

<sup>60</sup> Liu Zhanbin, *Yuanmingyuan cangsang ji*, p.103:

玉闕瓊樓委碧埃  
獸蹄鳥迹走荒臺  
殘碑沒盡宮人老  
空向蒿萊拔劫灰

Nearly half a century later, the educator and revolutionary Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1889–1927) lived and worked not far from the Yuan Ming Yuan. In the early Republic, perhaps in a mood of reverie, he penned the following lines:

Jade-like balustrades and lustrous pavilions sleep forever  
in the embrace of greening grasses and windswept sands;  
Terraces and gazebos are frequented now only by the footprints of  
animals and the passage of birds.  
Broken stelae lie buried in the dirt, while the palace attendants of  
yesteryear have grown old.  
Sifting aimlessly in the long grasses, what do they search for in the  
rubble of the past?<sup>60</sup>

### *The Summer Palace*

#### **Figure 43**

*The Lei Family model of the imperial apartments on Clear and Calm View of Nine Realms (Jiuzhou Qingyan) prepared for the Tongzhi reconstruction (looking west) (photograph by Zhao Tingjie 趙廷介)*

In the early 1870s, there was a fitful attempt by the Court to restore parts of the palace, and rebuild some precincts of the original Yuan Ming Yuan. The construction work was ostensibly aimed at providing the Regent Empresses, “exhausted by the labour of many years,” as the Tongzhi Emperor put it when he reached his majority, with a garden retreat. In reality, Tongzhi’s mother the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧, who had first lived in the Yuan Ming



Yuan as the main concubine of Xianfeng, was anxious to have the much-beloved pleasure rebuilt for herself. To this end elaborate plans were drawn up, models (*tangyang* 燙樣) of pavilions were made by the Imperial architects, the Lei Family 雷氏,<sup>61</sup> and the restoration begun in 1873. Officials concerned by the political chaos and natural catastrophes facing the empire strenuously protested that such extravagance could not be justified. Although the reconstruction was eventually called to a halt in 1874,<sup>62</sup> it was not before a number of buildings had been restored and much debris cleared from the area around the emperor's quarters.

Following this short-lived attempt at resuscitation, a second wave of destruction was unleashed on the grounds by the imperial house when it was decided to refurbish instead the Qingyi Yuan (Park of Clear Rippling Waters, now renamed Yihe Yuan, the Garden of Harmonious Old Age) to accommodate Cixi's 'retirement' in the 1890s. To carry out this project given the strictures on imperial finances and resources, the Yuan Ming Yuan became the object of exploitation. Thence began its long career of supplying other gardens and retreats of Peking with the wherewithal for their own existence. Most of the remaining buildings in the Yuan Ming Yuan were torn down for the bricks, tiles, wooden columns and stone-work required for the construction of the new Summer Palace.

### *In the Service of the Revolution*

The third great sacking of the gardens began shortly thereafter, in 1900, when trees (numbered in their thousands) and the wooden pillars in the few extant structures, as well as the surviving wooden bridges, were cut or pulled down and stored in the township of Qinghe 清河 for sale or for the manufacture of charcoal.

Added to this was the ruinous confusion of the Boxer Rebellion. Following the occupation of the imperial capital by foreign troops, soldiers were also billeted in the imperial gardens. Banner men, whose villages surrounded the Yuan Ming Yuan, having found themselves defeated and without effective leadership, now formed marauding gangs and ransacked the grounds in search of profit. They reportedly destroyed all of the remaining trees and buildings of the gardens in the space of a month.<sup>63</sup>

After the 1911 Revolution it was the stones, bricks and rockeries of the palaces that came under threat. The administrators of the Summer Palace, overseen by the Bureau of Household Affairs (*Neiwu fu* 內務府), who also had jurisdiction over the Yuan Ming Yuan, deprived of their former emoluments now relied for a considerable portion of their income on the proceeds of the sale of materials taken from the old palace grounds. It was not until 1924 that the Bureau even determined the exact area covered by the Yuan Ming Yuan gardens,<sup>64</sup> when Reginald F. Johnston, English tutor to the Xuantong 宣統 Emperor Puyi 溥儀, was put in charge of the western pleasures.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> For six generations dating from the mid-Kangxi period the Lei Family (Yangshi Lei 樣式雷) were the imperial architects commissioned to design buildings for the Yuan Ming Yuan. The Leis were reduced to poverty following the founding of the Republic and sold the models and materials related to the gardens to the Beijing Library, now the Peking National Library. See Zhang Enyin, *Yuan-mingyuan bianqian sbitanwei*, p.178.

<sup>62</sup> *Qingdai dang'an shiliao: Yuanmingyuan*, vol.1, p.743.

<sup>63</sup> For the details of which Banner men groups destroyed the various sections of the palace see Zhao Guanghua, "Yuanmingyuan jiqi shuyuan de houqi pohuai liju," p.14.

<sup>64</sup> For details see Qin Guojing, *Xun Qing buangshi yishi* [Anecdotes from the former imperial family of the Qing] (Beijing: Zijincheng Chubanshe, 1985), pp.87-8.

<sup>65</sup> Reginald F. Johnston, *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, reprint ed. (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.358.