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## The American Returned Students of China

By CHIH MENG

“RETURNED STUDENTS” is a term coined in China to denote those Chinese students who have studied abroad and have returned to China. The American “Returned Students” are those Chinese students who have studied in America.

During the past six years it has been the duty of the writer to move among the Chinese students in the United States. An interest has been naturally and gradually developed to observe them while they are in America and to keep in touch with them after their return to China.

As one looks into the undercurrents beneath the chaos of revolution, readjustment and reconstruction in China, he becomes amazed at the influence of American ideals, methods and habits that reaches out into many phases of China's national life, and in some fields plays a dominating rôle. Perhaps, in the history of international relations, no one nation of such magnitude as China has ever been culturally affected by another nation of a very different background to such an extent and so immediately.

The following are among those questions which present themselves to anyone who is interested in Chinese-American relations, with special reference to the American returned students of China :

Have the American returned students of China been a helpful influence? If so, in what ways?

What is this group of students like?

Why do they go to the United States, and what do they do while they are there?

What have they done and what are they doing in China?

In what ways has their stay in America affected them and through them China?

What follows represents a part of my impression resulting from an investigation of the American returned students who have been pursuing their life's work in China during the period 1924-30, and those who studied in America during 1847-1920. (The careers of a number of those who are deceased are included in this study).

Some two hundred and thirty-eight nationally and internationally known American returned students of China have been specially studied. Of course, they constitute only a part of those who have achieved something and who have attained various degrees of success in their respective fields and professions. Therefore, this special study is somewhat one-sided and brings out mainly the profitable side of the effect of American education in China.

An attempt has yet to be made to gather together a large enough sample group which will make possible a more critical study. However, in this article some opinions are expressed regarding the group of American returned students as a whole. These opinions represent the deductions from the observations of the writer, as well as those which the writer gathered from people who are in a position to form authoritative judgments. It has been difficult to gather complete information regarding individual students.

#### HISTORICAL SKETCH

**T**HOUGH Chinese explorers penetrated India and Malaysia as early as the Han Dynasty (206 B. C. to A. D. 25), Chinese students did not pay any serious attention to the cultures of Western nations until the latter part of the 19th Century. The defeat China suffered in the Opium War not only broke her commercial and political isolation, but also disturbed her intellectual complacency and aroused the curiosity of her scholars towards Occidental civilization.

The rise and expansion of the nations of Western Europe during the 19th Century attracted the attention of a few Chinese intellectuals. China was not able to resist the invasions of these newer nations. For centuries China had been without a political and economic equal. But she was powerless for the first time to resist foreign domination and economic exploitation. There must be something that had made the modern West strong and prosperous. A few Chinese students, therefore, set out to the West in quest of that new source of power of a modern nation.

Chinese students were sent to England soon after the Opium War because England was the first Western nation that conquered China. The modern navy and arsenal were then the centers of attention. Prussia demonstrated her power by defeating the French Empire. The Franco-Prussian War drew a number of Chinese students to Germany to study her famous army. Japan rose as a world power as it were over-night. She scored a decisive victory over China in 1895, and only ten years later defeated Russia, a recognized world power at that time. China had, by that time, almost completely lost confidence in herself. The success of Japan inspired her and gave her fresh courage. This small island empire is of similar race and culture. What Japan could do China could do also.

By 1905 there were at least 20,000 Chinese students studying in Japan. They were apparently overwhelmed by the thorough transformation of this once Oriental nation. They found that Japan's strength was not merely in her modern army and navy but also in her political and educational reforms. These students wrote and translated voluminously. The books and pamphlets they published were warmly received and eagerly read by the Chinese people.

During the years 1895-1906 the atmosphere in China was electric with hope and faith in the secondhand Western theories and systems imported from Japan. The rapidity with which these "panaceas" were applied was phenomenal. Newspapers, magazines, Japanese style institutions, railroads, etc., sprang up by the hundreds even in small towns and villages. Unfortunately, due to the intrigue inherent in the Manchu regime, to the inexperience of the "half-baked" reformers and to the corruption of certain high officials, the Japanese returned students who at first led the political reforms later became more or less discredited during the early years of the Chinese Republic.

In 1847 a New England missionary brought three Chinese lads to America to be educated. Yung Wing, one of the three lads who graduated from Yale in 1854, dreamed of a project of bringing qualified Chinese boys to America for modern education. In his autobiography he said, analyzing the needs of China, "I was anxious that China should have the latest modern guns as well as the latest modern educated men."

After years of advocacy, Yung Wing realized his dream in 1871 when the Chinese Imperial Government entrusted him with establishing the Chinese Educational Mission to the United States. A group of 30 young students arrived in 1872 and 30 more came for each of the three years following. These boys were at first placed in American families in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Later the Mission erected an office and dormitory in Hartford, Connecticut, in which those students received their training in the Chinese classics each day after public school. Some of their American schoolmates in Springfield and Hartford still recall with amusement their funny "pigtails" and queer but picturesque caps and long gowns. The American children followed them after school and teased them. "One little fellow had more of a fighting temperament than the others. He was not afraid of fighting boys twice his size. He was nicknamed 'The Fighting Chinaman.'" This "little fellow," Tsai Ting-kan, became the brave commander of the torpedo squadron in the Sino-Japanese War.

The reactionaries at the Court of Peking were alarmed by the possible influence of the American theory of government. In 1881 the students were recalled and the first Chinese Educational Mission was withdrawn.

Between 1881 and 1906 only a small number of Chinese came to America to study. The attitude of the Chinese government discouraged them from going to what was regarded as an immature country, and those students already returned were having difficulties in finding suitable positions. Furthermore, anti-Chinese feeling and propaganda were then raging on the Pacific Coast. The Exclusion Act was enacted and the definition of "student" among the exempt classes was made very strict by the immigration officials.

In 1906, at the repeated request of the Chinese Minister to the United States, the American Government made a more liberal interpretation of the definition of "student." In 1908 Congress resolved and authorized President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Elihu Root to return to China the surplus from the Boxer Indemnity, amounting to over 10 million dollars. The Chinese Government, recognizing the spirit of friendship as embodied in that Act, decided to use this fund for the purpose of preparing and sending students to America to pursue higher education. The Chinese Educational Mission was reestablished and in 1909 the first group

of students who received scholarships from this fund came to America to study. The Open Door Policy had already dispelled the ill feeling toward the United States engendered in China by the Exclusion Act. The remission of the surplus of the Boxer Indemnity gave assurance of America's good will toward China. Then the Chinese Republic was established in 1911. Since the European War, American ideas and methods have become widely known and adopted. Moreover, America has been supporting in China the largest number of missionaries and mission schools among the mission-sending nations. All these factors and conditions combine to bring about the flow of Chinese students to America. In 1924 there were probably 1,800 Chinese students in the United States.

In the meantime the influence of the American returned students in China has been increasing. The educational field became their first sphere of influence. Consequently, the schools in China are today profoundly rooted in American pedagogy, curriculum and philosophy of education. With the development of the Nationalist movement, American returned students began to occupy important positions in politics, especially since 1926. Quite a number achieved successes in engineering, industry and business, while the Christian churches and other Christian and social welfare organizations are dominated by American returned students. The fields into which they have entered more recently are the army and aviation.

At present there are over 1,263 Chinese students in America studying in 186 schools, colleges and universities in 37 states. According to various estimates there are probably between 4,500 and 6,000 American returned students in China.

The period 1872-1916, the first 50 years of Chinese student migration to America, may be called the experimental period. The students had not been well prepared, perhaps not prepared at all, before they came. Most of them were adolescents. Often they had to go to grade and preparatory schools, and few ever did postgraduate work. Their greatest handicap was the fact that they had little understanding of their own culture and society. Since they came over in their plastic age, they were easily and rather thoroughly "Americanized." Consequently, upon their return to China they found readjustment very difficult and in some phases

impossible. However, a few of them succeeded in attaining positions of leadership and usefulness.

From 1916 to 1924 the students had better preparation. Tsing Hua College, established in 1911, was sending over its own graduates. A number of American-supported missionary schools in China had risen to college standing and strengthened their faculties. The government technical colleges were offering instruction in natural sciences and engineering, in which fields Chinese education had been and still is inadequate. Large numbers of students flowed to America every year. They were better prepared but yet not mature enough to receive their American training critically. This period may be characterized as one of apprenticeship.

With the benefit of experience, more complete information about American education became available to the Chinese. The Nationalistic spirit, combined with the post-mortem examination of Western civilization after the War and the New Thought Tide (the Chinese Renaissance) among the younger intellectuals, inspired confidence anew in their own culture and a more critical attitude toward things Occidental. More mature students have come to do post-graduate study with more discrimination and a broader Chinese background. So the present period seems to be the beginning of critical study by Chinese students in the United States.

#### DATA CONCERNING A GROUP OF NATIONALLY KNOWN RETURNED STUDENTS

##### *1. Time Periods*

Questionnaires revealed that of the 238 returned students considered in this inquiry one went to America to study as early as 1847, another in 1869, and 14 at intervals, one or two a year, during the remainder of the 19th century. The stream was steadier after 1900. Most of those under consideration went to America between 1905 and 1915 and have since taken their places in China's national life.

##### *2. Chinese Preparation*

Another question revealed the schools in which this group of students had studied before coming to America. Almost without exception, there are American teachers in all of these schools, while most of them are modeled after American



schools and colleges. This list of 50 schools included those of widely varying standards, from the Peking Government University—the largest national university in China—to small provincial or sectional preparatory schools, with a variety of mission and private institutions in between. The largest numbers, however, came from St. John's University (Shanghai, missionary), Tsing Hua College (Peking, founded with U. S. Boxer Indemnity funds), and Peiyang University (Chinese, at Tientsin).

### *3. Length of Stay*

Naturally, the preparation of these students differs one from the other. The differences in their preparation, in their courses of study and the degrees they desire to obtain, contribute to the variation of the length of their stay in America. The ages of the first group of Chinese students ranged from twelve to eighteen. Later on only middle school graduates came to America. Since 1924 more students came for postgraduate study. (The concensus of opinion among teachers at present is that it is more profitable for Chinese students to take their undergraduate study in China and come to America only for postgraduate work. Exceptions may possibly be made for students who specialize in certain natural sciences and certain phases of engineering.)

Of our special group the questionnaire showed that the largest number, 34, stayed in America for the regular four-year period of college study; 24 remained for five years, 19 remained for six years, 17 remained for seven, and ten as long as eight; many remained for but one or two years of study.

### *4. Distribution in America*

At first most of the Chinese students attended New England schools. A few of those who were born in that country studied at the University of California. Later on when the courses of study became diversified and when the newer schools in the Middle West and the Far South developed merits of their own, the number of schools attended by Chinese students increased very rapidly. For instance, in 1929 the Chinese student attendance was divided among 183 colleges and universities in 33 states, and in 1930 among 186 colleges in 37 states.



The group in which we are interested were scattered, during the period 1872-1920, among 72 colleges and universities and 20 preparatory schools, in 26 states of the Union. The more heavily attended, in order, were Columbia, Harvard, Cornell, Yale, and the University of Chicago, with certain state universities next in order, such as California, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. A large share of the total attendance was distributed in small numbers amongst small sectarian colleges; and specialized institutions, such as Johns Hopkins (medical), Colorado School of Mines, Carnegie Institute of Technology and Massachusetts Agricultural College, came in for a fair share of representation. Considering the small proportion of women among these students, the women's colleges, such as Vassar and Wellesley, were well attended.

### *5. Studies Pursued*

Question five indicated the distribution of the courses of study among this group of students who studied in America from 1847 to 1920. It illustrates the early trend and attitudes toward education. The United States was yet regarded as a young country, not so advanced in education in the classical sense and perhaps only proficient in certain technical and utilitarian studies. The founding of the Chinese Republic probably gave impetus to the Chinese students to study law and political science, the two courses which head our list in point of numbers. The achievements of certain returned students in agriculture and engineering helped to make those courses popular, and are probably responsible for their next place on the list. While the questionnaires revealed a wide variety of over forty specialized subjects pursued, from philosophy to mathematics and geology to public finance, those just named were far and away the most popular, with general economics and education immediately following. Classical studies, natural sciences (especially military science), were considered during this period to be the specialties of the countries of Europe.

Since that time and with the increase in the number of Chinese students as well as the knowledge of American schools, the number of courses of study has rapidly increased. Yet professional and practical courses of study, such as economics, education, engineering, medicine, business, etc., are still leading the others.

### 6. Degrees and Academic Honors

Among the degrees obtained by the group under consideration, M.A., B.A., B.S., Ph.D., M.S., LL.B., Ph.B., M.D., Doctor of Engineering, were the most numerous. Most Chinese students obtain at least two degrees.

While as a group they are handicapped in their language, yet quite a few of these students competed for academic honors. This group boasts amongst its membership nine who won first prizes in debating and oratory, five who won medals in essay contests, nine winning prizes for general academic proficiency, twelve who won research fellowships, one who won a medal for original research, one who was made valedictorian for his class, twelve making Phi Beta Kappa, etc. Others have been made members of the national associations of History, Political Science, International Law, Ceramics, Mining and Metallurgical Engineering, Medicine, etc., etc.

In certain quarters, the Chinese students in America have been accused of being "bookworms" who crave academic honors and who refrain from participating in extracurriculum activities. Our questionnaire helped to correct that impression. Some "old timers" of Eli still recall their mysterious Chinese cockswain, Chung Mung-yew, who led the Yale crew to victory successively in 1880-1881. Y. C. James Yen was popular as a good singer in the Yale Glee Club. "The Spectator" of Columbia University was edited by Wellington V. K. Koo, who was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa and two social Greek letter fraternities; and a number of others were editors of student publications, officers of student bodies, tennis stars, etc.

Perhaps the organizations among the Chinese students themselves are more widely known. The Chinese Students' Alliance of America was founded in 1905 and four years later the Chinese Students' Christian Association in North America was established. Both organizations are national and both have been publishing periodicals and holding conferences. In addition to these, there are the various professional and academic societies, political organizations, and social fraternities.

It is partly due to some gross misconceptions on the part of the American public about China and also due to the tide of the Chinese Student Movement that a number of Chinese students have taken it upon their shoulders to inter-

pret China by lecturing whenever an opportunity presents itself.

### *7. Spheres of Influence in China*

Geographically, our group of American returned students is of course scattered well over China, in the large centers and in the provinces, and some of them are abroad in diplomatic, educational and commercial posts. Peiping, Shanghai, Tientsin, Canton, Nanking, Hankow, Mukden and Tsinan know them in the largest numbers, but a good proportion of them have returned to spread their acquired influence in their own provinces, north, south, east and west. The distribution closely corresponds to the political, educational and commercial position of the cities. Practically none have stayed in the towns and villages of the interior. Recent political changes have affected redistribution somewhat. While heretofore Nanking occupied fifth place, today its being the capital of China has attracted a large number of the returned students.

Occupationally their spheres of influence have been almost as varied. In the field of education the largest number have become professors, the next largest number having risen to the position of college or university president or dean. Fewer have entered the humbler ranks of the school teacher. In the field of government the number of American returned students makes up an imposing array. Six have been premiers; forty-six have been ministers with portfolio; seventeen have been ministers to foreign countries, and twenty-one, envoys on diplomatic missions. Every branch of government service has known the returned student in some capacity or other.

Banks and factories, the law, medicine and the press, religious activities and social service have all claimed the returned student, and his influence has been felt in the development and reconstruction of all these spheres.

### *8. Outstanding Achievements*

We may name among our group: the founder of the Chinese Educational Mission; the engineer who built the Peking-Kalgan Railway; eight founders of universities and schools; the founder of the Socialist Party of China; the founder of the Woman's Suffrage Party; the "Cotton King" of the mod-

ern cotton textile industry; the inventor of the Chinese typewriter; four leaders in the Republican Revolution of 1911; the "Father" of the Chinese Literary Renaissance; one Deputy Judge, Permanent World Court of Justice; one member of the League of Nation's Commission of Experts for the Progressive Codification of International Law; and the founder of the Mass Education Movement.

WHEN Yung Wing returned to China in 1854 he had difficulty in securing employment. He was not regarded as an educated man. A British firm employed him as an interpreter. Before the founding of the Republic few returned students occupied positions of importance. Those who held high degrees from classical examinations and those few Princes of the Blood who had some classical training were the only privileged ones who might be appointed to the Inner Cabinet and the Grand Council. However, since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Customs service were organized, returned students have been readily accepted in diplomatic service and the Customs administration. The demand exceeded the supply forty years ago. A graduate of Stevens Institute was made Customs *Taotai*. Three, who had hardly completed their freshman year in Yale and Columbia, were appointed Junior Secretaries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After the Sino-Japanese War more attention was paid by the Government to preparedness and transportation. Students trained in Western countries were asked to construct railways and to develop mining and other industries. Two American returned students distinguished themselves during this period and won international renown. One was Jan Tien-yo (Jeme Tim Yo of Yale), who constructed the Peking-Kalgan Railway (recognized as a great engineering feat) and Wang Chung-yo (Columbia) who helped to build the Tayeh Iron Mines.

However, European countries had been the first to crash the gates of China. Therefore, the Imperial Government in the beginning preferred those who were educated in Europe. Those who studied in England were entrusted with the organization of a modern navy. The reform of the army was first in the hands of German returned students, while for a number of years Japanese returned students occupied important positions in political, judicial, and educational fields.

The establishment of the Chinese Republic in 1911 marked the ascendancy of American returned students in China. The European and Japanese returned students wished to apply, as a political remedy, a constitutional monarchy. But their American education imparted to the American returned students a distaste for such political compromise. Even before the organization of the Tung Mung Hui (a revolutionary society and forerunner of the Kuomintang), Chinese students in America were discussing democracy and revolution, though more or less in secret. The visit of Sun Yat-sen to the United States strengthened their determination and hastened their organization. When the revolution in 1911 succeeded in overthrowing the Manchu regime, the young republican ship of state naturally looked to the older Republics for guidance on her maiden voyage. French and American returned students were called on to draft a provisional constitution. Dr. Wang Chung-hui, who has become a jurist of international recognition since his Yale days, exerted profound influence in the constitutional assembly.

True to American background, the American returned students went vigorously at the task of democratizing education. Over 85% of them had at one time or other taught or governed schools; and eight had founded schools or universities supported entirely by the Chinese. Perhaps the most widely known educational scheme in China is the Mass Education Movement, the founder of which is "Jimmy" Yen (Y. C. James Yen, Yale, '18). Consequently, the American philosophy of education has become the philosophy of modern education in China, and American educationists, such as John Dewey, Paul Monroe, and William H. Kilpatrick, and the Teachers College of Columbia University, have helped to a large extent to train China's educational leaders and to shape her educational policies and methods.

However, due to the dictatorship of the successive military generals, little has been accomplished by "putting new wine into old bottles." Those who devoted their energies in technical fields have been more successful than those in politics. In addition to Jan Tien-yo, there is Wang Ching-chun (Yale '08 and Illinois) who reorganized railway financing in China, increased the efficiency of operation, and made the railways "pay." Liu Ta-chun (Michigan '15) established the Bureau of Economic Information, which has gathered

data of practical and scientific value. M. Y. Moh came to America in 1909 with a single-tracked mind to study the cotton industry. He attended Wisconsin, Illinois, and Armour Institute and went to Texas for field training. Six years after his return to China he established five modern cotton mills equipped with American-made machinery and established an experimental station to breed cotton seeds suitable to Chinese soils. At each of the mills there was provided a Y.M.C.A., a savings department, a reading room for the workers and a school for children.

These and other examples indicate at least partially certain American influences at work through the American returned students. At present six out of the ten cabinet ministers at Nanking received one or more academic degrees from American universities. They have even invaded the army; which has been and still is, however, dominated by Japanese returned students.

#### OBSERVATIONS, OPINIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

IT is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to evaluate the American returned students in China as a group in the light of their American education. To do so will involve a definition of American education and necessarily an argument on Nature and Nurture. "Heroes make circumstances; circumstances make heroes." This old Chinese saying finds its modern counterpart in "Native ability conditions response to stimulus; stimulus conditions the development of native ability." But it is not impossible to observe certain cultural traits which the Chinese adopted from their American sojourn. For instance, traditional Chinese education emphasizes self-control and the philosophical attitude towards life, while American education develops self-expression and practical usefulness. In private, most of these returned students prefer coffee to tea, ice cream to any Chinese dessert, dancing and movies to the old Chinese theatre and tea shop, tennis, baseball, chewing gum, horse racing, etc., to the more gentle sorts of recreation and vices of their fathers. In public life they are usually campaigners, "sellers" of ideas, and "go-getters" who stress speed, efficiency and mass production. Their emotional attitude may be also typically American, that is, the youth spirit that is frank, aggressive, and jovial, but also inconsistent. It includes such



opposites as feminism and chivalry, freedom and determinism, radicalism and hero-worship, and internationalism and race-superiority.

The social contacts of Chinese students in America are limited to the college communities and to the Protestant and Anglo-Saxon section of the population. The number of Catholic Chinese students is exceedingly small. It was only five years ago that there was organized among Chinese students in this country a Communist Party that has close relations with the other racial groups, such as the Slavonic and Hebrew.

In research and abstract studies the training in America has perhaps been the most complete. For technical and professional students, opportunities for practical experience and training in China are all too few.

It is the common weakness of human beings to perceive often the superficial and seldom discern the fundamental. The American returned students as a group are not exceptions. A large proportion of them are caught in the whirlpool of the American brand of nationalism, industrialism, and philosophy, from the biases of which they are not able to escape. Their specific views on certain subjects often correspond to those of the college communities. Columbia and Chicago tend to be radical in economics and sociology, while Harvard perhaps emphasizes authority in scholarship. Yale is probably more interested in the human side of education, and most state universities have the atmosphere of the so-called 100% Americanism. The characteristics of smaller institutions, such as Oberlin, Reed, Amherst, etc., are usually very pronounced and therefore exert their influences accordingly upon the Oriental student. Those who have studied in several types of schools in America often achieve a more adequate understanding of the country.

Hu Shih once said to a Chinese student audience in America: "If I were a student who had perfect freedom to plan my study abroad once more, I would go to America again for this very important reason: America is young, while China is old. In addition to our school education, it is desirable for us to assimilate some of the qualities which are found in youth and which are lacking in our age, such as curiosity, optimism, and energy."



A few others disagree with Hu Shih. They say that the very fact that China is so old and America so young, makes it undesirable for Chinese students to study in America. The optimism that is inherent in youthful and prosperous societies often accounts for the downfall of a number of American returned students, who sink into the deepest pessimism when they find that it requires soberness and perseverance to work in an ancient country, the traditions and social and economic conditions of which have already been made and some of which have to be undone. Moreover, the critics of American education would add that it is a mistake to send the children of a poor family to learn the methods and habits of those of a wealthy family.

Whether American education is entirely beneficial to Chinese students and through these students to China is an open question. Perhaps it is yet too early to form any conclusion. Like most questions involving merit, it is probably not an unmixed one. But two definite results can definitely be traced to this cultural relationship. The first and the most apparent one is China's appreciation of American culture and her good will toward America, which is not mere vague sentiment but grounded in intelligent understanding, mutual confidence, and personal and institutional relations. It is obvious that the American returned students of China played a large part as interpreters of America to China and of China to America, by virtue of their number and length of stay in China and America. It is interesting to recall that in 1888 the Exclusion Act aroused great hostility in China towards America, against which country the first boycott was organized as a result. But today America is recognized by the Chinese people as their best friend among the nations.

In the second place, very intangible but perhaps more significant culturally, is the part American thought played and is playing in the cultural transformation of China. China suffered from lack of outside contact and from conflict in her intellectual life. The ideas and ideals emanating from a different background and environment are most refreshing and stimulating. American thought constitutes the most vigorous and irritating ingredient in China because it is the least colored by the traditions of the old world.

It may be interesting here to consider a summary of statistics concerning Chinese students in America during 1929-1930:

Number of Men.....	1,102
Number of Women.....	161
	<hr/>
Total.....	1,263
Number of States.....	37
Number of Institutions.....	186
States with Largest Number :	
New York .....	232
California .....	216
Illinois .....	182
Massachusetts .....	111

China seems to be going through a second childhood. She is like an aged person whose habits were formed many years ago, but who is rejuvenated by changing circumstances and new ideas and who experiments with new toys, some of which are made by her own hand. During the second childhood of China, American education, through a large number of American returned students, plays an important part. This preliminary study brings out certain facts and suggestions. A further and more thorough study of this subject will probably add much to the understanding of the cultural relationship between China and the United States and shed light on the interaction of diverse cultures.