Book Review:

International Students in the Asia Pacific – Mobility, Risks and Optimism (Peter Kell & Gillian Vogl, 2012)

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International student mobility, a significant aspect of internationalisation of higher education in today's global economy, is emerging as a growing area of research and scholarship. Critiques argue that approaches to researching transnational student mobility largely focus on theoretical frameworks that tend to analyse trends of student mobility from statistical data or subjective student experiences and do not account for complexities that characterize student mobility and their experience in terms of educational, cultural and social interactions.

Peter Kell and Gillian Vogl are widely recognised as an authority on transnational mobility in the Asia Pacific and through their research and projects working with students in the Asia Pacific (Kell & Vogl, 2007; Kell & Vogl, 2012; Vogl & Kell, 2010), have made an impressive contribution to the discourse in the subject.

Their book, *International Students in the Asia Pacific – Mobility, Risks and Optimism,* makes an important contribution to the body of knowledge by providing an up-to-date perspective on the regional and global changes that have influenced student mobility in the Asia Pacific, while addressing the gaps and inadequacies in the existing theoretical approaches to the research in student mobility. Kell and Vogl have argued the existing discourse in transnational mobility to be instrumental and focused on market analysis, leading to commoditisation of student mobility, objectification and universalisation of student experience.

The discourse in the book, organized in twelve chapters, describes the complex interplay of factors from historical background, theoretical perspectives, global economic and political changes that influence transnational student mobility, making the book appeal to wider and diverse audience from administrators, policy makers, academics, education providers and others engaged with international education.

Chapters 1 and 2 explore raison d'être for the traditional dominance of the 'Big Five' countries – the UK, USA, Australia, France and Germany, in influencing the transnational student mobility from the Asia Pacific to the 'West'. The authors', through their comprehensive analysis of statistical data from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) research, have substantiated their claims to the global developments in the higher education landscape that are catalysing the evolving role of traditional higher education providers from 'traditional academic' to 'Corporates' with mercenary interests in viewing international students as income generators.

In Chapter 3, while discrediting the notion of a uniform benign international market, Kell and Vogl have debated the need to understand the 'reflexive quality' around global mobility that

perpetuates alienation and exploitation of international students. They explore Beck's (2006) notion of risk society and other contemporary theories to argue the need of a new conceptual framework to understand, appreciate and incorporate the vulnerability of international students on account of structural and political inequalities.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 describe the changing dynamics of Asia Pacific student mobility from 'traditional West' to 'East' - Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Hong Kong and Korea, in response to their growth as education hubs, the global political changes, particularly in the West and the USA, in the aftermath of 9/11 events - triggering immigration restrictions and perception of students mobility as risk and threat to sociocultural and national integrity. The authors argue the impact of these 'push' factors as instrumental in reversing the 'flow' of international students to study destinations in the East due to cultural commonality, regional proximity, political stability and personal safety. This resonates with my understanding of international students' perceptions of transnational mobility, developed through their anecdotal evidence during my informal interactions with international students.

In Chapter 7, the authors have used examples of narratives of students studying in the South Asia to emphasise the centrality of student experience as the key to influencing student mobility and argue for treating them as individuals with legitimate needs, rights and aspirations. Kell and Vogl emphasise the need to address student anxieties, their experience of risk and threats, following acts of alienations, such as, post 9/11 sentiment against students of a particular religious affiliation and racial attacks in Australia.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 highlight the authors' extensive work on student mobility in the Asia Pacific, in particular, their community based project in Wollongong, Australia. This demonstrates the positives of integrating international students with home students and their wider engagement with the local community as the key to averting student alienation and isolation in host countries.

In Chapter 12, the authors advocate the agency of students and their capacity to shape and influence the nature of their experience. They stress the need for reshaping perspectives in terms of taking an 'optimistic' attitude towards student mobility as a conduit to forge coalitions and collaborations to promote globalisation and the notions of 'global citizen' instead of synonymising international students as 'risk' and threat to national and cultural integrity and job market.

The authors' use of the term 'transnational' as meaning students' outward mobility contradicts the contemporary definition of transnational education as study-programme mobility instead of the traditional student mobility. The UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the provision of Transnational Education (2001) defines transnational education as education provision from one country offered in another. The basic premise of transnational education is that learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.

In summary, the book critiques the rhetoric of international education and systematically - through examples, evidence and statistics dispels the stereotypical perceptions on global student

mobility. While the book unpacks the inherent contradictions that characterise international student mobility, it offers a comprehensive understanding of complex dynamics of factors both at 'micro' (institutional level) and 'macro' – national level and student level that influence choice and decision on their overseas destination.

References

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