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## Mindfulness and the Ethics of Intercultural Knowledge-Work

Mindfulness, or 念 (niàn) in Chinese, is a concept and set of related practices which have both ancient Eastern roots and current popularity (especially in the West). It provides a fascinating example of intercultural knowledge-work involving a complex set of conceptual migrations through time and space, across languages and cultures, and within domains and disciplines. We first review the vitality of the concept as used in Western disciplines (chiefly intercultural communication and psychotherapy), noting how the Eastern origins are mentioned but not fully discussed. We then review the ancient origins in Eastern religious and philosophical thinking concluding with an account of the development of the term in the East until recent times. As we discuss next, when these differing arenas of use and development interact, understandings become contested and issues of privilege vis-à-vis knowledge sources can be seen. These complexities raise questions about authenticity versus translation with regard to the differing uses made of the concept in the different arenas. Learning from the reviews of the differing understandings of this concept and the sometimes fraught interactions between them, we propose that scholars and practitioners working in our highly interconnected era, adopt an intercultural ethic to regulate and guide such knowledge-work.

念 (mindfulness) 源于古老东方，在当前西方也颇受欢迎。这个概念及其相关实践提供了一个引人深思的文化间知识工作的案例。该案例包含了一系列极其复杂，穿越时间和空间，跨越不同语言、文化、领域和学科的概念迁移。本文里，我们首先解析“念”在西方学科（特别是文化间交际学和心理治疗学）中的活跃动态，并指出其中对于“念”的东方起源仅表面提及而未作深入阐述的现状。然后，我们回顾该概念在东方的宗教、哲学思想中的古老起源，以及在当代东方的知识发展。接下来，我们探讨这些不同“舞台”间的互动对于“念”的运用和发展所产生的理解和争议，以及其中关于知识来源之优势特权的相关问题。这些复杂性引起了我们关于概念在不同“舞台”间、不同应用中，转译变幻所致的真实性的疑问，以及其中一些关于文化、领域间互动方式的担忧。因而，我们在此提出：在这个愈发息息相连的时代，所有致力于知识工作的学者和实践者都应采纳文化间交流的道德规范，以调控和指导极具复杂性的知识工作。

**Keywords:** mindfulness, knowledge-work, intercultural ethics

## **Introduction**

In recent times, especially in the West, the concept of mindfulness has been much in vogue both in 'self-help' and other popular discourses and as part of the conceptual apparatus of disciplines including intercultural communication and psychotherapy. However, the concept has much older, Eastern origins in religious and philosophical thinking. Thus, the current vitality is but the latest stage of a complex migratory history through time and space, across languages and cultures, and within domains and disciplines. Our view is that all those using mindfulness in their work - whether that be with an Eastern or Western orientation, or whether used in psychotherapy, intercultural theorising, and/or religious practices – will benefit from an appreciation of the relationships between these origins, migrations and current vitalities. To this end, in this article we map out some of the main understandings of the concept. We begin by reviewing the development of the concept in Western thinking about intercultural communication and psychotherapy. This arena of usage derives from ancient, Eastern, Buddhist and traditional philosophical understandings of the concept which we review next. Although we can identify conceptual migrations within both Asia and the West, the migrations between these arenas - and how we might view them - are more problematic. Such migrations illustrate the challenges for all those engaged in knowledge-work in our increasingly globalised and interconnected times. In our concluding comments, therefore, we propose that scholars and practitioners recognise how their work builds upon and contributes to similar conceptual migrations. By the end, we suggest that the adoption of an intercultural ethic may encourage respectful mutuality in such knowledge-work.

## **The Development of Mindfulness in the West**

### ***Intercultural Theorising and Mindfulness***

The concept of mindfulness has been used in Intercultural Communication theorising since the 1980s. Perhaps the first and most prominent thinker in this regard was Stella Ting-Toomey (e.g. 1988). In her discussion of mindfulness, she explicitly builds upon the work of Langer (1989; 1997), a Western educational researcher. However, in an interview with Perez Canado (2008), Ting-Toomey acknowledges that her work with mindfulness is ‘actually taken from a very strong concept in Buddhism ... so it has a very strong Eastern philosophical root’ (p. 213). This is evident in her references to the work of a contemporary Buddhist author Thích Nhất Hạnh (i.e. 释一行) – a renowned Vietnamese monk, teacher and peace activist (Thích, 1991; 2013). For example, in her 1998 work, she references this source as she defines the concept: ‘Mindfulness (Thích, 1991) means attending to one’s internal assumptions / cognitions and emotions and simultaneously attuning attentively to the other’s...’ (p. 203).

Ting-Toomey’s understandings of mindfulness developed through a number of key works (1988; 1998; 2007a; 2009). For her, mindfulness is closely related to the qualities of reflexivity, openness, multi-perspectivity, analytical empathy and creativity in intercultural communication (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). It involves ‘attending to one’s internal communication assumptions, cognitions and emotions, and at the same time, becoming exquisitely attuned to... [those] of others’ (ibid; Ting-Toomey, 2009, p. 104). In particular, mindfulness enables us to tune into our own habitual cultural and personal assumptions and to learn to see the culturally unfamiliar from multiple lenses or perspectives (Ting-Toomey, 2007b, p.259). In other words, with ‘intentional mindfulness’, we develop the thinking patterns and skills necessary for reframing how we see an intercultural situation, moving from ‘a monocultur[al] conflict perspective’ to

understanding it from ‘multiple discovery perspectives’ (Ting-Toomey, 2009, p.116-117), and doing so from a ‘non-judgmental’ and ‘non-reactive’ standpoint (Ting-Toomey, 2007b, p.259). With a mindful approach to intercultural communication, we ideally learn to shift our perspectives and understandings, and to ground them in cooperation with others’ cultural frames of reference (Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 203; 2007).

Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) explicitly address the creative dimension of mindfulness. They suggest that a creative-mindful person is curious and interested in the surroundings, and practices divergent thinking, creates mobilised ‘flows’ of mindfulness and cultivates enjoyment in their intercultural interactions. In her model of intercultural conflict competence, Ting-Toomey (2007a) integrates mindfulness together with knowledge and communication-skills as the three pillars of competence. In a later stage of her work (2007b, p. 265), she applies these theoretical understandings of mindfulness in intercultural training, and proposes a four-stage developmental understanding of the concept: unconscious incompetence (i.e. a stage of total ‘mindlessness’), conscious incompetence (i.e. a ‘semi-mindfulness’ stage), conscious competence (i.e. a ‘wholly mindful’ stage), and unconscious competence (i.e. a ‘mindlessly-mindful’ stage). In summary, she understands the concept as a mental status which offers a means of rethinking one’s assumptions about oneself and the world by being attentive and attuned to ‘I-identity’, ‘they-identity’ and ‘we identity’ (Ting-Toomey, 1998).

Based upon, and in addition to, Ting-Toomey’s works, mindfulness is also regarded as part of intercultural competence in other interculturalists’ work (e.g. Gudykunst, 1993; Deardorff, 2006; 2009; Kim, 1992). Thus, for Gudykunst (1993; Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey & Wiseman, 1991), being mindful means being cognitively aware of our own communication and the process of interaction with others. He

suggests that a mindful person living in the increasingly interconnected era should be able to recognise cultural differences and similarities with others, to understand what they mean and to create sensitive and new ways of relating in the 'learning cycle' of intercultural experiences (Brake, 1997, p. 205). In this learning cycle, mindfulness plays the key role of 'process orientation' (e.g. cognitive awareness, empathy, flexibility and reflectivity) (Deardorff, 2006), through which it holds a person from the impulse of mindlessness. Kim (1992) summarises the concept as a creative, sensitive and aware way of thinking with which we perceive and orient ourselves among culturally (dis)similar others and interact with them (Kim, 1992).

In addition to insights about mindfulness arising in intercultural competence theorising, there are also insights arising in other, related, fields such as Cultural Intelligence and Interpersonal Communication. In research into Cultural Intelligence (CQ), mindfulness is seen as a key feature of the metacognitive process (Thomas, 2006; Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004) offering a 'higher-order mental capability to think about the processes of personal thoughts, anticipate cultural preferences of others, and adjust mental models during and after intercultural experiences' (Ang et al., 2007, p.341). Being internally and externally aware and attentive, i.e. being mindful, enables the individual intentionally to use their knowledge and intercultural-communicative skills in action (Thomas, 2006, p. 84; Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004). With a highly-developed level of mindful CQ, we are able to use all our senses to notice, to view and to understand a situation in order to confirm or disconfirm and to (re)create our assumptions, perceptions, attributions, categorisations and emotions about ourselves and others (Thomas, 2006).

The study of interpersonal communication further reminds us that mindfulness should not be simply equated with conscious, thoughtful, non-habitual, and strategic

communication, but rather seen as a processing of information, a process characterisable as fluid, dynamic, contingent, sensitive and novel, but in which the habitual and the sub-/un-conscious remain (Burgoon, Berger & Waldron, 2000, p. 106). Burgoon, Berger and Waldron's (2000) work on interpersonal communication explores the relation between mindfulness and communication. They suggest that communication is a process and product of mindfulness, mindfulness is embedded, required and 'catalysed' in communication (p. 107-108).

The above discussion summarises how interculturalists have drawn their conceptualisations of mindfulness from both Western disciplinary sources (e.g. Education) and Eastern religious sources (i.e. Buddhism). We will return to such conceptual migrations later in the article.

### ***Psychotherapeutic Practice and Mindfulness***

While mindfulness clearly has a presence in intercultural theorising, the vital Western adoption of the concept was first evident in discussions of psychotherapy. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, many Eastern traditional concepts were brought to the West through a so-called 'third wave' of psychotherapies (Fromm, Suzuki & De Martino, 1960; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984; Kahl, Winter & Schweiger, 2012). In this wave of 'refashioning' of traditions, ancient concepts were identified, adapted, applied and further developed by Western scholars (e.g. Psychotherapists, Educators, Interculturalists) in ways appropriate for the values of Western modernity (McMahan, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Langer, 1993; 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1988; 2009).

Notwithstanding this cultural modification, the underlying motivation seems to have been shared human concerns, e.g. for mental well-being (i.e. 'overcoming suffering') (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011; Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007).

As a case in point, the promotion of mindfulness in the West since the 1980s is usually attributed to the works of the psychotherapist Jon Kabat-Zinn (e.g. 1982; 1993; 2003; 2005), known in Western circles as ‘the father of mindfulness’ (Thompson, 2012). For Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is ‘a process of paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally’ (2003, p.145). For Western psychotherapists, the concept has come to the fore in the clinical treatment of stress and depression - e.g. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; 2003), Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (William et al, 2000) and Loving-Kindness and Compassion meditation (Aung, 1996). In the UK, these treatments have gained official endorsement from National Health Service (NHS) for patients with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) (Crane & Kuyken, 2012). Given the evidence-based culture (White, Jain & Giurgi-Onocu, 2014) and operationalisation-driven practices (Bishop et al, 2004) in Western psychotherapy, a number of measurement scales have been developed for assessing the effectiveness of mindfulness as a psychotherapeutic tool (e.g. Walach et al., 2006).

### ***Disciplinary Cross-Fertilisation in the West***

As explained above, these differing (Western-based) disciplinary discussions tend to overlap (Huang, 2014) and resonate with one another but each also emphasises discipline-relevant qualities of mindfulness. From an analysis of which sources for mindfulness are cited in which disciplinary discussions it seems that intercultural theorising draws more on educational thinking (e.g. Langer, 1989; 1993; 2013) and Eastern understandings (e.g. Thích, 1991) than on the already available psychotherapeutic work (e.g. Kabat-Zinn, 1982; 2003). Later in this article we examine the somewhat problematic ways in which the intercultural and psychotherapeutic discussions draw upon Eastern understandings but first we turn our attention to the



development of the concept in Asia.

## **The Development of Mindfulness in Asia**

### ***Roots in Buddhism***

The roots of mindfulness are found some 25 centuries ago in Indian Buddhism (Bodhi, 2011). In Pali, the ancient language of Buddhist scriptures (Rhys Davids, 1881), the root term is *sati* meaning ‘memory’ or ‘remember to be aware of’ (Jinpa & Wallace, 2009). This core tenet of Buddhism has the following religious and more humanistic aspects (Bhikkhu, 2008): the religious – in which mindfulness offers individuals salvation from internally-caused suffering (Ajahn, 2005) and the attainment of the highest bliss and peace in Buddhism (Bodhi, 2011); the moral – in which mindfulness guides individuals to see beyond their own misery (Garfield, 2011) by being watchful for hindrances (Bodhi, 2000) and unwholesomeness (Olendzki, 2011); the cognitive – in which, through mindfulness, one strives for deep cognitive transformation (Dreyfus 2010) sustained by a ‘lucid awareness’ and ‘clear comprehension’ of one’s ‘self’, surroundings and experiences (Bodhi, 2011); and the psychological – in which ‘letting go’ is achieved by taming our uncontrolled mind (Jansen, 2005) and through the development of ‘true balance’ (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Some 200 years after the development of the ancient Indian Buddhism, the religious understanding of mindfulness began spreading across Asia. It first arrived in Southeast Asia (e.g. Sri Lanka and Thailand) as a part of Theravada Buddhism (i.e. 南传佛教) in the 3rd Century BC; then, through the Silk Road, it spread to East Asia (to China in the 1st Century, Korea in the 4th, and Japan in the 6th) as a part of Mahayana Buddhism (i.e. 北传佛教); and, after that, in the 8th Century, as part of Vajrayana Buddhism (i.e. 藏传佛教), it moved to Tibet (Heirman & Bumbacher, 2007; Robinson,

1970). To outline some of what happened in these conceptual migrations, we use the Chinese term, and here focus on the migration of 念(*niàn*/mindfulness) in Chinese (i.e. 汉语) and in Chinese traditional philosophies.

### ***Mindfulness in Chinese***

In the first century, Buddhism was officially introduced to China by the Emperor Mingdi (汉明帝) of the Han dynasty (Zürcher, 2007; Silkroad, 2000). To represent the concept being brought from the Indian Buddhist texts to China, *sati* was translated into a Chinese character - 念 (*niàn*). The design of this character has two meaning elements: ‘今’ (i.e. ‘吟’ / reciting) and ‘心’ / heart, the combination of which captures the original meanings of *sati* - reciting and remembering by heart (i.e. 口吟心忆) (Vividict, 2010). This same character, as linked to slightly different pronunciations, has also been used in Korean - 념 (*nyem*) - and in Japanese – (*nen*) (Wordsense, 2016).

Since Buddhism was first introduced to China, it was devoutly followed and popular during several dynasties (e.g. the Tang and Song Dynasties) (Wright, 1959; Zürcher, 2007). In the Buddhist literature in Chinese, 念 (*niàn*)/mindfulness is described as a stable status of mind and mind-processes in which a practitioner stabilises the mind upon an object, and attentively senses it (Wu, 1992; Liu, Yi & Wu, 2015). With the mental stability sustained by mindfulness, one tries to hold onto mindful thoughts and behaviours, and leaves mindless desires and impulses (Xue, 2006). In this way, the practitioner develops ‘upness’ (精进) (e.g. kindness, autonomy, diligence) or ‘progressiveness’. In turn, this upness enables one to mindfully watch and protect the heart (and/or mind) from mindlessness (e.g. weakness, greediness, stagnancy, laziness, and ignorance) (Liu, Yi & Wu, 2015). In order to develop stable and strong

mindfulness, Buddhism suggests four aspects (i.e. body/身, recipient-feelings/受, heart/心, and investigation of the rules of nature (法)) of the inner practices which seek the ultimate enlightenment of freeing oneself from suffering (Xue, 2012; Liu, Yi & Wu, 2015).

As Buddhism spread in ancient China, it became one of the three most influential schools (i.e. 儒释道 / Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism) in Chinese traditional culture (Lou, 1986; Schlütter, 2008). Its related practices (for instance, 禅 (*chan*) / zen, and 空 (*kong*) / emptiness) - of which mindfulness is a core - merged with, and cross-pollinated, various schools of Chinese traditional philosophies (诸子百家) (Li, 1998; Zürcher, 2007). In this process, some of the key values of Buddhist mindfulness – for instance, 禅定 / *chan* (true balance), and 慈悲观 (compassion) – were also mirrored in the other schools of Chinese traditional philosophies (such as 阴阳消长 / *yin yang* (balance) in Daoism; 天人合一 (man-nature unity) and 仁学 (benevolence) in Confucianism) (Xu, 2006; Liu, 2008).

In the 20th century, however, interest in mindfulness gradually faded as China became more secular and as political and economic movements disturbed the continuity of many Chinese traditional religions and philosophies (Pittman, 2001).

### ***Migrations across Asia***

From the above review, we can see that mindfulness as a concept in Eastern thinking has migrated through time (i.e. ancient to more modern) and space (from India, to China and other eastern countries), across languages-and-cultures (from Sanskrit to Chinese), and within domains (i.e. from religion and philosophy). These migrations involve many

complexities but, for our present purposes, it is the migrations between Asian and Western arenas that are of most immediate concern.

### **Intercultural Conceptual Migrations**

The purpose of the preceding reviews was to provide an underpinning for the use of the concept in both arenas (i.e. the largely Western discipline-based arena and the Eastern religious and philosophical thinking arena). In addition, the reviews highlighted the ways that Western usage draws upon the Eastern origins. The relationships between the Eastern origins and the Western current usage are more problematic than this review indicated. It is to these problematic relationships that we now move.

### ***Western 'Appropriation' of Eastern Resources?***

Much of the information (e.g. online resources, articles) available in and from the West tends to downplay the Asian roots of mindfulness (White, Jain & Giurgi-Onucu, 2014). The concept is even sometimes taken to be 'not itself Buddhist at all, but really a universal pathway to sanity and well-being' (Mindfulnesscds, 2016; Wilson, 2014, p.44). Many mindfulness-related articles (e.g. Langer, 2000; Deardorff, 2009; Earley & Ang, 2003) seem to only name-check (if they mention at all) its Buddhist/Asian origins without addressing the meanings and possible implications of these roots. Thus, as noted earlier, Ting-Toomey mentions the work of the Buddhist scholar Thích as she defines mindfulness but her discussion does not make transparent what his perceptions are, nor how they have shaped her definition. It could be argued that Western writers have been influenced by Eastern insights or, more strongly, that they have appropriated the concept for their own purposes without a full understanding of the Eastern concept.

### ***‘West is the Best’? Eastern Adoption of Western Practices***

In the last 15 years, Western psychotherapeutic understandings of mindfulness have also migrated to the East. As they have done so, some of Asian (re-)embrace of mindfulness has tended to ignore or disparage the ancient Eastern roots of the concept and the centuries-old practices associated with it, and, instead, focus on the Western sources. Closer examination of Eastern psychotherapeutic thinking about mindfulness reveals the influence of this Western-understanding of the concept. For example, in a Chinese-translated version (Lei, 2009) of Jon Kabat-Zinn’s *Mindfulness*, the concept is introduced to Chinese readers as a powerful therapeutic tool that has been ‘approved’ and ‘legitimised’ by Western medical sciences. Thus, in the preface of the book, Zinai (2009) says that mindfulness, “褪去宗教、文化的外衣” [taking off its religious and cultural outer-clothing], “成为现代身心医疗的方法之一” [becomes one of the modern physical and psychological therapies], and “已被西方医疗界所肯定多年” [(its value) has already been affirmed by Western medical sciences for years]<sup>1</sup>. In this way, the psychotherapeutic and meditative aspects are foregrounded at the expense of the Buddhist, philosophical and moral origins.

Similarly, many mindfulness-related books in China today ‘sell’ the concept by positioning it as ‘the most wide-spread’, ‘the most popular’ and ‘the most influential in the West’ (e.g. in a book entitled 《成功者必有正念》 - translatable in English as ‘Success Requires Mindfulness’ - the author, Lan (2009) says that “正念修行在西方世界拥有崇高的地位和广泛的影响力” [the practice of mindfulness has a high status and wide impact in the West], and “它是西方国家最为普及、最受关注、最有影响力的

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<sup>1</sup> All the English translations of Chinese-medium resources are by the first author, Zhuo Min Huang, and are placed in square brackets [ ] after the original text.

佛教修行体系” [it is the most widespread, the most popular and the most influential system of Buddhism practices in the West]). Thus, we see that the ‘return’ of mindfulness to the East tends to gain its credentials from, and thereby to reinforce, the privileged status of Western understandings of the concept (Kirmayer, 2015; Ozawa-de Silva, 2015).

### ***Contesting Perspectives***

The Western ‘appropriation’ of the Eastern resources and the often uncritical embrace by Eastern practitioners of the Western understandings has met with two main counter-perspectives from Buddhist scholars. In the first, they clarify their understanding of the original meanings of the concept. For instance, the interpretations of the concept in the West usually focus on the key qualities of ‘non-judgemental’, ‘present-centred’ and ‘awareness’ (e.g. Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Bishop et al., 2004, p. 232). For some Buddhist scholars, these interpretations over-emphasise some meanings of mindfulness at the expense of others (Dreyfus, 2010; Löhner, 2010). They argue that, when a person is in a mindful state, they are not passive or non-evaluative (which might be the connotation of the Western ‘non-judgemental’), nor do they avoid making meaningful interconnections with the past and the future (as a result of focusing solely on the present) (Gethin, 2011; Dreyfus, 2007; 2010). The second, related perspective defends ‘authentic’, typically Buddhist, understandings of mindfulness from the distortions, misunderstandings, and dilutions of Western understandings of the concept (e.g. Dreyfus & Thompson, 2007; Bodhi, 2011; Varela & Shear, 1999). Reliance on such Western understandings could result in biased or misleading understandings of ancient wisdom, thereby limiting its wider potential (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Löhner, 2010; Dreyfus, 2010).

In a response to such critiques, Western scholars and practitioners argue that the original content and meaning of mindfulness has already subtly changed and transformed over 2,500 years of transmission (Bodhi, 2010). Instead of attempting to stay ‘consistent’ with the fixed ancient understandings of mindfulness (i.e. a form of religious fundamentalism), some useful inconsistencies and changes might also be viewed as ‘creative misreadings’ which bring new energy and possibilities to this ancient wisdom (Kirmayer, 2015). Some commentators (e.g. Kirmayer, 2015; Varela & Shear 1999; Bodhi, 2011) thus suggest that there are now opportunities for more enriched and constructive conversations resulting from this bilateral thinking. Hyland’s (2011) book ‘Mindfulness and Learning’ illustrates this potential. In it, a wide range of Buddhist authors and terms are mentioned, not in order to legitimise the usage by name-checking the Eastern origins of the concept, but rather in order to develop an enriched and refined understanding of the concept in the field of affective education. This intent is explicit: ‘the origins, nature and functions of mindfulness - from its roots ... to modern secular, therapeutic perspectives - have established a foundation upon which to examine various conceptions of mind ...’ (p. 37).

For us, these debates about ‘authentic’ (i.e. ancient Eastern) understandings versus contemporary (largely Western) understandings resonate with similar debates in other fields of knowledge-work and associated practice – for example, with debates about cultural appropriation versus cultural translation in ethnomusicology (Waligorska, 2013). However, we approach these contesting views of knowledge-work through an intercultural lens.

### **An intercultural Ethic in Knowledge-Work**

We are interested in how scholars and practitioners from differing backgrounds (e.g. linguistic-cultural and/or disciplinary differences) approach knowledge-work using

resources (i.e. concepts and understandings) with differing roots, histories of migration, and developing insights. The case of mindfulness alerts us to the dangers inherent in knowledge-work in this era of high interconnectivity. Thus, neither the use by a) Western scholars and practitioners of Eastern concepts without demonstrating a deep understanding of them nor the use by b) Eastern practitioners of Western credentials to legitimise their uncritical adoption of Western psychotherapeutic practices, do justice to the complexity of the concept and its related practices. Instead, we suggest that this kind of complexity would be better recognised, served and utilised by the adoption of an intercultural ethic. Thus, all scholars and practitioners - and especially those who work with concepts such as mindfulness, through time and space, across languages and cultures, and within differing domains and disciplines - would benefit from an intercultural ethic to regulate and guide their knowledge-work and associated practice. This article supports this objective.

What do we mean by an intercultural ethic? Resonant with others arguing similarly (e.g. Holliday, 2013; Phipps, 2013), we believe that, as grounded in an ethos of intellectual humility, all those engaged in intercultural knowledge-work need to be accepting of the co-existence of other ways of seeing and understanding things; and be open to the mutually enriching interconnections between these different ways of thinking.

Further, in operationalising these attitudes - and in the process addressing the arguments about (conceptual) translation rather than appropriation - scholars and practitioners should be informed about and respectful of the origins of the ideas they use; they should fully acknowledge these origins; and they should be transparent about the ways in which current understandings have evolved - through the processes of



translation through time and space, across languages and cultures, and within domains and disciplines - from the original conceptualisation.

The intercultural ethic we are proposing thus invites scholars and practitioners to recognise the debt incurred to those using the idea before them and to accept the imperative this creates for them to be informed, respectful and transparent in their usage of the ideas in question.

## **Conclusion**

Taking the highly topical concept of mindfulness as a case of complex conceptual migration, in this article we have argued that those using such concepts would benefit from being more fully informed about their development. Our review of Western and Eastern understandings of mindfulness is a modest contribution to this objective.

However, we also seek to make a more general point, namely that the ongoing development of understandings of mindfulness exemplifies a process of intercultural knowledge-work. For mindfulness in particular but also for all such processes of intercultural knowledge-work, we are proposing that scholars and practitioners adopt an intercultural ethic to regulate and shape their work. We have briefly sketched out the attitudes and practices this ethic may involve. We recognise that further and more detailed discussion is needed regarding the ways in which the conceptual migrations are shaped by the larger forces at play in knowledge development, maintenance and promotion. We recognise that some sources of thinking (e.g. Anglo-centric understandings from the Global North) are privileged and that the ethic also needs to address this inequity.

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