Columbia Libraries Launches Expanded Site for Ling Long, Rare Chinese Women's Magazine of the 1930s

(NEW YORK, December 1, 2005) Columbia University Libraries has redesigned and relaunched its Web site for Ling Long, a Chinese women’s magazine of the 1930s that provides a unique glimpse into the cultural life of Republican-era Shanghai. The site is publicly available at: http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?ANX0496

The new Web site features a digital version of the magazine’s run based on the C. V. Starr East Asian Library’s extensive Ling Long print collection, one of the most complete outside China, along with significant new content recently contributed by the University of Heidelberg. The site now also includes newly-prepared essays on relevant historical and cultural issues to provide additional context for this remarkable publication.

“Ling Long is a treasure for all students of modern Chinese history,” said Madeleine Zelin, Professor of Chinese History and former Director of Columbia’s Weatherhead East Asian Institute. “One of a few major journals directed at female readers, Ling Long provides a unique view of the ‘modern woman’ in the early twentieth century, shifting from Western exemplars to women of service to the nation.”

Ling Long (which means “elegant and fine”) was published in Shanghai from 1931 to 1937 during a time of dramatic social and political change. With articles on films, furniture, fashion, marriage, and “the girl of today,” it provides a rare document of the lives and aspirations of Chinese women during the Republican era (1912-1949). As scholarly interest in this period has grown over the past two decades, the use of Columbia’s print copies of this rare and fragile publication has continued to increase. In 1997, to help address growing user demand, Columbia microfilmed its Ling Long holdings and, with the help of a grant from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, digitized and published the collection on the Web.

In 2005, the University of Heidelberg generously offered to help fill gaps in Columbia’s run of the magazine and digitized eighteen issues from its own collection for incorporation into Columbia’s site. Relaunching the site with new content also
provided the opportunity to make it more useful to students of Chinese history and culture with the addition of short essays about the magazine and other relevant topics, as well as English translations of selected portions of the text.

"In style and content this is a model Web site for researchers in and out of the China field," said Dorothy Ko, Professor of History at Barnard College. "Three years ago I met a Chinese student in Nanjing who wrote a research paper on Republican womanhood based on the old, less complete Ling long Web site (she is now a Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago.) The new site may well foster new global research communities."

The reengineering and republication of the Ling long Web site was carried out as a digital sustainability initiative of Columbia Libraries' Digital Program. In addition to enhancing the content, look and feel of the site, all the original source files and metadata for the site have been documented, reviewed and migrated into the new METS format, the de facto standard for digital library programs nationwide. This effort will enable better management of the digital collection over time and also allow the original scanned image files to be easily submitted for long-term digital archiving. It will, in addition, allow collection content to be more readily shared with other digital initiatives such the Research Libraries Group Cultural Materials Initiative and the Digital Library Federations Aquifer Project.

The Ling long Web site redesign is a collaborative project shared among a number of Columbia groups and institutions. In addition to the Starr East Asian Library and the Columbia Libraries' Digital Program, Columbia's Digital Knowledge Ventures (DKV) provided site design, programming and consulting services. The Libraries' Preservation Division managed the microfilming and scanning. The color scanning was carried out by the Preservation Division Reprography Lab.

Columbia University Libraries is one of the top ten academic library systems in the nation, with 8.6 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 22 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 Columbia Libraries Digital Program Division works to improve the coordination and effectiveness of Columbia’s library-related digital initiatives. Currently staffed by eight full-time employees, its scope includes the development and support of the Libraries official public and staff websites; development of enhanced interfaces and tools for the Columbia community’s use of databases, e-journals and other e-resources; coordination of internal and external collection digitization and Web-publishing programs; and implementation and management of Columbia’s institutional repository programs, including Columbia Image Bank and Columbia Digital Commons.

The Columbia Libraries Preservation Division is one of the five oldest library
preservation programs in the United States. The division has primary responsibility for maintaining the Libraries’ collections through proper care, housing, and disaster prevention. The division provides treatment of items to ensure their continued availability for use, and copying to new formats when use is no longer possible due to damage or severe deterioration. Materials in all formats and genres are cared for by the division, including digital resources created by the Libraries. The Division’s Web site is available at: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/services/preservation/

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 785,000 volumes of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, and Western language materials, as well as some holdings in Mongol and Manchu, and over 6,000 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 Web site is located at:
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/eastasian/

Digital Knowledge Ventures is a multimedia design and development group created by Columbia University to provide services to clients on campus as well as to organizations outside the University. Their services include conference publishing, interactive kiosks, Web site development, online publications, e-learning curricula, as well as the development of collections, directories, and collaborative tools. DKV’s external clients include a host of educational and not-for-profit enterprises, and many of the University’s departments, divisions, centers, and institutes are among their internal clients. DKV’s Web site is located at:
http://www.dkv.columbia.edu/index.html

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