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Chapter 1

The Yuanmingyuan and its Objects

Louise Tythacott

The Yuanmingyuan was one of the most important palace-garden complexes in imperial China.¹ Known in the West as the “Summer Palace”², the English term for the site is misleading, for this was not, in fact, a single edifice, but rather a grouping of classical gardens and waterways, with thousands of buildings, housing a vast art collection.³ Originally established in 1709, it was used during the eighteenth and nineteenth century as the principle residence of Qing dynasty emperors, and it became the official seat of government, at times frequented more than the Forbidden City in Beijing.⁴

¹ According to Wong, it was “The greatest garden the Chinese have ever built”. Young-Tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 9.

² I will use the term Yuanmingyuan in this chapter. The term “Summer Palace” was used mainly in the nineteenth century by Europeans, and is sometimes referred to as the “old Summer Palace”, not to be confused with the Yiheyuan or the “new Summer Palace” nearby. The book will use pinyin romanization and occasionally includes Chinese characters for names. As the focus is on collections in Britain and France, however, Chinese will not be used throughout.

³ In fact the emperors spent their summers at Chengde (Jehol).

⁴ Greg Thomas, “The Looting of Yuanming and the Translation of Chinese Art in Europe,” *Nineteenth-Century art worldwide: a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture* Volume 7, issue 2, autumn (2008): 1.

[INSERT FIGURE 1.1 HERE]

Figure 1.1. Map of Yuanmingyuan.

In October 1860, the Yuanmingyuan was notoriously looted⁵ and destroyed by British and French troops at the culmination of the Second Opium War (1856-60): as a result, for many Chinese people today, the highly visible, ruined park in northwest Beijing has become a potent symbol of national humiliation.⁶ In recent years, objects looted from the Yuanmingyuan buildings - estimated to be in the region of 1.5 million⁷ - are the subject of increasing political and academic concern. While there has been a range of texts which discuss the broader issues surrounding the looting and repatriation of imperial Qing objects⁸,

⁵ The word “loot” is used deliberately here, for it came into usage in the English language to describe the behaviour of the British during the First Opium War (1839-42). See Hanes and Sanello, *The Opium wars; the addiction of one Empire and the corruption of Another* (Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, Inc. 2002), 93. The term entered common usage in India and China between the First and Second Opium Wars. See James Hevia, *English Lessons: the pedagogy of imperialism in nineteenth-century China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 75. It derives from the Hindi “lut” and the Sanskrit “lunt”, both of which mean to rob. See T.F. Hoad, *The concise English Oxford dictionary of English etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 271.

⁶ According to the Director of the Yuanmingyuan, Chen Mingjie. Cited in Macartney, J, “China in worldwide treasure hunt for artefacts looted from Yuan Ming Yuan Palace,” *The Times*, 20 October, 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See, for example, Hevia, *English Lessons*; Katrina Hill, “Collecting on Campaign: British Soldiers in China during the Opium Wars,” *Journal of the History of Collections* (2012): 1-

this is the first edited volume to discuss, in detail, the diverse histories and multiple interpretations of material from the Yuanmingyuan in museums in Britain and France.⁹

Inspired by James Hevia's seminal work, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-century China* (2003), and Kopytoff and Appadurai's notion of objects having "social lives"¹⁰, this book examines the movements and shifting meanings attached to Yuanmingyuan artefacts over the past 150 years. In his introduction to the *Social Life of Things*, Appadurai stressed the need, when discussing the lives of objects, to analyze the wider social contexts in which material culture is immersed in terms of different "regimes

16; Tiffany Jenkins, *Keeping their Marbles: How the treasures of the Past ended up in museums and why they should stay there* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kristina Kleutghen, "Heads of State: Looting, Nationalism and Repatriation of the Zodiac Bronzes," in *Ai Weiwei: Circle of Animals*, ed. Susan Delson (New York: Prestel, 2011), 162-83; Richard Kraus, "The Repatriation of Plundered Chinese Art," *The China Quarterly* (2009): 837-842; Zuozhen Liu, *The Case for Repatriating China's Cultural Objects* (Singapore: Springer, 2016); Haiyan Lee, "The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan: Or, How to Enjoy a National Wound," *Modern China* 35.2 (2009): 155-190; and Anne-Marie Broudehoux, "Selling and Past: Nationalism and the Commodification of History at Yuanmingyuan," in *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing*, Broudehoux (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 42-93.

⁹ This book, as a result, tends to focus on Western, rather than Chinese sources, and contributors are British, French or North American curators and academics, rather than Chinese scholars.

¹⁰ A concept first forwarded in *The Social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

of value” (1986: 4).¹¹ As we shall see, the diaspora of looted objects from the Yuanmingyuan after 1860 became embroiled within distinctive value systems in the West. Some pieces were transferred from one imperial collection to another - from the Yuanmingyuan of the ruling Chinese Manchu dynasty to the royal palaces of the Emperor Napoleon III of France and Queen Victoria in Britain, where they were inscribed with new nationalistic symbolism. This volume identifies how the museums which house Yuanmingyuan objects embody diverse ideological perspectives, whether it be the military focus of the Royal Engineers in Kent, with its emphasis on developing the *esprit de corps* of the regiment (as discussed by Scott in chapter 6) or the Musée Chinois at the Château of Fontainebleau, in a forest to the south of Paris, with its French Empire style aesthetics and celebration of imperial taste (the subject of both Droguet’s and Thomas’ chapters 9 and 10). It should also be remembered that the interpretations and meanings given to Summer Palace loot have shifted over time as European museum displays were refurbished and updated. This volume, therefore, discusses the very different stories Yuanmingyuan objects in the West have been made to tell.

Included are chapters written by those who have looked after Summer Palace material – Scott as a former curator of the Royal Engineers Museum in Kent; McLoughlin, former Principal Curator for East and Central Asia at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh; and Droguet, Conservateur général du patrimoine at the Château of Fontainebleau. Distinctive approaches to the collection, representation and exhibition of Summer Palace material are evident. While Hevia (chapter 2) and Pearce (chapter 3) provide introductory overviews of historical and political issues, other chapters focus on more detailed discussions of specific objects or displays. Scott, for example, examines the exhibition of Summer Palace loot in the Royal Engineers Museum in Kent (chapter 6), Finlay

¹¹ He writes how it “becomes useful to look at the distribution of knowledge at various points in their careers” (Ibid., 41).

addresses French collections in the eighteenth century (chapter 8), and Droguet and Thomas analyze, in their different ways, the Musée Chinois in France (chapters 9 and 10). There are more thematic chapters: Hill on design reform in Britain in the late nineteenth century (chapter 4) and Pierson on imperial provenance (chapter 5). Included too is a chapter devoted to the detailed museological biography of a single Summer Palace piece – the Hope Grant Ewer at the National Museum of Scotland discussed by McLoughlin in chapter 7.

The role of museums in defining meanings attributed to Summer Palace objects is clearly of particular concern. Museums are ideological institutions – and their mission as part of an imperialistic apparatus in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, through which other cultures were understood, analyzed, classified and dominated, is now well established in the academic literature.¹² MacKenzie, for example, refers to the museum as a “tool of

¹² See, for example, Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, *Colonialism and the object: empire, material culture and the museum* (London: Routledge, 1997); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2004); Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: museums, material culture and popular imagination* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1994); Clare Harris, *The Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics and the Representation of Tibet* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991); Sarah Longair and John Macleer, eds. *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); John Mackenzie, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Conal McCarthy, *Exhibiting Maori: a History of Colonial Cultures of Display*

empire.”¹³ For Barringer and Flynn, they function as “potent mechanisms in the construction and visualisation of power relations between coloniser and colonised”¹⁴; Basu characterizes them as a “technology through which the British...were able to transform the unknown into the known: that which could be collected, classified, categorised, and thereby commandeered and controlled.”¹⁵ We shall see in this volume how particular museums in Britain and France placed their own cultural, political and aesthetic concerns upon Yuanmingyuan material. Summer Palace objects in the West were disassociated from previous uses, earlier histories and meanings were erased and they were re-inscribed with new interpretations in relation to the prevailing ideologies of the time. Above all, we shall see how Summer Palace objects became enmeshed in complex imperial histories, and ultimately how the displays discussed – at the Royal Engineers Museum in Kent, the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, the Musée Chinois at the Château of Fontainebleau - tell us more about European representations and images of China, than they do about the Yuanmingyuan itself.

With such a focused field, there are inevitably crossovers and resonances between the

(Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007); Laura Peers and Alison Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities: a Routledge Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Glenn Penny, *Objects of culture: ethnology and ethnographic museums in imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Claire Wintle, *Colonial Collecting and Display: Encounters with material Culture from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2013).

¹³ *Museums and Empire*, 7.

¹⁴ *Colonialism and the object*, 5.

¹⁵ Paul Basu, “A museum for Sierra Leone? Amateur enthusiasms and colonial museum policy in British West Africa,” in *Curating Empire*, ed. Longair and McAleer, 145.

chapters. The same objects appear in different places – the now controversial and politicized zodiac heads, for example, are discussed by Hevia (chapter 2), Pearce (chapter 3) and Pierson (chapter 5); the Sino-Tibetan “Skull of Confucius” is referred to by Pearce (chapter 3) and Hill (chapter 4); General Gordon’s throne makes an appearance in both Scott’s and Hill’s chapters (6 and 4); and “Grant’s” gold ewer, the central subject for Mcloughlin (chapter 7), is mentioned too by Pearce (chapter 3). A number of authors touch upon the problems of provenance, as well as the fraught issue of restitution (Scott, chapter 6, and Pearce, chapter 3).¹⁶ Chapters address as well international exhibitions (Hill, chapter 4), and the role of the market in the commodification and dissemination of the material (Hevia, chapter 2 and Pierce, chapter 3).

* * *

In order to contextualize issues addressed in subsequent chapters, this introduction now turns to discuss the origins, history and development of the Yuanmingyuan in China, particularly in the eighteenth century, and its destruction in 1860 at the hands of British and French troops. It then provides a summary of the movements of the substantial diaspora of Yuanmingyuan material, from 1860, to distinct sites of representation and display in Britain and France.

¹⁶ As this series cover the history and acquisition of material culture from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, contemporary restitution debates will not be addressed. For further discussion on this topic see Tiffany Jenkins, *Keeping their Marbles: How the treasures of the past ended up in museums...and why they should stay there* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Krauss, “The Repatriation of Plundered Chinese Art”; and Liu, *The Case for Repatriating China’s Cultural Objects*.

The Yuanmingyuan: “Garden of Perfect Brightness” (1709- 1860)¹⁷

*Beyond doubt, had the garden survived to this day, it would be one of the greatest and richest museums in the world.*¹⁸

For more than a century, the Yuanmingyuan was the abode of five Manchu emperors – Yongzheng (r. 1722-35), Qianlong (r.1736-1795), Jiaqing (r.1796-1820), Daoguang (r. 1821-1850) and Xianfeng (r. 1851-1861). The Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors, in particular, made the Yuanmingyuan their home, conducting most of the affairs of state from within its capacious walls. Its location, on a site five or so miles to the northwest of Beijing, was originally chosen by the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722), and initial construction began in 1709. The palace-garden complex was destined as a gift for the emperor's fourth son, later the Yongzheng emperor.¹⁹ Under him, from 1725, the gardens expanded dramatically.

Waterworks were introduced, creating lakes, streams and ponds: Yongzheng was the first emperor to take up residence in the Yuanmingyuan, and he was to die there in 1735.²⁰ In the reign of his son, the Qianlong emperor, the Yuanmingyuan increased once more in size.

Tracts of land were added to the east, west and the south, and the space grew to include the *Changchunyuan*, “Eternal Spring Garden”²¹ and the *Qichunyuan*, “Variegated Spring

¹⁷ Yuanmingyuan literally means “round and brilliant” garden, but is often referred to as the “Garden of Perfect Brightness”.

¹⁸ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 6.

¹⁹ Eric Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism: The European Destruction of the Palace of the Emperor of China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 38.

²⁰ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 79, Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 38.

²¹ 1, 059 acres of land to the east, known as the “Eternal Spring Garden”, was to be used when the Qianlong emperor retired (Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 51).

Garden”.²² The Qianlong emperor took personal interest in and directed the works – and of all Qing emperors, he spent the longest time and lavished the most resources on this, the “Garden of Perfect Brightness.”²³

Once completed, the Yuanmingyuan comprised around 3.4 square kilometres - roughly the size of Central Park in New York.²⁴ The area was dotted with many small gardens, with lakes, artificial hills, palaces and architectural creations. The arrangement of the individual scenic sites was complex.²⁵ Distinct garden units created beautiful quiet retreats, extraordinary vistas, enclosed and enchanted spaces. Each small area was conceived as an architectural and natural ensemble, deliberately designed to have a poetic atmosphere. Courtyards were filled with magnolias, with bamboo and rare trees. An artificial landscape composed of hillocks, terraces, ponds, lakes, canals was set about with formal gardens, and with elegant rocks composed of fantastically shaped limestone. Deer, peacocks, hawks, golden and silver pheasants, horses and elephants inhabited various parts of the site.²⁶ The Jesuit artist, Attiret, considered the Yuanmingyuan “a veritable paradise on earth”²⁷; Ringmar

²² Hope Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: the History of the Yuan Ming Yuan and of the Emperors who lived there* (London: Williams and Norgate Ltd, 1950).

Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 43.

²³ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 118.

²⁴ With a circumference of 16 kilometres, it was 4,415 metres from east to west and 1,890 metres from north to south (Pratt, in Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*; Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 5).

²⁵ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 19.

²⁶ Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 67.

²⁷ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 50.

writes of it as a “perfect world”.²⁸ For the French soldier, Dupin, it was “a vision from the Thousand and One Nights”.²⁹

To capture its vastness and beauty, in 1737, the Qianlong emperor instructed court artists to create a silk map of the Yuanmingyuan, which was then hung on the wall of one of his apartments.³⁰ A group of “40 scenes”, painted on silk, was also commissioned in 1738 (see figs 1.1 and 8.1), and by 1744, the album “40 Views” was completed.³¹ The circulation of these images in eighteenth century France is discussed by Finlay in chapter 8, and they remain to this day the primary visual record of the gardens.³²

As well as an exquisite garden complex, the Yuanmingyuan was a gigantic architectural creation, consisting of some of the most magnificent building works conceived in the Qing period.³³ Around three thousand separate structures with an estimated total floor space of 160 kilometres squared were located around the huge garden site.³⁴ These structures conformed to specific Chinese architectural codes, and can be loosely categorized as palaces, halls, pavilions, terraces, temples, chambers, belvederes, basilicas, gazebos, galleries, chapels,

²⁸ 2013: 4.

²⁹ Cited in Thomas, “Looting,” 4.

³⁰ See Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 25. Malone notes that no copies of this are known and that it was probably destroyed in 1860. See Carroll Brown Malone. *A History of the Peking Summer Palaces under the Ch'ing Dynasty* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp, 1934), 62.

³¹ Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 4; John Finlay, *40 Views of the Yuanming yuan: Image and Ideology in a Qianlong Imperial Album of Poetry and Paintings*, PhD thesis (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 2008), 28, and chapter 8.

³² Thomas, “Looting,” 1.

³³ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 24.

³⁴ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 37; Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 5.

pagodas, kiosks, studios, land boats, marble bridges and elaborate walls.³⁵ The French, General Montauban, found it impossible “to convey...the magnificence of the many buildings”.³⁶ There was a three-story building devoted to Guanyin, the Goddess of Compassion, as well as a court for the God of Rain.³⁷ The Fahui Temple had a 22.5 metre-tall pagoda made of coloured glazed tiles.³⁸ The Temple of Treasures included a large image of the God of War, and other buildings on the site were filled with hundreds, if not thousands of religious statues of all shapes and sizes, in woods, metals and porcelain.³⁹ A gallery created for the Qianlong emperor displayed his collection of inscribed stone tablets.⁴⁰ The most imposing edifice was the magnificent and costly Ancestral Shrine, built in 1742, and constructed from the finest materials.⁴¹ There were more everyday buildings too - a silkworm farm, a brocade and dye mill, schools and theatres, a village replicating rural life with cottages, a temple and vegetable plots.⁴² In the market area, eunuchs dressed as shop-keepers sold merchandise to the emperor in masquerade with “all the bustle of a city.”⁴³ The Yuanmingyuan thus functioned as a mini-society, a world within a world.⁴⁴

³⁵ Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 43; Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 16-18.

³⁶ Cited in Thomas, “Looting,” 3.

³⁷ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 32-3. In the many temples resided Buddhist monks and Daoist priests: See Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 41, Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 104.

³⁸ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 54.

³⁹ These had been presented to the Emperor and his mother (see Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 66).

⁴⁰ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 53.

⁴¹ Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 55; Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 36-7.

⁴² Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 51.

⁴³ Attiret, in Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 73.

The most unusual area was devoted to European-style buildings. Between 1747 and 1783, mainly Jesuit architects and engineers of European origin working in the court - key among them, Castiglione, Attiret and Benoist - constructed, alongside Chinese experts, a series of Western-style palaces, pavilions, and gardens to the northeast, known as the *Xiyanglou*. Built on a 26 hectare strip of land - 750 metres long by 70 metres wide⁴⁵ - it covered one fiftieth of the site.⁴⁶ Indeed, this “Chinese Versailles”, as it came to be known, was the most ambitious project undertaken by the Qianlong emperor.⁴⁷ The *Xiyanglou* included over 40 structures, including palaces following Baroque models, using European-style materials – huge columns, marble balustrades, glass windows. Surrounding these were formal gardens and European-style fountains (see figs 1.2 and 8.3). The first buildings were erected by 1747 – with the *Xieqiqu* (Palace of the Delights of Harmony) the initial structure encountered.⁴⁸ Decorated with Ionic and Corinthian columns, it had a three-story central section, with three galleries running to double-story octagonal pavilions on each side. In the side pavilion was a large pool with fountains and musicians’ galleries.⁴⁹ The *Fangwaiguan*, known as the Belvedere, was completed by 1759 - a crescent-shaped palatial building with marble balustrades enclosed by a moat, with doors, windows and steps designed in heavily

⁴⁴ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 108.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 59.

⁴⁶ Kleutghen, “Heads of State,” 165.

⁴⁷ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 59-61.

⁴⁹ Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 103.

chased bronze by Castiglione.⁵⁰ The largest palace was the *Haiyantang*, “Calm Sea Hall”, reminiscent of the Cour d’honneur at Versailles. Containing 36 rooms, two winding staircases, marble balustrades, and glass windows, outside was a large fountain surrounded by a Chinese-style water clock, with the now-famous bronze zodiac animal heads spouting water from their mouths every two hours.⁵¹ Nearby, a large grey-brick palace on a small hill, the *Yuanyingguan* – “Observatory of Distant Waters”- was used by the Qianlong emperor as his royal vacation home: a huge hall for the emperor’s throne on a dais was part of its interior.⁵² It had European-style furniture and tapestries, life-size portraits of French women, as well as magnificent pier glasses, sent as gifts in 1767 by Louis XV.⁵³ And it was here that the emperor would listen to music from Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan. Around these palaces were arranged other exotic European-style structures - water fountains, a large maze, an aviary for peacocks and other exotic birds. The European section was Qianlong’s “cabinet of curiosities”⁵⁴ and, as Danby notes, “the achievement of a...monarch who...had the most wonderful materials and unlimited resources at his disposal.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ According to Wong and Danby, this was later converted into a mosque for the Qianlong emperor’s concubine, Rong Fei (Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 63, Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 104.)

⁵¹ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 42, Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 63-64.

⁵² Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 106.

⁵³ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 42; Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 64; Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 106.

⁵⁴ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 65 and Kleutghen, “Heads of State,” 165. In 1783, the Qianlong emperor commissioned 20 copperplate engravings, based on drawings by a Chinese court artist influenced by Western pictorial conventions. See Finlay (chapter 8) for a discussion of these.

[INSERT FIGURE 1.2 HERE]

Figure 1.2 Illustration of Haiyantang, in the Xiyanglou section of Yuanmingyuan.

Importantly for the concerns of this book, the Yuanmingyuan also housed much of the Chinese imperial collection of art and antiquities. The Qianlong emperor in particular was famed for assembling the richest private grouping of objects ever seen in China.⁵⁶ There were paintings, calligraphy, bronzes, porcelain, cloisonné, snuff bottles, silks, textiles, decorative arts and antiquities in jade, bronze and other precious materials, rare books, furniture and jewellery.⁵⁷ While the Qianlong emperor had special galleries and a library built for displaying inscribed stone tablets and books, most of the collections were distributed throughout the buildings as furnishings or ornaments. Interiors were adorned with imposing mirrors and chandeliers;⁵⁸ there were thick rugs of silk and wool of the highest quality.⁵⁹ Magnificent thrones, chairs, tables and couches were found in the different buildings, of teak and red sandalwood (*zitan mu*); some inlaid with semi-precious stones, some decorated with jade, ivory and gold. The Jesuit artist, Jean-Denis Attiret (1702 –1768) noted:

⁵⁵ *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 67.

⁵⁶ C.B. Chiu, *Yuanming Yuan: Le Jardin de la Clarté parfaite* (Paris: Les Editions de l'imprimeur, 2000), 176.

⁵⁷ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 5. Thomas characterizes this as “a vast and sumptuous repository of the greatest productions of the country’s royal culture” (“Looting,” 1).

⁵⁸ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 40.

⁵⁹ Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 48-9.

...all the most beautiful things that can be imagined as to furniture, ornaments and paintings...[There are] the most valuable sorts of wood: varnished works, of China and Japan; ancient vases of porcelain; silks, and cloth of gold and silver...⁶⁰

Ringmar comments on the large numbers of miniature objects and the lacquer boxes filled with small things: “ivory balls, flowers, fruit and insects, tiny scrolls, books and paintings.”⁶¹ In the emperor’s apartments were porcelains, carved jade ornaments, statuettes of gold, silver and bronze. The Yuanmingyuan accommodated collections of the most accomplished calligraphy – the highest art form in China – as well as important scroll paintings dating back a thousand years. Exquisite cloisonné vases and incense burners were used in the temples. The empresses’ apartments were lavished with decorative arts, as well as lacquer wares, jewellery, belts and hair ornaments in jade, pearl, coral and ivory. In other parts of the Yuanmingyuan were large store rooms stacked with bolts of silk and the immaculately embroidered court robes used on official occasions.⁶²

The Yuanmingyuan contained a range of imported objects too, both tribute from foreign delegations and much through the Canton trade.⁶³ There were the royal gifts from Louis XV, as we have seen, as well as mechanical toys, music boxes, clocks, astronomical

⁶⁰ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 30.

⁶¹ *Liberal Barbarism*, 47.

⁶² See Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 40-1.

⁶³ For example, the Macartney Expedition of 1792-4, the Dutch Embassy of Titsingh in 1794-6, and the Amherst Embassy of 1816. Members of the Macartney Expedition were housed in the Yuanmingyuan, and installed their gifts in the Audience Hall – terrestrial and celestial globes, the planetarium, clocks, barometer, orrery, Wedgwood porcelain (Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 85).

instruments, porcelain and watches from the Macartney Expedition.⁶⁴ Ringmar describes the Audience Hall:

The throne was carved in rosewood and decorated with dragons...All along the upper portion of one of the walls was a painting that showed the grounds of Yuanmingyuan. Below it and along the opposing wall were side tables with books and yellow silk covers, porcelain bowls, a celestial and terrestrial globe, and a musical clock made by George Clarke, Leadenhall Street, London.⁶⁵

The libraries in the Yuanmingyuan were of immense historical significance. The largest, and one of the most important buildings in the site, was the *Wenyuan Ge*, dating to 1774. Constructed to house one of only seven sets of the *Siku Quanshu*, “Collected Works of the our Treasures” (the largest collection of books ever compiled on Chinese history),⁶⁶ it was said to have housed over 120,000 volumes.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 37.

⁶⁵ *Liberal Barbarism*, 39. Wolseley noted that in the throne room there was an immense painting covering the upper portion of the wall on the left hand side, which, according to Finlay was the 1737 painting (*40 Views of the Yuanming yuan*, 25).

⁶⁶ The *Siku Quanshu* was begun in 1772, and completed in 1782. According to Wong, it was “perhaps the most ambitious literary project of the Qing”, consisting of over 10,000 manuscripts (*A Paradise Lost*, 66).

⁶⁷ Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, 58.

Wolseley described the Yuanmingyuan he encountered in 1860 as a “city composed only of museums and Wardour Streets.”⁶⁸ Yet inventories of its vast collections have, unfortunately, not survived and it seems unlikely that the original locations of extant objects can ever be fully known.⁶⁹

After the death of the Qianlong emperor in the late eighteenth century, three successive Qing rulers inhabited the Yuanmingyuan. Yet as China’s economy worsened in the early-mid nineteenth century, few new buildings were added, and existing structures were rarely maintained or repaired. Nevertheless, by the mid-nineteenth century, the imperial complex had undergone expansion in one form or another for over 150 years. The huge size, precise and exquisite landscaping, extraordinary buildings, and priceless objects made the Yuanmingyuan, in Wong’s words, “the greatest imperial garden China has ever built.”⁷⁰

The Looting of the Yuanmingyuan in 1860

While the Yuanmingyuan developed and expanded in this rarefied world over the course of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, wider geo-political shifts were to have a dramatic impact upon the fate of the site. The rise of Britain as an industrial and trading power in the early nineteenth century was matched only by the decline of China’s empire. Indeed the British, keen to expand their economic markets, declared war on China in 1839, on the pretext that quantities of their opium had been destroyed. The First Opium War (1839-42), as it became known, was the first time the Middle Kingdom had been invaded. China

⁶⁸ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 40.

⁶⁹ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 154. As Thomas observes, “we have almost no visual records of the palace”, and “most of the...objects remain dispersed and undocumented” (“Looting,” 1).

⁷⁰ *A Paradise Lost*, 1.

was unprepared for Britain's military offensive and the result, in 1842, was the country's defeat and the imposition of the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing. Tensions escalated over the following decade, culminating in a Second Opium War (1856-60), and the even more onerous, Treaty of Tianjin, of June 1858. When the Chinese refused to ratify the latter, relations between the countries deteriorated. In August 1860, James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin (1811 –1863) was placed in charge of an expeditionary force of 11,000 men, sent under the command of General Hope Grant (1808-1875) with the aim of making the Qing government acquiesce.⁷¹ The capture and torture of the British Consul and a number of other members of the invading force in September 1860 was the excuse for the British and French⁷² to attack the capital, Beijing.

On the night of 6 October 1860, French troops were the first to arrive at the Yuanmingyuan, followed by the British, the imperial family having fled.⁷³ The French General Montauban⁷⁴, along with Elgin and Hope Grant toured the site to identify trophies to present to Queen Victoria and Emperor Napoleon III: after this, the grounds were “opened up to all soldiers.”⁷⁵ The accounts of the military attest to the atmosphere of frenzy that overcame soldiers in the various buildings. Wolseley wrote how the “indiscriminate plunder

⁷¹ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 134.

⁷² The French joined the British due to the execution of one of their missionaries by the Chinese authorities in Guangxi province.

⁷³ Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 139. See also Hevia (*English Lessons*, 78-80) for further descriptions of the looting.

⁷⁴ Charles Guillaume Montauban (1796–1878) was in charge of the French forces during the Second Opium War.

⁷⁵ Thomas, “Looting,” 8.

and wanton destruction of all articles too heavy for removal commenced at once.”⁷⁶ The British soldier, Tulloch, described men, “off their heads with the excitement of looting a palace and for no apparent reason tearing down grand embroideries.”⁷⁷ Witnessing one man smashing a large mirror with the butt of his rifle, he wrote that “With the feelings of a boy suddenly told to take what he likes in a pastry-cooks shop, I was puzzled where to begin.”⁷⁸ Swinhoe commented on the emperor’s throne room, “filled with crowds of foreign soldiers and the throne floor covered with the Celestial Emperor’s choicest curios.”⁷⁹ While the French camps were strewn with textiles, the troops ran “hither and thither in search of further plunder.”⁸⁰ Some soldiers even dressed themselves up mockingly in the embroidered silk clothing worn by Chinese women.⁸¹ Swinhoe observed that “Most of the Frenchmen were

⁷⁶ Garnett Wolseley, *Narrative of the War with China in 1860* (Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862), 224. Garnet Joseph, 1st Viscount Wolseley (1833-1913) was deputy-assistant quartermaster-general under the command of General Hope Grant. He later became Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces (1895-1900).

⁷⁷ Alexander Tulloch, *Recollections of Forty Years’ Service* (Memphis: General books: repr. Blackwood and sons, 1903, reprint 2010, 55.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁹ Robert Swinhoe, *Narrative of the North China campaign of 1860 containing personal experiences of Chinese character, and of the moral and social condition of the country; together with a description of the interior of Peking*, 1861 (London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1861: repr. 2005), 296. Robert Swinhoe (1836-1877) was an ornithologist and consul in China at Amoy, Ningpo and Chefoo.

⁸⁰ Wolseley, *Narrative of the War with China in 1860*, 226.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

armed with large clubs, and what they could not carry away, they smashed to atoms.”⁸²

According to Ringmar, “rolls of the emperor’s best silk were used to tie up the army’s horses”⁸³:

The soldiers broke into the Wenyuanko [sic] library, tore up scrolls and used old manuscripts as torches or to light their pipes. Some soldiers played pitch and toss against the large mirrors, other took cock-shots at chandeliers. Soon the floors were covered with fur robes, jade ornaments, porcelain, sweetmeats, and wood carvings.⁸⁴

[INSERT FIGURE 1.3 HERE]

1.3. Illustration of the looting of the Haiyangtang by Anglo-French forces in 1860.

Godefroy Durand, L’Illustration, 22 December 1860.

Hevia has speculated on the motivations of these soldiers, noting how they tended to be drawn to objects linked in some way to the body of the emperor⁸⁵- imperial textiles, armour, jade *ruyi* sceptors, throne cushions, seals, the “Cap of the Emperor of China”, a carved screen “from behind the Emperor’s throne”, things from the emperor’s personal apartments, such as a book covered in jade thought to be the “sayings of Confucius”, a Tibetan cup labelled as the “skull of Confucius”⁸⁶, and a “lion dog” ironically named “Looty”.⁸⁷ European objects too,

⁸² *Narrative of the North China campaign*, 306.

⁸³ *Liberal Barbarism*, 4.

⁸⁴ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 71.

⁸⁵ *English Lessons*, 86-7.

⁸⁶ See Nick Pearce, “From relic to relic: a brief history of the skull of Confucius,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 26, 2. (2014): 207-222.

being more familiar, were attractive for the looters⁸⁸- clocks and watches, the tapestry and other gifts from Louis XV. Hill asserts specific meanings attributed to the loot: “The precious book, taken from the Emperor’s private quarters after his flight, signified his cowardice and personal defeat at the hands of the barbarians with whom he refused to negotiate. The vases from the hall where Lord Macartney had laid out gifts for the Qianlong emperor...represented his displaced authority.”⁸⁹ Objects thus functioned for the soldiers as trophies of war, symbols of subjugation.

The French are generally credited with more looting than the British. Swinhoe and Tulloch described the French camp as “revelling in silks and bijouterie.”⁹⁰ Hevia argues that the French General was happy to “let the loot fever run its course”, whereas the British were more systematic. Hill notes how their “primary areas of interest were trophies (military supplies, official dress and insignia), luxury goods (porcelain and silk), and curiosities (sacred art, pictures and carvings).”⁹¹ Porcelain and silk were, of course, most avidly collected, with cloisonné and jade taken too, along with lacquer, bronzes and jewellery.⁹²

⁸⁷ See Hevia, *English Lessons*, 86-7. “Looty” was taken by Capt. Hart Dunne of the 99th Regiment and presented to Queen Victoria. A painting of it by Frederick William Keyl is in the Royal Collections. See Martin McIntyre, *The Wiltshire Regiment, 1756-1914* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 30.

⁸⁸ Hevia, *English Lessons*, 87.

⁸⁹ “Collecting on Campaign,” 17.

⁹⁰ *Narrative of the North China campaign*, 299; Tulloch, *Recollections of Forty Years’ Service*, 54.

⁹¹ “Collecting on Campaign,” 22.

⁹² See Hill, “Collecting on Campaign,” 16.

Paintings and calligraphy were, as Thomas observes, of little interest, with books at the bottom of the looters' lists.⁹³

After the plunder, commissions were set up by both armies. France's loot commission was presided over by lieutenant-colonel Dupin - the man who stole the "40 Views" - and two others⁹⁴: they identified seven objects for Gros, the Minister of War, as well as for "five to six military leaders."⁹⁵ Hevia asserts how they were concerned to identify the "right sort of Qing imperial objects" as gifts for Napoleon III and Eugénie⁹⁶, in order to "transfer", as Thomas asserts, the "political and cultural prestige attached to the emperor's belongings to their own sovereigns."⁹⁷ Montauban was presented with three jade necklaces.⁹⁸ The commission then despatched the remainder to France.

On 9 October, Hope Grant ordered that all loot (excepting objects acquired from the French) was to be turned over to a British prize committee.⁹⁹ An auction was then held in a hall on the grounds of the Tibetan Buddhist Western Yellow Temple (*Xihuang si*) next to the

⁹³ "Looting," 9.

⁹⁴ Chiu, *Yuanming Yuan*, 309; Thomas, "Looting," 9.

⁹⁵ Thomas, "Looting," 11. As he states, "Following Chinese recommendations, they first took two jade and gold scepters...signifying the heavenly sanctioned absolute authority of the monarch." ("Looting," 10.)

⁹⁶ James Hevia, "Looting Beijing: 1860, 1900," in *Tokens of Exchange*, ed. Lydia He Liu (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 194.

⁹⁷ "Looting," 10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁹ James Hevia, "Loot's fate: the economy of plunder and the moral life of objects from the Summer Palace of the Emperor of China," *History and Anthropology* 6, 4 (1994): 321.

British Camp on 11 October, lasting two days.¹⁰⁰ By all accounts, it was an extraordinary assemblage, with objects gaining high prices.¹⁰¹ Most notably, an imperial gold ewer was purchased by the commission and presented to General Grant, now in the National Museum of Scotland - the subject of McLoughlin's chapter (7) and also discussed by Pearce (chapter 3) (see fig 7.1). Gordon acquired one of the emperor's thrones, which was later presented to his military corps in Chatham – an acquisition highlighted by Scott in chapter 6 (see fig 6.1).¹⁰² The prize money, totalling £26, 000, was divided up among officers and men, distributed in relation to rank.¹⁰³

On 18 October, in retaliation for the torture and execution of around 20 European and Indian hostages, Elgin ordered the complete destruction of the buildings in the Yuanmingyuan. The French took no part: indeed, ambassador Gros protested the destruction.¹⁰⁴ Over 4, 800 British troops were needed to set the complex ablaze, a conflagration which lasted two days.¹⁰⁵ Apart from the foreign-style palaces, most of the

¹⁰⁰ Hevia, "Loot's fate," 323; Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 73.

¹⁰¹ Hevia, "Loot's fate," 324.

¹⁰² See also Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 73 and Hevia, "Loot's fate," 324. Major General Charles Gordon (1833-1885) was one of the most important 'sappers' of the nineteenth century, and as Scott in this volume notes, still venerated figure within the Corps of Royal Engineers, almost as a martyr, due to his death in 1885 at the hands of the Mahdist forces in Khartoum.

¹⁰³ Hevia, *English Lessons*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, "Looting," 12.

¹⁰⁵ Hevia, *English Lessons*, 74, 107; Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 4.

buildings were constructed from cedarwood and, therefore, burned quickly.¹⁰⁶ Defeated by these actions, Prince Gong (1833-1898)¹⁰⁷ signed a treaty with the British on 24 October, and with the French the following day. China was forced to pay eight million taels of silver to Britain and France to cover the cost of the war, cede Kowloon to the British, legalize the opium trade and grant Christians full civil rights and access to all regions. Having succeeded in imposing all their demands on China, the two triumphant armies were withdrawn from Beijing by 1 November 1860.¹⁰⁸

The destruction of the Yuanmingyuan was received in different ways in the two conquering countries. While to an extent criticized by British politicians, it drew vociferous condemnation from some quarters in France, the most renowned being the letter written in November 1861 by Victor Hugo.¹⁰⁹ The looting and destruction of the Yuanmingyuan has been considered one of the most extreme examples of imperialist aggression of the nineteenth century, and even, as Hill suggests, “one of the worst acts of cultural vandalism of all time.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Prince Gong was the half-brother of the Xianfeng emperor who concluded the negotiations with the British and the French.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, “Looting,” 12.

¹⁰⁹ Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism*, 82; Thomas, “Looting,” 14, 16.

¹¹⁰ “Collecting on Campaign,” 1. She cites Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism* and Wong, *A Paradise Lost*.

Yuanmingyuan Objects in Britain and in France

*Today's estimate is that around 1.5 million objects were either looted or destroyed by British and French troops in October 1860; a proportion of the former is now located in more than 2,000 museums in 47 countries around the world.*¹¹¹

What, then, of the loot? Objects from the Yuanmingyuan were brought back by soldiers to Britain and France, and, as early as April 1861, sold at auctions in London.¹¹² Between 1861 and 1897, over 1,300 objects were auctioned at Phillips, and Christie, Manson and Woods. The latter acknowledged openly in their sale of 27 May 1861 that the range of pieces had been “taken from the Summer Palace of Peking” (see fig 5.1). Artefacts were labelled “Chinese curiosities” in the sale of 12 June 1861, and on 5 July as “magnificent enamel, bronzes & from the Summer Palace at Peking”. Various auctions the following year described Yuanmingyuan material as “fine enamels and silks”¹¹³, “magnificent enamels, porcelain and silks”¹¹⁴, “magnificent enamels”¹¹⁵, and a “very choice collection of ancient Chinese porcelain, enamels and carvings, and jade, including specimens of extreme Rarity and

¹¹¹ According to the Director of the Yuanmingyuan, Chen Mingjie. Cited in Macartney, “China in worldwide treasure hunt for artefacts looted from Yuan Ming Yuan Palace”.

¹¹² The author has documented 22 auctions between April 1861 and February 1897 at Christie, Manson and Woods, and Phillips of 1, 329 objects from the Summer Palace (see also Hevia, *English Lessons*, 92-95, and Thomas, “Looting,” 16).

¹¹³ 15 May 1862.

¹¹⁴ 22 May 1862.

¹¹⁵ 30 June 1862.

Beauty.”¹¹⁶ Compared with the blue and white-willow pattern and export wares pervasive in Europe up until this time, the sudden influx of high quality, exquisitely crafted objects from China’s imperial collection must have astounded these London auctioneers.

From the open market, artefacts made their way to dealers’ shops, private collections and public museums. Major displays of Yuanmingyuan loot took place, most notably at the 1862 International Exhibition in London (See Hill chapter 4, and figs 4.1 and 4.2).¹¹⁷ As well as in the metropolis, numerous displays were held up and down the UK, as Hill’s work in this volume demonstrates (chapter 4). Yuanmingyuan objects also, of course, ended up in a range of public museums in Britain, as well as regimental collections.¹¹⁸

[INSERT FIGURE 1.4. HERE]

¹¹⁶ 21 July 1862. Thomas notes how these were usually grouped as “jade, lacquer ware, ivory, silk, and porcelain, along with miscellany such as fans, small bronzes, gems and gold jewellery, weapons and all manner of souvenirs...” (“Looting,” 16).

¹¹⁷ Hevia, “Loot’s fate,” 327-8. This took place from 1 May to 15 November 1862 (See J.B. Waring, *Masterpieces of industrial art & sculpture at the International Exhibition, 1862* (London: Day & Sons, 1863). One of the most significant objects here was the so-called “Skull of Confucius”. See Pearce’s biography of this, “From relic to relic”.

¹¹⁸ See Hill, “Collecting on Campaign”; Louise Tythacott, “Trophies of War: Representing ‘Summer Palace’ Loot in Military Museums in the UK,” *Museum and Society* 13, 4 (2015): 469-488.

Figure 1.4. Anonymous, “French Spoils from China Recently Exhibited at the Palace of the Tuileries,” in the *Illustrated London News*, vol. 38, April 13, 1861, p. 334.

©Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans Picture Library.

In France, a triumphant exhibition of Chinese “curiosities”, given to the Emperor Napoleon III by the expeditionary army, was displayed at the Tuileries in Paris in early 1861 (see fig 9.1).¹¹⁹ Primarily military paraphernalia, it included “the ‘Chinese emperor’s costume’, rifles, pistols, swords, daggers, halberds, and saddles. There were two *ruyi* or imperial sceptres, a gilded and bejewelled stupa, a guardian figure with flaming head and tail, a large square covered urn, and a bronze bell.”¹²⁰ The drawing in the *Illustrated London News* refers to them as the “booty”, “sacred relics” and “curiosities of the Chinese collection at the Tuileries.” (see figs 1.5 and 10.2)¹²¹ The military material was then given to the Artillery Museum, now the Musée de l’Armée, and can be seen today on prominent display in the “Cabinet Oriental”.¹²² The set of “40 Views”, taken by Dupin, is presently in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.¹²³ Between December 1861 and April 1863, at least seven

¹¹⁹ Xavier Salmon, *Le Musée chinois de l’impératrice Eugénie* (Château de Fontainebleau, 2011), 23. Thomas, “Looting,” 15. The Tuileries was Napoleon’s III’s primary residence.

¹²⁰ Hevia, *English Lessons*, 95-96.

¹²¹ ILN, 13 April 1861: 334, 339, in Hevia, *English Lessons*, 96.

¹²² The collections of the Artillery Museum and the Army Historical Museum were merged in 1905. See also Thomas, “Looting,” 17. The author visited the displays in March 2016.

¹²³ Charles Dupin put it up for auction at the Hôtel Drouot in February 1862 for 300,000 francs. When it didn’t sell, he passed it on to a dealer for a mere 4,000 francs, who sold it a

auctions of “Palais d’Été” material took place at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris and, one of the most vocal critics of the loot, Victor Hugo, even acquired his own personal collection. Montauban presented several hundred pieces to the imperial couple – Napoleon III and Eugénie. Inspired by these gifts, Eugénie created displays of “Oriental curiosities” in a redesigned wing of the Palace of Fontainebleau. Here, some of the most significant Yuanmingyuan treasures – porcelain, jades, cloisonné, gold, lacquer, bronzes, and paintings – were placed on exhibition in 1863 (see fig 10.3). As Thomas argues, these were a way to “reinforce” France’s imperial status during the reign of Emperor Napoleon III”, which depended upon “recognition of similarity and even equivalence between China’s imperial culture and France’s own royal and imperial heritage.”¹²⁴ Even today, several hundred Chinese objects can be seen in Fontainebleau’s Musée Chinois - discussed by Droguet and Thomas in chapters 9 and 10 (see figs 9.2, 9.3, 9.4. 10.1 and 10.4).

One of the key works on the dispersal of the looting of Yuanmingyuan objects, James Hevia’s, *English Lessons* (2004), was the first to analyze the trajectories and locations of the material in the West. In particular, Hevia highlighted the shifting meanings attached to Summer Palace things, variously depicted as “prizes of war, as military trophies, as gifts for British and French monarchs, as commodities for sale on the international auction market, as museum pieces, as objects to be put on display at international expositions, as curiosities, and later as high art.”¹²⁵ Hevia noted how, at each location, objects acquired “new meanings, ones which rather than clarifying their status, embedded them more deeply in alien discourses and

month later to the imperial library for 4,200 francs, later known as the Bibliothèque National de France (Kleutghen, “Heads of State,” 18, and Thomas, “Looting,” 8).

¹²⁴ “Looting,” 1.

¹²⁵ *English Lessons*, 16.

exotic modes of cultural production.”¹²⁶ Above all, he conceptualizes 1860 loot as signifying imperial humiliation¹²⁷: “What more commanding image could there be for the constitution of colonising subjectivities than the appropriation of the signs of another ‘sovereign’ and the assimilation of these signs to oneself.”¹²⁸ Yuanmingyuan treasures thus functioned as “material proof” of British power over China.¹²⁹

In particular, once relocated to Britain or France, Yuanmingyuan material was reformed to fit the aesthetics and tastes of the time - visual transformations which are taken up in this volume by Hill (chapter 4), Pierson (chapter 5), Droguet (chapter 9) and Thomas (chapter 10). Some pieces became hybridized – the chandelier at Fontainebleau, for example, which, dismembered and reconfigured, still hangs as the centrepiece of Eugénie’s Musée Chinois (see Droguet, chapter 9 and Thomas, chapter 10, and figs 9.4, 10.1 and 10.3); or the separation of the “skull of Confucius” and its radical re-conceptualization after the 1862 Exhibition, as noted by Pearce (chapter 3).¹³⁰ Hill and Pierson (chapters 4 and 5) assert that before the arrival of this imperial material few high quality Chinese objects had been widely seen in Europe.¹³¹ The collection and display of Yuanmingyuan artefacts in Britain and France from the 1860s on thus represented a pivotal shift in the idea of Chinese “art” in the West. Cocks notes how...”connoisseurs realized that for the first time they were seeing the art made for the elevated tastes of the Imperial Court instead of the Western export trade.”¹³²

¹²⁶ “Loot’s fate,” 320.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹²⁹ Hevia, “Looting Beijing: 1860, 1900,” 196.

¹³⁰ “From relic to relic,” and also Harris, *The Museum on the Roof of the World*, 34-38.

¹³¹ Most Chinese things were low quality export wares.

¹³² 1980:129 cited in Hevia, “Loot’s fate,” n331.

Pearce too writes that 1860 was a “watershed in terms of a shift in taste and of interest by Europeans in Chinese art, as it marks the development in the taste for elaborate eighteenth-century jades, porcelains, and enamels in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth-century.”¹³³

Today, Yuanmingyuan material in Western museums is highly politicized, and is sometimes difficult to locate either on display or in store. As noted earlier, it is not always clear which of the thousands of buildings in the imperial gardens these objects originated from, and a number of chapters - Pearce (chapter 3), Pierson (chapter 5) and Scott (chapter 6) - address the problems of the accurate provenance of the artefacts. Pierson, for example, notes how the Victoria & Albert Museum no longer had a case with tiles and related objects from the Summer Palace after the refurbishment of the ceramics galleries in 2009 (chapter 5, footnote 1). Some museums do indeed indicate Summer Palace provenance on their display labels¹³⁴; but many others do not.¹³⁵ By contrast, Yuanmingyuan material is generally easier

¹³³ “From relic to relic,” 214. Weber argues that “Summer Palace” loot represented a “turning point” in the collecting of cloisonné in Europe (Susan Weber, “The Reception of Chinese Cloisonné Enamel in Europe and America,” in *Cloisonné: Chinese enamels from the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*, ed. Beatrice Quette, Beatrice (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2011), 189.

¹³⁴ For example, the Lady Lever Art Gallery on Merseyside or the Wallace Collection in London.

¹³⁵ For example, the Army Museum in Paris, the British Museum, as well as the V&A.

to identify in regimental museums in the UK, for here objects tend to be unapologetically conceptualized as “trophies of war”.¹³⁶

Book Structure

The book derives from a conference at the University of Manchester in 2013, and many of the papers included represent previously unpublished research. In the first section on overviews, James Hevia explores the representation of the looting in China today and the construction of the Yuanmingyuan as a “site of memory”. He examines too the politics around the auction sales of various Yuanmingyuan objects in the West, and discusses the “collective biographies” of loot from the auctions, public displays and museums, with a particular focus on the renowned set of 12 zodiac heads. Nick Pearce’s chapter addresses the difficulty of establishing provenance, raising the question of the authenticity of Summer Palace material via a series of cases studies of objects and auction sales. Like Hevia, he highlights the irony of the foreign inspired zodiac heads morphing into symbols of China’s national identity. Both contributors address the contentious sales of these zodiac heads, especially the rat and rabbit heads at Christie’s in Paris in 2009.

In Part II, on objects in Britain, Katrina Hill identifies the relationships between the influx of Yuanmingyuan objects in the UK and design reform in the late nineteenth century. In her exploration of the reception of these objects in Britain, she notes the astonishing variety of places where the “spoils” were displayed from the 1860s. Stacey Pierson discusses the impact of the introduction of new objects from the Yuanmingyuan in the West in the late nineteenth century, focussing specifically on ceramics as a new category of “imperial art”.

¹³⁶ See Scott in this volume and Tythacott, 2015. The author has undertaken research in 11 military museums over the past few years, as part of a wider research project on representations of Summer Palace loot.

Analyzing the notion of Summer Palace provenance, she clarifies how objects were received by collectors and incorporated into the canon of art. James Scott's chapter is devoted to the representations of Summer Palace material at the Royal Engineers Museum in Kent - the largest grouping of objects from the Yuanmingyuan displayed as such in the UK. He examines issues raised by the current exhibition and its interpretation, providing a critical appraisal of the gallery and touching upon the fraught issue of restitution. Kevin McLoughlin relates the biography of a single object from the Yuanmingyuan – the gold ewer, now in the collections of the National Museums Scotland – and analyzes different readings of the piece, especially within the museum, from its arrival in 1884 to the present.

Part II is devoted to Yuanmingyuan material in France. John Finlay's chapter explores images of the Yuanmingyuan in eighteenth-century France, with a particular focus on the collections of Henri Bertin. He discusses the "40 Views" in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and demonstrates French knowledge of the imperial gardens at this time via paintings and illustrations. Vincent Droguet's chapter provides an overview of the history of the displays of Yuanmingyuan loot, first in Paris, then the Château of Fontainebleau. This chapter documents the history of the construction and design of the Musée Chinois during the reign of Napoleon III in the late nineteenth century. Greg Thomas takes up the depiction of material culture at Fontainebleau, interpreting the exhibits as creating an effect of "cultural dialogue" rather than one of "domination". By examining the layers of interpretation - the fusion of design, the bringing together of French and Chinese aesthetics in novel cross-cultural, hybridized forms – he argues for the idea of imperialism's "innate heterogeneity".

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bronzes, lacquer ware, cabinets, boxes, &c. and some beautiful Chinese enamels, crystals, &c. from the Summer Palace, Peking, the property of a gentleman ... Christie, Manson & Woods... May 27, 1861. London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1861.

Christie, Manson & Woods. *Catalogue of the very valuable collection of ancient porcelain, enamels, bronzes, &c. &c. formed with taste and judgment during a long residence in China, by W.R. Adamson, Esq. A choice cabinet of carvings in jade, and other Chinese works of art and curiosities, property of an officer of Fane's Horse, brought from the Summer Palace at Peking ... Christie, Manson & Woods ... June 6, 1861. London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1861.*

Christie, Manson & Woods. *Catalogue of a very choice collection of the finest old japan lacquer work including specimens of great rarity and beauty), received from the well-known traveller and connoisseur, Robert Fortune, Esq. and some magnificent enamel, bronzes, &c. from the Summer Palace at Peking ... Christie, Manson & Woods ... July 5, 1861. London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1861.*

Christie, Manson & Woods. *Catalogue of a collection of Oriental porcelain, bronzes, jade and soapstone, ornaments & Japanese lacquer, formed by Edwin Wadman, Esq. during seventeen years' residence in China and Japan. Also some fine enamels and silks taken from the Summer Palace at Peking, by an officer in Her Majesty's service ... Christie, Manson & Woods ... May 15, 1862. London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1862.*

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