Online Confucius Institute at The Open University

Guest Speaker: Professor Louise Tythacott

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[Edited transcript]

Professor Louise Tythacott

Hello everyone – it's nice to be here today. I'd like to start off by thanking Dr Kan Qian and other at the Open University for inviting me to give the talk today.

I'm going to be discussing the fate of loot – or looted objects - from China's Summer Palace or the *Yuanmingyuan* (圆明园) in auctions, exhibitions and museums mainly in the UK and France and also briefly at the end be looking at some of the auctions that took place in China.

Here's the structure for the session:

I'm going to start off by introducing the original locations of the objects in the *Old Summer Palace*- known in Chinese as Yuanming Yuan, -and then briefly say a few things about the looting itself. I'll move on to think about the key auctions, exhibitions and displays that took place soon after the looting, so from 1860 onwards into the late 19th century, and then into the early 20th century. The third part of the talk will focus on auctions, exhibitions and also museums more recently, today and in the 21st century.

To start with an introduction the Summer Palace – or the Old Summer Palace is the term widely used in the West to designate this place, but it is a bit of a misnomer as this was in fact not a single Palace, but a series of buildings and palaces set in a large park. The Chinese

term for the site is the Yuanming Yuan which translates as the 'Garden of Perfect Brightness', and this was an Imperial Garden – or rather a set of 3 imperial gardens - initiated by the Kangxi emperor around 1707-9 - but most of it was constructed between 1709 and 1772, developed by his grandson the great Qianlong emperor in the 18th century.

The important thing about to remember about the site is that it was the official seat of government. It was the place where the emperors resided, where they lived, and handled government affairs. Also importantly, it was not located in the capital city itself, Beijing, but rather five or so miles just outside to the northwest of the city centre proper. I've got a few quotes here I'll just read out from a book by Wong, He says – and I quote – that '*it took one and a half centuries of endless constructions to become arguably the greatest imperial garden China has ever built*'. A visiting French priest called Attiret, in the 18th century, referred to the site, the park as '*a paradise on earth*'.

As I said, this was a vast garden, or set of gardens, it was also an extraordinary architectural achievement on a massive scale. I have a few statistics: it was around 350 hectares, which I believe is around eight times the size of *Vatican City* in Rome, or five times the size of the *Forbidden City*, if you're more familiar with the *Forbidden City* in the centre of Bejing the size of Forbidden City. I've been told this translates to around or 5,600 football pitches. I've got some more statistics: 3.4 square kilometres, thousands of metres from east to west and north to south, 160,000 square metres of structures. The site itself was filled hundreds and hundreds of largely wooden buildings, halls pavilions, terraces, etc., cottages, studios, temples – all sorts of buildings, largely made of cedar wood, constructed to the highest Imperial quality. You can see here on the left-hand side of the screen an overview of the site itself and I'll just highlight here an area to the top right-hand side of the site devoted what is called 'European palaces', and we'll look a little bit more at these palaces later on. The key thing about the European palaces is that they were largely made of stone rather than cedar wood so when the whole site was burnt it was these palaces constructed by Europeans that remained. The site for the European palaces was roughly one fiftieth of the site of the entire building, and you can see here on the left-hand side, some of the images of the buildings within the site.

So, as well as being a very important garden complex, an extraordinary architectural achievement, Yuanmingyuan was also a repository of objects – housing the imperial Chinese art collection which had been built up over a period of thousands of years, two thousand or so years. Some people have described the collection of things in the site as one of the largest art collections in the world. Here is a list some of the kinds of materials that were found in the various buildings: jade in particular was very important - you can see the jade sceptre here, which we will talk about a little bit later on - cloisonné enamel pieces, textiles, a range of different porcelain pieces constructed to the highest quality, manuscripts – there were libraries within the Yuanmingyuan itself.

The site has been written about by many authors, in particular Wong, as I mentioned earlier, who said that, '*Beyond doubt, had the garden survived to this day, it would be one of the greatest and richest museums in the world*' (Wong, 2001: 6).At the top here, I have put a quote here from the 19th century French writer Victor Hugo, who referred to the *Summer Palace as 'a wonder of the world'.* And then Greg Thomas, one of the great scholars of the Summer Palace, who looks in particular at relations between the Chinese and French aesthetics at this time, says that, '*Had it survived…it would easily rival the Louvre as a global tourist attraction*' (Thomas, 2008: 13).

The Summer Palace didn't survive and many of you, I'm sure, know that it was destroyed in the Opium Wars, in fact as the final act of the Second Opium War in 1860. The First Opium War took place between 1839 and 1842, the Second Opium War between 1856 and 1860 have been described as the most dramatic conflict between China and Britain during the 19th century (Pagani, 1998:29). The Opium Wars are complex and I'm, not going to go into too much detail about the origins of the wars here, but fundamentally they were based on British attempts to forcibly open up China to trade in the late 19th century and this tension simmered until the early 20th century, when the British invaded China in 1839. As other authors have written – and I quote here, '*No episode in modern history has provided more occasion for the charge of 'imperialist aggression' than the First Anglo-Chinese War of 1839-42.'* (Fairbank and Reischauer, 1986: 277). So just to say that in the First Opium War it was the British that invaded China, but by the time of the Second Opium War (1856-60), which we are going to focus on today , it was the combined forces of the British and French, who had been drawn in to the military invasion. Overall, it was a very murky period in British and also European history.

Towards the end of the Second Opium War, in 1860, this man here, Sir James Bruce, the eighth Earl of Elgin was appointed the British High Commissioner to China. It is important to remember that fundamentally it, was under his command that British troops – and also French troops – ended up rioting and looting the Summer Palace in 1860. It was fundamentally because of Elgin that the site was destroyed by the British troops; We are all familiar with the surname Elgin, we all know what his father got up to with a certain set of marbles from Athens....like father, like son. Here's an image of Elgin at the time, being carried into Beijing in 1860 triumphantly after the looting of the palace, and a computer-generated image of the hall in Yuanmingyuan where, it's believed, Elgin would have had his headquarters located.

I appreciate there's a lot of text on this slide, but I think it's important to read it out to give a sense of the plundering and looting. It's interesting that many of the soldiers, both the British and the French soldiers wrote travel narratives of their experiences during the Second Opium War, and in their diaries many of them focused in on the days when they were looting the Summer Palace itself. For researchers, this remains a very useful record of what happened. I have amalgamated here some of the reports to give you a sense of the real frenzied atmosphere that took place. I'll start at the top:

> The initial stages of plundering were a raucous affair in a carnivalesque atmosphere. French soldiers, many dressed in Qing imperial robes or 'richly embroidered gowns of women' and wearing 'fine Chinese hats' (Wolseley, 1904: 77), ran about emptying into their tents sacks filled with jade, precious stones, cloisonné vases, ivory carvings, and watches and clocks of European manufacture, while others attempted to commandeer wagons or carts…hundreds of rolls of silk were pulled off shelves in store rooms, some spread indiscriminately on the floors, others used to secure the piles of loot on wagons, and still other were sewn together to make tents in the French camp (North China Herald, 20 Oct 1860).

An extraordinary defilement of Imperial quality artefacts. On the next paragraph down I've noted that Lord Elgin, who wrote a journal documenting his experienced during the war, said that there was not a room 'in which half the things had not been taken or broken to pieces', and he was very disappointed about the waste that was evident (Walrond 1872: 361-362). In other words, so much material was smashed to pieces, especially, I guess, the ceramics, the

porcelain, the large mirrors etcetera. At the bottom here I've said: Observers spoke of seeing 'grand embroideries' torn down for no apparent reason, Frenchmen using clubs to smash things to 'atoms', and 'wanton destruction' of what could not be carried away. (Tulloch, 1902: 117: Swinhoe 1861: 306; Wolseley [1862] 1972: 224). (Hevia, 78-9) SO, an extraordinary sense here of the really frenzied atmosphere that accompanied the looting.

Here's a depiction that was made not long after the looting, which took place on October the sixth 1860, which depicts the really chaotic scenes outside one of those European-style buildings I mentioned earlier. Right up into the far right-hand side of the site, one fiftieth of the site was occupied by European-style palaces, which had been designed by some of the Jesuit missionaries in working in the Imperial Court at the time. This building in particular, Haiyantang – you can see one of the facades of the building – but I'm going to draw your attention to this area here, which is actually a water fountain, and you can probably just make out animal heads. This here is six heads, six zodiac heads on the one side and the other six zodiac animal heads on the other side. The heads themselves are made of metal and we're going to come back to these later. come back to these later. As these particular heads have been causing quite a sensation in the market

Twelve days after the looting, on October 18, Elgin ordered the complete destruction of the palaces, and specifically this was in retaliation for the torture and execution of around twenty European and Indian prisoners. It took around 3,500 British troops (we're not entirely sure of the numbers) to set the entire place ablaze. It should be said that the French refused to participate in the destruction even though they had been part of the looting they did not want the final destruction of the site. Witnesses said it took three days to burn all the structures and people could see the fires as far away as Beijing. As I mentioned earlier, the Yuanmingyuan largely included wooden buildings made of cedar wood which were largely burnt apart from the ceramic roof tiles, which just lay on the ground, and what really remained visible were the European-style buildings were destroyed – only the European style buildings and palaces made of stone. You can see a photograph here in the 19th century of the remains of some of these palaces, and a more contemporary image of the foreign-style stone buildings today.

It is hard to be absolutely clear but authorities in Beijing estimate that approximately 1.5 million objects may well have been looted from the Yuanmingyuan – looted or destroyed. The Director of the Yuanmingyuan Park [Chen Mingjie] has actually said that he believes that the objects are housed in more than 2,000 museums in 47 countries around the world. Here I've got not necessarily Summer Palace objects in specific museums, but just a general indication of the range of Asian art museums across France, the US, and this is the V&A here in London.

The looted Treasures were brought back to Britain and France from late 1860 onwards and very soon some started to be sold – often by the soldiers - at auctions in London and Paris, mainly from 1861 onwards. Given the lengthy sea voyage back from the China coast, it's extraordinary really that the first sale of Summer Palace objects took place on 18 April 1861 at Phillips Auction House in London, a mere six or so months after the looting. Ou can see here the frontispiece, the front of the catalogue to this particular sale on the 18th of August 1861. It says, 'Objects of Chinese art from The Summer Palace, property of an officer'.

I've done quite a bit of research in the Christies archive in particular, in auction archives, which are unfortunately now closed to the public, but when I did the research I counted at

least twenty-two auctions in London (Christies and Phillips) which took place between April 1861 and February 1897 and with approximately 1, 330 objects specifically designated 'from the Summer Palace'. The wonderful thing about doing research in the Christies' archive is that the original hand-annotated catalogues to these sales indicate – you can see here on the right-hand side - the names of sellers (though it is very difficult to make out the writing from the mid-19th century) who were more than likely soldiers, in the centre is the amount that the particular objects were sold for, and on the right-hand side are the names of the purchasers – now these are almost entirely dealers: Archibald, Durlacher, the key London dealers at the time.

Here's an example of one of the pages from the auction catalogue, which gives you a really good sense of the kind of material that were sold. You can see at the top it says, 'The following were taken from the Summer Palace', there's a huge emphasis on gold material, gold boxes. I'll particularly draw your attention to this 'oblong writing-desk of pure gold with birds and foliage and set with about 520 diamonds' – so an extraordinarily valuable individual object which, unfortunately, I haven't been able to trace so far; I'd love to find out what happened to this. But overall, I think it's really important to stress here that the sudden influx, if you like, of these highly refined imperial objects into the auction landscape of London and also Paris at the time, created what some people have referred to as a 'seismic shift' in the perception of Chinese objects in the West. Before this time, before 1860, it was only really low-quality, China trade material that had made its way to Europe – so you can tell by the descriptions that these auction houses couldn't believe – they thought it was extraordinary - the new high-quality objects that were starting to flood the market.

As well as the auctions landscape in London and Paris, many objects were also publicly exhibited soon after they were brought back – and there were a whole series of triumphant displays of the Summer Palace loot, not only in main exhibition sites, but also up and down the country in the UKI. 've just listed a few here to give you a sense of the places and the kind of material that was exhibited. So, in 1861 there was a textile display at the South Kensington Museum, which was the forerunner of the V&A, as we know it today. That year too, there was a big exhibition in the Tuileries in Paris of the French loot, and here is an image of some of this loot on display; this is depicted in *The Illustrated London News*, you can see there's a huge emphasis on military paraphernalia: this is Emperor Qianlong's armour, spears, and all sorts of important objects. This is a gold stupa (which we will come back to later) which is presently on display in the *Musée Chinois* Paris, and these pieces in particular, I'll draw your attention to, known as *Ruyi* (如意) or ceremonial sceptres made of jade and also gold.

Just to go back to this list again, in 1862, Elgin lent some of his material to the South Kensington Museum. That year, too, there was a big international exhibition, which I'll also come back to in a moment in London. Several years later, the Crystal Palace in London had an enormous 'China Court' exhibiting the collections of a Captain Negroni who is said to have appropriated more objects than anybody else, about five hundred or so pieces, which have subsequently been auctioned off, and then one of the key soldiers at the time, Charles Gordon, also acquired a range of material and exhibited this at the United Services Institute in London later on in the century.

So objects were also displayed very prominently in France almost immediately after the looting, and in fact, many people credit - if that's the right word - the French for being better

than the British at the looting. In some ways they got more stuff, but they also got some of the best things. So here's the very triumphant exhibition of the 'curiosities', as they were called, that were presented by the French army to the Emperor Napoleon III and also the Empress Eugénie, who was particularly interested in Chinese materials. So the Expeditionary Army, the French army, the presented material to the French imperial couple, and here they are, exhibited in the centre of Paris in the Tuileries. We just saw earlier a depiction of this particular configuration of material with the armour, but I'll just draw your attention to these three rather beautiful Buddhist tapestries, which were later displayed after the exhibition here in in 1861. They were later put on display at the *Musée Chinois* at the Chateau of Fontainebleau, the military materials, some of the armour and also the swords etcetera were then given to the *Musée de L'Armée* in Paris. So one of the key places that you can now see Summer Palace loot is the *Musée Chinois* at the Chateau of Fontainebleau, to the South of Paris.

As I mentioned, the objects that were looted from the Yuanmingyuan by the French army were largely gathered together by the French General Montauban and then presented to the French Imperial couple, particularly Empress Eugénie, who you can see here, depicted in this image, who had a particular interest in Asian objects Asian art Asian artefacts. Soon after the material was sent to Fontainebleau, she created a *Musée Chinois* in one of the rooms in the Chateau of Fontainebleau, which you can see here, which is still on display, still open to the public. Here's the more contemporary view of it, with that gold stupa, which we looked at earlier. You can also see, if I draw your attention, to those three beautiful Buddhist tapestries, which instead of being displayed vertically, were placed horizontally on the ceilings at the *Musée Chinois*, basically for decorative effects. Many people have referred to this particular display of material as very much triumphalist, as trophies, trophies of warfare. Way to demonstrate the power of Napoleon and Eugénie, the French in dominating China. So, it's very much about imperialism and power.

I'll just mention a few more things about the 1862 exhibition I referred to earlier.
A very important exhibition, which was intended very much as a sequel to *The Crystal Palace Exhibition* of 1851 in Hyde Park. You can see the size of the building here, which unfortunately no longer exists. It was located where the *Natural History Museum* is now in London. It was a purpose-built building, bigger than *The Crystal Palace*, had more visitors than the Crystal Palace, more exhibits than the Crystal Palace, the Great Exhibition of 1851, and importantly, it also included a China Court, because this is a mere two years or so after the looting. And here on the bottom left-hand side, you can see a photograph of parts of the China Court with a large cloisonné enamel incense burner It looks like here, and a young boy gazing at all this extraordinary material. So, this was a large exhibition or display of Summer Palace loot.

As well as the auctions and the exhibitions, Summer Palace objects also of course, entered museum collections, and it's clear that many museums in the UK have Summer Palace looted objects I've listed, highlighted here. In particular the *V&A*, the *British Museum*, the *Lady Lever Art Gallery* on Merseyside, on the Wirral, near Liverpool, and also the *National Museum of Scotland*. It's quite interesting that really up until the 1980s, many of these museums proudly indicated Summer Palace provenance on the labels in the public displays, because this really added a sense of sort of prestige and value to the collections. It made people realise that they had a very important collection. However, over the last twenty or thirty years, these associations with the Summer Palace have tended to be removed in

public exhibitions, as this is now a very problematic and contentious issue, and it's often quite difficult, if you go into these galleries today, to tell from the labels whether or not the objects actually came from the Summer Palace. So, sometimes it's quite difficult to really know how to provenance material. But if you want to know how to accurately provenance Summer Palace objects, it's mainly the pieces that are securely associated with particular soldiers, particularly prominent soldiers who looted, that we know for sure came from the site. I'm just going to give a few examples of soldiers' collections.

This man you can see here, Charles Louis du Pin, for example, was one of the. French Commissioners who was instructed by General Montauban to select the most valuable pieces to present to Napoleon, so as well as selecting for Napoleon he also acquired a range of objects that were clearly provenance to the site for himself, and I would say arguably the most important was the album of forty views of Yuanmingyuan that was commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor in 1744, which depicts scenes from the Summer Palace. You can see a folio from this on the left-hand side. This was auctioned in Paris when he came back and it's now in the Bibliothèque Nationale. It's important because it's among the few remaining visual records that we have of the buildings within the Yuanmingyuan. Du Pin also appropriated a pair of very important gold cups, and you can see one of the cups here which was subsequently sold in Paris and then acquired by what became the *Wallace Collection* in London. And here's a curator from the Wallace Collection holding the base of one of the cups which indicates the collection of Monsieur Du Pin. So, the label on the base indicates quite clearly at the provenance.

Another key soldier who appropriated a range of Summer Palace objects was Henry Hope Crealock. He was the Military Secretary to Lord Elgin, the man I mentioned earlier, who was in charge of the British forces, and Crealock made off with a very fine French tapestry. You might think that's a bit strange, but it was a tapestry that had been commissioned by Louis XI and then sent as tribute, as a sort of a present, to the QIanlong emperor. You can see it here on the left-hand side. This ended up in the *Ashmolean Museum* in Oxford. On the right you can see a very important sceptre, which we looked at earlier, a ceremonial sector known as a *Ruyi* with gold and jade inlays on a stand which Crealock then presented to Queen Victoria on his return, and this is now in the *Royal Collection*.

Material from the Summer Palace was also acquired by James Frederick Stuart-Wortley, who was the First Attaché to Elgin. His collection was passed on to his brother, who was the First Earl of Warncliffe. His collection was then sold at Christie's in the 1920s. Many of the key Summer Palace objects, were then bought at this sale by Frank Partridge, who was one of the key dealers in Chinese art at the time, and Partridge then sold Summer Palace objects at a huge increase, making huge profits, to Lever, whose collection was then put on display at the *Lady Lever Art Gallery* in Merseyside, and they are on display in the gallery to this day.

I'll just give you a couple more examples of soldiers who acquired material before we start moving on to more contemporary auctions.

Henry Loch was Lord Elgin's secretary and Loch is said to have formed a large collection of porcelain from the Summer Palace, which it is said, he subsequently sold to Alfred Morrison, who was one of the richest men in Britain at the time, and Morrison had the material installed in his house at Fonthill in Wiltshire - you can see an image of it here - which sadly doesn't exist anymore. According to the invoices in the archives, many of the objects were either from Loch or from the dealer Durlacher, where Morrison spent something like

£7,000,000 in today's money on purchasing ceramics from the Summer Palace, and here you can see some of those ceramics on display in one of the buildings within Fonthill.

And then finally, this man here, Charles George Gordon, who was the captain in the Royal Engineers during the First Opium War, who went on indeed to become one of the most famous Royal Engineers in the 19th century, and managed to acquire, amongst other things, this throne, I guess. Because he was part of the Engineers they could remove heavy objects from the site. So, there's a depiction of this throne - photograph in the 19th century - and here it is today in the *Royal Engineers Museum* in Kent. The throne itself is in a case behind glass, and it's almost being used as a sort of display plinth with a whole range of other Summer Palace objects laid out on top.

We mentioned earlier the sales of Summer Palace loot in the late 19th century and these auctions continued well into the 20th century, though slowing down a bit towards the late 20th century. But it was really the first few decades of the 21st century that saw the appearance of Summer Palace artefacts and an increasing number of auctions, both in the UK provincial auctions, national auctions, and also in international sales. It was really Christie's auction houses that continued to dominate the market in Summer Palace objects with also Sotheby's auction house participating, I would say by far the most publicised and iconic Summer Palace objects to be auctioned are the Zodiac heads, which, if you remember we looked at earlier. They were originally part of the water fountain in the western part of the Yuanmingyuan and they have been unequivocally provenanced to the site by a set of engravings made of them *in situ* in 1783. We'll look at that engraving in a moment.

In April 2000, there was a Christie's Hong Kong auction, which was referred to as an 'imperial sale', in which two of the Zodiac heads, the Monkey and the Ox, were offered for sale alongside other Summer Palace material. Two days later, Sotheby's in Hong Kong auctioned the Tiger head from the water fountain and these sales really provoked protests from the People's Republic of China as well as from Hong Kong residents for the first time and started to demand that these auction houses in the territory stop selling looted material, and they also demanded a return of these bronzes to the Chinese government. In the end, it was the *China Poly Group*, which is a state-owned business group and an auction house, which acquired the four lots: the Monkey, the Ox, the Tiger head, as well as a further Summer Palace object, and paid something like $6,000,000 U.S They were purchased by a man who was representing the Poly Group, Yi Suhao, who had been instructed to acquire them for the *Poly Museum* in Beijing.

Here you can see the fountain itself. This engraving dated to 1783, commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor: the fountain in the western part of the Summer Palace. This building is known as the Haiyantang (海晏堂), and here are the 12 Zodiac heads which form this water fountain.

It was really in 2005, I would say that the most well-publicised of all the Yuanmingyuan or Summer Palace auctions took place at Christies in Paris, and it was the sale of the Rat and the Rabbit Zodiac heads. You can see them here. These two cast bronzes caused tremendous upset and controversy when they were offered for sale from the estate of Yves Saint Laurent collection by his partner, Pierre Bergé .The Chinese government challenged in the French court and they demanded the return of the objects, which was an unprecedented intervention, really indicating the strong nationalistic sentiments aroused by the French. A French judge ruled that the sale was legal, it went ahead and then this man on the bottom-

right Cai Mingchao (蔡銘超) bid €28 million for the heads and then refused to pay on the grounds that this was a patriotic act, that the objects had been looted. It's believed to be the first time in auction history that this kind of thing happened. Cai Mingchao was an adviser to the *Lost Cultural Relics Foundation*, very much concerned with retrieving what's called 'plundered' Chinese treasures.

So, it was the French billionaire owner of Christie's in France, a man called Francois Henri Pinault, who is said to then have bought in, so acquired, the heads for an undisclosed sum and then in a very prominent, highly publicised ceremony in Beijing in 2013, he presented these heads back to China. They were placed immediately in the *National Museum of China*. You can see the ceremonial handover here on the top, and then the National Museum of China, which is located in Tiananmen Square – so a very prominent position - where they remain on display until this day. While you might think that such an act could be seen as an effort to strengthen the diplomatic ties and the trade relations between Britain and France, it's actually no coincidence that soon after the heads were repatriated, Christie's was granted a licence to hold auctions in the People's Republic of China in Shanghai and this was the first foreign auction house to be given such privilege. So not an altogether altruistic act, then.

The two heads were placed on display in a new gallery known as the *Road of Rejuvenation* in the National Museum of China, which is very much concerned to document the achievements of the Communist Party. They're in a very prominent position on display at the entrance to the gallery - you can see here a range of people looking at the heads - surrounded by a whole series of images of the colonial appropriation of Chinese objects at this time. As I've said here, the gallery starts with a with the decline of China in the 19th century, very much associated with the Opium Wars. These heads function as a symbol of the oppression and humiliation, and they're very, very easily recognisable and they're always a focus of activity whenever people visit.

Interestingly, the other Zodiac heads were bought at auction and then ended up in a very different museum in Beijing. Four of the heads went to the Poly Art Museum, which as you can see here, the Polygroup itself is the world's third-largest auction house and the Poly Museum has a very specific aim to protect Chinese cultural relics lost from abroad. You can see the four heads placed very prominently on display here with that water fountain placed behind them.

I'm conscious of time, so I'll just run through the last few slides now.

So, with all the controversy associated with the Zodiac heads, amongst other objects, it's very interesting that in 2009, the Chinese government sent a delegation of around a hundred or so experts to go through particularly American institutions and reclaim the objects originally from the Yuanmingyuan. Here's a photograph of one of the members of the delegation, I believe, looking at objects in the *Metropolitan Museum* in New York. Now, the Met and American museums don't have as much looted material as Britain and France do. And as I mentioned earlier, often the labels in museum displays do not indicate Summer Palace provenance. So as a result of really just looking at the galleries themselves, unfortunately the delegation didn't find anything specifically, or they didn't come back with anything. What you really need to do is detailed archival research in archives and museum registers, and not just look at what's on display in the galleries.

I'll just briefly mention some of the other Summer Palace material that's appeared on the open market in more recent years, because once again, these are associated directly with the descendants of soldiers that invaded in 1860. Here's one good example of this. In 2011, the *Woolley and Wallace Auction House* in Salisbury sold this golden box. It's a box of European manufacture, interestingly, but it was originally looted from the Summer Palace, and what's interesting is that it has an inscription. I'm not sure if you can quite make this out, but it says, 'Loot from Summer Palace, October 1860, Captain James Gunter of the King's Dragoon Guards'. So, they have absolute provenance. And here is the soldier himself.

And then finally, another very well-known auction took place in 2018, in Canterbury in the UK, where a rare bronze water vessel dating to the late western Zhou (周) period - the 7th century BCE - you can see it here on the right-hand side - had been acquired by this soldier, Captain Harry Evans of the Royal Marines, and the reason we know this for sure is that Harry Evans wrote a very detailed letter to his mother while he was on campaign, indicating the moment that he acquired this particular object. It was said to have been found in a bungalow in a Kent seaside town before it went to a Canterbury auction house and there was an article which suggested that the sale had been opposed by the Chinese government because it was an illegally discharged cultural relic, but the director of the Canterbury auction house believed that they had every right to sell it. The owner had good title, and it did in fact sell to an anonymous bidder for over £400, 000, so that gives you an indication of the extraordinary value attached to these artefacts.

Just to conclude then very briefly and to go back to the Yuanmingyuan itself, I think it's fair to say to say that today the destruction of the Yuanmingyuan is a very sensitive issue in China. It's regarded as the symbol of foreign aggression and national humiliation at the hands of Westerners, and as many of you will know, it's a key event that marks the fall into decline in the 19th century of China. The moment from the First Opium War to the communist takeover in 1949 is popularly referred to as the 'century of humiliation', and these objects have become very much entangled. There have also been debates over the reconstruction of Yuanmingyuan and it's interesting that the Chinese government keeps the park, if you like, as a ruined site in many ways to teach future generations about the consequences of foreign domination. There have, however, been over the last decade or so, a number of small museums and displays that have been built within the park and you can see in the middle here, a photograph of one of those museums in the park, and in fact I'm going to China the week after next in order to visit Beijing and actually have a look at what the latest developments are in the park.

So then just finally, in terms of the looted objects themselves, it's clear that China wants them back and that this has been asserted more forcefully. I mentioned that in 2009 experts were sent around the world to try and find the material and that they weren't successful. The only way to know provenance for sure for the objects is to do this very, very detailed archival research in order to identify through the auction houses, the museum displays, etcetera, the provenance, the clear provenance of the objects.

So, I think I'll stop here. Thank you very much for your attention. I'd be very interested in hearing from you if you got any feedback or any questions at all.

[End of transcript]

As Louise was unfortunately unable to attend the session in person, she kindly agreed to answer any follow-up questions, and we received this one by the deadline:

Question

Do you believe the loot should be returned to China from museums around the world or are they better off where they are?

Louise's response:

Firstly, the hundreds of thousands of artefacts removed by the British and French from the Yuanmingyuan in 1860 were taken in circumstances which in today's world would be deemed utterly illegal.

The moral, if not the legal, case for restitution is clear. I believe that key objects held by Western museums should be restored to China at the request of the relevant PRC authorities. A new museum was established at the Yuanmingyuan site in 2023, and this is the ideal space for the display of such objects.