Academic librarians are often embedded in projects or courses but rarely are they asked to establish a library in a new university in a country as historically rich or as politically complicated as China. Duke University Libraries were asked to help build the services and collections for the Duke Kunshan University Library and have played an instrumental role in its setup and in making it an integral partner in the Sino-American partnership between Duke University, Wuhan University, the city of Kunshan, and Jiangsu Province. Duke Kunshan’s mission is to create a world-class liberal arts and research university that will, “inspire students to master academically rigorous coursework, generate new ideas and develop creative solutions to the world’s challenges, preparing them not just for careers in specific fields, but to become globally sophisticated leaders and citizens.” The university opened its doors to its first cohort of students in fall 2014. From its inception, the Duke Kunshan Library has endeavored to support the university’s objective to address the changing needs of global higher education and global challenges.

Similar to the ambitious efforts that established this joint-venture university in China, an entrepreneurial spirit has been a key component of this library initiative. Librarians have been actively seizing opportunities to create meaningful programs; have collaborated with administrators, faculty, and students to implement creative solutions to problems encountered in the library’s start-up; and have been persistent in efforts to integrate information literacy and critical thinking into the curriculum. These efforts have been personally rewarding for the Duke librarians secunded to Duke Kunshan. They also show how American librarians can be leaders in international education in China and how this work supports the development of globalization and international librarianship.

The creation and development of Duke Kunshan University can be attributed to the coming together of three different aspirations: the desire by the Chinese government to
educate its brightest students to be critical, innovative thinkers; Duke University’s desire to be a leader in global education coupled with the opportunity to develop research projects with access to China-based sites, information, and resources; and the desire of the city of Kunshan to attract a world-class university to help solidify its economic growth and technological progress.³

China’s educational history includes a strong willingness to experiment in order to create world-class institutions of higher education. William Kirby points out, in Global Opportunities and Challenges for Higher Education Leaders: Briefs on Key Themes, that involvement with international partnerships to reach this goal is not a new phenomenon in China. Wuhan University, founded in 1893, was influenced by European educational methods to become a “Self-Strengthening” institution,⁴ and many state institutions, before 1949, were patterned after the model of the German university, which holistically integrated research and teaching.⁵ Michael Roth, author of Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters, describes his Chinese colleagues’ admonition that liberal education in China goes back centuries and that it “was never a disconnected or remote theory …but always had as its fundamental mission or telos the refinement of the student for the purpose of nurturing and guiding the nation as a whole.”⁶

To understand why the building and funding of joint-venture universities with liberal arts curricula, such as Duke Kunshan, now appeals to the Chinese government, it is important to understand the trajectory of higher education in China since World War II. From 1949 to the late 1970s, the primary goal of Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist Party was to reconstruct and modernize the country using the Soviet Union as its economic and social model. In higher education, Soviet teaching methods, administrative procedures, and textbooks were emulated, and most students received training in technical and vocational skills. In addition, from 1966–1976, Mao’s Cultural Revolution purged the country of traditional and capitalist elements and, in effect, destroyed the Chinese educational system as many schools were closed and students were forced to migrate to rural areas to perform manual labor. The postwar period was a disastrous time for higher education in China and it took many years for the country’s educational system to recover.⁷

In 1978, with Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door Policy, the Chinese government focused on economic and educational reform and the country began to move from a Soviet model to a market economy with socialist characteristics. Students were trained for careers in the sciences and math while less attention was given to the humanities.⁸ Implementation of the higher education curriculum focused on rote learning and test-based competence. Memorization of content became important and instruction to promote creativity skills and innovative thinking was de-emphasized.

In the late 1990s, another shift in Chinese higher education occurred. The goal became to improve the quality and availability of education for the whole country and to make China more economically competitive on a global level. To increase national and international competence, the national curriculum focused on educating the “whole person” with “cultural quality education.”⁹ Scientific and technological expertise and skills were developed, and the government invested in education to bring greater prosperity to the nation.

In July 2010, China’s Ministry of Education released its comprehensive plan for modernizing its educational system, The Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development 2010–2020, commonly known as Blue-
print 2020. This mandate called for higher education institutions in China to “open their best faculties to the world, and to participate in or set up collaborative international academic organizations.” Today, it is clear that China is dedicated to building a knowledge-based economy and access to world-class education is considered an essential element in the country’s development. The success of Blueprint 2020 can be seen in the increase in the number of schools and students. By 2015, there were 2,560 regular Chinese institutions of higher education and thirty-seven million Chinese students enrolled in college or university. China has the largest student population of any country in the world.

Many policymakers in China see the American system of higher education as a way to provide programs that promote critical thinking, creativity, and innovation and to develop curricula that focus on liberal education. In response, many leading American universities are eager to become involved in the opportunities afforded by the rapid rise of Chinese higher education and to have a “China strategy” to give them a foothold in that growing market. By 2015, there were twenty-nine joint-venture universities in China. In addition to Duke Kunshan University, New York University has built a campus in Shanghai as part of its global network, Stanford has built a research center at Peking University, and other American universities are involved in a variety of academic engagements in China. English is the language of instruction for all degree-granting programs at Duke Kunshan, so the university offers Chinese students the opportunity to prepare themselves for graduate education or employment in English-speaking countries.

Duke’s 2006 strategic plan, “Making a Difference,” clearly stated that the university gives a high priority to going beyond its campus to strengthen its international partnerships. Under President Richard H. Brodhead, the university’s vision was to become not only a more global university but a leader in global education. The plan to establish a joint-venture university in China offered the university the opportunity to achieve its objectives to further its international reputation and global impact, to develop innovative teaching models to extend the reach of its educational standards, and to strengthen its research capabilities and increase research funding in such areas as air and water quality, health inequities, economic development, and technological innovations. An enticing incentive was the Chinese government’s willingness to commit large amounts of money for scientific research and to build international partnerships.

From its inception, the primary interest of the Chinese partners in Duke Kunshan has been the development of the four-year university. Access to world-class, innovative education is a top priority for Chinese higher education. Duke’s status as a top-tier university with considerable name recognition, practical knowledge about innovative teaching methods and cutting-edge research, and significant intellectual capital made it a highly desirable partner.

Jiangsu province, home to the city of Kunshan, is one of China’s wealthiest areas. In 2016, Jiangsu had the highest per capita gross domestic product in China. Kunshan is located approximately thirty-five miles from Shanghai. The two cities are connected by high-speed rail and the sixteen-minute trip makes Shanghai easily accessible. The Jiangsu province is known for its technical innovations and rapid growth, and the construction of a top-tier university was seen as critical to ensuring its continuing development. When it became known that Duke was looking for a campus site in China, Kunshan offered land and financial incentives to entice Duke to set up a joint-venture university in this location. After much negotiation, Duke University in partnership with the city of Kunshan
and Wuhan University, formed Duke Kunshan University and received final approval from the Ministry of Education in 2013.\textsuperscript{20}

In fall 2014, Duke Kunshan University opened its doors to its first class of students. The faculty, staff, and students in the first semester saw themselves as pioneers. They were intrigued by the opportunity to help set up and establish a new university in China and were ready to take on the challenge of the unexpected. Students were enrolled in master’s degree programs in global health, medical physics, or management science, or in the Global Learning Semester (GLS), a program for undergraduate students from Chinese universities, Duke University, or other top-tier universities from around the world.\textsuperscript{21} Faculty were from Duke and other US universities or had been hired for longer-term appointments by Duke Kunshan University.

In this first year, 2014–2015, the interim directors of the Duke Kunshan Library were seconded from Duke, and this direct partnership reinforced the strong ties between the two institutions. The expectation that the rigor of the academic mission of Duke University needed to be realized at Duke Kunshan was carried forward by the seconded librarians who worked closely with Duke Kunshan faculty and students and were responsible for providing them with the services and collections equal to the quality of a Duke education.

This startup required the cooperation and expertise of many departments within the Duke University Libraries (Duke’s central university library system) and from three of Duke’s independently administered professional school libraries, Goodson Law Library, the Medical Center Library, and Ford Library at the Fuqua School of Business. The seconded librarians did not have prior experience setting up a new library nor had they traveled to China. It was an experience they met with enthusiasm and with some trepidation. The support of Duke librarians and administrators made this feel like a team effort that offered many opportunities, and it allowed for risk-taking with the understanding that any difficulties encountered would be treated as lessons learned rather than failures.

All Duke Kunshan degree-granting programs entail the receipt of a Duke diploma, and consequently Duke Kunshan faculty and students have access to the electronic resources available to Duke affiliates, to the extent that purchase agreements and licenses permit. This access required Duke collection development librarians to contact vendors and explain the status of Duke Kunshan programs and students, in some cases negotiate with vendors for additional access. Duke information technology staff set up open source library management systems, discovery platforms, and web proxy servers so the resources could be used in China. The twelve-hour time difference between China and North Carolina required people to work outside normal business hours when in-person communication was needed to set up or troubleshoot services or access to collections. Due to the inherent difficulties of working in China, it has become clear that the development of an international library requires individuals to be dedicated to the mission of the university to ensure that technology can be used across the globe and within a country that can tightly control access to information.

Duke Libraries’ electronic resources are available in China through a secure Virtual Private Network (VPN) that allows access to websites and other internet resources that would not normally be available in China. Duke Kunshan faculty, staff, and students have access to the Duke Kunshan wireless network and the VPN when they are on campus and it quickly connects them to Duke resources. Duke’s Office of Technology (OIT) monitors this IT network to ensure its security.
The protection of academic freedom at Duke Kunshan, including access to information, has been one of the founding principles of the university and a clear expectation for Duke University’s continued involvement in this joint venture. While faculty and students are expected to be respectful of Chinese laws and regulations, they are encouraged to be intellectually curious and are not deterred from tackling and openly discussing highly complex issues. With the help of the VPN technology, Duke University Libraries’ are able to provide students and faculty at Duke Kunshan access to relevant scholarly resources available at Duke.

The print collection at Duke Kunshan needs to provide copies of titles not available in electronic format or whose use would be preferred in print, and its size needs to meet Ministry of Education (MOE) requirements. Duke Libraries’ Technical Services staff has provided assistance with cataloging, acquisitions, and discovery. They established the initial procedures for ordering and importing print books, provided written documentation for specific cataloging procedures, helped troubleshoot cataloging and discovery problems, and created new modules within the Duke discovery tools for the Duke Kunshan Library. The use of Chinese import companies to acquire print books in the US for the Duke Kunshan Library is now the preferred method of acquisition. This process has worked well but can be slow as it may take ten to twelve weeks for a book to be delivered from the US to Kunshan. The use of ebooks, ordered and cataloged through Duke Libraries, shortens this acquisitions process and offers an attractive alternative since it eliminates customs screenings and makes texts more immediately accessible.

From the beginning, the Duke Kunshan Library has been a collaborative partner in the endeavors of the Duke Kunshan University. Librarians at Duke Kunshan have faculty status and the library director attends the weekly chancellor’s meetings to discuss university strategies and policies. The opportunity for librarians to be an integral part of the establishment of this new university, to have a voice in setting priorities and developing its programs, increased clear communication and provided a greater understanding of the ways librarians can contribute to the mission of the university. The seat at the chancellor’s meeting also affords the opportunity for the library to become blended into the fabric of the university. For example, a Duke librarian was one of the organizers of a key event held in fall 2014 in conjunction with the university’s grand opening. Representatives from seventeen Chinese partner institutions attended Duke Kunshan classes, toured the library, and spoke with panels of students and faculty as part of this open house. Duke Kunshan used this opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of the liberal arts curriculum and interactive teaching methods. The visitors asked many questions about these American methods and how to assess mastery of content when rote learning and recitation are not emphasized.

Secunded librarians have served on the Global Learning Semester (GLS) admissions committees and have reviewed and made recommendations about international and Chinese students’ applications for the program. This involvement has given librarians an increased understanding of incoming students’ academic and language proficiencies and has integrated the library into the process that determines the success of the GLS program.

The lack of Mandarin language fluency by Duke secunded librarians encouraged the development of alternative ways to communicate with non-English speakers. As the keynote speaker at the Jiangsu Academic Library and Information System (JALIS) annual meeting, a Duke librarian used the translation assistance of a Duke Kunshan un-
dergraduate student majoring in translation services at her home university to effectively present a program about the services and collections available through the Duke Kunshan Library. The student mentioned this experience as a highlight in her speech at the university’s fall semester closing ceremony as she effectively used her skills to partner with faculty, and she was honored to be asked to talk with Chinese professionals about the accomplishments of the Duke Kunshan Library.

In collaboration with Chinese library staff, Duke librarians were able to work effectively with Chinese vendors and build relationships with library administrators at several Chinese universities. In spring 2016, three Chinese book vendors were invited to campus for a book fair. These vendors brought newly published books in English to campus so that students, faculty, and staff could choose the titles they would like to have added to the library’s collections. The library provided the funds to purchase the selected books and this form of patron-driven acquisition has proved to be a popular way to involve the campus in building the print collection.

Research and instruction librarians at Duke Kunshan work closely with Duke subject librarians to provide services and resources needed for undergraduate and graduate students in China. Since the number of staff in the Duke Kunshan Library has been small—two librarians in 2014–2015 and three librarians in 2015–2017—this support has been essential. Duke librarians have provided assistance with research guides, course readings, assessment measures, focus groups, and the establishment of new graduate programs. As the new four-year undergraduate program is developed, additional librarians will be hired by Duke Kunshan. The depth of subject knowledge and understanding of specialized research tools and methods offered by Duke librarians will continue to be an important resource for the Duke Kunshan librarians.

Duke Kunshan University’s website describes its commitment to problem-based learning that engages students to generate new ideas and creative solutions to real-world problems. This mission focuses on the development of students who can think critically and have key skills, such as creativity, independent thinking, and evidence-based reasoning. Duke secunded librarians and faculty, in conjunction with Duke Kunshan librarians, have focused efforts to incorporate information literacy skills and critical thinking into the curriculum. In 2016, a Duke secunded librarian partnered with faculty and administrators and successfully won an Education & Research Innovations in China (ERIC) grant to bring two instructors from the Center for Assessment & Improvement of Learning at Tennessee Technology University, the home of the Critical-thinking Assessment Test (CAT test), to the Duke Kunshan campus to hold a two-day workshop on critical thinking skills. Goals of the workshop were to

- meet the stated interest of Duke Kunshan professors to learn more about critical thinking;
- provide quantitative feedback on critical thinking skills for students through the CAT instrument and specific classroom training and evaluation;
- create a key element of the overall assessment landscape for Duke Kunshan;
- create a cohort of Duke professors who could potentially take the lessons learned in the workshop and associated activities back to their courses at Duke;
- open the potential to use Duke Kunshan-derived data for publications on cross-cultural/international comparisons of critical thinking skills and scores; and
- implement a trial approach to critical thinking training, teaching, and measuring that could inform a process in the four-year undergraduate degree program.24
Twenty-four professors and senior administrators attended the workshop to learn more about the philosophy of critical thinking, look closely at the CAT instrument, and learn how to score responses to the CAT test. Thirty-eight Duke Kunshan students took the CAT that semester and these tests, after being de-identified, were scored as part of the workshop. This exercise proved useful as it developed the critical thinking skills of the test scorers and gave faculty a chance to see how Duke Kunshan students reason through real-world problems. On the second day, the training sessions focused on how to develop lesson plans for specific classes to encourage the development of critical thinking skills.

The workshop was just one element in a broader plan to more fully integrate critical thinking skills into the culture of teaching at Duke Kunshan. A critical thinking study group discussed scholarly writings that focus on teaching critical thinking skills on international campuses and a bibliography of critical thinking resources was compiled. Other components of the plan include developing customized critical thinking exercises and analyzing the results of targeted critical thinking efforts in the classroom. Students who took the CAT received letters with their scores and met with secunded Duke faculty and librarians to discuss ways they could increase their critical thinking skills. This data collection at Duke Kunshan will continue so as to build a greater understanding of how Chinese and international students use critical thinking skills and where gaps in teaching may occur.

In tandem with critical thinking skills, the development of literacy skills is being built into the Duke Kunshan curriculum. A survey to assess GLS students’ understanding of information literacies was developed and administered in fall 2016 to students before and after taking Duke Kunshan courses. The difficulties encountered by the students and identified by the pre-survey helped determine the content of library sessions and workshops. A credit-bearing information literacy course was developed and approved at Duke by the Ad Hoc Joint Duke Kunshan University Committee of the Arts & Science Council. The course is built around the learning outcomes of the 2015 ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education and looks to address social justice within information literacy to prepare students to be active, informed citizens. The course lesson plans will use interactive teaching methods and will be co-taught by Duke and Duke Kunshan librarians in spring 2018 as part of the GLS program.

You Guo Jiang, author of *Liberal Arts Education in a Changing Society: A New Perspective on Chinese Higher Education*, points out that if the ultimate goal of a university education is to create global citizens who can transcend utilitarianism, then Chinese universities need to offer a liberal arts education that educates students in critical thinking. Jiang discusses the many challenges for China’s higher education system to provide this type of education: the difficulty of building world-class liberal arts universities in China that are recognized in global rankings; the need to give students a broad education that shapes their lives and enhances their roles as citizens while ensuring their competitiveness for jobs; the changes needed in recruiting and hiring practices in order to attract faculty who understand active learning and critical thinking methods; and the challenge of finding ways to revamp tenure and promotion structures so teaching is supported and rewarded as an equal to research and publishing.

Because China’s top-tier universities cannot easily or quickly change to address these challenges, Duke University’s interest and willingness to use its talents to develop a liberal arts university in Kunshan holds great appeal. Duke University’s Liberal Arts in China Committee has developed an interdisciplinary curriculum built on a culture of pedagogy
that is immersive, in which teachers and students work closely together to approach open questions, articulate hypotheses, test out ideas, and challenge one another. It will be the type of education that builds critical thinking and problem-solving skills.\(^2\) The campus’ small size will offer opportunities for problem-based and team-based learning, close connections between faculty and students, and easy access to partnerships with Duke Kunshan’s research centers. In turn, Duke’s presence in China will open possibilities for collaboration and will secure its leadership role in helping to define the next frontiers of higher education.

Many scholars have written about the risks joint-venture universities take on by being involved in higher education in China. These risks include financial costs, reputational dangers to the rigor of the curriculum and the quality of the students and the faculty, and uncertainty about the possibility of creating a liberal education in a country that has an illiberal political system.\(^2\) However, the opportunities outweigh the risks if universities can control specific factors that jeopardize success. The assurance from the Chinese government that academic freedom will be protected at joint-venture universities offers librarians an opportunity to play a major role in supporting and fostering intellectual freedom. The future and ultimate success of these joint-venture universities remain to be seen, but the support provided by American library partners has helped build their high-quality services and collections, encouraged the open sharing of information, and created collaborations and initiatives that foster intellectual freedom and critical thinking while striving to redefine librarianship in the global environment.

Notes

2. Linda Daniel, Research & Instruction Librarian, was seconded from Duke University to Duke Kunshan University, Aug.–Dec. 2014, to set up the Duke Kunshan Library and returned to Duke Kunshan as the Associate University Librarian, Aug. 2015–Dec. 2016. Danette Pachtner, Research & Instruction Librarian, was seconded from Duke to Duke Kunshan, Feb.–June 2015. In May 2014, Mengjie Zou was hired by Duke Kunshan as Senior Library Assistant and in 2017 was promoted to Instruction/Research and Collection Development Librarian. In Aug. 2015, Dr. Helen Xu was hired by Duke Kunshan as the University Librarian. Additional librarians will be hired by Duke Kunshan as the student population grows and the university prepares to launch the four-year undergraduate program in fall 2018.
8. Ibid., 39–40.
22. Ibid., 13–14.
23. The MOE’s official policy for number of books required per student has not been officially updated since the late 1990s. The new library, to be built in Phase 2 of Duke Kunshan University, will use its agreements with Wuhan University and Duke University to help it meet MOE requirements.
26. Ibid., 147–51.

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