

Reflections on the American & Chinese Cultural Exchange Association (ACCEA)
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“Without Wax”

According to some etymologists (those who study the history of words), the English term “sincere” is derived from the Latin roots *sine* which means “without” and *cere* which denotes “wax.” “Sincere,” then, would literally mean “without wax.” As the story goes — and that’s all some people think it is — Roman potters and sculptors would fill the cracks in their works with wax to hide imperfections from their respective users or viewers. Contrariwise, a piece of earthenware or a statue that was “sine-cere” had no fractures filled with wax. It was honest, true and genuine, characterized by purity and integrity.

Though my theology and personal experience teach me that none of us is perfect — we all have cracked feet of clay filled with some wax — nevertheless, I would have to say that the people I met in China were, without exception, “sincere.” They were without wax!

The highlights of my time in the world’s most heavily populated nation were many. To have the opportunity to speak on the subject of “worldview” at the philosophy departments of Wuhan and Peking Universities exceeded my wildest vocational dreams. To talk on the same topic to a group of fashion design students at the Wuhan College of Science and Technology was an unexpected challenge, but a great experience. To have the privilege of giving a speech to an audience of about seventy people on worldview at the conference center of the Disanji Bookstore (the largest in Beijing) at the Cultural Height and Media Tower was an honor I will not soon forget. Indeed, on this occasion, the professor who translated my book *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans 2002) into Chinese for Peking University Press also served as the translator for my lecture that day. What a pleasure it was to meet him and work together ... in person! What a pleasure also to meet him and to have meaningful conversation with five of his top students who accompanied him.

At Peking University, I also had the privilege of meeting a woman who together with her daughter sent copies of my worldview book in Chinese translation to about one hundred universities throughout the PRC. At the same lecture, one of my former students from Dallas Baptist University, now living in Zhongguo with her husband and daughter, traveled a considerable distance by train to attend the lecture. What a delight it was to see her.

At each speaking engagement, the audience was attentive, inquisitive, and patient, especially since the need for an interpreter doubled the length of each address. The questions following each speech were thoughtful and challenging: “What is the meaning of life and the nature of human happiness?” “How can a virgin conceive and give birth to a son without a man?” “Where is God?” “How can worldviews be fairly evaluated if they are always evaluated by a

person holding to a particular worldview?” “Couldn’t there be a universal human reason that determines what the true worldview is in an unbiased manner?” These and many other honest and excellent questions really caused me to think and try hard to answer them honestly and well.

As a team of speakers, we enjoyed many delicious and bountiful meals together with our hosts, and I must say that my chopstick skills improved considerably. Great conversation and many toasts expressing hearty camaraderie and good will accompanied each feast. My visit to Tiananmen Square and the Great Wall of China were particularly meaningful, thanks especially to our gracious guides. The Tibetan Tea Service we experienced was astonishing. I took in as many of the sights, sounds, and smells of China as I possibly could while I was there and there were many. I want to return.

I am grateful for my new American colleagues who were part of our speaking delegation, for sharing the experience with a cherished friend, and for the unforeseen opportunity to meet a noted *New York Times* editorial writer and the son of a famed American film director/producer. I was very thankful for our native hostesses and hosts who did so much to make our time unspeakably pleasant and memorable. I have rarely if ever experienced such kind attention, selfless service, and expressions of appreciation in my life.

Prior to my departure, I contacted a professor friend of mine at Baylor University who has also been a visiting lecturer at Peking University since 1996. He offered me helpful advice, but his closing comment — a prophecy of sorts — came true. “Believe me,” he said, “when you come home, you will have received much more than you will have given.” I didn’t doubt him when he said this, but now I know it to be true firsthand. We came to China to serve and hopefully we did a bit of that. Even more, however, we were served by people of whom the world is not worthy, by those who, indeed, are “without wax.” We were in the presence of saints.