

**The Rebirth of
a Long Lost Imperial Garden**

by

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B.A., Rice University 2020

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Honors Program

in Bachelor of Arts Degree

in Art History Department of Art History

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THESIS APPROVAL

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TITLE: THE REBIRTH OF A LONG LOST IMPERIAL GARDEN

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Leo Costello

This thesis analyses the community of Chinese artists who formed Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village on and around the original ruins of the imperial garden, Yuan Ming Yuan, or the Old Summer Palace of Beijing between the years of 1976 and 1993. I would like to argue that the counter tradition these artists helped develop with other visual, musical and conceptual artists from the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village was predicated on a conceptual appropriation of space since its earliest establishment in 1980 as a both material and imaginary landscape.

By analyzing this special community with regards to the artists like Liu Tao and her peers, this counter-culture group is shown to depend partly on the old trope of Yuan-Ming-Yuan-as-Modern/Western/History/Colonialist-Stigma. Rather than simply considering space as a particular place, space is considered here an active field that includes the control of art-historical discourse, and the recycling of the historical position once represented by the ruins of Yuan Ming Yuan and the iconic styles of Jesuit missionary painters who were active in Qing court like Giuseppe Castiglione.

Yuan Ming Yuan here is a break and negotiation with ancient and early modern Chinese art history. I demonstrate that during this time frame (1980-1993), the control of art-historical discourse involved how by a burgeoning consciousness of a more commercial and “liberal” society, adapted to and negotiated new constraints placed on Chinese art, following the economic reform in 1978.

Through a moving lens on the selected works by the Chinese artists whose work and life interacted with the Yuan Ming Yuan, and more importantly, the historical and conceptual identity of this iconic establishment, my study will utilize the supporting materials consisting of various documents, to reflect on the emergence, development and inevitable collapse of this grassroots art commune that “landed on” a long lost imperial garden. Once as architectures unscathed, Yuan Ming Yuan pioneered the artistic styles that demonstrated surprisingly an imperial interest in the west, while as ruins almost forgotten by the modern history, Yuan Ming Yuan again, acted as a stepping stone for developing the new era of Chinese art in post-Mao Beijing.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, He Xigou.

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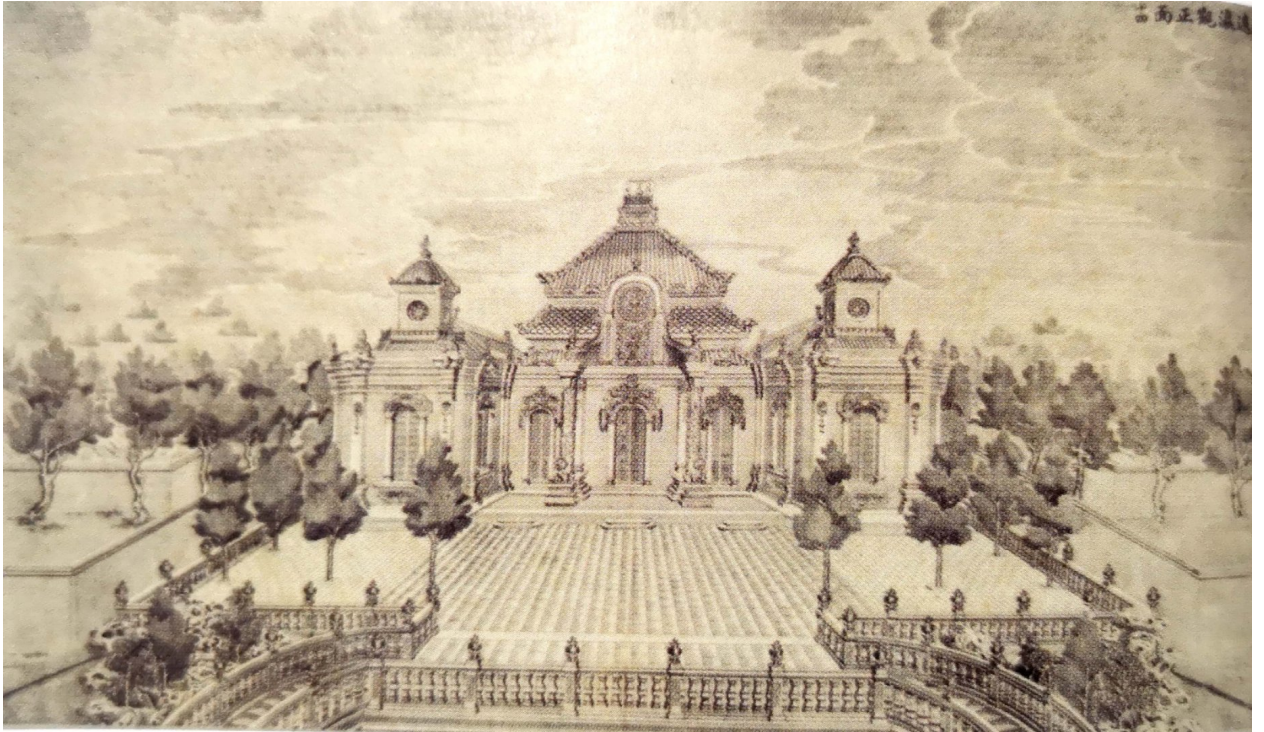
Yongzheng as European Killing a Tiger, from “Life Portraits of the Yongzheng Emperor in Costumes,” 13 Portraits, Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Yongzheng period (1711-99). Ink and color on silk, 34.9 * 31 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing

Fig. 1.3:



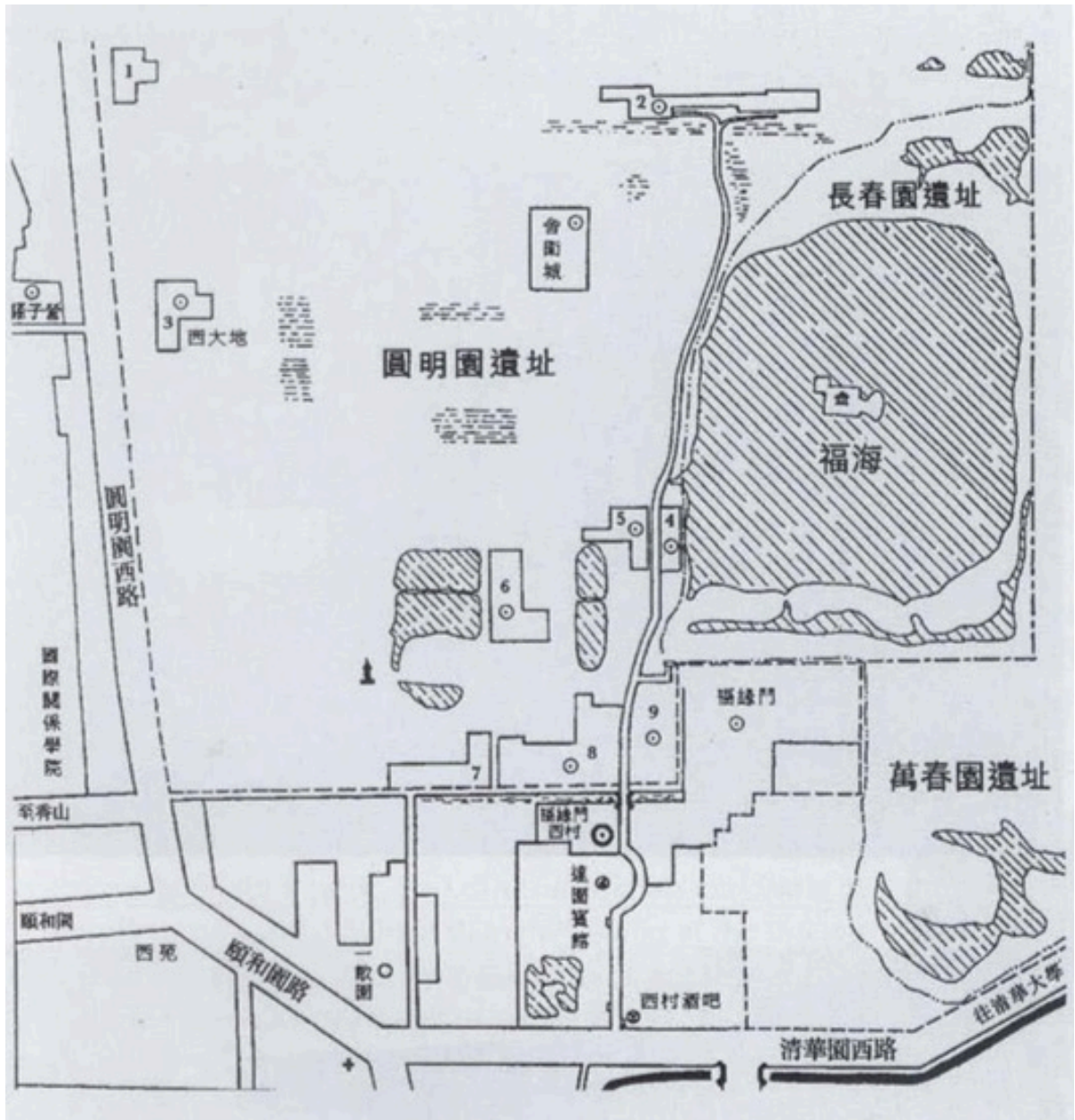
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Plan of the “Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village” c. 1995. From Jin Yinong, *“An Examination of the 1995 Exodus from the Artist Village.”* Areas marked with dotted circles indicate the disparate dwellings and studios of the artists.

Fig. 1.6:



“Concept 21,” 1988 performance art conceived and executed by Liu Tao with the participation of the students from local art institutions.

Fig. 1.7:



Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining), *Assembled Auspicious Objects*,

1715, Hanging scroll on silk, Taiwan, National Palace Museum

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyses the works of the Chinese artists who formed the community of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, located near and some on the original ruins of the imperial garden, Yuan Ming Yuan and otherwise called the Old Summer Palace of Beijing. The community developed from a itinerant gathering place in 1979, and it became a Bohemian village for permanent residence in 1989, which concentrated around the Western Palaces Area of Yuan Ming Yuan until 1995. The following chapters aspire to contextualize the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village in different periods of Yuan Ming Yuan and examine their connections to the community.

The three chapters, dedicated to a horizontal and longitudinal view of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, revolve around the same location of Yuan Ming Yuan, then Yuan Ming Yuan ruins, the The Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, and then Yuan Ming Yuan Park. This thread will visit different moments of this transformation, and arrive at an elucidated image of this long lost imperial garden that have enchanted and haunted the sinologists for centuries.

The first chapter provides historical background to the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Community. The narrative seeks to demonstrate the idea of “Yuan Ming Yuan as Western” by tracing the western designs of Yuan Ming Yuan back to Jesuit culture and European art history. Chapter one starts from the imperial interest in western styles and the consequent welcoming of Catholic missionaries admitted into China Proper, first as preachers then later some as craftsmen to create artworks and design artifacts for the

Qing imperial court. The conception of Yuan Ming Yuan, including its systematic plan, ritualistic considerations and ingenious design of the Xiyang Lou, the renowned part of European-style imperial buildings in the northern part of the complex, reveals a process of artistic incorporation of western elements into an imperial enterprise with some compromises, difficulties, interesting marriages and inevitable limitations. This part is followed by an examination of the contemporary interest in Jesuit styles and European design. The contemporary Chinese artists consciously reconnected with the previous history of Yuan Min Yuan and departed from its symbolic value to reach another dimension of Yuan Ming Yuan. They used this value to negotiate against the historical factors and authoritarian restraints, thus opening up new possibilities for Chinese contemporary art.

The second chapter investigates the entire life of Yuan Ming Yuan Art Village including the prelude and its legacies afterwords. The trajectory of this artist community is worthwhile to be examined with care because numerous noteworthy experiments all culminated in a momentum to reimagine the long lost imperial garden to level against the tradition. These experiments engaged the old rudiments of colonialism, feudalism and imperialism with the new challenges and situations specific to the 80s and 90s. The art practices as a whole among this community was likely to have created a conceptual fulcrum which was founded upon the foundation of history while constantly lubricated by a mixture of nostalgia, stigma and a strong drive to reevaluate the old and the new.

Finally in the third chapter, after the physical and ideological demise of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, experiments of similar fashion are explored in other contexts

and into the following decades. I will show that these experiments blossomed into different petals that influenced influence the global discourse on Yuan Ming Yuan and China, beginning with the contemporaneous reactions to the 1860 destruction of Yuan Ming Yuan, followed by the later collecting, recollecting and displaying of Yuan Ming Yuan in the west, and enriched by the rise of Chinese nationalism after 1980s. The western discourse, currently critically participated by Chinese politics and a surge of Chinese artists, partly as the legacy of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, enriches the old trope of Yuan Ming Yuan as modern/western/imperialist/colonialist and continues to inform the contemporary discussion on this ineffaceable memory, previously belonging to the Chinese, now to the world.

CHAPTER 1

Giuseppe Castiglione and The Legacy of Jesuit Styles

1.1 Imperial Interest in Western Styles

The core of the Jesuitical legacy to the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village lies in the imperial interest in western styles and the groundbreaking significance of this aesthetic diversity because it was the first time in hundreds of years for the Chinese to look westward for artistic inspirations. It is also worthwhile to include this previous history of Yuan Ming Yuan into our discussion because the aesthetic diversity Yuan Ming Yuan as an imperial garden represented was both governmentally sponsored and controlled, resembling the situations specific to the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.

Yuan Ming Yuan was long conceived as a cultural icon to show western art and a useful visa to introduce exotic techniques. A work of painting (Fig. 1.1) is considered to have used the cultural authority and permissiveness Yuan Ming Yuan represents. This painting entitled *Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in front of the White Pagoda* shows a key figure in the artistic exchange long before Yuan Ming Yuan artists turned to the west for inspirations. The execution date of this work is much debated but it can be approximated around 1920s. The dating shows an continuous interest in Jesuit styles and Yuan Ming Yuan as a cultural icon reappeared in China just like “Qianlong reappeared like a ghost.”¹

¹ Marco Mussilo, “Mid-Qing Arts and Jesuit Vision: Visual Encounters and Exchanges in 18th-Century Beijing,” in *Ai Wei Wei Circle of Animals*, ed. Susan Delson (New York: AW Asia, 2011), 160.

In fact, Yuan Ming Yuan as an artistic experiment, was initiated by the Qianlong's open-minded disposition, which coincided with the European curiosity in the uncharted waters beyond Marco Polo. Starting from Qianlong's grandfather, Kangxi's interests in astronomy, calendric studies and mathematics, the imperial support for the exploration of western science and technology expanded to arts and architecture. In the first decade of the eighteenth century, the emperor, Kangxi who was Qianlong's grandfather, was looking for a skillful painter from Europe, and the Jesuits in China, who had already accumulated a century's worth of fortunes and connections within the forbidden walls of Peking, introduced Giuseppe Castiglione to Kangxi. After an arduous voyage, the heavy doors of the Forbidden City were opened for Castiglione's skills in realism, which seemed exotic and astounding to the Chinese. Kangxi was so impressed by Castiglione's painting of a bird on a pot that he eventually employed him as an enamel painter. In the Yongzheng era following Kangxi's reign, Castiglione's career took a new turn because his versatility and artistic knowledge, proved precious and necessary for the development of the Qing authority.

The cultural diversity embodied at court by Castiglione and other Europeans acted as a visually controlled means to contribute to the emperor's ambitious containment of a multi-ethnic empire. As an cultural agent, the European element is being controlled and contained to demonstrate the Emperor's right to rule. This can be seen in Fig. 1.2 in which Yongzheng is a bewigged European chasing a tiger. Along with other depictions of Yongzheng in ethnic costumes all showing invincible actions of conquer, this image displays the Qing's supremacy over cultural, political, religious and finally visual

diversity.² Under Yongzheng's reign, the young prince, Hongli, later Emperor Qianlong, roamed Castiglione's studio as a boy and later already familiar with Castiglione's work, Qianlong started his remarkable patronage of Castiglione after he ascended to the throne in 1735. Given more freedom to paint the emperor's portrait, even in an Renaissance style as in Fig. 1.3, Castiglione was later entrusted with a project which would later turn into a world-renowned figure: Xiyanglou, or the European Building Complex, and this construction became the physical and cultural foundation for the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.

According to *The Garden Architecture and Delicate Culture in the Xiyang Building Complex of Yuan Ming Yuan* by Sun Ruoyi and the *Abridged Textology of the Biography of Giuseppe Castiglione*, from which Sun quoted from, Qianlong, having seen an illustrated fountain when viewing a group of European artworks, asked Castiglione if any European could make such a fountain. Castiglione recommended Michel Benoist, and Benoist was asked to construct a European-style fountain near the western residential hall, which was completed the following year, after considerable efforts.³ Although the previous information implies the existence of the western residential hall, Sun argues that the other European-style buildings were constructed only to accompany and highlight the beauty of the fountains since Qianlong originally intended to decorate other Chinese gardens with these fountains but the stylistic mismatch eventually aborted the paring between the two.

² Marco Mussilo, "Mid-Qing Arts and Jesuit Vision: Visual Encounters and Exchanges in 18th-Century Beijing," in *Ai Wei Wei Circle of Animals*, ed. Susan Delson (New York: AW Asia, 2011), 153.

³ Sun Ruoyi, "the European Palaces Landscape during the Period of Qianlong Emperor," *The History Journal of National Chung Hsing University*, no. 08 (2008): 95 -128.

Through Sun's argument about the fountain construction, the nature of the imperial interest in European arts can be easily seen. Again from Sun Ruoyi, the complex is seen to be far from being an harmonious example of artistic marriage, but rather a tentative, and ultimately failed attempt to combine the different elements. In Fig. 1.4, the illustration shows how Jesuit painters without architectural experience attempted under a Chinese hip-roof to make an exotic view to please the emperor by inserting an European body into a Chinese bracket structure.⁴ The construction was based more on unprofessional imagination than rigorous planning and studying of European architecture.

It is worth pointing out that the limitation of this intercultural dialogue lies in the authoritarian sponsorship which determines the artist-patron relationship to be one of subject-superior, rather than employee-employer, as one would often observe in the West. Castiglione had to answer his Chinese name given as Langshining and use his Renaissance skillset only as a vessel to propagate the empire's agenda - to reiterate royal legitimacy, imperial superiority, and thus the control over visual culture. This agenda, which began with the personal liking of Kangxi, though inevitably slighted by Kangxi as "no more than gadgets of craftsmen," continued for almost a century under the patronage of Kangxi's successors, in an equally personal and political form, until it reached its ultimate conclusion followed by the deaths of the Jesuit artist group including Castiglione in 1766.

With little chance of survival after the termination of Qing-dynasty, "the Yuanming Yuan descended, like its authors and patrons, into a controlled oblivion," as stated in *Ai*

⁴ Sun Ruoyi, "the European Palaces Landscape during the Period of Qianlong Emperor," *The History Journal of National Chung Hsing University*, no. 08 (2008): 95 -128.

*Weiwei, Circle of Animals.*⁵ Different parties did not forget the political value of Yuan Ming Yuan and the control of this cultural icon was passed from hand to hand. In the emperors' hands, Yuan Ming Yuan was born as controlled visual diversity and "died" in controlled oblivion as intended by the Republic of China and later the People's Republic of China. However, control as the main factor of the power discourse surrounding Yuan Ming Yuan continued to shadow the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.

With the previous discussion, it is striking to see the similarity between the emergence of Yuan Ming Yuan and the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. Yuan Ming Yuan as an imperial garden was born out of the imperial sponsorship because of Emperor Qianlong's disposition in alignment with his family tradition and an underlying agenda to promote controlled diversity to show the imperial supremacy. Likewise, Chinese government initially turned a blind eye to the emergence of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village and allowed it to thrive on the ruins of Yuan Ming Yuan, which the government could have utilized for their propaganda. This rapport from the authorities complied with the economic and cultural reform initiated by them and the art practice at the village developed as a controlled diversity under a close supervision.

This seemingly peaceful yet highly tensional relationship came to a threshold when the villagers began to recognize the similarities between Yuan Ming Yuan and the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. This similarity made the artists the new Jesuits and the legitimacy to recycle the iconicity of Yuan Ming Yuan in the following chapters.

⁵ Marco Mussilo, "Mid-Qing Arts and Jesuit Vision: Visual Encounters and Exchanges in 18th-Century Beijing," in *Ai Wei Wei Circle of Animals*, ed. Susan Delson (New York: AW Asia, 2011), 160.

1.2 The Design and Significance of Yuan Ming Yuan

In 1979, the editors of the samizdat literary journal, *Today* or *Jintian*, Mang Ke, Bei Dao, who were later joined by the supporters and a friend of the magazine, Chen Kaige, later a prominent film maker, returned to the Xiyanglouqu, European Building Complex, now in ruins, to start their literary salon.⁶ They would compose and recite poems to the Rococo and Baroque remains, and in this Bohemian fringe dwelling, an artist community called the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village was born on the skeletons of history awakened by their poems.

According to Geremie Barne, the major factors for the community's emergence on this specific location include the relative distance from the city, its borderland nature between urban and rural control, and the cheap accommodations available at a nearby village, Fuyuan Village, around what was once the Fuyuan Gate, the main entrance to the gardens for the foreign and local plunderers.⁷

Similarly, the previous owner of Yuan Ming Yuan would agree with the contemporary artists about the ideal location of Yuan Ming Yuan. As the first designer of Yuan Ming Yuan, Yongzhen, even when he was just a prince also recognized some of the factors when he was assigned a location by Kangxi, the Emperor then, to build his garden. According to Li Daping and Zhu Chengru, the original Yuan Ming Yuan was an expansion on Empress Xiaohui's new garden. The twelve famous sceneries, including the Grape Vineyard, Parasol Yard, and other crude-sounding titles that would have been

⁶ Geremie Barne, "The Romance of Ruins," in *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1996), 145.

⁷ Geremie Barne, "The Romance of Ruins," in *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1996), 148.

uncommon among the elite class, especially the royal family, when naming garden scenes lead us to discover its rural nature. The garden's proximity to Shuimo Village and local markets, some distance from the center of power, the Forbidden City, and its original name, "Danboningjing Gong," meaning Humble and Calm Palace, all suggest its modest origin, which unsurprisingly reflects Yongzhen's personality as prince, a facade presenting a lack of interest in the throne, only to be rewarded by the throne.

It is clear that some inherent characteristics of the original plan of Yuan Ming Yuan spoke to the preference of both Yongzheng and the Yuan Ming Yuan artists for living away from the center of power by taking such a rural residence. However, the calculated beauty and geometric layout bore drastically different meanings for the emperors and the artists. Young-tsu Wong thinks Yuan Ming Yuan is "a great synthesis of the garden arts" so that Yuan Ming Yuan was "pregnant with the history of art of garden design."⁸ The beauty of the garden landscape would mean nothing to the village artists, but only a reformed topography and remaining floor plan. In terms of these two elements, Wong also states that the construction of the Yuan Ming Yuan employed three key technical elements for creative integration including adapting, borrowing and coping.⁹ By connecting one landscape with another, borrowing aesthetics elements to complement each paring and adjusting the original landform to implement the design, Jesuit artists instilled meanings into every components of Yuan Ming Yuan. Accordingly, Yuan Ming Yuan's topography and floor plans were subjects and agents of cultural and political

⁸ Guo Daiheng, conclusion to *China's Lost Imperial Garden*, ed. Wu Yuezhou (Shanghai: Shanghai Press and Publishing Development Company, 2016), 241.

⁹ Guo Daiheng, *China's Lost Imperial Garden*, ed. Wu Yuezhou (Shanghai: Shanghai Press and Publishing Development Company, 2016), 238.

significance and any changes to the two elements would mean changes to the whole system of object-meaning mapping and thus the entire picture of Yuan Ming Yuan as a relatively stable icon of culture and art. In the same spirit, the village artists transformed Yuan Ming Yuan into their vehicle for bearing new meanings by occupying Yuan Ming Yuan in a different way. The careful skills of “arranging, organizing, creating” space took another form in the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.

A different form means a different usage of the key elements of the garden’s plan. For example, the strong centrality of Yuan Ming Yuan was used by the Emperor to showcase his central position in the power universe. The disparate dwellings and studios of the artists, and a radiated plan of the village’s residences indicate a counter-recycle of the Emperor’s idea of power as suggested by the relationship between architectural plan and power dynamics. Guo Daiheng finds in Yuan Ming Yuan configuration a conformity to a culture based on ethics. By examining the layout and axis, we can find the garden planning adhered strongly to “Centrality” and the vision of governance if objectified by the symbolic compartmentalization of the garden into nine parts as the nine continents in Chinese cosmology, as seen in *You Gong (Tribute of Yu)* in the *Shang Shi (Book of Documents)*.¹⁰ Along with a concern for geomancy deeply entrenched in their minds, Yuan Ming Yuan artists broke with the ethical authority by breaking with the geometric centrality.

Other possibilities also exist to change the ethical landscape of Yuan Ming Yuan.

Liu Tao’s “Concept 21,” a performance and installation work as shown in Fig. 1.6, broke

¹⁰ Guo Daiheng, *China’s Lost Imperial Garden*, ed. Wu Yuezhou (Shanghai: Shanghai Press and Publishing Development Company, 2016), 236.

the gaps between different components of Yuan Ming Yuan by physically connecting them, and this method challenged the power dynamics by reconstructing the formation of Yuan Ming Yuan.

In fact, instead of residing at the north side of Changchun Garden, where the Western Palaces used to stand, the artists held salons, gatherings, and exhibitions in the Western Palaces, but lived dispersedly all over Yuan Ming Yuan Proper. This phenomenon might have provided another explanation of recycling the element of centrality inside the Emperor's planning of Yuan Ming Yuan.

Another important element underlying Yuan Ming Yuan's design is Emperor Qianlong artistic pursuit and ethical concerns. Having participated heavily in the construction of Yuan Ming Yuan during his life time, he also composed poems and made paintings inside Qianlong's version of the garden. Qianlong could also be considered a Yuan Ming Yuan artist. Following this idea, we could even discover Qianlong's art is closely tied to a strong tradition of Chinese scholars who always combined Confucius ethics with their art practice. This pairing influenced both Qianlong in his design of Yuan Ming Yuan and the village artists whose occupation of Yuan Ming Yuan can be interpreted as an artwork expressing strong ethical concerns.

According to Sun Ruoyi, Qianlong epitomizes the Chinese school of artistic pursuit, and Yuan Ming Yuan exemplifies the goals of Chinese literati art as a means to reach harmony through combing the "small self" and "greater self," and more

importantly, the aesthetics as “Yi,” and ethical orthodox as “Li.”¹¹ Wu Hung also finds Qianlong’s pursuit of various ethical messages and his egocentric personality in many portraits of the Emperor.¹² This discovery is echoed in reality, by Qianlong’s naming of the many vistas at Yuan Ming Yuan, referencing the ethic principles of Confucius classics. Nevertheless, this discovery does not simply indicate a direct influence of Qianlong as a model artist on the village artists because Qianlong’s artistic purist is highly based on the Song-Ming-dynasty Confucianism which highlights the importance of practice and ethics, while how Confucius ethics affected the villagers’ art suggests a more complicated trajectory. However, it is clear that the combination between art and ethics is easily found in Chinese artists across different eras. “The delicate culture” Sun Ruoyi finds in Qianlong is in fact a model of thinking which always attempts to combine ethics and art in order to showcase a visual “Utopia” for Chinese culture. It was in this fashion, Qianlong’s “delicate culture” had an serendipitous encounter with “the delicate culture” of Castiglione, a Renaissance man, on the same path of metaphysical pursuit. Likewise, the village artists brought into their art again, the ethical questions by focusing on the realistic problems of Chinese society and only in this manner, the dialogue between the eastern and the western became meaningful.

Realism, as Qian Long as an artist also shared, indicated by many of his poems, was recycled by the 80s’ artists using the ancient ruins as a container, a body, a vessel to

¹¹ Suo Ruoyi, “Delicate Culture and Qianlong Period” in *The Gardening Architecture and Delicate Culture at the European Building Complex in Yuan Ming Yuan*(Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2009), 211-222.

¹² Suo Ruoyi, “Delicate Culture and Qianlong Period” in *The Gardening Architecture and Delicate Culture at the European Building Complex in Yuan Ming Yuan*(Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2009), 200.

bargain for an ethical and an aesthetic breakthrough, always as a pair in Confucianism. On the site of where Qing-dynasty emperors used to welcome and entertain western guests, Yuan Ming Yuan artists in the 80s did not intend to entertain any parties but to entertain themselves by exploring social issues in their artworks. This exploration might have reopened the long-existent question in Chinese art: what is the ethical role of artists in their visual pursuits?.

In the light of this question, Yuan Ming Yuan's plan and design became ethically important for the village artists. They became the constructive points on a new ethical grid.

1.3 The New Jesuits

The design and plan of Yuan Ming Yuan lead us to discover the Chinese root in the village artists by examining their connection to Qianlong as an artist and the possibility of whether they combined ethics and art as a continuance of the literati tradition. It is important to notice that beyond the Chinese influence, the Jesuit artists represent another source of influence for Yuan Ming Yuan. These Europeans not only introduced the exotic techniques into the resulting artworks and architectures but also a strong sense of their unique identity. This legacy is reflected by some artists at the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village and I thus call them the New Jesuits.

Doufu, also an artist who lived at Yuan Ming Yuan Village is a case in point. In a group exhibition entitled *Infra-Image and Yuanmingyuan* in 2009, China, the works of Doufu, revealed to us the similarities between the new Jesuits and the Qing-dynasty Jesuits. To unravel the complexities of these similarities, it is useful to turn the clock backwards to 1715.

In 1715, Giuseppe Castiglione, more well-known by his Chinese name, Lang Shining arrived in Beijing and started his legendary career as a court painter for the Qing household. Never as a priest but a lay brother, Castiglione merged his western training with the Chinese and consequently promoted a dialogue between Chinese and European paintings and architecture. Even though he was a Jesuit brother, his works are never remembered for any religious association. His religious experience only surfaced in the Baroque design of the Xiyanglouqu, or the European Building Complex of Yuan Ming Yuan. Conventionally interpreted as suppressed by imperial authority, Castiglione's

paintings are never meant to be viewed religiously. The religious root of the Jesuitical art in China has thus been downplayed in most scholarship.

It is unclear if Castiglione still managed to “smuggle” Catholic faith into his works within this context, however and we can still sense a strong religious sentiment in the modern occupants of the Western Palaces of Yuan Ming Yuan, the artists from the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village including Duofu. Most of his paintings suggest a strong presence of Jesuitical visual culture.

The Society of Jesus, whose members called Jesuits are actively engaged in evangelization and apostolic ministry in various nations, is an association founded by Saint Ignatius to “*whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God to strive especially for the defence and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine.*”¹³ Under this decree, Giuseppe Castiglione and other Jesuit members went to China and eventually failed their mission, in the eyes of churches and historians. Without any thorough investigation of the Jesuits and their visual culture, many would quickly assume that religiously, there is no similarity between Giuseppe Castiglione and the Chinese village artists except for both occupying the same space. However, other possibilities are worth exploring in this case.

Elisabetta Corsi has pointed out the religious aspect in Giuseppe Castiglione’s work entitled, *Assembled Auspicious Subjects* (Fig. 1.7). In fact, she even argued that Giuseppe adjusted so promptly to the Chinese emblematic tradition because of the

¹³ John W. O'Malley, Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Steven J. Harris and T. Frank Kennedy, introduction to *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), XXXV.

importance of vision and symbols in Jesuitical visual culture. “Although we might assume that Castiglione relied on court artists for the preparation of such complex iconological projects, we cannot but appreciate the similarity with Jesuit emblem devices,” Corsi states. She also suggests that the mirror reflects the sunlight just as humans reflect the love and grace of God in to a Jesuitical eye.¹⁴ From this perspective, the Christian symbolism became universally evident in Castiglione’s other works through the Jesuitical treatment of optical effects.

Additionally, Elisabetta says “The Jesuits were men of their time: they were deeply imbued with Renaissance culture. They did not just absorb, but actively participated in the production of humanistic and scientific knowledge.” Their paintings and visual objects were imbued with these educational and moral meanings.¹⁵ In a similar fashion, Duofu and other village artists also share this strong interest in the science of vision, or more specifically, how a revolution in vision could potentially change the moral meanings the Maoist visual culture had carried. In Duofu’s works selected for *Infra-Image and Yuanmingyuan*, for instance, the transcendental space opened by the repetitive abstracting of the Christian cross reflects the strong intention to direct the audience’s vision to enter a moral space. Likewise, artists like Xu Bing are deeply obsessed with the moral function of visual objects. The richness of emblems in their

¹⁴ Elisabetta Corsi, “ ‘Agreeable yet Useful: Notes on Jesuitical Visual Culture during the Seventeenth Century’ ” in Pacific Rim Report: “Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Arts in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (San Francisco: USF-Center for the Pacific Rim, 2003), 9-16.

¹⁵ Elisabetta Corsi, “ ‘Agreeable yet Useful: Notes on Jesuitical Visual Culture during the Seventeenth Century’ ” in Pacific Rim Report: “Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Arts in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (San Francisco: USF-Center for the Pacific Rim, 2003), 9-16.

works demonstrate the underlying existence of Jesuitical “mirror,” the metaphor of human soul.¹⁶ In Duofu’s case, the cross is a mirror, an emblem of ‘reflection’ and ‘speculation’ (from the Latin root *speculum*). Corsi describes how the spiritual images acquired from these visual works appeal to the visual eyes. In Liu Tao’s *Concept 21*, the reconfiguration of the symbolic space is obtained to “achieve a deep spiritual experience.”¹⁷

Beyond this passion for vision, the artists’ knowledge of the past is evident in their works, and Giuseppe Castiglione even became an important imagery for the residing artists and poets. They paid distant homage to Castiglione by using him as a great pioneer in looking westward for artistic inspirations but also criticized him for his obedience to the Qing court. Like Castiglione, these artists and their works radiated salvational sentiments and a public knowledge. The intermingling between visual art and other genres, the elite and mass culture, and between Bohemians and pragmatists coexisted to suggest an anachronistic yet strong presence of Renaissance culture in which the artists supposedly knew all and attempted to change all. In this experimental soil, the stigma resulting from the traumatic years before 1979 was resolved through self- and public-salvation by “preaching” the knowledge once limited to the elite, now to the mass, whether it be science or art, politics or non-politics. Surprisingly, bible-reading and

¹⁶ Elisabetta Corsi, “ ‘Agreeable yet Useful: Notes on Jesuitical Visual Culture during the Seventeenth Century’ ” in *Pacific Rim Report: “Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Arts in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (San Francisco: USF-Center for the Pacific Rim, 2003), 9-16.

¹⁷ Elisabetta Corsi, “ ‘Agreeable yet Useful: Notes on Jesuitical Visual Culture during the Seventeenth Century’ ” in *Pacific Rim Report: “Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Arts in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (San Francisco: USF-Center for the Pacific Rim, 2003), 9-16.

sharing sessions were extremely popular among the Yuan Ming Yuan artists and Duofu became a Christian in one of these activities.

Another explanation that might account for the similarities between the Jesuits and the village artists could be the political suppression they were both facing. This is another commonality when it comes to the two groups' identities. Specifically, the oppression came to both groups first as self-censorship during the art's conception, then close supervision during the art-making and limited tolerance for any moves out of the box. They both had to express their individualism in the guise of other permissible means. Starting from late 1980s and early 1990s, the new generation including artists like Fang Lijun initiated a "new" narrative called "Naughty Realism," exemplified by Fang's highly stereotypical portraits of smiling male figures with narrow, squinted eyes. Just like Castiglione, he had both focus perspective and cavalier perspective at his disposal to create his space. The "naughtiness" of his style lies in a diversified perspective, a bright saturated palette, and a surreal flatness as his cover to smuggle a strong presence of political irony and individual indifference under the eyes of the administrative powers constantly knocking on the doors of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. The vagueness and openness coexisting in Fang's approach provides a recipe to survive under the encroaching power pressing on the provocative potential of contemporary Chinese art. Similarly, Castiglione's recipe might have been his portraits of Emperor Qianlong.

CHAPTER 2

Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village

2.1 The Trajectory of the Artist Village

In any academic argument, the timeline is always the spine of the narrative. To unfold the history of the artist community, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, a tripartite periodization will be utilized for a comprehensive view: emergence, development and collapse. However, to avoid a fractured narrative, the analysis will include both the prelude and the legacy of this artist community. To summarize the characteristics of different periods, the emergence period can be viewed as a non-coincidental coincidence because many critical factors had been well prepared for the community to emerge even before 1979. The development period can be seen as a difficult survival, and the collapse period an inevitable fall.

Most scholarship would agree on the 1979 meeting of the literary journal, *Today*, in the Western Palaces, or Xiyanglouqu, the European Building Complex, marks the official emergence of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. In fact, the origin of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village could go much further into the previous history of Beijing.

Some would argue that Yuan Ming Yuan had lost all significance in Chinese life before 1979 except for the brief visit by the Red Guards from Qing Hua Middle School on the occasion of what they called “Yuan Ming Yuan Meeting.”¹⁸ This singular case would not stand as evidence of its consistent importance as illustrated by Geremie

¹⁸ Geremie Barme, “The Romance of Ruins,” in *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1996), 142-154.

Barne's statement, and certainly not a convincing prelude for its later rebirth as the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. Nevertheless, Beijing as an art capital even throughout the political turmoils was critical to the early embryo of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.

It is crucial to understand the importance of the artistic practices before the early 80s as a foundation for the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. The institutionalization of art and creative discourse was a blast to Chinese art scene. Starting from 1949, the field of visual art was managed directly by the China Artists' Association, which imposed strong control on creative endeavors.¹⁹ Even under strict control, there were still instances of deviation in artistic and literary practice and one example is the underground poets from the late 1960s such as Shi Zhi,²⁰ and during the Cultural Revolution, "subjects of varied experiences and consciousness were agents of action."²¹ These experiences and consciousness became the new foundation for the later development in Chinese art. In this fashion, many artists involved in making Socialist Realist paintings continued to experiment with modernist techniques in private and Beijing Art Company remained working during the revolution to provide service.²² Beijing Art Company provided artists like Yan Zhenduo a shelter from too much political pressure so that they could enjoy some private leisure to paint from nature at Yuan Ming Yuan.

¹⁹ Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu, introduction to *Salon Salon: Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile-A Beijing Perspective* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2019), 34-73.

²⁰ Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu, introduction to *Salon Salon: Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile-A Beijing Perspective* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2019), 38.

²¹ Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu, introduction to *Salon Salon: Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile-A Beijing Perspective* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2019), 37-42.

²² Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu, introduction to *Salon Salon: Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile-A Beijing Perspective* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2019), 42.

Yuan Ming Yuan had already been artistically activated and recognized before 1979. Many artists like Yan later became active participants in the art boom starting from the late 1970s. By the end of 1978, signs and traces in art indicated society's normalization and events like the New Spring Art Exhibition and Beijing Oil Painting Research Association gradually loosened the restriction on styles. Consequently, the abstraction and the commercialization of art became possible. All these art activities were imbued with creative autonomy and intellectual democracy, and thus had profound influence for the later development of Yuan Ming Yuan.

However, Yuan Ming Yuan had not yet become well-known enough for an artist community up till the mid 80s. Yuan Ming Yuan remained as a remote place for historical commemorations and sporadically a gathering place for art salons. More attention was given to places like Beihai Park, whose location are closer to central Beijing, so Yuan Ming Yuan was just a minor part of the art discourse. As the national reform and commercialization ensued, the institutions like Beijing Art Company became insufficient for creative expressions and the work-assigning mechanism started to collapse. In other words, the late 80s started to witness a new wave of unemployed artists who were seeking other opportunities beyond the old system.

Years after the *Today* meeting, artists began to consider Yuan Ming Yuan as a long-term residence instead of an itinerant venue to visit. With the disbandment of the art journal, *Fine Art*, the previous editors of the journal, Din Fang and Tian Bin, made their home in Fuyuan Gate Village, which later became the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.²³

²³ Han Zun, "Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village: The Odyssey of Contemporary Chinese Artists," last modified October 8, 2018, <https://posts.careerengine.us/p/5bbadbaaf46bd936379fabbb>.

However, they were not alone: many artists broke with the institutions including Beijing Art Company, China Artists Association or the art schools where they were employed, both on a spiritual level and financial level, which means they voluntarily renounced the opportunity to work on an assigned job as many would assume in a planned economy, and chose instead to live a Bohemian life inside the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. According to Yang Wei, a renowned art critic and close friend to Yuan Ming Yuan artists, he thinks during the emergence period from 1979 to 1989, Yuan Ming Yuan artist community was only in its childhood because many artists were still working for state-run institutions despite that some had come to Yuan Ming Yuan as freelancers. It was the dramatic impact of 1989 that catalyzed the rapid popularization of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village because what happened at Tiananmen Square had finally convinced the institution artists to distrust the system and consider other lifestyles.

The years 1989-1993 represent the development phase for the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. Many notable events happened during this time. The Manifesto of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village states that “A new form of existence has been confirmed on the ancient ruins of imperial gardens.” Aligned with the Bohemian lifestyle and idealist sentiment, many works were made to commemorate the establishment of this special community. Yang Lian’s poem, *Apologia-To a Ruin* best captures the artists’ complicated feelings towards living a new artistic life on the ancient artistic ruins. The younger generation, including the artists like Fang Lijun, with his iconic figure paintings, and Yi Li all joined this community to practice art and exhibit their works. In 1992, the “Woods Exhibition” marks the epitome of the community’s development. In the woods

behind the Fuyuan Gate, the artists organized a group exhibition, which attracted many attendees and press coverage.

In 1995, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village was officially closed down by the authorities, however, before its final closure, the community had witnessed a significant loss of residents since 1993. According to Li Gongming and Li Suting's memoir, in 1993 and 1994, many artists including Fang Lijun, Yang Maoyuan, Zhang Huipin and Wang Yin had started to consider leaving Yuan Ming Yuan as a result of the constant disturbance of the peaceful life of the community.²⁴ After Yuan Ming Yuan became the focus of press around 1992, the community received countless notices and warnings from the local police and cultural administration until the eve of 4 June 1995, a curious date to note, when the local police sealed off the area and ejected the artists. A hasty punctuation was drawn to conclude the last phase of this Bohemian trilogy.

Many factors could account for the emergence and fall of this artist community but the government's presence is a convincing one. Geremie Barme observes that Yuan Ming Yuan became "a charisma that led successive governments to develop their own plans to use it as a site symbolizing national revival."²⁵ This insight would be echoed by many critical moments throughout the three periods of Yuan Ming Yuan. The government's presence throughout the entire life of the village allowed the artists to exist as a demonstration of the new policies as part of the national reform, until the government found "better" agendas to use Yuan Ming Yuan as the symbol for national revival. These

²⁴ Gongming Li, "'Heterotopias': Artist Community at Songzhuang Village," *Landscape*, <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/articles/c076-200303054.pdf>.

²⁵ Geremie Barme, "The Romance of Ruins," in *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1996), 145.

agendas include the real estates and later the Yuan Ming Yuan National Park. Other factors will be examined in the following chapters.

2.2 Yuan Ming Yuan Reimagined

The origin of Yuan Ming Yuan could also be attributed to the appropriation value of the Yuan Ming Yuan, meaning both its physical location and cultural significance. Appropriation remained as a key concept to both the art practice and the action itself of establishing an artist community on the ancient ruins of Jesuit artists. The artists recycled Yuan Ming Yuan as a location, an artwork, a cultural icon, and a powerful memory. The establishment of this artist community grew out of a reimagined concept of the original Yuan Ming Yuan.

According to Yang Wei, an art critic and early participant of this establishment, Yuan Ming Yuan artists reimagined Yuan Ming Yuan as their intellectual Utopia, and this Utopia can trace its roots to Chinese literati tradition and the modern intellectual movement of the 1920s.²⁶ Yuan Ming Yuan was an artificially reconstructed community of literati dissidents, resembling the Shanghai concession for the early intellectuals like Lu Xun.²⁷

To begin with, the awareness of Jesuit artists was undoubtedly strong in the artists' minds. In Geremie Barme's description of the community's location, he mentioned "Many of the houses the artists rented were in the area of Scepter Lodge(Ruyi Guan), where Jesuit missionary artists like Giuseppe Castiglione had worked during the

²⁶ Wei Yang, "What I Experienced from Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village to Songzhuang Village," last modified January 8, 2017, <https://xw.qq.com/cmsid/2017010800725100>.

²⁷ Wei Yang, "What I Experienced from Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village to Songzhuang Village," last modified January 8, 2017, <https://xw.qq.com/cmsid/2017010800725100>.

Qianlong Reign.”²⁸ This information is important, however, the physical overlap does not simply lead to a historical connection, unless the artists’ work directly demonstrate this aspect. In *Birth*, Yanglian, a poet who was also an active member of *Today*, the literary magazine and later the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, wrote, “Let this mute stone attest my birth,” and “I come to this ruins seeking the only hope that has illuminated me.” These Passages show a desire to seek new hope on the cultural ruins. The signifiers, “stone,” “ruins,” “swaddling clothes,” and “grave” all visualize the will to “defy all the waste and degradation,” because the poet and the artists “has not come to lament death,” the death of the imperial order that Jesuit artists represented, but “a sun that will not be contained in the grave.”²⁹ By reconnecting with the history, the artists reconstructed their position as the new Jesuits.

Again from Yang Wei, the tradition of the literati community can be dated back to ancient times, but these communities were never independent but rather reliant on either the government or business sponsorship, and it was not until China’s Republic Period that the critical transition from the literati model to a modern intellectual one happened in the Concession Area of Shanghai, a comparatively liberal and peaceful “Utopia” amidst all the turmoil. The new intellectual community tapped the international resources both economically and culturally available in Shanghai, also called Chicago of the East, and produced many milestones for the early modern period of Chinese art history.

Additionally, the community thrived on the press industry, unemployed literati and a

²⁸ Geremie Barme, “The Romance of Ruins,” in *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1996), 148.

²⁹ Geremie Barme, “The Romance of Ruins,” in *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1996), 146.

surge of Nationalism. To avoid the heavy taxes and strict censorship imposed by the Chinese government, many press companies swarmed into the Concession Area of Shanghai where the judicial power was shared by several colonialist nations. Many from the traditional literati class also followed the press industry into Shanghai because the abrupt end of the Imperial Examination System had made them largely unemployed but they could still survive on remunerations by writing the commissions for various publishers inside the Concession Area. Besieged by colonialism within and authoritarianism without, these artists and writers always demonstrated a strong tendency for Nationalism and revolutions. In this context, provocative ideas almost became their weapons to protect their relative independency against colonialism and authoritarianism, and these ideas were the anchor of their complicated identity.

There are many exciting commonalities between this intellectual community and the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. They were both established by unemployed intellectuals under the internal and external pressure to change society. They both happened in the largest cities of China, one the political capital and the other the economic capital, at the critical moments of Chinese history when the nation was undergoing significant changes in all aspects. Both were short-lived and had far-reaching ramifications and influences into the following decades, both demonstrated a strong inclination towards Nationalism and Modernism. They both owe their origin to two important sources: the western intellectual model and Chinese literati model.

If we follow the thread of the contemporary connection to Yuan Ming Yuan's past, we cannot ignore the strong connection between western intellectuals and religious

missionaries. In fact, the old Jesuits yet reimagined themselves to be the western literati wearing Taoist cloaks and scholarly outfits, firstly under the pressure to conform and later by clear drives to merge the two models mentioned above: the western intellectual and Chinese literati. In the wake of Giuseppe Castiglione, Chinese artists again were in a similar position to conform and challenge. The economic reform following 1978 created the momentum to reconnect with the western intellectual model, and after three decades of cultural gap, the artists were looking back on one end of a broken bridge to the other: the Chinese literati tradition. According to Joseph Levenson, in his *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, the spirit of Confucianism reappeared in modern China in different forms.³⁰ Socialist China promotes “Red and Professional” and thus the image of an expert instead of a Renaissance man or a Confucian scholar. However, Levenson points out the importance to see Socialist China as a development on Chinese history rather than a break-up with the past.

In this complicated entanglement, Yuan Ming Yuan Artists took the Jesuit model by occupying the physical and cultural space by following footprints, yet this reimagined Yuan Ming Yuan, as a development on Chinese history, cannot stop us from detecting some melancholic nostalgia under its sophisticated charisma.

³⁰ Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, trans. Dahua Zheng and Jing Ren (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2000), 323.

2.3 Conceptual Fulcrum in Appropriations

When Liu Tao conceived and executed her performance art piece “Concept 21” using the physical ruins of Yuan Ming Yuan, the questions emerged: is the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village as a process a performance art, and as a whole, a great appropriation project? As a result, Liu Tao’s work triggered the anger of the authorities,³¹ which lasted for the entire life of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. These reactions from the authorities reflect another dimension of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. In a nutshell, the village artists appropriated Yuan Ming Yuan as a conceptual fulcrum to negotiate for new cultural space, although whether the negotiation was a success remains doubtful.

Liu Tao’s “Concept 21” included the broken parts of architectural remains available at Yuan Ming Yuan and she wrapped them along with living human bodies while exposing some recognizable motifs of the architecture. These motifs and gate-like formation gave away just enough information for the audiences to catch the references, but not too much to overwhelm them. The appropriation is clear here, as the cloth or the “shroud” acts as the new connector to piece together the broken puzzle - Yuan Ming Yuan Imperial Garden. This affordable, fluid and powerful connector, covers and reveals simultaneously, a paradox common to appropriation art, but the defining elements here are the physical components, the location where this work was executed and its relationship to other works of the village artists.

In fact, appropriation is a major element in the art practice at the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. For instance, Fang Lijun, appropriated his own imagery, his iconic smiling

³¹ Geremie Barme, “The Romance of Ruins,” in *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1996), 147.

face, after this representation became almost an identifier for his art. Although the underlying motives for this appropriation remain unclear, he continued to mass-produce this image in the following years and this self-appropriation. The importance of appropriation to the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village is evident. Another appropriation artist is Yi Ling, also an active member of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. From his early works to recent ones, Yi Ling maintained his unique manner of appropriation: maps, iconic buildings, characters and even his peer artists' names all became subjects of appropriation. During his residence at Yuan Ming Yuan, he took the map of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village and abstracted it into one of his works shown at the "Woods Exhibition" mentioned in the previous chapters. Beyond these artists, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village was the center of appropriation art, and this appropriation is part of a larger trend on the site, since the Western Palaces Area was built on Jesuits' appropriation of European elements but the appropriation does not equal the authentic because the European elements were specifically constrained by the emperors' tastes.

In the previous instances of art appropriation, Yuan Ming Yuan artists developed their ways of appropriation and the space of Yuan Ming Yuan made this trend permissible and the concentration of this trend possible. The permissiveness and significance of Yuan Ming Yuan as a temple or museum of appropriation art provided the artists the opportunity to "take from" the old and the new, the western and the Chinese. For the Jesuits, appropriation was, after all, an expedient strategy under the imperial command. The resulting works did not carry any radical meanings. Consequently, the results of

Jesuitical appropriations were powerless. This “controlled diversity” unfortunately wasted art’s potential to provoke alternative thinking and innate social negotiation.³²

By contrast, the contemporary appropriations at the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village represent an attempt to confront and negotiate, and this attempt is both protective and expressive. Their art would confront the realities of Chinese society of the 80s and criticized these realities by focusing on certain themes and narratives with a strong sense of individualism and romanticism. However, the representation of their stories were visually protected by the appropriation of certain images, figures and symbols including Yuan Ming Yuan, which would appear neutral and “harmless” to the authorities. In reality, Yuan Ming Yuan artists were highly aware of the authorities’ attitudes, and their intention to appropriate was explicitly demonstrated and directed towards the subjects of nationalism , colonialism and Capitalism. The Manifesto of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village is a case in point and it states “To fulfill our spiritual needs, we became homeless wanderers on our homeland.”³³ This literary paradox between homelessness and homeland is a strong signal to imply the necessity and goal of art appropriation: to leave home just to reach home - home is a tool.

The appropriations could have become a conceptual fulcrum, around which the artists had expected the social lever to turn. According to Li Gongming, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village seemed more like an event compared to Songzhuang, a “successor” of

³² Marco Mussilo, “Mid-Qing Arts and Jesuit Vision: Visual Encounters and Exchanges in 18th-Century Beijing,” in *Ai Wei Wei Circle of Animals*, ed. Susan Delson (New York: AW Asia, 2011), 160.

³³ Gongming Li. “ ‘Heterotopias’: Artist Community at Songzhuang Village,” *Landscape*, <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/articles/c076-200303054.pdf>.

Yuan Ming Yuan.³⁴ In comparison, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village's goal was to negotiate with a strong optimism that the negotiation would succeed, while Songzhuang had ultimately abandoned any attempts to negotiate but only sought to seek a long-term truce with the authorities. If Yuan Ming Yuan were a useful fulcrum, then Songzhuang would be a leveled surface and the only kinetic energy the friction but not out of an imbalance, Yuan Ming Yuan as a conceptual fulcrum created. "Heterotopia" a term coined by Michel Foucault to describe "of other spaces" best captures the nature of Yuan Ming Yuan, the appropriation heaven. By second-handedly taking, adjusting, utilizing, demonstrating, propagating and finally changing the "legitimized" visual elements at their disposal, the artists used the "this space" to negotiate for "other space" to exist .³⁵

Ai Weiwei's 12-Zodiac Animal Heads strongly reflects the function of this conceptual fulcrum and showcases how appropriation is readjusting the balances in Chinese culture and politics. As an early participant of artistic gatherings at Yuan Ming Yuan during late 70s, Ai missed the entire life of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village due to his relocation to New York City in the late 80s. As a copy of the stolen heads of Yuan Ming Yuan, his work, along with Liu Tao's "Concept 21," a similar undertaking raised a series of questions about ac culture "oscillates between iconic production and mass manufacture, ruin and production, patrimony and erasure."³⁶ The tensions between the

³⁴ Gongming Li. " 'Heterotopias': Artist Community at Songzhuang Village," *Landscape*, <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/articles/c076-200303054.pdf>.

³⁵ Gongming Li. " 'Heterotopias': Artist Community at Songzhuang Village," *Landscape*, <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/articles/c076-200303054.pdf>.

³⁶ Charles Merewether, "The Original and the Copy: Ai Weiwei and the Fate of the Zodiac Heads," in *Ai Wei Wei Circle of Animals*, ed. Susan Delson (New York: AW Asia, 2011), 102.

copy and the original, the appropriation and the source, and the “legitimate” and “unlawful” all target the conceptual fulcrum mentioned above, but the tensions will only remain if appropriations continue to exist and new meanings are created

Unsurprisingly, after this process was outlawed in 1995, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village folded quietly and this community ironically became a subject for later appropriations. Yi Ling, once nicknamed the Village Head of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village even named his son Canyon, which means remained garden.

CHAPTER 3

Imperial Garden in the Western Context

3.1 After the Loot

With the previous chapters dedicated to examine the premodern connection and contemporary development of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, we would wonder about the western perception of Yuan Ming Yuan and how this perception affected Yuan Ming Yuan. The West has always been an important participant in forming the artistic and power discourse of Yuan Ming Yuan. In 1860, Yuan Ming Yuan Garden was notoriously destroyed by Anglo-French troops during the Second Opium War and from there, Yuan Ming Yuan continued to take different forms in the western art world until the West returned to the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village as the novel elements of the villagers' art.

It was only as a result of recent auctions of the animal heads that some long overdue attention was paid to the looting of Yuan Ming Yuan. Although local residents and other parties across different periods also followed suit after the Anglo-French loot, the Anglo-French troops were remembered as the major perpetrators of this heinous crime upon Yuan Ming Yuan, a national humiliation to the Chinese, and a skeleton in the closet for previous Colonists. Amidst the anger, oblivion and confusion, the foreign looting of Yuan Ming Yuan became an inseparable part of this cultural and artistic relic, and certainly the recipe for the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.

During the artists' residence at the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, this violent history was rarely mentioned in artist interviews or exhibition catalogs, but cultural violence and its strong association with colonialism has a strong presence in artists'

works. Again, from Liu Tao's work, "Concept 21," the representation of the garden induces the audiences to think of not what remains but what was taken. The negative space between architectural parts and winding cloth prompts the viewer to meditate on the scars and emptiness left by the cultural violence on the grounds of artists' standing. This sentiment is underlined by the covered bodies and fractured forms. In Ai Weiwei's recovery of the zodiac heads, the representation of copy-making also raises a series of questions shrouded by the events of 1860. One of the questions would be how cultural violence perpetrated by different parties including both the West and the Chinese would inform the contemporary discourse of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village? By making copies of the Jesuits' copy of the European sources, Ai offered a surprising answer to this question: contemporary Chinese art would reject and invalidate both the Chinese and the Western in controlling the meaning of Yuan Ming Yuan as art.

Although Ai did not directly participate in the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village, the questions following the loot remained central to the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. If we take "Concept 21" as an example, it is fair to argue Ai's Zodiac Heads came as a belated echo to the Yuan Ming Yuan artists in terms of chronology.

Victor Hugo, as one of the few witting intellectuals to discuss the looting, blatantly denounced the Anglo-French troops. In his letter to Captain Butler, he spoke highly of Yuan Ming Yuan as the "formidable and splendid museum of the Orient," and expressed his sorrow and pity by calling the two looting parties "victorious" bandits. In this way, he individually criticized the Anglo-French troops and colonialism they represented. Two points in his writings stand out: the first one is the differentiation between European art

and oriental art as the “Idea” and the “Chimera.” Hugo argued that Yuan Ming Yuan “was a kind of enormous model of the chimera.” Another noteworthy point is that Hugo satirically underlines the crimes of the loot by calling attention to “What civilization has done to Barbarism.”³⁷ These two points still haunt the display and contextualization of Yuan Ming Yuan in the western context. It is interesting if we also count Victor Hugo, a representative of the modern European intellectuals as one of the parities to define the meaning of Yuan Ming Yuan.

According to *Collecting and Displaying China's 'Summer Palace' in the West*, objects from Yuan Ming Yuan were circulated through either private collectors or public museums in the years followed the looting. The provenance of the objects often became a subject for China-European conflicts in terms of repatriation versus museums maintaining legal holding. However, the issue of provenance was only brought to table in late 1980s when the looted objects started to make frequent appearances in international auctions and thus attracted more attention from the Chinese government. Prior to this new situation, the objects were mainly disseminated among Britain, France and India. In Britain, museum displays managed to use space arrangements and “neutral” language to avoid any confrontations, while in France, the acquisition and display of imperial objects meant to emphasize Empress Eugène’s power paralleling the Chinese counterpart represented by mounts of royal treasure.³⁸ The display of Yuan Ming Yuan in the western

³⁷ Victor Hugo, “THE CHINESE EXPEDITION: VICTOR HUGO ON THE SACK OF THE SUMMER PALACE,” last modified November 25, 1861, <https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/articles/the-chinese-expedition-victor-hugo-on-the-sack-of-the-summer-palace/>.

³⁸ Vincent Drouguet, “Empress Eugenie’s Chinese Museum at the Chateau of Foutainebleau: An Unusual Decor in the ‘House of the Ages,’ ” in *Collecting and Displaying China's “Summer Palace” in the West: The Yuanmingyuan in Britain and France* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 138-148.

context is currently fraught with different issues, and the confrontation between Nationalism and Imperialism remains a relevant issue to the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. The governmental efforts in taking back the looted objects were mirrored by their efforts to take back the control of Yuan Ming Yuan from the artists' hands.

Faced with the complicated history of Yuan Ming Yuan, with both Chinese and western powers involved, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village became a buffer zone for mediating old and new meanings assigned to this single location. Instead of simply becoming a relic whose value is shaped and controlled by the few including Victor Hugo, Chinese authorities or western collectors, the conditions of the artist village made it possible to turn Yuan Ming Yuan's identity to "a life of circulation" and a fate of rebirth by artists' physical and artistic recycling of Yuan Ming Yuan's unique niche in art history.³⁹

³⁹ Charles Merewether, "The Original and the Copy: Ai Weiwei and the Fate of the Zodiac Heads," in *Ai Wei Wei Circle of Animals*, ed. Susan Delson (New York: AW Asia, 2011), 102.

3.2 Chinese Art in Two Lenses

With the backgrounds and the following stories of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village examined, I would like to conclude with a direction for readers to explore: Chinese Art in Two Lenses. Following this direction, this title might provoke a strand of open-ended thoughts, which might invite the next question: what is Chinese art? To answer this question, we might as well return to the main subject of this thesis: the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village.

In chapter one, the Jesuit styles were reviewed in detail and their legacy was investigated with special attention to the new Jesuits, which used to refer to the Chinese artists living at the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village from 1979 to 1995. By contrast, chapter two focused on the trajectory of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village and based on that, the following content scavenged the cultural significance of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village as a conceptual fulcrum through art appropriations. The first part of the last chapter took the discussion beyond the previous scope and contextualized Yuan Ming Yuan in the western and global context to reflect back on the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village in terms of its art and politics.

In the light of the information above, the two lenses could mean the western and the Chinese, the local and the global and the traditional and the contemporary. The revolving discussion about the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village can act as a departing point for further looking into contemporary Chinese art. The question naturally evolves from “What is Chinese art” to “What is contemporary Chinese art,” because the time frame

shifts from Qing-dynasty to the Republic Period, then to Maoist China and finally the 80s and 90s.

In a basic sense, the term contemporary art refers to art—namely, painting, sculpture, photography, installation, performance, and video art—produced today. However, many other factors could easily complicate this definition. Agamben quotes from Roland Barthes to state that “The contemporary is the untimely” and explains further, using Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* to argue that those who are truly contemporary are those who neither coincide with today nor adjust themselves to its demands.⁴⁰ This argument provides a proper categorization for the art and artists at the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village because by staging the history in the present and projecting the present back to the history, the village artists did not belong to today as their art would be hard to fit into either the Chinese or western trends of the 80s. Their art did not answer the calls of the contemporaneous society but instead sought to create demands for the audiences to hear and answer in other contexts. This demand lies in the thoughts around Ai’s copy of the “fabricated history,” and the mystery around Liu Tao’s connecting of the fragments from different cultures and periods.

In other words, the artists are traditional from various perspectives, as discussed in chapter one, because they did not incorporate aspects of the legacy of the original Jesuits including Giuseppe Castiglione, but they became the new Jesuits by taking what was closer to the core of Jesuitical art than their visual performance: art’s malleability under similar power discourses. They are Chinese because they looked up to the Confucius-

⁴⁰ Giorgio Agamben, “What Is the Contemporary?” in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 41.

literati principles and departed from the early model of Chinese intellectuals to arrive at the original form of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. They are western because they manipulated the idea of Yuan Ming Yuan as an icon for western influences and instilled their works with these influences in terms of techniques and concepts. This mixture is organic because Yuan Ming Yuan remained as a living medium for both the Chinese and the western to communicate with each other but never a dead pond for storing meanings. It provided for the artists a shelter, with the freedom from confronting any ideologies. In this sense, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village is neither traditional nor modern, neither western nor Chinese but contemporary in alignment with Agamben's argument.

Recent scholarship has become accustomed to viewing Chinese art in binary lenses, either ancient or modern, either Chinese or western because art historians are usually too much distracted by the disconnection between the any two and their connection is always neglected. This issue can be even extended to the scholarship on contemporary art in general.

However, contemporary Chinese art is both disconnection and connection, thus defining the nature of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village. It is time to replace the binary lenses with a new vision, and just like Ai Weiwei's Zodiac Heads, the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village allowed for the realization of an imaginative realm of freedom not by belonging but by not belonging to any bipartition. Perhaps the legacy of the Yuan Ming Yuan Artist Village is that they can be read as signs of the past only within the light of the future, or of the west only within the light of China.

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