Realist Agency in the Art Field of Twentieth-Century China – Realism in the Art and Writing of Xu Beihong (1895-1953)

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the spread of the neologism *xieshi zhuyi*, the Chinese equivalent of ‘realism’, in China in the early twentieth century through a case study of Xu Beihong. He is an indispensable figure in modern Chinese art, with his eminent status as a devotee of realism in art in particular being widely recognised.

His dedication to realism in the twentieth century brings a dichotomy to his historical reputation, either as a beacon of modern Chinese art, or a conservative painter. To resolve this controversy, which results from the focus that scholarship so far has placed on ‘what his realistic attainments are’, this thesis explores ‘how’ Xu Beihong became such a prominent figure in China’s art world, largely through his perception, translation and appropriation of Western realism. This perspective replaces the colonial perspective, which views twentieth-century Chinese art as a passive and belated modernity modelled on that of the West, with one grounded in postmodernism, which turns its emphasis instead to China’s actively Occidental construction of the West.

This thesis also studies the promulgation of the English term ‘fine art’, which underlies the formation of the art field in China. The appearance of such neologisms as ‘realism’ and ‘fine art’ points to a large-scale transplant of a Western framework of knowledge into China, to replace the Confucian traditions seen as obsolete after the collapse of imperial rule in 1911. Through examining the realist agency of Xu Beihong, this thesis will disclose the conflicted nature of China’s art field, in which institutions, tastes and agencies are brought into play. Moreover, the diversity of the art field will in turn provide a perspective on the position-taking implied by Xu Beihong’s adherence to realism. Consequently, this thesis aims to appreciate Xu Beihong’s achievements beyond the simple dichotomy of modern Westernisation vs. conservatism.
Acknowledgements

I once came across a very interesting analogy between The Lord of the Rings and PhD study. One day, a nobody such as me was given a ring (a PhD offer letter) and was told that it possessed great power (such as the power of knowledge and the social prestige which comes with a PhD degree). I then started a several-year-long adventure, and throughout the whole journey what concerned me most was how to get rid of this ring! When I finally approached the destination, I felt deeply reluctant to say farewell to it (actually, it was because my PhD dissertation was not good enough to hand in). After having fulfilled this heroic mission by breaking away from the ring/PhD programme, I, well, did not feel any big changes or success in my life. What I wanted to do, then, was to have a sound sleep, just like Frodo Baggins did in the movie. Maybe this analogy over-exaggeratedly glorifies PhD study. Perhaps only those who have undergone studying for a PhD would understand this complex mixture of difficulties, accomplishments, stress, depression and enjoyment during the study, which lastly does turn into a great source of strength, supporting us to go further in our future journey.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

First of all, this thesis is not going to look upon Xu Beihong as a god-like figure who was able to guide the direction of twentieth-century Chinese painting largely on his own, or as a Communist painter who used his paintings politically to raise his objections to the KMT government (*Kuomintang*, the leading party of the Republic of China). On the contrary, this thesis proposes to look at Xu Beihong simply as an artist whose works serve mainly to project his personal aspirations for his art and for his career. Born in an age when China was undergoing a huge revolution, to the extent that a large-scale transplantation of Western civilisation had reached the cultural core of Confucianism in China, Xu Beihong’s proficiency in Western realism helped the rapid accumulation of his reputation in China’s art world, a field which was also gradually dominated by the Western fine art framework following the flood of Western culture into China. Realism, through the endorsement and legitimisation provided by the New Culture Movement (ca 1916-1920) to the Communist government, had become the guiding principle for Chinese art in the 1950s.1 Xu Beihong’s devotion to realism therefore won him an incomparable position in China’s art arena. This charismatic glorification of Xu Beihong resulted in his pre-eminent status in Chinese art; but this same eminence also frequently brought Xu Beihong under attack, in particular in the light of the non-figurative and autonomous tendencies in modern art. To avoid imposing such ideological judgements on a study of Xu Beihong and his work, this thesis uses the term ‘agency’, aiming to focus on Xu Beihong’s own efforts, in particular his appropriation of Western realism in developing his glorious career in China’s art world. So the term ‘agency’ as used

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here has nothing to do with influence or impact. In other words, this thesis is not
going to look at Xu Beihong as a symbolic national hero and thus offer a
retrospective evaluation of the authenticity of his greatness. This thesis instead
employs the concept of agency, endeavouring to put Xu Beihong into his proper
context, restoring his empirical presence as a concrete person and artist. With the
use of term ‘agency’ and the inevitable limit of the length of a thesis, this
dissertation will focus on investigating Xu Beihong’s art and life from the late
1910s to the mid-1930s, before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War.
This war commenced in 1937 and ceased in 1945, and was immediately followed
by the Chinese Nationalist-Communist Civil War. Therefore, the later stage of
Xu Beihong’s career and the whole artistic climate of China were subjected to
unavoidable interference from China’s politics. This thesis therefore will not
elaborate Xu Beihong’s life during this period.

1.1 The Definition of Realism

Realism, translated into Chinese as xieshi (寫實), xianshi (現實), xieshi
zhuyi (寫實主義), or xianshi zhuyi (現實主義), was a neologism which appeared
in Chinese vocabulary in the early twentieth century. The article Xiaoshuo yu
qunzhi zhi guanxi (小說與群治之關係, ‘On the Relationship between Fiction
and the Government of the People’), which was published by the late-Qing
reform-minded Liang Qichao (梁啓超, 1873-1929) in 1902, was among the
earliest Chinese texts to mention the term ‘realism’. Liang Qichao divided
fictions into two styles: the idealistic (lixiangpai 理想派) and the realistic
(xieshipai 實質派). The former provided readers with a utopian world, while the
latter revealed to readers the actuality of the present earthly world. Liang

2 On these two wars, see Jonathan D. Spence, The Search for Modern China (New York and
3 Liang Qichao, ‘Xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi’, in Fang Zhiqin 方志欽 and Liu Sifen 劉斯奮
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Qichao assigned to fiction the tasks of educating people and of rescuing what he saw as diseased Chinese society. Liang Qichao’s expectations for fiction demonstrate how realism has been inevitably intertwined with nationalism since it was introduced into China.

Liang Qichao’s article saw China as an ill state, and this point of view became a consensus among radical intellectuals. Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927) recorded the advantages of Europe when he lived there in exile from 1904. The purpose of his European trips was to seek the “magical prescription and miraculous medicine” from the West to rescue a “seriously ill China”. The leading figure of the New Culture Movement, Hu Shi (胡適, 1891-1962), regarded realism as the remedy for the Chinese people’s escape from the real, dark and diseased state of their nation and society. For these radical intellectuals, traditional literature was also a manifestation of the diseased culture and thus also needed to be reformed. Hu Shi advocated replacing classical literary conventions with vernacular, a process which he called Chinese Renaissance. Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀, 1879-1942) proposed a revolution in literature by abandoning the aristocratic, classical and hermit literature in pursuit of the national, realistic and social literature. The scholar of Chinese literature.
C.T. Hsia has pointed out this unique “obsession with China” which was pervasive among the intelligentsia in China in the first half of the twentieth century. Chinese literature of this period reveals an “obsessive concern with China as a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease and therefore unable to strengthen itself or change its set ways of inhumanity”. In this obsession with changing China, realism was considered to be a remedy for China’s disease and a vehicle for Chinese cultural reform, and as a result it carried the nationalist burden since the beginning of its introduction into China.

The intellectuals mentioned above not only proposed reforms in Chinese literature, they were also the pivotal figures who brought innovation and realism to the art field. The term ‘Renaissance’ was also used widely in the art world by eminent Westernized painters such as Lin Fengmian (林風眠, 1900-1991) and Xu Beihong. Chen Duxiu firmly announced that Western pictorial realism was the absolute way to reform Chinese painting. This art revolution which was proposed by Chen Duxiu in 1919 became the guide for the direction of modern Chinese art. Therefore, after it was introduced into China, realism quickly assumed significance in the Chinese cultural field. Its popularity reflected three important phenomena in modern Chinese literature and art: first, a large-scale transplant of Western knowledge into China; second, the importance of nationalism in modern Chinese literary and art fields; and third, realism was an

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1.2 Realism and Xu Beihong’s Career

The superiority of realism in modern Chinese art contributed to Xu Beihong’s eminent status in the world of Chinese painting. Xu Beihong first learnt painting with his father, Xu Dazhang (徐達章, ? - 1914), and earned a living by making portraits. Using realistic techniques in his portraiture, Xu Beihong then developed his career in the commercial art world of Shanghai from 1915 to 1917, and had opportunities to associate with influential figures in the reformation of Chinese painting, such as Kang Youwei and the leaders of the Lingnan School, Gao Jianfu (高劍父, 1879-1951) and Gao Qifeng (高奇峰, 1888-1933). From 1918 to 1919, Xu Beihong taught painting at the Beijing University Painting Research Society (Beijing daxue huafa yanjiuhui 北京大學畫法研究會), which was organised by Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868-1940), whose aesthetic thoughts had far-reaching influence upon the formation of the fine art field in twentieth-century China. Moreover, Beijing University was the base for the pro-Western New Culture Movement. Xu Beihong’s experiences in Shanghai and Beijing enabled him to associate with the aforementioned intellectuals who played a decisive role in shaping the contours of modern Chinese art and thus saw their influence upon Xu’s lifelong endeavours in reforming Chinese painting with Western realism. From 1919 to 1927, Xu Beihong pursued art studies in Europe. He acquired a solid grounding in Western academic realism during this period. After he returned to China, his proficiency in painstaking realism rapidly won him fame as an accomplished Chinese spokesman for Western art. In the 1929 National Art Exhibition, Xu Beihong’s image as a rigid realist was reinforced by his denigration of Western modernist painters. Soon after he moved back to China, Xu Beihong started to create large-scale hybrid history
paintings which became the most representative of his artistic achievements. Later on, Xu Beihong gradually turned his attention to the creation of richly allegorical ink paintings. In particular, his expressive horse paintings brought him prestige as a leader in the world of national painting (Fig. 1). As a loyal practitioner of Western realism, Xu Beihong was highly regarded as the founder of Chinese Realism, the father of modern Chinese painting, the forerunner of the modern Chinese Renaissance, the pioneer of new Chinese art, and so on.\(^\text{11}\)

Moreover, with the rich implications and patriotic passion in his works, Xu Beihong’s status in China’s art world was further elevated as an indispensably important figure in both the Westernised and the traditional arenas of Chinese painting. As regards Xu Beihong’s achievements and his significance in modern Chinese art history, the Taiwanese artist and critic Xie Lifa concluded that Xu occupies the most prominent position.\(^\text{12}\)

1.3 Literature Review

There has been a considerable number of publications on Xu Beihong’s life and work. Xu Beihong’s wives, Jiang Biwei (蒋碧薇) and Liao Jingwen (廖静文), have both published biographies of him.\(^\text{13}\) A complete collection of Xu Beihong’s speeches, articles, inscriptions and letters was also published by Wang

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\(^{12}\) Xie and Jiang, *Xu Beihong*, p. 99.

Zhen (also named Jin Shan), and Xu Beihong’s son, Xu Boyang. They also published detailed chronologies of Xu Beihong. Besides his texts, Xu Beihong’s paintings have also been continuously published. Among them, *Xu Beihong huaji* (徐悲鴻畫集, ‘Paintings by Xu Beihong’), published by the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, and *Xu Beihong huihu quanjji* (徐悲鴻繪畫全集, ‘A Corpus of Xu Beihong’s Paintings’), published by the Yishujia publisher, have the most comprehensive collections of Xu Beihong’s works. In addition to the publishing of the works collected in the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, the Beijing Palace Museum held an exhibition to display its collection of Xu Beihong’s paintings between November 2005 and February 2006. Several of the exhibited works had previously been little known to the public. The latest large-scale exhibition on Xu Beihong was held in Singapore from April to June 2008, and it explored the social practices in Xu Beihong’s art in addition to displaying several of his well-known paintings. In addition to all this, some catalogues have studied the market value of Xu Beihong’s paintings and told readers how to tell the authenticity of works which have been circulated in the market. These publications have broadened our knowledge of Xu Beihong’s

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19 Shi Shuqing 史樹青 ed., *Xiantai shuhua touzi: Xu Beihong juan 現代書畫投資：徐悲鴻卷*, ‘Investment in Modern Chinese Calligraphy and Painting: The Volume of Xu Beihong’ (Beijing, 2005); Yang Xin 喻新 ed., *Zhongguo jinxiandai shuhua zhenwei jianbie: Xu Beihong juan 中國近現代書畫真偽鑑別: 徐悲鴻卷*, ‘The Authenticity of Modern Chinese Calligraphy and
artistic accomplishments from many different angles.

Xu Beihong’s significance in modern Chinese art has put him among the main focuses of interest in related scholarship. Wang Zhen is perhaps the researcher who has been devoted the most time to working on him. In addition to the publishing of his chronologies and writings, Wang Zhen also collected a thorough list of reports, reviews and articles on Xu Beihong. These papers, in particular those written in memory of Xu Beihong, collectively formulated a charismatic vision of Xu Beihong, a vision which has continued into this century. For example, in the conference which was held in memory of Xu Beihong on the 50th anniversary of his death in Nanjing in 2003, Xu Beihong’s charisma was still emphasised. His devotion to realism and patriotic passion was highly praised in the conference.

Also, as mentioned above, the Beijing Palace Museum held an exhibition on Xu Beihong in memory of him on the 110th anniversary of his birthday in 2005, which was also among the celebration repertoire of the 80th anniversary of Beijing Palace Museum. This charismatic glorification of an artist was in large part derived from the Communist political perception of Xu Beihong’s artistic contributions. Take Xu Beihong’s history painting ‘Jiufang Gao’ (Jiu fa n g Gaoj'lfj, 1931) as an example: it was often politically read as a satire on the KMT’s muddle-headed and tyrannical leadership which oppressed the real intellectuals and the Communists (Fig. 2). However, the inscription on the Jiufang Gao points out that this painting was the seventh version which Xu Beihong had worked on this theme. Moreover, this painting was dedicated to the

Painting: 'The Volume of Xu Beihong' (Zhengzhou, 2005).
22 For example, Wang, Xu Beihong yanjiu, pp. 287-295, 304 & 320.
memory of Lian Nanhu (廉南湖, 1868-1932), a traditional learned scholar and a collector of Chinese painting and calligraphy. This political reading of Xu Beihong’s works reduced the rich layers of meanings in Xu Beihong’s paintings, such as his aspirations and endeavours to combine Chinese and Western painting, and his interaction with the intellectual circles. Nonetheless, it helped to elevate Xu Beihong’s eminence to be one of the greatest and the most patriotic painters in Communist China.

Besides the glorifying formulation of Xu Beihong, from the 1990s there has also been an increasing quantity of researches holding a relatively neutral perspective on Xu Beihong’s contributions. This perspective has emerged along with the unfolding of the diversified landscape of twentieth-century Chinese art in the scholarship. Realism was seen as only one of several contingencies of modern Chinese painting. This re-evaluation of the significance of realism looked at modernity in China from a postcolonial angle which restored the active agency of Chinese artists in the face of the challenges posted by the West and thus re-approved the vitality of traditional ink painting in modern times. In this regard, Xu Beihong’s realism has been criticised by some scholars as a passive and clumsy imitation of the West. The scholars Wen Fong and Michael Sullivan both argued that Xu Beihong’s intention to combine Chinese and Western art in his history painting was a failure.²³ Sullivan even criticised Xu Beihong’s choice of Western realism as being blind to the real state of modern Western art.²⁴ These negative comments on Xu Beihong’s art reflect a fact that, although Xu Beihong’s achievements were finally examined in the light of art for art’s sake,


they were seen within a critical framework of Western modern art, which saw the non-figurative tendency as the correct direction of modern painting. This pro-Western critical framework considers the subjective and expressive representations of traditional Chinese ink painting to be more coincident with the trends of Western modern art. This parallel between Western modernism and traditional Chinese art demonstrates the complexity of modernity in the discussion of Chinese painting. As John Clark has pointed out, a modern Chinese painting may be obviously inspired by the Western avant-garde even though it was created with very typical brush and ink.\(^{25}\) In the studies of this complexity in modern Chinese painting, Xu Beihong’s realism is often compared with the Chinese artists who employed more avant-garde trends of Western art or adopted traditional Chinese painting modes, such as Lin Fengmian and Chang Yu (also known as San Yu 常玉, 1900-1966).\(^{26}\) David Wang in the article 'In the Name of the Real' invoked the debate between Xu Beihong and Xu Zhimo in the 1929 National Art Exhibition to examine Xu Beihong’s realism and made the following comment that ‘The ‘real’ transmitted by their [The French Academic Realists] works might be understood as a residue of preceding realisms, anything but the ‘true’ Reality Xu Beihong saw. Xu Beihong’s problem was not that he advocated an idea of the Real, but that he had not learned anything about the chameleon nature of Realism from his contact with European realism, to say nothing of the many historically proven variations in it that had occurred during the one hundred years before the 1929 Shanghai exhibition’.\(^{27}\) David Wang apparently disagreed with the realism that Xu Beihong pursued in Europe and


\(^{27}\) Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’, p. 32.
then brought back with him to China. By comparison, David Wang approved Xu Zhimo’s defence of the formalism of Western modern art. He commented that ‘Looking back, one may find that his [Xu Zhimo] artistic tastes surpassed his poetic sensibilities’. Moreover, David Wang used Lin Fengmian’s paintings to exemplify Xu Zhimo’s idea of modern art, and implied that Lin Fengmian’s formalism might fit more than Xu Beihong’s realism to be the mode of modern Chinese painting. David Wang evidently employed a Western art framework to examine the correctness of Xu Beihong’s knowledge of Western art, but might ignore the subjectivity of a Chinese artist’s Occident appropriation of the West. Xu Beihong is undoubtedly a figure of remarkable significance in modern Chinese painting because of his indispensable presence in a variety of related studies. Nonetheless, in the Western and comparative light, his eminence has been gradually eroded. Furthermore, this perspective has increasingly endowed Xu Beihong with a conservative image.

As discussed above, a rich body of materials and studies on Xu Beihong has been published. At the same time, this has brought a dichotomy to Xu Beihong’s historical reputation. This dichotomy indicates that the corporeal Xu Beihong is becoming invisible in the discursive practices of formulating him as a symbolic and great ‘author’, because he has been increasingly detached from his own empirical experiences and his context. What then occupies the place of the author ‘Xu Beihong’ is an ideological operation. Therefore, this thesis aims to conduct a fundamental study of Xu Beihong by looking into his own works. Although Xu Beihong had frequently been the focus or the issue in the scholarship, a thorough analysis of his paintings was not conducted until recently

28 Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’, p. 32.
29 For the intricate relationships between ideological operation and historical writing, see Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author’, in Donald Preziosi ed., The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology (Oxford, 1998), pp. 299-314.
by the Chinese scholar Hua Tianxue (華天雪). 30 She published her study on Xu Beihong in 2007, in which she invoked formal analysis, examining in detail what reforms Xu Beihong had made to traditional Chinese painting through subjects, contents and techniques. By comparison, this thesis will study Xu Beihong’s art on a chronological basis, and employs a more sociologically-oriented perspective, putting more emphasis on the interaction between Xu Beihong’s career and his context.

1.4 Methodology – Agency and Art Field

First, this thesis will focus on Xu Beihong’s thoughts on realism and will also examine how Xu Beihong demonstrates his thoughts in his paintings. Moreover, this thesis aims to study Xu Beihong empirically and thus will investigate his works and activities in the context of his time. To achieve this goal, this thesis is going to employ the concepts of agent/agency and field, which the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) used to study the literary and art fields of nineteenth-century France. 31 To transcend the dichotomy between the subjectivism which sees an artist as a creator of universal mind free from his social context and the objectivism which sees an artist’s creation fully determined by his social structures, Bourdieu looked at an artist as an agent whose actions were conditioned by his ‘habitus’ and his social situations. Habitus refers to a set of dispositions which incline an artist to act in a certain manner. It is generally formed from a long-term process of inculcation such as education and family background. 32 Although habitus conditions an artist’s actions to a large extent, an artist may decide which action he is going to take.

30 Hua Tianxue, Xu Beihong de Zhongguohua gailiang 徐悲鴻的中國畫改良, ‘Xu Beihong’s Reforms in Chinese Painting’ (Shanghai, 2007).

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according to his social relations in the field in which he is situated, rather than being determined only by his habitus. Bourdieu still associated an artist’s intentions with his social context, but did not deprive the artists of his subjectivity. The subjectivity of agent and agency has been further emphasised by later anthropologists and art historians, such as Alfred Gell and W.J.T. Mitchell. These studies, however, ground the active aspects of the agents in objective social relations, that is, “the objectivity of the subjective” in Bourdieu’s terms. In other words, they emphasise the manipulations and intentions of the agents without looking at them with the pure charismatic vision of subjectivism or with mechanistic structuralism. This thesis aims to look at Xu Beihong with this concept of agent, with the intention of demonstrating how Xu Beihong’s origins as a professional portraitist led to his preference for realism, why he chose Western academic realism when he was in France, how he adapted Western realism for China’s local context, and why he rejected the circulation of Western modern painting in China. Looking at Xu Beihong as an agent who is conditioned by his habitus, on behalf of Western realism, and who makes choices according to his social situations, it will ground the trajectory of Xu Beihong’s career from a traditional portraitist, a practitioner of Western academic realism, a rigid realist, and then the leader of modern Chinese painting in the art field and social context of his day. With that kind of agency which strikes a balance between passive receiver and active maker, this thesis intends to avoid the charismatic elevation of Xu Beihong as the ruler who was capable of shaping the contours of modern Chinese painting on his own; meanwhile, agency will base Xu Beihong’s adherence to realism on his artistic aspirations and social positions.


34 Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 4.
without looking at it as only a belated and passive imitation of the West.

Agency has been increasingly employed in the studies of modern Chinese literature to turn the focus of non-Western modernisms from makers’ influence to receivers’ appropriation.\textsuperscript{35} By looking into modern Chinese literary works, Shu-mei Shih revealed in the Chinese agency the “wilful manipulation and misunderstanding of the Occidental Other for distinctly local purposes”.\textsuperscript{36} This Occidental construction of the West was also discussed by Lydia Liu in her research on the large-scale translation project in modern China.\textsuperscript{37} Their treatises will be useful references for this study of Xu Beihong’s reading of realism. This thesis intends to avoid looking at Xu Beihong’s understanding of realism in the light of the West, but to focus on his personal interpretation of this superior form of cultural capital which was legitimised in the New Culture Movement. By scrutinising Xu Beihong’s writings, speeches and opinions on realism in the 1910s and 1920s, this thesis aims to reveal how Xu Beihong, as an agent on behalf of Western realism in China, gradually established his prestige in the art world through his perception, translation and appropriation of realism. This thesis is going to focus on Xu Beihong’s intentions and actions to adjust his reading of realism in accordance with structural changes in the art field, and by this means it will also demonstrate the dynamic and complex relationship between the agent and his social situations.

In addition to unfolding Chinese agents’ local constructions of realism, this investigation of Xu Beihong’s thoughts on realism will bring to the fore the translation of fine art (\textit{meishu} 美術) and the formation of an art field in early


\textsuperscript{37} Lydia H. Liu, \textit{Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900-1937} (Stanford, 1995).
twentieth-century China, the second point of this thesis. *Meishu*, the Chinese equivalent of ‘fine art’, did not exist in Chinese vocabulary until the first decade of the twentieth century. Its introduction involved a large-scale transplantation of Western knowledge into China to replace the Confucian orthodoxy which had been under destruction following the collapse of the imperial regime in 1911.38 This translation project of fine art led to the formation of the art field in China. Moreover, it endowed fine art with the emblem of new Chinese culture and national character.39 Along with the rhetorical formulation of fine art, the Western modes of representation also dominated the discourses of the twentieth-century Chinese painting. No matter which stance a Chinese painter was taking, radical or traditional, he had to redefine his origin and identity within this Westernised framework of *meishu*.40 The radical painters may consider Western mimesis as the best vehicle with which to reform the conceptual forms of traditional Chinese painting; while the traditional camp drew on the non-figurative tendencies of modern Western art to defend the modernity of the traditionally orthodox literati painting.

The fundamental bifurcation of Chinese and Western painting traditions, as Norman Bryson has pointed out, increased the complexity of the discussion of modernity in Chinese painting.41 The concept of field will describe this complex and contested nature of China’s art arena. In Bourdieu’s theoretical model, field

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38 Cai Yuanpei’s article ‘Yi meiyu dai zongjiao shuo’ 以美育代宗教說, ‘On the Replacement of Religion with Aesthetic Education’ was the monumental statement for this transition of cultural framework. For this article, see Gao Pingshu 高平叔 et al. eds, *Cai Yuanpei wenji: Jiaoyu (Xia)* 蔡元培文集：教育（下）, ‘A Collection of Cai Yuanpei’s Writings: Education (II)’ (Taipei. 1995), pp. 378-384.


41 Fong, *Between Two Cultures*, p. 96.
is a structured social space which accommodates the agents who are occupying diverse positions engaged in competition for the control of power and for the legitimacy of what 'is' and what 'is not' the thing at issue.\footnote{42} In the art field, artists will be engaged in accumulating cultural capital, establishing prestige and conferring legitimacy on what should be modern Chinese painting. Michel Hockx’s research on the literary field of twentieth-century China serves as the main reference for this study of China’s art field. Hockx employed Bourdieu’s theory of field to analyse the context of the formation of China’s literary field, its operations and structures, and the actions of its agents.\footnote{43} He also pointed out that China’s field was dominated by a third principle, in addition to the autonomous and heteronomous principles of the French field. He argued that this third principle “motivated modern Chinese writers to consider the well-being of their country and their people”.\footnote{44} This concern for the nation and the people should be “the obsession with China” in C.T. Hsia’s terms. This third principle caused the pervasiveness of nationalistic discourses and legitimised the superiority of realism in China’s art field. Using this field model, this thesis intends to avoid criticising the conservatism of Xu Beihong’s realism in the Western light, but to look at his rigid realist stance as a result of his wilful position-taking action within China’s own conflicted art field.

1.5 The Structure of Thesis

This thesis will feature an investigation into the trajectory of Xu Beihong’s reading of realism in the 1910s and 1920s, the time pivotal in the formation and confirmation of Xu Beihong’s realist identity, both chronologically and methodologically. Xu Beihong’s career during this time will be divided into four

\footnote{42} Bourdieu, \textit{The Field of Cultural Production}, pp. 6-9.\footnote{43} Michel Hockx ed., \textit{The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China} (Surrey, 1999), pp.1-20.\footnote{44} Hockx, \textit{The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China}, p. 12.
stages: the Shanghai period, at Beijing University, the European period, and the
1929 National Art Exhibition. Each chapter will bring Xu Beihong’s writings
into scrutiny, and will exemplify them with his contemporaneous paintings,
along with a look into related fields of activity.

Chapter 2 will examine how Xu Beihong’s early experiences and the
Shanghai circumstance shaped his perception of realism. First, this chapter will
study how Xu Beihong’s background as a professional portraitist equipped him
with a great facility in realistic rendering and enabled him to enter the
commercial art world and modern art education business of Shanghai, which was
filled with Western chic and realistic practices. Second, with the mimesis
principle shared in both Chinese and Western portraiture and the rhetorical
interchange of connotations between the terms *xiezhen* (寫真, ‘rendering the
real’), *xieshi* and *zhexiong* (真像, ‘portraiture’ and 真相, ‘truth’), this chapter
will investigate the process by which Chinese indigenous realism transited from
an artisan practice to a superior form of cultural capital and a symbol of
modernism and nationalism. With this assimilation and negotiation of Western
realism, Chinese portraiture and nationalism, this chapter intends to reveal how
Xu Beihong’s early experiences and the related context formed his habitus which
shaped his later penchant for realism.

Chapter 3 first looks into the translation of the Western term ‘fine art’ and
the formation of art field in China. Cai Yuanpei was the pivotal figure in this
large-scale transplanting of the Western art framework. He promoted aesthetic
education to replace the traditional Confucian instruction and elevated the status
of art beyond the level of mere technology. Through Cai Yuanpei’s formulation,
art became the new emblem of Chinese culture and national character. The
second part of this chapter will focus on Xu Beihong’s activities in the Beijing
University Painting Research Society, the association which Cai Yuanpei established to bring into practice his aesthetic ideas. Through the articles that Xu Beihong published during this time, this chapter will examine how Xu Beihong responded to this new thought and how he reshaped his identity as an artist and his perception of realism within this new art framework. Finally, this chapter will look at the Beijing University Painting Research Society as a small art field, examining how the tutors with different backgrounds reformulated their philosophies within this new framework and how they competed to retain their legitimacy or prestige in this newly-formed art field.

Chapter 4 will explore Xu Beihong’s translation of Western realism through the articles and speeches that he published and delivered in the period during which he pursued art studies in Europe. First, this chapter is going to investigate Xu Beihong’s student life in Paris, and the influence of French academic realism upon his works. Moreover, by looking into Xu Beihong’s life in Paris, it will unfold his bohemian manner, which is overshadowed by his later stereotyped image as a conservative and rigid realist. This chapter is going to examine the actual image and evaluation of Xu Beihong in the eyes of his contemporaries. With his realistic craftsmanship and bohemian manner, Xu Beihong was successfully legitimised as an avant-garde and reputable agent on behalf of Western art in China’s art field. On the basis of this image so different from the stereotype in scholarship, this chapter intends to argue that Xu Beihong’s realism may not be perceived as a belated imitation of old-fashioned Western painting in the context of his day. In this regard, this chapter aims to focus on Xu Beihong’s personal reading of Western realism instead of examining whether his translation is faithful to the originals or not. Through delineating Xu Beihong’s explanation of realism, this chapter is going to disclose how an agent will manipulate
Western borrowings in accordance with his aspirations and positions and the rules of the given field.

Chapter 5 will scrutinise the first National Art Exhibition which was held in Shanghai in 1929. This exhibition is pivotal in the construction of Xu Beihong’s image as an old-fashioned and rigid realist, because he published an article entitled 轩 (Huo, ‘Doubts’, 1929), in which he reproached several influential figures of modern Western painting, including Édouard Manet (1832-1883), Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and Henri Matisse (1869-1954). Xu Beihong’s attack on modernist painting triggered a bitter dispute centred on ‘Doubts’, and Xu Zhimo (徐志摩, 1897-1931) became the loudest voice against Xu Beihong’s stance. By delineating the two Xus’ appropriation of the term 真 (zhen, ‘reality’), this chapter will reveal the diversity in Chinese agents’ Occidental formulation of the West. Besides the two Xus’ debate, this chapter will also investigate other articles and reports about this exhibition. Through this investigation into the discursive space of the exhibition, this chapter will reveal the intertwining of fine art and nationalism specific in China’s art field. Moreover, it will also disclose the complexity and perplexity which occurred in the shift of visual paradigms and rhetorical implications following the translation of ‘realism’ and ‘fine art’. Additionally, this chapter also intends to unfold the increasingly matured and conflicted art field in China by probing the competition between the agents, each of whom was acting on behalf of a specific Western painting style. They competed to be accepted as the new legitimate authority in the contest as to what should be modern painting in China. This chapter aims to project the National Art Exhibition as the conflicting field of artistic negotiation and power display, in which Xu Beihong’s seemingly anti-modern stance will be a wilful action of

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45 Xu Beihong, 'Huo', in Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji, pp. 131-134 (p. 131).
Finally, Chapter 6 will look into Xu Beihong’s paintings, in particular the large-scale history paintings and the richly allegorical ink paintings. By analysing Xu Beihong’s paintings from the perspectives of hybridity, allegory and modernity, this chapter intends to reveal how Xu Beihong crystallised his artistic ideas into his paintings, and how his paintings project the entwining of nationalism and the bifurcate pictorial systems of Chinese and Western art, the specific lure and challenge of modern Chinese painting.
Chapter 2 The Perception of Realism

2.1 Indigenous Realism (Xiezhen) in Xu Beihong’s Early Art Practice

Xu Beihong’s interest in painting emerged at an early age. According to his autobiography, Xu Beihong’s first painting teacher was his father Xu Dazhang, who was also a painter. Xu Dazhang, however, was apparently not well-known because his name is seldom mentioned in the historical accounts or in later scholarship on Chinese painting. In Xu Beihong’s account, his father made a living by making portraits and was able to paint realistically. Xu Dazhang developed keen observational skills by drawing from nature instead of imitating acknowledged masterpieces. His method of learning painting suggests that he was a professional painter, because developing observational skills was essential in traditional portrait painting training, a genre of professional painting. Moreover, his self-taught learning experience suggests that he came from a humble family. In addition to painting, Xu Beihong claimed that Xu Dazhang was also proficient in calligraphy and seal cutting, skills traditionally regarded as the artistic practices of literati painters. This personal account may be a deliberate glorification of his father by Xu Beihong. Xu Dazhang was not an inheritor of a painting school nor was he of a scholar-official family. His social identity was that of a professional painter. Nonetheless, Xu Beihong praised his father for his scholarly accomplishments and Confucian high-mindedness. These

46 Xu Beihong’s autobiography was published in the 46th issue of Liang You magazine (良友) in 1930. This article, ‘Beihong zishu’ (悲鸿自述, ‘Beihong in His Own Words’) is collected in Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji, pp. 1-28.
references to Xu Dazhang’s mastery of calligraphy and seal cutting and to his mild manner demonstrate that Xu Beihong intended to endow his father with the image of a literati painter, who historically enjoyed higher status than professional craftsmen.\(^{50}\) Xu Beihong’s intention is also manifest in his account of his early experience of art learning, when he said that his father required him not to learn painting until he had finished studying the canon of Confucian philosophy, the *Four Books and Five Classics*.\(^{51}\)

Xu Beihong started to learn painting with his father at the age of nine and in the following year he was able to help his father to add colour to some minor parts in the pictures.\(^{52}\) Few of Xu Dazhang’s paintings have survived nowadays. Among them, *Songyin kezi tu* (松蔭課子圖, ‘Coaching My Son under the Pine Shade’, 1905), in the collection in the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum in Beijing, is the most frequently reproduced (Fig. 3). In addition, Xu Dazhang’s surviving works also include a ten-leaf album of blue-and-green landscape paintings, *Jingxi shijing* (荆溪十景, ‘Ten Views of Jingxi’, 1907), now in the collection in the Yixing Archives (Fig. 4). This album renders ten scenic spots of Xu Dazhang’s hometown in Yixing province. Such illustrated records of local scenic spots were popular in traditional Chinese prints.\(^{53}\) The heavily-coloured green style of the album reveals a nostalgic flavour. This blue-and-green style is conventionally considered a characteristic of the artisan taste of traditional professional painting of the Northern School as opposed to the scholarly taste of

\(^{50}\) The dichotomy between literati and professional painting has often been seen in the narrative of Chinese painting history. Nevertheless, some studies in recent years have been conducted to challenge this dichotomy, such as James Cahill, *The Painter’s Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China* (New York, 1994).

\(^{51}\) Xu, ‘Beihong zishu’, p. 3.

\(^{52}\) Xu, ‘Beihong zishu’, p. 3.

literati painting of the Southern School.\textsuperscript{54} The album-leaf format, nostalgic atmosphere and heavily-coloured style of the \textit{Ten Views of Jingxi} can find similar examples in the works of professional painter, such as the Qing court painter and also the leading orthodox-school painter Wang Yuanqi’s (王原祁, 1642-1715) \textit{Xihu shijing tu} (西湖十景圖, ‘Ten Views of West Lake’) and Xu Dazhang’s contemporary, Ren Xiong’s (任熊, 1823-1857) album \textit{Shiwang tu} (十萬圖, ‘Ten of Ten Thousand Paintings’, 1856) (Figs 5-6).

In contrast to the heavily-coloured landscape paintings, however, Xu Dazhang’s \textit{Coaching My Son under the Pine Shade} is an outline drawing painting in ink and light colour. At the centre of the picture, Xu Dazhang and Xu Beihong are shown seated under the shadow of a pine tree. Xu Beihong holds a brush in his hand, about to write something down in the notebook, with a gesture which responds to the title of the painting. The four treasures of a scholar’s study (brush, ink-stick, paper and ink-stone) and some old-fashioned thread-bound books are laid on the desk at which Xu Beihong sits. The background is a wall with a round window in it, and a number of thread-bound books are piled up behind the window. A scholarly air is accordingly lent to the painting by these surrounding items. This painting projects the image of a scholar on the father. Xu Dazhang’s self-projection in the picture to a large degree coincides with the literati painter image which is bestowed on him in Xu Beihong’s autobiography. Moreover, this painting also reveals Xu Dazhang’s expectations for Xu Beihong, foreseeing Xu Beihong’s later endeavours to become a Westernised Chinese painter with accomplishments in the literati painting realm.

The composition, in which a figure is given social identity or social meaning by being rendered in a setting full of antique artefacts, or with the

cultural trappings of the literati, was popular in the portraiture of the later Ming and Qing periods. On the one hand, portrait painting of this type demonstrated the burgeoning material culture during this time, in line with the advent of a commercially-vibrant society of conspicuous consumption, which fostered an increasing interest in individualism and portraiture; on the other hand, this portrait genre helped professional painters to build their networks with the literati-gentry, and thus further deconstructed the dichotomy between the scholar-amateur and professional artists.\textsuperscript{55} The scholarly air in \textit{Coaching My Son under the Pine Shade} is reminiscent of the handscroll \textit{Wang Yuanqi yiju tu} (王原祁藝菊圖, ‘Portrait of Wang Yuanqi Appreciating Chrysanthemums’) by the Qing professional portraitist Yu Zhiding (禹之鼎, ca 1647-1716) (Fig. 7). Wang Yuanqi is portrayed seated on a couch, surrounded by books and scrolls and attended by three servants. He is leaning against a backrest, sipping a cup of wine, and enjoying himself in appreciating an array of chrysanthemums in planters. The relaxed atmosphere, emblems of cultural refinement, and the wine and chrysanthemums all make an allusion to the fourth-century recluse-poet Tao Yuanming (陶淵明).\textsuperscript{56}

Wang Yuanqi’s face is rendered realistically with fine-line drawing, soft shading and careful, rich layers of ink washes, revealing Yu Zhiding’s solid foundation in the portrait genre of professional painting. Xu Dazhang’s \textit{Coaching My Son under the Pine Shade} also sees this vivid facial depiction with the aid of modelling technique, which is characteristic of Chinese portraiture. Nevertheless,

\textsuperscript{55} Wang Cheng-hua 王正華, ‘Nüren, wupin yu ganguan yuwang: Chen Hongshou wanqi renwulua zhong Jiangnan wenhua de chengxian’ 女人、物品與感官慾望：陳洪綬晚期人物畫中江南文化的呈現, \textit{The Late-Ming Culture of Sensibility: Women and Objects in Chen Hongshou’s Late Figure Painting}, \textit{Jindai Zhongguo funishi yanjiu 近代中國婦女史研究}, 10 (2002), pp. 1-57. For the relationship between individualism and portraiture in late Ming period, see Craig Clunas, ‘Artist and Subject in Ming Dynasty China’, \textit{Proceedings of the British Academy}, 105 (2000), pp. 43-72.

the figures in Xu Dazhang’s painting are more rigid, lacking the sense of casual informality and mobility that Wang Yuanqi’s image reveals, which is created by Yu Zhiding’s suggestive description of the physical volume of Wang Yuanqi’s torso under the robe. The frontal, full-length figure, portrayed seated in a chair, with the contrast between the heavier facial modelling and the relatively formulaic drawing of the clothing in Xu Dazhang’s Coaching My Son under the Pine Shade, are the customary pictorial devices in Chinese commemorative portraiture (Fig. 8). There are no commemorative portraits among Xu Dazhang’s surviving works. Nonetheless, an ancestor portrait, which is attributed to Xu Beihong’s early work, may help us to understand Xu Dazhang’s life as a portraitist and the skills he passed on to Xu Beihong (Fig. 9). This ancestor portrait shows a frontal and full-length figure seated in a chair at the centre of the picture. The forebear’s head is modelled with a shading technique. The lifelike effect in his face is in contrast to his highly decorated official costume, which is devoid of any indication of physical presence under the robe. This ancestor portrait follows the conventions of Chinese ancestor portraiture. Nonetheless, the smiling look on the forebear’s face reflects the influence of photography, introduced into China by the British at the time of the Opium War of 1840-42 (Fig. 10).

Xu Beihong’s ancestor portrait reveals his early training in the portraiture strand of professional painting. The aim of reaching visual verisimilitude in Chinese portraiture also appears in Xu Beihong’s other surviving early-dated portraits. Zhulaotu (諸老圖, ‘The Elderly’) shows a different realistic style from the ancestor portrait and reveals other skills that Xu Beihong had acquired in the

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58 Stuart and Rawski, Worshipping the Ancestors, pp. 166-174.
early stage of his artistic career (Fig. 11). *The Elderly* depicts four frontal figures, two of them sitting and the other two standing beside a river. The two figures on the right are wearing gowns, padded jackets and little round caps, showing their bald foreheads, in the costume of the Qing period (1644-1911). This painting was probably done no later than the mid-1910s, around the time of the establishment of Republican China in 1912. The portrayal of the figures in the daily wear of the former imperial dynasty reveals an air of nostalgia, corresponding to the title of the painting. The landscape setting of the picture is more in the style of a Western watercolour, with the realistic rendering of the faces of the figures, reflecting the aid of photography in the making of this portrait painting. Its Western-influenced style is similar to another figure painting by Xu Beihong, in which two men are seemingly taking a stroll in the landscape (Fig. 12). The solidity of the facial modelling demonstrates here too the aid of photography and the Western influence. In the lower part of the picture appear a deer and two cranes, the auspicious symbols of longevity. The composition demonstrates a hybrid style combining traditional portraiture format and Western-style watercolour landscape setting. The later two figure paintings of Xu Beihong described above show little trace of the techniques which he applied in the traditional ancestor portrait. Different from his father’s portraits, which were made using the pictorial methods that were conventional practices in Chinese portraiture, Xu Beihong had manifested significant Western artistic influence in his paintings at the outset of his artistic career. The watercolour style and the realistic portraits employing the aid of photography were the hallmarks of Western influence at that time, and these features also appear in Xu Beihong’s portrait of the well-known, reform-minded Qing official Kang Youwei. Xu Beihong made this painting *Nanhai xiansheng liushi xingle tu* (南海先生六十行
A Celebration for Kang Youwei’s Sixtieth Birthday) in celebration of Kang’s sixtieth birthday in 1916 (Fig. 13). This is a watercolour painting: the faces of Kang Youwei and the other figures in the picture are heavily modelled. The size of the figures is relatively large in proportion to the garden background. These are the characteristics of the style of calendar poster making, of which Shanghai was the heartland at that time (Fig. 14).\(^{59}\) Kang Youwei’s portrait, executed in the style of contemporary Shanghai calendar poster painting, manifests the influence of this from of Shanghai commercial art on Xu Beihong when he stayed there from 1915 to 1917.\(^{60}\) Being a professional painter of humble origins, Xu Beihong’s ways of developing painting were associated with commercial and popular culture.

Xu Beihong’s portrait paintings demonstrate his mastery of realistic rendering, a significant attribute of Chinese portraiture. The portraits discussed above exemplify the fact that visual verisimilitude was stressed in traditional Chinese portraiture in particular through the modelling of the faces of those portrayed. This emphasis on visual realism in Chinese portraiture is also exemplified in the traditional term for making portraits – zizehen. In the English-Chinese dictionary published by the Commercial Press in 1903, the English words ‘portrait’ and ‘portraiture’ were translated as zhendian, and ‘to paint a portrait’ as xiezhen.\(^{61}\) Seeking to create a good likeness of the portrayed had traditionally become a standard of evaluation for a portraitist. The Ming portraitist Zeng Jing (曾鯨, 1564-1647) was held in high esteem in the art discourse of his time on the grounds of the disturbingly illusionistic effects he

\(^{59}\) For a comprehensive study of calendar posters and Shanghai’s visual culture, see Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu, 2004).

\(^{60}\) Xu and Jin, *Xu Beihong niangui*, pp. 7-15.

\(^{61}\) *Shangmi shuguan Hua Ying zidian* 商務書館華英字典, ‘Commercial Press English and Chinese Dictionary’ (Shanghai, 1903), p. 193.
achieved in his portraits (Fig. 15). His reputation came from his skill in mimesis, as well as from his portraits of eminent people in the art and literary world. The critics remarked that the images portrayed in Zeng Jing’s paintings were “alarmingly like real people” and “looked like reflections of models in a mirror”. His skill in realistic portraiture won him a reputation that made him the founder of Bochen School (波臣畫派), of which Yu Zhiding was also a significant figure. Moreover, Zeng Jing’s significance in Chinese art history was also on account of the Western pictorial influence on his creation. It has been argued that the realistic effects of Zeng Jing’s portraits were attributable to the impact of Western paintings and prints which were brought into China by the Jesuits around Zeng Jing’s time. Although the emphasis on mimesis led to Chinese portraiture being placed on a lower position in the hierarchy of Chinese art, it allowed more space for Western art to exert influence on it. Thus, after Zeng Jing, there constantly appeared Western pictorial influence in Chinese portraiture, and this influence was coupled with the increasingly frequent traffic between China and the West, in particular in the works of the painters at court or in the treaty-port cities, such as Guangzhou, through which Western culture first entered China (Fig. 16).

With this emphasis on visual realism in Chinese portraiture, the influence of Western art was continuously at work in professional painting. Xu Beihong’s background as a professional portraitist thus led to him being exposed to Western art.
pictorial practices at an early age. His early portraits demonstrate that Xu Beihong had assimilated the latest artistic trends of foreign art in Shanghai by his time. The stress on xiezheng, the indigenous pictorial realism in Chinese portraiture, had foreseen Xu Beihong's later pursuit of Western realism.
2.2 The Shanghai Painting School’s Influence on and Inspiration for Xu Beihong

The influence of Western art, in particular through its realistic practices, manifested itself in Xu Beihong’s early portraits as discussed above. It appears that professional art in China was relatively open to the influence of alien painting. It is hard to discern the trajectory of the infusion of Western pictorial elements into Xu Beihong’s early portraits by only comparing the ancestor portrait with the watercolour figure paintings. Nonetheless, the painters and devices from which Xu Beihong learnt painting, such as his father Xu Dazhang and the influential journalistic illustrator Wu Youru (吳友如, 1893), showed that Western influence was tightly associated with his learning experience.65 For example, Xu Dazhang’s Coaching My Son under the Pine Shade obliquely represented modern life experience in the metropolis of China, where Western culture was flooding in, although overall it remained very traditionally Chinese in its style. The metropolitan experience manifested itself in the close-up effect of the portrayed figures and the excessive display of things in a limited space. This compositional technique reveals an oppressive sense in Xu Dazhang’s work, replacing the escapism in Yu Zhiding’s Portrait of Wang Yuanqi Appreciating Chrysanthemums, which is created by a void in the background. Furthermore, it is reinforced by the framed effect in the picture, created by the partial view of the pine tree, by the servants and by the round window. This sense of constriction represented the urban life experience.66 Moreover, the piercing eyes of Xu

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65 Xu Beihong first learnt to paint by imitating one of Wu Youru’s illustrations daily. Xu, ‘Beihong zishu’, p. 3. For the influence of Wu Youru on Xu Beihong, see Cho Shenko 卓聖格, ‘Wu Youru — Xu Beihong Zhongguohua gaige linian xingcheng de guanjian yingxiangren 吳友如 — 徐悲鴻中國畫改革理念形成的關鍵影響人, ‘Wu Youru — The Key Figure in the Formation of Xu Beihong’s Ideas on Reforming Chinese Painting’ Xiamen meishu xuebao 現代美術學報, 2 (1999), pp. 73-95.

Dazhang and Xu Beihong in the picture betray their self-awareness about seeing and being seen. As has been argued, the act of watching is a visual translation of urban life as a result of the experience of and interest in spectacle.67

The depiction of modern life apparent in Xu Dazhang's painting is also seen in Pengcha xiyan (烹茶洗砚, 'Brewing Tea and Washing the Inkstone' 1871), executed by Qian Huian (錢慧安, 1833-1911), a significant figure of the Shanghai School (Fig. 17). The cropped frame and the act of watching are the defining characteristics of the Shanghai School of painting. Some scholars have argued that the output of the Shanghai School is modern, but it disguises its modernity under the traditional subjects of landscape and the classical past.68

The wide popularity of the paintings of the Shanghai School manifested the far-reaching influence of the School in Xu Dazhang’s work. Xu Dazhang resided in a village, instead of the metropolitan city of Shanghai. His knowledge of the Shanghai School was acquired in part from his imitation of the works of its members that were circulated on the art market. Xu Beihong recalled that he first learnt of the best-known Shanghai School artist Ren Bonian (任伯年, 1840-1896) through a copy of Ren Bonian’s Zhong Kui which Xu Dazhang made one day when he had visited the town.69 According to Xu Beihong’s account, his father’s copy depicted Zhong Kui hacking a tree, which was in the shape of a little devil. Another example of this subject can be found in another of Ren Bonian's Zhong Kui paintings, Zhong Jinshi zhanhu (鍾進士斬狐, ‘Zhong Kui Hacking a Fox’, 1878) (Fig. 18). So it appears that a professional artist could learn to paint by means of the paintings or prints circulating on the open market. The famous

67 Hay, 'Painting and the Built Environment in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai', p. 79.
modern landscape painter Qian Songyan (錢松嵒, 1898-1985) recalled how many painters first learnt to make portraits by means of copying the images in the illustrated book, *Wanxiaotang huazhuan* (晩笑堂畫傳, ‘An Illustrated Biography of Historical Figures by the Wanxiao Studio’).\(^{70}\) The subject and composition of Xu Dazhang’s *Coaching My Son under the Pine Shade* is similar to an illustration in the painting manual *Huapu caixin* (畫譜采新, ‘New Modes to Painting Manuals’), in which images were mostly designed by Qian Huian and his pupils (Fig. 19).\(^{71}\) So Xu Dazhang was able to represent the elements of modern life in his painting possibly by learning from the latest paintings or prints on the market. This method of learning may account for the frequent integration of novel techniques into professional painting.

Ren Bonian’s paintings in printed form could be obtained on the market after 1887 through a painting manual entitled *Ren Bonian xiansheng zhenji huapu* (任伯年先生真蹟畫譜, ‘Manual of Genuine Paintings by Master Ren Bonian’).\(^{72}\) A close relationship with the commercial market is a noted phenomenon of the Shanghai School.\(^{73}\) The emergence of a burgeoning publishing industry in the late nineteenth century, in line with the introduction of lithography into China by 1876, on the one hand led to the massive involvement of the Shanghai-based painters in providing their designs for various print media. On the other hand, the new printing technology enabled the high quality of printed reproductions of artists’ original works, giving rise to the Shanghai painters’ interest in publishing their paintings in printed form, such as the

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published collaborative manual *Haishang mingren huagao* (海上名人畫稿, Illustrations by Famous Shanghai Artists’) in 1885. Ren Bonian’s highly-admired accomplishments meant that he was in great demand in the printing industry. His works were made available to the general public in the form of both single-artist and collaborative manuals. Additionally, he also made frontispiece portraits for the publications of writers and artists. For instance, in 1878, Ren Bonian made a portrait of his contemporary Shanghai painter and calligrapher Chen Yunsheng (陳允升, 1820-1884) for the publication entitled *Renzhai huasheng* (續齋畫譜, ‘A Collection of Mr Ren Zhai’s Paintings’), collecting over hundred works of Chen Yunsheng. This publication was promoted by several celebrities of the contemporary art world in Shanghai and it became a popular painting manual of its day. Advertisements for this publication also appeared in the widely-circulated Shanghai-based newspaper *Shenbao* (申報) immediately. The flourishing publishing industry in Shanghai appears to have contributed to the wide popularity of Ren Bonian and other painters of the Shanghai School. At the same time, the close relationship between the Shanghai painters and commercial culture was manifested in the representation of metropolitan life in their works. The way Xu Beihong learnt about Ren Bonian reveals the commercial aspect of the Shanghai School, as well as the role of commercial art in Xu Beihong’s own art learning.

Ren Bonian was an eminent professional painter in his time. He was highly admired in the art discourse of his day for his gift of making portraits in a

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strikingly lifelike manner. The modelling and photographic vividness of his portrait heads indicates the significant Western pictorial influence on Ren Bonian (Fig. 20). It has been argued that Ren Bonian’s Western art learning may have been the consequence of his acquaintance with Liu Dezhai (劉德齋, 1843-1912), a brother of the Roman Catholic Church in the Tushanwan (土山灣) district of Shanghai. Tushanwan had become the location of the headquarters of the Chinese Society of Jesus after 1874. Liu Dezhai taught painting at Tushanwan Painting Studio, which was established by the Church to produce objects for religious purpose, and later he was appointed to manage the department of watercolour and ink painting from 1887. An illustration of The Last Supper made by the Tushanwan Studio provides a glimpse into the techniques of the apprentices at the studio, and their training in Western art (Fig. 21). The Tushanwan Painting Workshop made a great contribution to the promotion of Western art in China, and Xu Beihong regarded it highly as the cradle of Western painting in China. In addition to the relationship between Ren Bonian and the Tushanwan Painting Studio, the Western influence on Ren is also manifest in his use of the Western red transparent pigment. The Chinese artist Pan Tianshou (潘天壽, 1898-1971) indicated that the Western red pigment did not appear in the making of traditional Chinese painting before Ren Bonian and other Shanghai

76 For example, Zhang Mingke 張鳴珂 (1829-1908), Hansongke tan yi suolu 漢松閣談藝餘錄, “Trivial Records of Comments on Art at Cold Pine Pavilion” (Shanghai, 1988), p. 71.
77 Vinograd, Boundaries of the Self, p. 141.
78 For Ren Bonian’s association with the Tushanwan Studio, see Chialing Yang, New Wine in Old Bottles: The Art of Ren Bonian in Nineteenth-Century Shanghai (London, 2007), pp. 127-135.
80 Yang, New Wine in Old Bottles, p. 134.
Ren Bonian’s attainments in portraiture are exemplified in his portrait of Wu Changshuo (吳昌碩, 1844-1927), a famous scholar-antiquarian calligrapher and painter of his day (Fig. 22). In the picture, Wu Changshuo is portrayed naked to the waist, sitting leisurely under the Banana palms to enjoy the cool air. He holds a round fan in his hand, with his upper body naked, a representation which suggests the summer heat. The inscription on the painting also makes an allusion to the fourth-century recluse-poet Tao Yuanming, as did Yu Zhiding’s Portrait of Wang Yuanqi Appreciating Chrysanthemums. Wu Changshuo is resting his left arm on a stack of books, a typical emblem of a scholar. Nonetheless, Wu Changshuo’s rotund belly, devoid of any trappings of refinement, conveys a vulgar feeling in the picture in contrast to the elegant air in the Portrait of Wang Yuanqi Appreciating Chrysanthemums. Interest in the physical body in Chinese portraiture appeared to emerge among the Shanghai School painters. For example, Ren Xiong also painted his upper torso naked in his self-portrait (Fig. 23). The representation of the nude torso reveals a close relationship between Western pictorial practices and Shanghai School painting, and marks the Shanghai painters’ break with traditional portraiture, in which the body was generally invisible, hidden under formulaically-rendered clothing. The interest in depicting physical presence in Shanghai School portraits on the one hand expressed with genuine honesty the general humble origins of professional portraitists; on the other hand, it revealed the Shanghai painters’ turn from the pursuit of ancient taste to a concern with people’s daily life. Ren Bonian was a

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82 Li, Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi, p. 369.
83 The inscription was written by Wu Changshuo. For an English translation of the inscription, see Vinograd, Boundaries of the Self, p. 131.
representative of the Shanghai School. His portrait of his contemporary well-known painter in a populist way represents the close relationship between professional painting, Western art and mass culture in the painting of the Shanghai School.

Ren Bonian was also a professional painter of humble origins. He nevertheless won himself a prominent status in the art world of his day by integrating Western elements into his works to achieve a perfect Chinese visual realism, successfully combining Western pictorial novelties and traditional Chinese style in his portraits. Ren Bonian’s achievements may have served to encourage Xu Beihong to become a lifelong proponent of realism in Chinese painting. Xu Beihong regarded Ren Bonian highly, considering him to be the best painter in Chinese art after the Ming professional master Qiu Ying (仇英, 1494-1552). Throughout his life, Xu Beihong was enthusiastic about finding and collecting Ren Bonian’s works. After returning to China from Europe in 1927, Xu Beihong started to develop his artistic career by creating a large number of paintings on historical subjects in both Chinese ink and Western oils. Quite a few of Xu Beihong’s history paintings are similar to Ren Bonian’s in their subject and composition. For example, the Chinese sage Lao Zi riding on a bull in Xu Beihong’s Ziqi donglai (紫氣東來, ‘Purple Air Coming from the East’, 1943) is similar to Ren Bonian’s painting on the same theme (Figs 24-25). Xu Beihong’s Kongzi jianxue (孔子講學, ‘Confucius Giving a Lecture’, 1943) is probably inspired by Ren Bonian’s Sanyou tu (三友圖, ‘Three Friends’, 1884) (Figs 26-27). The subject of lecturing on Chinese classics is often seen in

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85 Xu, ‘Ren Bonian ping zhuan’, p. 606. Qiu Ying was a professional artist but was associated closely with the literati circle of Suzhou, the heartland of refined culture and literati painting in the Ming dynasty. His high esteem in the literati circle with his profound professional skills has challenged the oversimplified dichotomy of literati-amateur and professional values in Chinese painting. See James Cahill, Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty (New York and Tokyo, 1978), pp. 201-210.
Chinese figure painting, such as the paintings on this theme executed by the Ming professional artist Chen Hongshou (陳洪綸, 1598-1652) (Fig. 28).

Moreover, Xu Beihong executed a history painting in Western oils based on the popular Chinese legend Fengchen sanxia (鳳塵三俠, “Three Chivalrous Warriors”) in the 1920s, and Ren Bonian also created several paintings on this theme (Figs 29-31). This story enjoyed great popularity among the Shanghai School painters and in their contemporary illustrated publications, such as Qian Huian’s pupil, Lu Peng’s (陸鵬) design for the manual New Modes to Painting Manuals (Fig. 32).

Xu Beihong’s history paintings demonstrate Ren Bonian’s influence, as well as the links between professional art and popular culture. The warriors, historical figures and fictional characters in Xu Beihong’s creations are often seen in traditional prints or other professional artists’ works. The ghost catcher, Zhong Kui, one of the favourite subjects in both Ren Bonian’s and Xu Beihong’s works, is a popular subject in Chinese folk art.87 In the 1940s, Xu Beihong made several paintings on the theme of Jiuge (九歌, ‘Nine Songs’), written by the patriotic poet Qu Yuan (屈原, 340-278 BC). Nine Songs were later collected in the anthology of ancient romantic Chinese poems, Chuci (楚辭, ‘The Poetic Prose of the South’). The lady’s gesture in the sketch Xiang furen (湘夫人, ‘Mistress of Xiang’) is reminiscent of the print on the same theme made by the Ming professional artist Chen Hongshou in 1616 (Figs 33-34).88 Chen Hongshou was a professional artist who worked in close association with his

88 For a full display of Chen Hongshou’s eleven illustrations of Nine Songs, see Wong Wange 翁萬戈 ed., Chen Hongshou 陳洪綸, ‘Chen Hongshou: His Life and Art’ (Shanghai, 1997), Vol. II, pp. 9-18.
contemporary publishing industry. Xu Beihong regarded him highly as one of a few masters in modern times of Chinese painting, with Ren Bonian and Wu Youru. Xu Beihong once made a painting on the theme of the recluse-poet Tao Yuanming in 1948 (Fig. 35). In the picture, Tao Yuanming is picking chrysanthemums. Xu Beihong also collected a painting on the same theme by Chen Hongshou, Tao Yuanming zaiju tu (陶淵明戴菊圖, ‘Tao Yuanming Bringing Chrysanthemums Home’, ca 1649) (Fig. 36). Xu Beihong seems to have been very fond of this painting as he wrote an inscription on it in 1950. In the 1940s, Xu Beihong also made two Chinese beauty paintings based on the poem by the famous Tang poet Du Fu (杜甫, 712-770) (Fig. 37). The composition and subject of these two beauty paintings was also employed by the Shanghai School painters and illustrators, such as Qian Huian and Wu Youru (Fig. 38). An illustration of the same title and design was also published in New Modes to Painting Manuals (Fig. 39). The composition of these beauty paintings is very similar, seemingly derived from a conventional mode.

In addition to his father and Ren Bonian, Wu Youru also played a decisive role in the massive involvement of commercial art and popular culture in Xu Beihong’s works. Xu Beihong first learnt to paint by imitating Wu Youru’s illustrations daily. Wu Youru was a well-known artist in late nineteenth-century Shanghai. He quickly established his reputation in the press by being the principle illustrator of the Dianshizhai huabao (點石齋畫報, ‘Dianshi Studio Pictorial’) and his own Feiyingge huabao (飛影閣畫報, ‘Fleeting Shadow

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90 There is a year name in Chinese terms on the lower right of the painting, saying ‘Wu zi’ (戊子), corresponding to 1948 of the Common Era.
Pavilion Pictorial'). The *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* was one of the most celebrated pictorials in late nineteenth-century China. The first issue of the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* appeared in May 1884, as a supplement to the *Shenbao*, although it could also be purchased separately. Both *Shenbao* and *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* were founded by the British merchants Ernest and Frederick Major, who controlled several enterprises in China in the second half of the nineteenth century. The *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* enjoyed an immediate success with the aid of the wide circulation of *Shenbao*, which was launched in 1872 and could be obtained, outside Shanghai, in more than twenty places across China. The *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* produced more than 4,500 illustrations between 1884 and 1898. It was issued at intervals of ten days and each issue generally featured eight line drawings, illustrating items chosen from *Shenbao*. The illustrators’ mastery of the vanishing perspective helped to lend a feeling of veracity to the quasi-journalistic, current affairs feature drawings of the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial*. Take as an example the illustration *Heyi huaya* (合議畫押，‘The Treaty-Signing Ceremony at the Conclusion of the Sino-French War’, 1885), which represented the moment when the Chinese official Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823-1901) signed the Sino-French treaty in July 1885 (Fig. 40). The employment of the vanishing perspective realistically represents a three-dimensional interior, and the interior is rendered in remarkable detail, as if

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95 Wang, ‘Dianshizhai huabao suo zhanxian zhi jindai lishi mailuo’, p. 1. Wang Er-min in this article also argued that the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* ceased publication in 1900.
the illustrator had personally witnessed this significant event. The illustrators of
the Dianshi Studio Pictorial were not the first in China to employ the Western
use of perspective; nevertheless their predecessors had not yet completely
mastered it as fully as they did. Western perspective made great contributions
to the popularity of the Dianshi Studio Pictorial in the hybrid visual culture of
late nineteenth-century Shanghai. It not only helped to introduce Western
knowledge to a wider readership in China, but also made the Dianshi Studio
Pictorial one of the most influential promoters of Western painting in China.97

Wu Youru was the most influential artist of the Dianshi Studio Pictorial.98
The success of the Pictorial helped Wu Youru to reach the pinnacle of his career,
and at the same time, Wu Youru’s mastery of traditional Chinese fine-line
drawing also made great contributions to the popularity of the Pictorial. Wu
Youru then left the Dianshi Studio Pictorial and founded his own Fleeting
Shadow Pavilion Pictorial. In each issue of the Fleeting Shadow Pavilion
Pictorial, Wu Youru provided an illustration of a historical beauty, and these
beauty images were later published under the title Gujin baimei (古今百美,
‘One Hundred Beauties of History’), collected in the thirteen-volume corpus Wu
Youru huabao (吳友如畫寶, ‘A Treasury of Wu Youru’s Illustrations’), first
published by the Wenruilou bookstore (文瑞樓) in Shanghai in 1908 (Fig. 41).99
These beauties are elegantly rendered, clearly modelled on the previous printed

96 Ye, The Dianshizhai Pictorial, p.25.
Shen eds, A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China
98 For realism and photography in Wu Youru’s art practice, see Cho Shin ko, ‘Sheyingshu dui
Zhongguo jindai xieshi huihua yingxiang zhi tantao – Yi Wu Youru xinwenhua weili’ 摄影術對
中國近代寫實繪畫影響之探討 — 以吳友如新聞畫為例, 'The Influence of Photography on
Realistic Painting in Modern China – Wu Youru’s Journalistic Illustrations as a Case Study'
99 Xie Guozhen 謝國楨, ‘Xie Guozhen ti Wu youru huabao’ 謝國楨題吳友如畫寶, 'Xie
Guozhen’s Inscription to A Treasury of Wu Youru’s Illustrations', in Wu Youru huabao 吳友如畫
works of this theme, such as the eighteenth-century *Baimei xinyong* (百美新詠, ‘New Encomia to One Hundred Beauties’) (Fig. 42).\(^{100}\) Wu Youru’s turn from the journalistic illustration of news and metropolitan life to the conservative depiction of traditional Chinese beauties seems to indicate his intention to claim the higher social status of a painter rather than an illustrator.\(^{101}\) His move appears to have been successful as he was the only pictorial illustrator who was listed in the reference books on nineteenth-century Shanghai artists, and was included among the group of Shanghai School painters.\(^{102}\) His accomplishments were even compared to those of the Ming professional artist Qiu Ying.\(^{103}\) Wu Youru’s illustrations of classical beauties are conservative compositions, bearing great similarities to those of his predecessors. Nonetheless, his mastery of Western perspective is evident in the three-dimensional space in the picture. A shift in spatial conception as a result of the use of Western pictorial practices has the classical figures in Wu Youru’s illustrations with a modern face.

In addition to the beauty illustrations, other illustrations by Wu Youru were also included in the corpus *A Treasury of Wu Youru’s Illustrations*. These illustrations depicted a wide range of subjects and they were categorised under titles, such as *Haishang baiyan* (海上百豔, ‘One Hundred Beauties of Shanghai’), *Gujin renwu* (古今人物, ‘Figures of History’) and *Gujin mingsheng* (古今名勝, ‘Scenic Spots of History’), and so on. Before his corpus was published, Wu Youru’s works had been often selected and published by different publishers.\(^{104}\) The wide circulation of Wu Youru’s illustrations in the market

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\(^{100}\) Hay, ‘Painters and Publishing in Late Nineteenth-Century China’, p. 148.
\(^{101}\) Hay, ‘Painters and Publishing in Late Nineteenth-Century China’, p. 139.
\(^{102}\) Ye, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial*, p. 12.
\(^{104}\) The artistic activities in Shanghai, including the publishing of Wu Youru’s illustrations, as well as other Shanghai painters’ works and related manuals, are listed in detail in Yen Chuan-ying 顏娟英 ed., *Shanghai meishu fengyun: 1872-1949 Shenbao yishu giliao tiaomu suoyin* 上海美術
demonstrated their influence in Xu Beihong’s works. Many of Xu Beihong’s later history paintings appear to a certain degree to have been inspired by Wu Youru’s illustrations of historical figures. Xu Beihong’s *Huai Su xueshu* (懷素學書, ‘Huai Su Learning Calligraphy on Banana Leaves’, 1937) is an example; Ren Bonian also executed a painting on the same theme (Figs 43-44). Nonetheless, the gesture of Huai Su in Xu Beihong’s work is closer to that in Wu Youru’s illustration (Fig. 45). Moreover, Xu Beihong’s draft *Hualong dianjing* (畫龍點睛, ‘Putting the Finishing Touch to the Picture of a Dragon’, 1922) and the large-scale history painting *Jiufang Gao* can both find similar images in Wu Youru’s illustrations (Figs 46-48 & 2). The close relationship between Xu Beihong’s history painting and professional art paved the way for his later endeavours to elevate the status of professional painting in the new framework of fine art of twentieth-century China.

Wu Youru’s massive involvement in the journalism and publishing industry led to his illustrations reflecting the Western pictorial elements more directly than other Shanghai School painters’ works did. Julia F. Andrews has remarked that Wu Youru’s illustrations “may represent the shift in style and technology from innovation within Chinese tradition to a new, hybrid form of illustration that became typical of treaty-port Shanghai”.

105 Through Wu Youru, Xu Beihong had been exposed to the novel Western pictorial practices in Shanghai since he started to learn painting. Later on, Xu Beihong continuously assimilated the latest Western art trends in China. The Western art influence manifested itself more obviously in Xu Beihong’s early portraits than in Wu Youru’s illustrations, indicating that Xu Beihong also learnt Western painting skills from the images.

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published in other print media, such as images in books of pictures or on cigarette cards.\textsuperscript{106} The close relationship between portraiture, Western art practices and commercial culture was further manifested in Xu Beihong's paintings and jobs during his stay in Shanghai between 1915 and 1917, which is the focus of the next section. With a background in professional art, Xu Beihong had demonstrated his mastery of some Western pictorial skills and his interest in Western art since the beginning of his career. The emphasis on visual verisimilitude in Chinese portraiture led to Xu Beihong's later pursuit of Western realism. More importantly, the re-evaluation of indigenous Chinese pictorial realism and professional art by the Shanghai intellectual circle, which will be elaborated in the final section of this chapter, was the key to Xu Beihong's adherence to realism.

\textsuperscript{106} Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 5.
2.3 Aspects of the Visual Culture of Shanghai

Xu Beihong first visited Shanghai in the winter of 1912 to seek opportunities for learning Western painting. During his stay in the city, he submitted his illustration of Shi Qian touji (時遷偷雞, ‘Shi Qian Stealing Chickens’) for a competition and won the second prize (Fig. 49). His illustration was published in the newspaper Shishi xinbao (時事新報) on 31 December 1912. Shi Qian was one of the 108 heroes in the classic Chinese novel of chivalry, Shuihu zhuan (水滸傳, ‘Outlaws of the Marsh’), authorship of which has been attributed to Shi Naian (施耐庵, 1296-1372) and Luo Guanzhong (羅貫中, 1330-1400). The story about Shi Qian stealing chickens occurs in the forty-sixth chapter of the novel. In Xu Beihong’s picture, Shi Qian is rendered in the Chinese line-drawing style. He is holding a stick, about to perform a flip. His gesture, with the martial jacket, trousers and thin-soled ankle boots he wore, seems to represent the Shi Qian in the clown role of Chinese opera (Fig. 50). The increasingly wide use of lithography had resulted in the popularity of lithographically-printed novels and popular literature. Xu Beihong’s choice of Shi Qian as a subject indicates his background as a professional artist who had been closely associated with the publishing business in the past. Moreover, Shi Qian in clown costume may reflect the thriving of traditional entertainment in line with the rise of Shanghai to the status of an opulent metropolis. In addition to Xu Beihong’s illustration, other prize-winning works were published in the

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107 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, p. 6.
108 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, p. 6.
110 On the role and costume of clown in Chinese opera, see Alexandra B. Bonds, Beijing Opera Costumes: the Visual Communication of Character and Culture (Honolulu, 2008), pp. 16-17 & 329.
111 Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow eds, Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China (California, 2005).
newspaper, and one of them also depicted Shi Qian (Fig. 51). The costume and movement of Shi Qian in these two pictures share a great similarity. One of the prize-winning works depicted a young man who has been beaten up and fallen to the ground (Fig. 52). Another shows a child passing through the central hole of a copper coin (Fig. 53). All of these pictures seemingly describe either people of low social status, or different facets of society, such as entertainment, social events and customs. Xu Beihong saw the competition advertised in the newspaper during his brief stay in Shanghai in the winter of 1912, reflecting the role of the printing industry and mass culture in Xu Beihong’s art learning.

Xu Beihong’s Chinese line-drawing illustration is reminiscent of Wu Youru’s works for the news media. It indicates the close association between Xu Beihong’s early learning and the burgeoning printing industry in the Shanghai area, which has been studied in the previous sections through the investigation into Xu Beihong’s early learning and the Shanghai artists. The blooming publishing industry not only brought artists great opportunities for success, but also made paintings of the previous and present artists, as well as imported Western pictures, accessible to the general public. A wide range of advertisements for the publishing of painting manuals, the prices for artists’ works and the display of private art collections frequently appeared in the newspapers.\(^\text{112}\) A large number of advertisements selling oil paintings and Western artefacts also appeared in the newspaper Shenbao in the 1870s, immediately after the newspaper was launched in 1872.\(^\text{113}\) Moreover, Western pictorial images were also made accessible to the public by means of reproductions of them made by illustrators. For example, the thirty-eighth issue

\(^{112}\) Yen, *Shanghai meishu fengyun.*

of Dianshi Studio Pictorial mentioned the eighteenth President of the United States, General Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), in order to introduce Western democracy to the Chinese readership (Fig. 54). The illustration which Wu Youru made for this news item was copied directly from the image of the ill General Grant published on the front cover of the American political magazine Harper’s Weekly (Fig. 55).\textsuperscript{114} Xu Beihong’s portraits, which demonstrated more significant Western pictorial features than those of his father and Wu Youru as discussed above, can be more readily understood in the context of these hybrid cultural conditions under which he grew up.

Shanghai had risen to be the most westernised modern city in China after it was opened to trade with the West after the Opium War. Many facilities of modern urban life were introduced into Shanghai after that. Banks were introduced in Shanghai in 1848, gaslight in 1865, the telephone in 1881, electricity in 1882, automobiles in 1901 and trams in 1908.\textsuperscript{115} These Western and modern forms of equipment appeared in Shanghai when the inhabitants still wore gowns and little round caps, with bald foreheads and long pigtails, in the ordinary costume of the imperial Qing dynasty, just like the figures in Xu Beihong’s \textit{The Elderly} (Fig. 11). The impressive innovations of Western civilisation mingled with a traditional Chinese life style to constitute a hybrid environment for Shanghai residents. This hybrid phenomenon was represented in the paintings of the Shanghai School, in the way that the experience of spectacle and the opulence of material culture was coded under the traditional pictorial subjects and practices.\textsuperscript{116} Moreover, the exciting experience of hybridity and

\textsuperscript{114} Laing, \textit{Selling Happiness}, pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{116} Hay, ‘Painting and the Built Environment in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai’; Lai, ‘Remapping Borders’.
modernity in Shanghai was also recorded by the men of letters in their diaries. Wang Xiqi (王錫麒, 1855-1913) passed through Shanghai during his trip to Beijing in 1879 and he recorded the magnificent aspect of Shanghai in his diary. While he was in Shanghai, Wang Xiqi went on a sightseeing tour of the foreign settlements, where the traffic was heavy and noisy. At night, there were hundreds of thousands of gas lamps sparkling like stars. The several-storeys high Western buildings were as gorgeous as the palaces. One high-ranking Qing officer, Yao Jinyuan (姚觐元, 1855-1931), recorded his sojourn in Shanghai from 1879 to 1884 in his Gongzhai riji (弓齋日記, 'Diary of the Gong Studio'). On 6 March 1879, Yao Jinyuan and his friends "took photographs at the Sanxing (三興) studio" and after a meal, they went shopping at the foreign stores. On 12 May 1884, Yao Jinyuan went to see the Western printing equipment at the Tongwen Bookstore (同文書局), the first Chinese-run publisher to employ lithography. Then he paid a visit to a private collection of traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. Besides, he was also interested in visiting the Chinese teahouses as well as the Western painting exhibitions. Yao Jinyuan was a typical Qing official-scholar, who was renowned for his literary accomplishments. He enjoyed highbrow cultural activities and, at the same time, he also sought more exotic entertainment. His life well exemplified the hybrid culture in Shanghai.

117. Wang Xiqi, 'Beixing riji' 北行日記, 'Diary of the Trip to the North', in Qingdai riji huichao 清代日記匯抄, 'A Digest of Diaries of the Qing Dynasty' (Shanghai, 1982), pp. 332.
118. Hu Huaichen 胡華琛, 'Shanghai xueyi gaiyao (er)' 上海學藝概要 (二), 'An Outline of the Artistic Activities in Shanghai (II)', Shanghai Tongzhiguan gikan 上海博物館期刊, 1. 2 (1933), pp. 499-538 (pp. 523-524), reprinted in Shen Yunlong 沈雲龍 ed., Jiundai Zhongguo shiliao congkan xujie 近代中國史料叢刊續輯, 'Sequel to the Digest of Historical Materials of Modern China', Vol. XXXIX (Taipei, 1977). The missionary Tushanwen organisation was the earliest to employ lithography in China, but only published works for religious purposes. The Dianshi Studio publisher, founded by the British merchants Ernest and Frederick Major, was the first foreign publisher to print a variety of non-religious publications lithographically in China.
120. For the various lifestyles of traditional Chinese men of letters in Shanghai, see Catherine Vance Yeh, "The Life-Style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai", Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 57.2 (1997), pp. 419-470; also Yeh, 'Image Makers: The Settlements' Men of Letters and Shanghai Print Entertainment', in Yeh, Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals and
Photography was a convincing manifestation of the exotic entertainment and hybrid life style in Shanghai. Since around 1860, when photography had been introduced to the Shanghai area from the earlier treaty ports such as Hong Kong and Guangzhou, taking photographs had become a fashionable and popular pastime for the people of Shanghai.\textsuperscript{121} Its impact on Chinese portraiture was profound, in the way that it gradually changed people’s perception of realism and portraiture in China.\textsuperscript{122} The renowned Chinese critic and journalist, Wang Tao (王韬, 1828-1879), even referred to photography as xiezhen, the traditional term for portraiture.\textsuperscript{123} It was not difficult to find comments in the newspapers or literati diaries that valued the superiority of photography over traditional portraiture in terms of mimesis.\textsuperscript{124} As a consequence, many traditional portraiture businesses broadened their services to include photographic portraits. According to Régine Thiriez’s study, photography changed the making of traditional ancestor portraiture, in the way that the body and the chair in an ancestor portrait was still painted in the traditionally formulaic manner, while the head was copied from a photograph, or was even cut out of a photograph and affixed to the portrait painting. This mixture of photography and painting became widely popular in particular in the image making of the commercial market.\textsuperscript{125}

The photographic verisimilitude in Xu Beihong’s portrayed figures, such as in his portrait of Kang Youwei in celebration of the latter’s sixtieth birthday, reflects the degree of popularity of Western-derived pictorial practices and media

\textsuperscript{121} Laing, \textit{Selling Happiness}, pp. 57-59. Photography was imported into China as early as 1850s. The earliest record of photography in China was seen in the Guangdong zashu (\textquoteleft Random Notes of Guangdong\textquoteright), written by Zhou Shouchang (周壽昌) during his trip to Guangdong Province, whose capital was the treaty port, Guangzhou. Li, \textit{Zhongguo zaoqi youhua shi}, p. 375.


\textsuperscript{123} Liu, \textit{Translingual Practice}, p. 320.

\textsuperscript{124} Li, \textit{Zhongguo zaoqi youhua shi}, pp. 375-376.

in Shanghai and nearby regions by Xu Beihong’s time (Fig. 13). In the painting, the heads of the figures are rendered realistically, as if converted directly from photographs. In addition to Kang Youwei, most of the figures’ heads are out of proportion with their bodies. Their faces were photographically realistic, while their bodies were thin and proportionally smaller, without obvious indication of physical volume. Xu Beihong possibly portrayed their faces either directly or with the aid of photographs and then painted their dressed bodies according to the images in popular publications or advertising posters. Showing feminine images with incorrect proportions for their figures was common in the beauties depicted in early advertisement poster painting, such as Wanzhuang (晩妝, ‘Evening Makeup’, 1914), made by the renowned commercial artist Zheng Mantuo (鄭曼陀, 1888-1961) (Fig. 56). The incorrectly-proportioned figures reveal a decorative taste. Although photographic realism grew more popular in China in the 1910s, Western painting still found broad acceptance in the Chinese commercial market as chic modernity rather than as a counterpart to Chinese painting. Moreover, the figures in Xu Beihong’s painting were much bigger in comparison with the garden setting, making the figures seem to jut out from the picture’s surface. This seems to give the impression that the garden background is artificial. After photography came to Shanghai, customers posing before an artificial backdrop in the studio became a fashion in the making of indoor photographic portraits, as is represented in Wu Youru’s illustration (Fig. 57). Wu Youru depicted two women, one sitting and the other standing, in front of a screen with Western architectural elements on it. The perspective in the backdrop screen had to be very precise in order to create the illusion that the women had been photographed inside a splendid Western style house instead of in a studio. Xu Beihong’s portrait of Kang Youwei was perhaps executed according to a
photograph which Kang Youwei and his family had had taken in a studio in celebration of his birthday, while the garden setting of the photograph was in fact an artificial backdrop supplied by the studio.

With the great popularity that photography enjoyed in China, it increasingly replaced traditional portraiture to become the preferred choice for making portraits among the urban dwellers in the treaty cities.\textsuperscript{126} The flourishing of photography businesses caused a growing demand for the making of backdrops. In addition to their work for individual customers, the art studios produced a considerable number of backdrops in a variety of styles to cater for the great demand from the blooming publishing and tobacco enterprises in Shanghai. The import of lithography along with the publishing of Shenbao and Dianshi Studio Pictorial brought to China new Western printing technology as well as the practices of the Western press, such as including advertisement pages in the press and issuing calendars as gifts for customers.\textsuperscript{127} Advertising became an important source of income for the press.\textsuperscript{128} This produced a tighter relationship between the commercial and publishing industries in China and as a result led to a huge demand for advertisement calendar posters. Later on, tobacco companies accelerated the growth of advertising business and consequently caused the zenith of the production of advertisement calendar posters in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{129} These advertising posters gave rise to a renewed interest in the beauty genre. With the popularity of photography and the advertising aims of calendar posters, the

\textsuperscript{126} Li, Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi, p. 376.
\textsuperscript{127} Laing, Selling Happiness, pp 18-19, 55.
\textsuperscript{128} Wu Fangcheng 吴方正, ‘Wanqing sishinian Shanghai shijue wenhua de jige mianxiang - Yi Shenbao ziliao weizhu kan tuxiang de jixie fuzhi’ 晚清四十年上海視覺文化的幾個面向 — 以申報資料為主的圖像的機械複製, ‘Aspects in Shanghai Visual Culture during the last 40 years of the Qing Dynasty – the Mechanical Reproduction of Images in the Shenbao’, Renwen xuebao, 26 (2002), pp. 49-95 (pp. 51-52).
\textsuperscript{129} Chen Chaonan 陈超南 and Feng Yiyu 靳蕊雨, Old Advertisements and Popular Culture: Posters, Calendars and Cigarettes, 1900-1950 (San Francisco, 2004).
female images in this kind of painting were generally photographically illustrated and commercialised. To produce different types of women from classical beauties to the modern women depicted in posters, artists would rely on the photographers’ studios to supply different kinds of settings and props for the portrayed women to pose with. Thus, the demand for backdrops increased rapidly as a result of the flourishing of the advertising industry in a vigorously commercialised Shanghai. At the same time, the proliferation of photographically illustrated and lithographically printed objects on the market and in people’s daily lives gradually changed the conventions of image making as well as people’s visual habits in Shanghai.

The demand for photographic backdrops was so great that Zhou Xiang (周湘, 1871-1933) established an art school, the Training Institute of Backdrop Painting (Bujinghua chuanxisuo 佈景畫傳習所) in 1911, especially to teach backdrop painting. The Westernised artist Chen Baoyi (陳抱一, 1893-1945) once registered at this school. He recalled that it was a three-month programme. What Zhou Xiang taught was how to paint backdrops with Western perspective, and his watercolour painting was full of Chinese taste. The Westernised artist Wang Yachen (王亞塵, 1894-1983) also recalled that students at that school learnt watercolour painting and depicted hybrid subject matter. In addition to this school devoted specially to making backdrops, Zhou Xiang also founded the

130 Yingjin Zhang, ‘Artwork, Commodity, Event: Representations of the Female Body in Modern Chinese Pictorials’ in Kuo, Visual Culture in Shanghai 1850s-1930s, pp. 121-162.

131 Li, Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi, p. 358.


Shanghai Oil Painting Institute (Shanghai youhuayuan 上海油畫院) in 1910, offering a variety of courses including oil painting, watercolour, pencil drawing, and other styles.\textsuperscript{134} In addition, Zhou Xiang also offered intensive courses, designed for students who wished to equip themselves with the latest skills in Western portraiture as quickly as possible.\textsuperscript{135} To attract more students, the Shanghai Oil Painting Institute also offered a distance-learning course, and students who enrolled on this course would receive Zhou Xiang’s watercolour manuals with detailed descriptions of how to paint them.\textsuperscript{136} Zhou Xiang’s schools provided courses which apparently catered for the demands of commercial advertisement poster painting industry, such as painted backdrops, photographically-illustrated portraits, and watercolours, which demonstrated the popularity of photographic realism as well as the close relationship between Western painting and the commercial market at that time.

Zhou Xiang was the earliest Chinese artist to establish Western painting schools in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{137} At the opening ceremony of Zhou Xiang’s art schools in 1910, several eminent reform-minded intellectuals attended, including Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Wu Zhihui (吳稚暉, 1865-1953).\textsuperscript{138} Their friendship stemmed from their participation in the Hundred Days’ Reform, the national reform movement of the imperial Qing which existed from June to September 1898; Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were both among the leaders of that

\textsuperscript{134} Li, Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi, p. 357.
\textsuperscript{136} Li, Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi, p. 358.
\textsuperscript{138} Li, Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi, p. 358.
movement. Xu Beihong paid several visits to Zhou Xiang when he was in Shanghai. He asked Huang Jingwan (黃警旂) to introduce him to Zhou Xiang. Huang Jingwan worked at the Commercial Press and offered Xu Beihong a great deal of help during Xu Beihong’s period in Shanghai. Huang Jingwan later recalled that Zhou Xiang left a good impression on Xu Beihong. They talked cheerfully for the whole afternoon of their first meeting. Zhou Xiang had a comprehensive knowledge of Western art history. He showed them his own works and gave Xu Beihong several catalogues of Western painting. From Huang Jingwan’s account, Zhou Xiang appeared to have won himself a reputation in the field of Western painting in Shanghai, although he first established his reputation in the art world by his accomplishments in the traditional realms of Chinese painting and calligraphy. Huang Jingwan’s account also indicates that Xu Beihong had paid attention to the activities of the Shanghai’s art world, in particular the strand of Western art, before he arrived there.

Some studies have argued that Xu Beihong took courses at Zhou Xiang’s schools. Most resources, however, indicate that Xu Beihong registered at the

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141 Xu Beihong received a great deal of help from Huang Jingwan and Huang Zhenzhi (黃震之) in Shanghai. Huang Jingwan introduced several job opportunities to Xu Beihong. He also paid the tuition fee for a French language course for Xu Beihong. In appreciation of two Mr Huangs’ help, Xu Beihong once named himself ‘Huang Fu’ (黃扶). Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, p. 10.
142 Zhou Xiang was first renowned for his works of Chinese painting and calligraphy. He did not learn Western painting until he lived in exile in Japan and Europe after the failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform in which he had participated. Zhu Boxiong 朱伯雄 and Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林, Zhongguo xihua wushi nian 中國西洋五十年, ‘Fifty Years of Western Painting in China’ (Beijing, 1989), p. 35.
Shanghai Art Academy (Shanghai meizhuan 上海美專), the art institute which was set up by Liu Haisu (劉海粟, 1896-1994) in 1912. Xu Beihong’s photograph was published in the June 1919 issue of Meishu, the bulletin of the Shanghai Art Academy, as an honorary alumnus of the Academy who had won a governmental scholarship to study art in France (Fig. 58). Liu Haisu often mentioned Xu Beihong as an alumnus of the Shanghai Art Academy, though Xu Beihong denied it. The founding members of the Shanghai Art Academy, such as Liu Haisu, Chen Baoyi and Wu Shiguang (吳始光, 1885-?), all studied painting with Zhou Xiang. To compete with Zhou Xiang’s schools, they appointed Zhang Yuguang (張聿光, 1885-1968) as director of the Academy in 1914. Zhang Yuguang was an influential artist in the Shanghai of his day, and pursued multiple careers. He won himself a reputation in the commercial art world in Shanghai by making backdrops for photography shops and theatres. From 1908, Zhang Yuguang painted scenery for the New World Theatre (Xinwutai 新舞台), which opened in 1908 to promote reformed Beijing opera and to perform Western plays. Zhang Yuguang’s role as a reform-minded artist was also manifested in his contribution of political cartoons to the press (Fig. 59). Later, Zhang Yuguang and Xu Beihong became colleagues at the National Central University in 1929.

The Shanghai Art Academy dominated the art education field in Shanghai in the 1910s. It also offered courses similar to those of Zhou Xiang’s art schools, such as pencil drawing, watercolour and oil painting. The Shanghai Art Academy also emphasised that it offered courses on Western photography and

144 Yen, ‘Buxi de biandong’, p. 47.
145 Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu had bitter disputes on this event in 1932. They published announcements in the Shenbao. For these announcements, see Wang, Xu Beihong wenji, p. 52.
147 Laing, Selling Happiness, pp. 139-143.
148 Li, Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi, p. 360.
advertisement painting. Besides, its courses were intensive, designed for students who wished to obtain a certificate and find a related job as quickly as possible.\textsuperscript{149}

The courses on the one hand demonstrated how great the demand for photography and related pictorial practices in the market was; on the other hand, it revealed that Western-style painting was valued in China only for its practical and commercial value at that time. The essence of Western art seemingly had not yet been recognised. The teaching resources at the Shanghai Art Academy were catalogues of Western art, calendar posters and painted cards, mostly items of commercial art; and students learnt painting by means of copying the images from these posters and from books of pictures. Zhou Xiang and Liu Haisu’s art schools demonstrated that Western painting in Shanghai was more associated with the commercial cultural market rather than with the fine art institutes. The art schools trained students with teaching materials taken from the commercial market, and the graduates in turn continued to join the commercial image making of the blooming cultural market.

The curriculum of the Shanghai art schools revealed that the dissemination of Western painting in China in the early twentieth century was entangled with commercially-driven cultural production, in which photographic realism gained great popularity. In this period, Western painting was valued for its practical functions and its realistic renderings of the objective world, instead of its aesthetic value. Chen Baoyi indicated that this period was the initial stage of a Western-style painting movement in China. ‘Drawing from life’, the essential vehicle for learning painting in the West, did not find acceptance among the Shanghai art schools.\textsuperscript{150} The popularity of Western painting in this period lay in its commercial value and practical function rather than in aesthetic appreciation;

\textsuperscript{149} Yen, ‘Buxi de biandong’, pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{150} Chen, ‘Yanghua yundong guocheng lueji’, \textit{Shanghai yishu yuekan}, 7-8 (1942), pp. 144-146.
consequently, the school curriculum provided intensive courses, aiming to equip students with the basic techniques of Western realism within a short time. Accordingly, those who were interested in learning Western painting were generally aiming at getting jobs rather than acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of Western art.

With their massive involvement in the cultural market, commercial artists not only established fame as the early generation of the Western-style painting movement in China, but were able to pursue multiple careers. They participated in art education, publishing enterprises and the entertainment industry, so that their influence was far-reaching. Xu Beihong also later praised highly the contributions of Zhou Xiang, Zhang Yuguang, Liu Haisu and Xu Yongqing (徐詠青, 1880-1953) to the new art movement in China.151 Xu Yongqing was also a well-known watercolourist of his day (Fig. 60). His reputation came from his massive involvement in the commercial art world in Shanghai. He worked as an art editor of Shenbao and also provided designs for several publications.

Moreover, he also taught art courses and provided drawings for school textbooks, such as the six-volume Zhongxueyong qianbi huatie (中學用鉛筆畫帖, 'Manual of Pencil-Drawing Models for Middle School Students'), on which he collaborated with the Japanese artist Odake Takunobu (尾竹卓布), and which was published by the Commercial Press.152 Xu Yongqing headed the art department of the Commercial Press, which opened in 1913. Huang Jingwan and Xu Yongqing both worked for the Commercial Press. With their aid, Xu Beihong was able to make the acquaintance of Zhou Xiang.

The hybrid painting style of these commercial artists, which combined

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151 Xu, 'Xinyishu yundong zhi huiyu yu qianzhan', p. 429.
152 Laing, Selling Happiness, pp. 127-128. The Commercial Press was a leading publisher in the textbook market in the early twentieth century. For an account of this publisher, see Meng Yue, Shanghai and the Edges of Empires (Minneapolis, 2006), pp. 42-51.
Western pictorial elements and Chinese taste, was popular among the public. As early as 1911, a critic praised the visual verisimilitude in the paintings of Xu Yongqing and Zhang Yuguang in an article published under the pen name ‘Xiang Ke’ (湘客).\(^{153}\) The writer argued that the visual realism in their paintings was achieved by means of the Western pictorial practices which existed in photographic backdrop painting. Xiang Ke further approved the superiority of Western and Japanese painting over Chinese painting in their ability of rendering light and shade. Zhang Yuguang and other Western-style painters remained popular into the 1920s. An article which was published in the 1923 Shenbao listed the masters of modern Chinese painting, including Zhang Yuguang and Zheng Mantuo, and so on; almost all of them were well-known commercial calendar poster painters.\(^{154}\) With their mastery of photographic realism, the commercial artists were able to pursue multiple careers beyond the boundaries of commercial and fine art. At the same time, the various roles of a commercial artist in the art world also reflected the fact that photographic realism was so popular that it was pervasive in people’s daily life. Its popularity thus gradually changed Chinese people’s visual habits and developed their appreciation of realism. The fame of commercial artists indicated that Western-style painting became more and more significant in China after 1910s.

Xu Beihong’s career also took advantage of the popularity of photographic realism. He taught \textit{tuhua} (图畫, ‘painting’ or ‘drawing and painting’) courses at Pengcheng Middle School (彭城中學), Shiqi Girls’ School (始齊女校), and Yixing primary Normal School (宜興初級師範) in 1913 and 1914.\(^{155}\) \textit{Tuhua} was added to all levels of the school curriculum in China in 1902 in response to

\(^{153}\) Wu, ‘Xiyang huihua de Zhongguo zaiquanshi’, p. 147.
\(^{154}\) Wu, ‘Xiyang huihua de Zhongguo zaiquanshi’, p. 148.
\(^{155}\) Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 7.
the national call for modernisation modelled on Western science and
technology.\textsuperscript{156} Thus, Xu Beihong was well placed to take up these teaching
positions with his skill in realistic rendering, which was manifested in his
photographically-illustrated portraits. His painting skill and the course of his
career in turn demonstrated that Western realism was valued to a certain level in
China’s educational field at that time. To pursue more artistic achievements, Xu
Beihong went to Shanghai again in 1915. He first sought work at the
Commercial Press, and his figure paintings got him an opportunity to provide
designs for the textbooks published by the Commercial Press, though this job
was cancelled later for some unknown reason.\textsuperscript{157} In addition, Xu Beihong made
a \textit{Guanyin} Bodhisattva painting for a book cover and some illustrations for the
published by the Zhonghua Bookstore (中華書局). Moreover, during his stay in
Shanghai, Xu Beihong also made the acquaintance of the leaders of the
innovative Lingnan School, Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng.\textsuperscript{158} Xu Beihong’s
mastery of photographic realism and his background as a professional artist
enable him to develop his artistic career by taking up multiple jobs in the
educational and publishing fields.

Xu Beihong’s friendship with the Gao brothers during his time in Shanghai
was of significance in relation to his later perception of realism as the
embodiment of national spirit and an indispensable component of new culture
building. To seek job opportunities at the Aesthetic Bookstore (\textit{Shenmei shuguan}
審美書館), Xu Beihong painted for the Gao brothers a set of four beauty

\textsuperscript{156} Kao, ‘Reforms in Education and the Beginning of the Western-Style Painting Movement in
China’.
\textsuperscript{157} Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{158} On the Lingnan School, see Ralph Crozier, \textit{Art and Revolution in Modern China: The
Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906-1951} (Berkeley and London, 1988).
paintings, a typical subject of traditional Chinese New Year painting and then popular theme of calendar posters. Huang Jingwan recalled that it was he who introduced Xu Beihong to the Gao brothers. At first, Xu Beihong was unwilling to make the commercial calendar paintings that the Gao brothers required.\textsuperscript{159}

According to a pupil of Gao Jianfu, Xu Beihong frequently made calendar poster beauty paintings at that time, and that Gao Jianfu had been impressed by his talent and employed him to work at the Aesthetic Bookstore.\textsuperscript{160} Although these accounts are not completely coincident, both reveal that the relationship between Xu Beihong and the Lingnan School at that time had a commercial aspect. More importantly, it appears that Xu Beihong’s photographically-illustrated figure paintings had helped him to be successful in entering at least the commercial art world in Shanghai.

Xu Beihong’s autobiography claims that he had apparently known the Gao brothers before Huang Jingwan’s introduction. In Xu Beihong’s own words, he made the acquaintance of the Gao brothers because he sent them a horse painting he had done and by this means got their approval. To earn money, Xu Beihong then made four beauty paintings for the Aesthetic Bookstore. Gao Jianfu regarded Xu Beihong’s horse painting as a better work than those of Han Gan (韓幹, ca 706-783), the master of horse painting in the Tang dynasty (618-907) (Fig. 61).\textsuperscript{161} There exists a horse painting that Xu Beihong did in 1919 (Fig. 62). Three horses are depicted standing under a huge pine tree. Their front hoofs are lifted slightly, suggesting that they are either about to run or have just stopping galloping. They are carefully rendered with fine-line drawing and rich layers of

\textsuperscript{159} Huang, ‘Huiyi Xu Beihong zai Shanghai de yiduan jingli’, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{161} Xu, ‘Beihong zishu’, pp. 6-7.
colours. The style is different from that typical of Xu Beihong’s later horse painting, which is generally rendered with bold ink wash and expressive brushwork (Fig. 1). Instead, this early horse painting is reminiscent of those of the Italian Jesuit artist, Lang Shining (郎世寧, Giuseppe Castiglione, 1688-1766) (Fig. 63). His hybrid painting, successfully incorporating Western realism into Chinese subject matter, made him a renowned painter at the Qing court. Xu Beihong saw Lang Shining’s Songxian yingzhi tu (鸚鵡英芝圖, ‘White Hawk and Glossy Ganoderma’, 1724) at an exhibition of painting and calligraphy in the Beijing Wenhua palace in 1918, and praised its exquisite realism (Fig. 64). Xu Beihong mentioned in his article ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’ that his paintings were often compared to those of Lang Shining. The realism in Lang Shining’s painting was highly praised by the reform-minded official Kang Youwei, who made the acquaintance of Xu Beihong in Shanghai in 1916 and had a profound influence on him. Hence, the gradual shift from the Shanghai commercial art taste to Lang Shining’s realism in Xu Beihong’s early works may result from Kang Youwei’s influence. Xu Beihong and Kang Youwei’s close relationship will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Xu Beihong’s horse painting of 1919 was similar to Lang Shining’s in style. Nevertheless, the painstaking realism of the horses also possibly came from Xu Beihong’s frequent copying of the painted cards that he collected from cigarette

162 Waley-Cohen, ‘Diplomats, Jesuits and Foreign Curiosities’.
packets. Xu Beihong later recalled that he liked to collect cigarette cards with animal images.\textsuperscript{166} The most obvious manifestation of Xu Beihong’s admiration for the Gao brothers perhaps lay in the tiger painting he made in 1918 as a gift to Ma Shuping (馬叔平, 1881-1955), a renowned scholar of epigraphy (Fig. 65).\textsuperscript{167} The tiger is realistically rendered with ink and watercolour, reminiscent of those in the paintings of the Gao brothers (Fig. 66). Nonetheless, Xu Beihong’s tiger is less ferocious than the Gaos’. Unlike the nationalist implications coded in the fierce beasts in the works of the Gao brothers, Xu Beihong seems to have paid more attention to pictorial subjects and practices. Like the 1919 horse painting, the realistic rendering and watercolour style used in Xu Beihong’s tiger painting demonstrates that Xu Beihong’s early pictorial practices were in close association with the conventions of commercial art. Xu Beihong’s animal paintings demonstrate again how Western art had spread in China in the early twentieth century. The images and objects on the commercial market seemingly became the most common vehicles for Chinese artists to learn Western painting.

Named after the area from which the artists came from – Canton, to the ‘South’ of the ‘Five Ranges’, the Lingnan School was founded by three Cantonese artists, Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng and Chen Shuren (陳樹人, 1884-1948), who were among the first generation of young Chinese artists who were attracted by the successful Westernised modernisation of Japan and thus pursued art studies there from as early as 1906. The Lingnan School featured a new form of Chinese painting, integrating Western modelling after nature and atmospheric effects into traditional subject matter such as birds, landscapes and animals. Animals in dramatic or forceful gestures against romantic settings such as moonlit nights or snow scenes, rendered with careful shading and rich layers

\textsuperscript{166} Xu, ‘Beihong zishu’, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{167} Gugong bowuyuan cang jinxiandai shuhua mingjia zuopinji: Xu Beihong, p. 24.
of colours, represented the influence from the refined combination of realism and romanticism in late Meiji Japanese painting, in particular the Shijō School.  

The Lingnan School artists promoted ‘New National Painting’ (Xinguohua 新國畫), claiming that the Lingnan School’s aim was to reform old national painting and create new national painting in order to modernise Chinese painting. The Lingnan School artists promoted ‘New National Painting’ (Xinguohua 新國畫), claiming that the Lingnan School’s aim was to reform old national painting and create new national painting in order to modernise Chinese painting.

They endowed painting with a nationalistic ideology, emphasising their belief that art should be treated as “an integral part of, and a stimulus to, national rejuvenation”. The radical attitude of the Lingnan School manifested itself in Gao Jianfu’s depiction of modern objects in his ink paintings, such as aeroplanes, cars and telegraph poles (Fig. 67). For them, art should be modernised to be capable of faithfully representing the realities of the outside world in order to participate in the building of the new nation. For them, the social-political and artistic roles were not incompatible. Thus, the leading members of the Lingnan School actively participated in revolts against the imperial Manchu regime and helped to establish a new republican nation. Consequently, the Lingnan School artists occupied an important place in modern Chinese painting. Nonetheless, their radical attitudes to art seem not to have been welcome in Shanghai in the 1910s, when the Chinese painting world was still filled with conservative taste, and the commercial world preferred the exotic novelty of Western painting.

Therefore, when the politically radical artists of the Lingnan School came to Shanghai to develop their careers and propagate their new art, they involved themselves in the commercial world by running a bookstore/publishing house and by making calendar posters, in which their realistic and modern tendency

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168 Croizier, Art and Revolution in Modern China, pp. 37-59.
170 Croizier, Art and Revolution in Modern China, p. 65.
171 Croizier, Art and Revolution in Modern China, pp. 66-68.
could find greater support and acceptance.172

The Gao brothers opened the Aesthetic Bookstore to fulfil their intellectual aspirations on the one hand, and to cater for popular taste in order to support their livelihood on the other. According to reminiscences of their contemporaries, the Aesthetic Bookstore was one of the best-known stores offering Western painting oils and pigments in Shanghai. It also sold a wide range of painted cards, postcards and painting equipment.173 Huang Jingwan recalled that Xu Beihong’s pastime in Shanghai was to visit the Commercial Press bookstore to read art books and Chinese versions of Western literature. As well as this, Xu Beihong also went to the Aesthetic Bookstore which stood opposite to the Commercial Press, and which stocked a variety of commercial art goods, such as colour lithographic catalogues, copies of masterpieces and calendar posters.174 More importantly, the bookstore functioned as a small gallery where there were frequently displayed works by artists of the Lingnan School. Thus, the bookstore became one of the favourite gathering places for contemporary artists in Shanghai.175

The careers of artists of the Lingnan School in Shanghai reveal how the spread of Western art or new Chinese painting was inevitably entangled with the commercially-driven cultural market, and how photographic realism served to bridge these different realms. Although pictorial realism was popular in this period, comprehensive knowledge of Western art had not yet been introduced into China. Most of the Westernised artists were self-taught or had learnt about Western painting through copying printed images. Art courses in early

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172 On the Lingnan School artists’ life in Shanghai, see Crozier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China*, pp. 64-84.
173 Chen, ‘Yanghua yundong guocheng lueji’, p. 120.
175 Chen, ‘Yanghua yundong guocheng lueji’, p. 120.
twentieth-century China concentrated only on copying and on the practical aspects of Western painting, such as those which were taught at the Shanghai Oil Painting Institute and the Shanghai Art Academy. The Gao brothers were among the earliest Chinese students to pursue art studies overseas. They brought back with them a new perception of the role of painting in national modernisation. To promote their new form of Chinese painting with its emphasis on Western realistic practices, the Gao brothers had to involve themselves first in the cultural market in Shanghai, where Western realism and artistic novelties were greatly popular. They opened a bookstore/publishing house to print and sell commercial paintings. Gao Jianfu also cooperated with the renowned calendar poster artist Zheng Mantuo in executing a beauty painting in the style of calendar posters (Fig. 68).  

The Lingnan School’s radical attitude towards art and politics appeared not to find as broad acceptance as their involvement in cultural creativity among the Shanghai literary and artistic circles, as is demonstrated in the accounts of their contemporaries such as Chen Baoyi and Huang Jingwan. At the same time, with their success in gaining a place in Shanghai’s cultural scene, the Lingnan School artists exhibited their new-style paintings at the Aesthetic Bookstore, and by this means they were able to develop a new readership with a new perception of Chinese painting.

Xu Beihong’s experiences in Shanghai reveal the significant phenomenon, showing how Shanghai had gradually developed a context for the formation of an art field with its urban cultural market, flourishing printing industry, publishers and art educational institutes. The development of this art field was entangled with the spread of Western painting, in which photographic realism played a significant role. Photographic realism played a part in many aspects of

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176 Laing, *Selling Happiness*, pp. 122-123.  
Shanghai’s culture and life. Consequently, its popularity also reflected the booming of the publishing industry, photographic businesses, entertainment and advertising, which underlay the rise of a commercially-aware and modernised metropolis. More importantly, photographic realism not only changed painters’ pictorial practices and audience’s visual habits, but also elevated the value of realism in Chinese art discourse, which had long preferred the expressive and abstract quality of literati painting. The launch announcement of the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* stated that the verisimilitude effects in Western painting made it more suitable than Chinese painting to serve the news media. It was argued that Chinese art valued craftsmanship (*gong* 工), while Western painting valued resemblance (*xiao* 肖), and resemblance could reach veracity (*zhen* 真, literally ‘veracity, reality or truth’). Since the late nineteenth century, Western painting was often regarded as better than Chinese in terms of mimesis. Additionally, photographic realism also played a part in the pictorial and social practices of literati circles. He Guisheng (何桂笙, 1841-1894), the renowned editorial writer of *Shenbao*, repeatedly used photographs to report the elegant gatherings (*yaji* 雅集) of artists and men of letters in the press. He once suggested that painters should execute corresponding paintings according to these photographs. Moreover, embellished with literary inscriptions and bound in albums, this kind of painting would also be emblematic of the literati’s graceful accomplishments. His suggestion can find a demonstration in the illustration *Xuyuan caiju tu* (徐園採菊圖, ‘Chrysanthemum-Picking in the Xu Garden’), executed by the illustrator Jin Guisheng (金桂生) of the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial*

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179 Wu, ‘Wanqin shishinian Shanghai shijue wenhua de jige mianxiang’, p. 82.
in 1890 (Fig. 69). According to its inscription, this illustration was based on a photograph taken at an elegant gathering in which He Guisheng was also present. This illustration demonstrates that the pictorial practice of converting a photograph into a painting, which was widely popular in the making of calendar posters, was also employed in traditional art circles. Whether through the photographically-published forms of the literati activities or in the painted reproductions of the photographically-recorded literati gatherings, the self-expressive and secluded characteristic of traditional literati painting was unavoidably entangled with realism.

Xu Beihong’s portrait of the most celebrated Chinese opera actor of the twentieth century, Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳, 1894-1941), in the painting Tiannü sanhua (天女散花, ‘Celestial Maiden Spraying Flowers’), dated 1918, is an example which reveals the degree of the popularity of photographic realism and Xu Beihong’s skill in it (Fig. 70). Moreover, the painting reflects the relationship between photographic realism and cultural life in China. In the painting, Mei Lanfang is portrayed in his stage role as a female celestial in the opera Celestial Maiden Spraying Flowers, an adaptation of an episode from the Weimojie (維摩詰) Buddhist scripture. Mei Lanfang started to perform this role in 1917. Xu Beihong went to the opera in Beijing in 1918 and made the acquaintance of Mei Lanfang through the poet and playwright Luo Yinggong (羅繽公, 1880-1924). Later Xu Beihong made this painting for Mei Lanfang, and Luo Yinggong wrote an inscription on it in which he praised Xu Beihong’s skill in realistic portraiture.

181 On Mei Lanfang’s creation of this opera, see Mei Shaowu and Mei Weidong 梅紹武 and Mei Weidong 梅衛東 eds, Mei Lanfang zishu 梅蘭芳自述, ‘Mei Lanfang in His Own Words’ (Beijing, 2005), pp. 117-121.
182 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, pp. 16-17.
The visual verisimilitude in the portrayal of Mei Lanfang is overwhelming, as if the figure was cut out of an actual photograph and affixed to the painting directly. The portrayal of Mei Lanfang in Xu Beihong's painting was apparently copied from the advertising postcards and posters of this opera (Fig. 71). Xu Beihong's method of painting this portrait demonstrates again that Xu Beihong's early art education was closely associated with commercial art. At the same time, the Mei Lanfang portrait reveals that Xu Beihong had mastered a degree of pictorial realism before he pursued art studies in Europe in 1919.

From the late 1910s, it had become popular for tobacco companies to produce series of cigarette cards to attract customers. These cigarette cards often featured fictional characters such as the heroes of the *Outlaws of the Marsh* and the beauties of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. In addition, contemporary opera actors and film stars were also among the most popular subjects. Xu Beihong's realistic portrait of Mei Lanfang is an indication of the high degree of interaction between photographic realism, commerce, entertainment and people's urban life. From the illustration of the fictional and theatre character Shi Qian (Fig. 49), to the portrait of the Chinese opera actor Mei Lanfang, Xu Beihong's works reveal the significance of popular culture in his creative work. Xu Beihong's background made him interested in fictional and theatrical characters, the themes having been popular in the professional art realm, and this penchant continued into his later creation of *Bawang bieji* (霸王別姬, 'Farewell My Concubine') in oils in 1931 (Fig. 72). This historical story was popular in Chinese opera. Mei Lanfang's performance of the concubine won him his prominent status in Chinese opera world in the

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More importantly, Xu Beihong’s portrait of Mei Lanfang revealed the significant phenomenon that photographic realism also participated in relationship building between traditional cultural circles. Xu Beihong made this painting as a gift for Mei Lanfang. It is now preserved in the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum in Beijing. The man of letters Luo Yinggong’s inscription on the one hand increased the cultural value of this portrait; on the other hand, it added more cultural trappings to the image of Xu Beihong as a refined artist. This kind of social practice was seen in traditional art circles, such as Zeng Jing’s association with his contemporary literati painters. His realistic portraits of the literati or with the literati’s calligraphy inscriptions made him, a professional artist, popular in the literati art world. Luo Yinggong was Kang Youwei’s student. Therefore, with Kang Youwei’s introduction, Luo Yinggong took care of Xu Beihong and brought him into Beijing’s cultural circles. In addition to Mei Lanfang’s portrait, Luo Yinggong also invited Xu Beihong to portray another famous opera actor, Cheng Yanqiu (程砚秋, 1904-1958).\(^\text{185}\)

Xu Beihong’s skill in portrait painting enabled him to participate in cultural scene in Shanghai. At the same time, the visual impulses in Shanghai in turn further polished his technique in pictorial realism. The popularity of Western-derived realistic practices had a far-reaching influence on several aspects of urban life in China. It gradually changed Chinese people’s appreciation of realism and helped the birth of a Westernised art field in China. Moreover, entangled as it was with advanced Western civilisation, Western realism, which found broad acceptance among Chinese people through its

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\(^\text{184}\) Jingju shizhao 京剧史照, 'Pictorial History of Beijing Opera' (Beijing, 1990), pp. 25-26.  
\(^\text{185}\) Zhang Yih\-zh\-he 章其和, Lingren wenshi 伶人往事, 'Memories of Chinese Opera Actors' (Hunan, 2006).
Photographic verisimilitude, added a modern image to professional painters, who had traditionally been the masters of Chinese pictorial realism. They became endowed with a Westernised image and became active and influential in the art and the educational fields. Many of them were politically revolutionary as well, such as Zhou Xiang, Zhang Yuguang and the Gao brothers. Along with Western scientific civilisation and reform-minded intellectuals, photographic realism was symbolic of modernity and therefore increasingly became a valued form of cultural capital in China. As a consequence, Xu Beihong’s mastery of it not only led him to gain several job opportunities in Shanghai’s cultural market, but also enabled him to associate with intellectual circles; among them, Kang Youwei’s influence on Xu Beihong was the most profound. Shanghai intellectual circles valued realism from both the aesthetic and nationalist angles, considering realism to be an essential device to strengthen and modernise China. The following section will look into how Shanghai intellectual circles added nationalist connotations and aesthetic value to realism. Xu Beihong’s association with these same Shanghai intellectual circles may explain why he later became an adherent of realism and ambitiously accumulated this new cultural capital to win himself a significant place in the art world. Moreover, the growing perception of the nationalist and modern connotation of realism may have helped Xu Beihong to transcend commercial realism, which was pervasive in his works of the 1910s. He infused nationalism and Western classical painting elements into his later history paintings, which were executed in Chinese ink, and thus made his paintings intellectual. Far from establishing fame only in the commercial art world as the early generation of Westernised painters did, Xu Beihong successfully built his image as an intellectual and Westernised painter, winning himself a position in the fine art field with his use of realism.
2.4 A New Form of Cultural Capital – Shanghai Intellectuals’ Perception of Reality (Zhen) and Pictorial Realism in the 1910s

The importation of Western printing technology along with the consequent flood of Western images and objects caused the popularity of photographic realism in China. This photographic realism not only manifested itself in the visual art realm, but also referred to the capacity of faithfully rendering social realities. The previous section has indicated that verisimilitude was the key to the employment of Western realistic pictorial practices in the Dianshi Studio Pictorial. The launch announcement of the Pictorial pointed out that the difference between Chinese and Western craftsmanship lay in the pursuit of veracity (zhen 真). Without zhen, Chinese craftsmanship could not faithfully and visually represent current affairs. Here, zhen refers to both visual realism and the truth of news. The Dianshi Studio Pictorial featured realism and truth in its launch announcement and advertisement. It claimed to have hired master painters to depict news in realistic details. The news worthy of visual representation included important current affairs and events new to the public. For example, the advertisement for the third issue of the Pictorial announced that the issue would represent the news about the treaty-signing following the conclusion of the Sino-French War in 1884 by illustrating the ‘real images’ (zhenxiang) of the significant figures who took part in this event. In the English-Chinese dictionary published by the Commercial Press in 1903, zhenxiang meant portrait or portraiture, which implied visual and pictorial meanings at that time. Nowadays, zhenxiang refers to the actual state of affairs, the truth or the real facts. Through the Dianshi Studio Pictorial’s

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186 Chen, ‘Wanqingren yanzhong de xixue dongjian’.
187 Chen, ‘Wanqingren yanzhong de xixue dongjian’.
188 Shangwu shuguan Hua Ying zidicin, pp. 193 & 214.
interpretation, pictorial realism and truth became synonymous under the terms \textit{zhen} and \textit{zhexiong}. So \textit{zhexiong}, the original Chinese equivalent of portraiture, broadened its meanings through the ambiguous space brought by the character, \textit{zhen}, which referred to both visual veracity and social realities. Accordingly, \textit{xiezhen}, the indigenous realism of portraiture, was expanded to include both pictorial and discursive practices of realism.

The realistic illustration of domestic and international news and customs made \textit{Dianshi Studio Pictorial} an epitome of modern Chinese history. As studied in the previous sections, its illustrators as well as its significance in the spread of Western painting in China have attracted art historians' attention. Moreover, its illustrations, which were rendered in realistic details, made the \textit{Pictorial} an important source for studying the various circumstances in which China, and in particular Shanghai, encountered in the process of modernisation.\textsuperscript{190} Therefore, the wide popularity of \textit{Dianshi Studio Pictorial} in its day perhaps helped to change Chinese people's perception of realism, in the way that it went beyond mere craftsmanship and became a useful tool for bringing truth and new knowledge to the public. As has already been stated in the realm of traditional painting, \textit{zhen} referred to the pursuit of likeness in Chinese portraiture and was associated with pictorial realism, which was rated low on the art hierarchy. Nevertheless, the value of \textit{zhen} in the news media endowed Chinese pictorial realism with a new function of enlightenment, predicting the rapid elevation of the significance of realism in the later national-scale New Culture Movement which commenced around 1916.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{190} For example, Ye, \textit{The Dianshizhai Pictorial}. Yue, \textit{Shanghai and the Edges of Empires}.

\textsuperscript{191} Chow Tse-tsung, \textit{The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China} (Stanford, 1967). The May Fourth Movement and The New Culture Movement have often been considered as the same movement. On the nuances of these two movements, see Chen Pingyuan, \textit{Chumo lishi yu jinru Wusì} ‘Touching History and Entering the May Fourth’ (Beijing, 2005).
The *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* served as Xu Beihong’s first painting teacher. He learnt realistic painting skills from the pictorial. Nonetheless, the enlightened attitude of the *Pictorial* may also have generated an impact on Xu Beihong, which manifested itself in his contribution of his illustration *Shi Qian Stealing Chickens* to the *Shishi xinbao* in 1912. The *Shishi xinbao* was an important newspaper in the promotion of new thought in China. It actively served as the medium for promoting democracy by frequently publishing the thinking of reform-minded intellectuals. Moreover, it was among the first Shanghai-based newspapers to support the pro-Western New Culture Movement by issuing a new supplement entitled *Xuedeng* (學燈, ‘Light of Learning’) in 1918 to publish literary works written in the vernacular, the language signifying the new era of democracy.¹⁹² Both the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* and *Shishi xinbao* participated in the golden age of Chinese journalism, when the publishing of journals in China was burgeoning and taking on the more serious task of enlightenment, as was manifested in ways such as expressing unbiased information, creating public discursive space and introducing global knowledge.¹⁹³ Xu Beihong’s art learning was associated with the news media, in which painting was considered modern and intellectual, an integral part of a modern civilisation as in the West. These two reforming publications reveal that Xu Beihong may have perceived these new characteristics of painting when he was learning Western painting techniques from the news pictorials.

Xu Beihong’s contact with the news media showed that before he worked for the Gao brothers in 1916, he perhaps had known them through their pictorial, *Zhenxiang huabao* (真相畫報), with the English subtitle, *The True Record*.

which was published from May 1912 to March 1913. Xu Beihong said that he sent his horse painting to the Gao brothers and made their acquaintance by doing so. Huang Jingwan’s account of Xu Beihong’s life in Shanghai claims that the Gao brothers asked Xu Beihong to make a calendar poster first before they hired him. Nonetheless, Xu Beihong was reluctant and instead handed in the bird-and-flower hanging scrolls.\textsuperscript{194} Some of the details in these accounts seem to be contradictory each other and do not identify the accurate date when Xu Beihong and the Gao brothers first met.\textsuperscript{195} Even so, the horse and the bird-and-flower paintings that Xu Beihong submitted to the Gao brothers suggest that Xu Beihong may have recognised the artistic accomplishments of the Gao brothers in their animal, landscape and bird-and-flower paintings through \textit{The True Record}, which regularly published the works of the Lingnan School in the early 1910s.

To enter the Shanghai art world, in which commercial tastes were pervasive, the Gao brothers established the Aesthetic Bookstore and published their own pictorial to promote their reformed style national painting and their new thoughts on art. \textit{The True Record} claimed to be an advertising medium, while it contained a large amount of political news about the new Republican China as well as photographs of significant political figures and their activities, such as the first issue which published the picture of Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s mourning for the martyrs who had died in the cause of democratic revolt.\textsuperscript{196} In its launch statement, \textit{The True Record} explained that its purpose was to scrutinise Republican politics, examine social situations and introduce worldwide knowledge. In this way, the

\textsuperscript{194} Huang, ‘Huiyi Xu Beihong zai Shanghai de yiduan jingli’, p.30.
\textsuperscript{195} Xu Beihong nianpu listed a detailed chronology of the works Xu Beihong submitted to the Gao brothers. Xu Beihong first handed in four season bird-and-flower handing scrolls in November 1915 and the horse painting in January 1916; Gao Qifeng later asked Xu Beihong to paint four beauty paintings. Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, pp. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{196} Croizier, \textit{Art and Revolution in Modern China}, p. 69. \textit{The True Record}, 1 (1912).
publication itself was a ‘true record’ of Republican China. In addition to politically-oriented reports, it also published serialised articles on painting, such as Chen Shuren’s *Xinhuaфа: Huihua duxishu* (新畫法：繪畫獨習書, ‘New Painting Methods: A Guide to Independent Study’), in which Chen introduced Western art history and painting schools. When talking about the debates around realism and idealism in the nineteenth-century Western art world, Chen Shuren highly praised ideal beauty, which was created with great realistic technique in the landscape paintings of the Barbizon School, in particular those of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875). Chen Shuren cited the successful combination of poetic beauty and pictorial realism in the Barbizon School to criticise traditional Chinese painters’ dismissal of pictorial realism. Chen Shuren argued that the capacity for realistic rendering was the essential foundation of both realism and idealism. Pictorial realism was an integral element of a good painting. Nonetheless, a good painting should go beyond mere objective resemblance to express the artist’s moral integrity and sincerity. Chen Shuren took the making of an ideal female nude as an example. To reach an ideal nude, the idealistic painter first would be diligent in life drawing, and then select the best parts of different models to create an ideal beauty; while the realistic painter would draw from a life model in painstaking realistic detail and then carefully arrange the composition and colour to invoke viewers’ emotions. In Chen Shuren’s opinion, the ability to create lifelike renderings of real scenes and objects was the essential key to reaching both realism and idealism. At the same time, whether in the style of realism or idealism, a successful art work had to

197 ‘Zhenxiang huabao chushi zhi yuanqi’ 真相畫報出世之緣起 ‘Statement about the Launching of *The True Record*, *The True Record*, 1 (1912).
198 For a brief account of Chen Shuren’s article and the role of *The True Record* in the promotion of a new national painting, see Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde*, pp. 16-17.
strike a chord with the audience. Accordingly, a good painting had to reach both pictorial realism and aesthetic beauty.

As an illustrated magazine, *The True Record* featured image publishing. It announced that it would publish seven kinds of painting, including fine art, history, satire, current affairs and three kinds of *xiezhen* painting: current affairs, geography and historical sites. Current affairs *xiezhen* painting recorded important national events with photography; geography *xiezhen* painting rendered places of military significance in great detail; historical site *xiezhen* painting aimed to preserve the national heritage by faithfully illustrating the *zhengxiang* of these historical places. *The True Record* broadened the usages of *xiezhen* in both its subject matter and its function. *Xiezhen*, the originally Chinese term synonymous with portraiture, was expanded to include such categories as landscapes and current affairs. Moreover, its functions were broadened from reproducing realistic renderings of the portrayed to bearing social and historical responsibilities. Moreover, *xiezhen* was perceived as being closely associated with photography by *The True Record*, as the difference between current affairs painting and current affairs *xiezhen* painting lay in the use of photography. It is obvious that photography had exerted an influence on the Chinese perception of *xiezhen* rhetorically and visually.

*The True Record* broadened the definition of *xiezhen* beyond its original visual sphere by making a rhetorical connection between *xiezhen* and *zhengxiang*. *Zhen* was the character shared by the two terms and in turn created some ambiguous space in which they could inter-react. *The True Record* rendered its Chinese title *Zhengxiang* into ‘true record’. In the English-Chinese dictionary of 1903, ‘true’ was translated as *zhenshi* (真實) or *chengshi* (誠實); ‘truth’ as

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201 *The True Record*, 1 (1912).
202 *The True Record*, 1 (1912).
Accordingly, *zhexiang* had an emphasis on the faithful report or record of news rather than pictorial realism for *The True Record*. Actually, the definitions of *zhexiang* were varied in *The True Record*. Besides meaning the true record implied by the pictorial’s title, *zhexiang* in the launch announcement was used to refer to pictorial verisimilitude and socio-political realities. The launch announcement drew on the story of the English political leader Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) to stress the importance of a good likeness in portraiture. The announcement translated Cromwell’s saying ‘paint me as I am’ into *huiwu zhexiang* (繪吾真相), emphasising that a good likeness should take pains to include even the imperfect parts of the portrayed. This story of Cromwell was cited to project the goal of *The True Record*, which was to report with total honesty the realities of the government.204

*The True Record* featured current affairs reports and realistic illustrations and was issued at intervals of ten days. Its format was apparently modelled on the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial*. By comparison, the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* perceived *zhexiang* largely in its original pictorial realm and expanded its connotations from the socio-political perspective; while *The True Record* further transformed *zhexiang* to denote political, social and historical realities. From the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* to *The True Record*, this developing style revealed the trajectory of Chinese perception and appreciation of this indigenous realism. *Xiezhen* remained as pictorial realism while *zhexiang* gradually extended to reflect social realities. In the diversification of the meanings of the Chinese portraiture terms, *zhexiang* and *xiezhen*, painting became increasingly involved in social reform and culture building; and pictorial realism was the key to the

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203 *Shangwu shuguan Hua Ying zidian*, pp. 310-311.
embodiment of painting’s new functions.

The value and importance of indigenous realism was further elevated by Kang Youwei, who studied Chinese realism on a world scale. Kang Youwei was a prestigious reform-minded Qing officer, who was trusted by the Qing emperor Guangxu (光緒, 1874-1907) to institute radical reforms in 1898, known as the ‘Hundred Days’ Reform’. This reform movement aimed to strengthen and modernise China, and therefore it called for changes in several aspects of Qing life and government, including the examination system, education, the armed forces, commerce and industry. Nevertheless, the national reform movement only survived for less than one hundred days, between June and September 1898, and was then suppressed by the conservative Empress Dowager Cixi (慈禧, 1835-1908). Kang Youwei was forced to escape from Beijing and lived in exile overseas after the imperial Qing was overthrown in 1912. From 1904, Kang Youwei travelled to Europe to study Western governmental systems along with history and culture. He first planned to publish his travels in eleven European countries – Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Holland and Britain, although he only actually finished writing about his travels in Italy and France and published them respectively in 1905 and 1907. During his travels in Italy, Kang Youwei paid numerous visits to museums and galleries. He gave high praise to the convincing verisimilitude in Raphael’s paintings. He also conducted a comparative analysis of the development of Chinese and Western art and asserted that the West’s realistic

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206 Zhong, ‘Xunzhao zhenli de Kang Youwei’. 
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style originated in Chinese Song painting (960-1279). This assertion of the superiority of Song painting was continuously elucidated in the catalogue of Kang Youwei’s considerable collection of Chinese paintings, which was published in 1917. Kang Youwei’s views on art were mostly delineated in the above-mentioned publications and they made a profound impact on Xu Beihong when he became acquainted with Kang Youwei in Shanghai in 1916.

Xu Beihong submitted his portrait of Cangjie (倉頡), said to be the inventor of the Chinese writing system, for the new Cangsheng mingzhi University (倉聖明智大學, often abbreviated as Cangsheng University), which was established in 1916, and which solicited a portrait of Cangjie as the concrete presentation of its title. According to Huang Jingwan’s record, Xu Beihong depicted Cangjie as a man with a long beard and four eyes, whose shoulder was covered with leaves (Fig. 73). An illustration of Cangjie was attached at the top of the announcement of a charity party held by the Cangsheng University in the Shenbao in 1917. It appeared to be a printed copy of Xu Beihong’s original work, which perhaps became the emblem of the University (Fig. 74). Xu Beihong’s portrait of Cangjie was approved of by director of the University, Ji Juemi (姬覺彌) and, as a consequence, the artist was invited to live in the Hardoon garden, the location of Cangsheng University, as an artist-in-residence to create more portraits of Cangjie and to teach painting at the University, where he got acquainted with Kang Youwei.

Cangsheng University was sponsored by the Jewish merchant Hatong (哈同, Silas Aaron Hardoon, 1849-1931). Hardoon was an opium dealer and enjoyed

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208 Kang, ‘Wannu caotang canghuamu’.
209 Huang, ‘Huiyi Xu Beihong zai Shanghai de yiduan jingli’, p. 32.
210 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, pp. 11-13.
high social status in Shanghai by constructing the luxurious Asian-style Hardoon garden, where he established Cangsheng University, the Learned Society of Guangcang (Guangcang xuehui 廣倉學會), and published Yishu congbian (藝術叢編, ‘Art Miscellany’) and Xueshu congbian (學術叢編, ‘Learned Miscellany’), with the aim of promoting traditional Chinese learning.  

This ambitious cultural project attracted several famous intellectuals and collectors whose great learning in traditional Chinese culture was acknowledged and who felt strongly nostalgic for the collapsed imperial Qing, such as Luo Zhenyu (羅振玉, 1866-1940), Wang Guowei (王國維, 1877-1929) and Kang Youwei, etc. These men were enthusiastic about the study and collection of antiques. The Hardoon garden collected hundreds of ancient tortoise shells. It also actively purchased antiques and became a distribution centre for ancient books in Shanghai. In addition to Kang Youwei, Xu Beihong must have become acquainted with other learned intellectuals during his residence there and must have had access to the considerable collection of antiques in the garden. As Huang Jingwan recalled, Xu Beihong was busy viewing and copying all kinds of artworks after he moved to the Hardoon garden. His painting and calligraphy thus made impressive progress. Kang Youwei’s promotion of the powerful stele calligraphy, along with the other intellectuals’ interest in epigraphy, made Xu Beihong intrigued with the idea of creating his own calligraphic style based on the mode of stele inscriptions. Besides the intellectuals who gathered there and the various

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212 Li Enji 李恩彝, Ailiyuan mengyinglu 愛蜊園夢影錄, ‘An Account of the Phantom Aili Garden’ (Beijing, 1984), p. 278.
213 Li, Ailiyuan mengyinglu, p. 98.
214 Huang, ‘Huiyi Xu Beihong zai Shanghai de yiduan jingli’, p.33.
215 On Kang Youwei’s view on traditional Chinese calligraphy in terms of nationalism, see Fu Heyuan 傅高華, ‘Kang Youwei Guangyizhou shuangji de meixue sixiang’ 廣藝舟雙楫的美學思想, ‘Kang Youwei’s Aesthetic Thoughts in Guangyizhou shuangji’, Wenshizhe 文史哲,
activities in the field of antique studies, artists such as Gao Jianfu and the
well-known traditional painter Huang Binhong (黃賓虹, 1864-1955) also joined
Kang Youwei and Deng Shi (鄧實 1876-1951), the founder of the Guocui
xuebao (國粹學報, 'National Essence Journal', 1905-1911), to organise the
Society for Art Appreciation (Yishu guanshanghui 藝術觀賞會). They gathered
monthly in the Hardoon garden to view masterpieces of Chinese art.²¹⁶ Xu
Beihong may not have become close to those famous artists and intellectuals
(except for Kang Youwei) at that time. However, by means of his friendship with
Kang Youwei, Xu Beihong developed a relatively comprehensive knowledge of
the history of Chinese painting. Xu Beihong’s skill in realistic portraiture
brought him precious opportunities to view the considerable antique collection in
the Hardoon garden and Kang Youwei’s Chinese painting collection, involving
himself in traditionally highbrow cultural activities. His experience in the
Hardoon garden and his association with the intellectuals of great learning in
traditional Chinese culture paved the way for Xu Beihong’s later adherence to
realism and for his projection of an ambitious cultural identity as a modern and
reformed Chinese ink painter.

Xu Beihong attracted Kang Youwei’s attention by virtue of his skill in
portrait painting. In addition to the aforementioned portrait of Kang Youwei and
his family in celebration of Kang’s sixtieth birthday, Xu Beihong also made a
portrait of Kang’s deceased wife based on photographs of her. Kang Youwei
once publicly praised Xu Beihong as a painter of genius and claimed his skill in
life-drawing was miraculous.²¹⁷ Xu Beihong recalled how Kang Youwei held a
formal ceremony to announce him as a pupil. They often exchanged views on

Chinese painting, and Kang Youwei’s valuing of Song painting and dismissal of the Qing Four Wangs were among the most penetrating opinions on the development of Chinese painting, as far as Xu Beihong was concerned.\(^{218}\)

Kang Youwei argued that the simplified and rough style of literati painting, which was epitomised in the works of the Qing Four Wangs – Wang Shimin (王時敏, 1592-1680), Wang Jian (王鑑, 1598-1677), Wang Yuanqi (王原祁, 1642-1715), and Wang Hui (王翬, 1632-1717), was the key to the regression of Chinese painting in modern times.\(^{219}\) In the opening of the 1917 catalogue of his Chinese painting collection, Kang Youwei started by formulating his version of the development of Chinese painting with an assertion that “Of late Chinese painting has been at its worst because its painting theory was erroneous”.\(^{220}\) Kang Youwei attributed the erroneous theory to the aesthetics of literati painting, whose painters turned their backs on nature in pursuit of calligraphic and expressive brushwork in their paintings. They dominated the Chinese art world from the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) onwards. The aesthetics of literati painting, which manifested itself in the abstract tendencies in the paintings, reached its apogee in the Four Wangs and could be traced back to the Tang poet Wang Wei (王維, ca 701-761), who infused Zen Buddhism into his creations.\(^{221}\) Although the Yuan dynasty witnessed the emergence of literati painting, Kang Youwei approved of it because it created a new painting style when the realistic style reached its perfection in Song painting. In Kang Youwei’s opinions, the preference of the Yuan painters for the mood of a painting rather than form

\(^{218}\) Xu, 'Beihong zishu', pp. 9-10.
\(^{220}\) Kang, ‘Wanmu caotang canghuamu’, p. 93.
\(^{221}\) Kang, ‘Wanmu caotang canghuamu’, p. 93.
likeness was originally creative. The error was made by their successors in their blind adherence to the conventions of literati painting without reform. Kang Youwei indicated that the aesthetics and practices of literati painting were legitimised as the orthodoxy of Chinese painting in the hands of Wen Zhengming (文微明, 1470-1559) and Dong Qichang (董其昌, 1555-1636). While they dismissed the professional painters’ substantial renderings and valued the amateur literati’s symbolic brushwork, their Western counterpart, Raphael, was replacing the golden and stiff style of religious painting by life-drawing and oil painting. These two synchronic phenomena reversed the standing of Chinese and Western painting. Kang Youwei concluded, “The Western painting sought verisimilitude (zhen) while ours dismissed it; evolving against the trend, Chinese painting thus end up in regression”. The Qing Four Wangs represented the culmination of the trajectory of Chinese literati painting development from the Yuan dynasty to modern times. Their later generations learnt painting only by imitating the previous works with simplified brushwork. In Kang Youwei’s eyes, Chinese painting was at its worst in the Qing dynasty. He warned that if Chinese painters continued to be conservative, following the conventions and denying substantial renderings, Chinese painting would become extinct. To rescue Chinese painting, Kang Youwei proposed the integration of Chinese and Western painting to create a new era of Chinese painting.

Kang Youwei’s opinions on present-day Chinese painting, such as his view that Chinese painting was at its worst as a result of traditionalism (shoujiu 守舊), anti-verisimilitude and a dismissal of professional painters, were inherited by Xu Beihong in his article, ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’, first

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224 Kang, ‘Wanmu caotang canghuamu’, p. 120.
published in the *University Daily* (*Beijing daxue rikan* 北京大學日刊) on 23 May 1918.\(^{225}\) This article was originally a lecture which Xu Beihong delivered to the Beijing University Painting Research Society, where Xu taught painting between 1918 and 1919. Xu Beihong began the article with his criticism of present-day Chinese painting, saying that “The decline of Chinese painting has reached its nadir”. And ‘traditionalism’ (*shoujiu*) in the Chinese art world was responsible for the decline. To reform Chinese painting, Xu Beihong advocated “keeping what is good in traditional Chinese painting, continuing what is abandoned [in present-day Chinese painting], rectifying what is bad, reforming what is imperfect, and adopting what is appropriate for China in Western painting”.\(^{226}\) Xu Beihong’s opinions on the modern Chinese painting situation, its problems and remedies, shared a great similarity with Kang Youwei’s. Even the terms Xu Beihong used in the article were directly borrowed from those in Kang Youwei’s writings.

To rectify Chinese painting, which had gone astray as a result of its traditionalism and its dismissal of professional painters’ status and craftsmanship, Kang Youwei prescribed Song painting, which modelled painted images on real scenes and objects in order to seek pictorial verisimilitude. Kang Youwei referred to the realistic Song paintings as oils, such as those by Yi Yuanji (易元吉), Zhao Yongnian (趙永年) and Su Hanchen (蘇漢臣) (Figs 75-76). Their works were carried out with fine brushwork, delicate colour and painstaking care. Kang Youwei claimed that the world’s first oil painting tradition originated with Chinese Song painting. Marco Polo (1254-1324) took Song painting back to Italy and thus ushered in the highly-developed verisimilitude in Raphael’s oil

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\(^{225}\) Xu Beihong’s ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’ was first published in the *University Daily*. Later it was re-published in the first issue of *Huixue zazhi* (繪學雜誌, ‘Painting Miscellany’), the University’s art journal.

paintings. Kang Youwei came to the conclusion that Chinese painting was on the highest rung of the world art ladder before the fifteenth century and that Song painting was the world’s best. The watershed moment of the reversal of the standing of Chinese and Western painting occurred in the fifteenth century when Raphael invented the life-drawing technique and developed the Chinese-derived technique of oil painting.

Kang Youwei strived to see as many of Raphael’s works as he could when he travelled in Italy. He claimed that Raphael invented European oil painting, which was imported from China. Moreover, Raphael was the first in the West to model painted images on real scenes and objects so that he created superb verisimilitude in his paintings. Kang Youwei’s admiration for Raphael was so great that he created eight poems to pay homage to Raphael’s artistic accomplishments. In these poems, Kang Youwei stressed again the supreme verisimilitude achieved by Raphael in his works. Verisimilitude (zhen) was the key to Raphael’s great achievements and to the superiority of Western painting over Chinese in modern times. Kang Youwei argued that before Raphael, Western art world had been filled with solemn and stiff religious painting in the style of China’s Buddha and bodhisattvas images, whereas Chinese Song painting had witnessed the efflorescence of realistic painting in various subjects, such as landscape and bird-and-flower scenes. In addition to Western painting, Kang Youwei also compared Song painting to Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Indian painting. He thus asserted that Chinese painting was the world’s best before literati painting was legitimised as orthodox in China in the fifteenth century.

227 Kang, ‘Wanmu caotang canghuamu’, p. 94.
228 Kang, ‘Ouzhou shiyiguo youji liangzhong’, pp. 133-134.
To restore the supreme status of Chinese painting in the world, Kang Youwei laid new stress on form-likeness in painting. Moreover, he argued that literati painting should be replaced by the ruled-line painting (*jiehua* 界畫) and the academy style as the orthodoxy of Chinese painting.\(^{232}\)

Kang Youwei’s high esteem for Song painting was also inherited by Xu Beihong in his article, ‘Comments on the Painting and Calligraphy Collection in the Wenhua Palace’, published in the *University Daily* on 20 and 21 May 1918.\(^{233}\) This article was originally a talk which Xu Beihong had addressed to the members of the Beijing University Painting Research Society, when they paid a visit to the Institute for Exhibiting Antiquities (*Guwu chenliesuo* 古物陈列所), located inside the Forbidden City.\(^{234}\) Its exhibition spaces comprised several halls such as the Wenhua and Wuying (武英) palaces, in which significant imperial affairs used to take place. The Institute was the first art museum in China. It opened to the public in 1914 and exhibited part of the imperial collection from the previous Qing dynasty.\(^{235}\) Xu Beihong’s comments on the exhibited works provide a glimpse into his perception of traditional Chinese painting, which convey the extent of Kang Youwei’s influence on him.

At the beginning of the article, Xu Beihong elucidates the function, importance and status of art and Chinese painting. He argues:

Each nation, despite its origin from tribes, has established museums in metropolitan areas and large cities to facilitate its development of civilisation. It is especially valuable to have national treasures on display to arouse the feelings of admiration in later generations and to investigate the traces of evolution. It is

\(^{231}\) Kang, ‘Ouzhou shiyiguo youji liangzhong’, pp. 133-134.


\(^{233}\) For a republished version, see Xu, ‘Ping Wenhuadian suocang shuhua’.

\(^{234}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 10 May 1918.

only we the Chinese who do not have [museums]. What a pity! To our nation as the representative of Oriental art, [this demonstrates] our decline. Also, the cultural relics and ritual vessels left by our forebears are the treasured objects that are the evidence of our history and the embodiment of our national spirit ... We are distinctive as an ancient country, a country with an ancient civilisation, and by the fifteenth century, our painting was the world's best.

Xu Beihong inherited Kang Youwei's high praise for Chinese painting before the fifteenth century. Later in the article, Xu Beihong comments on specific exhibited works, and many he considered the finest were the works either of Song dynasty or of the realistic style, such as the paintings of the Song painters, Lin Zhuang (林椿), Zhao Danian (趙大年), Zhao Ziang (趙子昂); the realistic bird paintings of Huang Quan (黃荃) and Xu Xi (徐熙) of the Five Dynasties (907-979), the period before the Song; and those of the Qing court painters, such as Xu Yang (徐揚) and Lang Shining. Xu Beihong was impressed by the fine brushwork and realistic renderings in the bird-and-flower paintings of the above-mentioned painters, demonstrating their keen observational skill as well.

When remarking on Lin Zhuang’s bird-and-flower painting, Xu Beihong felt admiration for the painstakingly careful renderings of the Song painters and their mastery in striking a balance between realistic depiction and poetic beauty (Fig. 77). As regards Lang Shining’s White Hawk and Glossy Ganoderma, Xu Beihong approved of the refined and realistic renderings as well as the

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integration of Western painting practices and Chinese materials in his paintings (Fig. 64). Nonetheless, Xu Beihong felt regret that Lang Shining did not introduce Raphael’s accomplishments to China. Xu Beihong’s views on Song painting and Lang Shining demonstrated the profound influence of Kang Youwei. The way of elucidating Chinese painting development which is seen through commenting on specific works in Kang Youwei’s 1917 catalogue appears to have been followed by Xu Beihong in his lecture on the Wenhua palace collection. By comparison, Xu Beihong’s opinions were more neutral as a professional artist. He did not refer to the realistic Song painting as oil painting. When commenting on a work, Xu Beihong would give a detailed account of its composition, colour, brushwork and style. Take the example of Lang Shining: Kang Youwei drew on Japan’s high respect for him to advocate that Chinese painting should learn from the West, while Xu Beihong pointed out Lang Shining’s mastery of realistic rendering as well as his lack of poetic depiction. Moreover, Xu Beihong approved of the craftsmanship of ruled-line painting, which Kang Youwei advocated legitimising as orthodox, but he also criticised the fact that its spatial conception was not precise, as a result of its two-dimensional depiction. Kang Youwei apparently appreciated art from a political point of view, using art as the vehicle to propagate his aspirations to universalise Confucianism. The Song dynasty witnessed the efflorescence of Confucianism. As a consequence, Kang Youwei’s assertion of Song painting as the origin of the world’s oil painting and as a global supreme form of art appeared to support his advocacy of the universalised value of the Chinese intellectual tradition of Confucianism.

Xu Beihong’s comments on the exhibition of the imperial collection

237 Kang, ‘Wanmu caotang canghuamu’, p. 120. Xu, ‘Ping Wenhuadian suocang shuhua’, p. 35.
238 Xu, ‘Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa’, p 43.
demonstrated Kang Youwei’s influence on him regarding the rediscovery of the value of Song painting, and of Chinese indigenous realism as well as museum building and heritage preservation. After his travels in Italy, Kang Youwei also indicated that China was inferior to Italy because China did not preserve its antiquities, the embodiment of a nation’s culture. Kang Youwei therefore appealed to China to preserve its past by setting up a related institute for collecting antiquities. Kang Youwei and Xu Beihong’s re-evaluation of Chinese painting on a world scale reflected the shift of China’s geographical perception of its own culture. From about 1895, as a result of a series of challenges posed by the West and Japan, the Chinese became increasingly aware that their cultural position was no longer central and superior. Zhongguo, literally the Middle Kingdom, alluding to the supreme position of China, had undergone a fundamental reorientation. China appeared to be merely a member of the world – and even seemed to be a particularly weak member in modern times. The formation of a new global awareness in China not only reflected China’s domestic crises and international weakness, but also involved the substantial importation of Western learning, often through Japan. Many neologisms were created in this flood of Western culture, such as wenming (文明, ‘civilization’) and guozu jingshen (國族精神, ‘national spirit’), with Liang Qichao as the key figure in promulgating these ideas in China. Wenming, often synonymous with wenhua (文化, ‘culture’), was not a completely new

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term to the Chinese. Nonetheless, the expansion of its meaning at the turn of the twentieth century involved nineteenth-century Europe’s new measurement of a nation’s civilisation, in which concerns were shifted from political and economic development to cultural endeavours and artistic traits.\(^{243}\) Accordingly, art became the embodiment of a nation’s civilisation and a sign of national spirit and identity.

Kang Youwei’s high respect for Song painting as the world’s best thus not only reflected his personal aspirations to restore China’s glory, but also projected the collective mentality of modern Chinese intellectuals, who were obsessed with finding a pictorial paradigm to rescue China after art was perceived as the new sign of a nation’s civilisation. The substantial renderings in Song painting were considered by these Chinese intellectuals to take on the concrete form of materiality and substantiality seen in the advanced Western civilisation. Kang Youwei argued that the materiality of Western painting cannot compare with that of Chinese painting.\(^{244}\) Consequently, the realistic style of Song painting made it comparable with Renaissance art, which represented the highest achievement in the evolution of world’s civilisation.\(^{245}\) Cai Yuanpei, seminal in establishing art education in modern China, also concurred with the notion that Song painting was the culmination of the trajectory of the evolution of Chinese painting, claiming that its painting elements were assimilated both by Renaissance landscape painters and by the art of the French Rococo.\(^{246}\) Moreover, Cai

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\(^{244}\) Kang, ‘Wanmu caotang canghuamu’, p. 96

\(^{245}\) Wang, ‘Rediscovering Song Painting for the Nation’, p. 10.


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Yuanpei also published an article to introduce Raphael to Chinese readership. He mentioned the three masters of the Italian Renaissance and in particular focused on Raphael.\(^{247}\) It appears that the intellectuals of the day shared similar views on the evolution of Chinese and Western painting and felt great admiration for Raphael. The evaluation of art from a material perspective made a great impact on Xu Beihong, which was manifest in his assertion of the superiority of Western art over Chinese art in its material respect.\(^{248}\)

Realistic renderings were perceived as the key to the superiority of Western art, representing the advanced material civilisation of the West as a result of its developed science and technology. Accordingly, Chinese indigenous realism, *xiezhen*, was formulated, in particular through Kang Youwei, to serve as the concrete form of China’s high civilisation and thus became pivotal in the cultural/intellectual element of new nation building, which achieved its zenith in the New Culture Movement. Chen Duxiu, a significant figure of the Movement, determined in his 1919 article ‘Art Revolution’ that Chinese art urgently required a revolution, and that it must adopt the realistic spirit of Western painting (*yanghua xieshi de jingshen* 洋畫寫實的精神).\(^{249}\) In this article, Chen Duxiu elucidated a similar opinion to that of Kang Youwei on the present-day situation of Chinese painting. He accused the Four Wangs of representing the culmination of literati painting, the wicked Chinese painting (*ehua* 惡畫). In terms of Song painting, Chen Duxiu concurred with Kang Youwei’s view that the realistic renderings in Song painting were akin to Western realism. From Kang Youwei to Chen Duxiu, *xiezhen*, as the originally devalued pictorial practices and as a category of Chinese painting, was connected to Western realism, the neologism


\(^{248}\) Xu, ‘Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa’, p. 40.

\(^{249}\) Chen, ‘Meishu geming’, p. 86.
emblematic of advanced Western and modern civilisation. Painting became the concrete form of a rhetorical national power. In the eyes of intellectuals, the Four Wangs stood for the global weakness of present-day China. By contrast, realism became a cure which could bring about China’s rejuvenation. Realism therefore did not just refer to a pictorial technique. More importantly, it implied a world view and a belief.  

Pictorial realism was increasingly understood to be a valuable form of cultural capital in both the art world and the nationalist discourse. Xu Beihong, who first gained his artistic training in Chinese portraiture and realistic techniques, gradually recognised the importance of this indigenous realism in modern China, and reaped the benefits of it during his stay in Shanghai. By having acquired mastery of realistic skills, Xu Beihong gained himself many job opportunities in the commercial art world of Shanghai, where the early phase of Western painting occurred. More importantly, he was able to associate with the intellectual gentry, who had a profound influence on his lifelong devotion to realism. Through Kang Youwei’s introduction, Xu Beihong had access to artistic circles of Beijing, where he made the acquaintance of the actor Mei Lanfang by means of painting his portrait. Moreover, his skill in pictorial realism caused his artistic accomplishments to be compared with those of Lang Shining, as demonstrated in his Three Horses painting, a painting which Xu Beihong executed for Ji Juemi, the manager of the luxurious Hardoon garden, where Xu Beihong made the acquaintance of Kang Youwei and developed his art philosophy (Fig. 62). Xu Beihong’s skill in realism not only caused him to be associated with the traditional scholarly and artistic circles of Shanghai and Beijing, but also enabled him to enter the pro-Western intellectual circle of  

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250 Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’, p. 39.
Beijing. In 1918 Xu Beihong was invited by the well-known Francophile educator Li Shizeng (李石曾, 1881-1973) to teach painting at the Kongde School (孔德學校), named after the French thinker Auguste Comte (1798-1857). The Kongde School was established by Li Shizeng and Cai Yuanpei in 1917 and then became a part of the Sino-French University, set up under the Sino-French work-study scheme. Li Shizeng and Cai Yuanpei were the originators of the Sino-French scheme, encouraging Chinese students to study in France. This worker-student movement culminated between 1919 and 1921. Well-known Chinese artists such as Lin Fengmian and Pan Yuliang (潘玉良, 1895-1977) pursued art studies in France under this scheme. In 1918, Xu Beihong was also invited by Cai Yuanpei to teach at the Beijing University Painting Research Society. When Xu Beihong taught there, he gave several lectures and attended many artistic activities, including paying a visit to the Institute for Exhibiting Antiquities, the predecessor of the Beijing Palace Museum. Cai Yuanpei, the first Minister of Education of the Republic of China (1912) and then President of Beijing University (1916-1927), was seminal in promulgating the neologism *meishu* and aesthetic education in China, fostering the formation of a Westernised art field. Beijing University was the base of the New Culture Movement, which triggered a national-scale transplant of Western knowledge systems to replace the traditional Confucian system. In this movement, Western realism was accorded the highest ever status in the Chinese art world. Xu Beihong’s skill in pictorial realism enabled him to practise the

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highbrow cultural activities of traditional literati painters and to participate in the modern channels and institutes of art discourse, such as public exhibitions, art publications and associations. More importantly, by means of the close association between xiezhen and Western realism, it paved the way for Xu Beihong to fulfil his aspirations and to establish his prestigious reputation in the new Westernised art field.
Chapter 3 The Formation of the Art Field

3.1 The Transformation from Yi (Art) to Mei (Beauty): The Formation of Meishu (Fine Art) as a Field in China and Cai Yuanpei’s Contributions

Xu Beihong left Shanghai for Beijing in December 1917, and was invited by Cai Yuanpei to be a tutor in the Beijing University Painting Research Society in March 1918, teaching figure painting and Western watercolour. Xu Beihong taught there for about one year, until he left for Paris in March 1919.\footnote{Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, pp. 14-23.} While he was teaching at Beijing University, he published three articles, including ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’ in addition to the aforementioned ‘Comments on the Painting and Calligraphy Collection in the Wenhua Palace’ and ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting.’\footnote{Xu Beihong, ‘Hua zhi mei yu yi’ 畫之美與藝, ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’, in Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong yishu wenji}, pp. 29-30.} ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’, which appeared in the \textit{University Daily} on 23 April 1918, was a published version of part of a talk which Xu Beihong delivered to the Society. At the beginning of the article, Xu Beihong defined the two Chinese characters mei (美，‘beauty’) and yi (藝，‘art’) respectively. He elucidated that

My definition of yi is to display every detail of any object with our best effort, whereas mei refers to an [artificial] natural world, created by coordinating and fine-tuning our most sensitive perceptions, and conveyed through yi. Yi can exist without mei, e.g. the vivid portraits and documentation of customs; however, mei is impossible without yi. Yi serves as nothing more than a model that people can refer to, while mei is able to create something admirable and enjoyable.

吾所謂藝者，乃盡人力使造物無所遁形；吾所謂美者，乃以最敏之感覺支配、增減，創造一自然境界；憑藝筆之之。藝可不藉美而立（如寫風俗，寫像之逼真者），美必不離藝而存。藝僅足供人參考，而美方足以令人耽玩也。\footnote{Xu, ‘Hua zhi mei yu yi’, p. 29.}
Xu Beihong took the example of making a painting of a beauty to explain the difference between *mei* and *yi*. A portrait of a beauty of humble origins which was executed with *yi* would faithfully depict the poor surroundings of the beauty, such as some shabby huts located in a desolate place, with wild weeds growing everywhere. On the other hand, a portrait executed with *mei* would turned the dilapidated condition into a poetic one by ‘replacing her basket with an elegant one, placing a full view of wild flowers and some of them beside her, bordering the river with lushness, decorating pebbles with moss, turning the bushes into grandly posed trees whose shadow covers the worn-out fence, mirroring the sky with the glittering water; and depicting a carefree glint radiating in her eyes as if she was free from any worries’. Xu Beihong argued that a portrait painted according to *yi* techniques would be only a portrait (*xiézhēn*), while a painting which had undergone *mei* modification would turn out to be a work of art, conveying the full development of craftsmanship and beauty (*jīnyí jīnmei* 盡藝盡美). Xu Beihong related *yi* to practical technique, while he assigned to *mei* the function of evoking human feelings. In Xu Beihong’s opinion, works of art should strike a chord with their viewers, and so their composition could be invented without necessarily completely duplicating the real scenes. Even so, a painting of *mei* could only be achieved by realistic craftsmanship. Although the elements of a painting could be re-arranged to add a more artistic tone to the painting to make it more enjoyable, they should be modelled on real scenes or objects to make the painting realistic and visually convincing. Xu Beihong argued that

> If an artist fails to master chiaroscuro, to faithfully portray the shape of an object, or to harmonise the tones, these [shortcomings] are all indicative of undeveloped skills of *yi*, let alone *mei*.\(^{257}\)

\(^{257}\) Xu, *Hua zhi mei yu yi*, p. 30.
Xu Beihong's opinion on the function of art as evoking viewers' feelings concurred with that of Cai Yuanpei. In the article, *Duiyu xinjiaoyu zhi yijian* (對於新教育之意見, 'Suggestions for a New Education'), Cai Yuanpei approved of the artist's ability of poetic modification. He argued that a painter could turn terrific or magnificent scenes, such as storms, shipwrecks and volcanoes, into admirable works of art, just as a poet can transform the everyday routine of eating and cooking into something particularly enjoyable in his poems. Xu Beihong's interpretation of *mei* and *yi* is also reminiscent of Chen Shuren's elucidation of idealism and realism in the article, 'New Painting Methods: A Guide to Independent Study'. A painting characterised by realism was faithfully modelled on the portrayed objects, while one showing idealism added some poetic modification to the realistically-rendered work. But no matter whether realism or idealism was the aim, neither of them could be achieved without realistic skills. Although Xu Beihong had emphasised the importance of pictorial realism as much as the masters of the Lingnan School had, it was not until he returned to China from Paris in 1926 that he used the term 'realism' (*xieshi zhuyi*) overtly in his talks and writings. In the article, *Faguo yishu jinkuang* (法國藝術近況, 'The Current Situation in French Art'), which was originally an interview with a Shibao reporter and was published in the Shibao (時報) on 5 March 1926, Xu Beihong, like Chen Shuren, divided Western painting roughly into two categories, realism (*xieshi*) and idealism (*xiyi*). Like Chen Shuren, Xu Beihong also emphasised the importance of realistic skills as

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the essential instrument for executing both kinds of painting. In a speech which Xu Beihong delivered to the public in a radio broadcast and which was then published in the Shibao on 19 March 1926, Xu Beihong first clearly cited the term *xieshi zhuyi* as the solution to the current regressive situation in Chinese painting. Xu Beihong’s use here of *mei* and *yi* instead of idealism and realism demonstrated that his artistic thoughts during his time at Beijing University apparently corresponded with those of the University president Cai Yuanpei.

Cai Yuanpei was eminent in the educational and cultural world in China in the early half of the twentieth century. The most significant positions he took throughout his life were those of the Republic’s first Education Minister in 1912 and president of Beijing University from 1916 to 1927. Although he was only in charge of the Education Ministry for a few months due to his disappointment with Provisional President Yuan Shikai (袁世凱, 1859-1916) which caused him to resign his ministerial post, the programme of educational reform which Cai Yuanpei introduced was to exert a profound influence on Chinese education. Some strategies of this educational reform were sufficiently progressive to demonstrate a break with the previous dynasty, such as eliminating the study of Confucian classics from the elementary school curriculum; abolishing the eight-legged essay (*bagu wen* 八股文) as the basis for literary style; developing a system of schools to provide education for girls; allowing girls and boys to attend the same elementary and middle schools; and promoting aesthetic

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262 Cai Yuanpei resigned in July 1912. He made several statements to express his determination to resign his directorship and implied his disappointment with the political situation in Beijing. On the statements, see ‘Da ke wen’ 答客問, ‘Answers to the Questions Posed by the Public’, in Gao, *Cai Yuanpei wenji: Jiaoyu (Shang)*, pp. 207-211; ‘Ci Jiaoyu zongzhang cheng’ 聲教育總長呈, ‘Petition for Resignation from the Education Minister’, p. 197.
Among these reforms, the establishment of aesthetic education influenced China's art world the most profoundly.264

Although educational reform had been triggered in the late Qing dynasty to forestall further humiliation and defeat after a series of wars and following various national crises posed by the West and by Japan, Confucian classics still remained at the heart of educational system, in order to protect traditional Chinese values from erosion due to Western encroachment. This conservative attitude towards educational reform was manifested in the slogan ‘Zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong’ (中學為體，西學為用) – maintaining the essence of Chinese Confucianism and only adopting Western scientific and technical civilisation.265 This slogan was also stated as the principle of the Beijing Capital University (Jingshi daxuetang 京師大學堂), the highest educational institution of the late Qing dynasty.266 By comparison, the abolition of the study of the classics at elementary school level under the Republic marked a monumental shift in the attitude of the Chinese people towards their own culture and towards China’s position in the world. In the eyes of the Chinese people, China was relatively weak in the world. So this abandonment of classical studies indicated that the scale of the transplanting of Western knowledge under Cai Yuanpei’s leadership was huge enough to reach the very core level of Chinese culture.

The elimination of Confucianism as the core of education concurred with

the new aims of Republican education set out by Cai Yuanpei in the article, ‘Suggestions for a New Education’.267 Cai Yuanpei proposed national military education (junguomin jiaoyu 軍國民教育), utilitarian education (shili zhuyi jiaoyu 實利主義教育), ethical education (gongmin daode jiaoyu 公民道德教育), world-outlook education (shijieguan jiaoyu 世界觀教育) and aesthetic education (meiguan jiaoyu 美感教育) as the new five aims to replace the traditional ones of loyalty to the emperor (zhongjun 忠君); respect for Confucius (zunKong 孝孔); and training in public morality, the military spirit, and utilitarianism (shanggong, shangwu, shangshi 尚公、尚武、尚實).268 National military education, utilitarian education and ethical education continued the previous educational aims of training in public morality, the military spirit, and utilitarianism. In terms of ethical education, Cai Yuanpei suggested replacing the five traditional Confucian relationships (jun chen youyi, fuzi youqin, jufu youbie, zhangyou youxu, pengyou youxin 君臣有義·父子有親·夫妻有別·長幼有序·朋友有信) enjoining loyalty and obedience by minister to king, son to father, wife to husband, younger to older brother, and friend to friend) with the French revolutionary concept of liberty, equality and fraternity as the new ethical basis of Chinese society.269 The aims of loyalty to the emperor and respect for Confucius were abandoned in the new programme of educational reform and were replaced with world-outlook education and aesthetic education. Cai Yuanpei’s new five aims imposed a global dimension on education in China, which was manifested in his proposal Jiaoyu duli yi (教育獨立議, ‘Proposal for Education Independence’), suggesting that

269 Duiker, Ts’ai Yüan-p’ei, pp. 44-46.
the new educational system should assimilate the strong points of the
Euro-American countries, such as those of France, Germany and America.270
Cai Yuanpei's educational ideals demonstrated that the Confucian outlook should
give way to a Western world-view. This turn to the West was bound up with Cai
Yuanpei's overseas studies in Germany between 1907 and 1911. It also marked
the abandonment of Japan as the model for China's Western learning and
educational reform.271

Replacing Confucian studies with aesthetic education was perhaps the most
monumental feat achieved by Cai Yuanpei in terms of his innovative
contributions to China's education. It demonstrated the profound influence of the
humanistic aspect of Western civilisation upon him during his time at the
University of Leipzig, where he attained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1910. The
article 'On the Replacement of Religion with Aesthetic Education', which was
originally a lecture which Cai Yuanpei delivered at the Shenzhou xuehui (神州学会, ‘The Learned Society of China’) and was published in the August 1917 issue
of New Youth, became a beacon of Chinese reform in education and one of the
most frequently-cited art treatises of modern China.272 Cai Yuanpei employed an
evolutionary perspective on the development of human history to explain why he
promoted aesthetic education to replace religion. He argued that religion
dominated human knowledge, will and feelings in the early days. After the
gradual development of science, religion lost control over human intelligence in
modern times but still remained influential in evoking human emotions. The
function of religious art in moulding human disposition in the early days was

270 Cai Yuanpei, 'Jiaoyu duli yi' in Gao, Cai Yuanpei wenji: Jiaoyu (Xia), pp. 208-211.
271 Japan had served as the primary model for the late Qing educational reform. For related
studies, see Douglas R. Reynolds, China 1898-1912 - The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan
(Massachusetts and London, 1993).
272 This article is also collected in Gao, Cai Yuanpei wenji: Jiaoyu (xia), pp. 378-384.
similar to that of religion. After the style and subject matter of art became increasingly diversified in modern times, Cai Yuanpei believed that art was more suitable than religion to offer human consolation. More importantly, art could evoke people’s sense of beauty. He argued that because beauty had a universal nature, it could provide a feeling of emotional detachment and thus could avoid religious wars, which had been caused by the strong emotional conflicts between people of different beliefs. In China, traditional Confucian education used music to mould human personality. The establishment of aesthetic education was therefore a logical substitute after Confucianism was removed from the core of new education.

For Cai Yuanpei, art was more developed and in line with modern needs because it had undergone a scientifically evolutionary process. Cai Yuanpei stated his evolutionary view of art in *Meishu de jinhua* (美術的進化, “The Evolution of Art”). Art itself was a manifestation of science and therefore it was more effective than Confucianism at making China a modern nation. The evolutionary hypothesis of Darwinism had a monumental impact on modern Chinese intellectuals’ perception of reality. Chinese intelligentsia acknowledged that the Confucian moral idealism – *Dao* (道, ‘Ways of Kings’), was outdated and impossible to achieve in a world dominated by Darwin’s socially-generated rule of the ‘survival of the fittest’. Power was the rule of the universe. Accordingly, to be strong was the only way for China to survive in the modern world. Art, which had undergone evolution, thus served as the instrument for China’s reform.

Cai Yuanpei proposed that aesthetic education should replace religion in large part on account of the political context. There was talk of and action...
towards restoring the dynastic system around 1917. Kang Youwei was a leading proponent of this and he promoted Confucianism as a state religion.275 Besides, Liang Qichao suggested Buddhism as the primary instrument for social transformation and stability at the time when traditional institutions were on the brink of collapse.276 The conservatism of the reform-minded generation, who were raised on Confucianism and remained loyal to it through the Republican era, provoked the discontent of the radical intellectuals. They triggered the New Culture Movement in an effort to eliminate the dead hand of imperial reign and Confucian tradition. They objected to making Confucianism a region, and also attacked virtually every aspect of the traditional order, which revolved around Confucianism.277 Aesthetic education replaced Confucianism as the new cultural value in China. Cai Yuanpei advocated replacing the previous educational aim of respect for Confucius with aesthetic education. Chen Duxiu, appointed dean of the College of Literature of Beijing University by Cai Yuanpei in 1917, assigned art as the means to rejuvenate Chinese society and culture.278 Besides the radicals, the conservatives, who were endeavouring to protect the national heritage, also regarded art as the symbol of national spirit. Deng Shi and Huang Binhong, the leaders of the national essence movement which started up in the first decade of the twentieth century, compiled an anthology of art treatises,

Meishu congshu (美術叢書, ‘A Compilation of Fine Art’), in 1911. Deng Shi stated in the preface to this anthology that the motivation for the compilation was because Chinese art was internationally acclaimed and because it represented the superiority of the essence of Chinese culture in the world. Art was accorded the pivotal role in the process of cultural building after Confucianism was gradually faced with destruction during the Republican period.

Cai Yuanpei was among the progressive New Culture Movement intellectuals who took an offensive stance towards Confucianism and traditional institutions, but his humanistic orientation enabled him to strike a balance between political radicalism and philosophical idealism in his perception of aesthetic education and art. In addition to endowing aesthetic education with revolutionary attributes, Cai Yuanpei particularly emphasised its transcendent nature. Cai Yuanpei’s perception of beauty and reality was influence by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who had divided reality into two parts, the phenomenon and the noumenon, that is, the material world and the spiritual world. Science played the paramount role in the material world, whereas the spiritual world was dominated by a transcendental force, which Cai Yuanpei compared with the Confucian ‘Ways’ (Dao 道) or the Chinese Supreme Ultimate (Taiji 太極). Cai Yuanpei argued that national military education, utilitarian education and ethical education only improved the material conditions of the Chinese people, while aesthetic education brought them spiritual contentment and helped to reach a disinterested world of harmony and goodness.

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the noumenon world described by Kant. Therefore, Cai Yuanpei thought, aesthetic judgement was based on subjective and instinctive feelings instead of rational intelligence.283 The more of a sense of beauty a piece of work evoked, the less functional and utilitarian it would be. After clarifying the attributes and functions of each kind of education, Cai Yuanpei categorised music, fine art (meishu), and painting (tuhua) as the objects of aesthetic education.284

Art had attracted the attention of politicians who took charge of the educational reform in the last decades of the Manchu monarchy. Zhang Zhidong (張之洞, 1837-1909), the eminent statesman of the late Qing educational reform, recognised the urgent need for the incorporation of Western learning into Chinese schools.285 Therefore, in the 1902 and 1903 imperial edicts to establish a comprehensive system of new schools, under the directorship of Zhang Zhidong and Zhang Baixi (張百熙, 1847-1907), art was added to all levels of curriculum, from primary schools and middle schools to university preparatory schools and colleges, under the course titled tuhua.286 The curricula of university preparatory school was made up of two disciplines, politics (zheng) and yi; and tuhua was included in the yi discipline, along with ethics, Chinese and Western history, foreign languages, arithmetic, physics, chemistry, botany and zoology, geology and mineralogy, and gymnastics. Students who majored in the subjects of the yi discipline were able to enrol in the four faculties of

285 On Zhang Zhidong and Qing educational reform, see William Ayers, Chang Chih-tung and Educational Reform in China (Massachusetts, 1971).
286 Mayching Kao, ‘Reforms in Education and the Beginning of the Western-Style Painting Movement in China’, in Andrews and Shen, A Century in Crisis, pp. 146-161 (p. 148). There were two versions of the ‘Regulations for the Establishment of Schools’ (xuetang zhangcheng 學堂章程), one was Qinding (欽定) and the other was Zouding (奏定). The earlier one was formulated in 1902 and the latter was in 1903. Qinding version was not put into practice, and later the Zouding version was formulated to modify it. On the school systems of these two versions, see Li and Wang, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi: Diliujuan Qingdai xia (1840-1911), pp. 292-346.
Accordingly, art was perceived as the essential training for the study of science-related subjects. Hence, the official bulletin of the dynastic Education Ministry (Xuebu guanbao 學部官報) conveyed the fact that most teachers who taught the *tuhua shougong* course (圖畫手工, ‘painting and handicraft’) should also teach such courses as arithmetic, geometry, science and geography in schools. Art seemed to have only the slightest association with the study of humanities.

Zhang Zhidong divided Western learning into three kinds, *xizheng* (西政, ‘Western politics’), *xiyi* (西藝, ‘Western technology’), and *xishi* (西史, ‘Western history’); and he categorised painting (*hui* 繪) as a branch of *xiyi*, along with arithmetic, mineralogy, medicine, acoustics, optics, chemistry and electricity (*suanchuangyi*, *shengguanghuadian* 算繪礦醫·聲光化電). Although Zhang Zhidong advocated importing Western learning to strengthen China, he forbade the teaching of Western philosophy in schools. So the importance of Western art was apparently recognised by the Chinese in its technical aspect rather than the aesthetic one at that time. This emphasis on only the technical feature of Western art was manifested in the courses provided in the university preparatory schools, where the *tuhua* subject included such courses as perspective, chiaroscuro, cartography, descriptive geometry, mechanical drawing and other similar subjects. Those courses demonstrated that Western art was valued for the superiority of its drawing technique, which fitted China’s goal of

288 Tsuruta, ‘Shin matsuri Minkoku shoki no bijutsu kyoiku - Kin hyakunen rai Chugoku kaiga shi kenkyu (IV)’.
modernisation modelled on advanced Western science and technology. Art’s significance in the educational reform of the late Qing period was also demonstrated by its inclusion in the subjects of the new national examination, which replaced the traditional civil service examination in 1905. Jiang Danshu (姜丹書, 1885-1962), among the earliest students of the Liangjiang High Normal School (Liangjiang youji shifan xuetang 鹽江優級師範學堂), which was established in 1906 as one of the first normal schools to teach art teachers for the new educational scheme, attended the new examination and later gave an account of his experience in the magazine Meishu yanjiu (美術研究, ‘Art Research’). In this account, Jiang Danshu mentioned the examination topics on the subject of art, which included Chinese painting, Western painting, and descriptive geometry. The topic for Chinese painting asked candidates to depict two peonies with Chinese brush and ink; and that for Western painting required a watercolour painting of a gigantic battleship floating on the sea at night. The topic for Western painting indicated that Western art was imported to serve the development of China’s technology. Consequently, Western art had to be emphasised more than Chinese art in the new education programme of the early twentieth century. The sole emphasis on the practical aspect of Western learning in the late Qing reform movements was criticised by Liang Qichao, who argued that yi only touched on the shallow level of Western civilisation, such as the practical language and military tactics, and thus could not help to resolve China’s

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core problems.293

Before Cai Yuanpei promoted aesthetic education in China, it appeared that art to the Chinese had little association with the sphere of fine art. In the 1903 edition of an English/Chinese dictionary, the entry ‘art’ was translated as *shouyi* (手藝, ‘handicraft’), *jiyi* (技藝, ‘craftsmanship’) and *jishu* (技術, ‘skill’); ‘artist’ as *qiaoshou gongjiang* (巧手工匠, ‘skilled craftsman’), and *zhuyi jingshouzhe* (諸藝精熟者, ‘one who masters various skills’); ‘artisan’ as *qiaogong* (巧工, ‘skilled craftsman’) and *gongjiang* (工匠, ‘workman’).294 It is apparent from this that art before the Republican period was perceived by the Chinese as only a form of technique without any aesthetic connotations. Hence, Western art was known to the Chinese as *tuhua*, whose value was only recognized in its pictorial realism. Art, which was called *tuhua* or *yishu* (藝術), the techniques of craftsmanship, revealed that the Chinese did not learn about what was art or fine art in the way that Westerners did.

Art, meaning technique rather than fine art, was derived from the Chinese classical term *liuyi* (六藝, ‘six technologies’). In *Zhouli* (周禮, ‘Book of Rituals of Zhou’), one of the texts of the classical Confucian canon, *liuyi* referred to ritual (*li* 禮), music (*yue* 樂), archery (*she* 射), horsemanship (*yu* 御), writing (*shu* 書), and arithmetic (*shu* 數).295 *Yi* was then broadened by Emperor An (安帝, reign 94-125) to mean any subject requiring specific technique, such as medicine (*yi* 医), special technique (*fang* 方) and divination (*bu*, *shi* 卜、筮), in addition to the aforementioned six techniques.296 As a consequence, art, which was called *tuhua* or *yishu* in the Qing dynasty, was only regarded as technique.

With a close association between human spirit and aesthetic appreciation as

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294 *Shangwu shuguan Hua Ying zidian*.
296 Liu, *Translingual Practice*, p. 305.
well as a detachment of utilitarian and functional purposes, Cai Yuanpei’s perception of art was very different from that of previous dynasties. Cai Yuanpei called aesthetics *meixue* (美學), aesthetic or art appreciation *meigan* (美感), and art or fine art *meishu*, the techniques of beauty, marking a contrast to *yishu*, the techniques of craftsmanship. All terms associated with art or aesthetics had the character *mei* added to them by Cai Yuanpei. The most distinctive mark of the breakthroughs that Cai Yuanpei made in Chinese perception of art was his promulgation and institution of aesthetics and his acknowledgement of the transcendent nature of art by means of calling art *meishu* instead of *yishu*.²⁹⁷ By emphasising the aesthetic attribute of art, beauty (*mei*), rather than its technique (*yi*), Cai Yuanpei gave art and China’s aesthetic education a very different landscape from the previous one, which was only concerned with the material aspect of Western civilisation.

*Meishu* did not exist in the Chinese vocabulary of visual art until 1910, when the *Meishuguan* (美術館, ‘Hall of Fine Art’) was founded in the *Nanyang* Industrial Exposition (*Nanyang quanyehui* 南洋勛業會).²⁹⁸ In 1912, the Education Ministry under Cai Yuanpei’s leadership established the *Meishu diaochachu* (美術調查處, ‘Department of Fine Art Investigation’) and appointed the leading leftwing intellectual Lu Xun as its director.²⁹⁹ It was Lu Xun who

²⁹⁷ To promote aesthetics underlying the humanistic picture of the new Chinese educational system, Cai Yuanpei gave many related lectures, and all of the titles of them contained the Chinese character *mei*, such as ‘Meishu de jiazhi’ 美術的價值, ‘Value of Art’; ‘Mei Gan’ 美感, ‘Art Appreciation’; ‘Meishu de qiyou’ 美術的起源, ‘Origin of Art’, etc. For a complete collection of Cai Yuanpei’s talks and writings on art, see Guo, *Cai Yuanpei wenji: Meiyu*.

²⁹⁸ Fine art was translated as *meishu* by Wang Guowei in 1902. Wang Guowei had perceived the Western concepts of fine art and aesthetics and employed them in his study of the Chinese literary masterpiece, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as early as 1904. Nevertheless, Wang Guowei was concerned with *meishu* in literary terms rather than in the visual art realm, as Lu Xun and Cai Yuanpei later did. On Wang Guowei’s aesthetic ideas, see Shao, ‘Xixue “meishushi” dongjian yibainian’, pp. 106-108.

gave *meishu* a clear definition in the article *Ni bobu meishu yijianshu* (擬播佈美術意見書, ‘A Draft Proposal on the Dissemination of Fine Art’), published in 1913.³⁰⁰ Lu Xun explained that the term *meishu* had not existed in the Chinese language until it was created to be the Chinese equivalent of the English ‘art or fine art’. Lu Xun further clarified that the word for art was derived from the Greek, and had the meaning *yi*. Nonetheless, the works of *yi* were different from the works of *meishu*. He argued that works of fine art represented the process of glorifying (*meihua*美化) the natural things (*tianwu*天物) through artistic ideas (*sili*思想). Accordingly, the leaf-shaped jade, richly-carved tiny ivory pieces or furniture could not be regarded as works of art displaying *meishu*. Lu Xun’s view of art approved of the superiority of artistic creation over painstaking craftsmanship in the sphere of fine art. This stance concurred with Cai Yuanpei’s views and got a response in Xu Beihong’s ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’. Xu Beihong categorised those forms of traditional professional painting, such as portraiture (*xiezhen*) and genre painting, which were generally based on realistic rendering and routine practices, into the sphere of *yi*.³⁰¹ Xu Beihong was clearly sensitive to the latest artistic thinking of the intelligentsia, and endeavoured to transcend the lower status of a professional painter in the art world.

After clarifying the definition of art, Lu Xun further pointed out that fine art contained subjects such as painting, sculpture, architecture, music and literary writing, as opposed to those related to science described above. Except for architecture, other subjects of fine art were detached from function and practical value. Lu Xun drew a distinction between fine art and craft. Moreover, he elevated painting to the fine art sphere. Cai Yuanpei provided a similar point of

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³⁰¹ Xu, ‘Hua zhi mei yu yi’, p. 29.
view on fine art in his speech at the inauguration of the National School of Fine Art in 1918.\textsuperscript{302} In Cai Yuanpei's opinion, the subjects which should be taught in the schools of fine art were painting, sculpture and architecture. Sculpture and architecture originated with people's practical needs, while painting had its origins in aesthetic appreciation. Moreover, painting was more evolutionary than sculpture and architecture in China because the development of Chinese painting fitted the evolution of the global history of civilisation. In the sphere of visual arts, painting was placed on the highest rung of the new aesthetic ladder by Cai Yuanpei.

Cai Yuanpei and Lu Xun's Western perspective on art created a new picture of art in China in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{303} Moreover, the transcendent nature, philosophical attributes and unpractical value bestowed upon fine art fostered the formation of the art field in China. According to Bourdieu, an art field is an autonomous artistic world in which artistic creation or production has only the slightest reference to the economic purpose and thus represents a reversal of capitalistic principles.\textsuperscript{304} The formation of the concept fine art in China in the 1910s, based on the direct transplant of a Western framework, paved the way for the upsurge in Chinese students pursuing art studies in the West in the 1920s, including Xu Beihong. The Western, transcendent and scientific attributes of fine art may have contributed to Xu Beihong's choice of Western classicism and realism as the guide for his lifelong artistic career.

To adopt a Western framework into the Chinese art world, in addition to

\textsuperscript{302} Cai Yuanpei, 'Guoli meishu xuexiao chengli ji kaixueshi yanshuoci' 國立美術學校成立及開學式演說詞, 'Speech at the Inauguration of National School of Fine Art', in Gao, Cai Yuanpei wenji: Meiyu, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{303} For Cai Yuanpei and Lu Xun's contributions to the formulation of meishu in China, see Tang, Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde, pp. 10-14.

\textsuperscript{304} Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed', in Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, pp. 29-73.
literature, painting, sculpture, architecture and music, the subjects defined in the Western light, Cai Yuanpei also added Chinese calligraphy to fine art on account of its close relationship with Chinese painting. He argued that Chinese artists good at painting must be also masters of calligraphy. Cai Yuanpei’s perspective seemingly retained literati painting on the high rung of the Chinese painting ladder. Cai Yuanpei’s respect for traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy was manifested in the establishment of the Beijing University Calligraphy Research Society (Beijing daxue shufa yanjiuhui 北京大學書法研究會) under his directorship. Moreover, Cai Yuanpei invited the renowned traditional Chinese painter Chen Shizeng (陳師曾, 1876-1923) to teach Chinese painting and its history at the Beijing University Painting Research Society. At a lecture on the landscape painting of the Qing dynasty, Chen Shizeng attracted a large audience of around one thousand.

Cai Yuanpei replaced the Confucian tradition with aesthetics and art. This innovative undertaking evoked different responses. The radical intellectuals used Western art as a useful weapon with which to attack the traditional order; whereas the conservative side argued that art was the new symbol of national spirit and thus called for the preservation of the national heritage. These conflicting attitudes towards Chinese art and culture revealed the complex and contested character of the newly-formed art field in early twentieth-century China. This contradictory feature was also manifested in Xu Beihong’s artistic creation and thoughts. The Western and revolutionary perspective of the progressive intelligentsia on the formation of fine art in China exerted a profound impact on Xu Beihong’s aspirations to pursue art studies in France, and

305 Cai, ‘Guoli meishu xuexiao chengli ji kaixueshi yanshuoci’, p. 76.
306 Chen, Chumo lishi yu jinru Wusi, pp.135-156.
307 Beijing daxue rikan, 1 June 1918.
on his adherence to Western realism as the resolution to the rejuvenation of
Chinese art. At the same time, the relatively conservative view of art as a mirror
of national essence sheds some light on Xu Beihong’s seemingly abrupt turn to
Chinese ink painting from the 1930s, when he quickly became a painter with
national fame on account of the strong national spirit revealed in his ink
paintings.
3.2 An Institution for the Creation of the Art Field: The Beijing University Painting Research Society

To put his idea of aesthetic education into practice, Cai Yuanpei was active in organising art societies in Beijing University. The Beijing University Music Society and the Beijing University Calligraphy Research Society were both established in 1917; and the Beijing University Painting Research Society in 1918. Cai Yuanpei had the idea of establishing the Painting Research Society on the occasion when Chen Shizeng was invited to give a speech on Qing painting at Beijing University on 1 November 1917. The Painting Research Society was then founded on 22 February 1918 and continued to publish its news in the university newspaper, the *University Daily*, for over ten years. A preparatory meeting of the Society was held on 20 February 1918, at which it was stated that its aim was to gather together people sharing the same interest in art to improve their painting skills and their sense of beauty. The Society consisted of two sections, national painting section (*benguohua* 本國畫) and foreign painting section (*waiguohua* 外國畫). Several painters were employed to teach painting, give lectures, and mount exhibitions. The tutors of the national painting section were those active in the contemporary Beijing Chinese art world. Chen Shizeng and He Lúzhi (賀履之, 1861-1938) taught Chinese landscape and flower painting. In addition, Chen Shizeng would give speeches once a month and He Lúzhi twice a month.

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308 Chen, *Chumo lixhi yu jinru Wust*, pp.135-156.
310 The Painting Research Society first published its news in the *University Daily* on 5 February 1918, stating its establishment under Cai Yuanpei’s directorship. From that time the Society continued to publish its activities in the *University Daily* till at least 1930. The *University Daily* ceased publication in 1932.
311 *Beijing daxue rikan*, 26 February 1918.
312 *Beijing daxue rikan*, 9 & 11 March 1918.
313 For a short account of Chen Shizeng and He Lúzhi as well as their relationship with the
1878-1948) taught Chinese landscape painting and gave speeches fortnightly.\textsuperscript{314} The foreign painting section had four tutors. Li Yishi (李毅士, 1881-1942) taught watercolour and pencil drawing.\textsuperscript{315} Qian Daosun (钱稻荪) and Bei Jimei (貝季眉) gave lectures on Western art sporadically.\textsuperscript{316} Xu Beihong taught watercolour, and he also taught figure painting in the national painting section. This demonstrates that Xu Beihong’s early artistic accomplishments presented a hybrid style. Xu Beihong’s achievements and social status were apparently not as significant as those of other national painting tutors, so he was not invited to give advertised formal speeches. Nonetheless, he provided tutorial time according to his students’ needs. It appears that Xu Beihong was aspiring and diligent at the Society.

In the first year of its establishment, the Society’s news often appeared in the University Daily. It appeared around 13 times in April, 17 times in May, 14 times in June, and 17 times in October 1918.\textsuperscript{317} The news included advertisements for recruiting new members; timetables of courses and lectures;

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\textsuperscript{314} Tang Dingzhi built his fame in traditional Chinese painting. He was active in the Beijing art world and had a few famous students, including the renowned actors Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ye Gongchao (葉公超). Yun Ruxin 蘆茹辛勤 ed., Mingguo shuhuai ji huihujuan 民國書畫家畫傳, ‘An Index of Traditional Artists of the Republican Era’ (Taipei, 2005), p. 244.

\textsuperscript{315} Li Yishi was among the earliest Chinese students pursuing art studies in Europe. He studied painting in Glasgow in 1907. After returning to China, he won fame in the art world by painting Chinese historical themes in the style of Western realism. Lin, Zhongguo youhua bainianshi 中國百年畫史, pp. 123-124.

\textsuperscript{316} Qian Daosun was born in 1887. He studied in Japan and then taught foreign language and literature at Beijing University. Bei Jimei was Bei Shoutong (貝壽同). He was born in 1878 and was professor of the engineering faculty of Beijing University. Gao, Cai Yuanpei wenji: Meiyu 車耀辰文集: 美玉, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{317} Some news, in particular the lectures given by the Society’s tutors and Cai Yuanpei, was published in the newspaper in serialised form. In these cases, I count that kind of news has appearing once in the press.
contents of speeches and talks; meetings and gatherings; exhibitions and other artistic activities. The talks given by the Society’s tutors were often to be read in the University Daily; and the contents of the talks were generally published in serialised form and thus each continued to appear in the newspaper for several days. In the first year, Chen Shizeng gave talks on Huihua yuanyu shiyongshuo ('On How Painting Originated with Practical Utility'), Qingdai huahui zhiai (清代花卉之派別, ‘Schools of Qing Flower Painting’), Qingdai zhi shanshuihua (清代之山水, ‘Qing Landscape Painting’), Duiyu putong jiaoshou tuhuake zhi yijia (對於普通教授國畫科之意見, ‘Opinions on the General Painting Course in Schools’); Tang Dingzhi on Chinese landscape painting methods; Qian Daosun on He wei mei (何謂美, ‘What Is Beauty?’); He Lüzhi on Zhongguo shanshuihua tan (中國山水畫談, ‘A Talk on Chinese Landscape Painting’) and how to imitate ancient masterpieces; Li Yishi gave a brief account of Western painting, entitled, Xihua liueshuo (西畫略説); Feng Hanshu (馮漢叔 1881-?) provided his comments on literati and professional painting, a brief account of Chinese painting history and the difference between Chinese and Western painting. Xu Beihong gave talks on ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’, ‘Comments on the Painting and Calligraphy Collection in the Wenhua Palace’ and ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’. After Xu Beihong left for Paris in 1919, Gai Dashi (蓋大士, Dr Kats) succeeded him to teach oil painting and Zheng Jin (鄭錦, 1892-1959)

318 Beijing daxue rikan, 20 & 22 April, 15 May, 1-17 June 1918 and 10-11 January 1919; 15-16 April and 14 June 1918; 27 & 29-30 April 1918; 4, 6, 7 & 16 May 1918; 14 May 1918; 26-27 April 1918. Feng Hanshu was not included in the list of the teaching staff of the Society which was published in the University Daily on 26 February 1918; nonetheless, Cai Yuanpei’s statement of the Objective of the Beijing University Painting Research Society (北京大學畫法研究會旨趣書) indicted that Feng Hanshu had been on the teaching staff from the beginning. Feng Hanshu had studied in Japan and taught mathematics at Beijing University. He was also a calligrapher. Cai Yuanpei, ‘Beijing daxue huafa yanjiushu’, in Gao, Cai Yuanpei wenji: Meiyu, pp. 77-79.
319 Beijing daxue rikan, 23 April and 10-11 & 23-25 May 1918.
In addition to teaching painting, the Painting Research Society also organised exhibitions and elegant gatherings to improve students’ ability in art appreciation. Exhibiting private collections was listed in the Society’s constitution; Cai Yuanpei appointed Feng Hanshu to push ahead with this idea in his speech at the Society.\(^{321}\) In April 1918, Xu Beihong and Bei Jimei took the Society to see an exhibition of the works of the Russian artist Ladovleff [sic] at the Russian Embassy.\(^{322}\) In May 1918, the Society held three related activities, including displaying Zhang Weisan’s (章味三) 240 volumes of \textit{Xiaowanliutang shannian daguan} (小萬柳堂館面大觀, ‘Xiaowanliu Studio’s Comprehensive Collection of Fan Paintings’) and Song hand scrolls; paying a visit to the Institute for Exhibiting Antiquities; Cai Yuanpei, Li Yishi and Xu Beihong also held a meeting, in which they showed their painting catalogues.\(^{323}\) Some articles and talks related to these activities, such as Sheng Boxuan’s (盛伯宣) \textit{Eshiguan canguanji} (俄使館參觀記, ‘A Visit to the Exhibition at the Russian Embassy’), Lai Jigeng (來季庚) and Xu Beihong’s opinions on the exhibition of the Institute for Exhibiting Antiquities were published in the \textit{University Daily} and the Society’s magazine, \textit{Painting Miscellany (Huixue zazhi 繪學雜誌)}.\(^{324}\) In addition to visiting exhibitions, the Society members also organised their own exhibitions to display their works along with Chinese paintings and the

\(^{320}\) Dr Kats was a Belgian. He was a little-known person in the Chinese art discourse of his day. His name first appeared in the \textit{University Daily} in November 1918 because Qian Daosun and Li Yishi led the Society to see his individual exhibition, held in the Austrian military camp in China. Later his name was listed among the teaching staff of the Society in January 1919. On Dr Kats, see \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 27 November and 5 December 1918, and 18 January and 15 February 1919. Zheng Jin studied art in Japan. He was appointed director of the National School of Fine Art in 1918, and was invited to teach at the Painting Research Society from February 1919.\(^{321}\) Cai, ‘Zai Beijing daxue huafa yanjiuhui shang de yanshuoci’, p. 86.\(^{322}\) Wang, 'Beijing daxue huafa yanjuhui shimo’, pp. 66-67.\(^{323}\) \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 1 & 7-8 May 1918.\(^{324}\) Sheng Boxuan, 'Eshiguan canguanji', \textit{Huixue zazhi}, 1 (1920), pp. 7-8. Lai Jigeng, ‘Wenhuaian canguanji’ 文華殿參觀記, ‘A Visit to the Wenhua Palace Exhibition’, \textit{Huixue zazhi}, 1 (1920), pp. 1-6.
calligraphic works of contemporary artists and private collectors, such as those from the collection of the eminent artist and collector, Jin Cheng (金城, 1878-1926), in the campus art fair (youyi dahui 游藝大會). The fair was successful, attracting more than one thousand people a day.\textsuperscript{325} The Society also continued the traditional form of literati gatherings by organising an elegant gathering to enjoy the peony blossoms at Beijing’s Chongxiao Temple (崇效寺).\textsuperscript{326} At the gathering, Xu Beihong drew peony blossoms; Chen Shizeng also made a poem a few weeks later.\textsuperscript{327} In addition, the Society organised a trip to the Western Hills (Xishan 西山) during the summer vacation in August 1918, attempting to develop students’ keen observational skills through drawing from nature. Xu Beihong led the trip and provided six hours of courses a week.\textsuperscript{328}

The frequent artistic activities of the Painting Research Society corresponded with Cai Yuanpei’s expectations stated in the speeches which he gave to the Society. Cai Yuanpei criticised the fact that the traditional form of private collecting was an obstacle for Chinese painters’ development of technique; he thus advocated publicising private collections and organising more exhibitions in order to allow the public to have access to authentic works of art.\textsuperscript{329} Cai Yuanpei’s opinion reflected the rise of exhibition culture in China, which was manifested in the establishment of the Institute for Exhibiting Antiquities and in intellectuals’ promotion of the building of museums to preserve the national heritage, such as advocated by Kang Youwei. Moreover, Cai Yuanpei took a relatively neutral stance when he made a comparison

\textsuperscript{325} Beijing daxue rikan, 21, 25 & 30 January and 6 February 1919.
\textsuperscript{326} Beijing daxue rikan, 10 May 1918.
\textsuperscript{328} Beijing daxue rikan, 6 August 1918.
between Chinese and Western art. He argued that the different painting methods in Chinese and Western art resulted from their different cultural values. Chinese culture respected morality and thus Chinese painting emphasised the imitation of the virtues of previous masterpieces. On the other hand, Western culture valued science and consequently its painting emphasised drawing from nature. Cai Yuanpei indicated that Chinese painting should assimilate the virtues of Western painting, as the Renaissance and Rococo painting of the West had integrated Chinese elements. His speeches at the Society apparently exerted an impact on Xu Beihong. In the article ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’, Xu Beihong obviously responded to Cai Yuanpei’s aesthetic thoughts as discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The suggestion of establishing museums and assimilating the virtues of Western art, which Xu Beihong put forward in the other two talks which he gave in 1918, reflected the influence from Kang Youwei as well as from Cai Yuanpei. Although Kang Youwei’s influence upon Xu Beihong’s view on the regressive situation of present-day Chinese painting was obvious, the relatively neutral formula of reforming Chinese painting by means of ‘keeping what is good in traditional Chinese painting, and adopting what is appropriate for China in Western painting’ was closer to Cai Yuanpei’s attitude towards Chinese tradition. The title of the article, ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’, pointed out that its purpose was to study the painting methods, indicating that the overall article responded to Cai Yuanpei more than to Kang Youwei.

In addition to absorbing Cai Yuanpei’s thoughts and manifesting them in the discursive space, Xu Beihong was also diligent in embodying them in the concrete form of his paintings. His drawing of peony blossoms at the elegant

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gathering in the Chongxiao Temple has already been mentioned and he also painted old cypresses and pines realistically during the trip to the Western Hills (Fig. 78) The paintings modelled on real scenes exemplified his emphasis on drawing from nature, also seen in his talks at the Society.\footnote{Beijing daxue rikan, 28 June 1918.} In addition, his watercolour painting, Boshu tu (博獅圖, ‘Fighting with a Lion’), was published in the first issue of Painting Miscellany in 1920 (Fig. 79). The paintings of cypresses, pines and lion demonstrated again Xu Beihong’s skill in pictorial realism. The way in which Xu Beihong employed light and shade made the figure in Fighting with a Lion more like a statue than a person. Fighting with a Lion revealed a strong Western orientation. The statue-like figure and theatrical composition prefigured Xu Beihong’s penchant for Western classicism and history painting, as in his oil painting, Nuni yu shi (奴隸與獅, ‘Slave and Lion’), which was executed in 1924 when he was studying art at the École des Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (Fig. 80).

Although Xu Beihong only stayed at the Painting Research Society for one year, news of him frequently appeared in the University Daily. It seems that Xu Beihong attended virtually all of the activities of the Society. Besides the items of news already mentioned, Xu Beihong reported on Wu Zhihui’s talk on art, which was published in the first issue of Painting Miscellany. In addition, he also held seminars weekly and continued to tutor during the school holidays.\footnote{Xu Beihong, ‘Xu Beihong ji Wu Zhihui xiansheng meishutan’ 徐悲鴻集吳稚暉先生美術談, ‘Xu Beihong’s Report on Wu Zhihui’s Talk on Fine Art’, Huixue zazhi, 1 (1920), pp. 2-4. Beijing daxue rikan, 5 December 1918.} After he resigned his position at the Society in January 1919, he still donated 10 yuan (元) to the campus art fair in February 1919, which was held by the Society to raise funds for its operation; he donated 10 yuan again to the Society in another fund-raising activity held in June 1919, a significant amount – as much as Hu Shi,
and twice as much as He Lizhi and Qian Daojun.\textsuperscript{334} Xu Beihong’s diligence at the Society brought him many students. In the autumn term of 1918, there were 22 students studying watercolour with Xu Beihong and 4 studying Chinese figure painting with him. Xu Beihong received a total of 26 students, around one third of the whole membership of the Society.\textsuperscript{335} In the New Year of 1919, the Society held a farewell party for Xu Beihong at which several tutors gave talks: Dr Kats expected Xu Beihong to seek verisimilitude in his overseas studies; Chen Shizeng encouraged Xu Beihong to combine Chinese and Western art and to become an internationally-acclaimed painter; Xu Beihong himself talked of how he was indebted to the Society, the institution for promoting art, which helped Chinese artists to sharpen their skills and become internationally competitive.\textsuperscript{336} Throughout his career, Xu Beihong maintained the same stance on art and on the Chinese painting tradition which he had taken during his time at Beijing University. The Painting Research Society served as a significant institution to fulfil Cai Yuanpei’s aesthetic ideals, and fostered the formation of the art field in China by means of lecturing, publishing and exhibiting. Xu Beihong’s experiences at the Society helped him to participate actively in various channels of artistic production in the art field after he returned to China in the later 1920s and rapidly built his national fame. He created hybrid and realistic Chinese painting, published productively, organised international Chinese painting exhibitions, and institutionalised drawing from life into Chinese art education.

The Painting Research Society did not promote art alone. It also participated in exhibitions held by other art societies. In January 1919, Yan

\textsuperscript{334} \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 19 February and 3 June 1919.  
\textsuperscript{335} \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 24 October 1918.  
\textsuperscript{336} \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 9 January 1919.
Wenliang (顧文樑, 1893-1988), later the director of Suzhou Art School (Suzhou meishu xueshao 蘇州美術專校, established in 1922) then, who studied art in France in 1927, organised the Suzhou Fine Art Exposition (Suzhou meishu caihui 蘇州美術賽會) and invited the members of the Painting Research Society to exhibit their works. The objective of the Exposition was for art lovers to improve one another’s painting skills, sharing a similarity with the aim of the Painting Research Society and in respond to those of Cai Yuanpei. A large number of works varying in subject matter, style and medium were displayed at the Exposition. The Painting Research Society was the only art society outside the Jiangsu area to be invited to exhibit, and its members contributed sixteen works. News of the establishment of the Fine Art Research Society of Jiangsu Province (Jiangsusheng meishu yanjiihui 江蘇省美術研究會) was also published in the University Daily. Liu Haisu, vice-director of the Society, stated that the aim of the Fine Art Research Society was to promote aesthetic education; it also attempted to rejuvenate the realistic virtues of Chinese painting before the Song Dynasty by means of drawing from nature, the method which contributed to the superiority of Western art. Liu Haisu’s talk indicated that the Fine Art Research Society was established in response to Cai Yuanpei. Its members included Ding Song (丁鈞, 1891-1972) and Zhang Yuguang, both of whom were active in the Shanghai commercial art world. Cai Yuanpei’s promotion of aesthetic education changed the landscape of the Chinese art world; he fostered the birth of a vigorous Westernised art field, which accommodated agents and institutions of different circles and backgrounds. Moreover, the

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337 The Suzhou Fine Art Exposition was set up in 1919 and then held expositions annually till at least 1935. Tsuruta Takeyoshi ed., Chugoku kindai bijutsu daiji nenpy 中国近代美術大事年表, ‘A Chronology of Big Events of Fine Art in Modern China’ (Izumi, 1997), p. 16.
338 Beijing daxue rikan, 18 February 1919.
339 Beijing daxue rikan, 15 October 1918.
Intelligentsia seemed to reach a consensus on the promotion of aesthetic education and on the realistic virtues of Western art at that time. They advocated reforming Chinese art by means of institutionalising drawing from nature, and so rejuvenating the realistic tradition of Chinese painting. This consensus also became Xu Beihong’s lifelong belief.

The *University Daily* served as an important channel of alliance between different art societies. They not only legitimised their position in the art field through the *University Daily*, but they also relied on and competed with each other. Having Cai Yuanpei as director, the Beijing University Painting Research Society consequently played a crucial role in the field. It ran successfully from the first year of its establishment. Its membership kept increasing in number so it moved to bigger premises and appointed an administrator in the autumn term of 1918.\(^{340}\) In 1919, the second year of its establishment, the Society suspended its activity from May due to the May Fourth Movement.\(^{341}\) Its operation returned to normal in October. In 1920, the Society changed its name slightly to *Huafa yanjiusuo* (畫法研究所, ‘The Painting Research Institute’).\(^{342}\) Its news appeared often in the *University Daily* again, as it had done in 1918. The timetable which was announced in the *University Daily* on 15 April 1920 revealed that its staff became larger. Both sections provided courses daily from Monday to Saturday; the tutors of the national painting section comprised He Lizhi (landscape), Tang Dingzhi (landscape), Hu Peiheng (胡佩衡, 1891-1962, landscape), Sheng Boxuan (flower) and Tang Junbo (湯俊伯, flower); the foreign painting section included Zheng Jin (watercolour), Dr Kats (elementary oil painting and charcoal drawing), Wu Xinwu (吳新吾, 1883-1924, charcoal drawing) and Heng Weigong

\(^{340}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 22 October and 18 November 1918.
\(^{341}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 25 September 1919.
\(^{342}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 19 January 1920.
Nevertheless, the talks given by the tutors were seldom published in the *University Daily*, perhaps due to the issuing of the Society’s own magazine, *Painting Miscellany*, in June 1920. The art-related articles published in the *University Daily* in 1920 were Cai Yuanpei’s ‘Origin of Art’, the Chinese translation of Ernest F. Fenollosa’s book, *Zhongguo Riben meishu fenqishi* (中國日本美術分期史, ‘Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art’), and C. Bayet’s book, *Meishushi* (美術史, ‘Art History’). The Painting Research Society apparently attempted to turn itself into a professional painting institute, while the *University Daily* became purely a discursive space for art theories. The continuous publishing of art historical writings in the *University Daily* reflected an important phenomenon whereby the formulation of art history attracted the interest of Chinese artists and intellectuals. Writing and translating books on Chinese art history reached its zenith in the 1920s and 1930s. Jiang Danshu’s *Meishushi* (美術史, ‘Art History’), published in 1917, was the first Chinese account of art history in the modern era. He argued that Western art culminated in Italy, and Eastern art in China. Fenollosa in his writing on Chinese art history argued that the Song dynasty was the ideal period of Chinese art. Their views of the histories of Chinese and Western art coincided with the high praise that was given to Italian Renaissance art and to Chinese Song painting, which was pervasive among the intelligentsia. This perspective remained in subsequent...
writings on Chinese art history, such as those of Teng Gu (滕固, 1901-1941), the first professional art historian in China, and in Xu Beihong’s ambitions for reconstructing the rungs of the Chinese art ladder, which had been dominated by the literati philosophy.347

The Daily News continuously published news about other artistic activities outside the campus. A report about an exhibition of the Huayin huahui (花亜画会, ‘The Painting Society of Huayin’) signified a close relationship between the Beijing University Painting Research Society and the Painting Society of Huayin, because many of the tutors in the Painting Research Society were also members of the Painting Society of Huayin and thus participated in the exhibition; these included Zheng Jin, Li Yishi, Wu Xinwu and Chen Shizeng, along with renowned painters of traditional painting, including Yao Hua (姚華, 1876-1930), Wang Mengbai (王子白, 1888-1934), and Xiao Wuquan (萧屋泉, 1865-1948).348

The Painting Society of Huayin shared a great similarity with the Painting Research Society in its objective and its programme. Its aim was also to promote art through studying Chinese and Western painting methods. Its summer school also comprised two sections, Chinese painting and Western painting; each section provided a complete system of courses from elementary to advanced, catering for students of different levels.349 The Painting Society of Huayin apparently attempted to serve as a more professional painting institute. Moreover,

348 Beijing daxue rikan, 8 June 1920. Chen Shizeng resigned from the Painting Research Society in October 1918. Beijing daxue rikan, 25 October 1918. Yao Hua gained jinshi degree in 1904 and then studied politics in Japan. He, with Chen Shizeng and Jin Cheng, was a leading figure of the Beijing art world. Wang Mengbai was also an influential figure in traditional art circles in Beijing. For their significance, see Wan Qingli, ‘Nanfeng Beijian: Minguo chunian nanfang huajia zhudao de Beifang huatan’ 南風北漸：民國初年南方畫家主導的北方畫壇, ‘The Southern Painting Style in Beijing: The Leading Figures of Beijing Painting Circle in Early Republic Years’, in Wan, Wan Qingli meishu wenji, pp. 139-161.
349 Beijing daxue rikan, 4 & 18 June 1920.
the establishment of the Painting Society of Huayin reflected the fact that painters of different groups and backgrounds sought to form ties of allegiance, through which they gradually shaped a distinctive art field, which was differentiated from the literary field. In other words, the art field was increasingly dominated by actual artists instead of writers.

In 1921, the Painting Research Society changed its name from *Huafa yanjiusuo* back to its original *Huafa yanjiuhui*. During this year, the Society’s visibility dropped sharply because the *University Daily* ceased publication from March to July 1921 due to financial difficulty. Besides this external reason, the Society itself became stagnant. News of the Society only appeared twice in the *University Daily* before March 1921, and then four times each in November and December. Nevertheless, Cai Yuanpei still maintained his momentum in promoting art. In February 1921, seven talks given by Cai Yuanpei were published in the *University Daily*, and four were centred on art, including ‘The Evolution of Art’, *Meixue de jinhua* (美學的進化, ‘The Evolution of Aesthetics’), *Meixue de yanjiu fangfa* (美學的研究方法, ‘Methods of Studying Aesthetics’), and *Meishu yu kexue de guanxi* (美術與科學的關係, ‘The Relationship between Art and Science’). In addition, news about the Suzhou Fine Art Exposition was continuously published in the *University Daily*; for example, the fact that Liu Haisu was going to make a speech on *Xiandai huihua de xinqushi* (現代繪畫的新趨勢, ‘New Trends of Modern Painting’) on 10 January 1922. The activity of the Shanghai art world seemingly also maintained its momentum.

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350 *Beijing daxue rikan*, 9 December 1920.
351 *Beijing daxue rikan*, 3 August 1921.
352 *Beijing daxue rikan*, 8 November 1921.
353 The seven talks were a series of speeches given by Cai Yuanpei in Hunan province. *Beijing daxue rikan*, 14, 15, 19, 21, 22, 24 & 25 February 1921.
In 1922, Beijing University encountered financial and administrative difficulties in large part due to external political turmoil.\(^{355}\) The upheaval in the University culminated in October 1922, when Cai Yuanpei resigned, staff went on strike, the administrative system shut down, and the *University Daily* ceased publication.\(^{356}\) News about the Painting Research Society did not appear in the *University Daily* from June 1922. In November 1922, the University managed to get back to normal and planned to celebrate its 25\(^{th}\) anniversary in December. The celebration programme included an exhibition displaying works by members of the Painting Research Society.\(^{357}\)

In 1923, the Painting Research Society and the Calligraphy Research Society were united as a single society named *Zaoxing meishu yanjiuhui* (造形美术研究会, ‘The Plastic Art Research Society’).\(^{358}\) The teaching staff included Chen Shizeng, Yao Hua, Hu Peiheng, Sheng Boxuan, Wu Xinwu, Zheng Jin, Chen Qimin (陳啓民), as well as the famous calligraphers Ma Shuping (馬叔平, 1881-1955) and Shen Yinmo (沈尹默, 1883-1971); Ma Shuping was also a renowned epigrapher and was appointed director of the Beijing Palace Museum from 1934 to 1955. The courses comprised Chinese landscape painting, bird-and-flower painting, seal cutting and calligraphy, as well as Western watercolour and oil painting. The tutors of Western painting also taught at the Apollo Society (*Abolulu xuehui* 阿博洛學會) which was established in December 1922.\(^{359}\) The Apollo Society had ten teachers, including the former tutor of the Beijing University Painting Research Society, Li Yishi. It managed to be a professional art institute, stating that its aim was to teach Western painting and to

\(^{355}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 20 March 1922.
\(^{356}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 19 October 1922.
\(^{357}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 17 December 1922.
\(^{358}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 18 April 1923.
\(^{359}\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 26 December 1922.
train professional artists. Therefore, it only accepted members with art
certificates. Its summer school provided courses for those who wanted to
develop their Western painting skills and those who wanted to be art teachers. Its
Western painting courses included pencil drawing, charcoal drawing,
watercolour and oil painting.\(^{360}\) The structure and programme of the Apollo
Society revealed that Western art had successfully entered Beijing, the place
which was considered to be the stronghold of traditional Chinese painting.
Moreover, its courses demonstrated that Western art had increasingly matured in
China. In terms of the essence of Western painting, the figure watercolours of
calendar poster painting, which were popular in the commercial market, were
gradually replaced by drawing from nature and oil painting. The Plastic Art
Research Society and the Apollo Society combined to foster the maturity of the
art field in China, the field which was based on Western concepts of fine art and
aesthetics. While the professional institute of Western art, the Apollo Society,
was established, a complete unified institute of Chinese art was also formed
through the consolidation of the painting and calligraphy societies at Beijing
University. The combination of Chinese painting and calligraphy in a single
society would provide a complete system of Chinese art education, and maintain
the pivotal role of calligraphy in Chinese painting. Furthermore, combining
Chinese painting and calligraphy under the name of plastic art demonstrated
traditional painters' endeavours to modernise traditional Chinese painting. With
the increasing completeness of Western art learning in China, and the gradual
modernisation of Chinese painting in Western terms, the art field in China
reached maturity and presented its singular complexity and diversity.

Through teaching, exhibiting, collecting, and publishing, the Beijing

\(^{360}\) Beijing daxue rikan, 11 June 1923.
University Painting Research Society presented artistic activities in the domain of fine art, well beyond the utilitarian interests that had been assigned to art in the Qing period. It thus served as an important institution to embody Cai Yuanpei's art ideals and helped the formation of an art field in China. This art field, which was structured in Western terms, helped to raise the importance of Western painting in China. Western art was able to be perceived in its own terms. Its essence was acknowledged and its practice was considered as the better framework for learning painting. Western art thus gradually transferred from being a popular practice in the commercial market to a legitimised subject in the academic field. By contrast, Chinese painting had to re-define its identity within this pro-Western framework of art which presented some points of conflict with traditional Chinese art, such as the learning devices, subjects and standards of art. The shifts of names and programmes of the Painting Research Society demonstrated the efforts which Chinese painting had made to adapt itself to this newly-formed art field. Calligraphy and painting, used to be termed shuhua (書畫), had formed a set of practices in traditional Chinese painting. Nonetheless, they were divided into two separate associations when the Painting Research Society and the Calligraphy Research Society were established respectively at Beijing University in response to the promulgation of meishu. Although these two societies were later consolidated, they used ‘plastic art’, instead of ‘calligraphy and painting’, as the new name of this unified society. These adjustments within traditional Chinese painting revealed the fact that the concept of fine art met with broad acceptance in China, and further transformed the nature of the Chinese art world. A new Westernised art field was thus established, in which were accommodated two competing systems of painting, presenting the singular dichotomy and dynamics in the art field of twentieth-century China.
In 1923 and 1924, the Plastic Art Research Society still ran actively. News of its courses, exhibitions and publications was often published in the *University Daily*. Nevertheless, this activity was not as vigorous as it had been in the 1910s, because the political situation in Beijing was so disorderly that it threatened the operation of the University.\(^{361}\) News about the Apollo Society did not appear in the *University Daily* after the first year of its establishment. Cai Yuanpei resigned again from Beijing University in 1927 and never returned. Many intellectuals and artists also moved down to the South. With new academic institutions of fine art established in the southern cities, such as Hangzhou and Nanjing, and with more and more students who had studied in Europe returning, the landscape of the art field in China also changed. Accompanied by the rise of new agencies, there came into being new forces dominating the art field. As a consequence, the significance of the art society at Beijing University was marginalised.

\(^{361}\) For example, Cai Yuanpei resigned again in 1923 due to his deep disappointment with the Beijing government. *Beijing daxue rikan*, 19-20 January and 30 June 1923.
3.3 A Contested Art Field

The journal *Painting Miscellany* was launched in June 1920. The second issue was published in January 1921, and the third one in November 1921. Hu Peiheng was the chief editor. It gained popularity from the beginning. The outlets where it was stocked increased from one to six when the second issue was published, and further spread to Shanghai and Tianjin when the third one was issued.\(^\text{362}\) The talks addressed by Cai Yuanpei and the tutors of the Painting Research Society made up the largest part of *Painting Miscellany*. Cai Yuanpei’s talks on art, which were published in the *University Daily*, were also collected in the *Painting Miscellany*, talks such as his ‘Origin of Art’ in the first and second issues; ‘The Evolution of Art’, ‘The Evolution of Aesthetics’, ‘Methods of Studying Aesthetics’ and ‘The Relationship between Art and Science’ in the third issue. The tutors’ lectures, along with the Society’s exhibitions and gatherings, which were published in the *University Daily* were collected in the *Painting Miscellany* as well. Some tutors contributed more articles, such as Chen Shizeng’s *Wenrenhua de jiazhi* (文人畫的價值, ‘The Value of Literati Painting’, second issue), and *Zhonguohua shi jinbu de* (中國畫是進步的, ‘Chinese Painting Is Progressive’, third issue); Wu Fading published *Helan huashi Rembrandt zhi lishi* (和蘭畫師藍布郎 Rembrandt 之歷史, ‘An Account of the Dutch Painter Rembrandt’, first issue), and *Xihuajia Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519 zhi lishi* (西畫家黎有拉文喜 Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519 之歷史, ‘An Account of the Western painter, Leonardo da Vinci, 1452-1519’, second issue); Dian Daosun in his article, *Hua xing* (畫形, ‘Form in Painting’, third issue), translated the first chapter of the book, *Essentials in Art*, written by the Swedish historian of Chinese art, Osvald Sirén (1879-1966). In addition, the

\(^{362}\) Wang, ‘Huixue zazhi yanjiu’. 
talks given by renowned figures, such as Wu Zhihui’s talk on art, and Jin Cheng’s speech at Beijing University in 1919, were also published in the third issue of the magazine.\textsuperscript{363} *Painting Miscellany* also published reports about significant events and activities in the art world, such as the establishment of the first National School of Fine Art in Beijing in 1918, the Suzhou Fine Art Exposition, and the 1917 Beijing Exhibition of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, which was recorded in Chen Shizeng’s *Duhua tu* (讀畫圖, ‘Studying Painting’, 1917) (Fig. 81).\textsuperscript{364} *Painting Miscellany* thus served as an efficient channel for the distribution of art thought, and as the epitome of the art world.

Xu Beihong’s talk ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’ was published in the first issue of *Painting Miscellany*, along with his report on Wu Zhihui’s talk and news about his farewell party. In ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’, Xu Beihong criticised the fact that Chinese painters did not develop keen observational skills. They followed pictorial conventions instead of drawing from nature. Therefore, Chinese painters painted trees but could not recognise what trees they were depicting.\textsuperscript{365} Xu Beihong’s attack on the traditionalism of Chinese painters was refuted by Tu Fengyuan (涂鳳元), also a member of the Painting Research Society.\textsuperscript{366} Tu Fengyuan argued that painters all over the world could not recognise the trees they were painting. He was unhappy about the progressive attitude of negating tradition in all respects, and disapproved of Xu Beihong’s worshipping everything foreign. Tu Fengyuan’s reaction to Xu Beihong’s argument reflected the conflicting and


\textsuperscript{364} Chen Shizeng made this painting to record the ‘Exhibition for the Relief Fund’ held in the Central Park (中央公園) in Beijing from 1 December 1917. Gong Chanxing in his research on Chen Shizeng’s life pointed out that Chen made this painting on 24 February 1918, though this painting is generally dated 1917. See Gong Chanxing, ‘Chen Shizeng niubiao’, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{365} Xu, ‘Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa’, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{366} Tu Fengyuan, ‘Duhua congstan’ 讀畫載談, ‘Comments on Studying Painting’, *Huixue zazhi*, 2 (1921), pp. 15-16.
diversified attributes of the art world, revealing the challenges which China encountered in the endeavours to integrate Western pictorial elements into Chinese painting. This diversity is also manifested in the illustrations attached to the *Painting Miscellany*. The first issue published Xu Beihong’s watercolour *Fighting with a Lion* (Fig. 79), Li Yishi’s history painting *Zhang Chang huamei* (張敞畫眉, ‘Zhang Chang Helping His Wife to Draw Eyebrows’) (Fig. 82), Lai Jigeng’s watercolour of the Western Hills (Fig. 83) and He Lüzi’s landscape painting (Fig. 84). Xu Beihong’s watercolour revealed his inclination towards a Western mode of working, but did not yet manifest his later distinctive personal style. Lai Jigeng’s watercolour responded to the emphasis on drawing from nature, which was put forward by Cai Yuanpei and the tutors of Western painting. Li Yishi’s painting presented his endeavours to depict Chinese historical subjects with Western realistic skills. Xu Beihong’s later history painting, which brought him fame in the 1920s and 1930s, showed a similar hybrid style to Li Yishi’s work. This hybrid style reflected the call for modernising Chinese art and culture with Western scientific civilisation, which was pervasive in the fields of art and knowledge. He Lüzi’s landscape painting was executed with a typical Chinese painting vocabulary. The juxtaposition of Chinese and Western style paintings revealed the distinctive phenomenon of China’s art field, whose conflicted feature was exemplified in the argument between Tu Fengyuan and Xu Beihong.

As its name pointed out, the Painting Research Society aimed to study painting methods. As a consequence, discussing painting methods was a focus of *Painting Miscellany*. Chen Shizeng in the article ‘Opinions on the General Painting Course in Schools’ argued that painting methods comprised copying manuals, drawing from nature, and painting from memory, and that copying manuals was the most essential. Chen Shizeng approved of *Jieziyuan huapu* (芥子園畫譜)

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子圖畫譜, 'The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting') as a useful manual for copying as it revealed the clear procedure for executing a Chinese painting. By means of imitating the brushwork, colour and composition of masterpieces, one was then able to represent the spirit (qiyun 氣韻) of a painting. Qiyun was the key to transforming a thing into a work of fine art (meishu). Chen Shizeng criticised that drawing from nature could only represent verisimilitude without qiyun, and thus could not make a painting a real work of fine art. Chen Shizeng's defence for the traditional method of learning painting easily found acceptance among the tutors of Chinese painting in the Painting Research Society. Tang Dingzhi in his lecture indicated that the two stages of learning painting were copying The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting first and then imitating masterpieces. By contrast, the Chinese painting conventions of imitating were criticised by the tutors of Western painting. Dr Kats disagreed with having imitating as the vehicle for learning painting, because artists would be deprived of creative ability. To develop artistic technique, a painter thus should draw from nature. At Xu Beihong's farewell party, Dr Kats emphasised that the aim of painting was to pursue verisimilitude. Li Yishi concurred with Dr Kats' opinion. In his talk on Western painting, Li Yishi argued that drawing from nature was essential in learning Western painting. Xu Beihong in 'Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting' had blamed imitation for the regression of Chinese painting in modern times. At the end-of-term ceremony in June 1918, Xu Beihong also concurred with Li Yishi's

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369 Beijing daxue rikan, 22 February 1919.
370 Beijing daxue rikan, 9 January 1919.
371 Li Yishi, 'Xihua liieshuo'  西畫略說, 'A Short Account of Western Painting', Huixue zazhi 1 (1920), pp. 16-17. Beijing daxue rikan, 10 May 1918.
argument, stressing that learning painting should draw from nature and seek verisimilitude. Xu Beihong suggested that students might start with drawing from casts and then drawing from nature.\textsuperscript{373}

These opposite approaches towards learning painting came to a compromise in Cai Yuanpei and Wu Zhihui’s talks. Cai Yuanpei in his talk given at the Painting Research Society in October 1919 analysed the characteristics of Chinese and Western painting respectively. He indicated that Chinese painting originated in imitation and Western painting in drawing from nature. Cai Yuanpei took a relatively neutral attitude towards the different methods of learning painting in China and the West. He argued that different painting methods resulted from different cultures, and thus he approved of \textit{The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting} as a model for learning painting in China. Nevertheless, in terms of studying fine art, Cai Yuanpei advocated learning Western realistic rendering and employing scientific methods.\textsuperscript{374} Several of Cai Yuanpei’s talks revealed that he was partial to Western painting methods in terms of the best way forward for Chinese painting. For example, in the speech ‘The Evolution of Art’, Cai Yuanpei pointed out that Western painting was much more advanced than Chinese painting in its use of light and shade, perspective, the creation of atmospheric effects, and the realistic depiction of figures.\textsuperscript{375} Wu Zhihui in his talk also indicated that what Chinese and Western painting methods sought was different. Western painting pursued mimetic illusionism and mastery of light and shade, whereas Chinese painting stressed brushwork and sought spiritual likeness (\textit{shensi}).\textsuperscript{376} Wu Zhihui’s judgement on the standing of

\textsuperscript{373} \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 28 June 1918.
\textsuperscript{374} Cai, ‘Zai Beijing daxue huafa yanjiuhui shang de yanshuoci’, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{375} Cai, ‘Meishu de jinhua’, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{376} Xu, ‘Xu Beihong ji Wu Zhihui xiansheng meishutan’.
Chinese and Western painting was also relatively impartial. He argued that both Chinese and Western painting sought a kind of art which went beyond complete duplication of nature in pursuit of human creation, although their painting practices were different. Both Cai Yuanpei and Wu Zhihui's perspectives can find a response in Xu Beihong's 'Beauty and Art in Painting'. Cai Yuanpei's promotion of aesthetics seems to have had a far-reaching influence and to have formed a consensus among both artists and intellectuals.

The aforementioned talks showed the formulation of the dichotomy between Chinese and Western painting methods. Chinese painting was perceived as traditional and regressive, whereas Western painting was realistic and advanced. This dichotomy was pervasive in the fields of art and knowledge at that time. The announcement of the establishment of the Fine Art Research Society of Jiangsu Province argued that the lack of realistic renderings in early modern Chinese painting turned Chinese painting from fine art to 'poor art' (eshu 惡術).377 The Suzhou Fine Art Exposition also rejected the works involving imitation.378 The most frequently cited example is that of Chen Duxiu, who drew on the dichotomy to attack the traditionalism of Chinese painting and who advocated reforming Chinese painting by adopting the realistic spirit of Western painting.379 With the pro-Western framework of art taking shape, the formulation of the dichotomy between Chinese and Western painting methods helped result in the superiority of Western art and realism in new fine art terms.

To defend the status of literati painting in Chinese art, the Chinese painting tutors of the Painting Research Society took advantage of its own magazine, the Painting Miscellany, to refute disapproving views on Chinese pictorial practices.

377 Beijing daxue rikan, 15 October 1918.
378 Beijing daxue rikan, 8 February 1919.
379 Chen, 'Meishu geming', pp. 85-86.
Besides affirming the significance of imitation as a device for learning painting, the tutors also defend the artistic accomplishments of the Four Wangs. Chen Shizeng in his talk on Qing landscape painting praised the achievements of Wang Hui and Wang Yuanqi. He indicated that Wang Hui’s works integrated the virtues of different painting schools (Fig. 85). He further argued that the atmospheric effect and perspective in Wang Hui’s and Wang Yuanqi’s paintings could compete with Western painting.\(^{380}\) Hu Xiyou (胡錫佑) in his article *Lun Wang Shigu* (論王石谷, ‘On Wang Shigu’) provided a comprehensive study of Wang Hui’s paintings, and he argued that not all of Wang Hui’s works were bad.\(^{381}\) It appears that these defences of the established mainstream of Chinese painting were designed to contradict the radicals’ attack, in particular Chen Duxiu’s promotion of a revolution to overthrow the Four Wangs as the canon of Chinese painting in his frequently-cited article ‘Art Revolution’.\(^{382}\) Established by Chen Duxiu, dean of the College of Literature of Beijing University, the journal *New Youth* served as a pivotal medium for the distribution of the thinking of the progressive intellectuals, in particular of those of Beijing University. For example, the published version of Cai Yuanpei’s monumental talk ‘On the Replacement of Religion with Aesthetic Education’ first appeared in the August 1917 issue of *New Youth*; and Chen Duxiu’s own ‘Art Revolution’ was in the January 1918 issue. *New Youth* became representative of the radical side in the debates over the development of Chinese painting in the modern era. *Painting Miscellany* and *New Youth* both published Cai Yuanpei’s speeches on art, and thus they served as the seminal publications for the promulgation of fine art in

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China. Their conflicting stances on Chinese tradition demonstrated the contested forces in the fine art field, as well as the challenges that Chinese painters had to face in the institution of a Western art framework in China. The diversity also existed within the Painting Research Society itself. As regards Wang Hui, Hu Peiheng’s opinion was different from Chen Shizeng’s. He took a relatively critical perspective on Wang Hui, criticising Wang Hui for performing too much craftsmanship, his paintings with the effect that left little space for spiritual resonance (qiyun shengdong 氣韻生動).\(^{383}\) Hu Peiheng’s view of Wang Hui was similar to Xu Beihong’s on Lang Shining. Xu Beihong praised Lang Shining’s craftsmanship, which was far better than that of Chinese painters; nonetheless, his paintings could not evoke viewers’ spiritual resonance.\(^{384}\) As regards Lang Shining, another tutor, Feng Hanshu, completely disapproved of his painting skills.\(^{385}\) Although there existed a variety of opinions, spiritual resonance, which was believed to be obtained through calligraphic and anti-realistic brushwork, had been acknowledged as the essence of Chinese painting and the criterion for the judgement of a painting’s value.

The principles of Chinese painting, such as seeking spiritual resonance at the expense of formal likeness and legitimising imitation as the principal method of learning painting, were gradually regarded as outdated in the formulation of meishu, which valued realism and drawing from nature, the essence of Western art. Nevertheless, the seemingly conservative tutors of national painting endeavoured to modernise traditional art by adapting Chinese painting to the new framework of fine art; among them, Chen Shizeng was the principal figure. He was raised in a scholar-official family, which enabled him to cultivate literati

\(^{384}\) Xu, ‘Ping Wenhuadian suocang shuhua’, p. 35.
painting accomplishments. Moreover, he studied in Japan for seven years (1902-1909). Therefore, he could invoke Japanese and Western references to defend literati painting, and he became an esteemed leader of the Beijing art world of his day.\footnote{386} The second issue of Painting Miscellany published Chen Shizeng’s ‘The Value of Literati Painting’, which became a beacon of hope for those painters, who continued executing literati painting in the pro-Western context in twentieth-century China. The classical Chinese version of ‘The Value of Literati Painting’, Wenrenhua zhi jiazhì (文人畫之價值), was published in the book entitled, Zhongguo Wenrenhua zhi yanjiu (中國文人畫之研究, ‘Studies of Chinese Literati Painting’), which was published in 1922.\footnote{387} The book also collected the other essay, Wenrenhua zhi fuxing (文人畫之復興, ‘The Revival of Literati Painting’), which was written by the Japanese scholar, Ōmura Seigai (大村西崖, 1868-1927), and which was translated by Chen Shizeng to classical Chinese. Studies of Chinese Literati Painting gained great success and was reprinted eight times in the following few years.\footnote{388} The publishing of a series of treatises on literati painting reflected the intensive debate over the significance of literati painting in twentieth-century China, debates in which Chen Shizeng’s essays became the most powerful weapon of the traditional camp.

To modernise literati painting, Chen Shizeng was not only diligent in publishing essays in Painting Miscellany but also endeavoured to appreciate literati painting in the terms of Cai Yuanpei, whose articles were the focus of the magazine. As mentioned above, Cai Yuanpei argued that Western painting was more advanced than Chinese painting in its perspective and atmospheric effects.

\footnote{386} Aida-Yuen Wong, ‘A New Life for Literati Painting in the Early Twentieth Century: Eastern Art and Modernity, a Transcultural Narrative?’, Artibus Asiae, 60.2 (2000), pp. 297-326 (p. 307); also Wong, Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style painting in Modern China (Honolulu, 2006).

\footnote{387} Chen Shizeng, Zhongguo Wenrenhua zhi yanjiu  中國文人畫之研究, ‘Studies of Chinese Literati Painting’ (Shanghai, 1941).

\footnote{388} Gao, ‘Shixi “Wenrenhua zhi jiazhì” de chengwen qingjing’, p. 181.
Chen Shizeng also indicated that the composition and brushwork of Wang Hui and Wang Yuanqi’s works had represented these virtues. Moreover, to respond to Cai Yuanpei’s evolutionary theory of art, Chen Shizeng also employed an evolutional perspective on the development of Chinese painting in the two articles, ‘On How Painting Originated with Practical Utility’ and ‘Chinese Painting Is Progressive’. Chen Shizeng elucidated that painting originated with picturing. Their difference lay in their practical functions. Picturing possessed strong functions, such as for the purposes of decoration, preaching and recording, in opposition to the amusement intentions of painting. Accordingly, images made for temples, palaces and historical documents in old China could not be considered as paintings on the ground of their practical ends. This distinction between picturing (tu 図) and painting (hua 画) is an old issue in traditional Chinese painting. Chen Shizeng re-formulated it within the Western evolutionary framework in response to Cai Yuanpei’s evolutionary view of the development of painting in the “The Evolution of Art”. Chen Shizeng’s argument appeared to controvert Kang Youwei’s praise for realistic ruled-line painting as the representative of highly developed Chinese art, and to refute the statement that Chinese painting in modern times, which retained the expressive and unpractical feature of literati painting, was regressive. Chen Shizeng clearly expressed his disapproval of this statement in the article ‘Chinese Painting Is Progressive’. Xu Beihong was the tutor of the Painting Research Society, who made clearly the statement that modern Chinese painting was regressive in his

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390 Craig Clunas, Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China (London, 1997), pp. 104-111.
article ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’. 393

In the article ‘The Value of Literati Painting’, Chen Shizeng further invoked Western support to formulate his argument that literati painting, which represented the so-called ‘regressive Chinese painting in modern times’, was as advanced as Western painting. At the beginning of the article, Chen Shizeng indicated that spirit (xingling 性靈) and intelligence (sixiang 思想) were the key components of literati painting. 394 This spiritual element coincided with Cai Yuanpei’s emphasis on the transcendental aspect of fine art. Accordingly, Chinese painting was credited with possessing the aesthetic quality of fine art. Moreover, Chen Shizeng compared the spiritual intention of literati painting with the subjective tendency in Western modern art, which was embodied in such movements as Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism. 395 By paralleling the evolutionary pattern of modern Chinese and Western painting, Chen Shizeng asserted that the subjective and spiritual pursuit in literati painting coincided with Western modernist trends, and thus that literati painting was advanced. Chen Shizeng’s argument demonstrated his extensive knowledge of Western art, and challenged the stereotype that literati painters were conservative. Chen Shizeng’s way of appreciating literati painting in a Western light responded to Cai Yuanpei’s expectations of employing scientific methods to study fine art, which he had declared in the speech at the Painting Research Society. 396 Nonetheless, Chen Shizeng’s scientific attitude was manifested in his profound knowledge and discursive eloquence, instead of in pictorial realism as Cai Yuanpei suggested. This diversity of viewpoints and interpretations on a single topic became typical of the art field of early twentieth-century China.

396 Cai, ‘Zai Beijing daxue huafa yanjiuhui shang de yanshuoci’, p. 86.
In addition to Chen Shizeng, Hu Peiheng also endeavoured to modernise the image of literati painting. To dispute the pervasive attack on the lack of emphasis of drawing from nature in Chinese painting, Hu Peiheng, in the essay, *Zhongguohua xiezheng de wenti* (‘Problems of Drawing from Nature in Chinese Painting’), argued that Chinese artists learnt the regional landscapes of China through the brushwork of earlier painters. To realistically render the distinctive landscape of a region, Chinese painters invented various kinds of brushstrokes. Imitation was seminal in Chinese painting learning because Chinese painters had to learn the appropriate brushwork in order to precisely represent nature in paint.\(^\text{397}\) Drawing from nature was considered as the key to the dichotomy between Chinese and Western painting, and to the reversal of their standing in modern times. It thus became an important issue in the art field. The third issue of *Painting Miscellany* published several essays on drawing from nature, such as *Jixie de xiesheng* (‘Mechanically Drawing from Nature’) and *Xiesheng de wojian* (‘My View of Drawing from Nature’), in addition to Hu Peiheng’s ‘Problems of Drawing from Nature in Chinese Painting’.\(^\text{398}\) Although the Painting Research Society contained tutors of Chinese and Western painting, its magazine seemingly became the voice of the traditional camp. The aforementioned essays contributed by the tutors of Chinese painting revealed their anxiety over the gradual dominance of drawing from nature in China’s art world, something which bought Western realism into the mainstream of the fine art realm and increasingly threatened the superiority of the expressive and symbolic brushwork of Chinese literati painting. To reverse the waning fate of literati


painting in the twentieth century, the traditional camp engaged in modernising
Chinese painting, while preserving its traditional essence. Chen Shizeng’s
Western perspective on literati painting was echoed in other traditional circles.
The *Guohua tekan* (國畫特刊, ‘Special Issue on National Painting’), which was
edited by the *Guohua yanjiuhui* (國畫研究會, ‘Chinese Painting Research
Society’) in 1926, published several articles to compare the development of
Chinese painting with the Western art trend, articles with titles such as *Biaoxian
zhuyi yu Zhongguo huihu* (表現主義與中國繪畫, ‘Expressionism and Chinese
Painting’).\(^3\) *Zhongguo huaxue yanjiuhui* (中國畫學研究會, ‘The Chinese
Painting Research Society’), of which Chen Shizeng was a leading member,
aimed to study ancient methods of Chinese painting and to assimilate new
knowledge.\(^4\) Its purpose represented the strategies that the tutors of the
Painting Research Society adopted to consolidate the significance of literati
painting in the twentieth century.

The *Painting Miscellany* was planning to publish a fourth issue and
appointed Chen Shizeng as the chief editor.\(^5\) However, this fourth issue was
not published and Chen Shizeng died in 1923. His posthumous essay *Zhuanke
xiaoshi* (篆刻小識, ‘Some Knowledge about Seal Cutting’) was published in the
first issue of *Zaoxing meishu zazhi* (造形美術雜誌, ‘The Magazine of Plastic
Art’) in 1924.\(^6\) This magazine succeeded *Painting Miscellany* and altered its
title following the change of name and structure of the Painting Research Society.
Articles on traditional Chinese painting remained the focus of the magazine,
including the essays of Chen Shizeng, Hu Peiheng, Yao Hua, as well as some

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\(^3\) Chen, ‘Chen Shizeng Zhongguohua jinbulun zhi yiyi’, p. 98.
\(^5\) *Beijing daxue rikan*, 26 May 1922.
articles on Chinese painting and Oriental art translated from foreign treatises.\textsuperscript{403} 

*Painting Miscellany* served as a pivotal device for assimilating and institutionalizing both Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic ideals, and the neologism *meishu*, which fostered the formation of the Westernised art field in China. It accommodated two conflicting forces, which were derived from two opposite art systems. The conflicting feature represented the complexity of China's art field and foresees the debates and difficulties Chinese painters encountered on the grounds of the large-scale transplant of a Western art framework in an art world dominated by calligraphy and literati philosophy. The two conflicting forces consolidated their significance in the art field by means of claims about legitimising Western realism and modernising Chinese painting respectively. The discursive practices Xu Beihong learnt at the Society, as well as from the eloquent intellectuals of the Beijing University, such as Cai Yuanpei and Chen Duxiu, were manifested in the discursive space of the 1929 National Art Exhibition, where Xu Beihong made a reputation by both his eloquence in the discursive space and his provocative gesture of absenting himself from the exhibition space.\textsuperscript{404} The 1929 Art Exhibition was the first state-sponsored nationwide art festival. The variety in its repertoire and participants demonstrated the maturity of the art field in China, and underlay the conflicted nature of this art exhibition. Xu Beihong's defence of realism, intellectual eloquence, and progressive manner saw a continuation of his experience at the Beijing University.


\textsuperscript{404} This part will be studied in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

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More importantly, Xu Beihong’s promotion of and teaching on drawing from nature at the Society underlay his later dedication to the institutionalisation of realism. Drawing natural objects and scenes which Xu Beihong suggested in the learning of painting shows the advanced role that he played in the institutionalisation of Western art teaching in China. The previous chapter has elaborated the wide circulation of Western realistic skills in both early art institutes and the commercial market in China. Nonetheless, drawing from nature was not on the curriculum until Li Shutong (李叔同, 1880-1942) taught at the Zhejiang Normal School (Zhejiang liangji shifan xuetao 浙江两级师范学堂) in 1912. Li Shutong first taught students painting by means of drawing casts and still life compositions. Later, in 1914, he became the first teacher in China to use live models to teach painting at the School. By comparison, in the Shanghai Art Academy, which might have been the most representative institute of teaching Western art in early twentieth-century China, imitation was still the dominant mechanism for teaching and learning painting. Chen Baoyi recalled the difficulties that he encountered when he introduced drawing from nature into the Shanghai Art Academy in around 1915 because of the dominance of imitation on the campus. Lai Haisu supported Chen Baoyi’s method of teaching painting but also met many difficulties in finding models. The exhibition of nude figure drawings in 1917 brought the Shanghai Art Academy under severe attack. These serious disputes and conflicts over life drawing in China continued into the 1920s. It took a great deal of effort and a very long

405 Li Chao 李超, Zhongguo bainian youhuashi 中國百年油畫史, 'A Century of Chinese Oil Painting' (Shanghai, 2007), p. 58.
407 For a study of this event, see Chou Fangmei 周芳美, ‘Ershi shijiu chu Zhongguo huhua zhong nanxing luoti xingxiang de gaibian’ 二十世紀中華繪畫中男性裸體形象的改變, 'Changes over the images of male nudes in early twentieth-century Chinese painting', Renwen xuebao 26 (2002), pp. 97-142 (pp. 104-105).
408 Li, Zhongguo bainian youhuashi, pp. 65-66.
time for the Chinese audience to eventually accept life drawing and the public
display of nudes. Xu Beihong’s paintings from the portrait of Kang Youwei in
the style of Shanghai commercial art to *Fighting with a Lion* rendered with the
practice of drawing casts demonstrate the shifts in art teaching and learning in
China (Figs 13 & 79). These paintings also represent Xu Beihong’s keen
concerns over the latest knowledge of fine art in China, as well as his
endeavours in upgrading his status from commercial artisan to fine art painter.
He might have been influenced by the call for drawing from nature that had
emerged in southern China in the mid-1910s and assimilated it into his teaching
in Beijing. Xu Beihong had participated in the early institutionalisation of
Western art teaching in the 1910s. Later he acquired a rigorous training in
Western academic realism and brought back to China a more systematic teaching
of fine art in the 1920s. The Beijing University Painting Research Society
provided a stage for Xu Beihong to disseminate and develop his artistic
philosophy revolving around fine art and realism. His efforts in the
institutionalisation of life drawing and realism throughout his life exerted a great
impact on China’s art education and in turn brought about his prestigious status
in China’s art world.
Chapter 4 The Translation of Realism

4.1 Xu Beihong’s Art Studies in Paris

Following the pilgrimage to study art in the West, which started to flourish from the late 1910s among Chinese students, Xu Beihong embarked on a Japanese cargo boat for London with more than 90 students of the Sino-French work-study scheme in March 1919. In his journey to Paris, Xu Beihong stopped at London, where he visited the British Museum, National Galley and Royal Academy of Arts. The artworks which drew his attention were the Parthenon sculptures (447-432 B.C.), the paintings of the Spaniard Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), and of the British artists John Constable (1776-1837) and J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), the American portraitist John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), and the British academic painter Charles Sims (1873-1928). Xu Beihong arrived in Paris on 20 May 1919. The first place he rushed to visit was the Louvre, where he saw Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa, as well as paintings of Raphael and Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). In addition, he paid a visit to the retrospective exhibition of the academic painter Emile Auguste Carolus-Duran (1837-1917), which was held at the Luxemburg Museum (Fig. 86). He also went to the Salon, where the works of Léon Bonnat (1833-1922), Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921), Pascal Adolphe Jean Dagnan-Bouveret (1852-1929), François Flameng (1856-1923), Albert Besnard (1849-1934), Léon-Augustin L’Hermitte (1844-1925), and Fernand Cormon (1854-1924) were on display. The aforementioned painters either represented realistic craftsmanship in their works, or had some association with the Western classical tradition. The participating artists of the Salon who

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409 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, pp. 22-23.
drew Xu Beihong’s attention were all academicians of the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institute of France, who were listed in Xu Beihong’s 1922 article, *Zhi Chenguang meishuhui* (致晨光美術會, “To the Dawn Society of Fine Arts”). Xu Beihong regarded them as among the best artists in the contemporary art world of France. Because the aforementioned experiences were recorded in Xu Beihong’s autobiography, which was published in 1930, when he had become a spokesman for Western realism in the art world of China, his memoirs may be in part shaped by his later training in the French art academy, and by the stance he took. Nonetheless, the museums and exhibitions he visited to a certain degree revealed his penchant for the classical strand of Western art from the beginning of his studies in Paris. Xu Beihong’s enthusiasm for art was also recorded in Jiang Biwei’s memoirs. She recalled that Xu Beihong spend most of his time in visiting museums, while she had to study French hard during the first six months of their arrival.413

Xu Beihong first enrolled at the Académie Julian, the most popular private academy preparing artists for the École des Beaux-Arts.414 After two months, he sat the entrance examinations for the École des Beaux-Arts, and was accepted into the studio of Flameng (Fig. 87). Lucien Simon (1861-1945) succeeded to Flameng’s position after he died in 1923.415 Xu Beihong once provided an account of the studios at the École.416 New students did not have to pay any tuition fees, and were only obliged to pay for refreshment for the whole studio

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when they first arrived. They were also obliged to tidy the studio. In addition, the academicicians who taught at the École des Beaux-Arts drew Xu Beihong’s high praise for their possession of authentic knowledge of art. Xu Beihong’s adoration for the École de Beaux-Arts was in opposition to Lin Fengmian’s. In Lin’s opinion, it was ridiculous to ask the newcomers to buy the whole class drinks and to tidy the studio. Besides, Lin Fengmian also complained that newcomers were often bullied, and compared this insulting treatment to that in prison. The assistant tutor, who was in charge of the daily practicalities of studio life, in Lin Fengmian’s eyes was like the warden. Lin Fengmian did not enjoy the atmosphere at the studios of the École des Beaux-Arts, and thus he preferred visiting museums rather than going to the studio of Cormon. Lin Fengmian’s description of Cormon’s studio reinforces John Milner’s study of Cormon’s private atelier in the late nineteenth century. In Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian’s accounts, the studios of the École des Beaux-Arts in the early twentieth century remained largely the same as they had been in the nineteenth century. It seems that the French academic teaching system of the nineteenth century changed little and continued into the next century. Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong shared some similar experiences. For example, they both went to study at the École des Beaux-Arts and then were appointed heads of leading art departments and academies in the 1920s after they returned to China. Although they both studied at the French academy, they later developed different personal

painting styles. Lin Fengmian assimilated the latest trends of the Western art of his day, such as Expressionism and Fauvism, while Xu Beihong became loyal to the Western classical tradition and Realism (Figs 88-89). Scholars of modern Chinese art have often compared them to reveal the diversity of the art world of modern China, and on the basis of this comparison, Xu Beihong is often criticised as a conservative.

In Xu Beihong’s account, students at the École des Beaux-Arts were asked to draw from the plaster casts first, and then from the antique and from live models. These practical courses were joined by theoretical ones, such as anatomy, perspective, art history, aesthetics and history of antiquities. Xu Beihong was particularly fond of the anatomy course. He praised the teacher of the course, Paul Richer (1849-1933, professor at the École des Beaux-Arts from 1903 to 1933), as the best all over the world in this discipline. Xu Beihong’s results seem to have been the best among the contemporary Chinese students who pursued art studies in Paris. He was placed fourteenth in the first year and sixth in the second year of the annual examination of the École. According to Jiang Biwei’s memoirs, Xu Beihong was the only one among the Chinese students, who also studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, to pass both examinations in theories and techniques. Xu Beihong’s knowledge of Western art theories later made him an eloquent proponent of French academic art and realism in the

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422 For example, Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’.
425 Shibao, 5 March 1926.
426 Jiang, Jiang Biwei huyilu, p. 38.
discursive space of China’s art world. Xu Beihong’s results demonstrated his diligence. Jiang Biwei recalled that Xu Beihong often painted too hard to eat and sleep. Xu Beihong’s diligence drew attention from a journalist of the Shibao, Wang Ye (萬葉), who ran into Xu Beihong in Paris one evening. He praised the fact that Xu Beihong was too preoccupied with his art studies to be distracted by the pleasures of Paris. Xu Beihong also recorded his studious attitude in one of his drawings, saying that he did not have time for lunch for two weeks when he sat the examinations in the spring of 1921 (Fig. 90). Diligence became a virtue that Xu Beihong was proud of, as well as a standard by which to measure an artist’s accomplishments. Xu Beihong took his straitened circumstances as an example to argue that ‘unusual diligence’ underlay an artist’s talent. Moreover, the French painter Pierre-Paul Prud’hon (1758-1823) and sculptor Pierre Puget (1622-1694) drew Xu Beihong’s praise for their resolution to overcome the hardships that they encountered in their art studies.

Financial hardship was common among the Chinese students in Paris. Pang Xunqin (龐薰琹, 1906-1985) only had bread for Christmas. To distract his suffering from hunger, he thus kept painting from morning to midnight.

Chang Yu, who was from a well-to-do family, also encountered the hardship of poverty. He once could not fulfil a commitment because he did not have money to buy the required materials. Xu Zhimo’s short fiction, Rouyan de Bali (肉豔的巴黎, ‘Sensual Paris’), may provide a glimpse into the life of Chinese students.

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427 Jiang, Jiang Biwei huiyilu, p. 38.
428 Shibao, 5 March 1926.
432 Xiu, Shanghai-Paris, p. 97.
in Paris. Xu Zhimo in the fiction told the story of a friend, who was studying art in Paris. He lived in an attic of an old building, where the interior was always dim. When Xu Zhimo visited his place, he showed Xu Zhimo his collection, including a drawing by Bonnat and one by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). Moreover, he praised the ideal beauty in the nudes of Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) and Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), and criticised the ugliness in those of Matisse, Cézanne and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). This taste for art is reminiscent of that of Xu Beihong. The attic, where Xu Zhimo’s friend lived, is also reminiscent of Xu Beihong’s place in the Avenue de Friedland. Nevertheless, the life style of Xu Zhimo’s friend in the fiction was decadent. He was a night owl. His interminable comments on models in a sensual tone, which constituted the main theme of this fiction, suggested that the protagonist lived a depraved life, in opposition to Xu Beihong’s studious life style. This fiction may be a synthesis of several art students’ experiences. Thus, it reflected various aspects of Chinese students’ life in Paris in the 1920s, including that of Xu Beihong.

In addition to the studio of Flameng, Xu Beihong also learnt painting at the private studio of Dagnan-Bouveret on Sundays, till he retuned to China in 1927. Dagnan-Bouveret was a teacher of the École des Beaux-Arts and an academician of the Institute of France. Moreover, he was also a leading member of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, which was set up in 1890 under the

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433 Xu Zhimo studied at LSE and Cambridge in the UK. He went to Paris in 1924 and became a good friend of Xu Beihong and his wife. Jiang, Jiang Biwei huiyi lu, p. 147.
436 Some studies argue that the artist in Xu Zhimo’s fiction is reminiscent of Chang Yu’s life in Paris. Chen, Chang Yu, p. 28.
437 On Dagnan-Bouveret’s studio, see Milner, The Studios of Paris, p. 190.
leadership of Ernest Meissonier (1815-1891). The Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts and The Société des Artistes Français dominated the jury of the Salon. Hence, Dagnan-Bouveret was an influential figure in the official art world of France. Dagnan-Bouveret at the École des Beaux-Arts was the student of the well-established academician Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), who was known for his infusion of photographic veracity and a sense of contemporaneity into historical painting (Fig. 91). Gérôme’s meticulous painting style also demonstrated itself in his teaching which was known as demanding, incisive and thorough. Under such training, Dagnan-Bouveret was skilled at making a painting realistically with painstaking care, a skill which won him a reputation as a Realist. His genre paintings, which were rendered with photographic verisimilitude, made him a more successful painter of Naturalism. Horses at the Watering Trough, which was executed in 1884, was a highly acclaimed painting in the 1885 Salon (Fig. 92). The closely observed and accurately transcribed details demonstrated how Dagnan-Bouveret heightened the illusion of reality with the aid of photographs (Fig. 93). This horse painting may have exerted some influence on Xu Beihong’s later creation of horse painting. Although the ink and expressive style in Xu Beihong’s horse painting is very different from the realistic oil painting of Horses at the Watering Trough. Xu

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439 On the collapse of the official Salon system in the 1880s and the contesting situation of different forces and institutions in the art world of France in the late nineteenth century, see Patricia Mainardi, The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic (Cambridge and New York, 1994).
442 For a comprehensive study of Dagnan-Bouveret, see Gabriel P. Weisberg, Against the Modern: Dagnan-Bouveret and the Transformation of the Academic Tradition (New York, 2002).
443 Realism and Naturalism both required painstaking craftsmanship. The realistic effects made them synonymous. Many Realists were also Naturalists, such as Dagnan-Bouveret. On Naturalism, see Gabriel P. Weisberg, Beyond Impressionism: the Naturalist Impulse in European Art, 1860-1905 (London, 1992).
444 Weisberg, Against the Modern, pp. 70-72.
Beihong’s pencil drawings of horses demonstrated the importance of Western pictorial devices in the making of his ink horse paintings (Fig. 94). The photographic verisimilitude in Xu Beihong’s early portrait paintings may also draw on his admiration for Dagnan-Bouveret’s attainments. Dagnan-Bouveret turned to pursue in his painting a sense of transcendent spirituality in his later career. The combination of Realism and Symbolism in Dagnan-Bouveret’s later works was highly regarded by Xu Beihong as the best examples to represent the works of ideal beauty with realistic craftsmanship, which Xu Beihong expounded in the article, ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’.446

In addition to studying art with the academicians at the academy and in studios, Xu Beihong’s pastime was to visit museums and the antiquarian bookshops along the river Seine. Moreover, he also sharpened his art skills by copying paintings in museums. Copying masterpieces in museums seemed to be a widespread practice for art students. Wang Yachen spent two years in Paris on copying the works of the masters, such as those of Titian (1485-1576), Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), Rembrandt (1606-1669), Rubens, Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), etc. During his sojourn in Paris, Wang Yachen copied a total of 32 paintings. Jiang Biwei’s account provides a glimpse into Xu Beihong’s diligence in copying masterpieces. She recalled that Xu Beihong arranged an extra visit to the National Gallery in London to copy Velázquez’s The Toilet of Venus (1647-1651), which took him ten days (Fig. 95), when he was mounting a Chinese painting exhibition in Paris in 1933. Xu Beihong’s copy of Raphael’s The Miraculous Draught of Fishes (1515-1516) appeared at Sotheby’s auction of

445 Weisberg, Against the Modern, pp. 105-118.
446 Xu Beihong, ‘Faguo yishu jinkuang’, p. 72.
447 Jiang, Jiang Biwei huiyilu, p. 38.
448 Xu, Shanghai - Paris, p. 108.
449 Jiang, Jiang Biwei huiyilu, p. 82. On Chinese painting exhibitions held in Europe in the 1930s, see Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker et al. eds, Shanghai Modern 1919-1945 (München, 2004), pp. 27-44 & 112-126.
Fine Modern Chinese Oil Paintings, Watercolors and Sculpture in Taipei in October 1992 (Figs 96-97). This painting is dated 1933 (Gui you 縣酉), meaning that Xu Beihong also copied Raphael’s work at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Xu Beihong’s industry and ability can be seen in his faithful copy of Raphael’s painting.

Whether in his autobiography or other people’s memoirs, Xu Beihong’s image is always serious and studious. Nevertheless, his initiation into the Heavenly Dog Society (Tiangouhui 天狗會) revealed another side of Xu Beihong. The name of the Heavenly Dog Society seemed to form an ironic response to the famous art society, the Heavenly Horse Society (Tianmahuì 天馬會), which was founded in Shanghai in 1919. Its leading members included several influential figures in the Western art world of Shanghai, such as Liu Haisu, Wang Yachen, and Ding Song. A picture in which Xu Beihong and his wife were photographed around 1923 reveals Xu Beihong’s dandified appearance (Fig. 98). Xu Beihong was one of the principle members of the Heavenly Dog Society, along with Xie Shoukang (謝壽康, 1894-?), Shao Xunmei (邵洵美, 1906-1968), Zhang Daofan (張道藩, 1897-1968), Chang Yu, and Jiang Biwei. Several members, such as Shao Xunmei and Chang Yu, often behaved in a relatively bohemian manner. Jiang Biwei recalled how they often went to the cinemas and sat in the cafés several times a day. Xu Beihong later also attended the ateliers in Montparnasse, the centre of

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451 For a detailed account of the Heavenly Dog Society, see Jiang Biwei, Jiang Biwei huìyìlù, pp. 42-43, 47 & 50.
453 Jiang, Jiang Biwei huìyìlù, p. 47.
454 On Shao Xunmei, see Lin Qi 林詩, Haishang caizi Shao Xunmei zhuan 海上才子邵洵美傳, ‘A Biography of the Wit in Shanghai, Shao Xunmei’ (Shanghai, 2002). On Chang Yu, see Chen Yanfeng 陳炎鋒, Chang Yu 常玉 (Taipei, 1995).
avant-garde art in Paris. It may be that he was influenced by Chang Yu, whose nude paintings represented a sensual atmosphere in the style of Matisse and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) (Fig. 99).\textsuperscript{455} Chang Yu and Xu Beihong developed a close friendship when they were in Paris. Their friendship can be in part manifest in a paper sheet, of which one side is a drawing of lions and the other side an ink flower painting (Figs 100-101). The drawing of lions executed by Xu Beihong around 1922 represented a Western realistic style, while the flower painting made by Chang Yu in 1921 demonstrated a literati taste for traditional Chinese painting. These two works on a sheet’s two sides illustrated in part the dichotomy of realism and idealism in modern Chinese painting, in the face of the call for pro-Western reforms in China’s art world in the twentieth century. Moreover, this sheet has also been used as a convincing manifestation of Xu Beihong’s image as a conservative realist.\textsuperscript{456} With a growing popular Western modernist perspective on modern Chinese painting in the related scholarship, Xu Beihong has been gradually shaped as a conservative proponent of Western Realism, which was outdated in the West in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{457} Nonetheless, Xu Beihong’s photographs, friends, and the contemporary Chinese press indicated that he was regarded as a modern painter at that time. When Xu Beihong returned to China in 1927, a report said that Xu Beihong, with his long hair and detached languid manners, was a bohemian artist of the Latin Quarter of Paris.\textsuperscript{458} A drawing of Shao Xunmei done by Xu Beihong may exemplify the diversity of a modern Chinese artist (Fig. 102). The realistic rendering of Shao Xunmei demonstrated Xu Beihong’s solid foundation in a Western academic training. Nonetheless, the

\textsuperscript{456} Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’.
\textsuperscript{457} For example, the latest essays include Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’; Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’. For a study on the formulation of Modernism, see Jonathan Harris, \textit{Writing Back to Modern Art: After Greenberg, Fried, and Clark} (New York, 2005).
\textsuperscript{458} van der Meyden, ‘Submerged in a Melting-Pot of International Art’, p.40
painstaking style of this drawing seemed contradictory to Shao Xunmei’s image, as a writer well known for the decadent style in his writings and life. Xu Beihong and Shao Xunmei’s friendship remained after Xu Beihong became an advocate of realism, who severely criticised modernist art. Xu Beihong was a studious student in Paris and acquired attainments in painstaking realism through academic training. At the same time, he was also a young and ambitious Chinese painter, who was fond of the dashing side of Paris. His skill in academic realism rapidly made him the proponent of Western realism in the competitive art field in China; meanwhile the diversity in his art and disposition was gradually submerged in the shaping of his image as a realist hero.

Drawing may be the best exemplification of Xu Beihong’s academic training in Paris. During his sojourn in Europe, Xu Beihong was productive. He made a considerable number of drawings, as well as oil figure paintings, and drafts of history paintings. Xu Beihong’s drawings on the one hand demonstrated that he was a studious student; on the other hand, they revealed the demanding and strict training system at the École de Beaux-Arts. The life at the École consisted of endless contests up to that for the Prix de Rome. The competition started from the beginning. Aspirants to be official students of the École had to take examinations annually, and the results would affect the allocation of seats in the drawing classes. For Xu Beihong, painstakingly realistic rendering was the way to embody diligence and thus was the visual equivalent of moral integrity. Xu Beihong’s point of view responded to the influential French Neoclassical painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres’s (1780-1867) dictum that

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460 On Prim de Rome, see Lethève, *Daily Life of French Artists in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 31-34.
drawing was the probity of art. The dictum had been set as the guide in academic teaching.462

Comparing the drawings that Xu Beihong had done in 1921 and 1922 with those from 1924, we see that Xu Beihong made great progress in his painting attainments (Figs 103-106). The drawings of 1921 and 1922 are studies of male bodies. The layers of light and shade are not rich enough to represent the smooth texture of skin. It seems that Xu Beihong strived to take care of each part of the bodies and thus was unable to portray the live models as a whole. His skills were not mature at that time. Nevertheless, Xu Beihong seemed to overcome the difficulties and was able to represent anatomically precise human bodies in his works of 1924. The exquisite and thorough modelling with subtle gradations of light and shade vividly represents the texture of male skin at different ages. Even in a drawing done with a much more rough touch, the portrayed male nude still remains anatomically precise (Fig. 107). In this male figure drawing, Xu Beihong showed more confidence. It seems that he was able to represent a human body precisely only with bold use of light and shade. It showed that Xu Beihong’s drawing attainments had allowed him to draw from life with a more personal and even playful touch.

Comparing the aforementioned drawings with Xu Beihong’s early portrait paintings, in which the figure bodies are thin and schematic without a hint of volume, we see that Xu Beihong benefited greatly from the knowledge of anatomy that he learnt from the related courses at the École. As mentioned above, the anatomy class at the École and the teacher Paul Richer drew high praise from Xu Beihong. Richer was interested in studying the mechanics of physical

movements.\textsuperscript{463} In a series of photographs that he took of a male model in various positions, some of the poses seemingly imitated classical sculptures (Fig. 108). For example, the one in the third line, the second from the right, is posed in imitation of Michelangelo's famous statue \textit{David}. Richer also took a few series of female bodies in various positions (Figs 109-110). Some of these poses are also seen in Xu Beihong's drawings, such as the lying pose (Fig. 111) and the standing pose in the second row, the second from the left (Fig. 112). Xu Beihong must have drawn from the models posed in the life class, instead of from those taken in the photographs. However, these pictures reflected the way in which anatomy helped to improve a student's drawing skills.

Xu Beihong's industry is also demonstrated in his great patience in repeatedly drawing from the same live model from various angles (Figs 113-115). The tones of light and shade and the finished degree in the three drawings are very similar, showing Xu Beihong's meticulous attitude towards studying art.

The Russian-born American sculptor Saul Baizerman (1899-1957) described the life class that he took at the Beaux-Arts Institution of Design, saying that "We usually had four weeks with the same model and the same pose".\textsuperscript{464} Although it was a description of the life class in early twentieth-century New York, it can provide us with a glimpse into the life class at the contemporaneous École de Beaux-Arts in Paris. The same pose was a challenge for both models and students. It was boring and painful, as Baizerman complained, to manage to keep the momentum to draw from the same live model from different angles. This demanding practice, which revealed the high standard of perfection at the École, seemed to be embodied in Xu Beihong's drawings.

The thorough rendering and highly finished touch represent idealised beauty

\textsuperscript{463} Callen, 'The Body and Difference', pp. 45-52.
\textsuperscript{464} Carl Goldstein, \textit{Teaching Art}, p. 180.
in the portrayed figures of Xu Beihong’s drawings. The idealised beauty of the
human form was regarded by the academies as the embodiment of man’s moral
and spiritual value.\(^{465}\) The human body, which served as the highest form of art,
had been central to the doctrines of academic art since the seventeenth century
when the Academy was established.\(^{466}\) Nonetheless, perfect beauty did not
simply lie in human figures, but in the idealised form, which could be found in
the classical painting and sculpture. Therefore, in an academic training, drawing
from a live model was as important as drawing from the antique. The thoroughly
realistic skills were the best means to crystallise this beauty, by making a human
figure as idealised and smooth as a classical statue of marble. Xu Beihong’s
drawing of a female nude with the texture of a sculpture can demonstrate such
academic aesthetics (Fig. 116). The drawing depicts a woman taking a nap. The
rigid lines of her face express the hard touch of stone; and the exquisite
smoothness of her skin is also suggestive of marble; but the belly represents the
soft texture of the human body. Xu Beihong’s highly finished touch makes it
harder to tell whether the portrayed figure is a human body or a statue.

Xu Beihong’s drawings demonstrate his solid foundation in an academic
training. They rapidly won Xu Beihong a reputation as an accomplished
Westernised Chinese painter. Moreover, Xu Beihong argued that the painstaking
and realistic rendering in academic art, which represented human morality, could
serve as the remedy for the decadence in present China.\(^{467}\) The academic
aesthetics, which regarded the idealised human figure executed with realistic
craftsmanship as the embodiment of spirituality and morality, may provide an
answer to Xu Beihong’s lifelong loyalty to realism and academic art, because it

\(^{466}\) White, *Canvases and Careers*, p. 6.
\(^{467}\) Xu Beihong, ‘Angeer de suimiao’ 安格爾的素描, ‘Drawings of Ingres’, in Xu and Jin, *Xu
could serve as the model for realistic Chinese portraiture to represent the
spiritual resonance of literati painting, and thus raise their position in the Chinese
painting realm. This elevation of the cultural power of Chinese professional
painting would help Xu Beihong to increase his cultural capital and significance
in China’s art world.
4.2 Xu Beihong’s Reading of Western Realism during 1921-1926

After leaving for Europe from Shanghai in March 1919, Xu Beihong did not publish any essay on art until 1921 when the article, ‘To the Dawn Society of Fine Arts’, was published in the first issue of Chenguang (晨光) magazine. In 1925, Xu Beihong wrote prefaces for two catalogues: Beihong huiji xu (悲鴻繪集 序, ‘Preface to A Collection of Beihong’s Paintings’), and ‘Prud’hon’. In 1926, the press published several speeches give by Xu Beihong when he returned to China for a few months to look for financial support. These speeches have been repeatedly published, and provide an encapsulation of Xu Beihong’s art studies in Europe from 1919 to 1926, as well as of his perception of Western realism.\textsuperscript{468} The speeches of 1926, which are in wide circulation, are as follows: ‘Author’s Preface to The Drawings of Beihong’, ‘The Current Situation in French Art’, Xueshu yanjiu zhi tanhua (學術研究之談話, ‘A Talk on Academic Research’), Meishu zhi qiyuan jiqi zhendi – Zai Shanghai Xinwen xuehui jiangyanci (美術之起源及其真諦 - 在上海新聞學會講演辭, ‘The Origin and Essence of Art – A Speech Given to the Shanghai Journalism Society’), ‘The Anatomy of Beauty – A Speech Given to the Shanghai Kailuo Company’), Yu Shibao jizhe tan yishu (與《時報》記者談藝術, ‘Conversation on Art with a Journalist of the Shibao’), Zai Zhonghua yishu daxue jiangyanci (在中國藝術大學講演辯, ‘A Speech Given at the Chinese University of Art’), and Gujin Zhongwai yishulun – Zai Datong daxue jiangyanci (古今中外藝術論 - 在大同大學講演辯, ‘On Ancient and Modern, Chinese and Western Art – A Speech Given at Datong University’).\textsuperscript{469} Xu Beihong mentioned realism several times in these speeches. Nonetheless, the term realism for Xu Beihong seemingly referred

\textsuperscript{468} Xu Beihong moved to Berlin for about one and half years from July 1921, due to financial pressure. Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, pp. 26-29.

\textsuperscript{469} These speeches are collected in Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji, pp. 47-103.
to a set of meanings. His reading of Western realism was varied rather than fixed.

Sometimes, Xu Beihong referred Realism to a specific painting school of
nineteenth century France. More often, Xu Beihong referred realism to a kind of
art practice.

Xu Beihong first referred to Realism as a specific painting school in the
article, ‘To the Dawn Society of Fine Arts’. He argued:

Back in the nineteenth century, Classicism enjoyed its heyday and
was succeeded by Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism and so
forth. A wide variety of painting schools have been dominant and
flourishing in the French art arena one after another since then. I
would like to list the best-known living artists as follows. However, I will not include the artists of Cubism and German
Expressionism, who do not have great significance.

Following this brief account of modern French art, Xu Beihong gave a list of
artists, whom he regarded as among the best in the world of modern art in France.
These artists included Bonnat, Dagnan-Bouveret, Flameng, Cormon, L.P.
Laurens, L’Hermitte, Besnard and so forth. He marked Dagnan-Bouveret and
L’Hermitte as Realists. Both of them were famous for their realistic depiction of
the themes of peasants and common people, done with a dignified touch (Fig.
117). Here, Realism referred Xieshipai to the painting school, which was led
by French Realists in the nineteenth century, as the art historian Linda Nochlin
defined it: “Realism, as an historical movement in the figurative arts and in
literature, attained its most coherent and consistent formulation in France, with
echoes, parallels and variants elsewhere on the Continent, in England and in the

470 Xu, ‘Zhi Chenguang meishuhui’, p. 49.
471 Nochlin, Realism, p. 17.
United States. Preceded by Romanticism and followed by what is now generally
termed Symbolism, it was the dominant movement from about 1840 until
1870-1880." 472

Xu Beihong pointed out that the aforementioned artists were academicians
of the Institute of France. The academicians were often also the teachers of the
École des Beaux-Arts. Dagnan-Bouveret, Flameng and Cormon were teachers of
Xu Beihong. 473 Besnard became acquainted with Xu Beihong through
Dagnan-Bouveret. 474 He was marked as an Impressionist by Xu Beihong (Fig.
118). In addition to the academicians, Xu Beihong also listed some artists who
were among the best in his eyes, such as Georges Antoine Rochegrosse
(1859-1938), Lucien Simon, and Clémentine-Hélène Dufau (1869-1937) (Fig.
119). 475 Although they were not academicians, they were members of the
Société des Artistes Français, the association of French painters and sculptors
which was set up in 1881. It took charge of the official Salon from 1880 and thus
represented official taste. 476 The aforementioned artists often appeared in the
Gazette des Beaux-Arts, the journal believed to be representative of academic
taste. For example, an article on Dufau was published in the October/November
1917 issue of Gazette des Beaux-Arts. 477 An article on Prud’hon’s retrospective
exhibition at the Petit-Palais was published in the May 1922 issue. 478 Xu
Beihong published an article on Prud’hon in 1925 and in it quoted Étienne
Bricon’s praise for Prud’hon. Bricon was the editor writer of Gazette des

472 Nochlin, Realism, p. 13.
473 Cormon once taught Xu Beihong for a while as a supply teacher at the École. Wan Qingli,
‘Lin Fengmian yu tade Faguo laoshi Feiernande Keluomeng (Fernand-Anne Piestre Cormon,
1845-1924)’, pp. 210-211
474 Xu, Shanghai-Paris, p. 115.
475 Xu, ‘Zhi Chenguang meishuhui’, p. 49.
477 Chou and Wu, ‘1920 ji 30 niandai Zhongguo huajia fu Bali xihua hou dui Shanghai yitan de
yingxiang’ pp. 636-637.
478 Raymond Bouyer, ‘Le Génie de Prud’hon: A L’Exposition du Petit-Palais’, Gazette des
Beaux-Arts, 727 (1922), pp. 261-274.
Beaux-Arts. Xu Beihong’s knowledge of the French art arena was apparently through an academic lens. He was aware of the latest Western art trends, but he still referred to modern art as the painting schools of the nineteenth century. From a modernist perspective, Xu Beihong was conservative. His view of Western art was that of painters who grew up in the nineteenth century, such as his teachers at the École des Beaux-Arts, rather than those of an avant-garde.

In the article, ‘Conversation on Art with a Journalist of the Shibao’, Xu Beihong also referred to Realism as the most significant nineteenth century French painting school when he was elaborating the development of Western painting. He argued:

Later on, [Gustave] Courbet (1819-1877) and [Jean-François] Millet (1814-1875) promoted Realism, since they argued that all kinds of subjects should be allowed to be depicted in painting. What really mattered was whether or not a painter was able to study the subject-matter thoroughly. Afterwards, [Jules] Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884) established Impressionism, as he was unsatisfied with the ignorance of landscape subject matter in the paintings of the aforementioned artists. [The Impressionists] thought that beauty lay in the spirit of the depicted object. They complained that painstaking emulation and detailed depiction could only gain the form but not the spirit of the object. Therefore, they intended to represent the first impression of the project portrayed in order to [capture the spirit of the portrayed], something which was missing in the precedent schools. As a consequence, Impressionism became popular. The able Impressionists obtained better artistic accomplishments than their predecessors. Nonetheless, those who were incapable but claimed to be Impressionists, without profound and painstaking techniques, led to the regression of painting craftsmanship. ... The Impressionists were not content with perfecting the depiction of an object’s form. Instead, they aspired to infuse the depicted object with spirit. An art work would not be admirable without a

479 Chou and Wu, '1920 ji 30 niandai Zhongguo huajia fu Bali xihua hou dui Shanghai yitan de yingxiang' pp. 637-638.
spirit in it. The Impressionists actually set strict standards for their art.

Xu Beihong referred to Courbet and Millet as Realists, touching on the democratic connotations and painstaking craftsmanship of Realism. In today's light, it seems wrong for Xu Beihong to regard Bastien-Lepage as the founder of Impressionism. Xu Beihong's view revealed that he perceived Impressionism from the angle of Naturalism, a short-lived art movement beginning in the late 1870s and subsiding in the early 1890s. Naturalism has been ignored in the scholarship on nineteenth century French painting, because it shared the realistic illusion of Realism and the light effects of Impressionism, whose triumph completely overpowered other contemporary art schools. Impressionism and Naturalism displayed the two forms of artistic expression in response to the development of science in the nineteenth century. Both painting schools aimed to scientifically seek the reality of existence in portrayed objects. Naturalism represented this scientific attitude in photographic descriptiveness, while Impressionism situated it in the fleeting glimpse of light. Émile Zola (1840-1902) argued that the Impressionists could be called the counterparts of literary Naturalists, and were the bolder Realists. The scientific approach towards studying nature was shared by both Naturalism and Impressionism. Nevertheless,

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481 Nochlin, Realism, pp. 111-124.
482 Weisberg, Beyond Impressionism, p. 7.
while Impressionists chose to represent nature in the way of bold realism, the Naturalists displayed in their works a still more painstaking realism than the Realists themselves. The painstaking Naturalism was popular among academic painters, whereas the expressive Impressionism found acceptance among the rebellious painters outside the mainstream. Therefore, while Impressionism marked a break with the Western tradition and was in full swing as a school of modernism into the twentieth century, Naturalism's photographic illusion made it a variation of Realism and thus was forsaken when the non-figurative tendency came to dominate the Western art world at the turn of the century.

The *plein-air* (open-air) issue was another concern of both Naturalism and Impressionism. It made contributions to some distinctive features of Impressionism, such as the use of out-of-doors scenery, bright colours and broken brushwork.\(^\text{485}\) The use of *plein-air* was raised as an issue as a result of the Impressionists' scientific enquiry about the essence of reality.\(^\text{486}\) It brought challenges to the finished touch of traditional painting as the way of representing reality.\(^\text{487}\) An interest in *plein-air* subject matter also mounted among academic painters, such as Bastien-Lepage and Dagnan-Bouveret. Bastien-Lepage's *Potato Gatherers* was a highly acclaimed painting in the 1879 Salon (Fig. 120). The photographic illusion and *plein-air* effects made the painting the epitome of Naturalism, and made Bastien-Lepage a representative of Naturalism. Zola highly regarded Bastien-Lepage as the heir to Courbet and Millet. Moreover, he praised Bastien-Lepage for creating an Impressionist tonality in his painting, while maintaining his personal temperament.\(^\text{488}\) This making of Naturalistic

\(^{485}\) Nochlin, *Realism*, p. 137.

\(^{486}\) Nochlin, *Realism*, pp. 137-150.


\(^{488}\) Weisberg, *Against the Modern*, p. 62.
painting was also used in Dagnan-Bouveret’s *Horses at the Watering Trough* (Fig. 92).

In the sentence quoted above from Xu Beihong’s article, it appears that Xu Beihong preferred Impressionism to Realism. Nonetheless, the emphasis on both spirit and craftsmanship reveals that Xu Beihong perceived Impressionism in the light of academic Naturalism rather than of modernism. Accordingly, Xu Beihong regarded Bastien-Lepage as an Impressionist. Xu Beihong’s perception of Impressionism as having an emphasis on painstaking realism made him exclude those painters, who displayed a non-figurative disposition, such as Manet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), from the category of authentic Impressionists. Xu Beihong’s point of view demonstrated his academic stance, which was relatively conservative in the early twentieth century when modernist art gained its apogee.

In the two aforementioned articles, in which Xu Beihong perceived Realism as a specific painting school, he did not reveal an obvious preference for Realism. What he was concerned with more was the realistic techniques, which he believed to be the indispensable component of any painting school. In the article, ‘Conversation on Art with a Journalist of the Shibao’, after giving an account of Western art schools and describing Bastien-Lepage as an Impressionist as quoted above, Xu Beihong argued:

Art has two styles, one is the idealistic and the other is the realistic. Although no known artist in the world paints in an absolutely realistic manner, idealistic artists do not seem capable of crystallising their ideas by means of nonexistent scenes or objects. Consequently, the sculpture created by the most accomplished realist artist, such as Rodin, looks as if it has a soul. In comparison, every detail in the works of an idealistic artist, such as [Pierre] Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898), follows the

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489 Xu, ‘Yu Shibao jizhe tan yishu’, p. 87.

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form of being. Great artists do not subscribe themselves to any school, so that they are able to depict all kinds of things at their will. It is not these artists, but people in a later generation who feel the need to categorise their works. Take Phidias, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Titian and Raphael for example; we cannot point out which school each of them is actually under. As regards Rembrandt and Velázquez, their painting cannot be categorised under the school of Realism because one is Dutch and the other is Spanish. All of them base their accomplishments on realistic practices. With their knowledge growing, techniques developing and aspirations broadening, then they will be able to demonstrate in their work the ideal beauty, through the elegant form and subtle colour of the subjects they depict, because such ideal beauty can only be embodied by an artist with great breadth of mind and with lofty morality. If the embodiment of the ideal beauty is based on drawing from life, it will be called a realistic work; otherwise it will be considered an idealistic work if the ideal beauty is crystallised in a more sensational touch. Nevertheless, I still insist that only those who possess masterly realistic skills are capable of creating an idealistic work.

In this paragraph, realism refers to a set of meanings, including a style, an art practice and a painting school. In the sentence in which Rembrandt and Velázquez are excluded from the category of Realists, Realism there refers to the nineteenth century painting school. In other places, realism means either an art

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practice or a style based on this practice. For Xu Beihong, realism is the only precondition for every style of art. Nonetheless, a superb artwork has to represent something more than craftsmanship. Xu Beihong cited Rodin’s sculpture to exemplify what he meant as a painstakingly realistic work (Fig. 121). Rodin was held in high esteem in Xu Beihong’s writings. In the article, *Yiyuan jianshe jihua* (藝院建設計劃, ‘A Development Plan for Art Academies’), Xu Beihong argued that Rodin’s achievements can bear comparison with those of Phidias and Michelangelo. He gave a long list of Rodin’s works which he suggested that Chinese government should collect. On the other hand, for Xu Beihong, the works of Puvis de Chavannes were the best examples to embody his notion of idealism. The flat and painterly features of Puvis de Chavannes’s paintings drew wide admiration from both conservative and avant-garde camps in the art world of his day. The French painter and writer Maurice Denis remarked that Puvis de Chavannes’s *The Poor Fisherman*, dated 1881, revealed the features of modernism in its ‘flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain order’ (Fig. 122). Although Puvis de Chavannes represented a modernist tendency, the painterly form in his painting was considered as a way to rejuvenate French tradition rather than marking a break with it. Hence, Puvis de Chavannes’s painting was also held in high esteem in the official art world. His murals decorated public buildings throughout France.

Rodin and Puvis de Chavannes represented a modernist disposition in their works, and at the same time maintained some association with tradition. It was this painstaking craftsmanship that Xu Beihong was willing to greatly admired,

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along with the symbolic turn in their works. The paragraph quoted above indicated that Xu Beihong was actually more concerned with realism as a practice, one which underlay all kinds of paintings. The painting school known as Realism did not occupy the highest rung in the ladder of Xu Beihong’s aesthetics. Instead, the Naturalist Impressionism which revealed the aspiration to go beyond pure mechanical mimesis was, in Xu Beihong’s terms, more indicative of great art. What drew Xu Beihong’s high praise was any painting, which represented both personal disposition and realistic techniques. Accordingly, the classical canon of Western art, and the present realistic artists who represented the modernist tendency in their works, seemingly drew more attention from Xu Beihong than works of painstaking Realism and Naturalism.

Xu Beihong’s perception of realism in the aforementioned paragraph is also seen in another article, ‘The Current Situation in French Art’, in which he argued:

In my opinion, there are a variety of painting schools in the world, such as Classicism, Romanticism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, and Futurism. Leaving aside their nuances for the moment, they can be roughly categorised into two types, one is the realistic and the other is the idealistic. The feature of each painting school would definitely belong to either one or the other. The greatness of Dagnan-Bouveret’s artistic accomplishment lies in the gradual transformation of his painting style from the realistic to the idealistic. At the early phase, Dagnan-Bouveret started to paint in the realistic manner. Later on, when his skills became increasingly accomplished, and his knowledge of arts more comprehensive, his painting then gradually featured idealistic expression. Generally speaking, the transcendent idea is the most difficult thing to crystallise in painting. Nevertheless, Dagnan-Bouveret’s idealistic works illustrate it best.
This paragraph reveals that Xu Beihong was familiar with the latest trends of Western art, in opposition to the stereotype that he was blind to all European painting after 1880, as the scholar Michael Sullivan has criticised him. He ignored them in favour of the realism of painstaking craftsmanship. Nonetheless, the realistic works that were rendered in a very thorough and painstaking manner were not what he regarded as the best. Instead, what Xu Beihong appreciated was that kind of painting which was rooted in realism but was able to represent something spiritual beyond pure mimesis. In Xu Beihong’s opinions, Dagnan-Bouveret’s later paintings were among the best examples.

Dagnan-Bouveret started his career as an academic Realist. His genre paintings in the style of Realism and Naturalism enjoyed great popularity and brought him to the apogee of his career. However, in the later phase of his career, he was among the increasing number of artists who turned their attention to a transcendent subject matter. Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus of 1896-1897 exemplified this shift in Dagnan-Bouveret’s art (Fig. 123). This painting was modelled on Da Vinci’s The Last Supper. Nevertheless, the photographically realistic figures in Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus demonstrated that Dagnan-Bouveret still retained Naturalist practices in the making of religious painting. The two figures kneeling and praying in the far right side were Dagnan-Bouveret’s wife and son (Fig. 124). Dagnan-Bouveret still had models pose for him when he made religious paintings. Moreover, the religious paintings represented some connection with the classical canon of

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495 Xu, ‘Faguo yishu jinkuang’, p. 72.
496 Sullivan, Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China, p. 72.
497 Weisberg, Against the Modern, pp. 105-137.
Renaissance art. For Xu Beihong, the best painting of the present day was exemplified in those works of Dagnan-Bouveret, Rodin and Puvis de Chavannes which combined painstaking realism, classical tradition and spiritual implications.

Dagnan-Bouveret, Rodin and Puvis de Chavannes were the leading members of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Its founder members also included Besnard, Eugène Carrière (1849-1906) and Henri Gervex (1852-1929). Besides, Gérôme, Bonnat and Bastien-Lepage were among its supporters. These painters were often praised by Xu Beihong in his speeches and articles.

The Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts had seceded from the Société des Artistes Français. It quickly became the counterpart of the Société des Artistes Français and was also influential in the official art world of France. It held its own Salon, traditionally opening a fortnight later than the official Salon, and it accepted foreign members. Moreover, it featured exhibitions for established international artists such as John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) and James Whistler (1834-1903), both of whom were also esteemed by Xu Beihong (Fig. 125). Xu Beihong’s admiration for the aforementioned painters demonstrated that he perceived the art world of France of his day through the lens of his teacher Dagnan-Bouveret.

The secession of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts form the Société des Artistes Français resulted from the dispute over the issue of prizes. Meissonier refused to consider the possibility of removing privileges from the medal winners at the Exposition Universelle of 1889. He insisted that the medal

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498 Hungerford, ‘Meissonier and the Founding the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts’.
499 Green, Art in France 1900-1940, p. 40.
500 The Société des Artistes Français restricted memberships only to French artists. Although a series of reforms led by Jean-Paul Laurens in 1901 had ended some restrictions on foreigners at the Salon, the juries of the Salon still remained exclusively French. Green, Art in France 1900-1940, p. 61.
501 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji, pp. 50, 116, 119.
winners of the Exposition Universelle should be granted the same privileges as those who were awarded medals in the Salon; whereas his opponents feared that numerous award-winning artists at the Exposition Universelle, many of whom were foreigners, would weaken the authority of the Société des Artistes Français and the advantage of French artists. Meissonier insisted on equal privileges between French and foreign artists, because he regarded prizes as a concrete form of national glory.\textsuperscript{502} A sense of mission to protect national glory in large part led to the establishment of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, whose intention was to protest against the increasingly commercial bazaar of the official Salon in the hands of the Société des Artistes Français, and to restore a pure and grand art.\textsuperscript{503} The aim of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts to represent an honourable tradition and national glory in painting must have exerted some influence on Xu Beihong through Dagnan-Bouveret or Besnard. It largely inspired Xu Beihong to create history painting in the style of the Western grand manner, by assimilating Western realistic techniques and nationalist connotations into Chinese historical subjects. Xu Beihong's history painting will be studied in the following chapter.

Xu Beihong's academic perspective on Realism may account for his contradictory evaluation of Courbet and Manet, both of whom were representatives of Realism. Xu Beihong felt great admiration for Courbet, but disdained Manet. He praised Courbet several times for the dignified atmosphere that he created in the paintings.\textsuperscript{504} Nonetheless, Xu Beihong criticised the fact that Manet was not equipped with solid realistic techniques.\textsuperscript{505} Moreover, Xu Beihong's attack on Manet grew more and more bitter. In the frequently-cited

\textsuperscript{502} Hungerford, 'Meissonier and the Founding the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts', p. 71.
\textsuperscript{503} Green, \textit{Art in France 1900-1940}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{504} Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong yishu wenji}, pp. 84, 132.
\textsuperscript{505} Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong yishu wenji}, p. 87.
treatise ‘Doubts’ (1929), which became the discursive assertion of Xu Beihong’s adherent stance on realism, Xu Beihong showed a contempt for Manet’s artistic accomplishments by saying that they were vulgar.506 The Meeting by contrast revealed a photographic and reportage effect, representing Courbet’s declaration that “painting is an essentially concrete art and can only consist of the presentation of real and existing things” (Fig. 126).507 Courbet’s belief in Realism lent a fleshy tone to his nudes and thus made them look naked rather than nude in the classical sense (Fig. 127).508 The emphasis on concreteness and contemporaneity separated Courbet’s Realism from the academician’s, whose perception of Realism lay in the accurate representation of costume and setting in historical genre painting (Fig. 91).509 Although this photographic veracity left a factual and mundane feeling in the history painting of academic realism, the painstaking treatment of the genre scenes of antiquity demonstrated the academicians’ respect for time-honoured tradition. On the contrary, Courbet’s sole focus on the existing scenes of contemporary daily life made him an avant-garde Realist. In this light, Courbet and Manet were in the same camp of Realism in opposition to the academic one.

The fleshy tone in Courbet’s nude is also seen in Manet’s Olympia (Fig. 128). However, the nakedness in the Olympia looks more provocative.510 The strong sense of being seen in the eyes of the painted woman, along with her gesture, suggested that there was an unpainted spectator, who was looking at her as a prostitute or commodity.511 The spectator’s gaze thus turned the classical

507 Nochlin, Realism, p. 23.
509 Nochlin, Realism, pp. 24-25.
nude of a goddess into an image of a naked prostitute, which destroyed the
dreamy and time-honoured beauty of the nude. Manet’s *Olympia* found obvious
association with classical nude painting, such as Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (Fig.
129). Nonetheless, the bitter parody and mundane effect separated Manet from
tradition. Compared with Manet, Courbet’s nude painting revealed more directly
his admiration for the masters of former times, such as Velázquez and Rembrandt,
to name but a few.\footnote{512} The theorist of contemporary art Craig Owen has argued
that the history of modernist painting began with Manet and not Courbet,
because the latter represented an association with history painting in his
allegorical works.\footnote{513} Xu Beihong’s criticism of Manet coincided with that of the
academic Realists, such as Jules Breton (1827-1906), who criticised Manet as a
mediocre pupil of Goya and Velázquez. Some critics contemporaneous with
Manet also criticised the flatness in his paintings.\footnote{514} However, the self-critical
and flat traits led Manet to be regarded as a modernist by Clement Greenberg, an
influential figure in the formulation of modernist art history.\footnote{515} By comparison,
the more obvious traces of realistic craftsmanship and classical implications in
Courbet’s paintings made him a more accomplished Realist in Xu Beihong’s
eyes, in opposition to Manet’s vulgarity.

Xu Beihong’s perception of Western realism was shaped by academic
aesthetics. On the other hand, the academic representation of Realism appealed
to him because it could fulfil Xu Beihong’s aspirations to bring Chinese painting
into a modern era. The thoroughly realistic rendering of Realism responded to
China’s call for scientific civilisation. The beautification of academic realism

\footnote{512} Thomas N. Maytham, ‘A Reclining Nude by Gustave Courbet’, *Bulletin of the Museum of
Fine Arts*, 57.309 (1959), pp. 76-82 (p. 81).
\footnote{513} Craig Owen, ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism’, in Donald
\footnote{514} Milner, *The Studios of Paris*, p. 102.
\footnote{515} Harrison, ‘Modernism’, pp. 191-192.
further fitted Cai Yuanpei’s promotion of aesthetic value in painting. The painstaking realism and poetic representation of academic realism may have appealed to Xu Beihong as it expressed his ideas of fine art, as seen in the article, ‘Beauty and Art in Painting’.

Xu Beihong’s reading of Western realism not only demonstrated his academic training, but also revealed his Occidental perspective. He often provided a comparative view of Western and Chinese painting and read Western realism through his vision of Chinese painting history. For example, in the article, ‘The Anatomy of Beauty – A Speech Given to the Shanghai Kailuo Company’, Xu Beihong argued:

There are two major styles in art, one is the idealistic and the other is the realistic. The realistic puts emphasis on the form of the depicted object; while the idealistic puts it on the depiction of a transcendent realm. Because an idealistic artist’s pursuit is a transcendent effect in his work, he draws from nature mainly to achieve that effect. Hence, the depicted scenery only serves as a medium to fulfil the artist’s goal of idealistic expression. Nevertheless, it does not mean that an idealistic artist is unable to depict scenery realistically. He just intentionally avoids that realistic depiction so as to catch a spiritually untrammelled quality, aiming to go beyond the rigid verisimilitude executed by realistic skills. If a person cannot paint realistically, he is definitely unable to create some idealistic effect beyond the concrete object. However, some painters who are poor at depicting things realistically claim that their works are executed in the idealistic manner. This claim is ridiculous, but many people are not experienced enough to tell it. Therefore, there are quite a few failings in the promotion of idealistic art expression. These shortcomings appear in today’s art arena in Europe, while they have been pervasive in China since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). China’s art arena is at its worst nowadays, and those failings are such that Chinese painters are unable to observe objects in detail.

516 On Occidentalism and the Chinese intellectuals’ construction of the West in the early twentieth century, see Shih, The Lure of the Modern, pp. 128-148.
Nor are they able to execute their ideas with their hands. As a result, to reinvigorate Chinese art, we have to re-promote its classicism, which is, for example, exemplified in the magnitude and resourcefulness of Song painting as well as in its open-minded treatment of all kinds of subject matters for depiction. Moreover, to make up for the present deficiencies of Chinese art, we have to adopt European realism, such as Dutch painters’ thorough study of subjects, as well as the refined composition in the works of French painters, such as Courbet, Millet, Bastien-Lepage, and the German Wilhelm Leibl (1844-1900). A piece of artwork of good quality must demonstrate its thoroughness, refinement, vigor, and completeness, all of which consistute the merits of realism.

In this paragraph, Xu Beihong mentions realism twice and regards realism as a mode of art expression involving realistic craftsmanship. His view of Western realism in this paragraph remained the same as those discussed above. Moreover, he applied an Occidental perspective to compare the development of Western painting with that of Chinese. Xu Beihong paralleled Chinese literati painting with Western modernist painting by using the traditional Chinese art-historical term, *xieyi* (寫意, ‘conceptual depiction’). The dichotomy of *xieshi* and *xieyi* represented the binary opposition of professional and literati painting in the formulation of Chinese art history. Generally, Song painting stood for the

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517 Xu Beihong, ‘Mei de jiepou’, p. 84.
epitome of *xieshi* and Yuan painting for *xieyi*. This dichotomy reached its apogee in the art discourse of the Ming dynasty and legitimised the superiority of conceptual depiction of literati painting in the hierarchy of Chinese painting.518

Xu Beihong compared *xieyi* to Western modernist painting, and paralleled Western modernist painting with Chinese literati painting after the Ming dynasty. This parallel revealed that Xu Beihong’s personal reading of Western realism was grounded in his aspirations to reform Chinese painting. Xu Beihong argued that Western modernist painting was following the regressive path of Chinese painting, which had resulted from its dismissal of pictorial realism in favour of conceptual depiction. Accordingly, Western modernist painting was not the solution to the reform of Chinese painting. On the contrary, the assimilation of Western realistic craftsmanship and the re-discovering of Chinese Song painting were the prescription. Xu Beihong’s opinion on reforming Chinese painting was also stated in the article, ‘On Ancient and Modern, Chinese and Western Art – A Speech Given at Datong University’, in which he argued:

> I insist that the present decadence of Chinese art cannot be remedied without trumpeting realism. Someday, the establishment of new Chinese art schools must depend on an indigenous Chinese classicism, which consists of an emphasis upon the depiction of a transcendent realm in painting as well as on the accomplished skills of refined outline drawing.

掲個人對於中國目前藝術之頹敗，絕非力倡寫實主義不為功。吾中國他日新派之成立，必有賴吾國固有之古典主義，如畫則尚意境，精鉤勒等技。519

In the article of 1918, ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’, Xu Beihong pointed out conformism as the cause of the regression of Chinese painting in modern times.520 His point of view

519 Xu Beihong, ‘*Gujin Zhongwai yishulun* – *Zai Datong daxue jiangyan*’, in *Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji*, pp. 97-103 (p. 103).
apparently followed that of the influential intellectual Kang Youwei and he had not yet developed his own perspective. Later on, his academic training shaped his formulation of Chinese painting history. At the same time, his ambitions to reform Chinese painting, which he had revealed in the article of 1918, in turn underlay his Occidental reading of Western realism. Xu Beihong’s comparative study of Chinese and Western painting demonstrated the continuing influence of Kang Youwei, Cai Yuanpei and the pro-Western New Culture Moment on him. Nonetheless, he drew on French academic art to gradually formulate his personal reading of Chinese painting, which on the one hand fitted the interior call for modernising Chinese art, and on the other hand elevated the significance of his training background in indigenous xiezhen and Western realism. It is important to stress that before Xu Beihong pursued art studies in Paris, the term ‘realism’ (xieshi or xieshi zhuyi) did not appear in his speeches and articles. After he returned to China in 1926, Xu Beihong cited the authority of French academic art to develop his personal version of Chinese and Western painting, which centred on realism. Xu Beihong’s academic training helped to fulfil his aspirations to reverse the standing of professional and literati painting. This revision of Chinese painting history and hierarchy was elaborated in the article, Lun Zhongguohua (論中國畫, ‘On Chinese Painting’, 1938), a revised Chinese version of the preface to the catalogue Exposition de la Peinture Chinoise (Exhibition of Chinese Painting), which was published in 1933 for the exhibition of modern Chinese painting (Exposition d’Art Chinois Contemporain) held in the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris.521 In the article ‘On Chinese Painting’,

Xu Beihong used some Western art-historical terms to describe Chinese painting.\textsuperscript{522} The Song dynasty was highly regarded by Xu Beihong as the golden age of Chinese painting. It was seen as the first dynasty in China to establish an art academy. Moreover, Song painting represented for Xu that idealised Realism, which was also crystallised in the works of Dagnan-Bouveret, Puvis de Chavannes and Rodin. Xu Beihong further compared Song painters to Western classical masters, whose artistic accomplishments went beyond mere Realism. Xu Beihong’s high praise for Song painting concurred with the consensus among the intelligentsia, as discussed in Chapter 2.4. In addition, Xu Beihong’s comparative study of Chinese and Western painting paralleled Yuan painting with Western idealism. For Xu Beihong, Yuan painting was like Impressionism, in that it first aimed to supplement the over painstaking craftsmanship of realistic Song painting. Nonetheless, the unskilled literati painters took advantage of the conceptual depiction of idealism, and thereby led to the conformism and regression of Chinese painting, just as the Western modernists were doing to Western painting. Xu Beihong compared the orthodoxy of literati aesthetics in Chinese painting to the status of academic painting in the Western art world.\textsuperscript{523} By this parallel, Xu Beihong indicated the mistake that Chinese painting made in legitimising literati painting as the orthodoxy, which led to the reverse of the standing of Chinese painting and civilization in the world after Song dynasty. Therefore, the realistic attainments of Ren Bonian in the nineteenth century were highly regarded

\textsuperscript{522} Xu, ‘Lun Zhongguohua’, pp. 357-364.

\textsuperscript{523} Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, p. 139.
by Xu Beihong as they broke away from the Chinese academic tradition,
the conceptual depiction of literati painting.

Through the interchanging of Chinese and Western art-historical terms, Xu
Beihong found in Western academic art both the resolution to China’s call for
reforming Chinese painting and a way of preserving the essence of Chinese
tradition. The academic formulation of Western painting history helped the
formation of Xu Beihong’s personal version of Chinese painting, which played a
decisive role in shaping the contours of twentieth century Chinese art. The
authority of Western orthodoxy, in the form of academic art became a mighty
prop for Xu Beihong to strengthen his promotion of realism in the Westernised
art field in China.
4.3 Fashioning Identity as a Modern Chinese Painter

Xu Beihong returned to China in 1926 to look for financial support in order to continue his studies in Paris. He left France in 1925 and arrived in Shanghai in February 1926. During his journey home, he stayed in Singapore for a few months from the winter of 1925 to January 1926. On the liner that Xu Beihong took in Singapore, he met Cai Yuanpei and Lin Fengmian, who had boarded the same liner from France. Shibao carried the news with the headline, ‘Xu Beihong returned to Shanghai’, as follows: “Xu Beihong, the ex-tutor of the Beijing University Painting Research Society and ex-professor of art at the Cangsheng University, is the first student who won the scholarship of the Education Ministry to study in Europe. After staying in France for seven years, he has returned from Paris on the same liner as Cai Yuanpei and Lin Fengmian” (Fig. 130). The news about Xu Beihong’s identity as the first art student with governmental funding was published in both Shibao and Shenbao on 18 March 1919. Shibao and Shenbao were among the most popular Shanghai-based newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century. Shenbao’s involvement in Shanghai’s vitural culture has been studies in Chapter 2. Shibao had been launched in 1904 and ceased in 1939. Its breakthroughs in page layout and printing equipment made it a leading newspaper in China. It was also among the earliest newspapers to carry translations of foreign novels regularly as well as publishing criticism on modern Chinese poetry. Therefore, Shibao had been

524 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, pp. 32-34.
525 Shibao, 3 March 1926.
considered as a modern newspaper reflecting its epoch. As to its association with visual culture, Shibao's advanced printing equipment and technology made possible the issuing of the high quality Shibao Pictorial (Shibao tuhua) in 1920. The burgeoning publication of pictorials in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s was in close association with the vigour of the contemporaneous art arena. On the one hand, the pictorials provided the platform for artists to disseminate their ideas and display their works; on the other hand, the pictorials helped to shape their public images and legitimise their positions in the art world. As Julia Andrews has observed, some young artists who were apart from a particular artistic circle or locale, “succeeded not only artistically, as defined by the creation of an immediately recognisable personal style, but also in achieving a degree of national celebrity only possible with a modern mass media”. The flourishing publishing industry in Shanghai in the 1920s turned Xu Beihong into a sensation immediately after he returned to sojourn in Shanghai for only a few months in 1926.

Xu Beihong arrived in Shanghai in early February, 1926, and left for Paris by late April. In 1926, news of Xu Beihong appeared in the Shenbao around 19 times, mostly published in March and April during Xu Beihong’s sojourn in Shanghai. Besides, Shibao also carried news of Xu Beihong about 11 times.

529 On Shibao's new printing technology, see Hu, 'Shanghai de ribao', p. 269.
532 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, p. 40. As far as I know, there is no precise date about when Xu Beihong left Shanghai for Paris in 1926 in published sources. According to Xu Beihong nianpu, Xu Beihong arrived in Paris in the late spring of 1926. Moreover, news of Xu Beihong did not appear in the press from May 1926, so he must leave for Paris no later than early May, 1926.
533 Wang, Ershi shiji Shanghai meishu nianbiao, pp. 181-215. The news about Xu Beihong appeared on 6 & 18 February; 5, 7, 13, 25 & 31 March; 2, 5, 8, 21, 24 & 25 April; 25 September; 28 October; and 24 December 1926.
During March and April of 1926, items of news about Xu Beihong were published in Shenbao and Shibao a total of 25 times. These items of news show that Xu Beihong had a busy schedule when he stayed in Shanghai. He gave at least 10 talks in a few weeks. Before publishing each of these talks, the newspapers often added a short account of Xu Beihong to facilitate the readership’s understanding of this young artist. These introductions contributed to the shaping of Xu Beihong’s public image as an accomplished and modern painter. Take the short introduction of Xu Beihong given by Shibao on 3 March 1926, which is quoted in the first paragraph of this section, as an example, the information is not completely right. Xu Beihong was not on the same ship with Cai Yuanpei and Lin Fengmian from Paris. Nevertheless, this claim established a close association between Xu Beihong and the influential intellectual Cai Yuanpei, as well as with the new star in the art world, Lin Fengmian, who was just appointed principal of the National Beijing Art College (Guoli Beipin yishu zhuanmen xuexiao 國立北平藝術專門學校, formerly the National School of Fine Art) in early 1926. Moreover, the introduction mentioned Xu Beihong’s status as the first government founded student, citing official authority as

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534 Most of these talks have been repeatedly republished with some slight alterations to their titles. Liufa yishu zhuantia Xu Beihong ji shangwu (留法藝術專家徐悲鴻君訪問記, 'Interview with the Art Specialist, Xu Beihong, who Studied in France') was republished with the title, 'The Current Situation in French Art'; Xu Beihong ji shangwu yanjiu zhizhi tanhua (徐悲鴻君學術研究之談話, 'A Talk on Academic Research by Mr Xu Beihong') was republished with the title, 'A Talk on Academic Research'; Xu Beihong yong wanxiu shijianzhu huanhua yanshuo meishu (徐悲鴻用無線電話演講美術, 'Xu Beihong Delivered A Speech via Radio Telephone') was republished with the title, 'The Anatomy of Beauty – A Speech Given to the Shanghai Kaiifu Company'; Meishu jia Xu Beihong zhi tanhua (美術家徐悲鴻之談話, 'A Talk Given by the Artist Xu Beihong') was republished with the title, 'Conversation on Art with a Journalist of the Shibao'; Yishu jia de gongfu (藝術家的功夫, 'The Attainments of An Artist') was republished as 'Speech Given at the Chinese University of Art'; Meishu jia Xu Beihong xiaoyao yuan xiaoyao zhi lu (美術家徐悲鴻上下古今之論, 'The Opinions of the Artist Xu Beihong on Art of the High and Low, the Ancient and Modern'), or Xu Beihong duiyu xiaoyao de yijian – Zai Datong da xue yanshuo jingxuanhui zhi yanshuo (徐悲鴻對於國畫的意見 – 在大同大學演講競選會之演說, 'Xu Beihong’s Opinions on National Painting – A Talk Given at the Speech Competition of Datong University') was later republished with the title, 'On Ancient and Modern, Chinese and Western Art – A Speech Given at Datong University'. On a detailed schedule of Xu Beihong’s speeches, see Wang, Ershi shiji Shanghai meishu nianbiao, p. 190.

535 Sullivan, Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China, p. 43.
approval for Xu Beihong’s artistic accomplishments. Following the short
introduction of Xu Beihong, the news reported the small exhibition of Xu
Beihong’s Western style works in the Dadong hotel (Dadong lüshe 大東旅社) as
follows: “Xu Beihong displayed more than 40 oil and figure paintings, which
were executed during his time in Europe, at the gathering of The Society of Plum
Blossom (Meihuahui 梅花會) in the Dadong hotel. The brushwork is steady and
the colour refined, representing a subtle quality. Xu Beihong just returned to
Shanghai from his hometown Yixing yesterday, and since then he has been busy
attending welcome parties, which were held by his mentors and friends, such as
Kang Youwei, Ji Juemi, Huang Jingwan, Chen Baoyi, Wang Yiting (王一亭,
1866-1938) and Tian Han (田漢, 1898-1968), to name but a few.536 Kang
Youwei introduced Xu Beihong as follows: “My disciple Beihong demonstrated
talent for art as early as 10 years ago when he realistically portrayed me, as well
as the eminent Qing officials Qu Hongji (瞿鴻禎, 1850-1918) and Shen Zipei
(沈子培, 1851-1922). Later on, he visited Japan and then pursued art studies in
France for seven years. Hence, he obtained a solid grounding in painting. Today,
he shows me his works, which are the best in China”.537 By establishing
associations with significant educational institutions, such as Beijing University,
and with influential intellectuals, such as Kang Youwei and Cai Yuanpei, the
Shibao cited their prestige to construct Xu Beihong’s image as a distinguished
artist, whose reputation had been approved before his artistic achievements were
examined by the public.

In addition to the associations with well-established intellectuals of the
political and cultural fields, Xu Beihong was also connected to the more

536 Wang Yiting was the leading artist of Chinese painting and calligraphy in Shanghai. Yun,
Minguo shuhuajia huizhuan p. 31. On Tian Han, see Dong Jian 董健, Tian Han 田漢 (Beijing,
1999).
537 Shibao, 3 March 1926.
avant-garde circle of Shanghai. Tian Han was the principle organizer of the gathering in the Dadong hotel in February 1926, and invited more than 150 participants, including the artists Lin Fengmian, Ni Yide (倪贻德, 1901-1970), Feng Zikai (豐子愷, 1898-1975) and Li Jinfu (李金髮, 1900-1976). Tian Han was a left-wing dramatist, who played a decisive role in shaping the contours of modern Chinese drama. He was the editor of the supplement of the Central Daily newspaper (中央日報), entitled Modeng (摩登), the Chinese equivalent of the English ‘modern’. Xu Beihong designed a rooster for the letterhead of the Modeng supplement (Fig. 131). Moreover, Tian Han established the South China Art Academy (Nanguo yishu xueyuan 南國藝術學院) in 1928 and invited Xu Beihong to take charge of the painting department. They claimed to be ‘of the bohemian class.’

Ni Yide was one of the founding members of the Storm Society (Juelanshe 決灘社), the representative artistic association of Western avant-garde art in China in the 1930s (Fig. 132). Feng Zikai’s artistic accomplishments were all-round. He was a writer, painter, and cartoonist. He re-interpreted traditional Chinese literature and art in cartoon form (Fig. 133). Li Jinfu was a sculptor. He studied art in Paris from 1919 to 1924, contemporaneous with Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian. These artists were of the relatively avant-garde generation in the art world. The Shenbao reported this cultural event, mentioning the exhibition of Xu Beihong’s works and remarking

538 Wang, Ershi shiji Shanghai meishu nianbiao, p. 186.
539 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, p. 47.
540 Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, p. 112. On Tian Han’s connections with the art circle of his day, see Sullivan, Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China, pp. 34, 47 & 69.
that Xu Beihong’s works represented the epitome of Western art. Through the associations with the avant-garde circle, Xu Beihong was highly regarded as a reputable agent of Western art immediately after he returned from Paris.

The exhibition also demonstrated Xu Beihong’s aspirations to shape his image as a modern force in China’s art world through his accomplishments in Western art. The purpose of Xu Beihong’s journey home was to get money to continue his studies in Paris. Hence, he stopped at Singapore for several months to earn money by painting rich merchants. He must not have planned to stay in China too long, as he left his wife in Paris until he returned. Nonetheless, during his short sojourn in China, he still brought with him many works. It appears that Xu Beihong was active in looking for any opportunities to promote himself. In addition to retaining his relationships with Kang Youwei, Ji Juemi and Huang Jingwan, who had good political or cultural connections in Shanghai, Xu Beihong actively created new connections with figures who were more influential in the art world, such as Chen Baoyi, Feng Zikai, Ni Yide and Tian Han. They were very active in the Shanghai art world in the 1920s. They not only built their reputation by their artistic accomplishments, but also created their influence through engaging in art education. Chen Baoyi was the founder of the Chinese University of Art (Zhonghua yishu daxue 中華藝術大學), which was established in 1925. He also taught painting at the Lida School (Lida xueyuan 立達學園), established by Feng Zikai in 1925. Ni Yide taught at the Shanghai Art Academy. Tian Han taught at the Shanghai University of Art (Shanghai yishu daxue 上海藝術大學) in 1925 and founded the South China Art Academy in early 1928. These art schools were among the most renowned and

544 Wang, Ershi shiji Shanghai meishu nianbiao, p. 186.
545 On Xu Beihong’s experiences in Singapore, see Ouyang Yixing 欧陽義興, Beihong zai Xingzhou 悲鴻在星洲, ‘Beihong in Singapore’ (Singapore, 1999); also Xu Beihong zai Nanyang.
influential art institutions in Shanghai in their day.\textsuperscript{546} The 1920s saw the maturity of the Westernised art field. Art institutions sprung up and were led by the professional artists of the fine art arena. In other words, fine art gradually separated from commercial art.\textsuperscript{547} When Xu Beihong developed his career in Shanghai in the 1910s, he was more a commercial painter than an artist. His acquaintances were mostly those outside fine art circles, although they may have had good artistic connections. Nonetheless, during the journey home in 1926, Xu Beihong seemingly endeavoured to establish his reputation in the fine art field in Shanghai, through displaying his works on the occasions when a lot of artists gathered.

The reports about Xu Beihong’s Westernised paintings and cultural connections in \textit{Shenbao} and \textit{Shibao} successfully drew attention from both the press and artistic circles. \textit{Shibao} published its journalist Wan Ye’s (萬葉) interview with Xu Beihong on 5 March 1926, only two days after the news entitled ‘Xu Beihong returned to Shanghai’. Wang Ye in the interview highly regarded Xu Beihong as the most distinguished among the Chinese students who studied art in Paris. Xu Beihong was one among only two Chinese students who were admitted to study at the École des Beaux-Arts. In the annual examination of the École, Xu Beihong was placed fourteenth, while Fang Junbi (方君璧, 1898-1986), the other Chinese student admitted to study at the École, was placed seventy-fourth.\textsuperscript{548} Wang Ye also mentioned Xu Beihong’s diligence. One evening, he ran into Xu Beihong in Paris. Xu Beihong was only just going back

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\textsuperscript{547} Chen, ‘Yanghua zai Zhongguo liuchuan de guocheng’, pp. 25-29.
\textsuperscript{548} On Fang Junbi, see Frank Dunand, \textit{The Pavilion of the Martial Harmony: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy between Tradition and Modernity} (Geneva, 2002).

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to his place from school. He was very preoccupied with his studies, and thus he became an illustrious artist.\textsuperscript{549} Wang Ye’s report about Xu Beihong’s life in Paris provided a convincing support for Xu Beihong’s attainments in Western art, which were held in high esteem in the press.

Wang Ye also published a commentary on Xu Beihong’s artistic achievements, in which he itemised Xu Beihong’s paintings that he saw in a visit to Jiang Meisheng’s (蔣梅笙) house.\textsuperscript{550} Jiang Meisheng was Xu Beihong’s father-in-law, and Xu Beihong stayed at his place when he sojourned in Shanghai. According to Wang Ye’s report, Jiang Meisheng’s house was filled with Xu Beihong’s own works and with his collection. Since Xu Beihong stayed there, artists and journalists had come one after the other. Wang Ye had met the artists Ding Song and Yang Qingqing (楊清馨, 1893-1957) when he reached Jiang Meisheng’s house.\textsuperscript{551} Ding Song and Yang Qingqing both were leading members of the Heavenly Horse Society. They were known for their Western-style painting and active in the commercial art world of Shanghai. When Xu Beihong started his career in Shanghai in the 1910s, Ding Song and Yang Qingqing were much more influential than him in the Shanghai art world. Their standing seemed to be reversed in this report. Wang Ye praised Xu Beihong as a prolific painter, and he was particularly impressed by the four paintings: \textit{Miyue} (蜜月, ‘Honeymoon’, 1925), \textit{Jiang Biwei zhenying} (蔣碧薇真影, ‘Portrait of Jiang Biwei’, 1925), \textit{Luoti nilang juanxi tu} (裸體女郎倦息圖, ‘Model Taking a Rest’) and \textit{Lüyitong} (綠衣童, ‘Child in Green Clothes’). The \textit{Honeymoon} portrayed a couple, Huang Tianen (黃天恩) and Fu Jigu (傅季姑), in oils (Fig. 134). Huang Tianen was a rich merchant in Singapore. The portrait painting was executed in
1925 when Xu Beihong stopped by Singapore. According to Wang Ye’s description, Jiang Biwei in the Portrait of Jiang Biwei was portrayed in casual dress, sitting at her desk and reading books. This image accorded with the portrait of Jiang Biwei that was executed in 1925 (Fig. 135). The painstaking craftsmanship and photographic verisimilitude of Jiang Biwei’s portrait demonstrated Xu Beihong’s solid grounding in French academic training. Besides, the Model Taking a Rest and Child in Green Clothes matched the two pictures collected in Beihong huiji (A Collection of Beihong’s Paintings’), which was published by the Zhonghua Bookstore in Shanghai in 1926. In addition to the aforementioned four paintings, Wang Ye described the oil painting Fu mao (撫貓, ‘Petting the Cat’, 1924), which he called Baimao (白貓, ‘White cat’) in his report (Fig. 136). Petting the Cat depicted Xu Beihong and his wife, and was executed in 1924. Wang Ye also mentioned Xu Beihong’s copy of Prud’hon’s Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime. Wang Ye provided the public with an account of Xu Beihong’s artistic attainments, and by this means reinforced Xu Beihong’s image as an accomplished and admirable artist.

The oil painting Honeymoon was published in the Shibao Pictorial on 28 March 1926. Although this painting was a portrait of the rich merchant couple, revealing the commercial side of a painter, the realistic craftsmanship demonstrated a direct reference to Western art. Compared with Xu Beihong’s early portraits, which also represented Xu Beihong’s skill in realistic rendering, the brushwork, medium and live models of the Honeymoon indicated that French academic training had dominated Xu Beihong’s pictorial practices. Xu Beihong’s art had gone beyond the hybrid realism pervasive in the commercial art world of

552 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong nianpu, p. 33.
553 Xu Beihong, Beihong huiji (Shanghai, 1936), p. 40.
Shanghai, as discussed in Chapter 2, and was directly modelled on Western painting. Besides the *Honeymoon*, the *Shibao Pictorial* also published another picture of Xu Beihong, in which Xu Beihong was photographed with his oil portrait of Kang Youwei (Fig. 137). By comparing the two portraits of Kang Youwei that Xu Beihong executed in 1917 and in the 1920s respectively, it provided a glimpse into the changes that Xu Beihong had undergone in his creative trajectory. In the picture, Xu Beihong is formally attired in a suit with flowing tie, with a palette and some paintbrushes in his left hand, which projects the image of a Western artist. Moreover, Xu Beihong cited Kang Youwei’s influence in the cultural field to back up his own accomplishments in Western art.

Xu Beihong seemingly took full advantage of this practice to build his reputation. For example, he made an oil portrait of Ren Bonian in 1927 (Fig. 138). It may serve as an exemplification of his great admiration for Ren Bonian, which was manifested in his speeches. In 1926, Xu Beihong also visited an exhibition on Ren Bonian, in which he was invited to talk about Ren Bonian’s accomplishments. Xu Beihong’s admiration for Ren Bonian was thought to contribute to his acquisition of several Ren Bonian’s works from a collector.554

From the late 1920s, Xu Beihong made several portraits of Chen Sanyuan (陳散原, 1853-1937) (Figs 139-140). Chen Sanyuan was Chen Shizeng’s father, was both an illustrious traditional poet and a reform-minded Qing scholar. Kang Youwei, Ren Bonian and Chen Sanyuan were all masters of traditional Chinese literature or art; meanwhile they also took a critical perspective on their tradition. Their portraits in oils not only served as the exemplifications of Xu Beihong’s artistic achievements, but also as the objects of social practice. They demonstrated Xu Beihong’s attainments in Western art. Moreover, Xu Beihong

cited their eminence to claim to be the modern successor and reformer of the great achievements of Chinese culture.

Xu Beihong's aspiration to be a modern artist not only was manifested in his oil portraits, but was particularly reflected in his public image. Xu Beihong's image as a Western artist in the picture of 28 March 1926 Shibao Pictorial is reminiscent of his dandy appearance as seen in the photograph of 1923 (Fig. 98). His image in Western attire was also published in the Shibao on 7 March 1926, along with a compliment on his government-funded honour, and his comprehensive knowledge of both Chinese and Western art. Moreover, the brief report mentioned that Xu Beihong's paintings were accepted by the French official Salon; his artistic attainments were acquired through his painstaking craftsmanship. The report also mentioned that Xu Beihong was leaving Shanghai for Rome soon to continue his studies on art (Fig. 141). It seemed that Xu Beihong's image of an accomplished spokesman for Western art was assured through the press.

The mass media played the decisive role in shaping Xu Beihong's image as a modern artist; meanwhile, Xu Beihong himself also intended to display such an image in public. In August 1927 after Xu Beihong returned to China permanently, he displayed a more avant-garde image. Dagney Carter described his impression of Xu Beihong when he saw the artist in 1927. He said that it was easy to recognise Xu Beihong's image of a bohemian artist through "his long hair, velvet coat, flowing tie and detached languid manners, as well as his excellent French, which suggested the Latin Quarter". Xu Beihong's bohemian image responded to his claim to be "of the bohemian class" when participating in the establishment of the South China Academy of Art. The founding members of the

555 Dagny Carter, 'Modern Chinese Painters', Asia, 34.4 (1934), pp. 224-229 (p. 228).
A cademy also included Tian Han, Xu Zhimo and Yu Dafu (郁達夫, 1896-1945), who were open-minded to the latest trends of Western art and literature.\textsuperscript{556} In retrospect, Xu Beihong has been criticized as a conservative agent of Western art in China’s art field. Nonetheless, Xu Beihong apparently assumed his image as an avant-garde artist in China in the 1920s; and this very modern image was also constructed and approved by the press of his day.

Xu Beihong became an instant celebrity in 1926 through the promotion of the mass media. His lectures, interviews and activities were often to be read in the newspapers. Moreover, his speeches were aired on the radio to reach a wider audience. For example, the American invested \textit{Kailuo} company 開洛 invited Xu Beihong to give a speech on 13 March 1926, which was contemporaneously aired by the \textit{Kailuo} broadcasting station and was also published in the \textit{Shibao} on 19 March.\textsuperscript{557} The \textit{Kailuo} broadcasting studio was set up in the \textit{Shenbao} building in 1924 and became one of the earliest broadcasting companies in China.\textsuperscript{558} Before Xu Beihong’s speech, the deputy chairman of the Shanghai Association of Journalism (\textit{Shanghai xinwen xuehui} 上海新聞學會) introduced Xu Beihong as an internationally acclaimed painter, who had been an illustrious painter in China in the 1910s.\textsuperscript{559} The Shanghai Association of Journalism made great contributions to the rapid accumulation of Xu Beihong’s reputation in 1926. First, it invited Xu Beihong to give a talk on ‘The Origin and Essence of Art’ on 7 March. The audience was large, including pro-Western artists and associations, such as Zhang Yuguang and the Dawn Society of Fine Arts, as well as students of Shanghai art schools.\textsuperscript{560} On 9 March, the Shanghai Association of Journalism

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\textsuperscript{556} Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{557} The published form of this speech, see Xu, ‘Mei de jiepou’, pp. 83-84
\textsuperscript{559} \textit{Shibao}, 19 March 1926.
\textsuperscript{560} Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 35.
\end{flushleft}
gave a banquet for Xu Beihong. The chairman complimented Xu Beihong on his academic techniques and international reputation. The participants included Huang Jingwan, Chen Baoyi, Wang Yiting, Lang Jingshan (郎靜山, 1892-1995) and Zhou Shoujuan (周瘦鵲, 1895-1968), to name but a few. They were accomplished artists or writers in different areas of the art and literary fields.  

Through speeches and gatherings, Xu Beihong quickly drew attention from the influential figures of the Shanghai art world. On 29 March, Chen Baoyi invited Xu Beihong to visit his studio and invited Xu Beihong to address the Chinese University of Art, the art school that Chen Baoyi founded. Xu Beihong made two speeches there; one was on 31 March and the other on 4 April. In later April, Xu Beihong was appointed the professor of Western painting at the Chinese University of Art.

Although Xu Beihong left Shanghai for Paris as early as late April, his reputation was established and he continued to participate in artistic activities in Shanghai. His works were on display at the exhibition of the Chinese University of Art, which was held in the winter of 1926. *Shenbao* reported that there were over a thousand pieces of work on display at the exhibition, including those by such contemporary masters as Li Shutong, Zhang Yuguang, Wu Changshuo and Xu Beihong, etc. Xu Beihong was seen as being as prominent as those who had been active in the Shanghai art world much longer than him. In September 1927, soon after he returned to China permanently, Xu Beihong participated in the large-scale Associated Art Exhibition (*Meishu lianhe zhanlanhui 美術聯合展覽*).

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which was organised by the Chinese University of Art and the Dawn Society of Fine Arts. The exhibitors included Zhang Yuguang, Ni Yide and Ding Yanyong (丁衍庸, 1902-1978), who were famous for their attainments in Western art. This exhibition was so popular that its exhibition period was extended and it drew many avant-garde writers as well, such as Xiao Xunmei and Yu Dafu.\textsuperscript{564} Besides participating in exhibitions, Xu Beihong was immediately appointed to lectureships at several art schools when he returned to Shanghai in September 1927. He returned to the Chinese University of Art to teach Western painting and theory. In addition, he was invited by Tian Han to teach at the Shanghai University of Art.\textsuperscript{565} Later on, Xu Beihong joined Tian Han to establish the South China Art Academy, and soon took professorship at the art faculty of the Central University, which became one of the most prestigious art institutions in the course of modern art education in China.

Xu Beihong’s rigorous training in Western realism, brought to public attention by the exposure given to his works in the press, quickly turned him into a new star in the Shanghai art world. Even so, it should be his entry into the exhibition and education areas, significant strands in the fine art realm, that made Xu Beihong an influential figure in China’s art field. Xu Beihong’s solo exhibition of his drawings and oils during his returned trip in 1926 marked a departure from the commercial taste of his earlier watercolour paintings. His proficiency in Western drawing and oil skills endorsed his new identity as an accomplished artist rather than a commercial painter. More importantly, this new identity provided Xu Beihong with full access to art institutes where he could put his artistic philosophy into practice and have a louder voice with respect to the direction of modern Chinese painting. After settling down in China again in 1927,  

\textsuperscript{564} Wang, \textit{Ershi shiji Shanghai meishu niambiao}, p. 228.  
\textsuperscript{565} Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong niangpu}, p. 44.  

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Xu Beihong was first invited by Chen Baoyi to teach Western painting at the Chinese University of Art. As discussed in Chapter 3.3, Chen Baoyi was among the earliest to promote drawing from nature in Shanghai in the 1910s. Later, in 1921 when he returned to Shanghai after his studies in Japan, Chen Baoyi founded an oil studio and also published a book on how to paint in oils, *Youhuafa zhi jichu* (油畫法之基礎, ‘Elementary Techniques of Oil Painting’) in 1926.\(^{566}\) Chen Baoyi’s preoccupation with introducing a training programme closer to that followed in Western academies made the Chinese University of Art, of which he was a founding organiser, an avant-garde school in Shanghai in the 1920s. The pivot points in the curriculum at the Chinese University of Art were charcoal drawing and oil painting, marking a new stage of Western art learning in China, departing from the previous phase which had focused on watercolour, pencil drawing and imitation.\(^{567}\) Life drawing, charcoal drawing and oil painting became the core subjects of learning painting at the new art institutes, such as the National Hangzhou Academy of Art (*Hangzhou guoli yishuyuan* 杭州國立藝術院, later known as the China Academy of Art), headed by Lin Fengmian, and the Art Department of the National Central University, which was under Xu Beihong’s leadership.\(^{568}\) The new and influential art institutes in the late 1920s were largely government-funded and directed by art students returning from Europe, and they followed a curriculum modelled on French art academies. They marked a new age in the spread of Western art in China, that is, the earlier Japanese model of Western learning was replaced by a more authentic and authoritative one. Chinese students were able to learn about Western painting as closely as possible to its origins.

\(^{566}\) Li, *Zhongguo bainian youhuashi*, pp. 72-73.
\(^{567}\) Chen, ‘Yanghua yundong guocheng lueji’, pp. 119-120.
In this new age, Xu Beihong made many significant contributions. He published catalogues on his own oils and drawings, and also those of French masters, such as Prud'hon. He also mounted several exhibitions displaying paintings, including his own, which directly employed the pictorial language of European art. More importantly, under his leadership, the Art Department of the National Central University became a significant institute in China which loyally transplanted the ethos of the French art academy. It featured rigorous training in drawing, and to this end it was equipped with several classrooms for life drawing, and he ordered plaster-cast copies of masterpieces from France. In 1935, Xu Beihong went further by unifying the University’s Western painting group and Chinese painting group into one single ‘painting’ (huìhuà 繪畫) section. This combination reflected the fact that the disputes over the differences between Western and Chinese paintings in terms of their methods and values which were pervasive in the 1910s in China were at last drawing to an end. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, life drawing was the essential training generally only for Western painting; whereas Chinese painting featured drawing from nature and imitation. Although drawing from nature was also included in the Chinese painting curriculum, it employed different practices from those of Western painting. While the latter emphasised the faithful rendering of the appearance of details of the reality, drawing from nature in Chinese painting meant representing painters’ own reflections and philosophies towards nature and towards how the previous masters had used Chinese brushes to paint nature. For Chinese painting, drawing from nature was therefore a practice

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569 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong niánpu, pp. 32 & 40.
570 Li, Zhongguo bainian youhuashi, pp. 107-108.
largely derived from imitation and leisure, instead of a technique rooted in verisimilitude. The curriculum of the National School of Fine Art, the first national art school in China, demonstrated these different practices for learning Chinese and Western paintings. Moreover, the Chinese painting practices were also essential for students majoring in other subjects, such as craft and design, and painting and handicraft. By comparison, Xu Beihong’s emphasis on life drawing and his merging of the Chinese and Western groups therefore showed his intention to reverse the dominance of Chinese painting practices at art schools and to make drawing and realism essential for Chinese painting as well. The Art Department of the National Central University became Xu Beihong’s greatest source of support, allowing him to carry out his artistic ideals and aspirations. It was the fortress of realism in China, and trained up a number of accomplished realist painters, such as Jiang Zhaohu 近志和, (1904-1986), 吳作人 (Wu Zuoren, 908-1997) and Lü Shibai 吕斯百 (1905-1973), to name but a few. They played a decisive role in continuing Xu Beihong’s artistic thoughts and in bridging Academic Realism and Social Realism in the second half of twentieth-century China. Xu Beihong’s contributions in rooting realism in the soil of Chinese art through education led to his god-like status and has often overshadowed his endeavours in his artistic creation.

By virtue of his French academic training, Xu Beihong successfully won a reputation as an accomplished Westernised artist. Moreover, through the mass media, Xu Beihong was quickly thrust into the limelight in China’s art world. Meanwhile, the flourishing of art associations, schools, exhibitions, and publications demonstrated the ways in which fine art field reached maturity in

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572 Wu, Qingmo mingchu de huihua jiaoyu yu huajia, pp. 123-128.
the 1920s. Artists who won their reputation on the ground of their attainments in Western art in the 1920s mostly studied art abroad, artists such as Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, Pang Xunqin and Ni Yide, to name but a few. They developed personal artistic styles modelled on different Western art schools. Therefore, they contributed to the diversity of Western art in China in the 1920s. With the gradual popularity of Western modernist art among the returned artists and the Chinese audience, how to assure his modern image and influence in the art world seemingly became a challenge for Xu Beihong soon after he successfully entered the Shanghai art world in the 1920s. In the first National Art Exhibition, which was held in Shanghai in 1929, Xu Beihong despised the forerunners of modernism, such as Manet, Cézanne, Matisse, and likened the popularity of their art in China to the addiction to opium.574 Xu Beihong’s bitter attack on the modernists revealed his anxiety towards the gradual dominance of Western modernist art in Shanghai’s art world, and his aspirations to specify his position in the art field by distinguishing his realist identity from the ambiguous modern and avant-garde image.

574 Xu, ‘Huo’, pp. 131-133.
Chapter 5 The Appropriation of Realism – The First National Art Exhibition of 1929

5.1 Nationalist Discourses

The first National Art Exhibition was held at the Xinpuyu auditorium in Shanghai from 14 to 30 April 1929. It was claimed that this exhibition had displayed ten thousand works and attracted one hundred thousand spectators. The exhibition consisted of eight sections. The first section featured Chinese painting and calligraphy, in which 1231 individual works were displayed; the second section exhibited 75 works, including artefacts related to seal cutting as well as inscriptions of Chinese ancient bronze and stone tablets; the third exhibited 345 items of Western-style painting; the fourth consisted of 57 pieces of sculpture; the fifth section featured architecture, displaying 34 items including blueprints, pictures and models; the sixth showed 280 pieces of crafts; the seventh displayed 229 photographs. All seven of these sections displayed the works of contemporary Chinese artists. The various categories of the exhibition, from the Western sculptures to the traditional Chinese arts of seal cutting and calligraphy, demonstrated that the loan term meishu had developed maturely in China in the late 1920s. In addition to the contemporary part, the eighth section of the exhibition consisted of two categories: foreign art and ancient Chinese painting. The foreign art section featured Japanese paintings, in particularly those executed in the Western manner. The ancient Chinese painting...
section comprised two subjects: works dating from before the late
nineteenth-century, as well as a posthumous exhibition of works by the famed
artists in the traditional Chinese painting world of the modern era, such as Chen
Shizeng, Jin Cheng and Wu Changshuo (Fig. 142). The ancient Chinese painting
section showed thousands of works and thus its scale was the largest in the
exhibition. The sheer number of works to be shown was so substantial that its
content changed almost everyday.\textsuperscript{578} Moreover, the price of a ticket to this part
of the exhibition was twice the price of one for the contemporary part.\textsuperscript{579} The
ancient Chinese painting seems to have drawn the most attention from the
audience. Its popularity reflected an interesting phenomenon, suggesting that the
market for traditional Chinese painting was still bigger than that for
contemporary and Western works, although the Westernised art field of the
Republican era had established itself gradually about two decades earlier, as
discussed in Chapter 3. This National Art Exhibition, which was mounted by the
Education Ministry, demonstrated that art was officially recognised as a
legitimate and essential component of China’s national and cultural structure.
Meng Shouzhuang, the Education Ministry official who was in charge of the
exhibition, stated that art was the best form by which to represent the depth of a
nation’s culture. Art, he claimed, could add glory to China and could enable
China to compete with Europe, America and Japan.\textsuperscript{580} The lure of traditional
Chinese painting thus established itself as playing a significant role in the

\textsuperscript{578} Li Yuyi 李寓一, ‘Jiaoyubu quanguo meishu zhanlanhui canguanj (I)’ 教育部全國美術展覽
會參觀記(一), ‘A Report of My Visit to the National Art Exhibition Held by the Ministry of
Education: I’, \textit{Funü} 婦女, 15.7 (1929), pp. 2-7 (p. 5).
\textsuperscript{579} Yen Chuan-ying, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao - 1927 nian Taiwan meishu
zhanlanhui yu 1929 nian Shanghai quanguo meishu zhanlanhui’ 官方美術文化空間的比較 –
1927 年台灣美術展覽會與 1929 年上海全國美術展覽會, ‘A Comparative Study in the Official
Dimension of Fine Art – The Taiwan Fine Art Exhibition of 1927 and the Shanghai National Fine
Art Exhibition of 1929’, \textit{Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan 中央研究院歷史語言
\textsuperscript{580} Meng, ‘Gongxian’, p. 1.
nationalist mission which the government had assigned to art. The persistent charm and power of traditional Chinese painting in the twentieth century, in particular in the light of nationalism, may have contributed to Xu Beihong and other Western-style painters turning to ink painting in their later careers.\footnote{Eugene Wang analysed Xu Beihong’s later turn to traditional Chinese painting in the light of the political, nationalist, and global context. See Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, pp. 127-139.}

Xu Beihong was a member of the committee of the National Art Exhibition.\footnote{The committee members included Li Yishi, Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu and Xu Zhimo, to name but a few. Wang, Ershi shiji Shanghai meishu nianbiao, pp. 250-251.} After he moved back to China in the late 1920s, it seemed that he quickly became a new star in China’s art world with his accomplishments in Western academic realism, as discussed in Chapter 4. Xu Beihong successfully established his image as a modern, accomplished and Western-style painter. He was then appointed to posts as director or professor at several art schools, such as professor of the Chinese University of Art, the South China Art Academy, and the Art Faculty of the National Central University, and director of the National Beijing Art College.\footnote{Wang, Xu Beihong nianpu changbian, pp. 40-85.} Through several channels, such as institutions, exhibitions, and publishing, Xu Beihong rapidly assumed an active and influential role in China’s art field after his return from Europe. As a committee member, Xu Beihong also published a lengthy article, entitled ‘Doubts’ in the fifth issue of Meizhan (美展，‘Art Exhibition’), a special publication accompanying the exhibition, in which he praised the National Art Exhibition in the following items:

An art exhibition is being held for the first time in China. It is a noteworthy and encouraging event that deserves congratulations. What deserves the highest praise, however, is the exclusion of such shameless works as those by Cézanne, Matisse and [Pierre] Bonnard [1867-1949] (except for a couple of pieces displayed as references) (Fig. 143).
In the later part of the same article, Xu Beihong explained his denigration of the above-mentioned painters of modern art. He argued:

Despite all their iniquities, the vulgar Manet, the boorish Renoir, the turgid Cézanne, and the inferior Matisse have still managed, with the help of art dealers' manipulation and publicity, to become the sensations of their time, recognised and heeded by the general public. Since World War I, Europe has witnessed a shifting mentality. The dignity of the fine arts has been eroded, while vulgar fashions have become chic trends. Fortunately, all the masterpieces are well preserved, allowing us to view the absolute virtue of the masters of the past. As of today, the competition for survival had become increasingly fierce, leaving little time for profound exploration. This is rather a transient phenomenon not part of the normal course of evolution. If we attempt to model ourselves on depravity, we are no different from the Westerners who attempt to disseminate Chinese scholastic thought in Europe just by studying the books of Dr. Zhang Jingsheng [1889-1970] without delving into the history of the Three Kings and the Five Emperors, or probing the minutiae of Huang Huiru's story as a means of masking their utter bewilderment. Is this not, indeed, ridiculous?

... If the revolutionary government of China would apply its heavenly-endowed resourcefulness to the creation of a great strategy to reveal its notable foresight, it could impose a ten-million-dollar levy on opium and gambling that could fund the construction of an imposing art museum, where works of Cézanne and Matisse could be collected at a cost of three to five thousand dollars per piece and packed into ten large rooms (these artists can produce two pieces within an hour). For the sake of preserving the people's money, this would be no better than purchasing morphine and heroin in transit. Personally, I would rather live secluded and long-haired in the mountains than see any more of these despicable, muddle-headed, dark and corrupted...
Xu Beihong evaluated the artists of modern art in the light of nationalism by comparing their works to drugs, recalling the large import of opium in the later Qing dynasty, which was the key to China’s decline in national power and spirit. Xu Beihong opposed the circulation of Western modern art in China on the ground of its close relationship with commercial activities and popular culture. He denounced modern art on the grounds that its vulgar tendencies had destroyed the great traditions of Western art. To facilitate Chinese readers’ understanding, Xu Beihong compared the aforementioned modern artists to Zhang Jingsheng and Huang Huiru. Zhang Jingsheng studied philosophy in France under the work-study scheme from 1912-1919. He was awarded a doctorate by Lyons University for his thesis on Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the French influential thinker of the Enlightenment period. He was also the first translator of Rousseau’s Les Confessions in China. But it was the publication of Xingshi (性史, ‘History of Sex’) in 1926 that turned him into a

sensation. This book was a compilation of several stories which were selected from hundreds of sexual experiences contributed by the public.\footnote{Zhang Jingsheng, \textit{Xingshi 1926} (Taipei, 2005).} The book brought Zhang Jingsheng notorious fame, although his contributions were gradually re-evaluated in later scholarship.\footnote{Peng Xiaoyan, ‘Xingqimeng yu ziwo jiefang: Xingboshi Zhang Jingsheng yu Wusi de seyu xiaoshuo’ \textit{性啓蒙與自我解放：性博士張靜生與五四的色慾小說}, \textit{The Enlightenment of Sex and Self-Liberation: Dr Zhang Jingsheng and the Sexual Novels of the May Fourth}), \textit{Dangdai} \textit{當代}, 76 (1992), pp. 32-49.} Huang Huiru came from a rich family. Gossip about her romance with her family’s servant was widely circulated in Shanghai. A cigarette brand was even named after her and became popular in the market.\footnote{The story of Huang Huiru can be read on the website: \url{http://past.tianjindaily.com.cn/docroot/200205/09/xb01/09432702.htm}, and \url{http://past.tianjindaily.com.cn/docroot/200205/10/xb01/10292702.htm}.} Xu Beihong argued that the stories of Zhang Jingsheng and Huang Huiru reflected the vulgar and mentally sick aspects of Chinese society, and thus their popularity would threaten the magnificent orthodoxy of Chinese culture. As a consequence, if their works were circulated in the West, they would mislead Westerners’ perception of Chinese culture in the same way that Western modern art had misled Chinese perceptions. Xu Beihong further argued that the virtue of traditional Chinese art lay in its lack of commercial purpose in pursuit of transcendent beauty in art.\footnote{Xu. ‘Huo’, pp. 133-134.} To protect Chinese art from being tainted by commerce, Xu Beihong thus raised a strong objection to the introduction of Western modern art in China.

Xu Beihong evaluated Western art in terms of the welfare of Chinese art, demonstrating an anxiety about China’s future which was pervasive in the literature and art of early twentieth-century China. This ‘obsession with China’, as C.T. Hsia termed it, drove Chinese intellectuals to search for a resolution to national crises which had been caused by China’s defeats in her encounters with
the West after the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{590} The resolution not only introduced a series of concrete reforms in military and education practices in the light of Western models, but also led to the conception of a rhetorical reframing of Chinese culture in a global context. As elaborated in the previous chapters, the pro-Western camp in art advocated reforming Chinese art with Western realistic skills; while the traditional side drew on the abstract tendencies in Western modern art to re-affirm the value of Chinese painting. Although the different camps parted on their attitudes to reforming or preserving Chinese traditions, they converged on their strong nationalist mission to elevate the status of Chinese art in the world. This nationalist attitude towards the future of Chinese art not only continued in Xu Beihong’s artistic thoughts after he returned from Europe, but was still rife in the National Art Exhibition.

The nationalist perspective in Meng Shouzhuang’s article, by which art was expected to represent national character and strengthen national power, was echoed in other reports and articles about the exhibition. In an article entitled \textit{Quanguo meizhan suofu de shiming} (全国美展所負的使命, ‘The Mission of the National Art Exhibition’), the exhibition was assigned to project the great national spirit of China. The author Xu Shiqi (許士骐, 1901-1993), who studied Western painting in the Shanghai Art Academy, claimed that the art exhibition would lay the foundation for a Chinese Renaissance movement.\textsuperscript{591} Zheng Taixi (鄭太息) in an article to call for paintings stated that the art exhibition was an important means to show to the world our great culture and by which to elevate our nation’s status. He also stressed that Western art originated in Italy, while

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\textsuperscript{590} Hsia, ‘Obsession with China’, p. 536.
Oriental art began in China. Hence, contemporary Chinese artists should take the responsibility of rejuvenating the significance of Chinese art in the world.\(^{592}\)

This comparison between Chinese art and the art of the Italian Renaissance was a consensus among reform-minded intellectuals, including Kang Youwei, Cai Yuanpei and Chen Duxiu, as discussed in Chapter 2.4. This comparative perspective was very obvious in the National Art Exhibition. Another committee member, Lin Fengmian, who was appointed by Cai Yuanpei as the administrator of the Art Education Council of the Education Ministry and as the main organizer of the National Art Exhibition, demonstrated his high hopes for art by proclaiming that “art should take the primary position in the Chinese Renaissance just as it did in the Italian Renaissance” in the statement ‘A Letter to the National Art Field’ in 1927.\(^{593}\) In this statement, Lin Fengmian also apologised for having been self-contained in his past career and reminded artists not to forget the educational and social responsibility of art.\(^{594}\)

The Chinese Renaissance projected the great hopes of China’s art world for the creation of a golden age of Chinese culture in the modern era. Moreover, it reflected the ethnographic implications in the perception of Chinese intellectuals of their own culture in a global context in the twentieth century.\(^{595}\) The comparative view of Chinese art was also manifest in the fact that the National Art Exhibition was compared both to the French Salon and to Japanese "Teiten" (帝展, ‘Imperial Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition’).\(^{596}\) Feng Zikai, in the article, "Duìyù guǎnguó méishū zhānliánhuì de xiàngwáng" (對於全國美術展覽會的希望，)


\(^{593}\) Lin, ‘Zhi quanguo yishujie shu', p. 175.

\(^{594}\) Lin, ‘Zhi quanguo yishujie shu’, p. 172.

\(^{595}\) Liu, Translingual Practice, p. 239.

\(^{596}\) The first government-sponsored art exhibition was open in Japan in 1907, which was called "Bunten" (文展, 'Ministry of Education Fine Arts Exhibition’). It was renamed as "Teiten" in 1911, as the Imperial Art Academy took over as the organising authority. For a brief account of Japanese exhibitions of the twentieth century, see the website, [http://www.kagedo.com/notes.shtml](http://www.kagedo.com/notes.shtml).
‘Hopes for the National Art Exhibition’), stated that he hoped that the National Art Exhibition would be held annually and become China’s Salon.\(^{597}\) Li Yuyi, in his detailed report on the National Art Exhibition which was published in the special issue of *Funü* magazine in July 1929, praised the fact that the exhibition could bear comparison with the Salon and *Teiten*.\(^{598}\)

The large scale of the art exhibition was demonstrated not only in the considerable number of works on display, but also in the comprehensive knowledge of Western and Japanese art published in the magazines at the time. For the National Art Exhibition, *Funü* magazine published a special issue in July 1929, in which it provided detailed reports on the National Art Exhibition as well as introducing a variety of French and Japanese exhibitions and the latest trends in Western art. For example, Li Yuyi published a detailed report on the National Art Exhibition in which he provided a wide range of information, including the purpose of the exhibition, the arrangement of the exhibition space, and brief accounts of the works and the artists of each section of the exhibition.\(^{599}\) Song Yao (頌堯) analysed the exhibited works in the Western painting section and the Western art schools that influenced Chinese artists.\(^{600}\) *Funü* magazine also gave a detailed account of the women artists who participated in the exhibition.\(^{601}\) Moreover, it also introduced the different Salons of France, new Western architecture, Japan’s *Teiten* and the relatively radical *Inten* (院展, ‘Japan Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition’).\(^{602}\) Jin Weijun pointed out the conflicting

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\(^{597}\) Feng Zikai, ‘Duiyu quanguo meishu zhanlanhui de xiwang’, *Meizhan*, 1 (1929), pp. 4-5 (p. 5).

\(^{598}\) Li, ‘Jiaoyubu quanguo meishu zhanlanhui canguanji (I)’, p. 2.

\(^{599}\) The detailed report Li Yuyi published in the July 1929 issue of *Funü* magazine was divided into 4 parts.

\(^{600}\) Song Yao, ‘Xiyang huapai xitong yu meizhan xihua pingshu’ 西洋畫派系統與美展西畫評述, ‘The Analysis of Western Painting Schools and Western-style Paintings in the National Art Exhibition’, *Funü*, 15.7 (1929), pp. 41-45.


\(^{602}\) For example, Li Yuyi, ‘Ribenzuida meizhan zhiyi – Dizhan’ 日本最大美展之一 – 帝展,
forces in the French art field when she introduced the emergence of different Salons in France.\textsuperscript{603} Li Yuyi compared Post-impressionism to the contemporary part of the National Art Exhibition, which marked a new stage of Chinese art.\textsuperscript{604} The special issue of \textit{Funii} magazine demonstrated the more radical and avant-garde aspect of China’s art world in comparison to the exhibition’s accompanying publication, \textit{Meizhan}, which was more concerned with art’s influence upon society and upon people’s lives. Moreover, many of the \textit{Meizhan} contributors were active in the field of traditional Chinese painting, such as Zheng Wuchang (鄭午昌, 1894-1952), Yu Jianhua (俞劍華, 1895-1979), He Tianjian (賀天健, 1890-1977) and Huang Binhong, to name but a few. Both magazines represented the vigour and diversity of China’s art field in the late 1920s. Moreover, they also demonstrated that even though China’s art field was growing more and more mature and diversified in the 1920s, nationalism still remained a significant force in it.

Nationalism served as the reason for Xu Beihong’s dismissal of the forerunners of Western modern art. To make his provocative argument convincing, Xu Beihong listed Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin, Monet and Eugène Anatole Carrière (1849-1906), who were active contemporaneously with Matisse and Cézanne, as the authentic masters of French modern art.\textsuperscript{605} This list reveals the profound influence of French academic art on Xu Beihong because Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin and Carrière were all members of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, a conservative association which aimed to preserve the great

\textsuperscript{603} Jin, ‘Meizhan yu yishu yundong’.\textsuperscript{604} Li, ‘Jiaoyubu quanguo meishu zhanlanhui canguanji (I)’, p. 2.\textsuperscript{605} Xu, ‘Huo’, p. 133.
traditions of French art, as discussed in Chapter 4. Puvis de Chavannes and Rodin are often considered to be modern artists because their works reveal the abstract tendencies of modern painting; meanwhile, they still maintained a close relationship with the French academy and a certain level of respect for traditions. Hence, in terms of modernist artists, they were not as representative as Manet or Cézanne, because their attitude towards traditional authority was not so critical. Xu Beihong argued that, with the help of commercial manipulation, the vulgarity of Matisse, Cézanne, Renoir and Bonnard overpowered the splendour of French art, which was contributed by such artists as Prud’hon, Ingres, Delacroix, Millet, Corot, Courbet, Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin, Dagnan-Bouveret, Bastien-Lepage, Paul Baudry (French academic painter, 1828-1886), Edgar Degas (1834-1917), Monet and others. This long list of artists who are worthy of credit in Xu Beihong’s eyes represents a variety of schools. Monet and Degas are categorised into Impressionism, as are Renoir and Cézanne; Manet and Courbet are both Realists. However, Xu Beihong’s opposite opinions on their accomplishments reveal that his view of French art is self-contradictory. As revealed in Chapter 4, Xu Beihong’s reading of Western art demonstrates his penchant for realism and the influence of French academic aesthetics. Moreover, his version of realism is more concerned with technical virtuosity than with any specific painting school, a view which is also manifest here. Most of the listed artists are either academic painters or those held in high esteem in the Academy. Courbet, Monet and Degas are of the forerunners of modern Western art, as are Manet and Cézanne. However, they were praised by Xu Beihong perhaps because to a certain level they retained the correct contours of the depicted

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objects in their works (Fig. 126). They did not reveal in their works as strong a tendency to deform as Cézanne did (Fig. 143); neither did they take as bitter a critical attitude towards traditions as Manet (Fig. 128).  

At a time when Western art was being comprehensively introduced into China, Xu Beihong’s condemnation of the modernist painters appeared to be an anachronism. ‘Doubts’ has often been cited with reference to Xu Beihong’s artistic stance and the publication played a decisive role in defining his image as an old-fashioned and rigid Realist. Moreover, in the ever-growing popular discursive context among scholars, in which the self-referential expression of traditional Chinese painting is considered to be consistent with the non-figurative tendencies of Western modern art, Xu Beihong’s realistic painting as the ideal model of modern Chinese art is often questioned. Nonetheless, some scholars have argued that Xu Beihong’s insistence on realism responded to the call for a return to classical traditions and mimesis practices in the West after the devastation brought about by World War I. Xu Beihong’s condemnation of the modernist artists for their close relationship with commercial art dealers also heightened a historical fact in the French art world at the turn of the twentieth century. It revealed the conflicting agencies and institutions in the French art field. The victory of modernist artists and art dealers eroded the authority of the Salon and the Academy, dominating the direction of Western modern art. So

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607 Cézanne was a significant figure who bridged the visual truth of Impressionism and the intrinsic reality of art, the point of departure of Western modern art in the twentieth century. On Cézanne’s art and his relationship with Impressionism, see Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago, 1986).
608 David Der-wei Wang analysed Xu Beihong’s ‘Huo’ and the National Art Exhibition in detail and criticised the precision of Xu Beihong’s reading of Western realism. See Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’.
609 Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’.
611 Mainardi, *The End of the Salon*.  

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Xu Beihong was not really ‘blind to all European painting after 1880’ as Michael Sullivan has criticised.\textsuperscript{612} He just stood for the academic side, in opposition to the main direction of Western art.

In addition to the nationalist consideration, Xu Beihong’s attack on the modernist artists may have resulted from his anxiety about the increasing popularity of modern art in China’s art world. *Funii* magazine, which served as the biggest space for reports and criticisms of Western art in the National Art Exhibition, was filled with information about modern art, in particular Impressionism and Post-impressionism. For example, Li Yuyi used Post-impressionism to describe the new stage of Chinese art introduced by the National Art Exhibition.\textsuperscript{613} Some critics revealed a few regrets about the apparent reduction in the number of works in the Impressionist and Post-impressionist styles in the National Art Exhibition.\textsuperscript{614} An exhibition, which was organised by Lin Fengmian and held in Shanghai in May 1929, only one month after the National Art Exhibition, was seen as a complement to the government-backed exhibition as it displayed works in the style of Post-impressionism and the more avant-garde Expressionism.\textsuperscript{615} Before Xu Beihong went to Paris, the Italian Renaissance was regarded as the model of Western art in China. After he returned to Shanghai, Impressionism and even more radical artistic trends were filling China’s art world. There seemed little space left for Xu Beihong’s realism and academic aesthetics. Therefore, Xu Beihong posed a provocative gesture in the National Art Exhibition by

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{612} Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, p. 72.
  \item \textsuperscript{613} Li, ‘Jiaoyubu quanguo meishu zhanlanhui canguanji (I)’, p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{614} Jin, ‘Meizhan yu yishu yundong’, p. 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{615} Jin, ‘Meizhan yu yishu yundong’, p. 24. On Lin Fengmian’s artistic activities and thoughts in the late 1920s, see Liu Jui-kuan 劉瑞玄, ‘Yaboluo yu Yishu yundong she’ 《亞波羅》與藝術運動社, ‘*Apollo* and The Society of Art Movement’, *Xingda lishi xuebao* 興大歷史學報, 14 (2006), pp. 105-132.
\end{itemize}
withdrawal from the concrete exhibition space and publishing ‘Doubts’ to
proclaim his objection to the importing of Western modern art. As discussed in
Chapter 4, Xu Beihong made several speeches to promote the significance of
realism in 1926, which helped to rapidly establish his reputation. He was seen as
an avant-garde artist rather than a rigid realist painter at that time. Nonetheless,
his resentful attitude over the National Art Exhibition endowed him with a
distinct image of an agent of Western realism. It demonstrated Xu Beihong’s
anxieties and aspirations to creating his unique position in China’s art field. Xu
Beihong did not exhibit any paintings in the National Art Exhibition.

Nevertheless, in a report which provided an account of Western painting schools
and analysed their influence on the participating artists, Xu Beihong was also
mentioned as a realist artist, among other participating realist painters, such as Li
Yishi and Pan Yuliang (Figs 82 & 144).616

‘Doubts’ provoked enthusiastic reactions. Xu Zhimo published a lengthy
article, entitled Wo ye huo (我也惑, ‘I Have Doubts, Too’), in the fifth and sixth
issues of Meizhan.617 This article is about six times longer than ‘Doubts’ and
makers Xu Zhimo the loudest voice against Xu Beihong’s hatred for the
modernist painters. Xu Beihong reacted by publishing the article, Huo zhi bu jie
(惑之不解, ‘Unresolved Doubts’) in the ninth and supplementary issues.618

Moreover, Li Yishi also contributed an article, entitled Wo bu huo (我不惑, ‘I
Have No Doubts’) in the eighth issue.619 Yang Qingqing wrote Huo hou xiaoyan
(惑後小言, ‘A Comment after the Doubts’) to bring a conclusion to this dispute.

Yang approved of ‘Doubts’ for evoking renewed enthusiasm for art among

616 Song, ‘Xiyang huapai xitong yu meizhan xihua pingshu’, p. 42.
617 Xu Zhimo, ‘Wo ye huo’, Meizhan, 5 (1929), pp. 2-4; and 6 (1929), pp. 1-3. And also in Wang,
Xu Beihong wenji, pp. 25-29. All articles surrounding the subject ‘Doubts’ are also published in
Wang, Xu Beihong wenji, pp. 22-30.
This article is also in Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji, pp. 135-145.
artists.620

Xu Zhimo argued that Xu Beihong should not attempt to impose upon the creation of art a moral discipline, and further implied that Xu Beihong’s standard for art was old-fashioned and personal. He argued:

You are a passionate man of the ancient way, a rare breed in the world of today. Judging by your distrust of flattery, and the integrity and civility you show in your dealings with others or in your handling of artistic matters. You are not a man of this modern age. Behind your words and deeds are your firm and unique standards of beauty and virtue.... Your ancient way and your stern, your moral disposition can be likened to a Buddha seated regally on a lotus platform, resting upon your fervour, displaying an air of infallibility.

Xu Zhimo stated that the standard of art should lie in “an independent artistic version”.622 Xu Zhimo defended Cézanne in the light of this standard and proclaimed that Cézanne was a real artist. Li Yishi in the article ‘I Have No Doubts’ tried to mediate between the opposing positions taken by Xu Beihong and Xu Zhimo on the question of Western modern art. Li Yishi argued that the dispute between the two Xus lay in their different attitudes towards art judgement. In Li Yishi’s opinion, Xu Beihong’s attitude was that of an artist and thus was subjective; whereas Xu Zhimo’s stance was that of a critic and therefore relatively neutral.623 However, in terms of art’s educational responsibility, Li Yishi stood for Xu Beihong. He argued:

622 Xu, ‘Wo ye huo’, p. 27.
623 Li, ‘Wo bu huo’, p. 29.
Given my experience as a practitioner of Western painting for more than twenty years, I still cannot figure out the works of Cézanne and Matisse, Were my son to learn from them, I would give him a good beating and forbid him to continue. Because I take charge of my son’s education, I cannot decide my behaviour separately from my subjectivity. Therefore, I would say subjectively that I agree wholeheartedly with Xu Beihong’s attitude.

塞尚、馬蒂斯的作品，我研究了二十多年的油畫，實在還有點不懂。假若說：我的兒子要學他們的畫風，我簡直要把他重重地打一頓，禁止他學他們，因爲我對我的兒子負有指示他的責任，我不得不憑我的主觀來決定我的行爲。所以我澀我主觀說：我是極端贊同一悲鴻先生的態度。624

Li Yishi further suggested that the two Xus should consider our society before judging art, because artists should also take on social responsibilities. In this light, the works of the modernist painters who were influenced by commercial manipulation and avant-garde intention would not be suitable for circulation in China before Western art traditions were fully introduced.625 Li Yishi had won his artistic reputation with his realistic paintings, such as Changhenge huayi (長恨歌畫意，‘Representation of the Song of Everlasting Sorrow’, 1929), which was exhibited in the National Art Exhibition (Fig. 145). Like Xu Beihong, he emphasised the importance of the realistic skills of Western painting to reform Chinese art. In another article, entitled Xuexi xiyanghua de mubiao (學習西洋畫的目標，‘The Goals of Learning Western Painting’), which was published in the July 1929 issue of Funü magazine, Li Yishi pointed out that the aim of learning Western painting was to polish an artist’s pictorial ability. Moreover, he pointed out, a person who promoted art in modern China had to possess a knowledge of both Chinese and Western art so that he could protect the national essence on the one hand while on the other hand, he would know which kind of Western art was

624 For an English translation, see Fong, Between Two Cultures, p.38.
the best to improve Chinese art.\footnote{Li Yishi, ‘Xuexi Xiyanghua de mubiao’, \textit{Fumii}, 15.7 (1929), pp. 33-34.} Li Yishi shared with Xu Beihong the nationalist perspective on art, which put priority on art’s social responsibilities. Li Yishi was not the only person who approved of Xu Beihong’s point of view. Yang Qingqing also agreed with Xu Beihong that it was artists’ duty to correct those of their fellows who strayed onto the wrong creative paths.\footnote{Yang, ‘Huo hou xiaoyan’, p. 1.}

Both Li Yishi and Yang Qingqing were leading committee members of the National Art Exhibition. Yang Qingqing was also the chief editor of \textit{Meizhan} and Li Yishi took charge of recruiting the exhibited works. Li Yishi’s favour for realism may in part have contributed to the large number of realistic works on display in the Western-style painting section of the National Art Exhibition. Their endorsement of Xu Beihong demonstrated the force of nationalism in China’s art field. Li Yishi’s painting \textit{Kexue yu meishu} (科學與美術, ‘Science and Fine Arts’) was seen as the best example to represent the spirit of the National Art Exhibition. The painting depicted a nude goodness standing on a rock, below which was a pit in which many workers were hard at work.\footnote{Li, ‘Jiaoyubu quanguo meishu zhanlanhui canguanji (I)’, p. 3.} This picture revealed the importance of a material basis for art. The juxtaposition of art and science echoed Cai Yuanpei’s advocacy of using scientific methods to study fine art, which he had delivered to the Beijing University Painting Research Society in 1919.\footnote{Cai, ‘Zai Beijing daxue huafa yanjiuhui shang de yanshuoci’, p. 86.} Cai Yuanpei was the key person behind the mounting of the official art exhibition. He had strived to organise a National Art Exhibition as early as 1922, and the exhibition became possible when he was appointed Minister of Education of the Nationalist government in 1927.\footnote{Yen, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao’, pp. 630-634.} The National Art Exhibition saw the fulfilment of Cai Yuanpei’s aspirations of combining science and art to
create an accomplished modern Chinese civilisation. The emphasis on a scientific attitude towards art demonstrated nationalist implications, because science had been seen as the essential means to save the weak China in the modern era after the later Qing dynasty. Art, which had been assigned by Cai Yuanpei to replace the Confucian traditions to represent the main body of new Republican culture, was thus unavoidably intertwined with nationalism. When studying the structure of the literary field of twentieth-century China, Michel Hockx argues that it cannot be analysed solely through the two conflicting principles of autonomy and heteronomy, which were the two factors which operated the French literary field. China’s literary field comprises three principles: the autonomous, the heteronomous and the ‘utilisation of the people’, i.e. cultural capital, economic capital and political capital.631 This same phenomenon is also manifest in China’s art field. In the late 1920s, China’s art field was increasingly maturing and flourishing. More and more art schools and societies were set up; art newspapers and journals were frequently published; artists demonstrated more and more freedom in their creation; the styles and media of art works appeared more and more diversified. Meanwhile, art’s nationalist role became a primary objective. Xu Beihong’s dismissal of the modernist painters’ commercial manipulation and his objection to their circulation in China in terms of the welfare of the Chinese people helped to raise his status in the art field due to the increase in the influence of the cultural and political capital. In retrospect, Xu Beihong’s condemnation of Western modern art in the twentieth century seems to have been an anachronism. However, his artistic perspective, which responded to the nationalist context of modern Chinese art, made him rapidly become a principle agent in China’s art field.

5.2 The Appropriation of the Real (Zhen)

Xu Beihong published ‘Doubts’ to respond Xu Zhimo’s request for his participation in the National Art Exhibition. Although Xu Beihong was a committee member, he refused to exhibit his paintings to protest against the formalist dominance of the exhibition.632 Xu Zhimo’s rejoinder to Xu Beihong’s bitter criticism of modern painters has often been drawn on to enhance the conservative stereotype of Xu Beihong’s realist image.633 Xu Zhimo criticised Xu Beihong’s view of art as having moral and nationalist connotations for being outdated. He only approved of Xu Beihong’s high moral principles in terms of the pursuit of the real (zhen) in art. Taking the real as the point of departure, Xu Zhimo eloquently defended Western modern art in the article, ‘I Have Doubts, Too’.

First, Xu Zhimo argued that Xu Beihong raised the wrong moral principles for judging art’s reality. He argued:

Art is autonomous, but if there is room for a moral concept in any criticism on artistic matters, only one concept, and I think you will definitely agree, is permissible: the distinction between the real and the fake.... However, when it comes to the assessment of works of art, the boundary between the real and the fake, important as it is, cannot be gauged solely by empirical experience, nor can it be demarcated through pure intuition. Of course, by the terms ‘real’ and ‘fake’, I am referring to the thought and intent expressed by an artist through his works and not to the authenticity that an expert in antiques may seek to establish in authenticating an artefact.

632 Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong niangpu, p. 59.
633 For example, Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’.
In the light of the autonomous nature of art, Xu Zhimo objected to Xu Beihong’s nationalist perspective. Since art enjoys freedom of creation, its style may appear different from the tradition, such as the quick and unfinished brushwork of the modernists. Meanwhile, the fickle nature of human interest made people prefer the new style of the modern painters and thus contributed to the success of modern painting in the market. In this light, Xu Zhimo disagreed with Xu Beihong’s criticism of the modern painters for the way that they manipulated the commercial market. Moreover, Xu Zhimo argued that Xu Beihong’s condemnation of modern painters in protection of the real only revealed his ‘real indignation’ (*fenkai de zhengcheng* 傷慨的真誠). This anger derived from the traditional and thorough training that Xu Beihong had received from the Academy. Xu Zhimo compared Xu Beihong’s hatred of modernist painting to the traditional scholars’ scorn for Hu Shi’s vernacular writing and pointed out that Xu Beihong’s perspective was emotional and conservative.635

To avoid such biases against Western modern art, Xu Zhimo suggested ‘an independent artistic vision’. He argued:

In our evaluation of art, isn’t it true that the most important criteria should be an independent artistic vision and a little pure, artistic feeling? What is an artist? Isn’t he someone who desires to express, through painting or sculpture, a certain spiritual experience uniquely his own? Technique has its place, and knowledge its use. However, with only technique and knowledge, an artist – no matter how skilled – cannot create that which you and I would consider works of pure art. After all, isn’t it true that what you and I have been seeking, in art as well as in our daily life, is a certain original spiritual expression, or a certain noble essence of life?

635 Xu, ‘Wo ye huo’, p. 27.
In Xu Zhimo’s opinion, an independent artistic vision would take a more neutral attitude towards art judgment and would thus be able to discern the sincerity of artists under their various painting styles. Taking Cézanne as an example, Xu Zhimo argued that Cézanne’s sincerity, which was manifest in his insistence on creating his personal style and on painting for over fifty years, was crystallised in the bold brushwork of his work. Moreover, an independent artistic attitude would avoid falling into the polarised reactions to Cézanne’s work as happened in the late-nineteenth century French art world. From Xu Zhimo’s point of view, the most important component of a real artist was his sincerity, and this can be only judged by an independent artistic vision rather than by traditional conventions, techniques, and nationalism.

Xu Zhimo’s ‘I Have Doubts, Too’ prompted Xu Beihong’s eloquent article, ‘Unresolved Doubts’, in which Xu Beihong gave ‘the real’ a different definition. He argued:

In my opinion, I would refer to the real and the fake in your terms as the right and the wrong (shifei 是非). There is the word ‘resonance’ (yun 韻) in the literary and artistic world which excludes the existence of right and wrong. In the meantime, there also exists the word illumination (ming 明), therefore, the distinction between the real and the fake should not be blurred. A puppet cannot be a real person. Can we not tell the real from the fake? Warlord politics is not republicanism. Can we not distinguish the real and the fake? With regard to the elements of

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635 Xu, ‘Wo ye huo’, p. 27. For a English translation, see Danzker, *Shanghai Modern 1919-1945*, p. 376.
plastic art, form is the first and colour comes the second. What I cannot dismiss is the kind of art in which form exists.... I want to pose a question: does form exist in the works of those trifling schools of art? If not, can they be worthy of art?

In terms of the ‘real’ in art, Xu Beihong provided a different perspective from Xu Zhimo. For Xu Zhimo, a real piece of art represented an artist’s sincerity, which had nothing to do with the social or political ethos; whereas Xu Beihong insisted that the educative role was the route that the real art should take. Moreover, Xu Zhimo thought that an artist should enjoy freedom of creation; while Xu Beihong argued that a real piece of art was based on its form-likeness.

With regard to sincerity, Xu Beihong once defined it from a different angle from that taken by Xu Zhimo. In 1927, Xu Beihong participated in the Associated Art Exhibition which was organised by various art schools and societies of Shanghai, such as the Chinese University of Art, Xinhua Art Academy (Xinhua yishu zhuanke xueyuan 新華藝術專科學校), the Dawn Society of Fine Arts and others. Xu Beihong was invited to comment on the exhibition and so published the article, Meishu lianhe zhahanhua jilue (美術聯合展覽會記略, ‘A Short Remark on the Associated Art Exhibition’), in which he demonstrated his strict standards of realism as a standpoint for art judgement through his definition of sincerity. Xu Beihong argued that sincerity (zhenshuai 真率) was the cure for the current decadent atmosphere in the art world. He had come to this conclusion after visiting the exhibition:

638 Wang, Ershi shiji Shanghai meishu nianbiao, p. 228. A brief account of this exhibition is also mentioned in Chapter 4.3.
At this moment when art is growing decadent, sincerity can help the artist who wants to rectify the shallow fashion and ameliorate his own art. The beauty of artworks lies in the form instead of the colour. Abandoning the form in pursuit of the colour only touches on the superficial appearance. Michelangelo said: “A good painting must represent the sculpture-like effect”. Therefore, [an artist] should depict an object’s form thoroughly in order to reach the level of nobility and magnificence. On the contrary, if he only pursues beautiful colour and expressive brushwork, he will represent a trivial style in his work. Accordingly, he cannot approach the Way of art throughout his life due to a lack of sincerity.

While Xu Zhimo referred to sincerity as an artist’s true feelings, Xu Beihong thought of sincerity as form. For Xu Beihong, an artist’s sincerity should be embodied in his precise rendering of the portrayed objects’ contours. Sincerity for Xu Zhimo was a relatively personal and free way of expression; whereas it was seen by Xu Beihong as an absolute principle for the creation of art. Xu Beihong’s opinions in this article of 1927 anticipated his later more serious attack on Western modern art in the ‘Doubts’ of 1929.

As regards the difference between resonance (yun) and form, Xu Beihong further clarified it in a later article, *Dangqian Zhongguo zhi yishu wenti* (當前中國之藝術問題, ‘The Current Problems of Chinese Art’, 1947). Xu Beihong argued:

> It has been said while Chinese art values spirit-resonance, Western art emphasises form-likeness, not knowing that both form-likeness and spirit-resonance are a matter of technique. While spirit represents the essence of form-likeness, resonance

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comes with the transformation of form-likeness. Thus for someone who excels in form-likeness, it is not hard to achieve spirit-resonance.

For Xu Beihong, yun and spiritual expression, the forms of sincerity in Xu Zhimo’s opinion were both rooted in form-likeness. At the beginning of this article, Xu Beihong directly pointed out that both science and art pursued the real (qiuzhen 求真). Xu Beihong’s view of art remained the pro-Western approach to rejuvenating Chinese culture, which was modelled on the advanced material culture of the West. As discussed in the previous chapters, this intellectual approach to national crises had exerted a profound influence on Xu Beihong after his association with Kang Youwei and the May Fourth intelligentsia in the 1910s, and it seemed to maintain its influence throughout Xu Beihong’s life.

According to Xu Beihong’s perspective on the real, Cézanne’s new style of painting was categorised into the work of yun, which first required a grounding in form-likeness. Therefore, Xu Beihong disagreed with Xu Zhimo’s defence of Cézanne. He argued that Cézanne’s non-figurative brushwork only demonstrated his lack of technical proficiency to represent his ideas, although his artistic feeling was sincere.⁶⁴¹ To stress the importance of realistic skills in an artist’s creation, Xu Beihong further invoked the philosophy of the French critic Hyppolyte Taine (1828-1893) to describe the two stages of creation that an artist would go through. He argued:

An artist’s accomplishments consist of two stages. The first stage of his work reveals the effects of verisimilitude. Later on, as the artist grows more skilled, the sense of reality will be able to be

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⁶⁴⁰ Xu Beihong, Dangqian Zhongguo zhi yishu wenti, in Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenjie, pp. 533-537 (p. 535). The English translation, see Fong, Between Two Cultures, pp. 90-91.

⁶⁴¹ Xu, ‘Huo zhi bujie’, pp. 143-44.
thoroughly expressed though his work is not modelled on the concrete world.

This statement, which was based on Taine’s perspective, continued Xu Beihong’s formulation of realism in his speeches delivered in 1926, as discussed in Chapter 4. For Xu Beihong, form is the pivotal component of the art of the ‘real’, and the moral principle for art. In 1931, Xu Beihong published an article to introduce a drawing of Ingres which he had come across in Paris. He quoted Ingres’ saying, ‘Le dessin est la probité de l’art’ (Drawing is the probity of art) to stress the priority of form in art.643 Xu Beihong translated probite into the Chinese term zhencao (貞操, ‘morality’ or ‘chastity’). Moreover, he argued that China’s regression was as a result of her lack of this virtue.

Since art’s morality was form, it can be understood why Xu Beihong used such an emotional word as ‘shameless’ to abuse Western modern painting. Ingres’s comment demonstrated the profound influence of the classical training of French art on Xu Beihong.644 In the article Xinguohua jianli de buzou (新国画建立的步骤, ‘The Steps of the Establishment of New National Painting’, 1947), Xu Beihong praised the development of Chinese painting over the previous two decades, during which quite a few proficient artists in realism had appeared. This progress should be attributed to the promotion of drawing in China’s art world, because drawing was the basis of all kinds of plastic art. Consequently, Xu Beihong proclaimed that drawing from nature was the solution to the establishment of new Chinese painting.645

644 ‘Ingres’ saying was the touchstone of the Academic curriculum. White, Canvases and Careers, p. 7.
645 Xu Beihong, ‘Xinguohua jianli de buzou’, in Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji, pp. 529-531 (p. 531).
Developing realistic skills by drawing from nature was also stressed in the ‘Unresolved Doubts’ article. Xu Beihong stated that modelling after nature was the Way (Dao 道) of art. To achieve this way, the barriers should be removed, including the Four Wangs and non-figurative Western modern painting. Xu Beihong demonstrated the superior status of realism in his mind by proclaiming that he did not worship any ‘-isms’ in art, even Classicism, except for realism.\(^{646}\)

According to the context, Xu Beihong should be referring here to pictorial realism instead of the specific French painting school of the nineteenth century. As discussed in Chapter 4, realism had often been regarded by Xu Beihong as a painting method rather than a painting school. In the seventh issue of Meizhan, the renowned traditional painter Zheng Wuchang cited Courbet to cheer the candidates who had been rejected by the exhibition. Courbet, the promoter of Realism (Xieshi zhuyi)，as Zheng Wuchang called it, opened his solo exhibition, entitled ‘The Realist Courbet’, after he was rejected by the Salon.\(^{647}\) Although Courbet was not approved by the official exhibition, his non-traditional style changed the dull landscape of French art.\(^{648}\) Zheng Wuchang was active in the traditional Chinese painting arena of Shanghai; nonetheless, his knowledge of Realism and its relationship with the development of Western modern art revealed the growing maturity of China’s art field, in which a comprehensive knowledge of Western art could now be acquired.\(^{649}\) Moreover, artists of different camps saw greater exchange of ideas and information. Compared to the revolutionary image of Zheng Wuchang’s Realism, Xu Beihong’s realism, which was rooted in pictorial verisimilitude, demonstrated far more the influence of the

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\(^{646}\) Xu, ‘Huo zhi bujie’, pp. 136-137.


\(^{649}\) A brief account of Zheng Wuchang, see Yun, Minguo shuhuajia huizhuan, pp. 316-317.
Academy. However, Xu Beihong’s emphasis on modelling after nature was in accord with Courbet’s stance to ‘be the pupil of no-one but nature.’650 Realism’s rebellion lay in its objection to the classical idealised beauty in pursuit of an empirical and faithful rendering of the concrete world.651 Its revolutionary stance coincided with Xu Beihong’s reformed attitude towards the conventional paradigms of the mindscapes of literati painting, which he advocated should be based on drawing from nature instead of copying painting manuals. In terms of innovation, pictorial realism, which Xu Beihong strived to promote in China, might accord with radical French Realism more than the academic realism. Nevertheless, Xu Beihong’s realism was also intertwined with nationalism. With regard to national glory, Xu Beihong’s realism and the French academic realism appeared to converge.652 Xu Beihong’s realism demonstrated the complexity of the adoption of the Western artistic system in China, as the traditions to be challenged were different. Moreover, nationalism and modernity were often intertwined in twentieth-century Chinese art.

To proclaim a break with the academic traditions, Realism advocated looking at the world with a fresh eye instead of the academic eye. Through Bourdieu’s study of the writing of Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and the paintings of Manet, being free from the academic and Salon monopoly made Realism see the emergence of autonomy in the French literary and artistic fields in the nineteenth century.653 The modernist artists were thus privileged to be in a state of isolation of creation, free from patronage, pictorial conventions, political dictation and other restraints. Xu Zhimo’s perspective on modernist painting

651 Nochlin, *Realism*, p. 23.
652 See Chapter 4-2.

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apparently invoked the context of the Western art world, since he maintained that real art could not be measured with moral implications, social dictation or pictorial paradigms. In this respect, Xu Zhimo’s knowledge of Western art appeared more contemporary and more accurate than Xu Beihong’s. The emphasis on social responsibility and visual verisimilitude made Xu Beihong’s realist stance relatively conservative in the light of the discursive framework of Western modern art. The dispute between the two Xus reflected the conflict between the modernist camp and the academic camp in the French art world. Their debates thus demonstrated the continuation of the adoption of Western artistic discourse in China’s art world. Nonetheless, Xu Beihong’s pictorial realism turned out to be modern and revolutionary in terms of a break with the non-figurative tendencies of orthodox Chinese painting. Therefore, the dispute over ‘Doubts’ not only replicated the conflict in French art, but also unfolded the contradictory nature of China’s own art field.654 The conventions of representation were diametrically opposite in Chinese and Western art. The former was dominated by the abstract and expressive brushwork of the literati aesthetics, while the latter by the narrative and realistic modes. When Chinese painting underwent modernisation, which was ushered in by China’s encounter with the West, it was inevitably modelled after the West. However, the non-figurative fashions of Western modern art seemed to accord with the traditional paradigms of Chinese painting, which the radical Chinese intellectuals and artists aimed to dismiss; whereas the realistic representations that Western modern art wanted to break with were conceived to be the device for modernising Chinese painting. Moreover, the contexts for the emergence of both Chinese and Western modern art were also different. Autonomy in Western

654 Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, p. 103.
modern art arose as an objection to capitalist dominance in the modern society of
the West. The modernisation of Chinese painting, however, and the
construction of the fine art field were motivated by the call for strengthening
China. Western autonomy was embodied in the bohemian life-style of the artists,
while the nationalist ethos of the Chinese art field led artists to demonstrate an
obsession with China. This difference was also manifested in the two Xus' explanations of the real. While Xu Zhimo defended artists' egoism, Xu Beihong
stressed the social responsibility of art.

As realism invoked the dialectic between the 'true reality' and the 'mere appearance' in the West, the two Xus' dispute also revealed the diversity and
ambiguity of meaning with reference to the term *zhēn*. As discussed in
Chapter 2, *zhēn* could refer to veracity, reality, fact and truth. Since it was shared
by both of the Chinese terms *xiezhen* and *zhēnxīang*, pictorial realism was thus
seen to be capable of reflecting social reality. Accordingly, *xieši*, the Chinese
equivalent of realism and the twentieth-century neologism to replace the
indigenous realism of *xiezhen*, had been carrying the social responsibility of
representing social truth since it was introduced into China. Xu Beihong's
definition of *zhēn* demonstrated this perception of realism and reality, which was
pervasive among radical intellectuals. Nonetheless, Xu Zhimo employed a more
metaphysical approach to the term *zhēn*. The two Xus' perception of the real
reflected the extent to which Western discourse had been transplanted to China
on the one hand; on the other hand, it demonstrated the level to which Western
discourse was translated, appropriated and distorted by its Chinese agents
according to their position in the local art field. Xu Beihong's appropriation of

655 Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed'.
656 For the dialectic centred on realism and its relationship with modernism and post-modernism,
see Pam Morris, *Realism* (London and New York, 2005).
the real, which seemed to gain more response from his contemporaries, revealed that the social role of modern art was stressed in China, i.e. the consideration of the well-being of the nation and her people, as Michel Hockx points out.\textsuperscript{657} It also pointed to the association between China’s art field and the national ethos, which disturbed the development of avant-garde art in China, and also led to the Westernised artists turning to the creation of ink painting in their later careers, such as Xu Beihong.\textsuperscript{658}

The two Xus’ debates centred on the real reflected the wide circulation of Western modern art in China, which evoked Xu Beihong’s disappointment as well as his anxiety towards the repressed space for the promotion of his realism. The Realism, which Zhen Wuchang introduced, also seemed to challenge the realism that Xu Beihong aimed to promote in China. His anxiety was manifested in his provocative action of withdrawing from the exhibition and his censure for the modernist painters. The speeches of 1926, which were examined in detail in the previous chapter, revealed that pictorial realism had been the central issue in Xu Beihong’s artistic thoughts. These speeches helped to establish Xu Beihong’s reputation as a promising and modern Chinese artist, who was a trustworthy agent of Western art in China. With his fame growing, Xu Beihong took an increasingly rigid realist stance. In his autobiography published in 1930, Xu Beihong repeated his belief in realism. He proclaimed that his goal was to pursue scholarly art by means of seeking ‘the real’ (qiuzhen 求真) in art. To reach this goal, he would strive to promote realism and prevent commercialism.\textsuperscript{659}

Through the appropriation of the real, Xu Beihong correlated zhen with realism, truth and sincerity, and this led him to refer to realism as the best cure for both

\textsuperscript{657} Hockx, \textit{The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China}, pp. 12.

\textsuperscript{658} Croizier, ‘Post-Impressionist in Pre-War Shanghai’; Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, pp. 127-130.

social and artistic crises. By means of the translation and appropriation of realism, Xu Beihong gradually became a remarkable agent on behalf of Western art in China; then he in turn exerted his agency to consolidate the importance of realism in the Chinese art field.
5.3 The Conflicting Agencies

Xu Beihong withdrew from the National Art Exhibition because he was disappointed that the exhibition was controlled by formalists. However, some commentators pointed out that works in the style of Realism constituted the main part of the Western-style painting section at the exhibition. They also noticed that there were fewer works in the style of Post-impressionism, which had often been the mainstream of the Shanghai-based exhibitions. Realistic paintings, such as those of Pan Yuliang, were held in high esteem at the National Art Exhibition (Fig. 144). Even Xu Beihong himself said in ‘Doubts’ that he was delighted to see the absence of such Western modern paintings as those of Matisse and Cézanne at the exhibition. His protest against the formalist dominance may have been aimed at Liu Haisu and the Shanghai Art Academy, which favoured Post-Impressionism and guided the mainstream Shanghai art world.

Liu Haisu had been an active figure in the Shanghai art world since the 1910s. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Liu Haisu’s Shanghai Art Academy was among the earliest art schools to teach Western painting in China. He was also a founding member of the Heavenly Horse Society, which held exhibitions annually and claimed to be modelled on the French Salon and the Japanese Teiten. The Society was active and influential in Shanghai from the late 1910s to 1927, when it was suspended due to the political upheaval. Liu Haisu had

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663 Huang Ke, ‘Shanghai de meishu yuanxiao han meishu shetuan’ Shanghai’s Art Schools and Societies in Shanghai’, Duoyun 多雲, 47 (1997), pp. 139-186 (p.
demonstrated a leaning towards Post-impressionism and avant-garde art since the early stages of his artistic career. In 1918, Liu Haisu visited Japan and later published a book, entitled *Riben xinmeishu de xinyinxiang* (日本新美術的新印象, ‘A New Impression of the New Art in Japan’, first published in 1921), in which he provided a detailed account of Japan’s art exhibitions and education.\(^{664}\) The book revealed that Liu Haisu possessed a comprehensive knowledge of Western art, from Classicism to the latest trends of Cubism and Futurism. He observed that Post-impressionism had gained great popularity in Japan, and he preferred this kind of art of sensibility to that of rationality.\(^{665}\) Moreover, Liu Haisu’s interest in new art was manifested in his comments on the exhibition organised by the *Nikakai* (二科會, ‘Second Division Society’), an artistic association which had been founded in 1914 by progressive artists in an attempt to break away from the influence of official authority.\(^{666}\) Liu Haisu had a high regard for this avant-garde exhibition. Among the works displayed in the *Nikakai* exhibition, he recommended in particular the paintings of the artists Yorozu Tetsugoro (萬鐵五郎, 1885-1927) and Togo Seiji (東郷青児, 1897-1978), which were executed in the styles of Cubism and Futurism (Fig. 146).\(^{667}\) Liu Haisu’s penchant for Western modern art was also manifest in his own painting. The bold brushwork and bright colour in his works often caused him to be compared with Van Gogh (Fig. 147).\(^{668}\)

Liu Haisu’s enthusiasm for art led him to develop an all-round career. In addition to Cai Yuanpei, he was another key person behind the move to bring the national art exhibition to reality. Since 1922, he had proposed to the Education

\(^{664}\) Liu Haisu, *Riben xinmeishu de xinyinxiang* (Shanghai, 1925).

\(^{665}\) Liu, *Riben xinmeishu de xinyinxiang*, p. 16.

\(^{666}\) For a short account of *Nikakai*, see the website, http://www.artnet.com/library/06/Q625/t0625QQ.asp.

\(^{667}\) Liu, *Riben xinmeishu de xinyinxiang*, pp. 60-69.

\(^{668}\) Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, p. 73.
Ministry several times that a national art exhibition should be organised.\textsuperscript{669}

Because there seemed little hope of holding an art exhibition on a national scale soon, Liu Haisu then proposed instead that a provincial art exhibition should be organised first. This proposal was approved and led to the Art Exhibition of Jiangsu Province, the first provincial art exhibition in China, which was held in Shanghai in 1924.\textsuperscript{670} In 1927, when a National Art Exhibition was finally being organised, Lin Fengmian was appointed its principal administrator.\textsuperscript{671} Liu Haisu did not take up the directorship of the National Art Exhibition perhaps because of his own turbulent state: he fled to Japan in April 1927 for political reasons.\textsuperscript{672}

Later, he was asked by Cai Yuanpei to make a survey of art in Europe in 1928.\textsuperscript{673} Although Liu Haisu was in Europe during the art exhibition, several of his colleagues took significant positions in the organisation of the exhibition. Jiang Xiaojian (江小鹣, 1894-1939) and Wang Jiyuan (王濟遠, 1893-1975), who were responsible for exhibition arrangement, were both professors in the Shanghai Art Academy. Yang Qingqing, the chief editor of Meizhan, was also a member of staff of the Shanghai Art Academy.\textsuperscript{674} Moreover, Xu Zhimo also looked for Liu Haisu’s support when he and Xu Beihong were in dispute over Western modern art in China.\textsuperscript{675} Liu Haisu’s long-term active participation in the Shanghai art world meant that he was still influential in the 1929 exhibition, although he left for Europe after the exhibition had opened.

\textsuperscript{669} Yen, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao’, pp. 630-634.
\textsuperscript{671} Yen, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao’, p. 634.
\textsuperscript{673} Liu Haisu was appointed to make a trip to Europe in 1928, and he started his journey in 1929. He arrived in Paris in March 1929. Yuan Zhizhuang 袁志熾, ‘Nianpu’ 年譜, ‘Chronology’, in Zhu and Yuan, Liu Haisu yishu wenxuan, pp. 545-546.
\textsuperscript{674} Yen, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao’, pp. 634-635.
\textsuperscript{675} Xu Zhimo, ‘Zhi Liu Haisu xin shijiu tong’ 致劉海粟信十九通, ‘Nineteen Letters to Liu Haisu’ in Xu Zhimo quanji: Xiyou shuxin ji, 徐志摩全集：戲劇書信集, ‘Compilation of Xu Zhimo: The Volume of Drama and Letters’ (Hong Kong, 1863), pp. 130-149 (pp. 138-141).
Liu Haisu became an acknowledged agent of Western art in China’s art world earlier than Xu Beihong. In the 1920s, when Xu Beihong was pursuing art studies in Paris, Liu Haisu strived to promote Post-Impressionism in China. In 1922, Liu Haisu made a speech about the latest trends in Western modern painting to the Beijing University Painting Research Society at the invitation of Cai Yuanpei.\textsuperscript{676} In the speech, he introduced the new styles of Western painting, such as Post-impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and others. He had a high regard for Post-impressionism as the forerunner of new Western art, in that it abandoned rational realism in pursuit of subjective expression.\textsuperscript{677} Liu Haisu argued that art had to represent an artist’s sincere feelings. His point of view matched that of Xu Zhimo as expressed in ‘I Have Doubts, Too’. In addition to the speech, Liu Haisu also held his own one-man show in Beijing from 15 to 18 January 1922. Cai Yuanpei published a specific article to introduce Liu Haisu and his art. In this article, Cai Yuanpei pointed out the influence of Post-impressionism on Liu Haisu, as demonstrated in Liu Haisu’s honest representation of his feelings in his landscape painting.\textsuperscript{678} Liu Haisu’s status as the Chinese spokesman for Post-impressionism was also confirmed in the reviews of the 1929 National Art Exhibition.\textsuperscript{679} Looking at Chinese artists, Liu Haisu found in Shi Tao’s (石濤, 1642-1708) painting a correspondence with Post-impressionism (Fig. 148). He argued that the mindscape which was represented in Shi Tao’s painting was in accordance with the inner reality of Post-impressionism. Accordingly, he suggested, long before Post-impressionism,

\textsuperscript{676} Liu Haisu’s speech was entitled, \textit{Xiandai huihuci de xinqvshi} ('New Trends in Modern Painting'). The content was published in \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 10, 12 & 13 January 1922.

\textsuperscript{677} \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 10 January 1922.

\textsuperscript{678} \textit{Beijing daxue rikan}, 16 January 1922.

\textsuperscript{679} Song, ‘Xiyang huapai xitong yu meizhan xihua pingshu’, p. 44.
modern art had started in China as early as Shi Tao’s time. The vigorous brushwork and vivid colours in Liu Haisu’s later landscape painting represented a hybrid style, demonstrating the influence of both Shi Tao and Post-impressionism (Fig. 147).

Liu Haisu spoke of Post-impressionism in glowing terms. He also compared the expressive brushwork of Chinese painting with the art of Impressionism. His perspective was similar to that of traditional painters, such as Chen Shizeng, as demonstrated in his often-cited ‘The Value of Literati Painting’. In the 1920s, the force of traditional Chinese painting in China’s art world was still greater than that of Western art. The number of traditional painting societies was about three times that of those devoted to Western art. According to the calculations of the scholar Yen Chuan-yung, from 1900 to 1929 there were twenty-one societies devoted to traditional painting and six societies for Western painting in Shanghai. Several of the Western painting societies were set up by the staff of the Shanghai Art Academy. In addition to the Heavenly Horse Society, the Eastern Painting Society (Dongfang huahui 東方畫會, 1915) and the Association of Chinese Art (Zhonghua meishu xiehui 中華美術協會, 1916) were set up by Chen Baoyi, Wang Yachen and Wu Shiguang, who were all professors at the Shanghai Art Academy. Given the significance of the Shanghai Art Academy in the Western art arena of Shanghai, Liu Haisu’s promotion of Post-impressionism was bound to gain popularity. Moreover, by linking Post-impressionism and traditional Chinese painting, Western modern art would become more consolidated because of the response from the traditional painting

\[681\] Chen Shizeng’s perspective on literati painting and modern Western art has been discussed in Chapter 3.
\[682\] Yen, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao’, p. 653.
\[683\] For a full account of Shanghai’s art schools and societies before 1949, see Huang, ‘Shanghai de meishu yuanxiao han meishu shetuan’.
circle. All of this meant that Xu Beihong had to face a huge challenge to promote his academic realism in the Shanghai art world when he returned to China in the late 920s.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Xu Beihong quickly assumed the role of a new accomplished promoter of Western art during his return journey in 1926. In several of the speeches that he made at this time, Xu Beihong did not reveal any obvious dislike of the modernist painters, although his emphasis on painstaking craftsmanship had demonstrated this tendency. In a speech delivered to the Chinese University of Art, Xu Beihong mentioned Manet, Cézanne and Matisse as examples of the variety of styles in French art, but without the same bitter criticism of Western modern art that he later expressed in 'Doubts'. He argued that there were no absolute standards by which to evaluate which style was better and which was worse.\(^{684}\) However, his realist stance grew more and more ingrained after he returned to Shanghai in 1927. It seemed that Xu Beihong was eager to claim his position in the Shanghai art world. In the Associated Art Exhibition held in September 1927, to which Xu Beihong also contributed some of his paintings, he criticised the drawings of his friend Chang Yu for their lack of construction, although he acknowledged that they represented a special flavour (qiqu 奇趣).\(^{685}\) The simplicity of line and composition as well as the decorative colour and sensual nudes in Chang Yu’s paintings have often led to him being called the ‘Chinese Matisse’ (Fig. 99).\(^{686}\) Eugene Wang used Chang Yu’s art to exemplify Xu Zhimo’s artistic thoughts in the two Xus debate of 1929. Chang Yu’s paintings were held in high esteem by Xu Zhimo, who referred to the

\(^{684}\) Xu Beihong, ‘Zai Zhonghua yishu daxue jiangyanci’, in Xu and Jin, Xu Beihong yishu wenji, pp. 93-95 (p. 94).

\(^{685}\) Xu, ‘Meishu lianhe zhanlanhui jilue’, p. 19.

distorted legs of Chang Yu’s nudes as ‘cosmic legs’. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Xu Beihong, Chang Yu and Xu Zhimo developed a friendship when they were in Paris in the 1920s. Chang Yu and Xu Zhimo still retained their close relationship after Xu Zhimo moved back to China. Their friendship was demonstrated in a letter which Xu Zhimo sent to Liu Haisu after the two Xus debate to complain of Xu Beihong’s stubbornness and to enlist support from the overseas student circle. In this letter, Xu Zhimo also reminded Liu Haisu of the horse painting that Chang Yu had promised to execute for him. During Liu Haisu’s sojourn in Paris, Xu Zhimo continued to write to him and in his letters he also revealed his concern for Chang Yu. It seems that Xu Zhimo and Chang Yu then forged an alliance with Liu Haisu because of their similar perspective on art. However, Xu Beihong parted company with them on the issue of modernity in Chinese art and took the diametrically opposite stance.

Since Chang Yu was regarded as the Chinese Matisse, Xu Beihong’s criticism of his paintings for their non-figurative tendencies predicted his later condemnation of Matisse and other modernist painters. In the same year of 1927, Xu Beihong published another article to introduce the art of the Swedish painter Anders Zorn (1860-1920). Zorn’s painting combined the atmospheric effects of Impressionism with the thorough techniques of realism, which was reminiscent of the works of the French academic painters (Fig. 149). In this article, Xu Beihong rated Zorn’s work highly as the exemplification of sincerity (zhenshuai 真率), and censured Renoir, Bonnard, Cézanne and Matisse for the

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687 Chen, San Yu, p. 42.
inferiority and vulgarity of their paintings. Xu Beihong’s opinions given in this article share a great similarity with the point of view he expressed in ‘Doubts’. His hostile attitude towards Western modern painting may have been a response to the division in the Shanghai art field at that time. In 1926, a campaign arose at the Shanghai Art Academy. Some staff seceded from the Shanghai Academy and established the Xinhua Art Academy. Zhu Yingpeng (朱應鵬, 1895-?), the writer of the art column in Shenbao, and also a professor at the Xinhua Art Academy, proclaimed in 1927 that the artists involved in the Associated Art Exhibition would refuse to participate in the National Art Exhibition if the latter cooperated with ‘depraved and deceitful people’ (fuhua yu hudiao fenzi 腐化與胡調份子), which is a reference to Liu Haisu and the Shanghai Art Academy. Zhu Yingpeng pointed specifically to the division in the Shanghai art world in the article, Nanbei yishujie tuanjie de tujing (南北藝術界團結的途徑, ‘The Way to Unite the Northern and Southern Art Fields’), which was published in the October 1927 edition of Shenbao. In this article, Zhu Yingpeng also criticised the Great Beijing Art Meeting (Beijing yishu dahui 北京藝術大會) for the display of old-fashioned forms of art, such as traditional opera, music and painting. He then praised the Associated Art Exhibition, which exhibited the works of Xu Beihong, Chang Yu, Chen Baoyi and others, for rectifying the failings of the Great Beijing Art Meeting by rejecting non-creative music and theatre, as well as hermit paintings. By this means, Zhu Yingpeng warned the Northern artists not to associate with the degenerate artists of Shanghai otherwise the participators in the Associated Art Exhibition would withdraw from the 1929 National Art Exhibition. The main Northern artist whom

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692 Xu, ‘Zorn luezhuan’, p. 119.
693 Huang, ‘Shanghai de meishu yuanxiao han meishu shetuan’, p. 153.
Zhu Yingpeng was warning was Lin Fengmian, who was the organiser of the Great Beijing Art Meeting.\textsuperscript{696} Due to political upheaval in the North, Cai Yuanpei, Lin Fengmian and other Beijing-based artists moved down south, which gave rise to the occurrence of the first National Art Exhibition. The gathering of artists from all over the country increased the vigour of Shanghai’s art world, but also aggravated the conflict which existed in the art field.

Zhu Yingpeng’s article pointed out the division in the Shanghai art world as well as the sense of superiority felt in the city. Lin Fengmian went to France to study art in 1919 and returned to China to take charge of the National Beijing Art College in 1926. Because the warlord Zhang Zuolin (張作霖, 1875-1928) closed the School, Lin Fengmian then went down to Shanghai and assisted Cai Yuanpei in developing the idea of continuous art education.\textsuperscript{697} Compared with the artists mentioned above, such as Zhu Yingpeng, Liu Haisu, Chen Baoyi, and others, Lin Fengmian was a newcomer in the Shanghai art world. Nonetheless, Lin Fengmian demonstrated his aspirations in art by actively participating in various artistic activities. In 1927, he organised the large-scale Great Beijing Art Meeting, which claimed to model itself after the French Salon and aimed to unite artists all over the nation. The committee of the Art Meeting issued the often-cited manifesto:

\begin{verbatim}
Down with the tradition of copying!
Down with the art of the aristocratic minority!
Down with the antisocial art that is divorced from the masses!
Up with the creative art that represents the times!
Up with the art that can be shared by all the people!
Up with the people’s art that stands at the crossroads!\textsuperscript{698}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{696} For a full account of the Great Beijing Art Meeting, see ‘Beijing yishu dahui’ 北京藝術大會, \textit{'The Great Beijing Art Meeting', Yishujie 藝術界, 16 (1927)}; also in Zhao and Yu, 1542-2000 \textit{Zhongguo youhua wenxian}, pp. 518-519.

\textsuperscript{697} Liu, \textit{‘Yaboluo yu Yishu yundong she’}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{698} Sullivan, \textit{Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China}, p. 44.
This manifesto obviously echoed Chen Duxiu’s appeal to writers to overthrow aristocratic, classical and forest literature in pursuit of national, realistic and social literature in his 1917 article, "Wenxue geming lun" (文学革命論, ‘On the Literary Revolution’), which had become the most representative manifesto of the New Culture Movement. The manifesto of the Great Beijing Art Meeting demonstrated Lin Fengmian’s aspirations to lead a new revolution in art as the New Culture Movement had done in literature. Lin Fengmian’s passion for art continued in the statement ‘A Letter to the National Art Field’, which was published in the same year of 1927. In this statement, Lin Fengmian repeated his call to artists all over the country to unite. Moreover, he advocated replacing religion with art and emphasised the social responsibilities of art. Lin Fengmian’s artistic statement apparently followed Cai Yuanpei and the reform-minded intelligentsia of the New Culture Movement. His revolutionary attitude towards art remained after he moved to Hangzhou to head the National Hangzhou Academy of Art in 1928. The Art Movement Society (Yishu yundongshe 藝術運動社) was founded in the same year. Its manifesto claimed to deny completely the value of traditional art and to associate with the artists preoccupied with creating new art, which continued Lin Fengmian’s radical stance.

700 Chen, ‘Wenxue geming lun’.
701 Lin, ‘Zhi quanguo yishujie shu’.
Lin Fengmian’s revolutionary attitude may not only have been aimed at traditional Chinese painting, but also at the Western-style painting in the Shanghai art world. The Shanghai-based artists, such as Chen Baoyi, Ding Yanyong and Ni Yide, had all learnt painting in Japan. Although Liu Haisu did not take art courses at schools in Japan, his knowledge of Western modern art was acquired through Japan first instead of from Europe directly. Moreover, the teachers in the Shanghai Art Academy, such as Ding Song and Chang Yuguang, were both influential in the commercial art arena of Shanghai, as discussed in Chapter 2. On the other hand, the staff of the National Hangzhou Academy of Art had mostly studied art in France, such as Li Jinfa, Lin Wenzheng (林文錚, 1903-1990), Liu Jipiao (劉既漂), Wu Dayu (吳大羽, 1903-1988), Cai Weilian (蔡威廉, 1904-1939), and others. In addition to establishing the Art Movement Society, the National Hangzhou Academy of Art also issued the journal Apollo in 1928. The articles published in Apollo revealed that the National Hangzhou Academy of Art aimed to put Cai Yuanpei’s artistic ideals into practice, looked for the best way to combine Chinese and Western art, promoted sculpture, and emphasised the importance of drawing in the art curriculum. It appeared that Lin Fengmian intended to make the National Hangzhou Academy of Art the base for the artistic New Culture Movement as well as for ‘authentic’ Western art, that is Western art direct form its origins instead of through a third party such as Japan.

After heading the National Hangzhou Academy of Art, Lin Fengmian was seemingly too busy to take charge of the Academy and the Exhibition at the same time. So the directorship was then moved into the hands of the Shanghai Art Academy. In transferring the directorship, Lin Fengmian tried to retain part of

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703 Liu, ‘Yabolo yu Yishu yundong she’, p. 4.  
704 Liu, ‘Yabolo yu Yishu yundong she’, pp. 6-12.  
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the power by proposing an associated directorship. However, his proposal was not approved and the leadership was then made up of the Shanghai Art Academy and the realist painter Li Yishi.\textsuperscript{705} Lin Fengmian still exhibited several paintings in the National Art Exhibition, including *Nanfang* (南方, ‘The South’), *Juan* (倦, ‘Weariness’), *Hai* (海, ‘Sea’), and *Gongxian* (貢獻, ‘Tribute’).\textsuperscript{706} Other members of the staff of the National Hangzhou Academy of Art, such as Cai Weilian and Wu Dayu also participated in the National Art Exhibition.\textsuperscript{707}

However, their disappointment with the National Art Exhibition was stated bluntly in *Apollo*. The article, *Diyiyie* (第一頁, ‘The First Page’), criticised the fact that the National Art Exhibition was filled with ‘poorly made fakes’ (*Cuzhi lanzao de yanpin* 粗製濫造的赝品) and appealed to spectators to put their hopes for art on the West Lake Exposition (Xihu bolanhui 西湖博覽會), whose art hall was organised by the National Hangzhou Academy of Art.\textsuperscript{708} On 24 May 1929, only one month after the National Art Exhibition, Lin Fengmian and the National Hangzhou Academy of Art opened an exhibition in Shanghai, claiming to imitate the French *Salon des Refusés* (Salon of Rejects) and to exhibit the works of real art which had been rejected by the National Art Exhibition.\textsuperscript{709} Lin Fengmian exhibited his painting *Renlei de tongku* (人類的痛苦, ‘Humanity’s Pain’, 1929) (Fig. 88). In the picture of this painting, the distorted human torsos are dissolved in the black void of the background. The bold brushstrokes and heavy colours reinforce the torture the humans are suffering. Lin Fengmian’s painting, which

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\textsuperscript{705} Yen, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao’, pp. 655-656.


\textsuperscript{707} For their works in the National Art Exhibition, check the website, http://ed.arte.gov.tw/nae/index.aspx.


expresses his deep sympathy for what human beings have suffered in theatrical brushwork, has caused him to be regarded as Chinese Expressionist.\textsuperscript{710} Lin Fengmian's work may have been executed to reflect the pain of the Chinese people caused by national disasters. Lin Fengmian's intention was to represent in another way, different from Xu Beihong's realism, an 'obsession with China'.\textsuperscript{711} Besides Lin Fengmian, Wu Dayu was praised as the Chinese representative of Impressionism because of the bright colours and brisk brushwork in his paintings (Fig. 150). Cai Weilian was highly regarded in both the National Art Exhibition and the Exhibition of the National Hangzhou Academy of Art due to her successful combination of Realist precision and Impressionist colour in her portraits (Fig. 151).\textsuperscript{712} In addition to Liu Haisu's Japanese Post-impressionism and Xu Beihong's French academic realism, Lin Fengmian and his colleagues aimed to introduce to the Chinese people another aspect of Western modern art. Their efforts were also acknowledged. Jin Weijun approved the Exhibition of Rejects for bringing to China a more modern kind of Western art, which was more avant-garde than the Western-style painting of Liu Haisu and the Shanghai Art Academy.\textsuperscript{713} Zhu Yingpeng also regarded highly the vigour and strength in Lin Fengmian's paintings, which reflected the direct influence of European art and thus was distinctive from the modes inspired by Japanese art.\textsuperscript{714}

The contested atmosphere in the Shanghai art world was noticed by critics and by artists themselves. The calligrapher Ma Gongyu (馬公愚, 1890-1968) indicated in the National Art Exhibition that Westernised artists liked to do something new just to be original. Moreover, they attacked artists who were...

\textsuperscript{710} Hua He, \textit{Lin Fengmian: Ein Expressionistischer Maler in China} (Lin Fengmian: A Expressionistic Painter in China) (Frankfurt, 2007).
\textsuperscript{711} Wang, 'In the Name of the Real', p. 49.
\textsuperscript{712} Liu, \textit{Yaboluo yu Yishu yundong she}, pp. 15-17.
\textsuperscript{713} Jin, 'Meizhan yu yishu yundong', p. 24.
\textsuperscript{714} Liu, \textit{Yaboluo yu Yishu yundong she}, p. 18.
different from them. Ma Gongyu compared their behaviour with that of belligerent warlords.\textsuperscript{715} Jin Weijun directly pointed out that an exhibition was the best battlefield for art. The larger the exhibition was, the fiercer the battle on the art field would be.\textsuperscript{716} Lin Fengmian held other exhibitions to compete with the National Art Exhibition, while Xu Beihong was conspicuous by his absence from it. Xu Beihong was not the only one to withdraw from the National Exhibition. Several artists who were active in the Shanghai art world also refused to contribute their works to the National Art Exhibition, such as Zhu Yingpeng, Zhang Yuguang, Chen Baoyi and Ding Yanyong, although Zhang Yuguang later agreed to join the committee and Ding Yanyong did exhibit his painting \textit{Dushu zhi nü} (讀書之女, 'A Girl Reading') at the National Exhibition.\textsuperscript{717} Zhang Yuguang and Chen Baoyi were professors of the Shanghai Art Academy. In the late 1920s, however, they seceded from it and established the Chinese University of Art and the \textit{Xinhua} Art Academy. Ding Yanyong taught at the Chinese University of Art and Zhu Yingpeng at the \textit{Xinhua} Art Academy. They also founded the Shanghai Art Association (\textit{Shanghai yishu xiehui} 上海藝術協會) in June 1928 and held their first art exhibition in October 1928. This exhibition displayed more than 200 pieces of artwork and attracted an audience of more than ten thousand spectators.\textsuperscript{718} News reports published in \textit{Shenbao} claimed that the Exhibition of the Shanghai Art Association featured the works of the most eminent artists in Shanghai, including Xu Beihong.\textsuperscript{719} He displayed five paintings in the exhibition, including \textit{Xiaosheng} (齋聲, 'Playing Flute', 1926) and \textit{Zhang Ji xiang} (張繼像, 'Portrait of Zhang Ji', 1928), a portrait of the

\textsuperscript{716} Jin, ‘Meizhan yu yishu yundong’, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{717} Yen, ‘Guanfang meishu wenhua kongjian de bijiao’, p. 655. For a full list of the works exhibited at the National Art Exhibition, see the website, \url{http://ed.arte.gov.tw/nae/index.aspx}.
\textsuperscript{718} Huang, ‘Shanghai de meishu yuanxiao han meishu shetuan’, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{719} \textit{Shenbao}, 3 October 1928.
important figure of Republican Revolution (Figs 152-153). Lu Erqiang (陸爾強),
editor of several art textbooks, thought highly of Xu Beihong’s realist paintings,
which vividly rendered the portrayed figures, and represented their spirits at the
same time. Lu praised Xu Beihong as the best practitioner of Courbet’s Realism
in China. The painters of the Shanghai Art Association obviously intended to
challenge the authority of the National Art Exhibition, which they believed to be
controlled by the Shanghai Art Academy.

Xu Beihong taught at the Chinese University of Art from 1927. His
withdrawal from the National Art Exhibition was thus understandable because he
was responding to the secession movement which was led by his colleagues.
Moreover, compared to Zhu Yingpeng’s serious denigration of Liu Haisu as a
deceitful person, Xu Beihong’s attack on Western modern artists by using such
words as ‘shameless’ and ‘heroin’ were not particularly emotional and personal.
Zhu Yingpeng’s criticism of Liu Haisu and the conservative artists of national
painting can find echoes in Xu Beihong’s attack on the promoters of Western
modern painting and on the Four Wangs in ‘Doubts’. As discussed earlier, Xu
Beihong’s rigid realist standpoint seemed to gain more support than Xu Zhimo’s
perspective under the nationalist atmosphere. Moreover, Xu Beihong also took
advantage of the division in the Western art field in Shanghai to consolidate his
position in the art world. Nonetheless, Xu Beihong’s realist works were not
always welcome in Shanghai. Lou Jinsheng (樓金聲), in his review of the 1927
Associated Art Exhibition, admired the painstaking craftsmanship that Xu
Beihong represented in his works, however, Lou argued that the level of
technical proficiency could not strike a chord with him. Ni Yide held a similar

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720 Wang, Xu Beihong nianpu changbian, p. 69.
721 Lou Jinsheng, ‘Canguan lianhe zhanlanhui’ 參觀聯合展覽會, ‘A Visit to the Associated Art
Exhibition’, Shenbao, 20 September 1927.
opinion of Xu Beihong's works: he affirmed the solid grounding that Xu Beihong had in realism. Although this kind of painting was popular in China, it could not evoke in him any great interest due to its lack of creativity.\footnote{Ni Yide, 'Meishu lianzhan zhi huigu' 美術聯展之回顧, 'A Review of the Associated Art Exhibition', \textit{Shenbao}, 7 October 1927.} Even the artists who were in the same camp as Xu Beihong represented in their paintings a style far different from Xu Beihong's realism. For example, Ding Yanyong was a colleague of Xu Beihong at the Chinese University of Art and also refused to participate in the National Art Exhibition at the beginning. However, the bold colour and sensual air in the style of Matisse in his nude painting demonstrated an obvious modernist tendency (Fig. 154). He later joined the avant-garde Storm Society, whose founding members were close to Liu Haisu.\footnote{The Storm Society was founded by Pan Xunqin and Ni Yide in 1931. They both then with Liu Haisu established the Muse Society (Moshe 陶社) in 1932. News and articles about the Storm Society were frequently published in the journal of the Muse Society, \textit{Yishu xunkan} (藝術旬刊, \textit{The Art Magazine}). Chou and Wu, '1920 ji 30 niandai Zhongguo huajia fu Bali xihua hou dui Shanghai yitian de yingxiang', p. 654-655.} During World War II, he joined Xu Beihong in the China Art Academy (Zhongguo meishu xueyuan 中國美術學院) in Chongqing, the Chinese provisional capital in the Second Sino-Japanese War.\footnote{Huang, 'Shanghai de meishu yuanxiao han meishu shetuan', p. 163. For an English version of the Storm Society Manifesto, see Danzker, \textit{Shanghai Modern 1919-1945}, pp. 234-235.}

The division in the field of Western art which was manifest in the National Art Exhibition continued in the 1930s. The promoters of Western modern painting, such as Ni Yide, Pan Xunqin, Liu Haisu and Chang Yu, organised the Storm Society and the Muse Society in the 1930s to introduce the latest trends in Western art. The Storm Society was the first Chinese oil painting society and publicly announced that it aimed to revitalise the Chinese art arena in the same way as Fauvism, Dadaism and Surrealism had done in the West.\footnote{Sullivan, \textit{Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China}, pp. 77-78.} This manifesto was also embodied in the paintings of its members. Many of the
members’ works were clearly modelled on Picasso, Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) and André Derain (1880-1954) (Fig. 155). The Storm Society claimed to be creative in its pursuit of art for art’s sake; while Zhu Yingpeng, who had been among the loudest opponents to Liu Haisu in the 1920s, made a speech in 1938, at the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, in which he stressed the social responsibility of artists. He argued that artists could not be indifferent to political issues and should create works in the style of realism so as to reflect the hard times faced by China. Xu Beihong’s artistic activities in the 1930s also responded to the patriotism pervasive in wartime China, as is shown in Zhu Yingpeng’s speech. He was preoccupied with the making of realistic history painting and gradually turned to the creation of ink painting with nationalist implications. Xu Beihong’s painting will be under scrutiny in the next chapter. In the 1930s and 1940s, Xu Beihong’s nationalist painting, which responded to the wartime atmosphere in China, contributed a great deal to his eminent status in China’s art world. On the other hand, the autonomous Storm Society gradually saw a decrease in its influence in the art field in the nationalist context.

The debates and contests generated by the National Art Exhibition revealed the maturity and complexity of China’s art field. An artist’s accomplishments could receive highly polarised evaluations. Moreover, an artist’s stance could also change according to his position or to the rules of game in the art field. The National Art Exhibition demonstrated a flourishing Chinese art field which accommodated a crowd of agents. They had to address the challenge of how to

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728 Croizier, ‘Post-Impressionist in Pre-War Shanghai’.
manipulate Western art to build their fame on the one hand, and how to adapt Western art into the local context of China on the other. Besides, they were compelled to pull between nationalist feelings and pressures and artistic autonomy. It seemed that twentieth-century Chinese artists were destined to live in an artistic context which was permanently intertwined with political upheaval. The first National Art Exhibition provided a glimpse into the complexity of China's art field, which was caused by the contradictory nature of Chinese and Western art as well as by the interference of politics. The interaction between various principles in the art field provided an answer to Xu Beihong's seemingly sudden turn to ink painting after the 1930s. It also revealed how Xu Beihong established his eminent status in China's art world by mastering the different rules of the game in the art field in different times.
Chapter 6 The Creation of a New Chinese Painting

6.1 Hybridity

As discussed in the previous chapters, through the translation and appropriation of Western realism, Xu Beihong had gradually built his position in the competitive art field. Moreover, to exert his influence, Xu Beihong presented himself as a provocative figure in the discursive space of the 1929 National Art Exhibition, and had already started to create large-scale Chinese history paintings from 1928 to put into practice his thoughts about art. Xu Beihong’s history paintings were mainly produced in three periods. The first period, between 1928 and 1932, was the most productive of the three. Almost all the most representative of Xu Beihong’s history paintings were executed during this time, such as the oil paintings *Tian Heng yu wubai zhuangshi* (田横與五百壯士，‘Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers’, 1928-1930) (Fig. 89), *Xiwohou* (俠我后, ‘Awaiting the Deliverer’, 1930-1933) (Fig. 156), and the ink paintings *Liuchaoren shiyi tu* (六朝人詩意圖, ‘Poetic Expression of People in the Six Periods’, 1929) (Fig. 157) and *Jiufang Gao* (1931) (Fig. 2).\(^\text{729}\) Xu Beihong also made some other smaller history paintings, including *Three Chivalrous Warriors* (Fig. 29), *Farewell My Concubine* (1931) (Fig. 72), and Confucius’s father *Shu Liang He* (叔梁纥, 1931) (Fig. 158).\(^\text{730}\) The second period occurred in 1940 when Xu Beihong was in India at the invitation of the poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Although he was away from wartime China, Xu Beihong executed the history painting *Yugong yishan* (愚公移山, ‘The Foolish Old Man Moving

\(^\text{729}\) Xu Beihong first conducted on this theme in 1929. He then recreated another painting on this theme in 1939. The former version is now collected in The State Hermitage Museum, and the latter one is collected by Yang Yingfa (楊應法) and Yang Yingjun (楊應群) in Singapore. The illustration attached in this thesis uses the 1939 version. See *Xu Beihong zai Nanyang*, p. 219.

\(^\text{730}\) The painting *Three Chivalrous Warriors* is undated. It was first published in the *Fortnight Magazine of National Central University* (*Zhongyang daxue hanyuekan* 中央大學半月刊) in 1930. Xu and Jin, *Xu Beihong nianpu*, p. 70.
the Mountain’), one version in ink and one in oils, which was thought to express his patriotic emotions and his praise for Chinese resolve in the Second Sino-Japanese War (Figs 159-160).\textsuperscript{731} The third period was between 1943 and 1944, during which time Xu Beihong created several history paintings on the theme of literature, including \textit{Confucius Giving a Lecture} (Fig. 26), \textit{Tianhan cuixiu bo} (天寒翠袖薄, ‘Beauty in Du Fu’s Poem’, 1944) (Fig. 37), and scenes from the \textit{Nine Songs} (Fig. 33).\textsuperscript{732} The period from 1927 to 1944 was the most prolific time of Xu Beihong’s artistic career, and incorporated the aforementioned three periods during which his creation of history paintings was at its height. Besides the history paintings mentioned above, Xu Beihong also produced some other ink paintings on the theme of historical anecdotes between 1927 and 1944, such as \textit{Huai Su Learning Calligraphy on Banana Leaves} (1937) (Fig. 43), \textit{Jing Shisanniang} (荆十三娘, ‘The Heroine Jing Thirteen’, 1938) (Fig. 161), and paintings on Zhong Kui.\textsuperscript{733} These anecdotal paintings were smaller in scale and were executed with expressive ink brushstrokes in the style of traditional Chinese painting. Xu Beihong had been diligent and productive during his time in Europe from 1919 to 1926. But it was not until after 1927 when he moved back to China that he started to create a large quantity of paintings representative of his personal and mature style.

History painting had brought Xu Beihong unprecedented fame as the father of modern Chinese painting.\textsuperscript{734} But it also brought criticism. For example, the

\textsuperscript{731} Xie and Jiang, \textit{Xu Beihong – Zhongguo Xieshi zhuyi de dianjihe}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{732} Hua, \textit{Xu Beihong de Zhongguo hua gaoliang}, pp. 66-67. For a detailed list of Xu Beihong’s artistic activities and works during this period, see Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, pp. 57-276.
art history scholar Wen Fong argued that Xu Beihong's *The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain* and other paintings, which combine Chinese subject matter and Western chiaroscuro modelling and perspective techniques, do not fulfil the aim of reforming Chinese art. He pointed out that, "For although he [Xu Beihong] was a competent draftsman of individual figures, he failed in his attempt to depict many figures in one composition. His attempt to master the technique of Western realism with Chinese brush and ink appears to have been precluded by what Norman Bryson characterizes as the fundamental bifurcation of the two traditions of representational painting." 735 Michael Sullivan also had similar opinions with reference to Xu Beihong’s history painting. He commented on Xu Beihong’s first large-scale oil painting, *Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers*, that, “Although the theme is Chinese, the handling is typical of the Salon painting in the late nineteenth century, well composed and utterly lacking in any true sense of the drama of the moment. The same atmosphere of conventional correctness and lack of dramatic feeling informs in his later historic compositions, such as the equally admired *Awaiting the Deliverer* of 1933”. 736 Nevertheless, these two paintings have been highly acclaimed in China as Sullivan had described in his comment.

Fong and Sullivan’s criticism of Xu Beihong’s history paintings draws attention to the hybridity nature of his works, involving the composition, the medium and the subject matter. Xu Beihong had started creating history paintings as early as 1922 when he made the drawing *Putting the Finishing Touch to the Picture of a Dragon*, but *Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers* was the first completed history painting in oils. *Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers* illustrates the story of the disaffected hero Tian Heng from *The

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735 Fong, *Between Two Cultures*, p. 96.
Biography of Tian Tan (田儋列傳), which was written by the historian Sima Qian (司馬遷, ca 145-90 BC) in the Records of the Grand Historian of China (史記). Tian Heng was the prime minister of the Qi nation, and he committed suicide after refusing to surrender himself to the Han Empire.\textsuperscript{737} Xu Beihong depicted the moment of Tian Heng waving farewell to his followers before he committed suicide. In the painting, Tian Heng stands on the right of the picture. He is wearing a red robe and has a sword strapped around his waist. The scabbard of the sword is painted in turquoise and gold, making a contrast to the red robe. This contrast of colours makes Tian Heng and his sword the focus of visual attention and implies the next action that the protagonist is going to take. The application of red, gold and turquoise, with the white horse behind Tian Heng, also endows Tian Heng with a noble air, making him stand out distinctly from the other figures in the picture. There are 32 people in the picture in total, and 28 of them are crowded into the left half. Many of them are barefoot and stripped to the waist, revealing that they live in exile. The backdrop of sea and blue sky indicates that the location of this tragic event is on an island. The exaggerated vanishing perspective makes the figures in the picture stand out as if they are on a stage. This composition is often seen in the works of the nineteen-century French academicians, such as Bastien-Lepage’s *Potato Gatherers* (Fig. 120). The composition also brings an anecdotal interest to the picture, reminiscent of the genre painting *The Accident*, made by Xu Beihong’s teacher Dagnan-Bouveret in 1879 (Fig. 162). Reconstructions of historical stories or ancient legends in the form of genre painting were popular among the French academicians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{738} It is this


\textsuperscript{738} Nochlin, *Realism*, pp. 23-33.
kind of composition which demonstrates its effect in Xu Beihong’s history paintings.

The theatrical effect in Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers remains obvious in Xu Beihong’s next large-scale oil painting, Awaiting the Deliverer. This painting illustrates the chapter ‘The Announcement of Zhonghui’ (Zhonghui zhi gao 仲虺之誥) of Shangshu (尚書, ‘The Book of History’). This announcement praised the feat of Chengtang (成湯, 7-1588 BC), the first king of the Shang Dynasty (17th-11th century BC), to rescue people from the tyrannical regime of other kings.\(^{739}\) In the painting, a group of seventeen people is gathered in the centre of the picture, gazing into the distance as if they are eagerly waiting for something or someone to come. The umber farm-land without any grass growing and with trees with dried leaves on them represents a drought-stricken landscape. All the children in the picture are naked and several young men are wearing only loincloths, implying that they live in destitution. The baskets which some women are carrying are clearly empty, reinforcing their miserable situation due to the poor harvests. Illustrating this ancient historical scene in the form of a drought suggests that Xu Beihong’s inspiration may have come from another version of this story which is recorded in The Mencius (Mengzi 孟子). The Chinese Confucian philosopher Mencius (ca 371-288 BC) quoted ‘The Announcement of Zhonghui’ to answer a question posed by King Xuan of Qi (Qixuanwang 齊宣王) about whether it was a moral act to invade another kingdom. Mencius drew on The Book of History to advise King Xuan that benevolence was the best form of government. Mencius quoted ‘The Announcement of Zhonghui’ in the following terms: “When he [Chengtang] pursued his work in the east, the rude tribes on the west murmured. So did those

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on the north, when he was engaged in the south. Their cry was – ‘Why does he put us last?’ Thus, the people looked to him, as we look in a time of great drought to the clouds and rainbows”.

In addition to the elder who is standing in the centre of the picture, the woman who is sitting on the ground on the lower left side with two children in her arms easily attracts the viewer’s attention. The smaller child is suckling at the woman’s breast. This composition is similar to that in Delacroix’s *The Massacre at Chios* of 1824 (Fig. 163). On the lower right side of *The Massacre at Chios*, Delacroix painted a woman lying on the ground, nursing a child. *The Massacre at Chios* is made with a sensual touch, full of bright colour and dynamics. The composition of *Awaiting the Deliverer*, however, is more rigid, with all its parts unified by the brown tone representing in the painting a solemn atmosphere.

Although each individual figure is painstakingly rendered, the picture does not reach the level of photographic verisimilitude which those of the nineteenth-century academicians often did. Rather, the composition and handling demonstrates a closer association with the visual language of Western Classicism, which corresponds to Xu Beihong’s version of Realism, which has been studied in Chapter 4. For Xu Beihong, realism is more a pictorial practice with emphasis on form-likeness than a school of painting. So although Xu Beihong is regarded as the most representative practitioner of Western Realism in China, his painting does not represent the visual effect of photographic verisimilitude which was pervasive in the French academic realism of his day; neither does his painting reveal a self-critical sense of Realism outside the Academy, of which Manet was the most representative leader. On the contrary, Xu Beihong often betrays an inclination for classicism with reference to realism and this perspective is also

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embodied in his history paintings. Some scholars therefore argue that Xu Beihong’s preference for classicism made his style closer to that of Courbet.\textsuperscript{741}

This point of view in large measure corresponds to Xu Beihong’s own view of the French Realists. Xu Beihong held opposing attitudes towards the two acclaimed masters of Realism, Courbet and Manet. While deploiring Manet’s paintings as ‘vulgar and shameless’, Xu Beihong praised Courbet’s works as ‘composed and profuse’.\textsuperscript{742} As discussed in Chapter 4.1, the bitter self-critical attitude and the more provocative nudes in Manet’s paintings resulted in Xu Beihong’s hatred of his works.

Another large-scale painting which Xu Beihong executed between 1928 and 1932 is \textit{Jiu fan g Gao}. The story of \textit{Jiu fan g Gao} was derived from the chapter \textit{Shuofu} (説符, ‘Explaining Conjunctions’) of the ancient Taoist text \textit{Liezi} (列子), which was compiled around the fourth century.\textsuperscript{743} This work reveals Xu Beihong’s aspirations to execute a large-scale history painting with traditional Chinese ink and brush. Its inscription demonstrates how much effort Xu Beihong had put in its making, as it says that this painting is the seventh version of this theme. In the picture, a black horse occupies the centre. Its appearance of the movement marks a contrast to other horses which are standing still on the left hand side. Jiu fan g Gao is depicted as an elder standing on the right. He and the black horse are looking into each other’s eyes as if Jiu fan g Gao is measuring the inner quality, rather than the outside appearance, of the horse. According to the historical text, Jiu fan g Gao was a horse-judging master, famous for his extraordinary ability to discern the inner quality of a horse without being misled by its appearance. However, the black horse in Xu Beihong’s painting clearly

\textsuperscript{741} Jiang and Xie, \textit{Xu Beihong – Zhongguo jindai xieshi huihua de dianjizhe}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{742} Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{743} Hua, \textit{Xu Beihong de Zhongguo hua gailiang}, pp. 70-71.
looks superior to the others. Although Xu Beihong’s representation was contradictory to the historical text, in which the best horse Jiufang Gao found looked very ordinary at first sight, Xu Beihong may have tried to overcome this contradiction by depicting a kind of mutual spiritual comprehension between the elder and the black horse.

Another painting of Jiufang Gao which was executed in 1927 makes it clear that Xu Beihong had started to create this theme as early as the spring of 1927 (Fig. 164). This 1927 version depicted only Jiufang Gao, the black horse, the groom and one of Jiufang Gao’s two servants, the central part of the 1931 version, without the other additions and the landscape background. These two versions of Jiufang Gao provide a glimpse into the trajectory of Xu Beihong’s development of this theme into a narrative history painting in the form of a traditional handscroll. Moreover, a draft sketch for Jiufang Gao shows how hard Xu Beihong tried to depict this theme and the process by which he transformed the visual language of Western oils into Chinese pictorial paradigms (Fig. 165). In the draft, the composition and interaction between Jiufang Gao, the horse and the groom are different from those in the finished version of 1931. The bulk of the figures and the horse, the perspective and the format in the draft all show a closer association with Western painting, although Xu Beihong produced his picture with Chinese brushes. The lifelike rendering of the figures and the horse demonstrates Xu Beihong’s solid grounding in drawing. Moreover, its diagonal composition, which produces more theatrical and perspective effects, reminds us of the drafts which the students at École de Beaux-Arts often made to prepare their entries for the competition of the Prix de Rome (Fig. 166). Unlike the finished version, the composition of the Jiufang Gao draft seems more similar to

744 Weisberg, Against the Modern, pp. 29-46.
that of the drawing *Qin Qiong maina* (秦琵琶馬, ‘Qin Qiong Selling His Horse’) (Fig. 167). *Qin Qiong Selling His Horse* is not dated, although Xu Beihong’s chronology states that he did a drawing of *Qin Qiong Selling His Horse* in 1931.\(^\text{745}\) Besides, Xu Beihong mentioned in ‘Unresolved Doubts’ that in 1928 he asked the candidates who sat the examination held by the KMT to execute a painting on the historical story of Qin Qiong Selling His Horse.\(^\text{746}\) Accordingly, Xu Beihong may have started to conceive this subject no later than 1928. The story of *Qin Qiong Selling His Horse* is recorded in the *Shuo Tang* (説唐, ‘The Tales of Tang’), which is said to have been written by the Ming novelist Luo Guanzhong, and also in the *Sui Tang yanyi* (隋唐演義, ‘The Historical Romances of the Sui and Tang Dynasties’), written by Chu Renhuo (褚人穫, ca 1635-1706).\(^\text{747}\) The story describes how Qin Qiong, an official of the Sui Empire, once had to sell his horse to pay off his debts. Xu Beihong in his drawing depicted the moment of farewell between Qin Qiong and his horse after it was sold and was being taken away from him. Qin Qiong is pictured sitting at a table on the left side. He is turning his back to his horse while he waves farewell to it; the horse is looking at Qin Qiong as it is being taken away by a solider. The feelings between Qin Qiong and his horse are visualised in their interaction. The composition, which is full of movement and theatrical effects, is similar to that of the drawing of 1922, *Putting the Finishing Touch to the Picture of a Dragon* (Fig. 46). The search for a theatrical effect is often seen in Xu Beihong’s early works, such as the *Slave and Lion* (Fig. 80). This kind of composition demonstrates the influence of French academic training upon Xu Beihong.

Although Xu Beihong only executed a few works in the style of Western

\(^{745}\) Xu and Jin, *Xu Beihong nianpu*, p. 82.

\(^{746}\) Xu and Jin, *Xu Beihong yishu wenji*, p. 141.


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historical genre painting during his stay in Europe, he absorbed the elements of Western history painting diligently and then strived to nationalise them in his later creations of Chinese paintings on themes taken from ancient histories and classical literature.

Xu Beihong showed a consist preference for horses in his paintings. The horse had been a favourite subject for Chinese court and professional painters, whose works often served as the inspiration for Xu Beihong’s creations.

Considering together the three horse paintings which Xu Beihong executed in different periods of his career epitomises the different stages of creation that he had been undergoing. The first horse painting, *Three Horses* of 1919 (Fig. 62), is easily reminiscent of the works of the Qing court painter Lang Shining, who is well-known for his hybrid style which combines Western realistic technique and Chinese brushstrokes (Fig. 63).748 *Qin Qiong Selling His Horse*, which was executed in the 1920s, represents the influence of French academic training upon Xu Beihong. *Jiufang Gao* and other large-scale history paintings of the early 1930s mark to a large extent the culmination of Xu Beihong’s exhaustive efforts to create a new style of Chinese painting with the aid of Western pictorial language. The hefty style and anatomic precision with which the horses in the *Jiufang Gao* and *Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers* paintings are depicted obviously come from the numerous horse drawings that Xu Beihong made during his period in Europe (Fig. 168). By comparison, Xu Beihong’s paintings of the 1910s followed the paradigms of traditional professional painting. After he went to Europe, he turned to Western pictorial modes, in particular that of French academic realism, for his creation of history paintings. Nonetheless, most of the drawings of the historical genre of the 1920s maintain to a certain extent the

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748 The association between Xu Beihong and Giuseppe Castiglione’s horse paintings was discussed in Chapter 2.3.
influence of Chinese professional art and popular culture, which manifested itself in the anecdotal subjects and in the theatrical and entertaining effects in the drawings. In the large-scale history paintings of the late 1920s and 1930s, Xu Beihong was still depicting the heroes and sages of Chinese literature and history in Western pictorial language; meanwhile he was able to reduce the theatrical effects to seek a sense of the dignity of Western academic aesthetics in the paintings. In other words, Xu Beihong clearly found the way to visualise the nobleness and morality of art which he repeatedly stressed in his eloquent speeches and articles, such as the ‘Doubts’.  

The making of Jiufang Gao represents the difficulties which Xu Beihong must have encountered due to “the fundamental bifurcation of the two [Chinese and Western] traditions of representational painting”, as Bryson had marked. Western painting elements, such as modelling and perspective, have often been considered the opposite of non-figurative and flat Chinese painting. The Jiufang Gao may be seen as an answer that Xu Beihong tried to give to the question he posed regarding the shortcomings of Chinese painting, as in the article ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’. From Xu Beihong’s point of view, the inferiority of Chinese painting to Western art is largely because the Chinese pictorial instruments, such as the fragile paper and mineral pigments, constrained representation in Chinese painting. To extend the pictorial possibilities of Chinese painting, Xu Beihong thus infused Western pictorial language and painting technique into Chinese historical subjects. The Jiufang Gao draft reveals Xu Beihong’s efforts at carrying out his proficiency in Western life drawing using Chinese brushes. The finished version of the Jiufang Gao further demonstrates his aspirations to reform Chinese art with the aid of Western

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749 For Xu Beihong’s view of art in the ‘Doubts’, see Chapter 5.2.
painting techniques, which he continued to pursue throughout his life.

_The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain_, which was executed in both ink and oil versions, clearly discloses Xu Beihong's persistent endeavours to blend the fundamentally different styles of Chinese and Western painting. The paintings on this theme were made during Xu Beihong's visit to India in 1940. This is why some elements in the paintings, such as the elephants and the Indian figures, were inspired by the landscape of India. The oil version retained more of these exotic elements. The composition of these two versions is mostly identical, except for some changes in the background. For example, the elephants which are pulling the cart in the oil version are replaced by cattle in the ink painting. This change may have been an adjustment made to suit Chinese agricultural society. In addition to the cattle, the ink version also adds a huge elephant at the far left hand side. A strong man who is carrying a load of hay and vegetables on his shoulder is facing the elephant, appearing to feed it. His muscular figure is similar to another Indian-like robust man, who is portrayed in frontal view in the centre of the picture. These two figures are possibly modelled on the same Indian man, of whom Xu Beihong made several drawings (Figs. 169-170). These additions make the ink version appear longer and narrower in its format, which is closer to the form of a traditional Chinese hand scroll. Accordingly, the oil version may have been executed as a preparation for the creation of the ink version. Human figures which are portrayed in the different media of drawing, oil painting and Chinese ink produce varied effects. The volume and chiaroscuro which is created in charcoal and white chalk drawings seems much easier to transform an image into a Western oil painting than into a Chinese ink work. The quick-drying and transparent nature of traditional Chinese mineral pigment is a difficult medium in which to express the thick and modelled effects of Western
painting. So the effect of great strength which Xu Beihong represented by depicting vigorous workmen in his Chinese brush-and-ink paintings has not met with universal approval as is proved by the adverse opinions of Fong and Sullivan. Nevertheless, *The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain*, which is executed in different media, unfolds to us how much effort a Chinese artist has to make to create a new and hybrid Chinese painting.

In the West, the history painting of the Grand Manner has held the premier position in the hierarchy of academic art.\(^\text{751}\) But its status was precisely the opposite in traditional Chinese art. Although paintings on historical themes were popular in China, they were either executed to cater for mass taste, or they belonged to the category of figure painting, the pictorial genre by which court or professional painters were able to make money. To elevate the status of history painting in Chinese art and to increase its cultural capital, Xu Beihong thus represented episodes from the authoritative books of Confucianism. Moreover, he added a sense of dignity to his history paintings by infusing into them the modes of the Western grand style. As a professional artist, Xu Beihong found in Western history painting the best vehicle for the elevation of his status and his professional painting. He turned to Western realistic painting to look for pictorial styles in accordance with the intelligentsia’s scientific approach to China’s crises in her encounter with the West. Moreover, he drew on the authority of Western academic theories to endorse the value of history painting in modern Chinese art. So the hybrid history paintings represented Xu Beihong’s version of new Chinese painting. Furthermore, the hybrid style served as a strong weapon to

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build Xu Beihong’s position and to exert his influence in China’s art world.
6.2 Allegory

Xu Beihong’s history paintings, in particular the large-scale works, have often been regarded as the most representative of patriotism in the wartime China. The tragic heroism of Tian Heng, who refused to surrender; the high hopes for being rescued in the *Awaiting the Deliverer*; the strong will of overcoming difficulties in *The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain*; all these spoke with the voice of the Chinese people who were suffering from political upheavals. Xu Beihong was used to expressing his concern for the state of China in his works. In a female nude drawing, Xu Beihong inscribed on the far right hand side of it the words *Gemingjun de Jiujian* (革命軍得九江, “The revolutionary army took Jiujian”), referring to the military victory of the KMT-led Nationalist Government in 1926, which was a significant event for the incipient united state of China (Fig. 171). The drawings which Xu Beihong did during his stay in Europe seem to have often served as his diary. In addition to his patriotic mood, his poverty, diligence and friendship were also recorded in his drawings (Fig. 90). Most of these drawings bearing inscriptions about Xu Beihong’s overseas experiences are female nudes, a subject matter which seems not to correspond with the artist’s pensive mood. Inscribing poems or prose on paintings to express an artist’s feelings about national or personal issues had been a typical practice among the traditional literati painters. Xu Beihong appears to have followed this practice in particular in his later brush-and-ink paintings. Take the ink painting *Chenqu* (晨曲, ‘Morning Song’, 1936) for example, the picture zooms in on some branches and twigs, on which many sparrows are resting (Fig. 172). The branches and twigs are outlined with fine

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752 Xie and Jiang, *Xu Beihong – Zhongguo Xieshi zhuoyi de dianjizhe*, p. 94.
753 For a brief account of the Northern Expedition, see Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 341-348.
brush lines. Moreover, the sparrows are simply depicted with tones of black, white and ochre. Xu Beihong used only black and ochre tones to create a sense of space in the picture. The simple lines and colours in this picture render a refined atmosphere which the traditional literati art had been pursuing. Xu Beihong used colour so economically perhaps in order to create the impression of a lonely and cold season, as the inscription says: “Spring does not come”. The gathering sparrows seem to be waiting eagerly for the delayed spring. The inscription apparently carries some connotations beyond the poetic picture.

According to the year that this painting was made and its inscription, this painting must reflect Xu Beihong’s sorrow for the approaching Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. During the eight years of the War, Xu Beihong made several ink paintings of this sort to express his patriotic feelings, such as the painting *Fushang zhi shi* (負傷之獅, ‘Wounded Lion’, 1938) (Fig. 173). In this picture, a fierce lion is depicted with fast and bold brushstrokes. It is turning away and seems to be seeing something with alarm in the direction of the east. The inscription, which says “The lion is wounded. At twenty-seven years old, the nation has suffered from the greatest disaster”, apparently indicates that the lion refers to Republican China.

In 1938 when this painting was executed, Republican China was in its 27th year since its establishment in 1912. According to the connotations in the inscription, the lion looking in the direction of the east then appears more meaningful, because it suggests that the enemy of China is coming from the East. Xu Beihong also stated in the inscription that this painting was made to express his pensive mood in the face of national crises. Nevertheless, the piercing eyes of the lion also demonstrate Xu Beihong’s strong confidence and high hopes for national victory. In Xu Beihong’s paintings, the lion’s ferocious features often
make this beast symbolic of an unyielding China. For instance, in the *Huishi Dongjing* (會師東京, ‘Join Forces in the Eastern Capital’, 1943), several lions gather together at the top of a mountain (Fig. 174). Xu Beihong chose lions as the subject for this painting possibly because of the identical pronunciation of the words for ‘lion’ (*shi* 獅) and ‘force’ (*shi* 師) in Mandarin. This painting represents Xu Beihong’s high hopes for a significant turning point in China’s fight against Japan. Only by breaking through the Japanese occupation of Burma was China able to obtain more foreign aid, in particular from the United States. Therefore, once China was able to join forces in the Eastern Capital – Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, this meant that China had broken her isolated state in the war and stood much more chance of victory.754 This painting demonstrates Xu Beihong’s passionate patriotism because he was keeping abreast of the latest national issues.

Lions and horses appear frequently in Xu Beihong’s patriotic paintings. Horses are closely associated with the cavalry and with the battlefield. Consequently, they become an appropriate motif for paintings about war and patriotism. Xu Beihong was particularly fond of painting running horses. The vigorous movement of the running horse can well symbolise the high morale of the Chinese people in the wars. The *Aiming* (哀鳴, ‘Plaintive Whine’, 1942) is representative of this sort of painting (Fig. 1). In this picture, a horse is shown turning its back on the viewer and looking to the left with its mouth open. Its tail and mane are curved, painted with boldly-brushed ink daubs, as if blowing in the

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754 Hanoi was once named Tonkin, and its Chinese characters are '東京', identical to Tokyo. Therefore, articles often refer the ‘Eastern Capital’ in this painting to Tokyo. Hanoi and Kunming (昆明), the capital of Yunnan province of China were connected by the *Dianyue* (滇越) railway, which served as an important channel for China to import weapons and food during World War II until Japan occupied Vietnam. The Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia caused the seriously isolated state of China. So only by breaking Japan’s blockade was China able to win the war. Accordingly, it will make more sense to associate the Eastern Capital with Hanoi than with Tokyo. For articles discussing this painting, see Wang, *Xu Beihong nianpu changbian*, p. 248; Cho, *Xu Beihong yanjiu*, p. 93; Hua, *Xu Beihong de Zhongguo hua gailiang*, p.120.
wind. The gesture of the horse with the quick and bold brushstrokes creates a sense of movement in the picture, which makes the horse look as if it has just stopped running or is just about to gallop. Although it is only created by simple brushwork, this horse painting vividly represents a mood which is combines vigorousness and sadness, as is written in the inscription.\footnote{The inscription says: “Recalling the battle, [the horse] whines, faces to the blue sky and stands firmly” (哀鳴思戰鬥，週立向蒼蒼).} In another horse painting which was executed in 1943, Xu Beihong painted a horse lowering its head to graze (Fig. 175). This horse is also rendered with quick and free brushstrokes. The bold outline and the ink daubs are almost the same as in the earlier horse painting. The inscription says that Xu Beihong made this painting to celebrate China’s victory in her battle with Japan in the Hubei (湖北) province, which temporarily allowed the Chinese people to live in peace. The horse, which appears to graze with ease, is symbolic of the contemporary state of China and her people. The horses in Xu Beihong’s paintings are generally running, grazing or drinking water. These gestures on the one hand connote the high morale of the Chinese people and on the other hand they also symbolise the hardships that the Chinese people encountered during the wars. Xu Beihong’s horse paintings do bear strong patriotic implications, but they also embody Xu Beihong’s aspirations to reform the secluded and delicate paradigms of traditional Chinese painting, making them able to reflect the contemporary issues.

Besides horses and lions, pets, birds, fowls and flowers also become allegorical subjects in Xu Beihong’s paintings. Take the Zhuanglie de huiyi (壯烈的回憶, ‘Heroic Memory’, 1937) for example: Xu Beihong painted a cockerel standing on a rock (Fig. 176). The cockerel seems to be crowing loudly with its beak wide open. Hugh sunflowers flourish in the lower half of the picture. The cockerel and the sunflowers, all rendered in bright colours such as yellow and
red, make this painting full of vitality. The spirited air in the painting seems not
to coincide with the sentimental tone in the inscription, which says that Xu
Beihong was saddened by the re-occurrence of the Sino-Japanese War. Although
he was worried about Japan’s increasingly violent invasions, Xu Beihong applied
a bright tone to the painting to show that he was full of optimism for China’s
eventual victory. Fowls are often used in Xu Beihong’s works as a metaphor for
determination and hope. As early as 1928, Xu Beihong had designed a cockerel
for the masthead of the Modeng supplement of the Central Daily newspaper (Fig.
131). This cockerel is standing on a rock and behind it the sun is about to rise.
With its beak open, the cockerel is clearly crowing. The cockerel creates a
hopeful and bright image which corresponds with the new and promising
connotations which the term Modeng carries. In the first issue of Modeng, Xu
Beihong also published an essay, Geming geci sizhang (革命歌詞四章, ‘Four
Chapters of A Revolutionary Song’), which he wrote in the summer of 1927. The
Song told historical stories about chivalrous heroes and wise sages in troubled
times.\footnote{Wang, Xu Beihong niampu changbian, pp. 52-53.}
These stories are visualised in Xu Beihong’s history paintings, such as
those described above.

From the 1930s, Xu Beihong gradually turned to the creation of Chinese
brush-and-ink paintings. They are mostly executed with expressive and hasty
brushstrokes. Their subject matter is also typical, such as horses, magpies, cranes,
willows and plum blossoms. Nevertheless, these brush-and-ink paintings do not
endow Xu Beihong with a tranquil and disengaged image, the stereotype of the
traditional Chinese painters. On the contrary, their rich allegorical meanings,
which are often expressed in the accompanying inscriptions in the ink paintings,
lead Xu Beihong to be considered as passionate and patriotic. By comparison,
inscriptions are often absent in Xu Beihong’s history paintings, in particular those in oils. Even so it has been believed that Xu Beihong’s history painting contains an allusion to nationalism, as David Wang remarked: “He must not have intended merely to recapitulate a moment from the distant past; instead, that reality made sense for him only when brought to bear on the historical moment of China of the late 1920s”.

This is perhaps because Xu Beihong’s allegorical ink paintings make a great contribution to his patriotic image, and this image in turn reinforces the association between Xu Beihong’s history paintings and nationalism.

Xu Beihong was indeed a patriotic painter, and had proved his enthusiasm for national issues in the female nude drawings mentioned above, which he made before he started to create large-scale history paintings. In addition to this, his history paintings were mostly executed at times when nationalism was all-pervasive. For these reasons, it is hardly possible to look at Xu Beihong’s history paintings without being aware of these associations. Instead, they are full of allegory and are closely associated with the contemporary social and national state in which he was working. Nevertheless, the association between Xu Beihong’s history paintings and politics is so tight that it becomes difficult for other explanations to exist. Cho Shenko, in his lengthy treatise on Xu Beihong, refuted this sole patriotic reading of Xu Beihong’s history paintings. He argued that Xu Beihong’s large-scale history paintings, which have been acclaimed for their nationalist connotations, actually carry Xu’s own aspirations. The 天恒 and Five Hundred Retainers thus symbolised Xu Beihong’s ambitions to visualise that historical moment, which had never been well represented by the former painters. The 等待救世者 symbolised Xu Beihong’s ambitions

757 Wang, ‘In the Name of the Real’, p. 37.
to rescue degenerate Chinese painting. Furthermore, The Foolish Old Man
Moving the Mountain symbolised Xu Beihong’s determination to promote and
insist on realism in China’s art arena, where he believed that formalism had
gradually dominated.\textsuperscript{758} Xu Beihong’s student Ai Zhongxin (艾中信, 1915-2003)
recalled that Xu Beihong’s creation of the Tian Heng and Five Hundred
Retainers was in response to the question which Sima Qian posed at the end of
the story.\textsuperscript{759} Sima Qian explained that his motivation for recounting this
historical story was because he was touched by the loyalty of those martyrs.
Moreover, Sima Qian felt pity for the lack of illustrations of this story. He said:
‘Yet since they were all supposedly good at laying plans, why, I wonder, was
there none who could think of a way to save this situation?’\textsuperscript{760} Xu Beihong’s
creation of the Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers thus reveals that his
principle ambition was to create a great Chinese painting to demonstrate his
capacity as an outstanding new Chinese painter. Moreover, the integrity in this
story should also be a motivation for Xu Beihong, because the didactic and
moral history paintings could educate people, and thus develop the foundation of
‘illumination’ which Xu Beihong regarded as the essence of real art in his article
‘Unresolved Doubts’.\textsuperscript{761} Therefore, Xu Beihong’s history painting may be
political, but only within a cultural context. In other words, Xu Beihong should
subordinate political meanings to artistic significance in his history paintings. Xu
Beihong’s history paintings, which combine the refined craftsmanship and
spatial illusionism of Western painting with Chinese historical anecdotes, are
apparently intended to emulate French academic practices to create a

\textsuperscript{758} Cho, Xu Beihong yanjiu, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{761} Xu, ‘Huo zhi bujie’, p. 135.
grand-manner Chinese painting. By means of invoking the authority of the French Academy, Xu Beihong executed history paintings to realise his ambitions to be a great painter in China. On the other hand, the grand manner, which was used because it was closely bound to governmental and academic taste in the West, made Xu Beihong’s Chinese paintings in the grand style bound to bear allegories related to nationhood.

The grand style and idealised beauty in Xu Beihong’s paintings were criticised by Xu Beihong’s peers for a lack of nationalist rhetoric. Tian Han, Xu Beihong’s colleague at the South China Art Academy, remarked that Xu Beihong avoided picturing the real world literally in pursuit of idealised beauty in his works, although he claimed to be a Realist.\(^{762}\) Tian Han criticised the impoverished and starving people depicted in Xu Beihong’s *Awaiting the Deliverer* for not being convincing. What Xu Beihong cared about was actually picturesque Realism. Tian Han’s comments do to a certain level coincide with Xu Beihong’s point of view – the best art work is based on pictorial realism but should ultimately go beyond it to achieve idealised beauty, as discussed in Chapter 4.2. The writer Xie Bingying (謝冰瑩, 1906-2000) also shared a similar point of view with Tian Heng when she visited Xu Beihong’s exhibition in 1935. She praised Xu Beihong’s paintings because they were not executed simply for the sake of art; even so they still did not depict the social reality sufficiently.\(^{763}\) These remarks demonstrate that the pursuit of art still comes before political concerns in Xu Beihong’s history paintings.

Other than their patriotic implications, Xu Beihong’s paintings which


connote his own aspirations are also manifest in his brush-and-ink paintings. The paintings which are entitled *Chenyin* (沉吟, ‘Rumination’) should be among those that best represent Xu Beihong’s self-reflection and aspirations. The two paintings with the same title of *Rumination* were made in 1932 and 1936 (Figs 177-178). Their composition is similar. The space of the pictures is almost completely occupied by towering cypresses, which are depicted with hastily brushed ink daubs. There is only one tiny human figure – very possibly Xu Beihong himself – either standing to face the huge trees or turning his back to them. He seems to be in meditation. The poetic inscription on the two paintings is identical, saying: “Since when were heaven and earth collapsed, leaving it to witness the past and present? The dynamic overtones of a lifetime gather here for me to contemplate”. The 1932 version was executed when Xu Beihong was staying with Hu Shi in Beijing. In the letter which Xu Beihong wrote to Wu Zhihui, he said that it was a delight to be able to stay safe and to talk with friends about national crises in Beijing. With regard to the context of the 1932 *Rumination* painting and the image of destruction in the inscription, this painting has often been seen as Xu Beihong’s confession of his patriotism. In February 1932, Xu Beihong went up to Beijing because the Japanese invasion of Nanjing caused the National Central University to close temporarily. Nonetheless, the enduring nature of the cypresses is very possibly an allusion to Xu Beihong’s self-expectation. In 1936, when one of the *Rumination* paintings was executed, large-scale Sino-Japanese conflict was about to break out. Many artistic activities were suspended because of the foreign invasion and interior political upheavals.

764 For a list of the titles and inscriptions in Xu Beihong’s painting, see Wang, *Xu Beihong wenji*, pp. 213-221.
765 Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, p. 130.
At this time, many activities in which Xu Beihong participated demonstrated that how to continue the development of Chinese painting in wartime and how to make art serve national needs became central elements of Xu Beihong’s career.\textsuperscript{768} Besides, from the late 1920s, Xu Beihong had triggered several disputes with some well-known figures in the artistic and literary fields. The battlefield in the 1929 National Art Exhibition was the most famous of these, and the bitter dispute between him and Liu Haisu over their relationship and learning backgrounds was another.\textsuperscript{769} In the light of these difficulties that Xu Beihong had encountered, the poetic inscription of the \textit{Rumination} paintings thus very possibly projected Xu Beihong’s own situation rather than being a metaphor for national crises. Nevertheless, these paintings with allusions to self-portraiture are not completely detached from political significance. The \textit{Rumination} paintings were created at moments when Xu Beihong was filled with patriotic passion. Xu Beihong’s turn to brush-and-ink Chinese painting is also seen as a response to the upsurge of nationalism in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{770} Patriotism is an integral part of Xu Beihong’s allegorical paintings. However, what concerned Xu Beihong most throughout his life was always art – how to reform Chinese art and how to create a new Chinese painting. Although Xu Beihong was a patriot, the significance of his paintings should not be pinned down to the merely political.

Xu Beihong demonstrated his aspirations not only through the self-reflective paintings, but also by means of his paintings which had special meanings for friends, such as the horse painting of 1938, which was inscribed to Qi Baishi (齊白石, 1864-1957) to celebrate the birth of Qi Baishi’s son (Fig.

\textsuperscript{768} For a detailed list of Xu Beihong’s career in 1936, see Wang, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu changbian}, pp. 164-176.
\textsuperscript{769} For a detailed study of the 1929 National Art Exhibition, see Chapter 5. Xu Beihong published two statements in 1932 to announce that he was not Liu Haisu’s student and to refute Liu’s regarding him as the practitioner of Academism. For the statements published by Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu over these issues in 1932, see Wang, \textit{Xu Beihong wenji}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{770} Wang, ‘Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency’, pp. 129-130.
179). The running horse in the picture symbolised Xu Beihong himself, who wished to have been able to run to celebrate with Qi Baishi in person. Xu Beihong also made paintings in collaboration with other painters, such as with Qi Baishi in the Gamecocks of 1947 and with Wang Yachen in the Cat and Goldfishes of 1946 (Figs 180-181). These paintings not only exhibited Xu Beihong’s friendship with other painters but also demonstrated his wide connections in the art world. In the 1920s, Xu Beihong portrayed in oils several influential cultural and artistic figures of the earlier generation, such as Kang Youwei, Chen Sanyuan and Ren Bonian (Figs 137-139). These oil portraits show that Xu Beihong seemed eager to claim a position in the art field by portraying these eminent figures to endorse his accomplishments. By comparison, Xu Beihong’s later ink paintings revealed his affiliation and interaction with contemporary artists. It was clear that Xu Beihong had successfully entered the art arena and actively accumulated his cultural capital through affiliation. Xu Beihong followed the social practice among the traditional scholar painters, which was disguised under the amateurism of their literati painting. Moreover, Xu Beihong infused rich layers of allegories into his ink paintings. Combined with Western realistic techniques, as is clear in the anatomically-precise beasts and animals in his ink paintings, Xu Beihong added to the brush-and-ink painting genre which traditionally favoured a reclusive taste the earthy function of reflecting social reality. On the other hand, by combining both traditional and modern cultural capital – ink painting and Western realism – Xu Beihong quickly built his fame in both traditional and Western areas of China’s art world. In September 1930, the Shibao Pictorial published Xu Beihong’s ink painting and remarked that Xu Beihong was among the most accomplished Western-style

painters in China and that he had recently turned to the creation of national painting.\footnote{Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 68.}  In June 1931, the \textit{Beichen Pictorial} (北晨畫報) published Xu Beihong’s horse paintings and the accompanying commentary expressed high regard for Xu Beihong’s achievements in both Western and Chinese painting.\footnote{Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 77.}  In 1935, Xu Beihong was hailed as “the leader of the world of Chinese painting” \textit{(Zhongguo huatian zhi xiandao 中國畫壇之先導)}.\footnote{Xu and Jin, \textit{Xu Beihong nianpu}, p. 108.}
6.3 Modernity

When Xu Beihong’s *Tian Heng and Five Hundred Retainers* and *Awaiting the Deliverer* were exhibited in 1930, they were highly acclaimed as “the first sign of Renaissance in Chinese art”\(^{775}\). According to Mayching Kao’s study, Xu Beihong’s *Jiufang Gao* and *The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain* sought to “revive the grandeur of Chinese figure painting of Han (202 BC-220 AD) and Tang (618-907) times”\(^{776}\). Xu Beihong also tried to transform *The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain* into a mosaic wall painting, using the form of the traditional brick reliefs and wall paintings popular in the Han and Tang periods. This programme was suspended half-way through because of a lack of official support.\(^{777}\) These remarks and activities demonstrated that Xu Beihong intended to create a new Chinese painting through the modernisation and rejuvenation of the realistic traditions of Chinese art, and figure painting was at the centre of his reform programme. In his first article which touched on the reformation of Chinese painting in 1918, Xu Beihong had criticised the rigid and unrealistic depiction in Chinese figure painting because painters lacked any facility in three-dimensional modelling.\(^{778}\) Chiaroscuro modelling and a good knowledge of anatomy in Western figure painting therefore served as the most suitable vehicle for Xu Beihong to modify the shortcomings in Chinese figure painting and to create a new golden age of Chinese painting in modern times.

As discussed in Chapter 2, figure painting had been traditionally regarded as the genre from which professional and commercial artists, such as Xu Beihong, made their living and thus it had held a lower position in the hierarchy.

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of Chinese painting, which favoured amateurism. However, the realistic features of figure painting matched the call of twentieth-century intellectuals for a new pictorial technique to render contemporary China and to strengthen her national character. So the realistic strain of Chinese painting was re-valued and was considered to be the kind of Chinese painting which was able to compete with materially-advanced Western art. This comparative and global view had been centred on Xu Beihong’s strategies towards the modernisation of Chinese painting since the 1910s. In his 1926 speech ‘On Ancient and Modern, Chinese and Western Art – A Speech Given at Datong University’, Xu Beihong reviewed the development of Chinese painting from a global angle. As far as current Chinese painting was concerned, Xu Beihong argued, bird-and-flower painting was the best, landscape painting was the second best, and figure painting was the worst, because there were no masters of figure painting in China nowadays.

Xu Beihong went further and judged the accomplishments of the historically-acclaimed figure painters in a global light too. He listed the masters of figure painting in Chinese history such as Yan Liben (閻立本, ?-673), Wu Daozi (吳道子, 680-759), Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫, 1254-1322), Qiu Ying, Chen Hongshou, Ren Bonian and Wu Youru. Although their achievements were approved by their compatriots, in Xu Beihong’s eyes their skills were not good enough to compete with their international counterparts. Xu Beihong criticised the way that Wu Daozi’s superstitious attitude caused him to create wrongly-proportioned Indian deities in his works. He also criticised Chen Hongshou’s formularised handling of the figures in his paintings, such as the way that beauties were all depicted with wide jaws, that figures were dressed

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779 See Chapter 2-4.
without regard to the seasons, and that his figures were all painted narrow-eyed (Fig. 182).\textsuperscript{782} However, the importance of the realistic traditions of figure painting cannot be ignored in the modernisation of Chinese painting. In his article on the modern renaissance of Chinese art, Xu Beihong argued that modern Chinese painting should rejuvenate the grand traditions, as epitomised in the great artworks in the Buddhist caves.\textsuperscript{783} To improve the defects of traditional realistic painting and at the same time to restore its grand manner, Xu Beihong therefore concluded that pictorial realism and Chinese classicism was the key to the reform of Chinese painting, making it comparable with Western art in the modern era.\textsuperscript{784}

This proposal for the modernisation of Chinese painting is embodied in Xu Beihong’s history painting, which combines Western life drawing and Chinese classical figure painting. The vigorous figures in \textit{The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain} and their movements are reminiscent of the energetic workmen in the brick reliefs of the Han dynasty (Fig. 183). Compared with the silhouetted figures with little indication of volume in the brick reliefs, the figures in \textit{The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain} are heavily modelled and in this way they demonstrate the painter’s anatomical knowledge and the skills he had obtained from life-drawing practice. The sketches for \textit{The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain} also make it clear that the figures in the picture are modelled after real people (Figs 169-170). With the aid of Western life drawing, the muscular figures in \textit{The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain}, which are reminiscent of Buddhist sculptures and of the robust figures in Michelangelo’s paintings, embody Xu Beihong’s aspirations to create a grand and

\textsuperscript{782} Xu, ‘Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa’, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{783} Xu, ‘Fuxing Zhongguo yishu yundong’, p. 547.

\textsuperscript{784} Xu, ‘Gujin Zhongwai yishulun – Zai Datong daxue jiangyanci’, p. 103.
realism-oriented modern Chinese painting. Moreover, the anatomical precision of the figures in *The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountain* demonstrated a scientific attitude which had been considered to be the essential vehicle for China’s modernisation.

For Xu Beihong, modern Chinese painting aimed to revive the realistic traditions of professional painting and, at the same time, should represent a scientific and energetic ethos to symbolise modern China. As a result, many of Xu Beihong’s paintings shared a great similarity in composition with the works of Ren Bonian and Wu Youru, the artists whom Xu Beihong enthusiastically acclaimed as the only authentic painters in the world of Chinese art in the past three hundred years.785 As discussed in Chapter 2.2, several of Xu Beihong’s history paintings are apparently inspired by those of Ren Bonian. Although there is a correspondence between Xu Beihong and the professional painters’ works in terms of composition and subject matter, Xu Beihong’s works demonstrate a further influence of Western learning. The figures in Xu Beihong’s paintings are portrayed with more care for painstaking technique and anatomic precision. In addition, the commercial and anecdotal taste in Ren Bonian’s paintings is replaced by a more solemn and erudite manner in Xu Beihong’s works. It appears that Ren Bonian is the most influential Chinese painter on Xu Beihong’s career. In addition to figure painting, Ren Bonian’s influence upon Xu Beihong’s output is also seen in the paintings on themes such as cats, fowls and birds. Cats are often seen in Xu Beihong and Ren Bonian’s works (Figs 184-185). By comparison, Ren Bonian was obviously more interested in the playful use of Chinese brush and ink, whereas Xu Beihong cared more about the anatomic precision of the cat. Besides, cats in Xu Beihong’s paintings are also employed to

serve as a satire on Chinese people’s cowardice when confronted with national crises, such as Japan’s violent invasion (Fig. 186). To modernise Chinese painting, Xu Beihong drew on the genres popular in professional painting and represented them in a more invigorating manner by infusing into them the Western pictorial techniques. He also replaced the traditionally commercial and entertaining taste of professional painting with a nationalistic rhetoric.

As discussed in Chapter 2.4, the scholar-amateur painting had been regarded by Xu Beihong and other reform-minded intellectuals as the major cause of the degeneration of Chinese painting in modern times. So in Xu Beihong’s eyes, modern Chinese painting should reverse the entrenched art-historical orthodoxy which prioritised the amateur Southern School and should revalue the grandeur of the professional Northern School. In terms of the difference between the artisan Northern School and the scholarly Southern School, Xu Beihong indicated that the elegant and small pieces of the Southern School were only sufficient to please but were unable to inspire awe. On the contrary, the thorough craftsmanship of the Northern School could depict something overwhelmingly magnificent and vigorous, something as great as Michelangelo’s paintings or Beethoven’s music. Xu Beihong not only represented this grandeur in his figure and history paintings, but also infused this feature into his bird-and-flower genre. Xu Beihong made many magpie paintings in the 1930s and 1940s. The arrangement of the magpies and branches in his work is reminiscent of the bird-and-flower painting of the Song court style (Figs 187-188). These magpie paintings demonstrate Xu Beihong’s opinions of the modern renaissance of Chinese art. He argued that the modern Chinese renaissance should first regenerate figure painting and then executed as good

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786 Hua, *Xu Beihong de Zhongguohua gailiang*, pp. 127-128.
787 Xu, ‘Faguo yishu jinkuang’, p. 73.
bird-and-flower paintings as the Song artists had done.\textsuperscript{788} Compared with the graceful Song birds which are rendered with fine brushwork and rich layers of colours, the robust birds which are depicted with bold brushstrokes and ink in Xu Beihong’s work reveal a vigorous intention. Although the magpies are depicted with free and expressive brushwork, their sturdy shapes and varied gestures create a spatial sense in the pictures, demonstrating that the painter must carefully observe and directly draw them first. Xu Beihong’s vigorous magpie painting is reminiscent of Ren Bonian’s bird-and-flower painting (Fig. 189). The robust mynas and the bold brushwork clearly reveal Ren Bonian’s influence upon Xu Beihong. Nonetheless, Ren Bonian’s brushwork is bolder than Xu Beihong’s. Although the spatial sense and the sturdy birds also exist in Ren Bonian’s painting and demonstrate his knowledge and practice of Western drawing, how to represent a painter’s attitude towards ink and brush is still the priority of concern in Ren Bonian’s creation. In other words, Ren Bonian was clearly more concerned about how to represent his accomplishments in ink and brush through his depiction of the mynas. By comparison, for Xu Beihong, ink and brush largely served as tools just like the Western pencil and chalk, to render the volume and shape of the magpies. Although Ren Bonian and Xu Beihong’s paintings shared a great similarity, Xu Beihong’s bird-and-flower painting has stepped closer towards modernisation because of its evident break with and intended reform of the traditions.

In addition to revaluing the significance of professional painting in the modernisation of Chinese art by reviving its realistic techniques and grand features, Xu Beihong also reformed literati painting by strengthening its visual intensity. For example, in the painting \textit{Plum Blossom} painting (Fig. 190), Xu

\textsuperscript{788} Xu, ‘Fuxing Zhonguo yishu yundong’, p. 549.
Beihong created a mighty effect in the picture by painting the tree trunk with epigraphic brushstrokes and filling the space of the picture with numerous twigs. He clearly intended to create a sense of visual intensity in the picture by removing the remote feeling that literati painting had often given to the viewers. Moreover, Xu Beihong left an inscription on the upper right side of the picture, in which he wrote to his wife about his life and career in the wartime capital of Chongqing. Xu Beihong accused literati painting of causing the degeneration of Chinese painting in the modern era. He reformed it by replacing its sketchy and graceful brushwork with the heavy and epigraphic strokes of the Northern School, continuing the reformation of Southern-style elegant painting and calligraphy which had been carried out by artists and intellectuals in the late nineteenth century. This enthusiasm for epigraphy had a broad influence in the cultural field of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{789} Influenced by Kang Youwei, Xu Beihong had demonstrated his penchant for the calligraphy of the Northern School in the early stages of his career.\textsuperscript{790} At the same time, Xu Beihong also retained the typical practices of literati painting in his works, such as leaving long inscriptions, executing paintings for social connections and creating simply for amusement. Nonetheless, the practices of literati painting in Xu Beihong’s work were frequently employed to express his concerns and feelings towards national crises rather than to reveal a secluded mind, as traditional scholars had done. The plum tree, which was among the secluded motifs of literati painting, thus turns stout in Xu Beihong’s works and enables the viewer to visualise more earthy issues. Through the creation of a new style of literati painting, Xu

\textsuperscript{789} For the epigraphic movement in Chinese painting and calligraphy at the turn of the twentieth century, see Stephen Little ed., \textit{New Songs on Ancient Tunes: 19th-20th Century Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy from the Richard Fabian Collection} (Honolulu, 2007).

Beihong played the roles both of an accomplished painter and a Chinese intellectual who frequently worried about the future of his nation. His aspirations may be well crystallised in his *Pine* painting (Fig. 191). The calligraphic brushwork and the accompanying poem put this work in the style of literati painting. Nonetheless, Xu Beihong employed the bold and heavy epigraphic brushstrokes of the Northern School to paint and thus added a sense of intensity to the pictures. In the painting, Xu Beihong inscribed a poem written by Chen Sanyuan. The poem describes the enduring feature of the pine tree, which still stands firmly after thunderbolts. Chen Sanyuan used the pine tree to symbolise a scholar’s virtue, which had to be brave to resist the tyrannical regime.\(^791\) The subject matter and the enduring feature of the pines are reminiscent of Xu Beihong’s *Rumination* paintings, which were also executed at this time (Figs 177-178). As discussed before, the *Rumination* paintings represented Xu Beihong’s patriotic passion and his self-expectation. Considering the similar context of the creation of both the *Pine* and the *Rumination* paintings, the *Pine* painting thus also carried rich layers of allegory. Chen Sanyuan was a radical Qing scholar, and Xu Beihong may have invoked his poem to symbolise his own reformed attitude towards traditional Chinese painting. As discussed in Chapter 4.3, Xu Beihong had executed several portraits of Chen Sanyuan from the late 1920s. These paintings not only demonstrated Xu Beihong’s ambitions to build his fame in the art world through multi channels, but also manifested his aspirations to be the modern heir to the Chinese culture.

Xu Beihong aimed to create a modern Chinese painting style which combined the realistic and grand style of professional painting as well as the allegorical and intellectual features of literati painting. Besides reviving the good

\(^{791}\) For the poem, see Wang, *Xu Beihong nianpu changbian*, p. 108.
traditions, Xu Beihong also turned to Western art to look for those elements which could further improve these traditions to make them more suitable for modern times. The three paintings on the same theme of pine and cranes may exemplify Xu Beihong’s efforts in the modernisation of Chinese painting. Cranes and pines carry multiple implications and are popular in traditional Chinese painting. For example, both crane and pine symbolise longevity and thus serve as an auspicious motif popular in professional painting. Also the pine is symbolic of Confucian virtue, and the crane is emblematic of secluded life. So they often appear in literati painting as well, such as Wen Zhengming’s painting *Qin he tu* (琴鹤图, ‘Zither and Crane’) (Fig. 192). One of Xu Beihong’s *Pine and Cranes* paintings was made as a gift to celebrate Peng Hanhuai’s (彭汉槐, 1876-1952) birthday (Fig. 193). Xu Beihong employed the bold and heavy brushstrokes of epigraphic calligraphy to replace the fine and coloured brushwork which had been used to depict this auspicious motif by professional painters, such as Lang Shining and Tang Dai (唐岱, 1673-?) (Fig. 194). Xu Beihong used the epigraphic calligraphic brushwork to depict the subject matter perhaps in response to Peng Hanhuai’s achievements as a famed seal cutter. With calligraphic brushwork, Xu Beihong turned this popular and auspicious motif into an object of cultural capital and of the social practices of the literati circles. In another *Pine and Cranes* painting which was executed in 1938, Xu Beihong also employed the epigraphic calligraphic brushwork to render the subject and the brushstrokes were even thicker (Fig. 195). Although the images look schematic because of the calligraphic brushstrokes, the bold lines and the cropped pine trunks create a sense of intensity in the picture in complete opposition to the remote feeling which traditional scholar-amateur calligraphic painting, such as Wen Zhengming’s work, usually leaves to the viewer. In addition, the watchful gaze
of the cranes adds more tension to the painting in response to the inscription, which speaks of Japan's invasion. Its vigour brings the traditionally secluded motif to reflect mundane and national issues. The third painting, which was executed in 1932, reveals how Xu Beihong managed to create a three-dimensional space in the picture with the calligraphic brushstrokes (Fig. 196). The towering cypress and the relatively horizontally growing pine create a spatial sense in the painting. The gestures of the trees are reminiscent of that which Xu Beihong drew from the natural scene on his trip to the Western Hills in 1918 (Fig. 78). The painstaking and fine lines in the 1918 painting follow the conventional practices of traditional professional painting and the commercial watercolour painting of early twentieth-century Shanghai. They are replaced with the epigraphic and bold strokes in this 1932 painting. Although the trees look more schematic with the calligraphic brushwork, Xu Beihong successfully retained the spatial sense in the 1932 painting. Moreover, the vigorous gestures of the trees and the interaction between the two cranes create a narrative feature in the painting; while the epigraphic calligraphy of the Northern School endows the painting with a grand air. The solemn and narrative feature of this painting is reminiscent of Xu Beihong's history painting. This 1932 painting Songbo shuanghe tu (松柏雙鶺鴒, 'Pine, Cypress and Two Cranes') may well exemplify the idealist painting, the best artwork in Xu Beihong's terms, which should be based on painstaking realism. It also visualises Xu Beihong's version of modern Chinese painting, which should be grand, realistic and idealistic. Since Cai Yuanpei advocated replacing Confucianism with fine arts after the imperial regime collapsed, the question of which kind of Chinese painting should be created or kept to be symbolic of modern China had been a central issue among

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792 For Xu Beihong's definition of idealism and realism, see Chapter 4.2.
artists and intellectuals. The painting *Pine, Cypress and Two Cranes* provides a
glimpse into Xu Beihong’s version of modern Chinese painting. In addition to
combining the merits of both Chinese and Western painting, Xu Beihong aimed
to elevate Chinese painting from the artisan or amateur level to be an intellectual
art, which was able to reflect, symbolise and shape modern China. Xu Beihong’s
paintings based on painstaking Western realism had earned him fame as early as
the 1920s, nonetheless, it was his national-style paintings which led to his
eminent status in the art world after the 1930s. Zong Baihua, in his article *Xu
Beihong yu Zhongguo huihua* (徐悲鴻與中國繪畫, ‘Xu Beihong and Chinese
Painting’, 1935), expressed his very high regard for Xu Beihong’s modern
Chinese painting for its combination of Chinese and Western realisms and its
simultaneous retention of the spiritual features of traditional Chinese painting.
Xu Beihong’s national painting was thus highly acclaimed by Zong Baihua as
the supreme guide for the modern renaissance of Chinese art.\textsuperscript{793}

\textsuperscript{793} Wang, *Xu Beihong nianpu changbian*, pp. 107-108.
Chapter 7 Conclusion – The Making of a Hero

In the 1930s, Xu Beihong’s fame continued to grow. Unlike his withdrawal from the 1929 National Art Exhibition to demonstrate his artistic stance, Xu Beihong was able to organise the exhibition of modern Chinese painting (*Exposition d’Art Chinois Contemporain*) which took place at the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris in 1933.\(^{794}\) Besides being a principal organiser of this Exhibition, Xu Beihong also had the responsibility for arranging the objects on display. This exhibition featured a display of 10 paintings by the Qing painters, such as Yu Zhiding, Ren Bonian, and his own father, Xu Dazhong; and 181 paintings by 75 artists of the Republican era, including the renowned traditional painters Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong and Wu Hufan (呉湖帆, 1894-1968); as well as Westernised artists such as Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu, Zhang Yuguang, Wang Yachen and Xu Beihong himself, to name but a few. The Qing paintings featured works by the realistic, professional and commercial artists, whose status was traditionally disvalued. As regards the modern section, Xu Beihong put in fifteen of his own paintings, whereas his contemporaries Lin Fengmian only had two works and Liu Haisu had just one on display.\(^{795}\) This exhibition projected Xu Beihong’s version of modern Chinese painting, which revered realism. With this emphasis on realism, Xu Beihong was intending to replace traditionally literati orthodoxy with professional genealogy, reaffirming the legitimacy and prestige of his origins and then his position in modern times. By comparison, the Chinese exhibition organised by Liu Haisu and held in Berlin in 1934 provided a slightly different version of modern Chinese painting from Xu Beihong’s. It displayed 274 works by 163 artists, including deceased painters such as Ren Bonian, Jin

\(^{794}\) For this exhibition, see *Exposition de la Peinture Chinoise*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée du Jeu de Paume, 1933).


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Paintings of the latter two eminent traditional artists were absent from the Paris exhibition. This neglect of the works of renowned modern literati artists and of Liu Haisu and Lin Fengmian in the Paris exhibition brought some criticism from the artist and critic Li Jianwu (李建吾) and Qin Xunfu (秦宣夫). They approved Xu Beihong’s artistic accomplishments demonstrated in his oil paintings and portraits. Nonetheless, they criticised his history painting Jiufang Gao as a failed attempt for art’s sake, though it was a work filled with Xu Beihong’s patience and passion for art.\footnote{Li Jianwu and Qin Xunfu, ‘Bali Zhongguo huihua zhanlan’ ‘The Chinese Painting Exhibition in Paris’, 
\textit{Wenxue} 交學, 1.5 (1933), pp. 658-675 (p. 668).} The European Chinese painting exhibitions indicated the continuation of diversity and contest in China’s art field, succeeding the energy and dispute of the 1929 National Art Exhibition. The difference is that Xu Beihong had acquired greater power to participate in setting new rules.

Besides modifying the traditional artistic orthodoxy through exhibition, Xu Beihong also participated in the historical writing of Chinese art, providing his own vision of Chinese painting history, in which realism was stressed. This construction of Chinese art history reached its pinnacle in the 1920s and 1930s, following the institutionalisation of fine art as a discipline in the national higher education system.\footnote{Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, ‘The Japanese Impact on the Republican Art World: The Construction of Chinese Art History as a Modern Field’, \textit{Twentieth-Century China}, 32.1 (2006), pp. 4-35 (p. 7).} In the catalogue of the 1933 Paris Exhibition of Chinese Painting, Xu Beihong called Dong Qichang the builder of Chinese academism and referred to Ren Bonian as the great painter who broke away from this academic orthodoxy of Chinese painting.\footnote{Exposition de la Peinture Chinoise, p. 16.} With this contrast between realism and idealism in Western and Chinese artistic orthodoxy, Xu Beihong attributed
the decline of China in her visual art and national power in the modern era to her literati orthodoxy. Realism, which culminated in Ren Bonian’s art, would be the correct direction for Chinese painting in the future. Xu Beihong delineated this perspective on Chinese art again in 1938. In the article ‘On Chinese Painting’, Xu Beihong referred to Tang painting as intellectualism and as the Renaissance of Chinese art; and Song painting, in particular the works of the academic painters, as the crystallisation of idealistic realism.\textsuperscript{800} Yuan saw the flourishing of self-expressive and non-figurative painting. Xu Beihong praised this turn towards idealism on the grounds that it could refresh the dullness of Chinese painting which might succeed the pinnacle of realism in the preceding Song dynasty. Nonetheless, the succeeding Ming dynasty saw the degeneration of Chinese painting because idealism was further developed to the amateurism of literati painting and this became legitimised as orthodoxy. In Xu Beihong’s eyes, the authentic modern Chinese painters whose paintings could bear comparison to Western modern art were Xu Wei (徐渭, 1521-1593), Zhu Da (朱耷, 1626-1705), Shi Tao, Chen Hongshou and Ren Bonian, all of whose art broke away from the mainstream of literati painting. Among these unconventional painters, the realistic Chen Hongshou and Ren Bonian received the greatest praise from Xu Beihong.

The article ‘On Chinese Painting’ demonstrates that Xu Beihong’s perspective on Chinese painting had remained largely unchanged since he first expressed it in the 1918 article ‘Methods for the Improvement of Chinese Painting’. The difference is in the breadth of angle that he took. In the 1918 article, Xu Beihong reviewed Chinese painting only in terms of its technique, and assumed his identity as a pure painter. In the 1938 article, however, he

\textsuperscript{800} Xu Beihong, ‘Lun Zhongguohua’. 328
looked at Chinese painting from a more comprehensive standpoint, as an artist, historian and critic. The elevation of Song and Yuan painting and the denigration of Ming and Qing painting in Xu Beihong’s articles seemed common in the heated art historical writing of this time. From the 1920s, several treatises on Chinese painting written by Japanese scholars and artists, including Ōmura Seigai, Nakamura Fusetsu (中村不折, 1868-1943) and Oga Seiun (小鹿青雲), had been translated into Chinese. These publications inspired their writers’ Chinese counterparts to formulate their own art history, such as Chen Shizeng, Pan Tianshou and Yu Jianhua. The historical framework of Pan Tianshou’s book Zhongguo huihuashì (中國繪畫史, ‘A History of Chinese Painting’, 1926) shared great similarity with that of Nakamura and Oga’s Shina kaigashi (支那繪畫史, ‘A History of Chinese Painting’, 1913), in which they praised the court painting of the Song and Ming periods, and saw Qing painting as the decline of Chinese art. Teng Gu, who was among the earliest Chinese to obtain a PhD degree in art history in Berlin in 1932, employed the Western evolution theory to study Chinese art. In his book A Concise History of Chinese Art (1926), Teng Gu divided the development of Chinese art into four periods: birth and development (shengzhang 生長), intercourse (hunjiao 混交), flowering (changsheng 昌盛) and stagnation (shuaituí 衰退). In his periodisation, Tang and Song stood for the time of flowering in Chinese art, while Ming and Qing represented the stage of stagnation. Chinese artists may differ in their attitude towards the modernity in literati painting, but they seemed to share a largely identical ideological position on the historical progression of Chinese art. Xu Beihong’s creation of history paintings in pursuit of the grandeur of Tang art could be attributed to this

803 Teng, Zhongguo meishu xiaoshi.
contemporaneous esteem for Tang and Song painting in the discursive field. This upsurge in the literature of Chinese art history indicated a significant fact in that Chinese artists were taking back the predominance from the hands of the men of letters in the matter of the judgement of Chinese painting and were restoring the subjectivity of Chinese art with their indigenous versions of its history. Unlike his position as a passive recipient of artistic thought in the 1910s, Xu Beihong actively participated in shaping and guiding the direction of the art field in the 1930s.

The writing of Chinese art history increased to a large degree in accordance with the rising artistic nationalism in the 1930s. The alliance of traditional painters formed a mighty force in the art field. They continued the spirit of the early-twentieth-century national essence movement.⁸⁰⁴ The traditional camp, just like the Westernised painters, also learnt from European and Japanese models to modernise traditional Chinese painting, but they did not allow Western learning to threaten the foundation and subjectivity of Chinese art. This call for the ‘cultural construction of the Chinese base’, which was announced in 1935, could be seen as China’s protest against the long-term Imperialist invasion from the West and from Japan.⁸⁰⁵ Xu Beihong’s creation of history painting and his turn to traditional ink painting reflected his keen perception of and quick response to the latest milieu of the art field.⁸⁰⁶ As discussed in Chapter 6, Xu

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Beihong’s richly allegorical ink paintings and his history paintings with their patriotic implications brought an upsurge in his fame during the Second Sino-Japanese War. In 1948, after the War, Xu Beihong became the alternate supervisor of the Society of Chinese Painting (Zhongguo huahui 中國畫會), one of the largest associations of traditional painters, which had been established in 1932 and was suspended during the War.807

Xu Beihong’s aspirations to legitimise the superiority of realism in Chinese painting may be best manifest in his revision of the ‘six principles’ (liu fa 六法), the authoritative standard for judging Chinese painting which was established by the sixth-century critic Xie He 謝赫.808 Xu Beihong published Xin qi fa (新七法, ‘New Seven Principles’) in 1932, and in this article he replaced the old premier principle ‘animation through spiritual resonance’ with his new one ‘proper placing’ (weizhi deyi 位置得宜).809 The traditional six principles emphasised first the ‘spiritual resonance’ and second ‘the use of the brush’ (gufa yongbi 古法用筆); the principle of ‘proper planning in placing’ (jingying weizhi 經營位置) came fifth. Now, however, Xu Beihong put ‘proper placing’ first, ‘correct proportions’ (bili zhengque 比例正確) second, and ‘clear chiaroscuro’ (heibai fenming 黑白分明) third. ‘The use of the brush’ was excluded completely and the principle of ‘spiritual resonance’ came last in his new set of seven principles. The traditional six principles had very obviously served as a powerful tool for the non-figurative and calligraphic tendencies of literati painting. Nonetheless, Xu Beihong’s new principles put an emphasis on realism and demonstrated the intention to replace the traditional pictorial language of ink and

808 For the six principles, see Michael Sullivan, The Arts of China (California and London, 1999), pp. 95-96.
brush with Western techniques, aiming to challenge the conventional authority which disvalued the realistic tendencies of professional painting.

Xu Beihong’s new principles, which stressed a faithful version of reality and a solid grounding in drawing, very obviously followed the doctrines of the French art academy. These principles were visualised in his ink paintings, such as the vigorous dynamics, the three-dimensional sense, and the anatomically precise magpies created with white and black brushstrokes as discussed in Chapter 6.3 (Fig. 187). To modernise Chinese painting, Xu Beihong not only employed this new set of principles in his own works, but also used them as the guidelines for teaching art. During his leadership of the Art Department of the National Central University in the 1930s, Xu Beihong combined the previously separate Chinese painting and Western painting groups into a unified painting section. On the one hand, this merger demonstrated the further adaptation of the foreign fine art framework into China; on the other hand, this move to a certain extent reflected Xu Beihong’s intention to make drawing the essential training for both Chinese and Western painting. As discussed in Chapter 4.3, Chinese painting and Western painting were two separate subjects at art schools in early twentieth-century China. Drawing was largely fundamental only for Western painting, while imitation was for Chinese painting and was also widely included in the curriculum of other art subjects. The new seven principles could be seen as the perfect solution to Xu Beihong’s concerns over how to improve Chinese painting. Xu Beihong embodied these principles in his paintings, and carried them out in art education to establish a ‘new national painting’ (xinguohua 新國畫) by making drawing an obligatory course for all freshmen and sophomores at the National Beijing Art College (later renamed as the Central

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810 See Chapter 4.3.
Academy of Fine Arts). Students were not able to select a major until they had completed this fundamental training.\textsuperscript{811} This curriculum which Xu Beihong conceived in 1947 was far different from the one in use at the beginning of the establishment of this school in 1918 (it was originally named the National School of Fine Art). At that time, imitation was far more popular on the school’s curriculum.\textsuperscript{812} Xu Beihong’s radical move generated protests from the members of the ‘Fine Art Association of Peking City’ (Beipingshi meishu xiehui 北平市美术协会), but received great support from the Communist Party, the new government of China since 1949.\textsuperscript{813} Xu Beihong’s dedication to realism was held in high esteem by the new leaders of China, such as Mao Zedong (毛澤東, 1893-1976) and Zhou Enlai (周恩來, 1898-1976), and led directly to his appointment to the eminent position of director of the new country’s primary art college, the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 中央美术学院). This college gathered a number of celebrated Realists and left-wing artists, including Dong Xiwen (董希文, 1914-1973), Wu Zuoren, Jiang Zhaohe, Ai Zhongxin, and Pang Xunqin, to name only a few. With government support, Xu Beihong was able to realise his ideals in respect of realism. As the art historian Li Chu-tsing has argued, ‘Chinese social realism may be seen largely as a continuation of Xu Beihong’s ideas and theories’.\textsuperscript{814} There does actually exist a gap between the academic elegance in Xu Beihong’s realism and the public taste for social realism which the Communist Party favoured. Hence, Xu Beihong’s large-scale oil painting Mao Zhuxi zai renmin Zhong (毛主席在人民


\textsuperscript{812} Wu, Qingmo mingchu de huahu jiaoyu yu huajia, pp. 123-128. Also see Chapter 4.3.

\textsuperscript{813} Lin, Zhongguo youhua bainianshi, pp. 195-196.

\textsuperscript{814} Li Chu-tsing 李鎔箋, Trends in Modern Chinese Painting, The C.A. Drenowatz Collection (Switzerland, 1979), p. 98.
'Leader Mao with his People', 1950) was rejected by the Communist government at the exhibition in Russia because it still represented a particular intellectual inclination. It is Xu Beihong's great legacy to China's art education that has won him his incomparable status in the Communist China.

When the Communist Party took over China in 1949, Xu Beihong's paintings also demonstrated an inclination towards social realism. The painting Zai Shijie heping dahui shang tingdao Nanjing jiefang xiaoxi (在世界和平大會 聽到南京解放消息, 'On Hearing the News of Taking Over Nanjing at the Assembly for World Peace', 1949) described Xu Beihong’s delight at the Communist victory (Fig. 197). This pictorial record of a significant moment to praise the ruler's great feats may be reminiscent of David's The Coronation of the Emperor Napoleon I and the Crowning of the Empress Joséphine in Notre-Dame Cathedral on December 2, 1804 (1806-1807) (Fig. 198). This comparison provides a glimpse into Xu Beihong's alteration of his academic technique to fit the gradual dominance of social realism in China. This kind of highly political painting which Xu Beihong executed in the late stage of his career contributed a great deal to his incomparably prominent status in Communist China. At this time, the drawings of the new leader of China, Mao Zedong, the early leader of the Communist Party, Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白, 1899-1935), and the best-known left-wing artist, Lu Xun, continued to show the realistic craftsmanship and social practices that Xu Beihong had shown in his previous periods (Figs 199-200). These paintings demonstrate that Xu Beihong had the awareness and the ability to make this slight alteration in response to the different milieu in different periods. On the other hand, the change in Xu Beihong's art and fame brings to light how close the relationship between the

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815 Lin, Zhongguo yinhua bainianshi, p. 222.
political situation and the art field was in twentieth-century China.

It was the search for a solution to this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon that Xu Beihong’s adherence to realism remained throughout his life, but that his identity and reputation appeared unsettled, that motivated this thesis. With the concepts of agent/agency and field, this thesis looks at Xu Beihong’s loyalty to realism as both a habitus and a strategy. In this light, Xu Beihong’s career reveals the dynamics between an artist and the art field: how he endeavoured to be a legitimate agent, how he challenged the canons, and how he in turn participated in the production of new restrictions in this field. Moreover, examining Xu Beihong in the context of the concrete social situations of his day unfolds the complicated intertwining of the West, nationalism and Chinese agency in the development of China’s art field, which tightened the relationship between the art field and the field of power. In addition to his cleverness in adjusting himself to the rapid structural changes in the art field, Xu Beihong’s legendary status in the pages of twentieth-century Chinese art also demonstrates the unique association of autonomy and heteronomy in China’s art field. The formulation of Xu Beihong reflects the ambiguous and complex interaction between Western colonialism and post-colonial Occidentalism, which contributed to the vital reality of twentieth-century Chinese painting, and at the same time generated the dilemma of how to deal with its modernity.
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