Their names are neatly written on grade reports of the University of Chicago Law School, but who they are is partially a mystery. Between 1909 and 1918 the Chinese government sent at least six students to the Law School to study. They each took three years’ worth of courses, from the expected Torts and Contracts, to the more exotic Roman Law. Some of their grades were good, some outstanding, and some not up to snuff, but they all gleaned valuable information about the American legal system that they brought back to China to build a new nation.

For the past year, several people on the staff of the Law School have been fascinated by the possibility of uncovering these students’ stories. These six men—Pan Hui Lo (罗泮辉), ’11, Tsung-Hua Chow (周宗华), ’12, Hsi Yun Feng (冯熙运), ’12, En Tse Wang (王恩泽), ’13, Chuncin Kuohwei Chang (张国辉), ’17, and Chaoyuan Chang (张肇元), ’19,—came to America to study; to soak up knowledge of the law, and to bring that knowledge back home to help strengthen China. Based on all the evidence available, they succeeded admirably.

These men were strong students who were selected to come here because of their academic abilities. We know they received more preparation—especially in reading and writing English—than previous Chinese students who came to America had received. We know that most, but probably not all, returned to their homeland to work in government or industry. Each of the six received JD degrees from the Law School, and some went on to study at other US institutions as well. Many of the scholars China sent to the United States between 1909 and 1949 studied at several schools and studied a number of different subjects. These men drafted important legislation, served in high levels of government, and taught at prestigious universities. And they came here in larger numbers than one might expect: the University of Chicago Law School granted more JD degrees to Chinese students in the early part of the 20th century than any of its peer schools.

Receiving a Juris Doctor degree from a foreign university in this period was extremely unusual, but a complete Western education was clearly the intent of the Chinese government in sending these students to the United States. The Chinese had a keen interest in introducing new knowledge to their society. Their practice of sending students abroad to learn and return to their native land was seen as essential to bringing China into the modern age.

Beginning in the 1870s, the Qing Dynasty, in an effort to modernize their economy and government and drag it out of its agricultural languor, began sending students to the
United States and other countries to learn engineering, sciences, law, and government. Unfortunately, while many of these young people were fine students, they were inadequately prepared for learning in English, and it took them some time to adjust to their new environment. However, by the time the first of these students returned to China, problems began to arise. The graduates were not well viewed by the Chinese government—they had become too westernized, had given up their traditional upbringings and had not gathered information, according to leadership, that was useful to the Chinese government. By 1881, hostility toward China and the Chinese had risen in the United States, and the students were recalled to Asia much against the protest of their professors.

Then in 1900 the Eight Country Allied Force entered China to suppress the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion. Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States stayed for a year, helped to defeat the Boxers, and made it clear to the Chinese government that they were owed money for their efforts. Ultimately, the United States was owed $33 million. In the ultimate irony for the xenophobic Boxers, a deal was brokered that allowed the U.S. to use these funds to set up the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program, which would enable Chinese students to study in the United States and bring their knowledge back to their country.

The Boxer scholarships funded selection, preparatory training (largely English reading and writing), transportation, and study for the scholarship beneficiaries. Part of the money was used in 1911 to establish a preparatory school, Tsinghua College (also known as American Indemnity College), to help Chinese graduates pursue further studies at American universities.

Before the establishment of the Boxer scholarships, there were a few students who were sent by the Chinese government to study at the Law School. They came from Peiyang University, now known as Tianjin University, the first modern university in China. One of these was Showin Wetzen, who studied at the Law School in 1906 or 1907, but did not end up receiving a degree. In 1914 he sent a letter to his classmate, Paul O’Donnell, ’09, in which he explained that after leaving Chicago he went on to Indiana University where he earned a degree in political science. He then returned to China, took an Imperial Palace Examination and earned a master’s degree, after which he was appointed as Undersecretary of the Board of Education. Wetzen went on to serve as Chief of the Foreign Intercourse Department of the Board of Communications and the Judge-Advocate of the Board of the Navy. After the formation of the Republic, he was appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court of China. While Wetzen was not part of the Boxer program, he took his American education back to China to build a new nation, just as the Boxer scholars were meant to do.

A few of the Chicago JD students also came from Peiyang University. Tsung Hua Chow (周宗华) enrolled at Brown University in 1906, transferred to Yale, and graduated with a PhB in 1908. He entered the Law School in 1909 and received his JD in 1912. Upon graduation, he returned to China and was appointed Chinese Assistant District Inspector at Shiherwei and then became Director of Salt Administration.

Pan Hui Lo (罗泮辉) arrived at Harvard University from Peiyang in 1906 and earned his undergraduate degree in 1909. He matriculated at the Law School in 1908, so it is possible that (as was somewhat common at the time) the first year of his legal studies counted as the final year toward his undergraduate degree. By 1911 he had earned both a JD and an AM in Political Science. After that, Lo joined the Canton Province government on his return to China and was responsible for the portfolio of foreign relations and legislative drafting and later became president of the province. However, his tenure was short-lived because of infighting in the province, and he chose to teach at the Soochow University Law School in Shanghai. At some point, he also served as Deputy Speaker of the Canton Parliament.

Hsi Yun Feng (冯熙运), entered Harvard in 1907 after attending Peiyang and earned an AB in 1909, ultimately
earning a JD from the University of Chicago in 1912. After returning to China in 1913, he was appointed Associate Justice of the Chihli Supreme Court. The following year, he became a Professor of Law at Peiyang and in 1920 became president of the University. In 1924 he established a private school, and from 1927 to 1951 he worked as legal counsel and board member of a number of private corporations. En Tse Wang (王恩泽) was also a Peiyang University student before being sent to Harvard, where he earned an AB in 1910. He received his JD in 1913 from the Law School, but we have no clues about his career or personal life.

Students came to Chicago Law with a wide variety of educational backgrounds, including higher education at elite Chinese and American universities. Chaoyuan Chang (张肇元) earned his AB in China at St. John's College and went on to earn a Master’s degree in 1916 at Columbia University. In 1919 he graduated with a JD from the Law School. After his return to China, Chang served as the translator of the Chinese Criminal Code, drafted important legislation, and was also a member of Parliament. Ultimately, he rose to the position of Acting Minister of Finance.

Chuncin Kuohwei Chang (张国辉) was sent to the University of Michigan in 1911 and earned a BA, after which he earned an AM in diplomacy and international law at Columbia University in 1916 while working on a JD at the Law School, which he received in 1917. Apparently unsatisfied, Chang returned to Columbia for more diplomacy and law training and earned an LLB in 1919. He won the Einstein Prize for having been “deemed to have done the best and most original work in American Diplomacy.”

Upon returning to China, Chang became an Acting Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Deputy Judge of the Peking District Court, an assistant Councillor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and finally a Professor of Political Science and Economics from 1922 to 1926 in Beijing. Later, he served as Commissioner of Foreign Affairs for Fujian Province while simultaneously serving as Superintendent of Maritime Customs for the Xiamen, a subprovincial city of Fujian. In later life, he was appointed an ambassador on overseas mission for the Chinese government.

From 1909 to the end of the Qing dynasty in 1912, 179 students came to America. After the founding of the Republic of China, the students were chosen exclusively from Tsinghua, and 852 students were sent to study in the United States, including 43 women. The finest students in the Republic continued to apply to the Boxer program.

Naturally, there was friction between the goals of the two governments. America wanted the Chinese students to acquire its Christian culture. China wanted the students to learn America’s machinery know-how. Education as a means to understand the cause of poverty in China was the goal, without interfering with the Confucian teachings the Qing government supported. Clashes occurred, but the program continued.

Approximately 1,300 students were able to study through the program from 1909 to 1929. After Tsinghua became a university in 1929, the scholarships were opened to all graduates, and five additional groups of students were educated in the United States before the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. Very few students arrived during the war years, and the Communist Revolution put an end to the program altogether.

Several of the Chinese students who attended the University of Chicago Law School between 1909 and 1918 were likely Boxer Scholarship recipients. Boxer fellows were noted for their academic achievements and are credited with the foundation of China’s modernization in all areas, including the westernization of the legal system of the Republic of China. Soon other nations began designing programs similar to the Boxer Indemnification Scholarship Fund to educate Chinese students abroad.

One additional Chinese student, Ju-ao Mei (梅汝璈), ’28, came to the Law School much later than his other Boxer countrymen. Mei was born in 1904 and was a native of Nanchang, Jiangxi province. He graduated from Tsinghua University in 1924 and came to the United States to study at Stanford, receiving his BA—Phi Beta Kappa, no less—in 1926. He received his JD from the Law School in 1928. He returned to China in 1929 and taught at Shangsi, Nankai, Central Political, and Fudan Universities. He is best known as a judge in the International Military Tribunal for Japanese war crimes in 1946–48. One wonders whether Mei ever crossed paths with...
Professor Bernie Meltzer, ’37, who served as a prosecutor in the Nuremberg trials during an overlapping time period.

The Republic adopted the existing German-based legal codes, but they were not immediately put into practice because following the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1912, China came under the influence of rival warlords and had no central government strong enough to establish a legal code. In 1927, Chiang Kai-Shek’s Kuomintang government began the development of Western legal and penal systems. Returned Boxer fellows were central to this effort, but the new codes never managed to take hold on a national level.

But law students were actually in the minority of Boxer scholars, as the program supported mathematicians, writers, philosophers, linguists, architects, and many scientists. Engineering and the physical sciences were the most popular areas of studies for Boxer scholars, and those who entered the program before the 1940s largely returned to their homeland to use their education in the new Republic. Beyond the students we know of at the Law School, there are several prominent Boxer scholars who had connections to the University. For example, Peng Chun Chang got his higher education at Columbia University and then returned to China to teach philosophy at Nankai University. He fled the country at the time of the Japanese invasion and worked to promote awareness in Europe and America of the Nanking Massacre. He later taught at the University of Chicago.

Yuzhe Zang, long regarded as the father of modern Chinese astronomy, arrived at the University of Chicago in 1925 as a Boxer scholar and received his PhD in 1929 before returning to China to teach at National Central University. In 1928 while completing his dissertation, Zang discovered an asteroid that is now known as 3789 Zhongguo, which means China in Mandarin. Youxun Wu was a physical scientist who did his graduate work at Chicago, where he studied x-ray and electron scattering and verified the Compton effect, which gave Arthur Compton the Nobel Prize in Physics. He went on to be president of National Central University.

Others Boxer scholars ended up teaching at Chicago, including the mathematician Kai-lai Chung. In 1944, he was chosen as a Boxer Scholar and received a PhD from Princeton University in 1947. In the 1950s he taught at Columbia, Berkeley, Cornell, Syracuse, and the University of Chicago. He is considered one of the most important contributors to the modern theory of probability. Ping-ti Ho, who died just this year, won a Boxer scholarship in 1944 and received a PhD in history from Columbia University in 1952. He began teaching at the University of Chicago in 1965, became James Westfall Thompson Professor of History, and retired from the school in 1987.

Unfortunately, bringing American ideas through education to China fell off significantly after the 1949 revolution. But the success of the Boxer scholarships made them the model for the Fulbright Program, the competitive international educational exchange for students, teachers, professionals, scientists, and artists, which was founded in 1946 by United States Senator J. William Fulbright.

The search continues to flesh out the details of the lives of Tsung-Hua Chow (周宗华), Chaoyuan Chang (张肇元), Chuncin Kuohwei Chang (张国辉), En Tse Wang (王恩泽), Hsi Yun Feng (冯熙运), and Pan Hui Lo (罗泮辉). We will probably never know how they felt their time at the Law School helped them and helped their country, or how their educations helped to shape their beliefs. Simply knowing about the time in which they lived and the program in which they participated, however, tells us something about their intentions and their goals. As we participate in discussions today about the importance of diversity of viewpoint and background in law school classrooms, we can only imagine how fascinating it must have been for the classmates of these men to share insights with each other. Their experience at the University of Chicago Law School must have played an important role in helping to form the legal and political thinking of these pioneers, and, by extension, of the Republic they went back to China to lead. Indeed, in its own small but critical way, the University may have been an important element in the creation of modern China.