

Columbia University's East Asian Library Launches Chinese Paper Gods Website

NEW YORK, May 9, 2007 Columbia University Libraries has launched the new web resource *Chinese Paper Gods*, an online visual catalog of over 200 woodcuts used in folk religious practices in Beijing and other parts of China in the 1930s. The website is part of C. V. Starr East Asian Library's initiative to digitize its unique holdings and make them available online, to the benefit of scholars and other interested people who are unable to visit its collections in person.

The woodcuts represented in *Chinese Paper Gods* were assembled by Anne S. Goodrich (1895–2005) in 1931, when as a Christian missionary in Peking she became interested in local folk religious practices. She studied the paper gods in this collection for much of her life and, after publishing her research conclusions in 1991, donated her prints to the C. V. Starr East Asian Library.

In announcing the new *Chinese Paper Gods* website, Amy Heinrich, Director of the Library stated, "Columbia University Libraries is committed to providing digital access to its collections. This website is offered in the hope that scholars with similar curiosity about these images and the worldview they represent will continue to study them, and to deepen our understanding of their significance."

On the new website, full-color digital reproductions of the woodcut prints are organized according to their primary purpose: first those for display, which were intended to protect the family and which were to be burned at the end of the year; then, those for ceremonial use, which were purchased to be burned immediately, with the deities serving as emissaries to heaven on behalf of the family. The images are further categorized according to where in the house they were to be displayed and by the types of deities they represent.

The new website also features informative essays about the Goodrich collection, the role of paper god prints in Chinese folk culture, and the way the images may be 'read' and understood, along with a detailed description of the conservation processes that were carried out to stabilize and preserve fragile and deteriorating prints from the collection.

According to Stephen Paul Davis, Director of the Libraries Digital Program, the creation of this site is part of an important strategic initiative for the Libraries. "*Chinese Paper Gods* has been funded entirely by institutional investment in our digital publishing program rather than by grants or other external funding. Providing users with high-quality reproductions, item-level descriptions, and contextual essays exemplifies Columbia University Libraries' commitment to making its unique research materials available to the scholarly and teaching communities."

The website, created by Columbia University Digital Knowledge Ventures in collaboration with the C. V. Starr East Asian Library and the Columbia Libraries Digital Program Division, can be found at http://www.columbia.edu/library/paper_gods.

Columbia University Libraries is one of the top ten academic library systems in



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the nation, with 9.2 million volumes, over 65,650 serials, as well as extensive collections of electronic resources, manuscripts, rare books, microforms, and other nonprint formats. The collections and services are organized into 25 libraries, supporting specific academic or professional disciplines. Columbia Libraries employs more than 400 professional and support staff to assist faculty, students, and researchers in their academic endeavors. The Libraries' website at www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/ is a gateway to its print and electronic collections and to its services.

The C. V. Starr East Asian Library is one of the major collections for the study of East Asia in the United States, with over 805,000 volumes of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, and Western language materials, as well as some holdings in Mongol and Manchu, and over 6,500 periodical titles. The collection, established in 1902, is particularly strong in Chinese history, literature, and social sciences; Japanese literature, history, and religion, particularly Buddhism; and Korean history. The Library's website is located at: www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/eastasian/.

The Columbia Libraries **Digital Program Division** (LDPD) was established in 2002 to carry out planning, implementation and coordination of digital projects and services for Columbia University Libraries. The Division coordinates Columbia's collection-digitization initiatives, provides technology support and hosting for major scholarly databases such as APIS, Digital Scriptorium and the Papers of John Jay, develops enhanced end-user interfaces and tools for discovery of and access to the Libraries' licensed electronic resources, manages Columbia's institutional repository and digital preservation programs, and provides technology and design support for the Libraries' public and internal web sites. The Division's website may be found at: www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/units/ldpd/.

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