

Committee II
Ethnocentrism vs. World Unity:
Impacts on Socialization and
Education

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**EDUCATION AND ETHNOCENTRISM:
THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

by

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One way of approaching the analysis of the broad topic of education and ethnocentrism is perhaps first by briefly addressing the issues of the role of education in society in general, and how education operates or fails to operate in particular. Of course, the role of education in society is to serve the purposes of that society. In other words, societies--for their own edification and for the propagation of values, skills, knowledge, or attitudes from one generation to the next--institute means of addressing these goals. In traditional societies this was accomplished through the instrumentalities of the home (constituting of the nuclear and the extended family), the work place (such as the farm), the various occasions set aside to celebrate or mourn important events of life such as birth, initiation rites, wedding, mourning, and the like. The goal was to train, teach, or inculcate in the young people those elements deemed essential for the continued survival and viability of society. One other important factor that needs pointing out about the traditional type of education is that it was given in the native tongue using materials drawn from the daily experiences of the local community and transmitted by people are known and knowing members of the community.

Of course there are many important problems and shortcomings of traditional ways of educating the young, including too much emphasis being placed on memory, too much imitation at the expense of original thinking, blind obedience to authority, and fatalistic attitude. But the important thing is that it kept the community relatively intact, i.e., there was no alienation, for instance between the young and the old and certainly some of the plagues afflicting modern society such as juvenile delinquency or the misuse of drugs were unknown or minimal. Modern education, initially sponsored by the various religious organizations such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and others, on the

other hand, brought many of the blessings of progress, while at the same time it also brought with it the problems associated with alienation and estrangement of youth from their own roots, and other forms of disruptions continue to occur within as well as between communities.

Addressing the question we posed earlier regarding the purposes of education it can be said that societies institute the means of education to serve their purposes. Thus one society may desire its educational institutions to serve the ends of an independent, democratic, egalitarian, and self reliant society. The same society may design another system of education for other people. This later type may be entirely different from the former one. For instance, when the former colonial powers of Europe (such as the United Kingdom, France, Portugal, and Belgium) ruled a significant part of the world, they tried to institute one type of education for their own citizens at home and an entirely different ones for the people of their colonies. The schools in the colonies, to the extent that they were established, were for the most part designed to train people who would serve the interests of the metropolitan power and only secondarily the long-term interests of the local communities. Which is another indication that education is only a tool; in the hands of a body politic it can be used as instrument for enlightenment and joy for the people, or as a means of maintaining power or exploitation of one group by another. This pattern shows one thing clearly and that is that education can be used to set people free or to enslave them in one form or another. This means that goals, policies, and actions of education reflect the political and economic philosophies of those in power at a given time.

In the aftermath of World War II the world community, being fully aware of the traumatic experiences it had just gone through, tried to redress the evils

of the past. One of these means was the attempt to devise some way to spread democratic ideas and principles among and between all groups of people. The attempt eventuated in the creation of the United Nations Organization which replaced the defunct League of Nations. This world organization in turn, in order to facilitate its many responsibilities, created subdivisions of itself. Thus came UNESCO. The preamble of UNESCO sets forth the root causes of all wars and the hopeful means of eradicating them. It states that since war is created in the minds of people peace also must be constructed in the minds of men. The means of creating peace is to reach people every where with education. Since that time in 1945 there have emerged many types of international, regional, philanthropic, religious, as well as bilateral organizations to address the question of peace and war, prosperity and poverty primarily thorough education and training.

What have been the collective experiences of societies in the post World War II years? Have we come closer to achieving the cherished goals or are we moving further away from those goals? Is the world now a safer, more secure, harmonious place than it was some 40 years ago? Have we brought forth the right combination of educational programs and institutions that will continue to inform and shape our thoughts, our attitudes, our values or judgments?

The various international organization have different goals and methods of achieving these goals. Moreover the goals as well as the methods fluctuate from time to time depending upon the availability of funds, the political climate of the respective countries, and the like. The organizations under the purview of the United Nations, such as UNESCO, WHO, and UNICEF, operate only at the invitation of the host country, and more or less follow the directions or biddings as well as the priorities set by the host country. They are supposed

to be neutral, apolitical, and development-orientated, both in terms of programs or personnel. So are the regional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Economic Commission (ADD), or the Organization for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD). The philanthropic organizations that operate at the international level, such as the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundation, presume that they are guided by the desire to help facilitate development or other similar efforts of the host country, with no ulterior, nationalistic or narrowly based motives of their own. The religious organizations operated by the various religious, bodies on the other hand, admit that in the first instance they have their religious mission in mind, although they often engage in the broader arenas of education or economic and cultural developments as well. The bilateral agencies such AID, that arm of the United States Government through which formal aid of all sorts including education is channeled, as well as the British, French, German, Canadian, and the Soviet counterparts seem to be politically motivated, although the degree or intensity of such motivation may vary; for instance, the British Council, the French Alliance Francaise, and the West German Gothe Institute are prime examples of institutions created by their respective nations to influence cultural and educational outcomes on the part of the host societies. In other words, while some similar institutions may be ambivalent regarding their stated missions, others such as those just listed have no qualms about being agents of cultural imperialism. In other words, it seems that all organizations, some by design others by default, tend to transfer the educational ideas, programs and goals that they are familiar with or think will best achieve their own goals and, perhaps at the secondary level, the goals of the host society.

In the course of events when there is a transfer of resources--such as school personnel in the form of technical assistance, facilities or equipment, or policy consultation --by design or default (most often the former) the cultural baggage of the dominant society are packaged and shipped with it. In some instances, there is some insistence on the part of certain powerful countries thorough their representatives or agents that the way of salvation (development) for a host country is to imitate or follow the exact biddings of the donor country. There have been preponderant amounts of this occurring among many societies in our era. For instance, right after WWII the Americans tried to impose their educational systems directly, or through third parties, on Germany and Japan. On the other hand, independent of explicit governmental or organizational policies, wherever people operate they are bound to think and act in the way their experiences inform them. However, such experiences may not take into account the new milieu and they may be inappropriate at the cultural or educational levels.

These analyses may lead us to conclude that as long as there is a transfer of ideas and institutional programs are carried out and as long as the flow of such entities is one-directional (say from North to South America or from Europe to Africa), a form of ethnocentrism occur. Some may want to term such one-directional flow of ideas or forms of educational institutions as cultural imperialism.

We may yet pose another question here: are ethnocentrism and its concomitant cultural imperialism inevitable, a necessary evil, or is it avoidable? Could there be forms of transference of technology, skills and know how other than the ones with which we have become familiar, which are less suspect of imposition of unidimensional or ethnocentric ideas, conventions, or

traditions? We assume there are other ways but if we wish to go through that route we have to be willing to reeducate ourselves, which is not an easy task.

Besides the imposition from outside of concepts, values or ideas, it often happens that willingly or otherwise certain members of the host societies, such as educators, politicians and other policy makers, opt not at adapting but at imitating or copying ideas and institutions from other societies. Often these people are products of the acculturation processes that happen to them under the tutelage of the external culture. Thus perhaps often unwittingly, such people become agents of ethnocentric machinations without even being aware of it.

Logically, the dominant societies, or the aid giving powers, rely heavily on such foreign acculturated persons, not on the representatives of the poor--the real creators and representatives of the indigenous cultures--to channel and implement their objectives. At the same time, aids have never been large enough, for instance, to help wipe out adult illiteracy within a given society, or to achieve certain economic objectives within a given period, but they have been large enough to be used to manipulate policies, programs, or the development of other alternatives. Where educational reforms have been attempted, either to bring about social change as envisioned by the elite (detrribalized) or in response to demands by others in society, in either case, the scope, process, and outcome of the change remains under the control of the elite, who in turn remain under the constant influence and control of the external political or economic powers. Thus the curriculum, the language, as well as the means of delivery remain alien or unrelated to the language, experiences, or expectations of the local society.

For colonized man books, literature and art forms as well as values and

norms occur outside of his experience. In his search for genuine self-identity, he becomes unsure of anything he had or he is about to have. The language used in the schools, businesses, diplomacy, and commerce, in other words the vehicle and symbol of modernity, is the language of the metropolitan powers. For instance in 1987 the embattled outgoing director of UNESCO in his loathe for Americans may address them in French than in English which he is capable of using, but the fact is that French is not a Singalese language either. Language, the true vehicle of self identity and the foundation of a coherent personality development, remains dual and a duality in language is bound to create dual loyalty (See Carnoy p.71) and cultural alienation.

Cultural alienation or loss of self-identity manifests or leads to blind and copious imitation of manners of thoughts, food preference, habits, dress, and the like from developed metropolis. The desired values and norms of the metropolis and not the local ones become the guiding forces. Of course, these forces are not perceived clearly or appreciated for their relevance to the general well-being of the local populations. Some scholars think that this dependence is key to the combined existence of illiteracy and the underdeveloped situation in much of the so called Third World. Cultural dependency includes dependency on technology, concepts, art forms, fashions, food or eating styles, dresses, and the like, and severely limits the possibility of new forms of institutional arrangements from developing. This is also sometimes called the "conditional situation" which determines the limits and possibilities of human action and behavior. Faced with this dilemma, there exists only two alternatives: 1) to change this conditional situation in order to permit other possibilities of action or 2) to choose between the distinct alternatives within the situation. Also to the extent these pull and push

forces become strong among the local people there springs stagnation, malaise, loss of direction and even major dislocation that eventually may contribute in a major way to chaos and revolution. Usually the replacements after the revolution, either thinking that they are acting on the interest of the majority, for lack of experiences in governance, or for fear of losing power and control, tend to take steps that may lead to mistakes, aggravating more of the people. Eventually the new leaders are either thrown out of power or they resort to inviting the military and other help and outside power which, when it occurs, ends up being worse than the one that existed before.

International Dual Education Policies

Another way looking the issues of ethnocentrism and international organizations and the way they attempt to influence educational policies for segments of a population within the societies and other societies across the seas is to look the historical experiences that involved the United States, the United Kingdom, and Africa. As may be recalled, following World War I most of the former colonial powers were forced to evaluate the progress or lack of their educational policies for the colonized areas under their respective control, which meant most of what we now call third world countries. Before that time, educational activities were primarily left to individual organizational efforts such as the churches and private companies. But the changing situation demanded governmental intervention. When they began to proceed they did not know how for they had concluded that their experiences at home were not of much value for educating colonized people. Furthermore, they felt they had to be careful lest they unleashed too much expectation either in the form employment opportunities, or access to means of political

participation.

In the case of the United Kingdom, for instance, in the previous century they had been experimenting with their Indian colony. Actually the British system of education for the people of the subcontinent that is India evolved over the 1700-1930 period. During that period different approaches to education were tried and improvements effected. But some important policy constructs remained constant, i.e., educational policies were designed to effect political control over the subcontinent and create and maintain economic and cultural dependency on the part of the local population on Britain. In addition, as Carnoy reminds us, the British tried hard to impose cultural transformation on the part of the Indian population to develop loyalty to Britain and to serve as intermediaries to the uneducated and unassimilated masses of Indians. With the progress of time, the policy of cultural and political control as well economic dependency was refined. The 1832 minutes of Thomas B. Macaulay, one of the great English proponents in charge of the subcontinent, noted that:

In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seat of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the South of Africa, the other in Australasia; communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian Empire.... We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern... a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals, and intellect.¹

The same man who thus tried to create indigenous leadership was completely sold to the efficacy of the British way of life at the expense of the genuine, the local norms and values, formulated a policy of "filtering down". According to this policy, the British government took cognizance that there were not enough resources to educate the masses of people. They felt that

the wisest thing to do was to concentrate on the creation of a small elite groups of Indians who were thoroughly indoctrinated in the British norms, values, even political policies, who in turn reach the Indian masses. This way, the British thought, they would control the country, and elicit the loyal allegiance of the total people. But the idea of filtering down did not take place. The elites trained with that policy in mind had their own narrow, self centered idea. As K. C. Vays tell it:

The Theory of "filtering down" was an evident example of wishful thinking on the part of the Government. After intense English education, the educated were practically cut off from their surroundings. For all practical purposes in manners, clothes, language and tastes they became English minded and developed a dislike for those who, unlike themselves, had not taken to an English education. Obviously, such persons would never return to the illiterate masses."²

In addition, the British were already sensing restlessness and an increased desire on the part of the elite to have access to better and high paying jobs as well as participation in decision making. Understandably, the British were disconcerted not only for what it meant for their interests in India but for their other Asian or African colonies as well.

Now across the ocean and also in the aftermath of World War I, the British were engaged in reformulating their educational policies for their many colonies. This time, they turned toward the unlikely place of the United States. The response was ready and forthcoming. The New York-based Phelps Stokes Fund agreed to underwrite a blue-ribboned commission consisting of industrialists, missionaries, as well as governmental representatives of both countries to evaluate the type of education and training that was provided in the colonies and recommend appropriate actions. The first commission reported in 1922 and covered the West and central African territories. The second one came out in

1925 and covered the Eastern and southern African countries. The reports were identical in their conclusions as well as the recommendation for action. They made clear the education provided to the local people was misguided, misdirected, and irrelevant. They maintained that what Africa needed was people that were adept at working the land effectively and economically, that emphasize healthful living, and the like. The recommendation was to teach Africans for effective rural living, and the means to achieve this was to establish many centers that taught reading, writing, calculation but just as important centers that could provide young men and women the skill and appreciation for vocational education.

The type of vocational education prescribed was drawn from the experiences of educational arrangements worked out for American Blacks. The American institutions that provided the example were Hampton Institute in Virginia and Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. In the United States, the type of education recommended for the minorities was at variance with that provided for the rest of the population. Led by the famous educator Booker T. Washington and supported by the industrialists of the time, one side recommended that education for this group should consist primarily of the concrete, vocational type. Academic education, according to this thought, should be postponed indefinitely. Political and civil rights issues would have to be postponed until after the economic conditions of the former slaves had improved. On the other hand another group of people, the minority, felt that educational efforts should be directed at the top ten percent of the population and it should cover the apex of the educational ladder. It was such educated people who would at last provide the needed leadership for the masses of the trodden people. The leader of this group was the socialist intellectual, W.E.B. DuBois. Moral,

political, and financial supports were on Washington's side. For the time being Washington was at a great advantage in terms of presenting a coherent educational policy as well as support from the target people.

The main objection to the initiative was primarily based on the issue of equality and efficacy. A concept of education based on the assumption that one group of people, the minority--who were traditionally subjected to one of the most dehumanizing experiences known to man for a long period of time, then struggling to be free and equal on the same footing as any other citizen--to be told they deserved or needed a separate educational policy which was perceived to lead nowhere was tantamount to telling them they would remain for the indefinite future second hand citizens in their own country.

At any rate, advocates of such educational policy thought that policies ought to be appropriate for the colonized people of Africa. The Author of the commissions report and one of the leading personalities of the membership, Jesse Thomas Jones, the author of the Phelps-Stokes Commission report himself a black man, thought that the vocational education of the Hampton-Tuskegee model would serve to control the Africans better than academic schooling. Thus: "The transplant of the idea to Africa had the same political, social, and economic implications that it had in the United States. It was Thomas Jesse Jones who suggested to the British that the unrest of India could be avoided in Africa by adopting the concept of 'educational adaptation'. Jones described the problems of India as 'too many who were prepared to write and talk' and too few who were prepared to 'till the soil and engage in the great and numerous mechanical operations.'"³

The World Bank As Cultural Broker

Because of its political and financial power base the World Bank group is today the most powerful international organization.⁴ Through several branches it advances credits, sets conditions for economic and financial reform which in turn fundamentally affect the direction and magnitude of national development. The World Bank is of course controlled by the Western nations and Japan. Those nations' voting power on the Board is based on the amount of contribution made to it. Thus for the last 25 years or so the United States was the most important single contributor, followed by Japan and Germany. As such, the U.S. exercises tremendous power on who gets how much of the credits. All this is known to most of the world. What is not well known is how much influence the Bank has on education in the world. The Bank--especially its concessionary lending arm, the International Development Association which was created in 1960--got into the education and training business almost by accident when it discovered that economic development cannot be carried out or sustained in the absence of a skilled work force. Thus over the last two and half decades, billions of dollars have been poured into scores of developing and some developed nations in an attempt to cajole and encourage them to reform, or at least redirect their respective educational and training policies, as well as programs.

From the beginning, the Bank has conceived of education and training in terms of skills formation. This emphasis seems to have been based on the assumption that since economic development in agriculture, industry, or commerce involves the marshalling and deployment of all available resources effectively and economically, and since the major bottleneck in the development of countries in the Third World is the lack of skilled work force at all levels

(particularly at the middle, professional and managerial levels), providing for the formation and supply of such human skills an appropriate function for the Bank Group to enter into in cooperation with other national and international agencies. Further, the formation of such skills is considered in terms of the immediate economic benefits that might be derived from such activities. The fact that human development and learning takes a long time means that it is a long-range investment which calls for, among other things, a considerable amount of faith on the part of the policy makers and financiers that it will ultimately pay off in terms of the individual's life-long commitment to self, family, and community. In other words, what the Bank is doing may be acceptable and good as far as it goes.

The major questions remain: whether the individual thus trained would indeed be available to work in the anticipated position and whether the person would contribute maximally by staying in that position for the desired length of time, and the like. Another related and important question is whether in the final analysis that is the type of program that will enjoy the support of the local people and whether it indeed addresses the fundamental problems confronted by the respective societies or whether it is an imposition on the part of the Bank in order to achieve certain predetermined political or commercial objectives in support of the ideological positions of the West? Another way of summing up the questions raised so far is to ask whether the Bank's conception of skill formation for economic development takes into full account the broader attitudinal, motivational, political, and cultural imperatives under which individual societies and their governments operate. It appears not. Of course it could be argued that the Bank functions within its own policy constraints and that it decides to support education projects and

programs to the extent that the borrower invites it to do so. Though these are plausible arguments, given the Bank's prestige, most governments--pressed for a way out of their enormous economic dilemmas--are likely to succumb to Bank suggestions even when deep in their hearts they might know otherwise. Thus, the Bank's narrow definition of education and training for economic development seems to have the tendency to influence investment policies which ultimately may not solve the problems of economic development at all. Emphasis on the technical and vocational training components is needed, but it is not sufficient.

As we will see later it is also possible that the Bank's policy is influenced by other than educational and economic imperatives. In addition, for instance in the case of many of African and Asian countries, historical forces, which we have touched upon already, are at work rendering the Bank's efforts none effective.

In addition, the situation regarding vocational-technical education as contrasted with academic education was complicated by home grown and imported biases or prejudices, some grounded on facts others on fantasy. In the case of Africa, for instance, which has been participating in the Bank's credit advances since 1963, the attempt on the part of the British to implement the recommendations drawn by the Phelps-Stokes Commission left bitter tastes in the minds of many African thinkers. As may be recalled from our discussions above, the Commission's recommendations were coated with the desire to make education relevant and useful for the African realities. The Commission had explicitly stated that while fundamental skills in language, reading, and arithmetic were a must, education should equip participants in farming, cattle raising, healthful living, morality, and sound family life. The essentials may be

categorized to constitute: 1) character development, defined as instilling the simple virtues of perseverance, thrift, temperance, self-control, reliability, honesty, and respect for parents; 2) health and hygiene; 3) agriculture and gardening; 4) industrial skills; 5) knowledge of home economics and wholesome recreation.

The recommendation at face value looks innocent and germane to the local economic and political situations prevailing in many of the colonized African countries. But it may be remembered as time changing. For one these thoughts were being formulated in the aftermath of World War I and the American Civil War. The political climates at international levels were changing fast. The traditionally oppressed peoples in the Americas, Africa, or Asia had already begun to debate how to determine their respective destinies vis a vis the European powers. More specifically, the Africans, at least the educated elites, were very familiar with what kind of education was being planned for those in Africa and in America for the minorities.

As the issue of vocational versus academic education were being debated in the United States, led by Washington and Dubois each taking opposite position, so in Africa, including Nigeria, there occurred similar divisions among indigenous educated people. The majority of this group of Africans saw in the commission's recommendations for rural, tribal, vernacular, and moral bias curricula, and the British's desire to implement them, a design to perpetuate the racial and class differences existing between the Africans and non-Africans, rekindling the oft repeated question of " Are we always to be the hewers of wood and drawers of water?" Consequently, the attempts remained mute. But the Africans' suspicions that the people in power were trying to forge for the colonies the kind of education which was less than equal to that offered

for the children of free people anywhere, was to last for a long time, even to this day.

More or less this type of attitude against agricultural and vocational oriented curricula provided thorough the medium of indigenous languages has been resisted up to this time, which the World Bank was very slow to recognize. In modern times and as far as the Bank is concerned this resistance is made manifest in the delays of project implementations, problems of maintaining a sufficient level of enrollments in vocational schools, and the absence or lack of political commitment on the part of the leadership, and the differential remuneration, promotion or otherwise prestige-related rewards on the part of policy makers and employers.

Parents and their children are intelligent enough to know, no matter how we argue about the need for trained people to live and develop the land and in spite of the problems of shortages of employment opportunities and a lack of social services in urban centers, that access to the regular curricula as afforded in the cities to the children of the powerful is the key to the aspired "high-paying" jobs, social mobility and power. Of course, these kinds of expectations are unrealistic but thanks to historical biases against practical education and in the absence of strong leadership which can convince the population otherwise the hiatus continues; illustrating once again that any educational policy or program to be meaningful, it must take into full account the traditions, the history and the desire of the people which it seeks to serve. Failing to do so is an exercise in futility.

Another approach employed by the Bank has been to establish a dual system of education in the developing countries. One designed for people living in high populations centers-towns and cities-with emphasis on academically

oriented curricula, and a second one for the people living and making their living of the land, and these latter group usually constitute upward to 80% of the total population of the respective countries. Usually this kind of attempt has been resisted by the rural people. They see it another sinister designed aimed at perpetuating the traditional maldistribution of power and wealth along the urban-rural continuum. While staying on the land to make it productive thorough the provision of appropriately trained work force in the interest of all the people is a plausible policy. however such a policy should include mechanisms that would allow, indeed encourage, some of the promising young people to proceed beyond what the village-level education can offer. Usually this kind provision is lacking and at any rate many young people from the rural areas flock to the cities whether they would get what they are seeking or not often with disastrous results for both the individuals concerned and the larger community of citizens. Often international organizations such as the Bank contribute to the problem.

SUMMARY

Throughout history, the experiences and culture of the powerful have been those which enjoyed the allegiance and imitation of many--poor or rich. In the school setting society chooses those aspects of the universal realities that it wishes the on coming generation should learn. Among the many universal constructs choices are made. Unusually such choices are culled from those constructs that belong to powerful groups in society and these in turn are included in the curricula to be learned by children and youth as well as adults. Thus the structures, policies, and curricula of formal education reflect the desires and goals of powerful institutions and individuals. This

hierarchy of control based on economic and political power extends from the international to the lowest tribal level in society.

In recent history international organization have become involved on the economic and cultural-political reconstruction of the less developed societies. This type of involvements have assumed many forms--money, personnel, technology, and the like. With these commodities come the several types of cultural baggages and in different guises. Thus the several types of international organizations operating today are either willingly, by design or unwittingly agents of cultural imperialism.

Given the present world and the need for international understanding, and commerce, the learning of other cultures, languages or conventions are very desirable. Indeed at present Western European countries are undergoing thorough basic reformulation of their concepts of national sovereignty in the interest of ultimately forging a united states of Europe. It could be argued that similar thinking ought to be the order of the day for other societies of Africa, Latin America or Asia among themselves as well as with the industrialized societies. However the issue is that such arrangements should not be one-sided, should be of mutual benefit and that the people should have direct knowledge and say on the choices. In this way, people of the world may come closer to understand and appreciate the essence of one another's culture and aspirations for the mutual benefit of all concerned.

NOTES

1. Martin Carnoy, Education as Cultural Imperialisms, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1984, p. 100.
2. Ibid, p. 102.
3. Ibid, p. 301.
4. See Teshome G. Wagaw, The World Bank in Africa's Education, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1984, pp. 1-25.

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