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Learning Self Through *Shosin* in International Education

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This essay is in response to Dr. Kalyani Unkule's essay "*Redesigning Internationalisation with Beginner's Mind.*"

I was pleasantly surprised to see the idea of *Shosin* (beginner's mind) introduced in Unkule's *Internationalising the University* and to re-learn this attitude towards life. As an early career professional in international higher education from Japan, I have lots for oom to learn and explore in international higher education research and discussion. In other words, my *Shosin* has always been there. I teach EFL in higher education. I also work with study abroad students at their pre-departure orientation. My main focus with this assignment is goal setting. I discuss the purposeful study abroad experience with students, introduce the SMART goal method, and guide them to reflect and analyze their learning outcomes. This always reminds me of the beginner's mind, taking me back to my very first long-term study abroad experience in college. When I encountered the idea of negative capability, I realized that I have actually lost the beginner's mind, however. Since I was so focused on goal setting, I forgot about my willingness to not know. I should take a step back and reflect on myself to keep reminding myself of the beginner's mind.

Study abroad programs tend to focus on English language acquisition but there is less attention to other soft, interpersonal skills in Japanese higher education (Suzuki, 2017). It is important for higher education institutions to educate and prepare students for the job market in the age of change and uncertainty. It is also important to cultivate them as tomorrow's leaders in the local community. As Unkule states, it is important for universities to make a local impact in this globalized era. It is the time to reflect on ourselves, and to get back our *Shosin* to identify the uniqueness of each university's role in the community and embrace its diversity. The strategy of internationalization should be focused on the social, local needs and goods.

I started my teaching career during the COVID-19 pandemic and have been teaching online. This book points out the challenges of the loss of social bonds and the loss of commitment, and I face these challenges every single day. I see there is less self-reflection. When classroom discussions are based on knowledge and information, students actively participate. However, when it comes to the discussion of themselves, their own opinions, ideas, and experiences, they go silent. It may be because they are not used to reflecting on themselves. I see the same challenge in the re-entry phase of study abroad programs. Students have a hard time figuring out what to reflect on.

Shosin is self-reflection coupled with excitement towards the new and openness to the unknown. It makes you see different perspectives but requires knowing yourself. “[T]he spiritual pathway is helping students learn more about the world, simply by discovering more about themselves” (Unkule, 2019, p. 150). It is expected that intercultural competence is a skill to work in a multicultural environment, but, as practitioners, it is also about learning about ourselves since we are guiding ourselves into unfamiliar cultures. I believe the value of knowing self and reflecting on self requires more attention in international education.

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Yuka Jibiki (she/her) is an international educator, currently working in higher education in Greater Tokyo in Japan as an English language instructor. She is Japanese and has studied and worked about in the US. She had served 1500+ Japanese study abroad students from middle school to college level based in the Boston area of the US. She believes in the transformative power of intercultural experiences and is passionate about helping develop intercultural competence. Her research interests are study abroad and its effectiveness. She enjoys watering plants and playing musical instruments outside of the office.
