

## China in the 1930s

The editors and writers of *Ling long* published the magazine in Shanghai from 1931 to 1937. The modern city of Shanghai provided an ideal backdrop for this modern women's magazine. But the story of the rise of Shanghai is also the story of modern Chinese history.

During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Shanghai was a small town on China's eastern coast. This changed when the British defeated the Qing in the first Opium War. In 1842, the British set up the first foreign concession in Shanghai; they were later followed by the French, Japanese, and Americans. When *Ling long* started publication in 1931, Shanghai was divided into the International Concession, the French Concession, and a Chinese-governed district.

The period between 1912 and 1949 in China is known as the Republican era. The Nationalist Party (Guomindang) took over China in 1912 and remained in power until 1949. During this time, Shanghai became an increasingly important economic, political, and cultural center. Also during this period, the Chinese Communist Party was founded in Shanghai (1921) and played the roles of both enemy and ally to the Nationalists over the course of Republican history.

In 1925, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) seized control of the Nationalist party and unified China. His leadership had two major implications for the city of Shanghai. In the 1920s, he purged the city's Communists, driving them underground and eventually out of the city. And in 1934, along with his wife, Song Meiling, he launched the New Life Movement across China. (1934 was also the year that the Chinese Communist party embarked on the 6,000-mile Long March from Hunan to northwest China.) The New Life Movement combined Confucian and Christian morals to advocate a modern healthy lifestyle and social order. For women in Shanghai and elsewhere, this meant that they were expected to fulfill their social responsibility by becoming good housewives and mothers.

*Ling long* readers would have followed China's political tensions with the Japanese. In 1931, just as the magazine started publication, anger against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in northern China reverberated throughout the country. In cities like Shanghai, Chinese residents organized boycotts of Japanese goods. Perhaps in retaliation for the boycotts, Japanese forces bombed Shanghai on January 28, 1932. Japanese troops withdrew by the end of May, only to return with a full-scale invasion in 1937. Around the time that *Ling long* magazine ceased publication in 1937, Nationalists and Communists set aside their political differences to form a united front against the Japanese.

What did these events mean for the women who wrote for, edited, and read *Ling long* magazine? Although *Ling long* never took a firm stand on domestic or international politics, traces of these issues can be found on the pages of the magazine. The editors published the magazine in a city where leftist ideas were heavily censored by the Nationalist government, so that any Communist

sympathies had to be carefully and subtly expressed. Although the New Life Movement criticized the non-practical education of many female *Ling long* readers, the movement's ideas of hygiene and order seemed to resonate with certain articles and photographs in the magazine. The representation of foreign countries, peoples, and goods on *Ling long*'s pages was equally ambivalent. In some cases, *Ling long* praised certain foreign customs, while at other times the magazine encouraged its readers to fight imperialism. These kinds of contradictions are typical of Shanghainese, Chinese, and indeed global history in the 1930s and make *Ling long* magazine a valuable resource to students and researchers.