Interview With Mr. Kwan So

In 2009, the Confucius Institute at San Diego State University (CISDSU) was officially founded. Mr. Kwan So donated 15,000 dollars to the institute to support its function in promoting Chinese language and culture. Mr. So is currently the Senior Advisor of the Advisory Board of CISDSU. He served as the president of EVG Enterprises, Inc and joined the UC San Diego’s Foundation Board of Trustees. On November 14th, 2016, CISDSU staff interviewed Mr. So, on the topics of the founding history of CISDSU, as well as stories of his adventures and lucky life.

Q: You are one of the founding fathers of CISDSU. How did you learn about CISDSU at the beginning?

So: I learned about CISDSU from Dr. Lilly Cheng. I’ve known Lilly for many years. Lilly and my wife Marion So both worked together at the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum. We used to support the Museum for their activities. Lilly is always supportive and helpful to Alexandre Chuang, then Executive Director. Lilly is the Professor in the School of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences. She also has a keen interest in studying Chinese language and culture. So I wanted to invite her to help support our UCSD program. Even though she retired, she had shown interest in the program. I’ve worked at the UCSD School of Global Policy Strategy (GPS), especially the 21st Century China Center for over two decades. In 2008, I got in touch with Lilly. She was planning to retire back then. I said, “Why don’t you come to UCSD and help us develop the Center.” She replied she wanted to consider it.

In September, I got a phone call from Lilly. She called me from Shanghai, China, saying that she was going to fly back to the United States and send me great news. But I told her, I had to fly to Beijing in two days. So Lilly replied that she could meet me in Beijing. We met up in Beijing. That afternoon, I invited Lilly to lunch with a brunch of friends. Lilly just arrived in Beijing from Shanghai that morning and she went straight to the restaurant. After
We talked a lot on that day. I was very happy for her. I said yes. I supported her and donated some money. Later on, the Confucius Institute library was named after me and my family. This was how I started with the Confucius Institute.

Q: What was your first impression to the Confucius Institute?

So: I didn’t know much about the Confucius Institute before. Later I learned that CISDSU mainly focuses on education, teaching Elementary school to high school students Chinese. Now, CISDSU has developed to teach Chinese culture and promote Chinese culture in the community. These are good stuff.

Q: What was your expectation to CISDSU when you made your donation?

So: I was hoping that it would be a good thing if more and more people in the world could speak Chinese, that way more people can learn about China. In today’s world, to my understanding, conflicts are created on misunderstanding between people. They don’t understand each other. If we can develop that mutual understanding, we can have less conflict, and the world will be more peaceful. I’ve had difficult times during the war. We, as Chinese, are hard-working people. We work hard. This is our Chinese culture.