

WORLD TRENDS

INTELLIGENCE/ROGER COHEN

The Rise of Generation Global

LONDON — My son Daniel is working in Vietnam marketing Budweiser beer, an American icon. Budweiser may be as American as you can get, but it's now owned by Anheuser-Busch InBev, a Belgian-based company. InBev itself was created a few years ago by the merger of a Brazilian company, Ambev, with Interbrew of Belgium.

That's a lot of info to crowd into the top of a column, forgive me, but the modern world is a little like that: a tangled web of cross-border holdings where national icons are not really that national at all. Daniel, 27, is heading to Brazil for a month to train with Brazilian marketers on how to sell an American beer to the 80 million citizens of fast-growing Vietnam. He's part of Generation Global (GG).

Send comments to intelligence@nytimes.com.

The existence of GG is a hopeful thing. Never before have so many young people been so aware of the shared challenges facing the globe, so determined to get "out there" to learn about it, or so intent on making a contribution to a more equitable world. The borderless cyber-communities of social networking have a powerful effect on their views.

My son's Vietnamese-Brazilian connection is interesting. That's where the growth is. He's American-educated, but if he'd stayed in the United States after completing his M.B.A. he might well have found himself joining the long line of twenty-somethings without a job. The growth that has helped avert

economic meltdown since 2008 has come overwhelmingly from next-wave countries like China, Vietnam, India, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa.

However, there's a lag between the economic and political worlds, and that's going to complicate the lives of my son's generation. We are moving toward a new multipolar reality that better reflects the distribution of power in the 21st century, but we are not there yet. On the major global flashpoints — Iran, Israel-Palestine, Afghanistan, North Korea — America leads (with growing difficulty), Europe follows, and then come the other voices, often indistinct.

Now I'm for a more multipolar world because the United States simply does not have the resources to assume ad infinitum its current pivotal role in global security. But I'm also mindful that the worlds of 1914 and 1939 were multipolar — and produced cataclysm. Careful what you wish for is a useful maxim when radical power shifts, of the sort occurring today, are in progress.

The emergent powers represent a hodgepodge of systems and values, which is one reason their voices are indistinct, along with the fact that they are for now intensely focused on their own development. You have the authoritarian systems (in their different forms) of China, Vietnam

and Russia; and the sprawling democracies (one old, one middle-aged, one newish, one new) of India, Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia. All, in varying degrees, have misgivings about the western-dominated world whose time is coming to an end.

Another thing they have in common is their burning desire to grow. Many of these nations know much from their own histories of the struggle for freedom (ongoing in Iran), for peace (ongoing in Israel-Palestine), for national reconciliation (Afghanistan), for an end to totalitarian misery (North Korea). How emergent powers assume the responsibility growth brings seems to me critical.

For now, they lag the corporations that knit the world closer and have landed my son in a Brazilian-Belgian-American-Vietnamese web. I'll raise a glass to that particular exotic brew.