

ЕВРОПЕЙЦЫ В АЗИИ

# LANG SHINING'S PARADIGM, AND THE CASTIGLIONESCHI FROM THE STATE MUSEUM OF ORIENTAL ART

(VLADIMIR S. KALABUSHKIN'S COLLECTION)

ПАРАДИГМА ЛАН ШИНИНА И «КАСТИЛЬОНЕСКИ» ИЗ СОБРАНИЯ  
ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО МУЗЕЯ ИСКУССТВА НАРОДОВ ВОСТОКА

(КОЛЛЕКЦИЯ В. С. КАЛАБУШКИНА)



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The article looks at a small group of scrolls signed by Lang Shining (Giuseppe Castiglione) from the collection of the State Museum of Oriental Art (hereafter SMOA). The author tries to clarify the reasons for the time-honoured yet mistaken attribution of one such scroll to Castiglione and traces the influence and transformation of the style, motifs, and specific characteristics of his paintings against the SMOA scrolls, which date from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> cc.

*Key words:* Giuseppe Castiglione, Lang Shining, Chinese painting, Rong-fei, Xiang-fei, Qianlong Emperor, court painting, Sino-European style, Chinoiserie, Occidentalism



В статье рассматривается группа свитков из коллекции Музея народов Востока в Москве (далее ГМВ), подписанных именем Лан Шинина (Дж. Кастильоне). Автор ставит задачу выяснить причины, по которым один из свитков долгое время приписывался Кастильоне, а также проследить влияние и трансформацию стиля, мотивов и особенностей живописи итальянского художника на примере уверенно датированных концом XIX – началом XX вв. работ из ГМВ.

*Ключевые слова:* Джузеппе Кастильоне, Лан Шинин, китайская живопись, Жун-фэй, Сян-фэй, император Цяньлун, сино-европейский стиль, шинуазри, оксидентализм

From the beginning of his stay at the court of the Manchu emperor in Beijing, the young Italian painter Giuseppe Castiglione (Chinese name Lang Shining; 郎世宁, 郎世寧; 1688–1766) worked on the Emperor's commission<sup>1</sup>, which was to blend certain elements of the European painting technique and spatial approaches with the major principles of Chinese artistic tradition. The method that Castiglione and his colleagues were developing was based on the unification of Chinese motifs, themes and subjects with the characteristically European instruments such as *chiaroscuro* modelling and linear perspective. Delicately, yet across many works, Lang Shining would make space in his paintings perspective-based — particularly where buildings were depicted against landscapes; direct perspective allowed a fresher look at the way court scenes were represented, and the depth of landscapes became relatively greater [Dubrovskaya, 2018, pp. 90–96 (1)].

An untrained eye will probably find it difficult to distinguish between the works of Castiglione, those of his collaborators and followers — all of whom employed the linear method *xianfa* [Corsi, 1999; Dubrovskaya, 2019; Yang, 1988] — and purely Chinese ones, and not only because of characteristically Chinese imagery, attributes and subject matter. The Italian painter did not rush to embed the European technique into the local context mindlessly and blindly: instead, his shadows progressively became lighter and the contrast between light and dark more

seamless. Lang Shining, himself the follower of the famous Italian perspectivist Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709)<sup>2</sup>, was also able to create a three-dimensional effect via the marriage of direct perspective [Dubrovskaya, 2018, pp. 54–55 (4)] (highly valued by his clients the emperors — it was for this specifically that Castiglione was imported from Italy on Emperor Kangxi's direct order) with traditional Chinese axonometry.

The present work seeks to identify the possible considerations that led to the attribution to Giuseppe Castiglione of scrolls gifted to the SMOA from the collection of Vladimir S. Kalabushkin, and to demonstrate, based on these works, the difference between Lang Shining's Sino-European style and the style of the Castiglioneschi in SMOA.

Generally speaking, Castiglione's *accommodative* style, in itself a reflection of the broader Jesuit concept of *teologia accomodativa*, can be seen as an interplay of European and Chinese uses of perspective and a light-touch *chiaroscuro* modelling in some of his well-known animalistic scrolls — for example, *White Falcon* (1765) and *Aquatic Plants and Fish* (prior to 1744; see [Tseng, 1988]); in his oil on paper paintings (*tie-lo*) and many other works. But the Italian master's fusion of methods is most pronounced in his modular approach to composition, which allowed him to achieve spatial depth in works that include depictions of architectural ensembles and buildings generally. Here, one possible example

1 Giuseppe Castiglione lived in China from 1715 until his death in Beijing in 1766. He worked at the court of three consecutive Manchu emperors: Kangxi (1661–1722), Yongzheng (1722–1735) and Qianlong (1736–1795). See, for example, [Golovachyov, 1998; Dubrovskaya, 2018 (3), etc.].

2 Pozzo's book was first published in Rome: *Perspectiva Pictorium et Architectorum*. Rome: Komarek, 1693, and later in America. See: [Pozzo, 1989; Ning, Chu, 2015, p. 106].



Fig. 1 (a, b). **Unknown Painter (signed “Lang Shining”). Ice Amusements on the Lake Taiyi (details).** Hand scroll. Ink, water colours on silk. Painted screen: 53 x 257 cm. Later copy (?). Beg. of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.

(out of many) is the vertical scroll *December. Snow Amusements* from the cycle *Twelve Merry Months in Yuanming Yuan* (十二月令圆明园行乐图)<sup>3</sup>.

Russian SMOA also has works (getting ahead of ourselves, *one work*) by Castiglione, but the “winter” scroll discussed below is not alone in the museum. In all, Lang Shining’s fine signature can be seen on seven scrolls — two vertical / hanging scrolls and five horizontal / handscrolls<sup>4</sup>.

This group of scrolls, similar in that they are signed “Lang Shining”, but stylistically very different, comes from a collection gifted to the museum in 1975 by Vladimir Semyonovich Kalabushkin<sup>5</sup> — professor of the Institute of Steel and Alloys, an accomplished chemist, caster and collector of, among other things, antique cast iron — about whom, sadly, few testaments survive [Rozov, 2000; Nabat-chikov, 1997]. Some information about his deed of

gift to the SMOA, written literally on his deathbed, can be found in the recollections of his neighbour, a playwright Victor Rozov [Rozov, 2000, pp. 269–270], who mentions, in particular, that an exhibition took place in the Oriental Museum (which, prior to the year 1970, was located on Obukha st., now Vorontsovo Pole st.), and occupied three halls<sup>6</sup>.

For a while, it had been widely assumed that the Oriental Museum only hosted one scroll by Castiglione, and it was the *Ice Amusements on the Lake Taiyi* [Suraeva, 2011; Shteiner, 1987] (see Fig. 1), but already in 2014 Vadim L. Sychev, in his exhaustive commentary on all museum works signed by Lang Shining and accompanying all the reproductions in the catalogue *Classical Painting of China*, definitively demonstrated that all scrolls, except for the *Children at Play*, must be dated much later — namely late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> cc. [Sychyov, 2014, pp.

3 *Twelve Merry Months in Yuanming Yuan. Twelfth Month (December; Snow Amusements)*. Vertical scroll. Silk, ink, water-colour. 144 x 80 cm. Gugong National Palace Museum, Taipei [Dubrovskaya, 2018, p. 13 (3)].

4 The author is sincerely grateful to the Director General of the SMOA, Alexander V. Sedov; the Head Custodian, Daria N. Smirnova; Head of Repository, Lidia A. Orekhova and especially the museum’s expert on Chinese painting, Konstantin M. Pistsov, for the opportunity to closely study the scrolls in question. Vertical scrolls: No 13699-I: *Children at Play* and No 16913-I: *Two Monkeys*; horizontal scrolls: No 16652-I: *Ice Performance on the Lake Taiyi*; No 19645-I: *Walk on the Lake Taiyi*; No 19543-I: *Moonlight Walk in the Xiyuan Park*; No 19644-I: *Glory to the Military Valour Earned in Distant Parts* and No 19544-I: *Ceremony of Attending the Taishan Mountains*.

5 Items from the collection of an antique casting chemist-foundry Vladimir Semenovich Kalabushkin from Moscow // *Visualrian*. URL: [http://visualrian.ru/hier\\_rubric/photo/725050.html](http://visualrian.ru/hier_rubric/photo/725050.html) (Retrieved 14.02.19).

6 By a coincidence, in one of the halls where Vladimir S. Kalabushkin’s collection was being exhibited, K. Pistsov helped this author to study five out of seven scrolls in February of this year.



69–79]. So, to re-iterate: **the only** authentic scroll by Lang Shining in Russia is **not** the *Ice Amusements on the Lake Taiyi*, but the *Children at Play*.

The author of the catalogue presents some undeniable arguments, showing how it would have been impossible for Castiglione's paintings to contain certain dress details of the court guards, and highlighting a number of other discrepancies (for the most part based on costume details and the independent attestations of whether a particular work by Castiglione was listed in any catalogue or register of the imperial workshops). Together, these observations unambiguously demonstrate that the scrolls from the series we will for simplicity term *Emperor Qianlong's Inspections and Leisure* cannot belong to the hand of the court Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione [Sychyov, 2014, p. 71].

A natural question, therefore, is why of all the “Lang Shining” scrolls in SMOA it was the *Ice Amusements* that attracted the greatest attention of Russian researchers and was repeatedly attributed to Castiglione. The answer must be fairly prosaic: it is both *the shortest* of the five horizontal scrolls (the size of the painted part is 53 by 257 cm — contrast this with, say, the 66.5 by 652 cm of the scroll *Glory of Military Valour*) and arguably the most interesting, both in terms of composition and plot. Indeed, although the motif of court amusements on ice is itself far from unique in the corpus of Chinese paintings, the theme of skating on the ice of a lake elicits a predictably happy reaction from a Western observer, who inevitably recalls the same pastime in European art — beginning with Breughel and, through François Boucher's *The Four Seasons: Winter* (1755)<sup>7</sup>, Gilbert Stuart's *The Skater* (1782), and Henry Raeburn's *The Skating Minister* (1790s), to Konstantin Somov's famous painting *Winter. The Skating Rink* (1915).

*Ice Amusements* is the easiest scroll to reproduce without breaking into parts; and, importantly, the painting lends itself rather freely to thoughtful description and analysis (see here the pioneering work

by Larisa I. Kuz'menko [Kuz'menko, 1983]). Once the two-and-a-half-meter-long scroll has been unfolded in its entirety on a horizontal surface — this is a much more challenging undertaking with scrolls that are five, six and more meters long — its composition, again compared to other “multi-plot” horizontal scrolls, can be taken in at a glance and described as a self-contained work of art (compare this with another famous and relatively short horizontal scroll by Castiglione, *Qianlong Emperor receiving tribute horses from Tartar envoys* in the Parisian Musée Guimet; see for example [Dubrovskaya, 2018, p. 15 (3)]). And yet *Ice Amusements* (see an exhaustive analysis of this scroll in [Sychyov, 2014, pp. 70–71]) is not Giuseppe Castiglione's work; moreover, we know of no works by Castiglione that would similarly depict courtliness and officialdom (the courtly love part here manifested in the fact that the Emperor's favourite concubine Rong Fei is seen wearing scarlet and glancing out of the palanquin standing behind the pensive Emperor; the official one, in civil servants racing against each other on ice).

Describing Kalabushkin's scrolls, Vadim Sychev writes, “theme-wise, the museum scrolls are different: two of them appear to belong to a series of paintings linked to Qianlong's summer visit to the lake Taiyi, another <...> is called the second of the two devoted to the Emperor's winter visit to the lake, and two, judging from the fragments in the text, are related to inspections Qianlong undertook outside the capital. The only association that emerges here is that, headed by Lang Shining, a group of painters created a series of horizontal scrolls dedicated to Qianlong's travels to the south. There are no mentions of the exact names of the museum scrolls” [Sychyov, 2014, p. 71]. The author of the catalogue then proceeds to imply that, at best, we are dealing with liberal copies.

So therefore, we do not know of any direct prototypes of these museum scrolls, but we do know that during his many years in Qianlong's service, Lang

<sup>7</sup> A gilded carriage, much reminiscent of the heavily decorated sleigh of the lady in this painting by F. Boucher, can be seen in one of the Castiglioneschi scrolls in the SMOA (modestly seated in it is Rong-fei, who, as always in the paintings described before, is following Emperor Qianlong).



Shining with his collaborators (often jointly with Jin Tingbiao; 金廷標; ?–1767) prepared several series of works dedicated to imperial and court leisure, travels, hunts and inspections. These include the “life and times” in the Yuanming Yuan palace complex (the “Western” palace ensemble, whereof Xiyang-lou was designed by none other than Giuseppe Castiglione and his colleagues), the winter parts of which series indisputably depict some entertainment activity, particularly in *Twelve Merry Months in Yuanming Yuan*. However, all scrolls from the *Twelve Months* series are vertical, people in them appear solely as staffage, and landscape motifs — parks and architecture — prevail over the subject matter. And so, in any case, it is impossible to state that *Ice Amusements*, as well as other lengthier works from the *Inspections and Leisure* group, are *copies* of Lang Shining’s famous works; we believe, therefore, that the characteristic offered in the catalogue — “in the style of Lang Shining” (or, say, “imitation of Lang Shining”) — is more fitting than “later copy of Lang Shining”, since we have no reason to infer that either a “school” or even a “circle of” the artist even existed. Castiglione and his co-workers laboured jointly as “task forces” over major imperial commissions [Dubrovskaya, 2018, pp. 52–53 (3)].

Why then did these nameless masters at the break of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — masters clearly connected not only to traditional imperial artistic workshops, but also to the *maitaigong* workshops which used to produce art pieces for the wide market (including foreign buyers) (see [Dubrovskaya, 2018, pp. 103–104 (3)]) — elect to make homage scrolls that could be attributed specifically to Lang Shining and his “circle”? The answers are, we think, rather self-evident. Firstly, Castiglione must have been the most celebrated and successful foreign painter at the court of Emperor Qianlong, and his (and his co-workers’) winter works are most famous. Secondly, it was specifically Castiglione who visually documented the dashing amusements, parades, hunts and feats of his patron the Emperor. Third-

ly and finally, it was Castiglione who created the recognizable and oft-repeated (after his death) visage of the Emperor’s wife / concubine Xian-fei (Rong-fei), a constant character in all horizontal scrolls from SMOA.

Indeed, Rong-fei is easily recognizable and present in all paintings behind the already aged Emperor. Both she and (of course) the Emperor are highlighted by size and placement in the composition of the scrolls. Also, Rong-fei can be unmistakably identified by a number of traits already well known to researchers: her skin is much whiter than the skin of the other characters, and artists typically depict her with a forehead that is exaggeratedly high and wide, and slightly concealed beneath a European-style wide-brimmed hat (the *Ice Amusements* are an exception to this: here, Rong-fei is shown in a scarlet dress in a palanquin, carried after the Emperor [see Fig. 1 (b)]).

By the time our scrolls were being created, the relationship of Qianlong and Rong-fei had become a widely popularised, almost mythical story<sup>8</sup>, in itself much more attractive for the viewer or buyer than any landscape with any staffage. It is the topic and the main characters that lead us to believe that the splendid scrolls from the *Inspections and Leisure* series were manufactured to be sold; at the same time, the *Ice Amusements*, with their kindred subject matter, still stand apart — mostly owing to the composition: here, the author is not interested in the lengthy narratives of the six-meter scrolls, where Qianlong and Rong-fei, while central characters, are still *among others* in an action that unfolds in time and space. *Ice Amusements* is a painting with a holistic subject and composition, built practically in accordance with Corneille’s and Racine’s classic unities of action, time and place.

Not so with the *Walk on the Lake Taiyi*, *Moonlight Walk in the Xiyuan Park*, *Glory to the Military Valour Earned in Distant Parts*, and *Ceremony of Attending the Taishan Mountains* scrolls. This group of works is also centred around the themes of the Emperor’s and his concubine’s attending a parti-

8 See a remarkable article by N. Suraeva about Xiang-fei [Suraeva, 2013].



Fig. 2 (left). Giuseppe Castiglione. Portrait of Rong-Fei (?) in European Armor. Oil on paper [Old Palace Museum Gogong, Taipei]



Fig. 3 (right). Giuseppe Castiglione (?) Portrait of the Chinese Lady (Rong Fei?) in Shepherdess' Costume [Provenance unknown]

cular event. But the format of the scrolls doesn't tie the events specifically to the central figures of the Emperor and Rong-fei who follows him. Instead, the composition freely splits into distinctive frames, with architectural units as some of the central "characters". It is these buildings with their explicit three-dimensionality, excessive brightness and uncompromising linear perspective that immediately demonstrate how these works could not have been painted by Lang Shining and his collaborators during the reign of Emperor Qianlong.

Why then is Rong-fei, once painted (presumably) by Castiglione with her proportions proper and agreeable (*see Fig. 2*), now recognisable in the scrolls from the SMOA but with proportions strange and distorted? A cautious supposition would be that the authors of these *Castiglioneschi* did not use as their prototype the Lang Shining's work where Rong-fei is portrayed wearing European armour (*see Fig. 2*), nor the work that gave birth to a multitude of imitations with Rong-fei seated by a table wearing a scarlet *qipao*, but her portrait as a European shepherdess, where we do indeed find all of the distinctive features: the prominent and irregular forehead, the deliberately white skin, the far-spaced eyes, and perhaps the most important attribute and marker of a Western beauty — the wide-brimmed straw hat (about these portraits

cf. [Dubrovskaya, 2018, pp. 101–107 (3)] *See Fig. 3*).

In SMOA's scrolls, Rong-fei is thus not merely represented as a sort of exotic flower in Qianlong's collection of women — she miraculously turns into a... European woman. Indeed, Rong-fei as a character in "leisure" scrolls is no longer an Uighur, but a European concubine to the emperor, akin to famous white-locked odalisques of Turkish harems. In this regard the *Inspections and Leisure* with easily identifiable central scenes depicting the pair — Qianlong and Rong-fei — can be seen as a symmetrical, while a slightly belated, Occidental response to *Chinoiserie* and *Orientalism*.

Undoubtedly, Giuseppe Castiglione could not have had anything in common with this particular marriage of technique and subject matter. He was tasked with working on imperial commissions, which included, among other things, the portraits of his patron and the latter's wives, as well as some celebratory (and regular) women's portraits of which this author wrote in [Dubrovskaya, 2018 (2)]. And while the court style of Lang Shining and his colleagues can be legitimately classified as Qing "Orientalism"-Occidentalism (*see Qing Chinoiserie* [Neglinskaya, 2015]), compared to the works in the previously described group of *Inspections and Leisure*, Castiglione's portraits are immeasurably closer to traditional Chinese pain-



Fig. 4. **Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining; 1688–1766).**  
**Children at Play.**

Hanging Scroll. Ink and water colours on silk.  
158 x 67 cm [State Museum of Oriental Art (Moscow)]

tings than the scrolls from Vladimir Kalabushkin’s collection.

*Leisure* works in this sense are reminiscent more of François Boucher’s “Chinese” works than Castiglione’s art, which became the symbol and face of Sino-European court style of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This can be seen even from the most cursory comparison of Lang Shining’s scroll *Children at Play* (see Fig. 4) and the paintings from the aforementioned *Leisure* cycle.

The linear perspective with the vanishing point in the upper right corner of the scroll, seen in the sophisticated and translucent “children’s” scroll, is delicate and effortless; the vanishing point itself is definitively concealed, as if by a screen, with a layered rock formation on the right riverbank, closest to the observer. The figures of five infants are shown in lively and entertaining poses and at various angles; the light and shade modelling of landscape parts is highly inobtrusive and the three-dimensionality of the children’s bodies and heads also quite unforced. The greenish-blue colouring is holistic and noble.

In front of us is a remarkable phenomenon: namely, that Castiglione and his collaborators in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century produced pieces far more Chinese in nature and form than their “native” copyists a century and a half later. We can safely assume that the “Western style” introduced by Giuseppe Castiglione, Jean Denis Attiret, a number of court workshops and the Art Academy, went “popular” just as the foot binding fashion and others had done before it. Also, this production of scrolls for the art market (and not the imperial consumption) did not in any way reflect on the quality of art, the level of skill, or the outstanding (and perhaps even somewhat excessive even for the *gongbi* style) level of detail in the imagery. It is hard to fathom, therefore, how the price of such works (preserved in such immaculate state) could have dropped so far as to make them accessible to the collector to whose will we owe the ownership of these scrolls from the group *Inspections and Leisure of Emperor Qianlong* (see, e.g., Fig. 5, 6).



Fig. 5. **Unknown Painter (signed "Lang Shining")**. **Moonlight Walk in the Xiyuan Park**.  
Hand scroll. Ink, water colours on silk. Painted screen: 56 x 664 cm. Beg. of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.

Fig. 6. **Unknown Painter (signed "Lang Shining")**. **Ceremony of Attending the Taishan Mountains**.  
Hand scroll. Ink, water colours on silk. Painted screen: 54,5 x 555 cm. Beg. of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.





À propos we notice the grape-gathering motif in Castiglione's children's scroll: the grapevine is an ancient Christian symbol and an evangelical image of Christ, and one is tempted to see, in the innocent theme of children climbing a tall tree wrapped in vine to collect grapes, a hidden missionary meaning.

A detailed description and analysis of the Castiglioneschi from SMOA certainly deserves a separate article, and the scrolls themselves a frame-by-frame publication, without which it is impossible either to fully enjoy these precious works of Chinese art, or to see them properly in the evolutionary context of court or market art of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> / beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.

In summary, we can state with certainty that the SMOA collection has a unique cycle of under-appreciated Chinese turn-of-the-century paintings, which demonstrate just how major was the influence of Giuseppe Castiglione and his co-workers on the development of not just later court art and the output of the metropolitan artistic workshops, but also on the taste and style of a certain line of Chinese paintings. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this movement has a decidedly more Western character than the works of Lang Shining himself, and only remains Chinese in format and subject matter, having morphed into a sample of universal Chinoiserie, though *made in China*.

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