



昆山杜克大学
DUKE KUNSHAN
UNIVERSITY

当代中国研究中心
Center for the Study of
Contemporary China



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF
CONTEMPORARY CHINA

THE CHINA CENTER *WITHIN CHINA*



LETTER FROM THE CO-DIRECTORS

This past year has once again confirmed the importance of the Center for the Study of Contemporary China at Duke Kunshan University. Amidst a rapidly evolving global landscape, the CSCC has remained a steadfast hub for monitoring, analyzing, and explaining current societal and international developments in and pertaining to China.

CSCC-affiliated and sponsored faculty are at the forefront of research on issues shaping China and the world today – from Chinese overseas investment, climate change, and pandemic preparedness at the global level, to domestic developments such as the platform economy, online influencers, start-up universities, and evolving norms around marriage and religion, as well as the local Kunqu and Suzhou culture, among many other topics.

Through teaching and one-on-one mentorship, the CSCC and its faculty have created countless valuable opportunities for students to develop research and professional skills. Students supported by the CSCC are now studying and graduating from top ranking programs and universities, including Duke, Harvard, Columbia, and Yale.

Alongside research conducted by CSCC faculty and students, the CSCC and its research clusters actively facilitate international and domestic scholarly exchange. In 2025 alone, the CSCC organized 46 seminars, workshops, conferences and student training sessions. These well-attended events are precious opportunities to freely discuss ongoing and emerging societal developments in China, while strengthening our scholarly network and community in China and beyond.

Your engagement and support have been instrumental in amplifying our impact and ensuring that the CSCC continues to serve as a vital platform for understanding China.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey!

Melanie Manion & Annemieke van den Dool
Co-Directors, Center for the Study of Contemporary China

Contents

Letter from the Co-Directors	1
About the CSCC	2
Impact in Numbers	4
CSCC Key Areas of Expertise	5
CSCC Highlights	12

About the CSCC: What we do

The Center for the Study of Contemporary China (CSCC) at Duke Kunshan University was established in 2018 to advance world-class research on the society, politics, and economy of contemporary China; to train the next generation of China scholars, and to facilitate the free exchange of research on contemporary China.

Research excellence



Advance world-class research on **society, politics, and the economy of contemporary China**

Student training



Prepare the next generation of **China scholars** through rigorous empirical methods and social science training

Scholarly exchange



Connect scholars from China and around the world to **freely exchange research about contemporary China**

Research Excellence

- Fall and Spring grants for research and creative projects
- Annual awards for research excellence
- Research dissemination through monthly newsletter, social media, and reports
- Identification of external research opportunities for faculty & students

Student Training

- Student-Initiated Project Grant
- Annual award for student scholar
- Annual award for Faculty mentor
- Hands-on training through paid student worker and research assistant positions
- Extensive formal and informal mentorship by CSCC affiliated faculty
- Student-focused events such as library training and fieldtrips
- Financial and logistical support for student-initiated events
- Regular online exposure of students in CSCC projects

Scholarly Exchange

- Financial and logistical support for conferences, guest lectures, film screenings, workshops, and other China-focused events
- Organization of activities related to current issues, such as Earth Day
- Collaborations with institutions in China and abroad, such as Duke University, NYU Shanghai, XJTLU, and the University of Glasgow
- Hosting of visiting scholars and students

CSCC LEADERSHIP TEAM

The CSCC is led by two co-directors—one from Duke University and one from Duke Kunshan University. This shared leadership demonstrates the center’s commitment to build bridges between institutions, countries, and cultures. Advised by the advisory board, the leadership team develops strategy, identifies research focus areas, and ensures alignment with the academic goals of both universities. The co-directors are supported by the Center’s senior coordinator, who is responsible for grant management, event organization, administrative and operational support as well as coordination with DKU university partners.



Melanie Manion

Co-Director, Center for the Study of Contemporary China
Vor Broker Family Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Duke University



Annemieke van den Dool

Associate Co-Director (2024), Center for the Study of Contemporary China
Co-Director (from 2025), Center for the Study of Contemporary China
Assistant Professor of Environmental Policy, Duke Kunshan University



Chi Zhang

Senior Program Coordinator, Center for the Study of Contemporary China

CSCC ADVISORY BOARD



Megan Rogers
Assistant Professor
of Sociology



Fangsheng Zhu
Assistant
Professor of
Sociology



Fan Liang
Assistant Professor
of Media



Mengqi Wang
Assistant Professor
of Anthropology



Kaley Clements
Assistant Professor
of Media and Arts



David Landry
Assistant Professor
of Political Economy

Impact Summary 2025



Publications

48 Journal
articles

6 Book
chapters

2 Creative
artworks

\$90,251

External funding



Events

46

Events

1632

Participants



Student training

> 60

Students participated
in research projects

> 5

Undergraduate
presentations at major
international
conferences

Graduate school admissions: Yale, Harvard,
University of Arizona, Columbia University, Duke
University, and more.



Faculty presentations

> 35

Conference
presentations

> 10

Invited talks

CSCC Key Areas of Expertise

The CSCC comprises six research clusters building upon our current research strengths.

China and the World

China Stories & Images

Gender and Global China

Governing China

Digital Technology and Society

Meanings, Identities and Communities

Each cluster is led by one to three DKU full-time faculty members who identify research priorities within their areas of expertise; develop and execute research projects; and organize events such as seminars, conferences, and student training sessions. Students are actively involved in the clusters: they support project coordination, event organization, and research projects.



CHINA AND THE WORLD CLUSTER

Despite its relative stability since the end of World War II, the international system today is confronting multiple mounting challenges, such as climate change, the return of mercantilist policies, and a re-intensification of great power competition.

The China and the World research cluster examines China's potential and actual role in this changing landscape, such as its continued engagement with the Global South, leadership in the green energy transition, growing diplomatic reach, and stewardship of the current global governance infrastructure.

Cluster Co-Leads

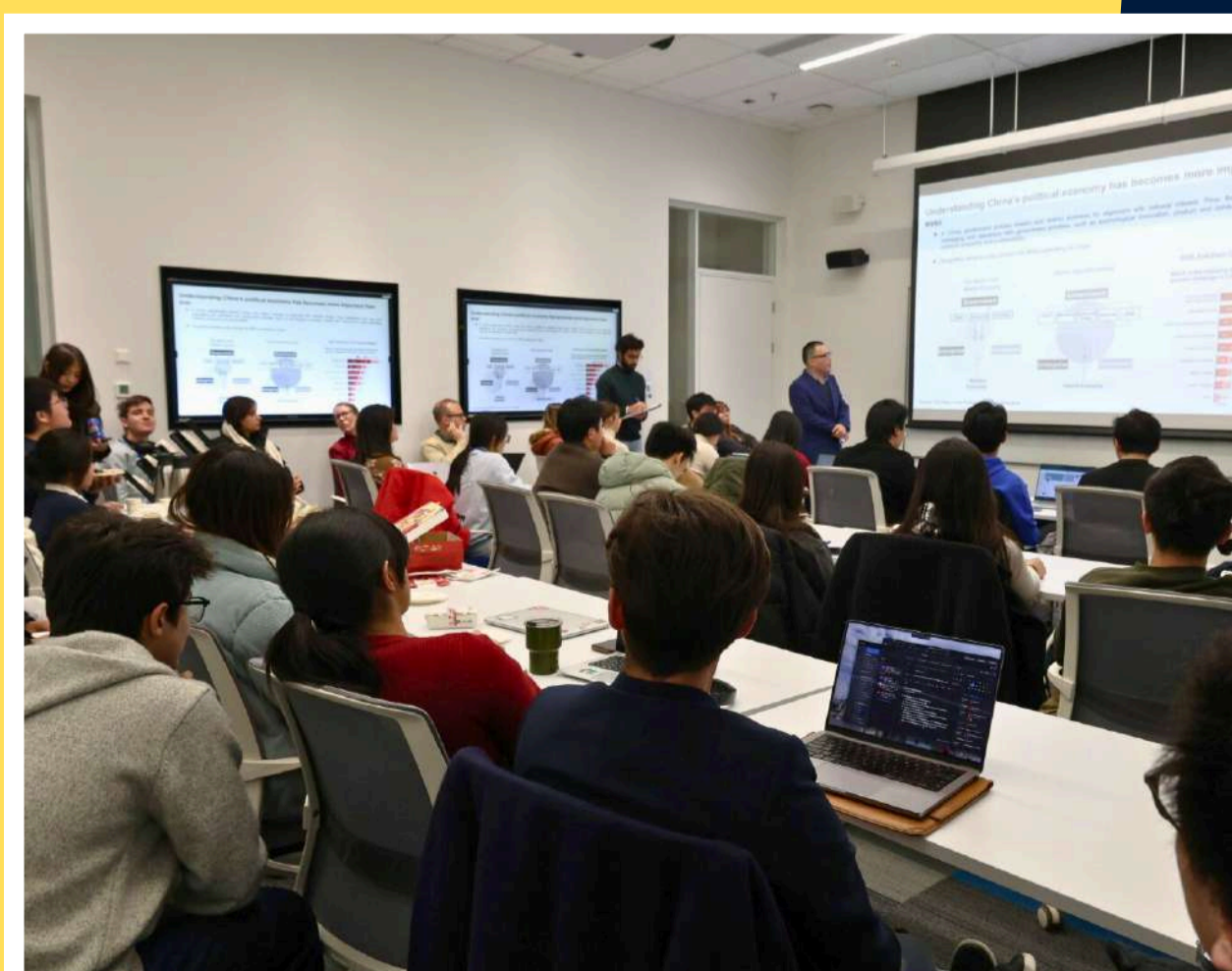
- Andrew Cheon, Associate Professor of International Relations
- David Landry, Assistant Professor of Political Economy
- Paula Ganga, Assistant Professor of Political Economy

External Affiliated Faculty

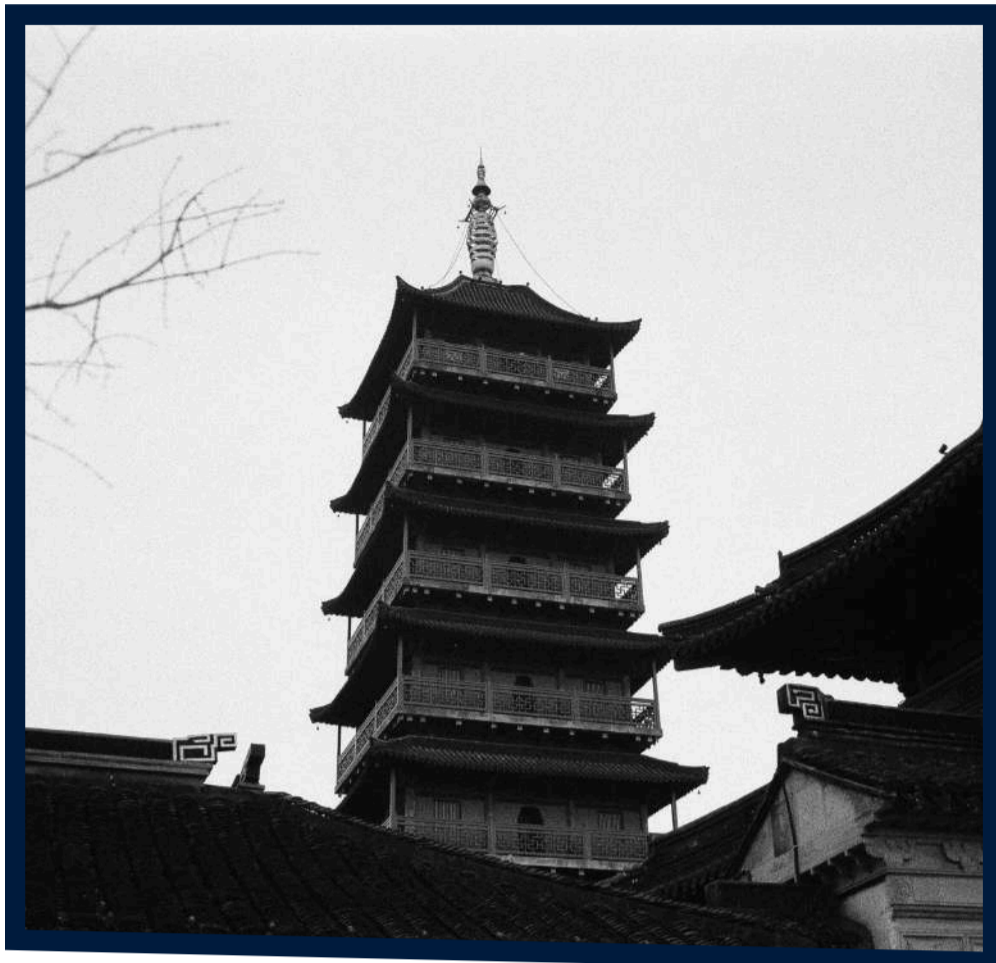
- Yuan Wang, Adjunct Assistant Professor at DKU; Assistant Professor at Peking University

Selected Publications Related to Cluster Themes

- Landry, David. "Chinese Mining Investment Globally: Who, Where, and How?" *Resources Policy*, vol. 111, 2025, article 105780.
- Li, Hangwei, and Yuan Wang. "Adaptive Governance at Work: How Chinese State Actors Respond to Overseas Pushback on the Belt and Road Initiative." *The China Quarterly*, 2025, pp. 1–17.
- Li, Hangwei, and Yuan Wang. "Reputational Governance and Party-State Capitalism: A Tale of Two Chinese-Sponsored Railways in Africa." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2025, pp. 1–17.



CHINA STORIES & IMAGES CLUSTER



The China Stories & Images Cluster aims to tell, create, publish, and promote different forms of aural and visual storytelling that originate from and connect one or more of the following themes: cultural transition, loss of biodiversity, memory, history, identity, and climate change.

Cluster Co-Leads

- Kaley Clements, Assistant Professor of Documentary Arts
- Benjamin Leland Bacon, Associate Professor of Media and Art
- Nathan Hauthaler, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Selected Artworks/Publications Related to Cluster Themes

- Clements, Kaley. *ສຸກກາວະ (Sukha Phawa)*. Art project, 2025.
- Clements, Kaley. *Pace of the Mekong at 1KM*. Documentary film, 2024.
- Clements, Kaley. *Shen Qu Requiem for a Martyr*. Short film, 2022.
- Clements, Kaley. *Stund People*. Short film, 2021.

GENDER AND GLOBAL CHINA CLUSTER

This cluster seeks to bring scholars from various disciplines to discuss gender in China from transnational, comparative, and interdisciplinary perspectives. Topics include gender and housework, mass media, childcare and fertility, generation and aging, public health (including mental health), as well as affect and subjectivity, as means of theorizing and making sense of, gender from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Cluster Leads

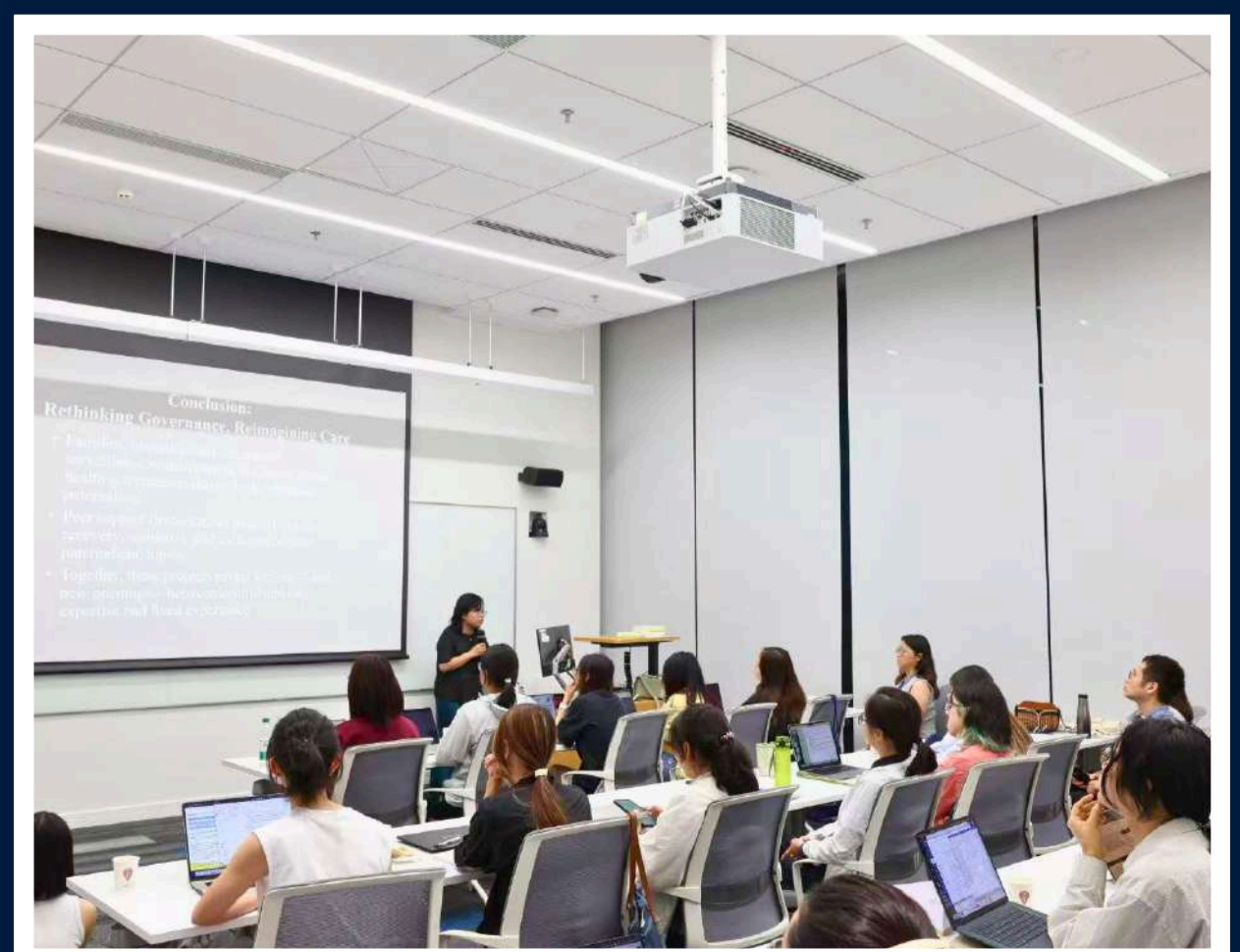
- Nellie Chu, Assistant Professor of Anthropology
- Mengqi Wang, Assistant Professor of Anthropology
- Yu Wang, Assistant Professor of Sociology

Cluster Faculty Members

- Andrew Wortham, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology
- Baozhen M. Luo-Hermanson, Professor of Global Health
- Fangsheng Zhu, Assistant Professor of Anthropology
- Hyun Jeong Ha, Assistant Professor of Sociology
- Keping Wu, Associate Professor of Anthropology
- Megan Rogers, Assistant Professor of Sociology
- Ralph Litzinger, Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Duke University
- Robin Rodd, Associate Professor of Anthropology
- Sajida Tuxun, Lecturer of Cultural Anthropology

Selected Publications Related to Cluster Themes

- Chu, Nellie. *Precarious Accumulation: Fast Fashion Bosses in Transnational Guangzhou*. Duke University Press, 2026.
- Wang, Mengqi. *Anxious Homes: Inflexible Demand and China's Housing Market*. Cornell University Press, 2026.
- Wang, Yu. "Age-discrepant marriages and educational assortative mating in urban China: The exchange of youth for status." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 87, no. 2, Apr. 2025, pp. 636–658.
- Zhang, Yue, Yu Wang, et al. "Parity, Socioeconomic Status, and Depression in Women's Mid-to-Late Life: Evidence from Two Prospective Cohorts." *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 378, June 2025, pp. 320–28.



GOVERNING CHINA CLUSTER

This research cluster focuses on the governance of China, which encompasses the areas of government, executive politics, public policy, law, public administration, and the organization of the state, including its embedded relationships with the ruling Communist Party. The cluster brings together DKU faculty members, undergraduate students, and graduate students from a range of social science disciplines.

Cluster Lead:

- Jiahua Yue, Assistant Professor of Political Science

Cluster Faculty Members:

- Coraline Goron, Assistant Professor of Environmental Policy
- Fangsheng Zhu, Assistant Professor of Sociology
- Jianzi He, Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Economy
- Junius Brown, Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Economy
- Yanran Yang, Assistant Professor of Sustainability Studies
- Annemieke Van Den Dool, Assistant Professor of Environmental Policy



Selected Publications Related to Cluster Themes

- Yang, Yinger, and Fangsheng Zhu. “Pioneers at Start-up Universities: How Pragmatist Agency Explains Education Decisions amid Uncertainties.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Oct. 2025, pp. 1–23.
- Li, Ya, and Jianzi He. “Public Policy in China: Navigating Political Particularity and Global Convergence.” *Handbook of Public Policy in Asia*, edited by Ora-orn Poocharoen, Piyapong Boossabong, and Pobsook Chamchong, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025, pp. 274–286.
- Cao, Yuchen, Zhaozhi Li, and Jiahua Yue. “AI-tocracy: How Automated Censorship Works in China.” *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media*, vol. 5, 2025.
- Harlan, Tyler, Yixian Sun, Juliet Lu, Coraline Goron, et al. “China Aspires to Be an Environmental Leader: How Should the Rest of the World Engage?” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 2025, pp. 1.
- van den Dool, Annemieke, and Tianlei Qiu. “Policy Processes in China: A Systematic Review of the Multiple Streams Framework.” *Policy & Politics*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2025, pp. 506–528.
- Zhang, Yi, Jialin Li, and Annemieke van den Dool. “China’s Revised Infectious Diseases Law: A Step towards Stronger Global Pandemic Preparedness.” *The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific*, vol. 63, Oct. 2025, article 101708.

MEANINGS, IDENTITIES, AND COMMUNITIES CLUSTER

The Meanings, Identities, and Communities Cluster focuses on integrated and interdisciplinary research, especially between humanities and interpretive social science, while building links with the broader community. Expertise within this cluster include anthropology, sociology, history, culture, and religious studies, especially the topics of religion, urbanization, NGOs, ethnicity, feminism, Buddhism, Kunqu opera, and local culture in the Jiangnan region.

Cluster Leads

- Keping Wu, Associate Professor of Anthropology
- Ben Van Overmeire, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies
- Megan Rogers, Assistant Professor of Sociology

Cluster Faculty Members

- Andrew Field, Associate Professor of Chinese History
- Andrew Wortham, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology
- Kent Cao, Assistant professor of art and archaeology
- Kim Hunter Gordon, Assistant Professor of Chinese and Performance Studies
- Wenting Ji, Assistant professor of Chinese language
- Sajida Tuxun, Lecturer of Cultural Anthropology
- Qian Zhu, Assistant Professor of History
- Nellie Chu, Assistant Professor of Anthropology
- Mengqi Wang, Assistant Professor of Anthropology
- Ralph Litzinger, Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Duke University
- Wen Zhou, Assistant professor of Evolutionary Anthropology

Selected Publications Related to Cluster Themes

- Beek, Kimberly A. D., and Ben Van Overmeire. “New Genre Developments in Autobiographical Buddhist Literature.” *Journal of Global Buddhism*, vol. 26, no. 1, 12 Nov. 2025, pp. 83–97.
- Gordon, Kim Hunter . *Kunqu: China’s Classical Song-drama*. Methuen Drama, Bloomsbury Publishing, 22 Jan. 2026.
- Wu, Keping. “‘Buddhification’ and ‘Daoification’ of Local Religions in Contemporary Suzhou.” *Historical, Comparative, and Theoretical Perspectives: A Festschrift in Honour of Timothy Brook*, edited by Jinhua Chen and Dewei Zhan, World Scholastics Publishers, Feb. 2025, pp. 627–649.
- Wu, Keping. “Taste Market and Social Sustainability Multi Scalar Foodscapes in Southwest China.” *Food, Culture & Society*, 2025.
- Zhu, Qian. “Bringing the Global to China: Anti-Eurocentrism, Rooted Globalism, and Chinese in Global Intellectual History.” *Global Intellectual History*, Dec. 2025.



DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY CLUSTER



The Digital Technology and Society Cluster aims to enhance the understanding of emerging technology and society. This includes digital technology both in terms of methodology and subject matter for interdisciplinary research on how technological shifts shape Chinese society, and vice versa.

Cluster Lead

- Fan Liang, Assistant Professor of Media

Cluster Co-Leads

- Charles Chang, Assistant Professor of Environment and Urban Studies
- Luyao Zhang, Assistant Professor of Economics

Cluster Faculty Members

- Chen Zhang, Assistant Professor of Urban Planning and Public Policy
- Mengtian Chen, Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics
- Paula Ganga, Assistant Professor of Political Economy
- Seongkyung Cho, Assistant Professor of Public Policy

Selected Publications Related to Cluster Themes

- Chemaya, Nir, Lin William Cong, Emma Jorgensen, Dingyue Liu, and Luyao Zhang. “A Dataset of Uniswap Daily Transaction Indices by Network.” *Scientific Data*, vol. 12, no. 1, Jan. 2025, article 93.
- Chen, Juan, Mengyu Liu, Lin Gong, and Charles Chang. “The Physical and Virtual Presence of the Local State and Citizens’ Life Satisfaction in Urbanising China.” *Urban Studies*, vol. 62, no. 7, May 2025, pp. 1334–1357.
- Liang, Fan, and Gabriel Miao Li. “Geopolitics in Platform Governance: Algorithmic Sovereignty and Data Localization in China and the United States.” *Policy & Internet*, vol. 17, no. 3, Sept. 2025, pp. 1–11.
- Pan, Zhangyang, Fan Liang, and Shenglan Tang. “Trust in Information Sources and Parents’ Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) of Children’s PCV13 Vaccination in the Yangtze River Delta Region, China.” *Vaccines*, vol. 13, no. 9, 2025, pp. 1–14.
- Zhang, Chen, and Z. Li. “The Geography of Political Trust in Urbanizing China: A Comparative Analysis of Trust in Local Government Among Rural Villagers, Rural-to-Urban Migrants, and Urban Dwellers.” *Management Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2025.

CSCC Annual Awards

Outstanding Faculty Scholar Award: Yuan Wang China-Africa relations

Professor Yuan Wang’s research has made a profound impact in the field of global China studies. Her work focuses on China’s international relations, particularly its influence in the Global South and Africa.

During her time at DKU, Professor Wang has shown extraordinary scholarly productivity—publishing a book, three first-authored articles in top-tier journals, and actively engaging in conferences and workshops. Her work exemplifies excellence, intellectual curiosity, and a commitment to advancing knowledge—qualities that make her truly deserving of the award.

Professor Wang’s book, titled “The Railpolitik: Leadership and Agency in Sino-African Infrastructure Development” (Oxford University Press), investigates why Chinese-financed and -constructed infrastructure projects develop into starkly different trajectories in different African countries.



Outstanding Student Scholar Award: Chengxi Yin Social Media in China

In her research project, Chengxi Yin, student in the Class of 2025, explores critical issues in China’s media studies, including social media content moderation and audience engagement with online fiction. The student is supervised by Professor Fan Liang.

Her work demonstrates a deep engagement with China’s evolving media landscape. What makes her stand out is her ability to bridge theory with rigorous empirical analysis, using sophisticated methodologies. Moreover, her work has been accepted for presentation at academic conferences, including the Hawaii International Conference on Chinese Studies and the Cultural Studies Association Conference. Attending these conferences demonstrates the quality and impact of her work.

The Award Committee believes that Chengxi will contribute to both academia and public discourse on digital culture and media in China.



Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award: Kaley Clements Building Bridges & Creating Real-World Experiences

Professor Kaley Clements' commitment to guiding students—intellectually, creatively, and professionally—has left a significant mark on his students' academic and personal growth. The Award Committee believes that what sets Kaley apart is his deep engagement with students, fostering their development through various approaches. Whether through summer collaborations or by transforming classwork into public exhibitions and creative projects, he always encourages students to push boundaries and think differently. His mentorship is not just about academic guidance, it's about building bridges. He connects students with professionals across disciplines, opening doors to grants, creative opportunities, and real-world experiences. His students don't just leave his courses or projects with new skills; they leave with confidence, curiosity, and a deeper connection to the world around them.



Outstanding Community Service Award: ArtsDock Living Learning Community

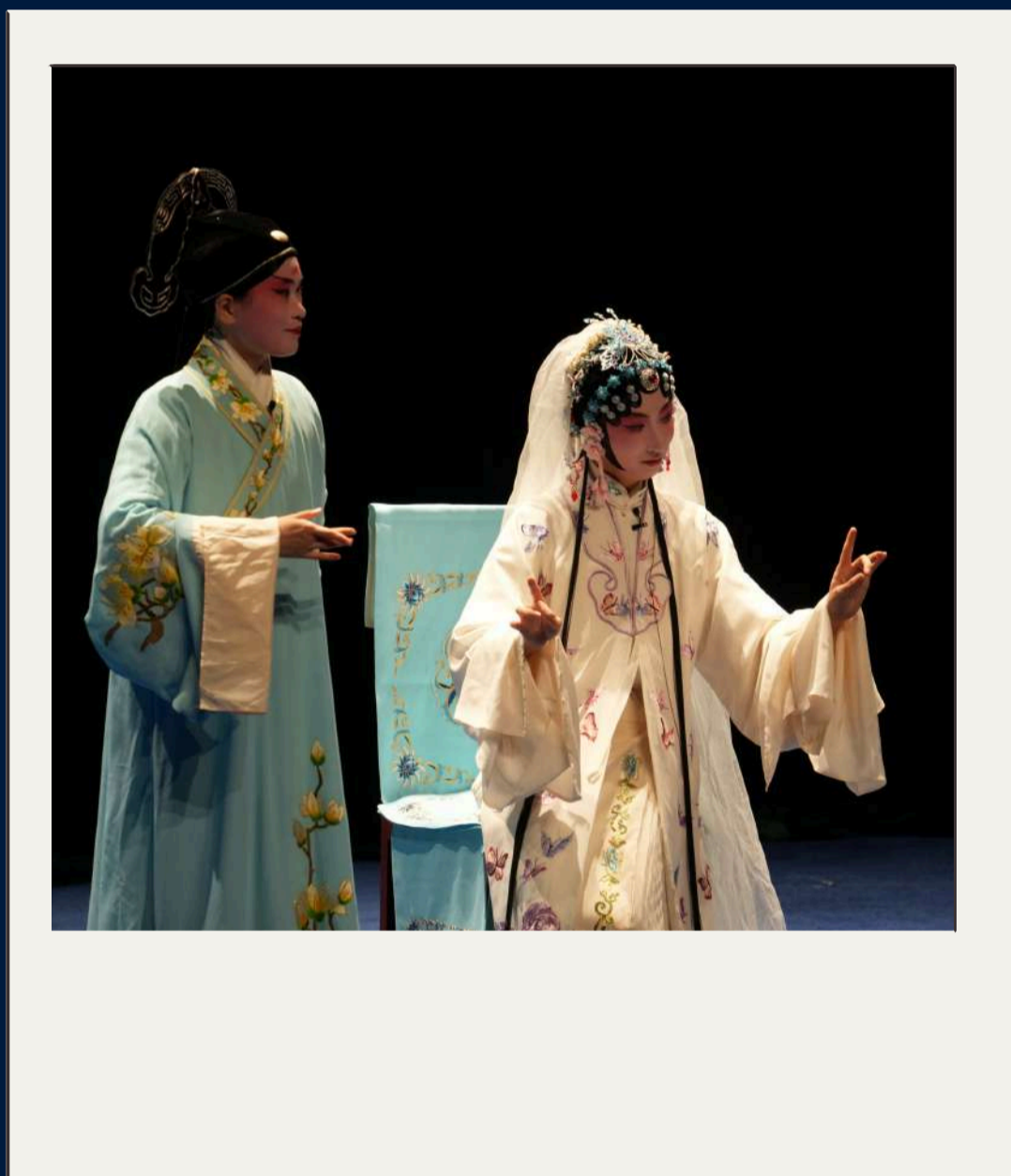
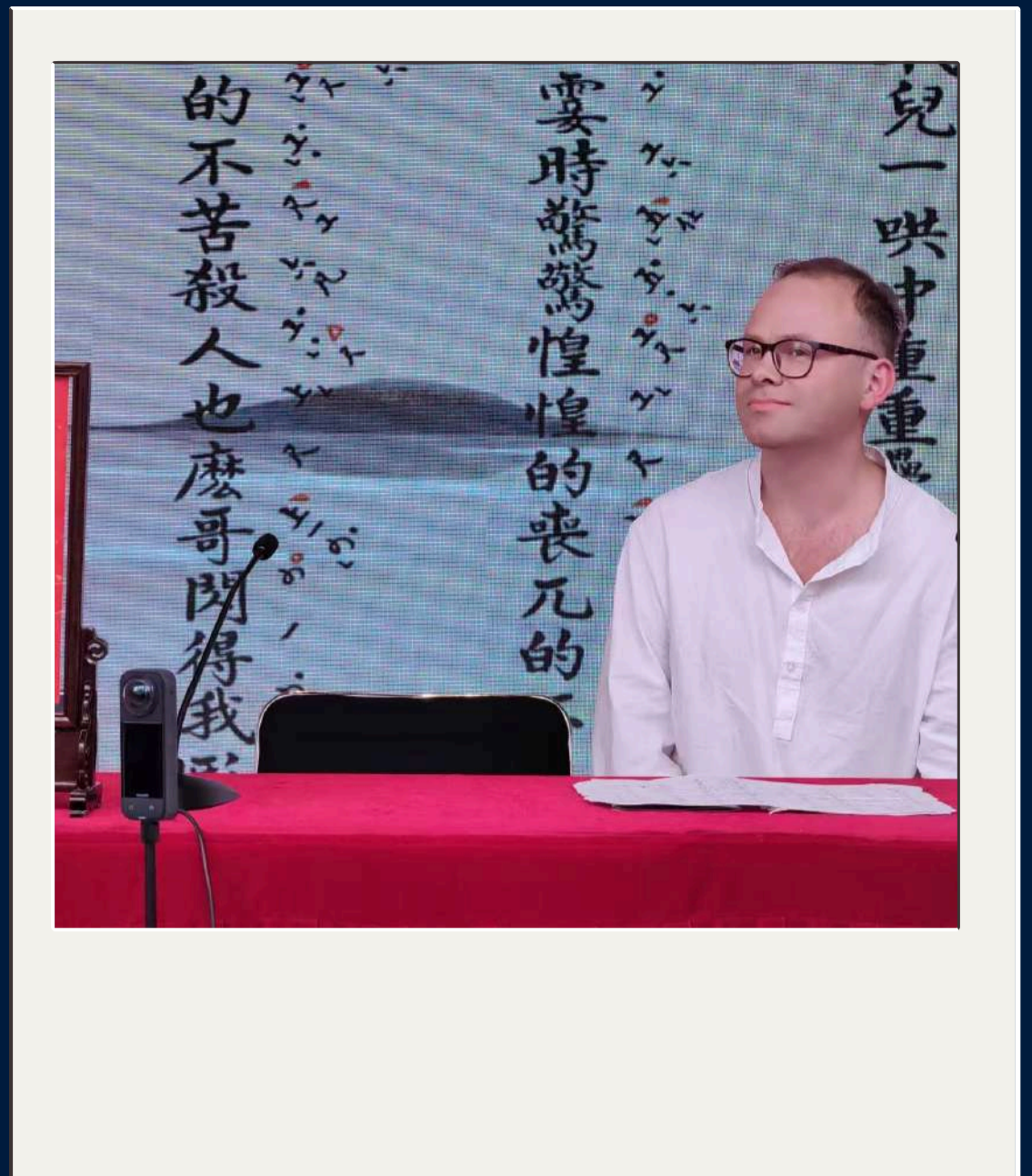
ArtsDock Living Learning Community (LLC) has built meaningful bridges between DKU and the local community. It is far more than just a project—it is a platform for connection. It has provided spaces for dialogue, learning, and mutual understanding. Whether through collaborations with local coffee makers, high school students, or local residents, ArtsDock demonstrates how academic knowledge can extend beyond the classroom to foster real-world impact. What makes it particularly special is its commitment to interdisciplinary engagement. It brings together diverse perspectives—from environmental studies to cultural anthropology—to examine local issues in ways that are both thoughtful and actionable. It reminds us that education is not just about what we learn, but how we share it.



FACULTY RESEARCH

Kim Hunter Gordon: Bringing Kunqu to Life Through Research, Performance, and Community

Professor Kim Hunter Gordon, Assistant Professor of Chinese and Performance Studies at Duke Kunshan University, integrates research, teaching, and cultural engagement to revitalize Kunqu, one of China's oldest and most refined theatrical traditions. With over a decade of experience in stage translation and active participation in China's avocational Kunqu singing community, his work bridges scholarship and practice. At DKU, he leads two CSCC-supported projects: "*Kunqu in the Community*," which fosters public engagement through performance and outreach, and "*Archival Recordings of Senior Kunqu Singing Masters*," which preserves rarely documented traditions of poetic singing accompanied by bamboo flute.



Central to Professor Gordon's work is the recognition of Kunqu not only as performance, but as a cultural and historical lens. His research highlights how Kunqu, rooted in China's poetic tradition, reflects broader social, political, and linguistic transformations across centuries. His recent book, *Kunqu: China's Classical Song-drama* (Bloomsbury, 2026), traces the evolution of the art form from its origins in literati culture to its contemporary revival, making it accessible to wider international audiences. Through both scholarship and creative practice, he works to bridge the gap between academic study and lived artistic experience.

At DKU, Professor Gordon has also played a key role in building platforms for cultural exchange and student engagement. With support from the CSCC, he has organized annual Kunqu festivals that bring together students, scholars, professional performers, and local singing

communities. These events combine performances, exhibitions, and collaborative activities, allowing students to encounter Kunqu not only as spectators but also as participants. His teaching further encourages students to engage with the art form through singing, translation, and performance, offering new ways to experience Chinese language and culture.

Through his work, Professor Gordon demonstrates how traditional art forms can remain vital in contemporary contexts. By preserving endangered practices, fostering community connections, and creating opportunities for student learning, he positions Kunqu as both a subject of scholarly inquiry and a living tradition. His efforts reflect CSCC's broader mission to support interdisciplinary research and meaningful cultural engagement, while contributing to the ongoing vitality of Kunqu in Kunshan and beyond.



STUDENT RESEARCH

Lingyi Shen: Reframing Dementia Care Through an Anthropological Lens



Lingyi Shen (Class of 2025, Anthropology) has been an active contributor to the Center for the Study of Contemporary China. She previously supported the Care and Gender Cluster as well as the Aging and Care Initiative by helping organize events and research activities.

Lingyi is also involved in research. Her work reflects a strong commitment to understanding aging not only as a social issue, but as a deeply human experience shaped by relationships, identity, and care.

At the center of Lingyi's research is an ethnographic study of older adults living with dementia in China. Moving beyond a purely biomedical perspective, she examines how individuals maintain a sense of self amid cognitive change. Through interviews and field observations, she captures how memory, storytelling, and everyday interactions continue to carry meaning. Rather than evaluating these narratives based on factual accuracy, Lingyi emphasizes their subjective truth, arguing that all memory is shaped by interpretation. Her work highlights the importance of recognizing dignity and personhood in individuals whose voices are often overlooked.

Lingyi's academic interests are rooted in personal experience, having witnessed her grandmother's struggle with Alzheimer's disease and the challenges faced by caregivers. This motivation has led her to pursue research and fieldwork across different settings, including hands-on experience with dementia care organizations during her exchange at Duke University. Across these contexts, she has developed a comparative perspective on care systems and a strong awareness of the ethical responsibilities involved in working with vulnerable populations.

Her research also offers practical insights: small, intentional practices—such as offering simple choices in daily routines—can help individuals with dementia retain a sense of autonomy and dignity. Through her work, Lingyi brings attention to the lived realities of aging in contemporary China and contributes to a more compassionate, human-centered understanding of care.

STUDENT-LED COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH PROJECT

Gardening in Universities Workshop: Cultivating Sustainability and Community on Campus

In November 2025, the CSCC hosted the Gardening in Universities workshop at Duke Kunshan University. The event was primarily organized by student Zheng Zeng (Class of 2026) as part of the 2024–2025 CSCC Community Service Project, *“Initiator’s Manual for Community Gardening in the Yangtze Delta.”* It brought together scholars, practitioners, and student leaders to explore the role of campus gardening in higher education. As universities increasingly seek ways to integrate sustainability into everyday learning, campus gardens have emerged as dynamic spaces that connect environmental awareness, experiential education, and community engagement.

The workshop featured participants from institutions including Peking University, NYU Shanghai, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, the University of Glasgow, and DKU, each sharing diverse models of campus gardening. Presentations highlighted initiatives ranging from course-based projects and student-led organizations to institutionally supported programs. Speakers reflected on how gardening can be integrated into teaching, foster student participation, and contribute to broader sustainability goals, while also addressing practical challenges such as long-term maintenance, resource allocation, and community involvement.

A roundtable discussion with student representatives further explored how to sustain engagement in campus gardening initiatives. Participants shared insights on building student interest, fostering collaboration across campus groups, and creating inclusive spaces that encourage participation. These conversations emphasized the importance of adaptability and shared responsibility in maintaining vibrant and impactful campus gardens.

The workshop highlighted the broader significance of campus gardens as “living laboratories.” By bringing together diverse perspectives and experiences, the event underscored how gardening can serve not only as an educational tool, but also as a platform for community building and dialogue around sustainability, biodiversity, and the future of university life.





STUDENT-LED COMMUNITY BASED PROJECT

**Wanlin Bai:
Empowering
Communities Through
Digital Inclusion**

Wanlin Bai, an Economics student at Duke Kunshan University, has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing digital inclusion and rural development through community-based initiatives. Recognized as a “changemaker,” she has led the CSCC Community Service Project “*Connecting Seniors to the Digital World*,” which partners with nursing homes and student organizations across the Jiangnan region. Through workshops, one-on-one support, and outreach activities, the project has improved digital literacy for over 1,400 seniors while engaging a broader community of students and volunteers.

Grounded in both research and practice, Wanlin’s team conducted field studies in public spaces such as subway stations, hospitals, and shopping centers to better understand the challenges seniors face when navigating digital systems. These insights informed the development of targeted training materials focused on essential applications like WeChat, Alipay, and local public service platforms. The project also produced a white paper advocating for more accessible digital policies, and its findings were presented at the United Nations ECOSOC Youth Forum, bringing international attention to the issue of digital inequality among older populations.

Central to the project’s success is its human-centered approach. Inspired by personal experiences and close observation, Wanlin designed training programs that prioritize simplicity, practical relevance, and emotional sensitivity. Recognizing that many seniors face not only technical barriers but also a lack of confidence, the initiative emphasizes patience, encouragement, and respect. It also highlights the important role of family support in fostering motivation and sustained learning, particularly as older adults navigate unfamiliar technologies.

Through sustained community engagement, research, and advocacy, Wanlin’s project demonstrates the potential of student-led initiatives to create meaningful social impact. At the same time, it reflects her own development as a socially engaged scholar, one who integrates academic interests with real-world challenges. By empowering seniors with digital skills and fostering stronger community connections, her work contributes to a more inclusive and equitable vision of technological advancement.

STUDENT-LED COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING

Johann Diego Asmus León:

Cultivating Environmental Stewardship Through Community-Based Learning

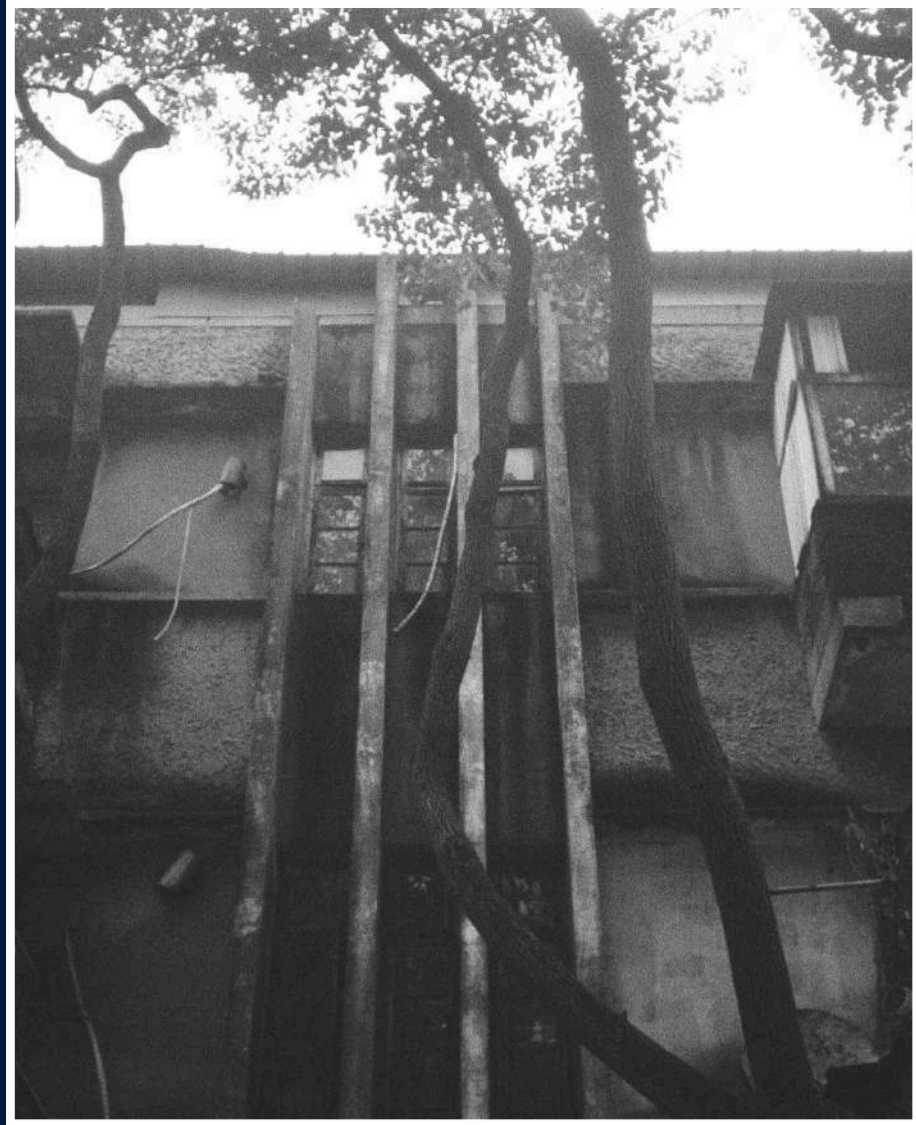
Johann Diego Asmus León (Class of 2026), an Environmental Science and Public Policy student, combines academic inquiry with hands-on environmental action through the Hive Minds Community Beekeeping Initiative, a CSCC Community Service Project. Established in 2023, the initiative responds to the global decline of pollinators by connecting DKU students with local beekeepers in Kunshan and the wider Jiangsu region. Through this work, Johann has created opportunities for students to engage directly with local ecosystems while developing a deeper understanding of biodiversity, agriculture, and sustainability.



Central to Hive Minds is experiential learning. Through regular visits to sites such as Yangcheng Lake and local organic farms, students participate in beekeeping activities, observe hive dynamics, and learn about the ecological role of pollinators. These hands-on experiences are complemented by community-oriented initiatives, including honey-tasting events and campus outreach, which both raise awareness and support local beekeepers. Since its founding, the initiative has organized multiple field visits and activities, fostering sustained interaction between students and local practitioners while contributing to the local environmental economy.

Johann's leadership reflects significant personal and academic growth. By building long-term relationships with local beekeepers, navigating cultural and language barriers, and coordinating collaborative activities, he has developed skills in cross-cultural communication, project management, and community engagement. His approach emphasizes curiosity, consistency, and trust-building, demonstrating how student-led initiatives can bridge academic learning with real-world contexts.

Looking ahead, Johann envisions Hive Minds as more than a single project, but as a lasting platform for environmental awareness and student involvement at DKU. By fostering a culture of sustainability and encouraging students to take tangible action, his work highlights the potential of community-based initiatives to inspire long-term engagement with environmental challenges—both on campus and beyond.



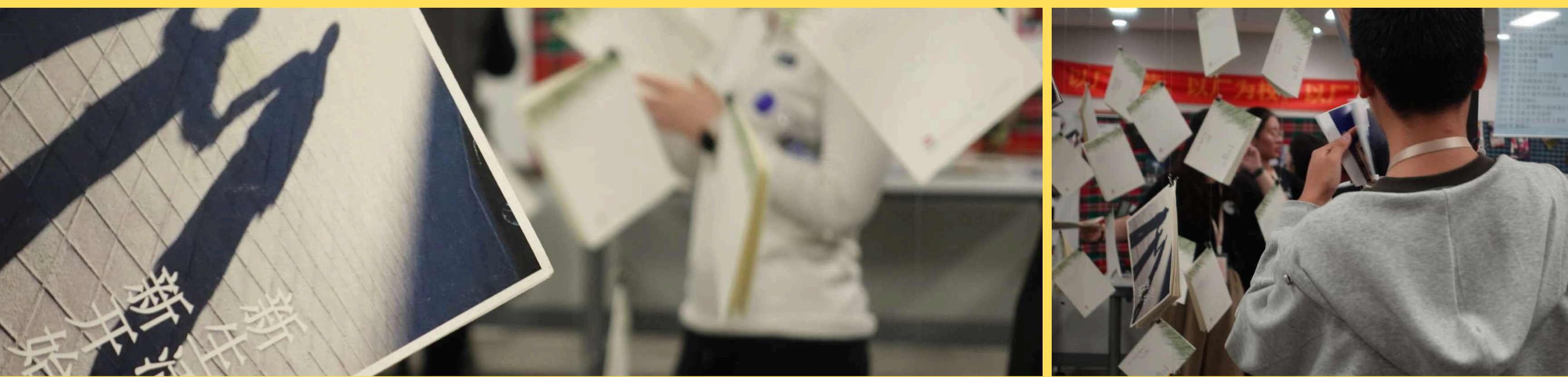
STUDENT TRAINING

Analog Workshop: Exploring Urban Change Through Film Photography

In March, the China Stories & Images Cluster hosted an immersive Analog Workshop led by Professor Tom Rankin of Duke University, introducing students to film photography as a method for studying urban transformation. Combining artistic practice with social inquiry, the workshop invited participants to document Kunshan's evolving cityscape through black-and-white analog photography, encouraging careful observation of how urban space is shaped by construction, planning, and everyday life.

A key component was a cycling field trip to Bacheng, where students explored urban change at a slower pace. Traveling by bike allowed them to notice subtle shifts in the built environment and social life, from infrastructure development and architectural change to evolving local demographics. Through photography and interaction with residents, participants examined not only physical transformation but also how communities adapt within changing urban contexts.

Bringing together students from diverse academic backgrounds, the workshop fostered interdisciplinary perspectives on urbanization. The use of analog photography further deepened engagement by slowing the creative process and encouraging more intentional interaction with local communities. More than a technical exercise, the workshop became an opportunity for meaningful community engagement, highlighting how creative practices can serve as powerful tools for understanding urban change.



STUDENT TRAINING

The Life of Mulan Flower: *Exploring Migrant Women's Lives in China Through Game-Theater*

In November 2025, the CSCC, in collaboration with the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Initiative (InE), hosted The Life of Mulan Flower, an interdisciplinary game-theater workshop exploring the lived experiences of rural migrant women in China. Organized by the Mulan Community Service Center, the two-day program combined artistic expression with interactive learning, offering participants a unique opportunity to engage with the social realities behind migration, gender, and inequality.

The workshop began with an exhibition featuring videos, music, and personal stories created by migrant women, providing insight into their daily lives and aspirations. Participants then took part in an immersive game-theater experience, assuming the roles of migrant women and navigating key life stages such as education, work, marriage, and family. Through role-play and group interaction, the workshop encouraged participants to move beyond observation and engage directly with the structural challenges and emotional experiences shaping these lives.

A defining moment came when participants learned that the characters they embodied were based on real individuals, prompting reflection on the human stories behind broader social issues. The workshop also introduced the ongoing work of the Mulan Community Service Center, which supports migrant women through community programs, education, and cultural initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion and empowerment.

Through programs like The Life of Mulan Flower, CSCC continues to create platforms that connect research, education, and community engagement. By fostering dialogue and empathy, these initiatives help bring greater awareness to the complexities of contemporary China and highlight the importance of understanding social change through lived experience.

VISITING SCHOLAR

Advancing Global Academic Exchange Through the Scholar in Residence Program

Dr. Hua Wang, Lecturer in Politics at the University of Glasgow, joined Duke Kunshan University in Fall 2025 as a CSCC Scholar in Residence. Specializing in Chinese politics, governance, and public policy, she brought a comparative perspective shaped by her academic experiences in both China and the United Kingdom. During her time at DKU, Dr. Wang actively engaged in the intellectual life of the CSCC and the broader DKU community, contributing to seminars, workshops, and collaborative discussions across disciplines.



Her research at DKU focused on community governance and elder care policy in China, drawing on both academic resources and field-based observations. The DKU environment—characterized by interdisciplinary exchange and close interaction among faculty, students, and staff—provided a dynamic setting for developing new research ideas. Through participation in workshops, site visits, and campus initiatives related to community gardens, cycling, and ecological practices, Dr. Wang expanded her research to consider governance not only as policy, but as lived practice within communities.

Beyond her research, Dr. Wang’s residency fostered meaningful academic connections and institutional collaboration. Her engagement with faculty and research networks at DKU opened new avenues for future projects, including potential joint work on community governance and public policy. At the same time, her role as a core member of the Scottish Centre for China Research highlights opportunities for sustained exchange between DKU and the University of Glasgow, strengthening global academic partnerships.

Dr. Wang’s experience reflects the value of the CSCC Scholar in Residence program as a platform for interdisciplinary research, international collaboration, and intellectual exchange. By bringing together diverse perspectives and supporting scholars working across contexts, the program contributes to a deeper and more globally informed understanding of contemporary China.

“I have been deeply impressed by the diversity and richness of seminars, workshops, and lectures at CSCC and across the DKU campus. The equality and inclusiveness between staff, faculty, and students, as well as the collaborative spirit both inside and outside the classroom, stand out to me. It truly feels like an oasis in an increasingly polarized and uncertain world.”

– Dr. Hua Wang

INTERNATIONAL VISITING STUDENT

Hannah McGee: Cross-Institutional Research and Learning at the CSCC

Hannah McGee, an undergraduate from Dartmouth College, spent the Spring 2025 semester at **Duke SCHOLAR** Kunshan University as the first visiting undergraduate hosted by the CSCC. Drawn to the CSCC Digital Technology and Society Cluster because of her interests in technology ethics, AI, and Chinese studies, she reached out directly to Professor Fan Liang when she realized the timing of Dartmouth's spring term aligned with DKU's semester schedule. This initiative allowed her to engage in meaningful research as a volunteer assistant, contributing to a project on AI policies in developing countries. Hannah helped compile a database of nearly 400 policy documents across more than 20 nations and conducted a literature review on technology governance, expanding her academic perspective beyond her home institution.

During her time at DKU, Hannah benefited from CSCC as a platform for academic exchange and mentorship. The center facilitated her integration into a new research environment, connecting her with faculty, research partners, and students.



Hannah participated in seminars, symposiums, and collaborative discussions, gaining exposure to diverse approaches to technology ethics and digital policy. The supportive CSCC community provided guidance, resources, and personal support, helping her adapt quickly to a new academic and cultural setting.

By hosting a visiting undergraduate like Hannah, CSCC demonstrates its role as a hub for institutional collaboration and student development. Her semester at DKU exemplifies how the center supports meaningful academic exchange, fosters new research perspectives, and provides students with the guidance and resources necessary to thrive in an international research environment.





SCHOLARLY EXCHANGE

Digital Technology for Sustainability Symposium & Finance Forum 2025

In April 2025, Duke Kunshan University hosted the Digital Technology for Sustainability Symposium alongside the Finance Forum 2025, bringing together academics, industry experts, and students to explore how technological innovation can address global challenges. Organized by the CSCC Digital Technology and Society Cluster and student partners, the event highlighted DKU’s commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration, responsible innovation, and social impact.

The symposium featured speakers from leading institutions and organizations, examining the role of emerging technologies—particularly artificial intelligence—in advancing sustainable development. Discussions addressed key issues such as planetary health, digital transformation, and the ethical dimensions of innovation, emphasizing how technology can support environmental sustainability, human well-being, and social equity.

In the afternoon, the largely student-led Finance Forum 2025 extended these conversations to global finance, with speakers from major financial and technology sectors exploring how financial systems can support tech-driven sustainability. Together, the events created a dynamic platform for interdisciplinary exchange, underscoring the importance of integrating technology, finance, and policy, while highlighting student leadership and CSCC’s role in fostering collaborative, forward-looking solutions.

“Being part of a student-led forum alongside global experts was an incredible experience. It showed me that students can play an active role in shaping conversations about technology and sustainability.”
 --Class of 2026 Student

2025-2026 CSCC GRANTS

Faculty Research & Creative Activity Grant

- Andrew Wortham | Rural Queer Collusions: HIV Governance and MSM CBOs in Southwest China
- Chen Zhang | (No) Place for Aging? Older Rural-to-Urban Migrants' (Un)Integration into Chinese Cities
- Dingyi Xu | Intergenerational Memory and Socio-Environmental Transformation in Rural Wuhan since the 1970s
- Kent Cao | Colonel Van White: Zhou Enlai, Marshall Mission and American Collecting in the 20th Century China
- Puyang Li | Bridging the Green Belt: Assessing the Ecological and Social Spillovers of China's Belt and Road Mining Investments in the Congo Basin
- Zhenjie Weng | GenAI-integrated Training Strategies and Models in Language Teacher Education in China

Faculty Research Product Workshop Grant

- Fangsheng Zhu | Untamable Competition: Bottom-Up Institutions and Intensive Education in China

Faculty-Student Collaborative Project Grant

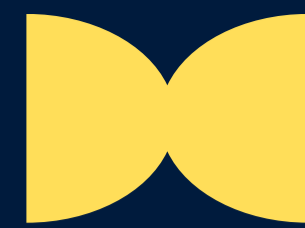
- Camila Saez Muller & Marta Grinberga | Daughters of Rural China: How Parental Schooling Shapes Women's Education
- Coraline Goron, Beibei Yang, Yufei Yao, & Shilin Ou | Just Transition Analysis of the Government response to social grievances related to the "Coal-to-Gas" Reform in Hebei Province
- Joseph Arthur Davies & Tanannum Azad Arufa | A Systematic Review of Gamification in Education: "Seriousness" Framing and Evidence of Impact Across Learning Contexts
- Kent Cao & Zhixian Zhao | From "Buddhist Stupa" to "Cultural Relic": Changing Meanings of the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda in Local Memory (1949-2026)
- Lianyun Pang & Jiayi Li | Structured Peer Interaction and Intercultural Competence Development in a Sino-Foreign EMI University
- Lijing Yan, Yucheng Jin, Ziyi Xia, Fangyu Wu, & Candice (Yujia) Zhang | AI-Assisted Art-Based Intervention for Enhancing Intrinsic Capacity among Older Adults with Stroke and Multimorbidity
- Na Fu, Yaxi Yao & Yichen Jiang | Daily Labor in the Digital Age: Platform Economy, Short-Term Migration, and Labor Networks in Kunshan

Student-Initiated Research and Creative Inquiry Grant

- Andi Wan & Xinyi Guan (Faculty Supervisor: Rui Hu) | Mixed Reality as Reflective Medium: Re-Experiencing Urban Transformation through Alleyway Life in Nanchang
- Aspen Dong (Faculty Supervisor: Yeshim Iqbal) | Exploring Factors in Shaping Therapy Willingness among Chinese Young Adults with Depression or Depressive Symptoms: A Qualitative Study
- Tianyi Xie (Faculty Supervisor: Wendy Li) | Investigation of how Chinese first-year students interpret EMI policies and negotiate their identity struggles in Sino-Foreign Joint Venture Universities
- Wangqi Chen et al. (Faculty Supervisor: Kristinn Már Ársælsson) | Longitudinal Evaluation of Behavioral Intervention Outcomes in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Institutional Settings: A Quantitative Cohort Study
- Yitong Lin (Faculty Supervisor: Luyao Zhang) | CircuLink: A Multi-Case Comparison and Campus Pilot of Second-Hand Exchange and Donation Governance in China

Community Service Project Grant

- Emily Kus, Holly McClure, Qihan Hu, & Xavier Monroy (Faculty Supervisor: Joseph Davies, Laura Davies) | Medical English Project
- Violet Nguyen & Zhuo'er Chen (Faculty Supervisor: Robin Rodd) | The Language of Inclusion
- Yifan Wu (Faculty Supervisor: Keping Wu) | From Buddha to Rapper: Tibetan Youth Identity and Subculture
- Yuechi Kelly | 中国欢迎你 Welcoming Chinese International Adoptees to Birth Country



CONNECT WITH US

The CSCC welcomes researchers and students at DKU and beyond with an interest in contemporary China.

To stay up to date on our events, scan the QR codes below to follow us on WeChat or sign up for our monthly newsletter.

We invite scholars and practitioners to present their research, art, or share insights on contemporary China with our community. If you are interested in giving a talk or exploring collaboration opportunities, please reach out to us at dku-cscc@dukekunshan.edu.cn.

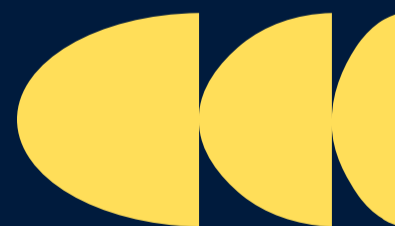
CSCC WECHAT



CSCC WEBSITE



CSCC NEWSLETTER



昆山杜克大学
DUKE KUNSHAN
UNIVERSITY

当代中国研究中心
Center for the Study of
Contemporary China

