

Transcript of The China Exchange - Episode 2

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DENNIS MILLER: Welcome to part two of The China Exchange. Enrollment Services Director Brian Barden talks about his experiences with the Chinese people who he found warm, generous and caring. He also talks about how the trip changed his life.

Did you get a feel for the students themselves? I mean, culture-wise, how easily they're going to blend in? Is their structure different?

BRIAN BARDEN: Well I think that we're going to find Chinese students to be very focused, very goal-driven.

DENNIS MILLER: That's what I was getting at, yeah.

BRIAN BARDEN: Yeah. I actually was on a couple of campuses, Dali University being one of them. Impressive campuses. We were just really impressed with the campuses. But I got to see some student housing. And very focused individuals, studying. They took us through a tour and there were students studying and doing wash. They did their wash right in their room. They didn't have a washing machine per say, but in their lavatory and stuff, and they were hanging clothes up and really attending to tasks at hand. But I do think we're going to find our Chinese visitors this fall to be very focused, in terms of their goals, their aspirations. Hard working people.

I found the Chinese people to be very warm, very personable, very willing to help. Obviously I tend to look like an American and I really looked like an American when I was over there because there were lots of times I had this confused look on my face, in terms of, "Okay, now where do I go?" And people were very helpful in reaching out. I just found my experience with the Chinese people to be exceptional, far more than I had anticipated.

It's one of those things Dennis, and I'm getting a little philosophical now, but we have, at least I have, I'll speak about myself, we have ideas about people in our world, and those ideas are many times shaped by what we see on TV, through news, what we may read and many times that's dealing on a governmental level in terms of what is the Chinese government doing, what is the American government doing? We really were with the people. Other than yes, they're Chinese and yes, they tend to eat a diet that's different than my diet, and probably far more healthy than my diet, they are a people just like us. I found that as a real revelation. They have aspirations, personal aspirations and goals. They want to be happy. They want to pursue opportunities and those kinds of things, just like we do. And that was a real revelation for me.

We need these kinds of exchanges. We want this kind of exchange for our own students to be able to relate to cultures that are different than from where our students are coming from. They want to do the same thing. They want to learn about us. And it's through that Dennis, that I could see where our world could change, as we get to know one another and understand the aspirations of people to people, as opposed to government to government.

DENNIS MILLER: And that's one of those things that I think you almost have to experience to really appreciate it.

BRIAN BARDEN: Right.

DENNIS MILLER: I mean, you can sit here and tell me that and I'm thinking, "Yeah, he's absolutely right." But until you are actually in the midst of it...And talking with the individual people.

BRIAN BARDEN: Oh, absolutely. And one of the things that surprised me is I did not see any evidence of military, and I anticipated that I would. None. No evidence of military whatsoever while I was in China. So as you begin to have conversations with Chinese you realize, "Hey, this is an individual just like me." The apprehension, and I have to be honest, I had apprehension about going to China and what would I experience and how would I be treated as an American. I'll tell you, I was totally blown away by the people of China and the reception that I received. They just embraced us. They wanted us there. They wanted to work with us.

There were several speeches, that was another thing, we heard several speeches while we were over there. But what,

again, just kind of floored me in some of the speeches, were how they talked about the Americans. It was a presentation, several times, from various individuals, that talked about the Americans as being “our friends, our allies, our partners.” And those were words that were used in these speeches. And I haven’t necessarily heard that, from my experience, in terms of again, the news. It was amazing to me to hear them, Chinese people, talking about us as their friend, as their ally, as their partner. That was another revelation.

DENNIS MILLER: Sure. Tell me about some of the activities. I mean, you did spend 12 days over there, three cities and...

BRIAN BARDEN: Activities, well we had a lot of meetings. [laughs] And I heard a lot of speeches. And the speeches were longer, they seemed to be longer than they were, partially simply because some of the folks...because we had Chinese and Americans in these meetings and some of the Chinese didn’t speak fluently, nor necessarily comprehended English, then the speeches were done in English, then interpreted. So depending on the individual doing the speech, they would speak in Chinese and then they would interpret what they had said. So we heard the speech twice.

DENNIS MILLER: Yeah.

BRIAN BARDEN: Which made them a little longer than they needed to be. Sometimes it would be an individual speaking in Chinese and then an interpreter. And then once I really felt like I was at the UN because we went into the conference hall one morning and we all had these ear sets that we put on and the person gave the speech in Chinese and then while that was going on somebody was interpreting over the headsets, we heard that. So I really felt like, “Oh, this is like the United Nations here.”

DENNIS MILLER: Felt really international.

BRIAN BARDEN: Yes, I did. So we had a lot of speeches, obviously all around education from a Chinese perspective and how that relates to an American education and that kind of thing. We had...the best part of what we did was the interaction that we had with our counterparts and being able to talk with individuals and begin to work out and develop a relationship and articulation, what we need to do to get this articulation agreement going and those kinds of things. “What issues are we seeing? What are you seeing from a Chinese perspective in terms of your students coming to us? And what things do we need to be watching out for and paying attention to?” The same way, “Okay, these are issues we have from an American educational experience that we must adhere to because of accreditation issues, a variety of different things.” And then, “How can you accommodate those needs that we have?” So a lot of those kinds of conversations going on. So we had formal opportunities to do those kinds of conversations and then certainly a lot of one on one, because we had several banquets that we attended and normally you would sit with someone different during lunch or at a banquet and you would have those kinds of opportunities for one on one. So that was a large portion of the conference.

The conference actually ended with a graduation ceremony that we attended right there in Kunming. So we attended that and that was really interesting because the graduation was really done twice, because they graduated from a Chinese institution and an American institution. So each of the institutions that had students from the United States that were graduating, either their president or their provost was there to present the diploma to the American, as well as the president, typically it was the president, from the Chinese institution was there to present the diploma from the Chinese. And again, more speeches because we had the American presidents would speak and the Chinese presidents would speak. So we heard a lot of speeches.

[laughter]

DENNIS MILLER: So eventually we’ll be sending our provost or representative over once a year.

BRIAN BARDEN: Once we begin having graduates I would suspect that Maravene probably will be going over as part of the graduation ceremony over there. And that’s typically held in June, for these institutions.

DENNIS MILLER: That’s Maravene Loeschke, our president.

BRIAN BARDEN: That's right.

DENNIS MILLER: So, tell me about shopping for clothes.

BRIAN BARDEN: Ah! Shopping for clothes. Well now, that was another experience that I had. Of course one of the things that you think about, especially if you're traveling internationally, is, "Will your luggage show up?" And that was a question that I had and it was quickly answered that, "No, your luggage will not show up." [laughs] At least in my case anyway. When I arrived in Beijing, because we had to go through customs, my luggage was not to be transferred directly to the next flight, into Kunming, because they really don't have customs in Kunming, so I was supposed to go through customs in Beijing. Flew into Beijing, stood around the carousel and let me just pause a moment Dennis, the Beijing airport is the most spectacular airport I have ever seen. It's brand new, in preparation for the Olympics. Absolutely, very modern facility and just...it's breathtaking. Very beautiful and huge. I had never been in an airport as large as the Beijing airport. We flew in there, I went through the immigration there, had my passport stamped and was relieved when I got through that point. Then I had to go get my luggage. I went to the luggage area and stood and watched the carousel go around and around and around. And I stood and stood and stood and stood some more. Eventually I was the only one left standing around this carousel wondering, "Where is my bag?" And again, this will show the care of the Chinese people. A Chinese woman who obviously worked for the airport, there was an employee there at the airport, walked up to me and said, in fluent English, "May I help you sir?" And I said, "Well, maybe you can. I'm waiting here for my luggage and I don't see it." She said, "Well, if you don't see it now, you won't see it, because all the luggage has arrived." So I thought, "Okay, here I am in Beijing, no luggage, what do I do? I have an air flight to catch." She said, "You'll need to go right over..." She could see on my face my distress. She said, "You'll need to go right over to that office, right over there, and they'll take care of you."

So I did and it was their version of the lost and found baggage office. And again, very helpful. People speaking fluent English. I explained exactly what had happened. They were able to get right on the computer and the woman said, "Oh, yes. Your luggage is still sitting in JFK." So I filled out a form, a lost luggage claim form and that type of thing, and flew onto Kunming and thus started 12 days of touring China without luggage.

I had anticipated well, in a day or two the luggage will show up. I had actually two outfits with me, one I was wearing, a pair of khaki shorts and a polo shirt and sneakers, very American. And then my wife, who tends to watch out for me said, "You know, you really ought to have something in your carry-on bag just in case." So I had put in a pair of dress slacks and a casual business shirt and thought, "That'll get me through for a day or two if luggage is late." Well, 12 days, 2 outfits. I did not ever get my luggage. In fact, to make a very long story short my luggage was in JFK waiting for me when I returned after 12 days.

I did go shopping thinking, "Okay I need to get some clothes." And I spent an afternoon shopping and really could not find anything, other than a pair of shoes, because I did not have a pair of dress shoes. I was able to find a pair of dress shoes. I bought the largest pair that they had in the store. I wear a 10 1/2, so I don't consider my feet that large, I think they're pretty average for American, that was the largest pair they had in the store. So I was able to purchase that however I could not find anything in terms of clothing, that would fit. A double X was the largest they made and I thought, "Double X, I can fit into a double X. I may be a little large but I can fit into a double X." Well I discovered that the double X there is considerably smaller than the double X here in the United States and it did not fit.

DENNIS MILLER: And you're how large? How tall?

BRIAN BARDEN: How tall? I'm 5'11.

DENNIS MILLER: Most Americans going over to China are not going to go clothes or shoe shopping.

BRIAN BARDEN: Certainly not in the stores that I shopped in anyway. A double X was skin-tight on me. And we were not in a place where I could've had clothes made, because I wasn't in any one place long enough with the time to be able to find a tailor and have clothes made, which many times you hear of individuals doing when they're visiting in China. So I lived on two outfits, twelve days, washing my clothes every day in the bathroom sink, hanging them up and then in the morning invariably having to get the blow dryer out and blow dry them dry because

hey hadn't completely dried yet. Actually, after a day or two of adjusting to the fact that I didn't have clothes, it really became quite easy. I only had two outfits. There wasn't a whole lot of deliberating in terms of what I was going to wear. And I always planned ahead every night thinking, "Okay tomorrow, which outfit should I be wearing tomorrow that would best suit the activities that we were in?" So really I did have my carry-on, so any travel that I did in China, I just had my carry-on to worry about. I didn't have to worry about any other piece of luggage.

I did end up buying a piece of luggage over there in China because there were people back here in the United States expecting that I would bring things home and so I needed a piece of luggage to be able to put some of that in. It really worked out very well. I probably some day may write a book on how to travel China for two weeks with two outfits.

[laughter]

DENNIS MILLER: But you did have your camera.

BRIAN BARDEN: I did have my camera. Fortunately I carried that right with me at all times, my camera and my passport. I did not let either one of...and my airline tickets, getting back out of China, they were on my at all times. I didn't let them out of my site at all. So those were the three items that I made sure I hung on to, didn't let anyone else have any access to them. All the essentials. I had my Blackberry, I had my laptop and my camera, so I was good to go.

DENNIS MILLER: Two sets of clothes, what more could a traveling guy need.

BRIAN BARDEN: That's right, exactly. So I learned how to travel light and probably a good lesson because the next time I travel any distance like that I'm going to think twice about how many clothes I take with me and that type of thing.

DENNIS MILLER: Yeah. So overall it was a very successful trip for you?

BRIAN BARDEN: I think it was very successful, on two fronts. One, certainly for the institution. This was firsthand for me, in terms of really understanding what this program that we're involved in, this One Plus Two Plus One program that we are involved in as an institution, I learned so much about that. And I also learned how we need to be working with these students and the special accommodations that we're going to have to for these One Plus Two Plus One students. So I think that was hugely successful for the institution.

On a personal front, it was an incredible experience and I learned so much, first of all about myself, internationally, and then to be in China with no clothes and all of that, and relating to people and realizing, "Yes, I can do this. I can get around. I can figure this out." And that the people are warm and outgoing and willing to help, that kind of experience. Certainly looking from a cultural standpoint in terms of looking at the world a little differently and understanding that we do live in this big world and come to a point of being able to work through our situation, so to speak, globally so that we can live in peace in this world.

DENNIS MILLER: It sounds like when the students come over you're going to be one of the first to greet them and--

BRIAN BARDEN: Oh absolutely. I'll be thrilled to see the students over here and yes, I plan to be very involved with them.

DENNIS MILLER: Do you think you'll be going back?

BRIAN BARDEN: Well, I'm not opposed to going back. I guess that would be up to the administration in terms of whether I go back or not. Met some wonderful people over there so I would certainly love to see those individuals and work on articulation agreements. I also, Dennis, and this is another perspective, I also met some wonderful Americans over there as well. These were all individuals involved in the same exchange program that Mansfield University is involved with, representing a variety of institutions from the East coast all the way to the West coast.

DENNIS MILLER: Well, your emails are going to get heavier and heavier with all these new friendships.

BRIAN BARDEN: Indeed they are. You know, the trip also helps to, or for me it helped to re-assess and re-assert that there are good people out there.

DENNIS MILLER: Yeah, yeah.

BRIAN BARDEN: And individuals wanting to work together to accomplish great things.

DENNIS MILLER: Sounds like a great trip and a life-altering, life-changing trip.

BRIAN BARDEN: Indeed it was.

DENNIS MILLER: Thank you very much.

BRIAN BARDEN: Thank you.

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DENNIS MILLER: That's it for part two of The China Exchange. For more pod casts ranging in everything from making movies to recording the New Testament, go to podcast.mansfield.edu.