around him in relation to the conditions, contexts, and global social issues. "I got interested in how underdevelopment and access to health and other services specifically is connected to power structures" he said, continuing, "I like that the program [I'm in] looks at broader issues of ethics, human rights and applies them to global health inequalities."

He is articulate about issues involved in international education, "in making programs more international in their focus". In his view, "it's part of the expansion of the globalization discourse".

Usually it is thought of as a good thing—you know, spreading intercultural understanding and values and stuff like that. And I guess it's hard to argue that that is a bad thing. I am not saying that. But I think that's very much a surface rationale. I think what's really going on is more dark

than that, and it's not easy to see. I think it's—how to say it? I guess I think its part of economic globalization. I mean by this that it is part of the spread of neo-liberal economic values and interests.

He sees value in working internationally, and in learning about global health issues as a way of making a contribution, more than seeing international experience as a boost for his own CV. He is articulate about the inequities that he observes, and in his interview, spent most of the time describing what he observed in his own classes: how international students were being treated, mostly unfairly in his view, and having a deep understanding of the difficulties and challenges they were facing.

[T]he school is full of students from all over the world, but when I am sitting in my classrooms I feel like the teachers don't always know how to talk to the international students. It's not like I know how to do it, but I get frustrated sometimes because their voices are not heard or encouraged. It's like they are silent.

Ian identifies his privilege in recognizing how he benefits from the experience and knowledge brought by international students (they are the gift of knowledge) and also that this benefit is not extended to the international students themselves.

I am interacting with people from all over the world right here in Canada. This is great for me because I get to benefit from their perspectives, which are in many cases different from my own or from what we learn here culturally. There are times in classes when I want to hear from the international students—like when we are going over material that they might have some critical or unique perspective on given their backgrounds. But I don't—we don't—really get to hear them too often. I think that the university needs to build its capacity—especially the teachers' capacities—to teach international students.

Further, he recognizes the privilege he carries even as he studies and works in overseas placements, in that the benefits of his work accrues mostly to himself. Ian confirms the disappointing lapses in the educational experience of international students, and demonstrates in his discussion of global social issues and his critique of globalization, how his program of studies is creating the gift of knowledge through its critical analysis of these issues. In Ian's experience, his program is an 'endless giving' of knowledge.

Jane

Jane has worked at MU for eight years, and she supports students in a Co-op program, and organizes employment placements. She works with both domestic and international students. Reflecting on what internationalization means to her, although she turned to the most common association with the notion of 'international', the presence of international students, Jane's first consideration is support for students. "How can I support them?" She asks, "What barriers am I going to be faced with along with that student, and how am I going to help that student integrate not only our educational system, but into our culture, into our ...work culture and the attitudes?"

She recognizes the barriers and challenges they face, and that it is not going to be easy for them – to learn those 'subtle, subtle soft skills'. She recognizes that the co-op placement is at once their biggest challenge, and yet also "their easiest path to learning". In recognizing the unique situation and the challenges to learning, and in crafting her support of them in specific ways, Jane has begun to fashion her gift - identifying how they can best learn.

In that same vein, she moves on to talk about the domestic students in international placements, observing that she sees a difference in the experiences of students who go on an

academic exchange, and students who go on an international co-op, the latter “coming back changed, like really changed. I don’t see that from the academic exchanges....They get this other sort of educational perspective.”

Seeing the impact of the international experience – whether it is the international students coming here, or domestic students going on an international co-op, provides Jane a perspective on international education.

When one of my students is out there going on ... and they are having a meltdown on a personal level, it is way more important that I’m the person skyping them and saying, ‘I can see you, I can hear you.’ So I think almost all of us in a coordinator’s role are looking at how do I make this work for every student?

As she asserts – her work is her passion, and she sees the results of her support of her students, often, as she says, ‘flying by the seat of her pants’. Jane is learning along with her students. She is helping her students to flourish, easing their way for the gift of learning. And she receives the gift of learning as well.

Peter

The interview with Peter was one of the more interesting interviews that emerged from our conversations with Faculty in this study. At the time of the interview, he was an Assistant Professor in Health Sciences, going up for tenure in the following year. Having been an international student himself he not only understands many of the issues and challenges of ‘going international’, but is a passionate advocate of international education.

I am from Argentina, I was educated in Argentina to a great extent, and then I was educated in the United States in my final years of university for my doctoral studies. I did my dissertation work in Guatemala, I had a pre-doctoral fellowship that involved some training in Germany, I continuously travel around the world for conferences, and I give talks all over the place. My work is cited by everybody in the world that is in my field, and I cite everybody that is in my field that is all over the place.

He describes knowledge production itself as being international and while he does not stop to interrogate or reflect on whether value is ascribed to all forms of knowledge and ways of being, he cites his own identity as a scientist in his assertion that science is international.

I think being international is unavoidable for almost anybody right now and for a university I think particularly unavoidable to international because any knowledge that is being produced is being produced in the context of other knowledge and knowledge today is international. So, I think it is easy to see the advantages to being international. I’m a scientist and as a scientist I see science as an international endeavour.

For Peter, the benefits of having an international student body are that, “it enriches the experience, like the human experience of studying, it enriches the intellectual fabric of what is being studied because of the multiple intellectual perspectives, because of the multicultural perspective, because of the multiple philosophical approaches, and that is just one portion.” This enrichment in his view, ultimately leads to world peace, because people would be better equipped to understand cultural difference.

In response to the observation that there is not much ‘mixing’ of international and domestic students on campus, he invokes his own experience of being an international student, and defends the behavior of international students retreating from the expected integration.

of course you are going to seek refuge with those that understand your humour, that don't get offended by your humour, that include you, that like you for who you are and where you don't have to either learn something new or pretend that you are something that you are not.

He understands very well the difficulties of studying internationally, adding thoughtfully that “the places where I learned the most was where there were people who were from a different country from my own, a different culture from my own.” So far you can see how Peter illuminates the gifts that emerge from what can at first be a challenging and difficult experience. In some ways there are similarities to the experiences recounted by Samantha, but with the optimism that gifts could only flow from the enrichment of international learning.

Having demonstrated how much he understood the process of learning ‘internationally’, he proceeds to illustrate how these insights have shaped his own teaching. Teaching is a carefully constructed experience in order to open up to views and ideas that are different from one's own.

So, if I wanted people to open up their mind I would try to provide a very diverse group where in some way acceptance for diversity will be encouraged and rewarded and so that people have no choice but to open up and by opening up then you learn...

When I asked him to provide examples from his own classroom of how he created an environment where students open up to different perspectives, he paused and responded – “Yeah, I'm an educational terrorist!” I'm sure that today, if challenged to justify his use of words, in equating the horror, violence, hatred and trauma unleashed by acts of terror here at home and abroad, he might retract them. However, at the time I was beginning to see this and other responses as part of Peter's strategy to be a provocateur. He elaborates further on what he means.

I always tell my students that I would rather make them uncomfortable than make them sleep, so I'm constantly, constantly provoking and I try to be as respectful as I can. It is not always easy and it is not always —so, for example, I just used the label an educational terrorist and that may get some people a little bit concerned. You know, it is intentional - let me shake you up and let's see how you react!

As he identifies, this way of teaching, of provoking inquiry, is nothing new – it is inquiry based learning. “I ask questions, I always try to ask questions and I don't answer for them. ... And people engage, people engage, but again, that is where you see the different cultures of engagement.” In using it, however, to create an environment where students face difference, have to experience discomfort, he is providing them with an unlikely gift of coming to knowledge and understanding. From remembering his own received gifts and enrichment, he is provoking encounters of difference, and creating dissonance.

In this process, he is very mindful of being respectful. He says

I want to be respectful of each individual's desires and culture and processes and so, for example, if they come from a given culture where questions are not allowed or encouraged or thought of as valuable or engagement is not part of it, and they are comfortable there and they want to be that way, who am I to tell them that is wrong and my approach is right?

But he continues.... “there is one thing that we have to agree upon and that is, that challenging yourself is the way to learn.” He summarizes his pedagogical approach:

[I]f I'm your teacher and you are my student and we need to go through this process, I want to respect you, but on the other hand the only way I know how to do this, is the way I know how to

do this, so in both the teacher and the student - the student and the teacher have to crack their own epistemologies.

For Peter, the gift of knowledge involves learning through discomfort, pain, and a challenging of self, and that, in his view, is the learning process for both teacher and student. It is also a double giving - to the other (student) and to the self (teacher), recognizing that it is hard work. The result is enrichment, and Peter demonstrates how his work in the academy is to facilitate that process.

Concluding thoughts

So what do we gain, if anything, from the Nalanda concept? The contemporary Nālandā International University, and the so-called renaissance of the Nālandā dream, is, in my view, yet another example of how discourses of international are constructed and created to support various agendas. For the proponents of Nālandā International University, the close alignment to the ancient Nālandā is one way of saying these values and ideals have existed from time immemorial and they are a confirmation that we are going the right way.

Just as the creators of the modern Nalanda want us to believe that Asian countries are coming together to forge a continent based on the foundations of peace and harmony, so do we sometimes fool ourselves that our contemporary iterations of international education are leading us to “prepare graduates who are interculturally competent and internationally knowledgeable” (citation). Internationalization is thus viewed as an uncontested good.

From Ian’s experience we can see the importance of acknowledging the barriers and ways in which the flow of knowledge is disrupted and maintained in the same old ways, how a certain kind of knowledge is upheld as the only one that can be aspired to. He also illustrated how the interrogation of this power system can lead to a knowledge exchange that can lead to equitable outcomes - a recognition of privilege for Ian, and the gift of autonomy and collaboration for the communities he will work with. Ian’s insights and observations about the experiences of international students is a kind of Freirean ‘naming the world’ which can be a gift for the institution if only they seek the opinions of students. Jane demonstrates the gift of service that can create the conditions in which the gift of knowledge can be generated. She appears to be the one who is the ‘endless giver’ and in the satisfaction she gains from her work, realizes her own gifts. Samantha’s story is difficult: she has been seeking the gifts of knowledge but she comes back over and over again to the pain of exclusion, of struggle, and is unable to see any gift, if there is any to be had. While Peter’s experience, that learning through pain, discomfort, and difficulty IS the gift, Samantha reminds us that it may not be useful to romanticize this notion either. International education can become the Trojan Horse if we are not vigilant.

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