It Started with a Thank-You Letter:
An Interview with the Andersons

Riverview International Academy students, Jack Anderson and Mia Anderson, wrote a hand-written thank-you letter in Chinese to the Chinese Navy on December 7th, 2016, after touring their ship at the B street pier. Jack and Mia had mentioned Riverview International Academy as their school and Confucius Institute at a supporter of their Mandarin Immersion Program. The Chinese Navy personnel were so impressed by the note that they contacted Confucius Institute to try and find them. Confucius Institute helped the Navy find the Andersen family, and informed that they were invited to join an exclusive reception dinner on the ship. The dinner reception included US Navy Admirals and their Staff along with San Diego elected officials. The dinner was great and everyone was really friendly. Jack and Mia were the only kids invited and they were photographed extensively by the Chinese media present. This was a special experience for the kids. At the reception dinner, they met four Admirals, two from China and two from the US! They were able to use their Chinese language skills to introduce themselves and interact with the Chinese navy. On December 28th, CISDSU Co-Director Cunlu Zhang and Project Coordinator Chudan Li interviewed John Anderson (father) and Linda Anderson (mother).
**Question: Why did Jack and Mia decide to write the thank-you letter to the Chinese Navy?**

John: This is a very special thing to be invited on the navy ship. When I was a young man, that would be a rare occasion. My dad encouraged me to say thank you. So I would find any piece of paper, and I would say, “Thank you for the tour of your ship”. Because it's a lot of work for them to do everything like that, and it is not necessarily what they're here for. It was an appropriate thing and it was special for me. I haven't been on a military ship since I was little. So I thought it was really special and I will tell you they were very courteous. The ship was spotless, and they were proud. What happened with the note is that we just wanted to say thank you for the tour of your ship. Then Linda says “their writing is really going be all right”. I said to tell them they are learning Chinese, because their writing is not very good...just tell them the truth you are learning Chinese at Riverview. Then Linda who is translating what I think they should be saying thank you for the tour of the ship. We always teach them that when people come to our house, or we go to other people's we write little notes. The next thing you know she's writing something outside, a little bit more than we thought. But we felt we should tell them that the kids are learning language at Riverview. Then I thought Riverview gets this program because of Confucius Institute, because you support them. Linda said, “If you're going to do this then say Confucius.” I think we did.

**Question: How was the tour on the Chinese Navy ship?**

John: This is a modern cruiser, modern guided missile warship. It was very impressive, more advanced than anything I've been on in the U. S. It was a very nice tour, they were very respectful and they put very good people in positions along the tour route. I don't know some of the weapons there so I said to Linda, ask them what these are. She then translated to Chinese. The sailor looked at her and then looked at me and then answered the question in perfect English! Then I knew they put English speakers in all the key places. And that was the tour, we got the invitation back. That was really something to go back and to be treated so well. I got to meet all these U. S. admirals, and it reminded me of being little with the US Navy as my dad was a Navy sailor. The Chinese admirals were very nice. They gave us those gold coins - under it has their name and title. We got pictures with the Chinese admirals and the American admirals. Then I went back to see my dad, he is 93 in a retirement home. I went back and said, “Hey, your grandkids met all these admirals” I thought he was going to cry, he just looked at things said “Oh, that is so neat.” reminded him of 40 or 50 years ago, the whole thing was good.

Linda: They take turns in writing the note, my son was writing one paragraph and then my daughter wrote another. For me it's not long, for them, especially hand writing is hard, so they took turns. John: We started the letter in the car before the tour. After finishing the tour, we finished up the letter by adding the name of the ship. It was a lot of work for the kids to write all that. But we always tell our kids to be respectful, say thank you and please. To me it is normal courtesy.
Question: So your father, he served in the navy for how long?

John: He was an enlisted man in World War II. He enlisted late on the war. Because he was in high school and got out then he got enlisted. Then the war ended. I joked with him and I say, “Dad, the Japanese heard you’re enlisted so they surrender.” Then he went to Korea as a pilot and then he went to Vietnam. He taught us respect and I grew up in a disciplined environment of the military. This was a big deal I guess not for other people but to me, it’s a huge job to be invited on that vessel. Once I started thinking about the note. I said this is such a cool thing, the program. This is a school of choice for us and we could go anywhere. I was a chief pilot for UPS airline, I travelled the world. I’ve been to Hong Kong, Singapore, cities like Harbin and Shenzhen. I realize when you get outside of the U. S., this is a big world. It’s a world economy and we need to go along as best we so we don’t repeat things like World War II. Linda and I met in Los Angeles long time ago. After we got married we had Jack on our way. I don’t want him going to school like I went to school. I went school in Coronado. It’s a very nice school, very wealthy. You know I don’t want that, I want their world to be this (big). And so we looked around and we were in Los Angeles and I said let’s come to San Diego. We were living in Los Angeles. We moved for the school (Riverview).

What the Confucius Institute is doing here, putting the Chinese program together, and broadening these kids world. They don’t even know it yet. It’s good to be culturally sensitive, to understand culture, to speak the language. That’s why we moved from Los Angeles to here. Now we had this great opportunity. It was amazing because we met with the admiral staff. That’s a big deal in the U.S.

Question: How was the reception dinner?

John: It went well. The admiral introduced himself to make us feel welcomed. We’re out on the back of the ship and everyone got stripes everywhere, high ranking and I’m wearing a suit with two kids, they were wearing traditional Chinese outfit. They’re the only kids on the boat that day. One of the U. S. captain came up and he saw me. He looked at me and he said, “What are you doing here?” and I said I’m with them (point to the kids). And he said. “Why are they there?” I said because they wrote a thank-you note for a wonderful tour yesterday. He said that is so appreciated and hardly anyone does it. And I said, “Well you know we just wrote a nice note for the ship and they invited us here.” I don’t speak Chinese but the U. S. admirals were impressed that the kids were there (speaking Chinese). They thought it was a nice touch that evening because it lowers the tension. Does that make sense? It’s so official and then the kids are there, you kind of relaxed.

Question: What is your future plan for the children with their Chinese?

John: What we want to do is take one step at a time. Right now we want to get them to China for summer school. We’re going to keep them exposed to the language and culture. When we come back we want to arrange some sort of exchange. We want to immerse them in Chinese culture so that they are at least comfortable. It’s funny to mention that because I keep thinking if you really have a grip of the language and an understanding of the culture, and open minded enough, you can’t be one of these people that goes “Oh, I don’t want to step out of the office in San Diego.” China’s rapidly becoming the number one economy in the world, close. That great opportunity there could be anyway, politics or anything else. We’re trying to expose them to that. That’s a parent goal. It’s tough to push kids that way, all we do is to give them the tools and give them the exposure and hopefully they will embrace it.