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The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan

Or, How to Enjoy a National Wound

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Yuanmingyuan (Garden of Perfect Brightness), or the Old Summer Palace, was once a massive complex of gardens, pavilions, lakes, hills, and pleasure grounds. After it was looted and burnt down by Anglo-French troops in 1860, it commenced a long “afterlife” as a site of farmsteads, factories, school campuses, a bohemian colony, and a public park. This article explores the politics of spatial configuration and signification, or “the relations of proximity,” in the present-day Ruins Park by revisiting the debates of the 1990s surrounding restoration/development issues, the disquiet over the *xiyanglou* ruins in literary and visual representations, and a more recent environmental controversy that has brought a new political life to the park. Analytically, the author proposes to read the park as a heterotopia of multiple emplacements: ruinscape, gardenscape, Disneyscape, and civicscape. As such, the park is a spatial metaphor of contemporary China and a schooling ground for the art of socialist neoliberal citizenship.

Keywords: *Yuanmingyuan; Summer Palace; ruins; heterotopia; object lesson; space*

Yuanmingyuan (Garden of Perfect Brightness, also known as the Old Summer Palace) was built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a summer palace for the Qing emperors. Located in northwestern Beijing, it was a massive complex of gardens, villas, pavilions, lakes, hills, and pleasure grounds that collected architectural and landscape wonders from China and Europe and housed a wealth of priceless treasures. After being looted and burnt down by Anglo-French troops in 1860 at the end of the Second Opium War, it commenced its “afterlife” as a repository of building materials, farmland, garbage dumps, factories, campuses, public

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park, and a fairground. According to one account, in the century following its initial destruction in the infamous conflagration (*huojie*), Yuanmingyuan also underwent the “calamities” of wood (*mujie*), stone (*shijie*), and soil (*tujie*). The latter three calamities refer to the burning of trees during the allied occupation of Beijing in 1900 on the heels of the Boxer Rebellion, the plundering of marble and tiles by warlords during the Republican period, and the reclamation efforts by farmers and “sent-down” professors during the Mao period (Wang, 1999: 406-14). As a result, for much of the twentieth century the few clusters of broken stone pillars and pedestals of the European-style gardens on the northeastern edge of the garden complex, commonly referred to as the *xiyanglou feixu* (ruins of the European palaces), were practically the only visual reminder of Yuanmingyuan’s former glory.

When archeologists, city planners, and scholars turned their attention to Yuanmingyuan in the 1980s, they were alarmed and dismayed to find it haphazardly carved up and nonchalantly utilized. The once forbidden ground of imperial prerogatives and the primal site of national trauma was irreverently absorbed into the postsocialist topography of everyday life. With the dual ascendancy of nationalism and capitalism in the 1980s, Yuanmingyuan could no longer be left alone. It began to pain those who visited it with its buried meanings as well as buried profit. A governmental bureau and a scholarly committee were formed, symposia and writing forums (*bihui*) were held, and restoration and preservation plans were drawn up and debated. The present-day Yuanmingyuan Ruins Park (*Yuanmingyuan yizhi gongyuan*) is a product of this two-decade-long process of resurrecting the “fallen” site and transforming it into a national monument and a revenue generator.

In the summer of 2004 and 2005, I visited the Yuanmingyuan Ruins Park as a tourist and researcher. The only previous visit I had made was in the fall of 1986 when, shortly after I arrived in Beijing as a college freshman, our class president organized a Mid-autumn Festival outing to the park. At that time the park charged no entrance fee, so we barged straight in on our bicycles and soon settled down at the foot of the Grand Waterworks pillars. We laid out our mooncakes and snacks and immediately launched into small talk, only occasionally lifting our eyes to gaze at the moon behind the eerily majestic pillars. We were far more interested in one another than in either the moon or the ruins—it was exhilarating to be socializing with members of the opposite sex away from the watchful gaze of parents and teachers.

On my two recent trips nearly twenty years later, it struck me that, if my classmates were distractions for one another back then, there is far more to occupy/distract present-day visitors: the joy rides, souvenir shops, food stalls, restaurants, exotic exhibitions, and endless *jingdian* (scenic spots)

for composing snapshots. Local visitors holding discount passes rarely make it to the xiyanglou ruins; they are here to relax and enjoy the green space and/or amuse themselves and their children. Organized tour groups, by contrast, follow the prescribed route that culminates in the xiyanglou enclosure, which charges a separate admissions fee. Once they are inside the enclosure, the groups frequently break up for extended photo sessions. Much time is spent brainstorming on the angle and background of a shot or patiently shifting body position or limb configuration for the camera (Figure 1). Tour guides become more animated when regaling their listeners with descriptions of the sumptuous lifestyle of the court.

On my second trip, I tailed a group of mostly male high school teachers from Anhui, perhaps the poorest province of eastern China. Evidently the group's tour package did not include the extra 50 yuan for admission to the xiyanglou enclosure. Aware of the significance of the xiyanglou, the teachers complained vociferously to the guide, "How can you take us to Yuanmingyuan without showing us the ruins?" The guide retorted, "But your school didn't pay me the entrance fees. You don't expect me to pay out of my own pocket, do you? If you want to see the ruins, do it yourselves. Or you can just walk around—it's plenty big here." She then told them to meet her near the northern exit at a certain time. The group dispersed. Several of them headed for the xiyanglou, but, deterred by the admissions fee apparently too steep for a school teacher's salary, they began to walk alongside the corrugated iron fence and look in on the ruins and better-heeled tourists from a distance. "Without getting close to the stones," they wondered out loud, "how can we take good pictures?" However, before long, they came upon a section in the fence where the spikes were missing and the horizontal bars shone a bit from frequent rubbing. It was immediately evident that this section has been used by purse-conscious tourists to gain unpaid access to the xiyanglou. So the men promptly followed suit and climbed inside. Unable to resist the temptation, I too climbed over and immediately felt elated for having contravened the system and gotten away with it. As the teachers scattered, I ceased following them. But I wondered if they would return to Anhui to teach their students the standard object lessons of Yuanmingyuan as spelled out in textbooks, even though their own experience might have elicited more resentment against their penny-pinching school officials or anxiety about their low placement in the nation's economic ladder than against the distant imperialists.

Scholars have studied Yuanmingyuan from multiple angles, ranging from its pre-destruction architectural and landscaping splendor (Wong, 2001) and its fitful history of ruin and partial or aborted restorations, to its

Figure 1
Visitors Taking Snapshots in front of the Calm
Sea Hall (Haiyan Tang) Ruins



present ambivalent status as a totem of national shame and national pride (Barmé, 1996; Broudehoux, 2004; Hevia, 2003; Kutcher, 2003; Wang, 1999). This article focuses on the politics of spatial configuration and signification, or what Michel Foucault calls “the relations of proximity,” in the *present-day* Ruins Park. What does Yuanmingyuan mean to scholars, writers, artists, state officials, city planners, commercial developers, merchants, and tourists? How do they relate to it spatially and emotionally? To address these questions, I use two types of materials that I collected on the above-mentioned trips: discursive (public debates) and symbolic (visual and literary representations). I begin with the controversy over the proposed restoration/development plans in the mid-1990s and the clashes over how best to construct the object lessons of the ruins. In particular, I consider the disquiet over the most iconic section of the park: the xiyanglou ruins, which grace the covers of most guide materials and supply the background of countless tourist photographs. Next, I examine how visual and literary representations

produced by a variety of cultural actors (ranging from museum officials and photographers to patriotic tourists and dissident writers) vie to articulate the spatio-emotional life of the ruins. I then turn to a more recent controversy surrounding a waterproofing project that has brought a new political life to the park. In conclusion, I question the adequacy of reading Yuanmingyuan as a site of collective memory. Instead, I argue that it is a spatial metaphor of contemporary China and a schooling ground for the art of socialist neoliberal citizenship.¹

Trash and Treasure: The Object Lessons of Ruins

It is said that the Qianlong emperor had a dilettantish fascination with things foreign. Upon viewing some drawings of European-style gardens, Qianlong ordered the Jesuit priests in his employ to reproduce them on the site of the Yuanmingyuan imperial gardens. This standard account of the genesis of the famed European palaces, or *xiyanglou*, often sits uneasily with the equally standard summation of Yuanmingyuan as the crystallization of the creative genius of the Chinese laboring masses. Especially galling to some Chinese is the fact that, thanks to the accident of the choice of construction material, it is the remnants of the masonry-structured *xiyanglou* that have doggedly survived the many “calamities” and have come to stand for Yuanmingyuan iconographically. The primarily timber-structured Chinese-style palaces, villas, and pavilions, however magnificent they once were, had been thoroughly reduced to ashes by the two burnings. Without the *xiyanglou* pillars, Yuanmingyuan might have long fallen into historical oblivion, sharing the fate of earlier architectural wonders in Chinese history whose existence is now purely textual.

That Yuanmingyuan’s afterlife should come to be sited primarily in the *xiyanglou* ruins seems ironically in keeping with its cosmopolitan character.² As an imperial palace pleasance, Yuanmingyuan was a secular utopia that celebrated uncontested political power as well as unchecked indulgence in pleasure. For Foucault, a utopia is a special kind of “emplacement,” or a mode of configuring space, that is curiously connected to all other places (Foucault, 1998: 178). As the so-called “garden of all gardens” (*wanyuan zhi yuan*), Yuanmingyuan was connected to “other places” through its collector’s drive to assemble “all the variety and components of the universe” (Saussy, 2006: 159). If “gardens are the self-image of empire” (147), Yuanmingyuan was imperial in more than one sense in its ambition to be the ur-place that replicated and subsumed all real, living places,

including places that were decidedly inaccessible to the royalty, such as the marketplace.

The construction of the *xiyanglou* must be comprehended in the same imperial logic. It grew out of the desire not to leave any wonders out of the symbolic re-creation of “all under heaven” (*tianxia*). Yuanmingyuan as a utopia thus disavowed the “hierarchized ensemble of places” (Foucault, 1998: 176) that characterized the late imperial Chinese social world as well as the impossibility of inhabiting an empire—even if one claimed to own it. In this sense Yuanmingyuan was more accurately speaking a “heterotopia.” Heterotopias, in Foucault’s words, are “real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable” (178). In its heyday, Yuanmingyuan was one such actually realized utopia that aspired to “represent” all the other real emplacements that could be found both within the Manchu empire and the “Western oceans” (*xiyang*) that would not stand to be ignored. It was “the smallest parcel of the world and the whole world at the same time” and “a sort of blissful and universalizing heterotopia” (182).³

Through a century of destruction, the heterotopia of Yuanmingyuan has become a phantasm that can only be imagined and reconstructed according to construction records, drawings, engravings, eyewitness accounts, narratives of plundering and destruction, and postmortem photographs. In its place has arisen a different kind of heterotopia, that of ruinscape. The heterotopia of ruinscape is the Yuanmingyuan that is actually localizable now. It is anchored in the *xiyanglou* ruins but encompasses the entire site that is now being identified and reclaimed for the Ruins Park. It is akin to what Lydia Liu calls a “super-sign,” or a signifying chain that encompasses two or more heterolinguistic regimes (Liu, 2004: 13). It gathers disparate material and discursive elements into itself and binds their incompatibility into a heterotopia wherein the contradictions of post-socialism are displayed and negotiated. The posthumous prominence of its exotic gardens, the traumatic destruction at the hands of foreign troops, and the century-long process of expropriations are the alien forces that have permanently estranged Yuanmingyuan from its imaginary fullness of being.

In most accounts, Yuanmingyuan is an accidental heterotopia because it is the product of destruction, neglect, and anarchy. It therefore has to overcome this history of fortuitous emplacements in order to be true to itself. In the early twentieth century, Yuanmingyuan was sparsely populated by

eunuchs and gardeners and their kinsmen and descendants as well as farmers who cultivated crops on patches of the garden's grounds. After the founding of the People's Republic, the area was declared a municipal park/green space and left at that. In the years following the Great Leap Forward, nearby production teams began to cut down trees, flatten the hills and fill the lakes and waterways, make rice paddies, build hog and poultry farms, and set up factories and workshops.⁴ In the words of one scholar, the peasants turned Yuanmingyuan into "an unfettered kingdom, transforming it haphazardly according to their own fancy" (Wang, 1999: 413). This same scholar reveals that in those dreadful years, a group of Beijing University faculty, himself included, led by a production brigade head, spent a month pulling down rocks with ropes and crowbars and flattening out two islets: the result was a modest-sized crop field. But this was nothing compared to what has been done in more recent decades with bulldozers (414).

If the reclamation of the park space as farmland was excusable, if unfortunate, given the circumstances of post-1949 history, the presence of garbage heaps and grave mounds today in what was the heart of the original Yuanmingyuan (a walled-off area for mixed use to the west of the present Ruins Park) is considered highly offensive and clinches for many intellectuals the fundamental illegitimacy of the encroachment of everyday life. An article in the *Beijing Evening News* exclaims,

This sacred site—"the garden of all gardens"—has now become a festering ground crowded with garbage heaps, vegetable plots, pigsties, and beancurd presses! Motley groups of peasant and migrant families have converged here in the thousands to make a living and to multiply in a disorderly and slipshod manner, generating pollution at a shocking speed and hastening the final deterioration of Yuanmingyuan. (Wang, 1999: 800)

Another writer gives this account of his recent visit to Yuanmingyuan:

When I stood on the original site of "Nine Realms United in Peace Hall" and looked about me, I dared not try to conjure up its bygone splendor. I merely hoped to find a trace of the old site such as a brick or tile fragment. But even such a humble wish was not to be gratified. All I saw was piles and piles of trash, fly- and mosquito-infested ditches, and weed-covered grave mounds. Squeezed among these were pigsties, mushroom farms, beancurd presses, even stockpiles of construction materials. . . . No one with the slightest knowledge of Yuanmingyuan's history could stand amid such things and hold back their tears. Where were the world-renowned royal gardens? Where were the famed creations of the ingenious Chinese people? (Wang, 1999: 815)

The idea of Yuanmingyuan as a sacrosanct space that has been profaned by the products and byproducts of everyday life is striking when contrasted with the representations of manual labor in socialist narrative and iconography. Fields, livestock quarters, and construction sites used to be the prized topoi of socialist realism. Peasants were the sculptors of the socialist rural landscape with its vast vistas of undulating crop fields, extensive irrigation works, broad tree-lined roads, and shining farm implements. Workers stood tall and erect against the imposing machinery of socialist industrialization. In this Panglossian genre, the filth and stench of waste are filtered out and only clean smoke puffs out of factory chimneys.

As the reform era sought to replace a class-based nationalism with a culturalist one, Yuanmingyuan's primary identity as a national patrimony lost to imperialist robbers and vandals became crystallized in public discourse. Historians, city planners, municipal officials, and park managers vied to re-empower the site. As they sparred in public media and scholarly venues, the removal of the longtime inhabitants of Yuanmingyuan soon got underway. That Yuanmingyuan had been all along inhabited instead of a no-man's land was often acknowledged in passing, as an inconvenience, even nuisance, that needed to be addressed at a practical level. The question that preoccupied all parties in the debate was in what capacity should Yuanmingyuan proclaim its symbolic status—as a memorial to the injury inflicted on the body politic by imperialism or as a tribute to a crowning achievement of the Chinese people? In both scenarios, the pigsties and beancurd presses, the garbage heaps and grave mounds have nothing to contribute to the symbolism and must therefore be removed along with the people who produce and live by them. In both scenarios, Yuanmingyuan's drawn-out degradation after the initial destruction would be downplayed. Instead, it was to be a pristine site of history whose meaning was bracketed by two kinds of emplacement—ruinscape and gardenscape—with their corresponding modes of aesthetics: the aesthetic of ruins and the aesthetic of renewal.

Those who envisioned Yuanmingyuan as a gardenscape supported a partial restoration of the main Chinese sites (partial because the cost of full restoration is prohibitive). They focused their arguments on Yuanmingyuan's prelapsarian identity as the foremost imperial palace pleasure. The only proper way to honor and memorialize such a lost milestone of the Chinese civilization, they argued, was to rebuild the essential structures and re-create the key scenic foci. Traditionally, this was how later generations showed their reverence for the legacy of former generations: they copied masterpieces (of literature, calligraphy, art, or architecture) that were extant, restored those that had faded or eroded, and rebuilt those that had been lost to natural or

man-made disasters. One scholar argued that because Chinese architecture emphasized the relationship between a structure and its environs, no structure had intrinsic, irreplaceable aesthetic value. In fact, “a structure is beautiful only when it is new; once [the decorations] have faded and especially once the structure has collapsed, the beautiful turns into the ugly because the harmony with the environs has been destroyed” (Wang, 1999: 769).

The restorationists believed that, left alone, Yuanmingyuan would invariably deteriorate into a wasteland, something of absolutely no value, aesthetic or otherwise. Even more appalling, people would continue to regard the xiyanglou as *the* Yuanmingyuan and go there to mourn an ultimate Chinese tragedy in front of a few European-style marble columns. A historian interviewed by Norman Kutcher, for example, declared that nothing could be more embarrassing than when the “accumulated genius of Chinese architecture lies in a garbage heap, while the ruins of some Western-style building miles away, of little architectural or historical interest, have become symbols of Chinese nationalism” (Kutcher, 2003: 33-34). Zi Jun (who is quoted above denouncing the trash piles) firmly maintained that only a partially restored Yuanmingyuan could fully live up to its significance as a key site for patriotic education (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu de jidi*). The challenge was,

First, how can we harmonize patriotic education with the need for recreation and relaxation? How can we make visitors remember that this is the former Yuanmingyuan when they are rowing a boat on the lake or gazing at the flowers on the shore? Second, how can a few broken stones enable people to call to mind the magnificence of Yuanmingyuan two hundred years ago? How can they call to mind the savagery committed by foreign imperialists one hundred years ago in these resplendent gardens? (Wang, 1999: 765)

A restored Yuanmingyuan could accomplish these goals because the rebuilt structures would constitute a dramatic contrast and comparison (*fancha he duibi*) to the broken pillars of the xiyanglou, “thereby sending shock waves across the hearts of all visitors and arousing patriotic passions from a deep hatred for the imperialists” (Wang, 1999: 765).

The restorationists’ enthusiasm was mostly reserved for the Chinese sections; few had seriously considered doing the same for the xiyanglou. Their disputes with the anti-restorationists at times appeared moot, for what the latter objected to was any large-scale attempt to restore the xiyanglou, or, more precisely, to eliminate the ruins. The aesthetic and ideological purpose of the ruins would be irrevocably lost, they feared, if the broken pillars were made whole and if the rubble were cleaned out. An architecture

professor explained that the true value of the xiyanglou lay in its ruined state, whereas the original structures, built on the basis of fanciful paintings, were quite worthless architecturally speaking. He contended: “restoration would amount to eradicating the evidence of the destruction and covering up the crimes of the imperialists; tinkering [with the ruins] and altering their present state is tantamount to tampering with history” (Wang, 1999: 673).

Concerned that even routine maintenance can lead to unwelcome, even if well-intentioned, alteration, a city-planning expert urges those in charge always to keep the word *can* (broken, crippled, ruined) as the arch-referent of the Ruins Park: “The result of repair and cleanup should still be *can*, not ‘whole’ (*zheng*) or ‘new’ (*xin*); not only should the structures be kept in a state of ruin, the surrounding vegetation, pathways, and waterways should all exude the aura of ruin (*canxiang*)” (Wang, 1999: 681). He cautions that he is not speaking of literal brokenness (*ziran zhuyi de can*), but rather an aesthetic ideal that answers the visitors’ need for mourning and remembrance. “Only a ruinscape (*canjing*),” he concludes, “can inspire the imagination and arouse passion” (Wang, 1999: 681–82).

The emphasis on *can* signals a significant departure from the traditional aversion to the visualization of ruins. Although classical poetry can be highly poignant in its invocation of loss—the loss of a physical edifice and all that was associated with it: the splendor, the treasure, the people, the attachments, and the conviviality—pictorial representations of ruins are virtually nonexistent. According to Wu Hung, ruin images became legitimate only in modern visual culture. What distinguishes ruin images in avant-garde art from classical ruin poetry is “their emphasis on the present, their fascination with violence and destruction, their embodiment of a critical gaze, and their mass circulation” (Wu, 1998: 60). This critical gaze, it should be remembered, was adopted from nineteenth-century European photography whose images of “old China” continue to carry archaeological and anthropological interest even today. The internalization of this gaze led to the creation of “the first and most important modern ruin in China: the remains of the Yuanming Yuan,” thereby inaugurating a modern Chinese conception of ruins wherein “architectural remains surviving from war or other human calamities [are] a ‘living proof’ of the ‘dark ages’” (60–61).

Emplacing Yuanmingyuan as a ruinscape, the anti-restorationists were also ill disposed toward restoring the Chinese sections. Their objections were several. First, the absence of the Chinese sections allows the xiyanglou ruins to stand alone in stark wretchedness that accentuates their message and heightens their impact. Second, the almost certain shortage of funds and

workers with specialized training would result in ersatz antiquarianism, or, worse still, Disneyfication. Third, with nearly all of the original treasures missing or scattered across the globe, even a fully restored Yuanmingyuan would be no more than an empty shell. And last, restoration on any scale would invariably add stress to a fragile ecosystem and any misstep could trigger a disastrous chain of events among the park's constellation of lakes (including their fish and aquatic plants), trees, hedges, meadows, and small wildlife. This last line of argument dovetailed with the emerging environmental discourse, particularly the concept of "greater heritage" (*da yichan*), which maintained that both the cultural and natural components of the park should come under the protection of heritage laws (Gou and Li, 2005). Thus, not only must the xiyanglou pillars not be tampered with, every blade of grass should be protected from being made "useful." When the flora and fauna are treasured as a part of the national heritage, Yuanmingyuan is no longer a collection of absences or a gigantic void waiting to be filled with man-made things, for nature has stepped in with its cyclical costumes of myriad colors and shapes.

This is how a photographic album presents Yuanmingyuan (Liu, 2002). Featuring the work of Liu Jiwen, the official photographer of the park, the album gives the xiyanglou section proportionate (i.e., little) representation and dedicates far more space to "sights" that few readers would automatically associate with Yuanmingyuan. The majority of the over one hundred exquisitely composed photographs feature natural scenery arranged in arresting patterns of light, color, form, perspective, and texture. Each picture has a caption naming the site as the "ruin" (*yizhi*) of a former "sight" that once incorporated a noted structure or cluster of structures, even if there is now only a lone foundation stone or an oddly shaped Taihu rock lying about—or oftentimes not even that. What is interesting is that these admittedly "empty" frames are collated in the album as "sights" no less legitimate and worthy of the viewer's contemplative gaze as the xiyanglou columns. Only ruins, the wreckage of wounded pride and abandoned hubris, seem a fitting partner to nature redefined as ruinscape. All other "unnatural" elements, such as restored structures and modern facilities, are kept out of the main frames as much as possible.

Once composed by the camera lens, nature ceases to be mere wilderness. Its fullness of being seems to compensate for the double loss inflicted on the Chinese structures (destruction and obliteration); and the abundant visual pleasure it yields seems to suggest that a ruinscape need not connote a fatal lack. The defenders of the Yuanmingyuan ruins might not be cognizant of the context in which ruins emerged as the focal point of the intellectual

aspirations of an entire epoch in Europe, but they were equally intent on rendering Yuanmingyuan as “a landscape of sensibility” (Baridon, 1985: 84) and educating their countrymen to appreciate the aesthetic as well as political significance of a ruinscape. The restorationists’ response to this position was to question the suitability of the aesthetics of ruins to Chinese sensibilities. Zi Jun conceded that the ruins of masonry structures can carry a certain aesthetic value because Western architecture privileges the uniqueness and dominance of each structure vis-à-vis its surroundings, a quality that does not vanish entirely with the destruction of the structure proper. The stone facades and carvings can weather long passages of time and come to acquire a special kind of beauty. Hence, Westerners have consciously cultivated an aesthetic of ruins. But this aesthetic is completely out of place on Chinese soil and those spouting theories of “broken beauty” (*canque mei*) are merely trying to tie up “our” hands with foreign doctrines. “Beauty has never been an abstract concept,” he reiterated; “each nation, each era has its own understanding of beauty” (Wang, 1999: 769).

Just as the anti-restorationists’ argument did not rest on aesthetics alone, the plea of the restorationists also included other considerations, such as the prospect that the restored park would attract more visitors and this would in turn serve as the necessary financial stepping stones to future, more ambitious restoration projects. In the end, it was probably the economic argument, however low keyed, that won the restorationists a more sympathetic hearing from the decision makers. Some restorationists were not apologetic at all about adding an entertainment component to the park, contending that it is only appropriate for the citizens of the People’s Republic to avail themselves of the enjoyment that was once off limits to anyone but the royal family. One horticulture professor explicitly professed the desire to turn Yuanmingyuan into something that can rival the Disneylands in the United States and Japan: “Our Yuanmingyuan is far more famous than Disneyland. Once it is fully developed, it will surely attract visitors from all over the world” (Wang, 1999: 694).

The charge of Disneyfication is only to be expected. In an article published in the prestigious magazine *Dushu* (Reading), Chen Zhihua laments the market-driven approach to preserving cultural relics and heritage sites. The fatal combination of money worship and deficiency in cultural capital (*wenhua suyang*) has led to a veritable plague of ersatz antiquarianism in China: from the rent-a-mini-garden in Suzhou, to the souvenir-shop-lined streets of “ancient” villages, to the burly commercial chaos along the Badaling section of the Great Wall. In the case of Yuanmingyuan, even the most clueless of peasants have been drawn into the race for “development

and utilization” (*kaifa liyong*). Chen writes, “In the past we used to think of the working class as the wisest people. But as a matter of act, our peasants have not reached that level [of sophistication so as to be qualified to undertake preservation projects]” (Wang, 1999: 723). Thus, it irks him to learn that a rural township on the outskirts of Beijing has been permitted to invest in a “Primitive Totem Exhibition” on the Mind-Opening Isle (*Haiyue kaijin*) (Wang, 1999: 724).⁵

The totem isle is just a particularly egregious instance of the “folk culture” spawned by the market economy, according to Chen. He mentions that on a recent trip to Yuanmingyuan, he was deeply troubled not only by what he saw, but also by what he heard—the revving of jet-ski engines and the boom of drums and gongs. Also irritating was the addition of several high walls inside the park designed to ensure maximum revenue from ticket sales for a few sealed-off sections, so that one could no longer appreciate the expansive scale of Yuanmingyuan (Wang, 1999: 726). In this state of affairs, both the traditional aesthetics of remembrance and the imported aesthetics of ruins are sorely out of place. And Yuanmingyuan is merely joining the long line of heritage sites that have been rendered “coarse” and “vulgar” (*cubihua* and *disuhua*) by the market economy.

All the bemoaning notwithstanding, there is every reason to believe that the “coarse and vulgar” elements of mass amusement are here to stay, not least because tens of thousands have hitched their dreams of prosperity to the tourist industry. They are here to stay also thanks to the new legitimization of pleasure in the emplacement of Yuanmingyuan. The pain of loss and humiliation is always acknowledged, but pleasure is never far from consideration. The theme parks such as the totem isle are only blatant statements of the nation’s determined pursuit of happiness. More subtle is the fascination with a high life of gaiety and opulence that seems to lie just beneath the feet of the urbanites who daily traverse the pleasure ground of yesterday. How do various cultural actors cope with the juxtaposition of pain and pleasure? Can the facts of modern tourism, or the Disneyscape, be reconciled with Yuanmingyuan’s dominant emplacements as gardenscape and ruinscape?

Pain and Pleasure: The Emotional Life of Ruins

In his exhaustive survey of ruins around the world, Robert Ginsberg finds that the ruin of war and destruction usually “has a public dimension colored with the content of loss, pride, identification, continuity, suffering,

and survival” (Ginsberg, 2004: 109). Nearly all who contributed to the restoration debate, whichever side they took, agreed that Yuanmingyuan should be primarily a symbolic site conducive to fostering a range of moral-sentimental experiences for its visitors: from awe, pride, humiliation, rage, and resentment to patriotism. In an article detailing the four phases of Yuanmingyuan’s century-long destruction (the four “calamities”), Zhao Guanghua wrote almost rapturously about the aesthetic potential of the ruins left by the first conflagration: “From the angle of tragic art, the ruins presented an extremely moving sight. On one hand they exposed the atrocities committed by the vandals; on the other hand, they bore witness to the pulchritude of the gardens—all in a sensorially concrete manner” (Wang, 1999: 408). The pleasure bestowed by beauty is simultaneously subsumed by the sense of tragedy, thereby “bringing edification to visitors in a state of sensory pleasure, truly a seamless combination of enjoyment and education” (408). From the sublime experience afforded by the sight of the ruins, one comes into touch with “the hidden truth of history and the tide of justice” (408).

But this is only the imaginary workings of the early ruins that have since further deteriorated and been subjected to diverse use. In today’s Yuanmingyuan, how can such a simultaneously emotional, aesthetic, and moral experience be guaranteed for every visitor? Ginsberg believes that our encounter with ruins is inherently awkward and ambiguous:

The ruin as a whole gives this feeling of being out of joint, while we are out of step. Awkwardness is inherent in the ruin. The plan of visit is unclear, since the ruin has no purpose. Wandering comes to stumbling, distraction to disorientation, lack of direction to being lost. Initially, we feel ill-at-home in the ruin, since it does not accommodate our expectations for buildings. The ruin throws us off, makes us lose our pace, causes us to take a step back, and stops us on a step. (Ginsberg, 2004: 52)

Not surprisingly, the very setup of the Ruins Park aspires to contravene this sense of being ill at home and to turn disorientation to purposefulness. The park circumscribes and delineates each visit with a prefatorial address (inscribed on the entrance), guide materials, a continuous documentary film screening, signposts, site markers, drawings and models of the vanished structures, and topical exhibitions. There is also a sizable museum in which one can survey the history of Yuanmingyuan, view a complete model replica of Yuanmingyuan in its heyday, and gaze upon a few reclaimed objets d’art as well as a fragment of a charred tree trunk.

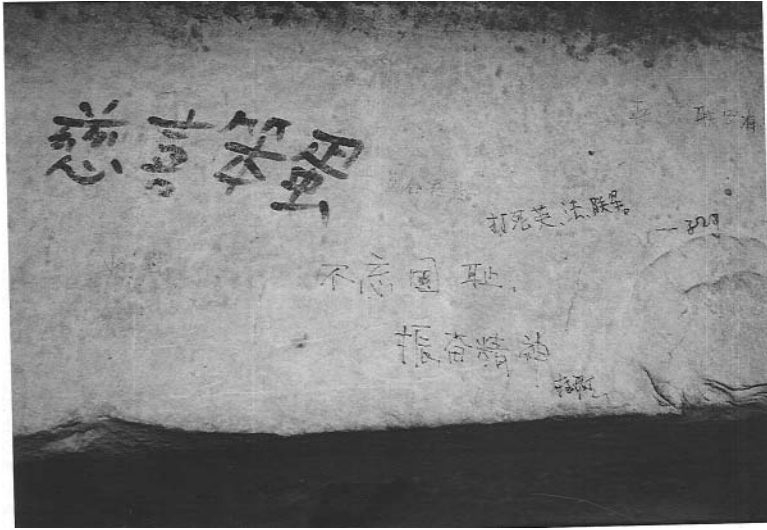
All this combines to impart the intended object lessons to visitors. Most tourists will enter the park from the southern main entrance (the palace gate of Qichunyuan). They will probably pause by a broken single-arch bridge, glance

at a few restored pavilions (leased to art dealers), be greeted by souvenir touts and the din of the mini theme parks, board a golf cart or a man-powered raft on the southern shore of the Sea of Blessing (*Fuhai*), and end up inside the enclosed xiyanglou section on the northern edge of the park. This standard route is also what infuriates many restorationists with its none-too-subtle way of treating the xiyanglou as the telos of the Yuanmingyuan tour.

Inside the xiyanglou, visitors can touch the few still-standing columns, climb up the foundations, or thread their way through the “Ten-Thousand Flower Maze” (*Wanhua zhen*), the only restored structure in this section, while imagining themselves as palace ladies holding aloft lotus lanterns vying to be the first to be greeted by the emperor seated in the center pavilion. The brooding type can linger quietly amid the rubble and perhaps carve out a line or two (*liuyan*) on the numerous stone fragments lying about (see Figure 2). A cursory survey of the carved testaments left by tourists since the mid-1990s indicates that the object lessons have been largely absorbed by visitors hailing from all corners of the country. Most slogans are variations of the theme of remembering the humiliations and injuries China suffered at the hands of foreign imperialists and of striving to make the fatherland wealthy and strong. A few also vow to wreak revenge on the British and French or to say “no” to foreign powers. The sloganeers usually sign off with their names, places of origin, and dates. A few have taken care to carve out poetic couplets or quatrains, a gesture reminiscent of the traditional literati practice of leaving behind calligraphic inscriptions at famous sites. Here, the impassioned scribblers seek to make permanent their self-inscription in the nationalist scriptural economy. Most tourists, however, choose the snapshot to capture the moment of encountering national history. More than any other location in the park, the xiyanglou is awash with posers and snap shooters, whose earnest efforts at selecting the best angle and background and whose concern about blinking eyes and interlopers in the frame turn the site into a node in the universal chain of modern tourism.

Many tourists do make a stop at the museum, especially the video room where a 50-minute documentary film called *The Vicissitudes of Yuanmingyuan* (*Yuanming cangsang*) is shown continuously. The film, released in 1990, is made in the high socialist realist mode with a newscaster’s voice-over, conventional editing techniques, and total absence of alternative voices. The first half tells the familiar story of the birth and destruction of the gardens. The Qing rulers, it begins, lavished resources on gardens and retreats because their Jurchen ancestors had roamed freely the “white mountains and black waters” of Manchuria and had passed down

Figure 2
Inscriptions Left by Visitors



their inveterate love of nature to their descendents. The emperors disliked the stifling atmosphere of the Forbidden City and preferred the Jiangnan-esque landscape of the western suburbs of Beijing. Here over the course of 150 years emerged a vast garden archipelago that embodied the perfect harmony between pastoral beauty and architectural elegance.

At this point, the tone of the voice-over shifts from eulogistic to grave, indignant, and sorrowful, and the *mise-en-scène* turns dark and ominous. The “fall” is narrated through juxtaposing shots of the “evil flames” and the resulting waste/ruins with drawings, photographs, and replicas of key sites already shown earlier. The film then lurches toward the rebirth with a transitional shot of sunset as the orotund voice-over asks rhetorically: “Does the brilliant glow on the horizon come from the flames of 1860? No!” Yuanmingyuan is now a park for the people, the narration goes on, and it has never seen such hustle and bustle, greeting some 200,000 visitors (including repeat visitors) a year. Thanks to the government’s effort at restoration and cleaning up, ordinary people can now come and enjoy the

wonders of Chinese civilization, relax and rejuvenate themselves on the waters or among the flowers and recall China's painful history. Student groups regularly come here to receive history lessons and nurture the park with their young hearts and voices. The film ends with a group of youngsters staging a song and dance performance at the xiyanglou ruins as the music swells to a crescendo.

The film is for all intents and purposes the official visual statement of Yuanmingyuan, endorsed by then Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin, who bestowed the title calligraphy. It takes a predictably omniscient approach and emphasizes the present, seeking to elicit uplifting emotions that will propel the nation into the future. But as the party re-anchors its legitimacy from the (communist) future to the (nationalist) past, and as consumerism spawns an intense nostalgia for imperial grandeur and cultural authenticity, a veritable cottage industry has sprung up since the mid-1990s to cash in on Yuanmingyuan's new found salience.

Accordingly, a newer documentary film for sale (in VCD format) in Yuanmingyuan's souvenir shops assumes an ethnographic perspective on the past and is less hard hitting with its moral-political message. Simply called *Yuanmingyuan* and sporting the calligraphy of the Kangxi emperor, the film departs from the publicly screened documentary in significant ways. First, it is primarily concerned with visually reconstructing and remembering the original Yuanmingyuan. For this it relies heavily on the technique of juxtaposition and superimposition. As if to insist on Yuanmingyuan's status as a super-sign, for every shot of a stretch of field or wooded area or shrubbery, a drawing of an ornate structure follows or sits atop the frame or slowly flits across the screen.⁶ As we watch the film, we learn to regard the drawn images as the true referent of what greets the camera/eye. We learn to look right through the mundane and the unremarkable in search of the wondrous and the sublime.

A corresponding shift is discernible in the iconography of Yuanmingyuan. The older iconographic image of the park consists solely of the broken but still majestic pillars and arches of the Grand Waterworks (*Dashuifa*) set against a blank background or an azure sky. The image is a perfect example of a logo in Benedict Anderson's definition: empty (of human figures), contextless, visually memorable, and infinitely reproducible (Anderson, 1991: 185).⁷ The newer icon of Yuanmingyuan tends to superimpose this logoized image onto a fuzzy reproduction of a drawing that features a dreamy array of Chinese palaces nestled in naturalistic environs (Figure 3). This new image cues us to fill in not only the missing parts of the Grand Waterworks but also the entire panoply of architectural and landscape wonders of Yuanmingyuan.

Figure 3
Cover of the VCD Documentary



Source: Courtesy of Zhongguo guangbo yinxiang chubanshe.

The abstraction of the pillars and their symbolic import have not changed dramatically, but the insistence on making the Chinese sections the constant referent of the familiar Yuanmingyuan icon is quite new.

Second, the newer documentary breaks with the monologic tradition of Chinese documentary making by inserting several interviews with scholars. With their expertise ranging from Qing history to garden history, these scholars offer history lessons and commentaries that do not diverge significantly from the official narrative and yet are couched in the idiom of intellectual inquiry based on historical research. We are invited to treat their remarks as knowledge rather than propaganda.⁸ In addition, the documentary features the official photographer of the park, Liu Jiwen, who guides the camera/viewer around the park on foot, seeking, pointing, explaining, and in the process bringing parts of the film to eye level and to sections that are off the beaten path of ordinary tourists.

The ethnographic drive is most palpable when Liu takes us to an area where all that greets the eye is a stretch of dirt road. He informs us that this

is the location of the Market Town (*Maimaijie*), the hub of earthly delights in the halcyon days of Yuanmingyuan. It was here that were held banquets, opera performances, fireworks displays, and a variety of seasonal festivals:

This is the Market Town. Don't pay much heed to the dirt and gravel. In the old days this was a prosperous and bustling market town with scores of stores, just like our Wangfujing Boulevard today [the busiest shopping district in Beijing]. The emperor came here with his ministers in tow to browse and shop while the eunuchs and palace ladies played attendants and clerks. Some of them even pretended to be thieves. There were also storytellers, minstrels, and sightseers.

Liu's source about the Market Town is likely a letter written in 1743 by the French Jesuit missionary Pierre Attiret (known as Wang Zhicheng in Chinese) which is full of the kind of fanciful descriptions that did much to fuel the *chinoiserie* fad in eighteenth-century Europe.⁹ He does not acknowledge his source since much of the testimony produced by Western eye-witnesses has passed into Yuanmingyuan lore. Perhaps there is also a sense that as a Chinese, he *should* be able to describe Yuanmingyuan—his cultural patrimony—without citing a Frenchman. The irony is that other than the royal household and its attendants, the only people who had ever had the good fortune to see Yuanmingyuan in its full glory and left records behind were the missionaries involved in the creation of the xiyanglou and a handful of foreign dignitaries such as Lord Macartney. The emperors themselves left behind voluminous poetic compositions (some 4,500 of them), but it was mostly foreigners who bequeathed to the world descriptive accounts of the gardens. These alien narratives are not always verifiable (e.g., the Market Town story), but they are nonetheless indispensable to historians and reconstruction experts. Europeans—as both creators and destroyers—have in a way become the ghostwriters of much of the historical ethnography about Yuanmingyuan that we encounter in scholarly work, official narratives, and popular representations.

Third, the documentary is liberally interlaced with clips from a feature film directed by the Hong Kong filmmaker Li Han-hsiang. Titled *The Burning of the Summer Palace (Huoshao Yuanmingyuan)*, 1983, the film tells the story of the Empress Dowager Cixi's rise to power as the Qing empire was increasingly battered by imperialist incursions, culminating in the abandoning of the capital to Anglo-French troops and the sack of Yuanmingyuan.¹⁰ The film, along with its companion production *Reign behind a Veil (Chuilian tingzheng)*, 1983, was hugely successful among

Chinese-speaking audiences, thanks in large part to its authentic-looking set, sumptuous visuality, and cultural nationalist bent. Significantly, Li chose Yuanmingyuan to stage the seduction of the Xianfeng emperor by the young Cixi (as Yulan). Shot on a lavish set built near the Ming tombs north of Beijing, the film offers many long shots of xiyanglou's baroque structures basking in soft spring sunlight, intercut with medium shots and close-ups of the famous waterworks, particularly the twelve water-spouting bronze zodiac animals (which supposedly took the place of a dozen nude statues in deference to Chinese sensibilities). The seduction sequence assails the viewer with a collage of erotic imageries, explicitly associating Yuanmingyuan with romantic passion and carnal transport. All this seems to be an effort to remedy its apparent deficiency in literary and artistic resonance. Geremie Barmé cites Rose Macaulay who argues that palace ruins afford a peculiar pleasure because "their luxurious past . . . drift[s] about them like a cultured and well-fed ghost, whispering of beauty and wealth."

Yet few cultured and well-fed ghosts disport themselves in the grounds of the Yuan Ming Yuan, and no real heroes' lives adorn its history; there is no individual whose tragic tale or sorry fate has given birth to a literature of melancholy or imagination that is associated with the palaces. (Barmé, 1996: 154–55)

Barmé contrasts the ghost-deprived Yuanmingyuan to Qin Shi Huangdi's Epang Palace immortalized by the Tang poet Du Mu and to the Great Wall—"the grandest of ruins"—to which the legend of Meng Jiang Nü is forever wedded (155). In European literature, crumbling edifices are the favored settings of gothic romance, so much so that when Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* arrives at the eponymous abbey, her overstimulated imagination hankers for an encounter with just these cultured and well-fed ghosts who would sate her appetite for a bygone world of unrequited love, intrigue, betrayal, and murder. Li's film is not deliberately evocative of gothic aesthetics, but its extravagant presentation of the seduction plot (with the added weight of star appeal) effectively repopulates Yuanmingyuan with romantic ghosts who both leaven and feed on our fantasies. Here, the emperors and his minions are no longer at the apex of a corrupt ruling class that midwived the collapse of the Qing empire and the decline of Chinese civilization. Instead, they are romantic heroes whose spectral shadows are beginning to turn Yuanmingyuan into an enchanted and consumable place for the masses.

There is reason to believe that the libidinal-aesthetic signification of Yuanmingyuan contributed heavily to the film's popularity. As the site of

royal seduction, Yuanmingyuan solicits tender longing rather than blunt rage. If screen time allotment is any indication, the film is clearly holding up nostalgia as a more refined and pleasurable emotion than collective anger, for the looting and burning receive a very summary treatment at the end. Writing in the late 1990s, Barmé believes that over time Yuanmingyuan will grow in “romantic stature,” as China becomes more economically “boisterous” and its need for nostalgia multiplies apace (Barmé 1996: 157). In fact, the thirst for the romantic is already quite evident in Li’s film, which is indeed why its footage is copiously raided by the documentary.¹¹

Interestingly, despite its preoccupation with the royal past, the documentary does not go out of its way to filter out traces of contemporary everyday life. At several locations, we are given unflinching shots of squat warehouse-style buildings or concrete apartment blocks belonging to various work units that have staked out working and living spaces in and around the present park over the years. When the film first identifies Yuanmingyuan’s location in western Beijing, the camera takes us through the congested streets of Zhongguancun, China’s Silicon Valley, letting the urban jumble of traffic lights, automobiles, cyclists, pedestrians, telephone booths, and billboards roll across the screen in a montage. One is tempted to read this refusal to blot out the mundane spaces and objects of urban life as springing from a desire to sanctify them. If Yuanmingyuan was no more than a place wherein the royal family once lived, played, and (mis-)ruled the country, then the spaces that urbanites call home or workplace should not be categorically excluded from partaking of the symbolic.

Visual and multimedia representations of the park thus tend to foreground the panoramic and the heterogeneous, highlighting its status as an estranged heterotopia marked by imperial exoticism at the zenith of the Manchu empire and its traumatic encounter with the West. Here ghostly foreigners rub shoulders with royal apparitions, rendering the park a place of both profound alienation and irreducible Chineseness. Verbal genres, however, are more adept at articulating an emotional life of the ruins in which alienation is not limited to the disjunction between the form of the European-style columns and their function as nationalist monument, between the native aesthetic of renewal and the imported aesthetic of brokenness/decay, or between ruinscape and Disneyscape. Alienation is also about the misalignment between the official object lessons and the idiosyncratic meaning and feelings that individuals experience in their awkward and ambiguous encounters with the ruins. The three authors discussed below all express a sense of being ill at home that inheres in the ruins experience but is also accentuated by the park’s heterotopic emplacements.

In an essay titled “The Summons of the Ruins” (Feixu de zhaohuan), Zong Pu contemplates a vague sense of obligation that she feels toward the ruins without ever naming it.¹² Instead of dwelling on the “vicissitudes” of Yuanmingyuan, Zong revels in the rich aesthetic possibilities that the ruins afford the imagination. She compares the cluster of ruins to a sinking ship: The first time she visited the site, she thought it might well have sunken by the next time she came. But each time she comes, it appears to have anchored itself on the plain “leisurely and nonchalantly” and have arrested time and congealed history in itself:

The broken columns of the Ocean Observatory still stand lonesome under a bluish gray sky, rendering the surroundings so very empty and deserted. The arched gateway of the Grand Waterworks is still lapped by stony waves; the marble panels of the Fountain View still display weapons and armor, the carvings so distinct and firm. (Zong, 1991: 278-79)

In this description, the aesthetic of ruins is in full play. Instead of lamenting the act of destruction as in most poetic and prose tributes, Zong Pu attends to the subtle transformation that liberates matter from form and form from function. Ginsberg writes of the “exultant materiality” that results from the breakdown of form: “Matter, which once had been conquered in the original, returns in the ruin to conquer form” (Ginsberg, 2004: 1). And yet matter creates its own form which yields further aesthetic pleasure in the form’s liberation from function. The free-floating matter and form lend themselves to the essayist’s agile mind, which brings a new formal and functional unity to the ruins—the sinking ship. Liu Tieyun (aka Liu, E), a turn-of-the-twentieth-century writer, allegorized the declining Qing empire as a sinking ship in his novel *The Travels of Lao Can* (Liu, 1990: 6-11). In wishing its disappearance, Zong Pu seems to say that the nightmare that was late-nineteenth-century Chinese history does not have a place in today’s China and that it is time for the ghost ship to end its haunting.

The essayist then hears a susurrus emanating from a few stacked rocks, as if calling her to hearken to its message. “I was suddenly awakened. The ruins are calling, calling people to stay and change this frozen history. The ruins do not wish to be fastened here in eternity” (Zong, 1991: 279). Though still reserved and elliptical in style, the essay converges here with the official object lessons of Yuanmingyuan: if the ruins have condensed the tragic history of modern China, it is incumbent upon the Chinese people to pry history loose from its entombment so that it can set sail toward a new future. However, this brief, expectant moment is immediately followed by

doubt: “But haven’t I striven for this [goal]? Next to this giant stone turtle, how we debated! Back then, we were so fired up and so full of ardor!” (279-80). After being swept up in the futile socialist endeavor to sink the ship of ruins, the essayist finds herself returning to the ruins and attempting to persuade the next generation to do their part: “Stay! Because the ruins need each one of *you*” (emphasis in the original). A young man who appears out of nowhere replies, “But how can *each one of us* [*mei yige wo*] do our duty?” (280, emphasis in the original).

Apparently not having an answer to the young man’s query, she turns to the landscape and gives us a painterly description of the sun setting over Yuanmingyuan. It is a picture in which the crimson radiance of the sun is framed by dead trees (ruins of nature) and the cold glint of frozen lake water. Outside this frame of clashing colors and light is the verdure of the Western Hills (Xishan), its moist glow seemingly worlds apart from the descending dusk in the ruins (280). Aestheticized nature, it seems, is the solace that will always be there, just as the ship of ruins seems to have put down its anchor forever. Elizabeth Costello, the title character in a novel by J. M. Coetzee, makes this observation about art: “No matter that God had failed, and Socialism. There was still Dostoevsky to guide one, or Rilke, or Van Gogh with the bandaged ear that stood for passion” (Coetzee, 2003: 207). Zong Pu may also be gesturing toward a faith in art when she introduces a third person into her essay: someone hard at work with his palette trying to capture the extraordinary colors of the sunset. The young man from the previous scene comments, “He is not a painter; he just loves this scenery” (Zong, 1991: 281). Indeed, one need not be an artist to seek the redemptive powers of art. But to hear the summons of the ruins beyond the ubiquitously trumpeted messages, one would have to tune in to their whispers, or, in the case of the amateur painter, to work with auratic colors instead of simply purchasing a mechanically reproduced postcard. While they gaze together at the sole surviving bridge in Yuanmingyuan, the young man says, “Perhaps I can think about it, about the summons of the ruins.” It is not clear whether the young man will ponder the ruins’ promise of aesthetic redemption or their ideological interpellation. The ending gives little clue:

I seem to have heard that Yuanmingyuan will be restored. I thought: can some part of the ruins be preserved? Ideally the Ocean Observatory and its vicinity, or even just this broken bridge. For what? For commemorating this frozen piece of history, and for remembering the summons of the ruins. (281)

In deliberately leaving unstated what the summons of the ruins is, and in devoting so much space to the aesthetics of the ruinscape, the author

constructs an ambiguous relationship to the ruins that both depends on and deviates from the official object lessons. Her wish to have a piece of the ruins preserved seems both to echo the anti-restorationists' argument and to point to the need for a last sanctum in which time itself can be contemplated as an aesthetic object instead of being reckoned as a measurement for progress.

If nature, refracted through the aesthetic of ruins, promises redemption in Zong Pu's essay, it stands for the hope of emancipation from the nightmares of national history in a poem by Yang Lian.¹³ Titled "Apologia: To a Ruin" (Zibai—gei yizuo feixu), the poem casts the ruins as a metaphor of rebirth, not of the nation but of the individual rising out of the ashes of the Cultural Revolution.

Here in the gray shattered sunlight
 Arches, stone pillars cast shadows
 Cast memories blacker than scorched earth
 As if frozen in their death agony
 Their arms convulsed into the sky
 As if to bestow their final
 Testament to time
 This testament
 Becomes a curse muttered at my birth

I come to this ruin
 Seeking the only hope that has illumined me
 Faint star out of its time
 Destiny, blind cloud
 Pitiless chiaroscuro of my soul
 No, I have not come to lament death! It is not suicide
 That has drawn me to this desolate world
 I defy all that belongs to the barren and shameful
 —These swaddling clothes
 Are a sun that will not be contained in the grave
 [. . .]
 Only a singing gale
 In place of the broken sundial buried in the earth
 Points to my own dawn (Yang, 1983: 250-51)¹⁴

In the arresting image of the pillars as spectral arms frozen in death agony, the poet recognizes the ruins' metonymic and indexical relationship to historical traumas. But for him, the testament of the ruins has become a curse that smothers new hopes and new voices. Hence, the poet rejects death and

its lamentation and legitimation, that is, all that belongs to the barren and shameful world of the ruins. He will not permit the swaddling clothes—or the official object lessons of Yuanmingyuan—to become his tomb; rather, he would follow the singing gale—a force of nature—to reach his own destiny, discarding and disregarding the broken sundial buried in the earth. In contrast to Zong Pu's hesitant essay, the poem is a powerful tribute to the discovery of the individual voice in the wake of the collectivist mania of the Mao era.

Both Zong Pu's essay and Yang Lian's poem were products of the heady 1980s. Beginning in the early 1990s, national and regional publications, especially pedagogical journals, have frequently featured poems, essays, travel accounts, and classroom lesson plans on Yuanmingyuan. These tend to hew closely to the official object lessons and record profusely emotional responses to a visit, a text, or a film (usually *The Burning of the Summer Palace*). But they also speak of a sense of alienation that points to yet another way of experiencing the park's multiple emplacements. A three-part poem cycle titled "Three Laments at Yuanmingyuan" (Yuanmingyuan san tan) by a certain Wang Xigeng (2001), for example, voices a personal testimony to the standard lessons of the ruins while registering abhorrence at indifferent or distracted tourists. Thus, the pillars are the upstanding ancestral bones of the nation, stripped, gutted, and corroded, crying out their testaments (*yizhu*) to their descendents. Among the inattentive descendents are mini-skirted playgirls and tight-trousered playboys who desecrate the nation-people's remains (*minzu de shigu*) with their flirtatious songfest and their hip-gyrating disco dancing.

For the poet, Yuanmingyuan should be a mausoleum where the Chinese nation mourns its shameful history. Its sepulchral solemnity must be safeguarded so that the nation's offspring can come and walk into "the depths of history." Instead, the ruins are infested with costume photo concessions. He asks caustically, "Why/Are there now counterfeit palace ladies/Preening/In shameful royal garb/To the face of the new millennium/Winking in coquetry/And parading/Imperial glories?" (Wang, 2001: 53). The poem cycle employs short, staccato lines without stanza breaks to convey the impression that the poet is too choked up to utter more than a few syllables at a time and yet is too brimming with emotion to put pauses in his versification. In the final "lament," the poet calls on all who visit the ruins to surrender their bodies to the inscription of the crippled pillars, which are likened to "the cracked lead pieces of a movable typeset" branding the visitors' chests with "blood-smearred letters," producing "a sizzling smoke" (53). These letters would spell out a heroic epic of the Chinese nation as it forges ahead on the global stage.

It is ironic that the poet should speak of “letters” (*zimu*) instead of characters (*zi* or *hanzi*) that would compose the national epic, almost in tacit recognition of the foreigners’ ghost hand in the writing of China’s modern history and perhaps its future as well. But more immediately and self-consciously, he decries the alienating effect of disco dancing and costume photography—mass cultural forms that render the visitors’ bodies unruly, unstable, and overly performative. Instead, he calls for a total surrendering of one’s body to the Kafkaesque scriptural machine of the state even if it chars one’s flesh. The simile of moveable type—one of the four much vaunted Chinese inventions—functions like the drawings of Chinese palaces that form the warm and fuzzy background of the iconic *xiyanglou* pillars: it redomesticates these foreign things and makes them the very essence of Chinese civilization.

Moreover, Wang’s poem helps explain why Yuanmingyuan tourists are allowed to have a very intimate, tactile encounter with the ruins, whereas in most Chinese heritage sites the “relics” are always in some manner or another cordoned off and protected from the corroding touch of the human hand. One could stress the European imperialist pedigree of the ruins and imagine that the Chinese tourists are encouraged to carry on the destruction by rubbing them out, as it were.¹⁵ But this would put too much emphasis on the “foreignness” of the ruins at the cost of obscuring their symbolic status as a *nationalist* monument that betokens irreducibly *Chinese* pain and humiliation—as evident in the metaphors of the ruins as either arms frozen in death agony or ancestral bones. Unlike other monuments that can only be reverently gazed on from a distance, the ruins require not genuflection but tactile engagement because they are the wounds of the nation that must be “licked” by its pen/carving knife-wielding citizens. Graffiti-making is therefore a process of suturing: as the tourists write themselves into the nationalist scriptural economy through an act of defacement, the latter in turn inscribes what Wendy Brown (1995) calls “the state of injury” onto their bodies, with sound and fury as Wang Xigeng envisions in his final lament. For Wang as well as the sloganeers, the object lessons and the emotional life of the ruins have converged to produce the subject of *ressentiment*, a reactive identity grounded in the affects of hurt, rage, and righteousness (Brown, 1995: 66-71).

Shouts and Murmurs: The Political (New) Life of the Ruins Park

James Hevia’s study of imperialist pedagogy in nineteenth-century Chinese history describes Yuanmingyuan as a primary site of “English

lessons” whereby the Chinese learned to internalize “a whole new way of thinking about the world” underscored by the Enlightenment ideas of power and progress (Hevia, 2003: 332-33). The official object lessons of Yuanmingyuan are largely derivative of the English lessons and are condensed in the social Darwinian axiom mouthed by the author of “Three Laments at Yuanmingyuan”: “The backward are bound to be beaten.” But this umbilical cord is strenuously disavowed in the strident anti-colonial ideology of the PRC. As Yuanmingyuan emerges as the iconic wound on the national body, the state is eager to orchestrate its symbolic life through rituals and pageants (e.g., those staged in 1997 to celebrate the retrocession of Hong Kong to Chinese rule) and in the process upstage alternative modes of emplacing, interpreting, or politicizing the site. It also diligently renews the official object lessons through exhibitionary practices. For example, a long wall inside the xiyanglou enclosure displays all the unequal treaties signed during China’s “Century of Humiliation” (*bainian guochi*) and enjoins visitors “Never Forget the Humiliation of the Nation” (*wuwang guochi*).

Another exhibition was recently put up to document the present global whereabouts of the lost treasures of Yuanmingyuan, ending with a call to all Chinese (and foreigners with a moral conscience) to endeavor to recover these scattered objects so that the national body can be made whole again.¹⁶ The alienation of treasures from their “proper” home while home is fending off trash calls to mind our basic thesis that Yuanmingyuan is an estranged heterotopia: there is always an Other that renders the self incomplete and incoherent but also full of hope and possibilities. At another level, the exhibition also tacitly charges all Chinese to learn an essential skill of socialist neoliberal citizenship: to navigate the complex world system in which national sovereignty must negotiate with the forces of global capitalism and in which one’s cultural patrimony is achieved rather than inherited—by hook (culturalist or moralist arguments) or by crook (market maneuvers).

The state’s symbolic investment in Yuanmingyuan has also had the paradoxical effect of exacerbating its volatility and lending it to radical significations. Yuanmingyuan’s latest media exposure concerns a topic that has been grabbing more and more news headlines these days—environmental protection—adding civic engagement to its already crowded heterotopic “scapes.” When it was discovered that the water in the restored Sea of Blessing had been seeping through the lake bed at an alarming rate, the park management unilaterally proceeded, in February 2005, to drain the lake and insert a layer of plastic material into the mud floor, without assessing the potential environmental impact of such a massive project. (It also got underway without an open-bid process as required by law.) After negative

exposure in the media, the State Environmental Protection Administration (Guojia huanjing baohu zongju, or SEPA) was obliged to step in and call off the lake floor waterproofing project. In April 2005, a panel of officials sat through a public hearing in which scholars and common citizens voiced their opinions and criticisms and which was Web cast on China's two biggest official Web sites (*Renmin* and *Xinhua*) in addition to being reported in over forty news outlets. It was hailed as the first true public hearing ever in China, a milestone in citizen participation in public affairs and a triumph of grassroots environmental movements. Liu Jianqiang, a reporter for the *Southern Weekend* (*Nanfang zhoumo*, renowned for its investigative journalism), even applauds the supposedly chaotic turn that the hearing took—instead of orderly speech making, argumentation and booing took over. Even if this shows the inexperience of the officials in charge, he asserts, it nonetheless distinguishes the Yuanmingyuan hearing from all previous national-level hearings, where the voices were uniformly lopsided (Liu, 2005a). He finds the “Yuanmingyuan stalemate” (*Yuanmingyuan jiangju*) an occasion for celebration for it was the byproduct of democracy taking its first gingerly steps (Liu, 2005b).

The “Yuanmingyuan incident” (*Yuanmingyuan shijian*), as it is dubbed with a historiographical ring, began in March when the party organ the *People's Daily*, prompted by a letter from a Gansu-based scholar, published an exposé questioning the scientific soundness of the waterproofing project. After the hearing, SEPA requested a study of the project's environmental impact and, based on this study, ordered a thorough reevaluation of the project in July. The whole affair lasted about a hundred days and came to be known in media circles as *Bairi weijiu*, or the One Hundred Days of Restoration, in a deliberate wordplay on the tragically abortive reform movement of 1898 known as *Bairi weixin*. *Weijiu*, which does not exist in modern Chinese, would be a more literal translation of the English word *restoration*, whereas *weixin* (a loanword from modern Japanese, as in the *Meiji ishin*) better captures what usually transpires in nearly all so-called restoration movements. It is apparent that a new word was necessary to name a different process, not one in which reform measures are pushed through by the elite in the name of restoring the old and lost, but rather one in which rash, illegal, and undemocratic changes are stalled by the people in the name of preserving the old and irreplaceable.

But Liu still prefers *Bairi weixin* because, in his view, the incident is truly unprecedented and portends much welcome change (Liu, 2005c). It is hard to overestimate the significance of declaring a *Bairi weixin* that not only ended on a successful note but also ushered in a new era at a site that

has long marked the nadir of Chinese history and China's global standing. Whether Liu's optimism is justified or not, we can see how the whole affair has attached another set of referents to the super-sign of Yuanmingyuan. For the time being, Yuanmingyuan is first and foremost the arch-signifier of the bundle of keywords that have defined the parameters of the affair: development and environmental impact, public hearing and accountability, decision making and transparency, public opinion and civil society, and the role of intellectuals and the media. But that it is able to acquire so much potency and inspire so much hope is intimately tied to its status as a spatial metaphor of contemporary China, a heterotopia. As Liu Jianqiang puts it aphoristically, "The Yuanmingyuan incident is a sparrow; it may be small, but it is replete with all five viscera" (Liu, 2005a).

Conclusion: The Politics of Space

If a heterotopia is "a system of opening and closing that isolates and makes [it] penetrable" (Foucault, 1998: 183), then Yuanmingyuan is a paradigmatic heterotopia. It is simultaneously a public park for which an entrance fee is levied on all visitors, an apparition that dwells in drawings and picture books and flits across screens, and an amorphous space that contracts to the tiny sliver of the xiyanglou and swells to swallow up streets, farms, factories, and campuses. It is a real site in which the other sites of a culture are represented and contested. These other sites include not just the southern Chinese-style and European-style gardens with which Qianlong was infatuated but also the living, working, playing, and dreaming spaces of contemporary life.

There is a tendency among some scholars to see present-day Yuanmingyuan as swinging between anamnesis and amnesia, or between (1) a nationalist propaganda tool that distorts history and manipulates memory to promote a patriotism that borders on xenophobia and (2) a Chinese Disneyland that sacrifices authenticity and good taste to profit and mass amusement. While there is no doubt that the official narrative tells a reductive story, it is a stretch to claim that the official memory is contested by visitors just because they pay scant heed to the message-bearing plaques and instead take sentimental pleasure in the poetic aura of the ruins that seem to connect them to far away landscapes in time and space (Broudehoux, 2004: 83). We would be equally reductive if we politicized the site's many pleasures, be they aestheticized or commercialized, high-brow or low-brow, as subversive countermemories.

Collective memory provides an insufficient analytical framework because it privileges diachrony over synchrony, and time over space. It speaks only to the monumental dimension of Yuanmingyuan, thus implicitly endorsing the anti-restorationists' desire to make it a strictly symbolic space whose value is bounded up with the past. Robert Shepherd writes of an entrenched Western discourse of authenticity that associates "authentic" cultural objects and practices to a primal past that is unconnected to the market. In this perspective, the Great Wall, for example, with its newly cemented bricks, piped-in music, and roller coaster, is "desacralized, ruined, corrupted, cheapened" (Shepherd, 2002: 192). This view is widely shared by foreign visitors as well as Chinese intellectuals.¹⁷ By contrast, most domestic tourists seem untroubled by the concern that commercialization degrades culture and destroys authenticity, "concentrating instead on getting suitable pictures certifying their presence at the Wall" (192). Their mode of engagement with the ruins does not draw on alternative memories, nor is it necessarily predicated on a willful forgetting of the past. Rather, the tourist enacts a different relationship to space in the framework of a different mode of emplacement. Heterotopia, for this reason, more aptly captures the park's multiple and oftentimes incompatible emplacements, allowing us to discern "what relations of proximity, what type of storage, of circulation, of identification, of classification of . . . elements are to be preferentially retained in this or that situation to obtain this or that result" (Foucault, 1998: 177). The relations of proximity in Yuanmingyuan seem purposively kept in a state where the ruinscape, the gardenscape, the Disneyscape, and the civicscape coexist cheek by jowl.

As a super-sign, Yuanmingyuan is also a classic example of symbolic "superscription" that Prasenjit Duara (1988) employs to theorize pan-Chinese religious symbols. Such symbols acquire their potency and legitimacy precisely owing to the broad participation of cultural actors, not least the state, in converging signifying practices. But the more prominent a symbol becomes, the more liable it is to subversive appropriations, and thus it must be subjected to governmental surveillance. This explains why the state has been unsympathetic toward the anti-restorationist cause aimed at safeguarding the official memory and has in fact given tacit approval to Disneyfication. A resacralized Yuanmingyuan might rival Tiananmen Square as the nation's foremost political space. As Wu Hung (2005) has shown, Tiananmen Square has been for half a century the most privileged site of collective memory, literary and artistic expression, and emotional and political contestation precisely because it is the most sacralized space of the socialist polity. By contrast, during the years of official neglect,

Yuanmingyuan did not become a fermenting site of counter-memories. Indeed, the dearth of literary output (and of cultured ghosts) associated with the site had everything to do with the fact that it had become largely integrated into everyday life and remained un-inscribed until the 1980s.¹⁸ What the anti-restorationists wanted in Yuanmingyuan, by way of an imported aesthetic of ruins that located authenticity in a traumatic past, was a sacred space that did not issue from the socialist founding and therefore could lend itself to modes of emplacement that might challenge the dominant ideology. Hence, it is in the state's interest to maintain a delicately balanced set of relations of proximity, keeping Yuanmingyuan only a quasi-ritualized site where aspirations for an alternative symbolic space must contend with the profane pursuits of pleasure and profit.

Haun Saussy writes that gardens and museums are "models for dealing with the world," for the primary fact about them is the multiplicity of perspectives built into their very structures (Saussy, 2006: 165). Today, the state's chief concern is that the various perspectives embedded in the different modes of emplacement do not clash overtly just as it hopes that the contradictions accentuated by socialist neoliberalism do not all come to a head in society at large—such contradictions as experienced by the Anhui school teachers whose story of estrangement from the national patrimony is told at the beginning of the article. What James Hevia sees in the Qing emperors' mountain resort in Chengde where "marketing magic" thrusts together domestic tourists, overseas Chinese, national minorities, religious pilgrims, foreigners, and local residents in "ever changing configurations" (Hevia, 2001: 222) also obtains here. While different groups or camps may have different stakes and negotiate the relations of proximity differently, no one group has unquestionably hegemonized the field of spatial signification. The heterotopia of Yuanmingyuan juxtaposes seemingly incompatible emplacements to the consternation of many critics, but it is in many ways a most apt spatial metaphor of contemporary China and a schooling ground for the art of socialist neoliberal citizenship: of being able to reconcile authoritarianism and freewheeling capitalism, patriotic loyalty and cosmopolitan sensibility, self-righteous rage and aesthetic and sensual enjoyment.

Notes

1. I intend the phrase *socialist neoliberal citizenship* to capture the contradictory nature of citizenship in the contemporary People's Republic, where the official rhetoric of socialism with Chinese characteristics seems to be a coded endorsement of no-holds-barred capitalism. For further discussions, see Harvey (2005), Lee (2006), and Ong (2006).

2. The foreign Other is indispensable to all Yuanmingyuan narratives. For example, the primal act of destruction is rarely described without summoning the enraged voice of Victor Hugo. Although he had never set eyes on the fabled palaces, Hugo condemned the act in no uncertain terms in a letter to a certain Captain Butler who solicited his opinion on the China Expedition (the Second Opium War or the Arrow War). The letter is dated 25 November 1861, a time when Hugo was in exile: "In a certain corner of the world, there was a miracle called the Summer Palace. . . . Imagine an inexpressible site, as ethereal as the celestial realm, then you would have the Summer Palace. . . . This miracle has vanished. One day, two bandits walked into the Palace, one plundering it, the other setting it on fire. From all appearances, the victory was a robbery; between the two victors they destroyed the Palace. . . . One victor stuffed his pockets, and the other his coffers. Then arm in arm, they returned to Europe with a grin on their faces. . . . Before history, one of the bandits is called France and the other England" (Hugo, 1875, v. 3, *Pendant l'exil I*). The key passage of the letter, slighter longer than the quoted portion here, is inscribed in French and Chinese on the Yuanmingyuan Museum wall and is reproduced in most Yuanmingyuan publications. Likewise, few descriptions of prelapsarian Yuanmingyuan fail to quote the fulsome encomiums issuing from awe-struck European visitors.

3. As the imperial treasure depot (for paintings, calligraphy, antiques, fineries, jewelry, gems, curios) and a storehouse for the imperial compendia *Siku quanshu*, Yuanmingyuan also resembled modern museums and libraries, or the heterotopias of time. Insofar as it was a site of royal merrymaking, it also combined the heterotopia of the festival (of transitory time) with that of "an eternity of accumulating time" (Foucault, 1998: 183). The Qing emperors also boasted a mountain resort called Bishu shanzhuang in Chengde, Hebei (about two hundred miles northeast of Beijing). James Hevia's study (2001) shows that here the emphasis is on the Qing overlordship of not just the central states/China, but Tibet, Mongolia, and Central Asia. Hence the famous replica of the Potala Palace on its premises. The Chengde resort fell into disrepair in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now a World Heritage Site, it has been restored and turned into a bustling tourist attraction.

4. By the mid-1970s, there were fifteen work units and twenty villages comprising 270 families in the precincts of the former gardens. By the late 1990s, there were 615 households slated to be evicted (Broudehoux, 2004: 64, 74).

5. Opened in 1992, the exhibit presented replicas of the totem sculptures allegedly on display in the museums of over seventy countries. After years of criticism and derision, the park administration finally dissolved its agreement with the exhibitor and took down the exhibit in early 2007.

6. These are part of the "Forty Scenes of Yuanmingyuan" (*Yuanmingyuan sishijing tuyong*, with epigraphic poems by Qianlong) drawn by the court artists Tang Dai and Shen Yuan. These drawings are in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

7. The Beijing Yuanmingyuan Academy, a private university founded in 1994 and located in the Haidian university district, features the iconic arches of the Grand Waterworks on its southern gate. See www.ymyu.com.

8. Conspicuously absent, however, are interviews with former residents or visitors. The reason is predictable. The former residents were the biggest losers in Yuanmingyuan's ascension to a symbolic space; their family memories might well disrupt the hegemonic splendor–destruction–rebirth narrative. Likewise, the average visitor cannot be trusted to toe or even to care much for the official line. For this reason, the documentary is not truly dialogic.

9. The letter is translated into Chinese in its entirety and included in Zhang Enyin (2000); the passages about the market town appear on pages 30 to 31.

10. Li Han-hsiang is known for his elaborately executed and melodramatic costume dramas such as *The Love Eterne* (1963) and *The Story of Xishi* (1965). Hugely impressed by these costume dramas Li produced in his Hong Kong studios, the Chinese government is said to have invited Li to shoot films at the “real” sites, which hitherto had been rarely accessible to filmmakers.

11. Li frequently takes liberty with history, spicing up his cinematic spectacles with juicy morsels of unofficial history and urban legends. The documentary film freely intercuts clips from Li’s film with interviews and on-site tour sequences, without so much as acknowledging the source of the clips. Intellectual property issues notwithstanding, it is clear that questions of fact versus fiction matter very little to the documentary makers. The 1988 television miniseries *River Elegy* (*Heshang*) also uses clips from Li’s film, albeit to make a different point: the Qing emperors had no qualms about enjoying Western-style luxuries; but instead of promoting cross-cultural exchange of ideas, goods, and technologies, they encircled the xiyanglou with high walls and posted armed guards at the entrances—a gesture that echoed the quintessentially “Chinese” efforts to build the Great Wall, lock the gates of the country, seal off the coastline, and “let big swords, spears, homemade cannons, and soldiers’ flesh resist the iron-clad warships that advanced under the thunder of their guns” (Su et al., 1991: 151-52). The xiyanglou therefore stands for a wasted historical opportunity, amounting in the end to a mere elegant flirtation with Western culture.

12. Zong Pu, penname of Feng Zhongpu, is the daughter of Feng Youlan, Beijing University’s preeminent scholar of Chinese philosophy. She grew up in the vicinity of Yuanmingyuan and graduated from Qinghua University’s Foreign Languages Department. She garnered national attention with her 1957 short story “Red Beans” (Hongdou), a tale of love and revolution. Since the late 1970s, her modest output of fiction, essays, and children’s stories has been favorably received for her simple, elegant, and unobtrusive style. The essay on ruins was first published in *Renmin wenzue* (no. 1, 1986).

13. Like Zong Pu, Yang Lian spent his childhood in the Yuanmingyuan neighborhood. A prominent member of the Misty Poetry (*Menglong shi*) school and cofounder of the underground literary journal *Today* (*Jintian*), Yang Lian has been in self-imposed exile for over two decades. Along with Bei Dao, he is one of the most translated contemporary Chinese poets. The underground avant-garde of which he was a member began to gather at the xiyanglou in the late 1970s to recite poetry and make speeches, treating the ruins as “a public space” and “a cultural grey zone” (Barmé, 1996: 145). Yang’s poem was written during this period. Since the mid-1980s, a group of bohemian artists and poets had gradually settled in shabby quarters rented from the local villagers, forming the well-known “Yuanmingyuan artist colony” (*Yuanmingyuan huajiacun*) until they were ejected in 1995 by the authorities.

14. Translated by John Minford with Seán Golden (Yang, 1983); translation modified.

15. This reading is suggested by one of the anonymous reviewers of this article. I thank him or her for pushing me to rethink the implications of the ruins’ physical accessibility.

16. Hevia and Broudehoux give detailed accounts of the looting, the variegated fate of the loot, and the efforts by the Chinese state as well as private companies to recover some of it. When three of the original twelve zodiac animal heads from the xiyanglou turned up at an auction in Hong Kong in 2000, the Beijing-based Poly Group made an extravagant bid and “repatriated” the bronze heads to the “motherland” (Broudehoux, 2004: 84-85; Hevia, 2003: 331-32). The fact that these heads are now sitting in the company’s private collection rather than in the Yuanmingyuan Museum is a good indication of how much the nation-state is decentered.

17. Chen Zhihua, author of the *Dushu* article, asks what Chen Zi'ang, the Tang poet who wrote those immortal lines of the "Song of Ascending Youzhoutai," would write if he were to show up at the Badaling section of the Great Wall today. Perhaps something like this: "Looking ahead I see eateries; / Turning back I see stalls; / Thinking of our declining culture, / I shed lonely tears" (Wang, 1999: 724). Geremie Barmé clearly shares this sentiment: "Those who wish to visit the ruins presented as a garishly dolled-up and picturesque socialist park are best advised to keep to the well-trodden cement paths of the new edu-tainment half of the Yuan Ming Yuan. For the real ruins, however, the melancholy remains of the most magnificent imperial pleasure of a ruling Chinese dynasty, you must venture to the west, into the dust and brambles, the faeces-clogged and grave-strewn fields of a former oriental realm of fancy that was once the wonder of European monarchs and garden designers alike" (Barmé, 1996: 142).

18. Tellingly, Wu Hung wrote the book on Tiananmen Square in part because it so dominated his childhood memories, while his having attended Beijing 101 High School, located right in the former Yuanmingyuan precincts, received only two passing mentions (Wu, 2005: 87, 107).

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