

Artistic Formation of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang Through Taine's "Three-Factor" Theory

Xu Yijiao

School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang 11800, Malaysia
xuyijiao@student.usm.my

Sarena Abdullah*

School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang 11800, Malaysia
sarena.abdullah@usm.my

Abstract: In the early 20th century, Xu Beihong (1895-1953) and Pan Yuliang (1895-1977), as artists who studied in France, held a significant position in the history of modern Chinese art. Despite this, comprehensive research surrounding these two artistic masters remains insufficient. This paper delves into their artistic journeys and intersections, utilizing Taine's "Three-Factor" Theory and documentary analysis methods to reveal the artistic formation of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang's oil paintings. It explores the profound influence of race, milieu, and epoch on the formation of their artistic creations. Through a multidimensional analysis of these two early 20th-century Chinese artists who studied in France, this research aims to provide new insights and theoretical support for future artistic creation and academic research by analyzing the artwork using Taine's "Three-Factor" Theory.

Keywords: Early 20th Century, Chinese Artists in France, Taine's "Three-Factor" Theory, Artistic Formation, Influencing Factors

1. INTRODUCTION

During the early 20th century, the Chinese art world experienced an unprecedented transformation, largely thanks to the significant influence of Chinese artists who went to Europe, especially France, to receive modern art education. As noted by Fan Di'an, the experience and artistic contributions of a generation of Chinese artists who studied in France were crucial in the early years of the 20th-century Chinese art history. Amid significant social upheaval, these artists, driven by ambitious ideals, journeyed to Paris, the art capital of the world. Undeterred by hardships, they endeavoured to explore new artistic territories, making a lasting impact on the exchange between Chinese and Western art and paving the way for the development of modern Chinese art (Fan, 2019). Paris, France, continued to hold the throne as the world's art capital in the 20th century, attracting the attention of artists worldwide with its rich cultural ecosystem. Hence, it is proposed that the 20th century marked a new era where visual

artists challenged previous artistic styles. Beauty and aesthetics gave way to abstraction, expression, and symbolism. This shift led to the formation of many unique and significant art movements, such as Fauvism, Expressionism, and Cubism, among others, in the early 20th century (Davis, 2020, February 19). At the same time, early 20th-century China was undergoing profound social and cultural transformation, with its artistic development trends being influenced by a rich history of artistic movements and cultural changes. It has been pointed out that the May Fourth Movement, which raised the banner of anti-feudal revolt and advocated for the use of modern Western cultural ideas to build a new culture for China, also marked the rejection of traditional literati culture. This movement paved the way for the eventual adoption of Western-style realism as the primary model for Chinese contemporary art (Li, 1993). Indeed, these crucial phenomena shaped the development of Chinese art in the 20th century. It has deeply explored that the rejection of the literati culture mentioned above. Ancient China was self-contained from the outside world, especially in its later stages, where, under the suppression of extreme imperial rule and rigid Confucian doctrines, people lost their capacity for creativity. In the realm of art, this manifested as Chinese painting long imitating the works of ancient painters, leading to a stalemate in the development of Chinese painting. Thus, against the backdrop of rebelling against traditional literati painting, the introduction of Western oil painting became the main objective for transforming traditional Chinese painting. Therefore, in the early 20th century, Chinese artists' desire and enthusiasm for Western art reached an unprecedented level, with more and more artists choosing to study fine arts in Western countries. The influence of the Work-Study Movement in the early 20th century saw the wave of studying abroad following the May Fourth Movement in 1919. The number of people studying abroad at their own expense or sponsored by political parties surged during this wave. Of course, many still needed to work while studying, living a frugal life. Therefore, this movement is also known as the Diligent Work-Frugal Study Movement (Levine, 1986). As John Clark mentioned in his book "Modern Asian Art" (1998): "The early republican minister of education thought art education was an essential aspect of general modern education and prioritised it, including allocating very scarce funds for Xu Beihong (1895-1953), among other artists, to train in France." (Clark, 1998) The early 20th-century Chinese artist Xu Beihong, mentioned by Clark, was the first officially sponsored Chinese student to study fine arts abroad. Xu Beihong was not only a pioneer among Chinese artists sent overseas for art education but also had the opportunity to study under two

master artists, François Flameng (1856-1923) and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1852-1929), during his studies at the National School of Fine Arts in Paris, France. Pan Yuliang was the first female artist to receive an official scholarship to study in France in the early 20th century (Sullivan, 1996). She also completed her studies at the Franco-Chinois de Lyon in France and the National School of Fine Arts in Paris, France. Later, these two artists became some of the most essential art masters in China. As Chinese modern history continues to be examined in recent years, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the impact of Chinese artists who studied in France in the early 20th century. This is done by studying the influence of the era's environment and national culture on their artistic creation. For instance, Fan Di'an suggested that the "Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911-1949)" exhibition held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 2019 not only showcased the remarkable achievements of these artists but also revealed the unique artistic styles and forms of expression in their works, which were formed against the background of the integration of Chinese and Western arts (Fan, 2019). Besides, the era also significantly impacted them, as noted by the renowned Michael Sullivan. In 1919, Japan's attempt to take over the lease of Qingdao in Shandong also provoked strong anti-Japanese sentiments in Chinese society. This prompted young Chinese painters to shift their focus from Japan to Europe. The liberal ideas of Cai Yuanpei inspired this generation, driving them to explore new forms of artistic expression (Sullivan, 1989). Michael Sullivan also highlighted how political events of the era profoundly affected artists. Similarly, Kevin McLoughlin noted that the group of Chinese artists who studied in France in the early 20th century had a steadfast commitment to Chinese artistic culture. For example, Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, after returning to China from their studies in France, did not merely promote Western art but strived to integrate Chinese and Western painting traditions to create a new synthesis (McLoughlin, 2011). Based on this background, this paper will discuss the artists and the works that they produce through three primary factors: race, milieu, and epoch. Although many scholars have conducted various studies on the early 20th-century Chinese artists in France, research on these artists' similar trajectories and the deep cultural and social meanings reflected in their artistic practices are still limited, and a systematic and comprehensive research framework could contribute to the understanding of the early 20th-century phenomenon. This paper will attempt to address these gaps to provide a comprehensive insight into the artistic contributions of the early 20th-century Chinese artist community in

France. This study will focus on Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang, by examining their selected oil paintings. As outstanding representatives of Chinese artists in France especially in the context of the early 20th century, their explorations and achievements in artistic expression and ideology have profoundly impacted later generations. The educational backgrounds and career trajectories of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang after returning to China also showed remarkable similarities in many aspects, providing a unique perspective for studying their artistic achievements and contributions. Therefore, the core of this paper revolves around two interconnected questions: What similar trajectories did Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang have while studying in France and working back in China, and can their commonalities be reflected in their paintings? By employing Taine's "Three-Factor" Theory, this paper will examine the artists and the oil painting that they produce through the three factors that Taine have highlighted, which are race, milieu, and epoch, reflected in these artists work. These findings summarise the potential influencing factors during the artists' creative processes and the key characteristics reflected in their paintings. This study provides new perspectives and a theoretical framework for subsequent research on artistic works, thereby filling gaps in the existing literature.

2. TAINE'S "THREE FACTOR" THEORY: RACE, MILIEU, AND EPOCH

It is challenging to interpret the unexpressed personal intentions of Chinese artists who studied in France in the early 20th century through their oil paintings. Unless the artists made explicit records and explanations during the creation of their artworks, any understanding of their inner thoughts and intentions can only be based on assumptions and conjectures. The oil paintings of these selected artists have a wide range of dimensions, making it crucial to establish parameters for examining, analysing, and discussing the works within the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the dimensions and scope of this study will be based on the well-known theory of cultural development as a product of race, milieu, and epoch (Logan, 2018). The theory's founder, Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), was a prolific and erudite writer who dabbled in various subjects, producing works on history and literary history, philosophy and psychology, criticism, and journalism (Morton, 2005). Hippolyte Taine is known as the founder of the theory of art sociology. He applied sociological perspectives to the study

of art history (Wolfenstein, 1944). He proposed the famous theory that the emergence and development of literature and art are determined by three factors: “race, milieu, and epoch.” Based on this theory, he put forward the essence of art and criteria for art criticism, thereby constructing a theoretical system of art sociology (Taine, 1873). The “three factors” of race, milieu, and epoch used in this study as determinants of art constitute the core issue of Taine’s art theory and represent the highest achievement of Taine’s application of natural science methods to critique literature and art. The term “race” has diverse meanings in different contexts. In art history, it can refer to a group of people sharing common characteristics or to an individual’s descendants and family of the same ancestry. It can also broadly denote a tribe, nation, or ethnicity with a common lineage, demonstrating the concept’s breadth and complexity (Harris, 2006). In Taine’s “Three Factor” Theory, “race” refers to the innate and hereditary tendencies that individuals bring into the world, usually combined with the evident differences in the body’s temperament and structure (Wu, 1979). Based on Taine’s perspective, this study considers that the essential characteristics of race are fixed and determined by heredity, not significantly affected by changes in milieu and epoch. The study views race as ethnicity, a kind of “tendency”. The definition of “milieu” in Taine’s “Three-Factor” Theory is very ambiguous. Sometimes, it is related to the natural environment, which is mentioned with “race,” and other times, it is associated with the social environment, which is discussed with “epoch.” Taine also provided detailed reasoning at the end of “The Production of the Work of Art,” stating that each situation produces a certain state of mind, which is followed by a corresponding class of works of art. This, he argues, is why every new situation must give rise to a new state of mind, and consequently, a new class of works (Taine, 1873). From this, it can be seen that the “milieu” in Taine’s philosophy of art can be defined as the social environment. Taine believes that the social environment influences the artist’s mental state, thereby affecting the artist’s creative mindset. Indeed, artists and artistic practices are part of the social structure, influenced by economic and political environments. Historically, artists have been individuals and social members of their nation-states, participating in production and consumption activities. These social relationships facilitated their creation and set norms and boundaries for their activities (Harris, 2006). This study defines “milieu” as the social environment influencing humans, including social systems, educational background, and cultural atmosphere. These factors continuously shape artists’ mental state and creative attitudes, thereby affecting their artworks’

formation. In art history, “epoch” refers to a specific historical period, often associated with a distinctive artistic style and stage of social development. Terms such as Renaissance and Baroque denote a timeframe and encapsulate stylistic and socio-cultural characteristics. Therefore, an art epoch typically integrates the concepts of time, style, and social progress (Harris, 2006). Taine’s philosophy of art emphasises that the epoch, as an “external force,” is indispensable in analysing artworks. To understand the art of any epoch, it is necessary to consider the dominant trends of that time, the specific period of the art, and the personal emotions of each artist. In Taine’s theory on the influence of epochs on artists, he mentions that an artist’s creation is influenced by two stages: the epoch of natural feelings during their youth and the manners and decline of the particular historical context (Taine, 1873). This study primarily focuses on the latter, namely the influence of the manners and decline of the epoch on the artist.

3. THE SIMILAR BACKGROUND OF XU BEIHONG AND PAN YULIANG

Taine suggested that by observing the outstanding artists of an era, it is often possible to see a group of genius painters with similar artistic pursuits and significant characteristics. They may have “conceiving painting in the same spirit and with many distinctive features.” (Taine, 1873: 28) This similarity can be reflected in the learning and educational experiences of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang. This study selects the experiences of the two artists in Shanghai, France, and Nanjing to examine their similar trajectories.



Figure 1: Private Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Source: Liu Haisu Art Museum
Shanghai, as the cradle of modern Chinese art, marked the beginning of

the artistic careers of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang. In the autumn of 1913, Xu Beihong went to Shanghai, hoping to study Western painting through part-time work and study arrangements. However, he faced setbacks at the Shanghai Art School under the leadership of Principal Wu Shiguang (1885-?). Under this young principal's leadership, the school's educational quality was poor. This left Xu Beihong greatly disappointed, and he left disheartened just two months later. In 1915, twenty-year-old Xu Beihong returned to Shanghai, attempting to make a living through art. Despite initially facing difficulties with employment and livelihood, he was fortunate to meet Huang Jingwan (1894-1979). This friendship supported his life and facilitated several valuable exchanges with the famous artists Zhou Xiang (1871-1933). Through Huang's introduction, Xu Beihong was also able to sell his works to Gao Qifeng (1889-1933) and Gao Jianfu (1879-1951) of Lingnan School of Painting, which not only boosted his confidence in creating art but also earned the appreciation of these two art masters. Although the income was modest, this experience significantly improved Xu Beihong's situation and positively impacted his artistic career. Subsequently, in Shanghai, a metropolis full of opportunities, Xu Beihong's artistic journey underwent a crucial turn and enhancement. In 1916, he enrolled in the preparatory course at Aurora University to study French in preparation for studying abroad. In April of the same year, he was hired as an art professor at a university, where he met the leader of the reform movement, Kang Youwei (1858-1927). Kang Youwei greatly admired Xu Beihong's paintings, and the two often engaged in in-depth discussions about the art of painting and calligraphy. Kang Youwei significantly influenced the formation of Xu Beihong's artistic concepts (Wang, 2006). Overall, Xu Beihong's learning experiences in Shanghai laid the foundation for his future studies in France. Pan Yuliang's artistic journey was also enlightened and developed in Shanghai, a city of cultural confluence. In Shanghai, Pan Yuliang was deeply attracted to the painting activities conducted by Hong Ye, a neighbour and instructor at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. She began learning oil painting from him in 1917, an experience that laid a solid foundation for her later creation of Western-style paintings. During the same period, under the visionary leadership of Liu Haisu, the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts opened its doors to female students for the first time, and Pan Yuliang was among them (Teo, 2010). According to records, Pan Yuliang was admitted to the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts with top sketching scores and high colour marks. In January 1921, she left the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts (Figure 1). Despite such misfortune, Pan Yuliang's passion for art did not wane. Her perseverance

[illegible]

significant turning point in his artistic career. In March 1919, Xu Beihong, accompanied by Jiang Biwei, joined the first group of students studying abroad in France and was hailed by *Shun Pao* as a pioneer of official Chinese art education abroad. Upon arriving in France, due to his weak foundation in sketching, Xu Beihong initially enrolled in the Julian Academy of Fine Arts (Académie Julian) to study sketching and life drawing. At first, Xu Beihong was not accustomed to practicing sketching, but after two months of diligent practice, his skills gradually became proficient. In his spare time, Xu Beihong visited museums to copy famous paintings and study the similarities and differences among various schools of French art and the achievements of different artists (Wang, 2006). In 1920, Xu Beihong underwent three examinations: human figure practice, plaster model, and art theory exams. Based on his combined performance in these three exams, Xu Beihong was admitted to the National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France, ranking fourteenth with excellent results (Cinquini, 2018) (Figure 2). After enrolling, Xu Beihong chose to enter François Flameng's studio. From then on, Xu Beihong finally had the opportunity to study Western art under the guidance of the painter he admired the most, François Flameng (Wong, 2004). Not only that but in the winter of that year, Xu Beihong attended a tea party hosted by a renowned sculptor and had the privilege of meeting Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret, who accepted him as a student. From early 1921, Xu Beihong visited Dagnan's studio every Sunday to paint, attend classes, and receive guidance (Wong, 2012). Despite his talent and hard work, which enabled him to enrol successfully in the National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France, and gain recognition from masters like François Flameng and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret, Xu Beihong also faced severe economic and life challenges. In the spring of 1921, although Flameng recommended that he study oil painting, financial difficulties made it difficult for Xu Beihong to afford it. The demanding study schedule and exams at the art school forced him to subsist on bread and cold water to alleviate hunger (Wang, 2006). In 1923, Xu Beihong's oil painting "Old Woman" (1924) was selected for the Salon (French National Art Exhibition), showcasing a painting level comparable to contemporary European artists. Subsequently, other masterpieces such as "Xiao Sheng" (1926), "Slave and Lion" (1924), and "Stroking a Cat" (1925) were also created (Zhang, 2019). In May 1927, Xu Beihong's nine artworks were exhibited at the French National Art Exhibition. That fall, he graduated with excellent results from the National School of Fine Arts in Paris, France, and returned home with honours. In September, he arrived in Shanghai by ship, concluding his eight-year-long study abroad (Wong, 2004). Meanwhile, Pan Yuliang was the first female artist in the Chinese

Republic to receive an official scholarship to study in France. She was awarded a subsidy for overseas studies by the provincial authority, enabling her to enrol in the newly established Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon in France in July 1921 (Sullivan, 1996). This was also the first cohort of Chinese students admitted to the Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon in France. From then on, she no longer used the name “Pan Shixiu” and adopted the name “Pan Yuliang” exclusively for public use (Dong, 2013). Due to her several years of study in sketching at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, she had a solid foundation in sketching and was placed directly into the advanced class at the art school (Su, 1991). It is worth noting that the Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon was also referred to as the “specialised institution for training art talents and preparing candidates for the National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France” at that time. In early 1923, unable to resist the allure of the artistic capital Paris, Pan Yuliang left the University of Lyon and travelled alone to Paris to pursue her studies in painting. While in Paris, she met Xu Beihong and attended classes by Lucien Joseph Simon (1861-1945). In June 1924, Pan Yuliang was officially admitted to the National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France, thanks to the recommendation of Professor Lucien Simon. Upon receiving the acceptance letter, Pan Yuliang could attend classes in Paris, study temporarily in galleries and libraries, and work in studios according to the prescribed schedule, until May 22, 1932 (Dong, 2013) (Figure 3). While studying painting at the National School of Fine Arts in Paris, France, Pan Yuliang was taught in Simon’s studio and was a classmate of Xu Beihong. According to records, Pan Yuliang often visited the Louvre Museum in Paris and attended gatherings of fellow Suzhou natives. When conversing with Shen Peilin, Pan Yuliang came across as lively and talkative. Pan Yuliang once remarked that all the men in Xu Beihong’s paintings resembled him, while the women resembled his wife, Jiang Biwei. Shen Peilin also compared the works of these two fellow artists. He felt that Pan Yuliang’s paintings were colourful and carried a sense of modernism, similar to the works of the French Fauvist painter Matisse. On the other hand, Xu Beihong’s paintings were considered more in line with the aesthetic preferences of the Chinese people (Shen, 1998). After completing her studies in 1928, Pan Yuliang decided to return to China. While studying in Europe, she devoted all her energy to artistic creation. After class, she would visit major museums to observe and copy artworks. However, at this time, she often faced difficulties with her meals, and hunger was a constant concern for her (Chau, 2011). The experiences of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang, demonstrated many similarities between the two artists. Both pursued further education at the National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France, and

knew each other. They both actively visited local museums during their spare time to observe and copy classical works, enhancing their artistic knowledge and skills through direct contact and study of these masterpieces. Despite facing financial difficulties and living in very modest conditions during their time in France, their passion for artistic learning remained undiminished. This period of studying in France greatly expanded Xu Beihong's and Pan Yuliang's artistic horizons, which could be seen later through the artworks they produced.



Figure 4: In May 1931, Xu Beihong and the National Central University art department painting class graduation visiting group were in Tianjin. From the left, Xu Beihong was the third and Pan Yuliang was the fifth, Source: *Xu Beihong Chronicle Long Edition*

After returning to China, Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang both worked in Nanjing, where they applied the advanced concepts and techniques they had learned abroad to the reform and develop the Chinese art education. In 1928, Xu Beihong received an appointment from the president of Peking University, Li Shizeng, to serve as the dean of the School of Arts at Peking University. In January 1929, Xu Beihong resigned from his position at Peking University. In February, he continued to serve as a professor in the Department of Art at Central University. In May 1931, Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang led a group of graduates from the Department of Art at Central University on a trip from Nanjing to Qufu. As they were both professors at Central University. They also participated in art exhibitions and led graduates of the art department in various art visits and activities (Wang, 2006)(Figure 4). In 1928, Pan Yuliang returned to China and initially served as the director of the Western Painting Department at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, appointed by Liu Haisu (1896-1994) (Dong, 2013). Although Pan Yuliang harboured ambitions to pioneer modern art education, her rapid rise to fame and outspoken manner soon provoked dissatisfaction among other artists in traditional art institutions.

Gradually, the Shanghai Art College staff became unwilling to accept her leadership (Teo, 2010). In the spring of 1929, Pan Yuliang resigned from her position as department head at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. Subsequently, upon the invitation of Xu Beihong, the head of the Art Department at Central University, she took on the additional role of teaching oil painting at Central University's Art Department, commencing a period of commuting between Shanghai and Nanjing. During her tenure at Central University, Pan Yuliang faced challenges. Initially, her monthly salary was only 32 yuan. Although she became an associate professor in 1931, she was treated poorly compared to Xu Beihong, although she was equally qualified as Xu Beihong in Western painting and had similar academic credentials. Pan Yuliang and Xu Beihong taught oil painting together at the Central University's Art Department for about four to five years, but Pan Yuliang's classes were less popular. Xu Beihong's classes were always full, and he even encouraged students to transfer to Pan Yuliang's studio. As a result, students like Yu Feng (1916-2007) and several others switched to Pan Yuliang's studio. According to the records, Xu Beihong's classes were always full of students, while Pan Yuliang's classes not only had fewer students but also offered more freedom in the curriculum. This reflects the challenges Pan Yuliang faced at Central University, where she had lower pay and lacked student support (Dong, 2013). During their years teaching at Central University, Pan Yuliang and Xu Beihong participated in numerous activities and exhibitions together and developed a deep friendship. For instance, in 1934, when Xu Beihong returned to Shanghai from Europe after studying art, Pan Yuliang and several other professors at Central University organised a grand tea party to welcome him back. That same year, Xu Beihong recommended that Pan Yuliang participate in compiling the "Collection of Contemporary Chinese Famous Painters." (Wang, 2006) In 1935, Pan Yuliang held a solo exhibition in Nanjing featuring more than 200 artworks. On the eve of his departure to Shanghai, Xu Beihong visited Pan's exhibition, demonstrating the close collaboration between the two in the development of oil painting (Zhang, 1935). Since their return from France, Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang dedicated themselves to education, holding important positions in the Art Department of Central University, where they taught and participated in exhibitions. The two artists had frequent collaborations and exchanges in various fields. Despite facing unfair treatment, Pan Yuliang received high praise for her artistic achievements from Xu Beihong, who actively recommended opportunities. This reflects Xu Beihong's respect for talent and concern for the art world's development, showcasing the two artists' profound friendship. In summary, the artistic careers of Xu Beihong

and Pan Yuliang, from studying Western painting in Shanghai to studying at the National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France, and then returning to China to teach at Central University, demonstrate a similar trajectory of artistic development.

4. ARTISTIC FORMATION OF XU BEIHONG AND PAN YULIANG

Based on the discussion of both Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang, who have similar and interlinked backgrounds, this section will discuss the artistic formation of these artists through the context of race, milieu, and epoch, as listed by Taine. The characteristics of different national schools, the changes in style, and the artistic innovations could be traced in both Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang's works. This section will focus on analysing and interpreting art while capturing the traits of various schools and individual uniqueness through the artworks that the artists produced (Taine, 1873).

4.1 Race

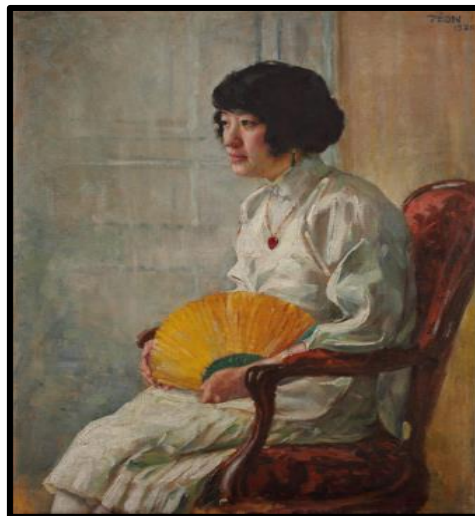


Figure 5: Xu Beihong, “Portrait of a Woman with a Fan” (1920) 71.5×52cm, oil on canvas, Source: Beihong China Art

As highlighted earlier, in the context of art history, particularly in the art sociology expounded by Taine, “race” refers to those innate and hereditary tendencies (Wu, 1979). It must be observed that the Chinese culture, with its long history and profound connotations, possesses many national characteristics that can be drawn upon to creation Chinese oil paintings, particularly the esteem for artistic interest and meaning. Various forms of Chinese art, such as calligraphy, painting, theatre, music, and literature, use the presence or absence of artistic conception as a standard of judgment.

The so-called artistic conception is a vague concept, hidden behind words, images, forms, and brushstrokes, reflecting the implicit beauty of Chinese art and culture. Therefore, this study emphasises racial characteristics referring to implicit natural qualities. This section will focus on the implicit beauty of figures in the paintings of two artists. Xu Beihong's 1920 oil painting "Portrait of a Woman with a Fan" (Figure 5) is also an artwork that showcases the implicit beauty of the Chinese people. This piece is Xu Beihong's oil portrait created during his studies in Europe, featuring Jiang Biwei as the subject. At first glance, the woman in the painting is dressed in the attire of the Republic of China period and holds a traditional Chinese folding fan, exuding a strong Oriental atmosphere. At that time, Jiang Biwei, as Xu Beihong's companion, accompanied him during his studies in France. Despite being in a foreign country, her attire maintained traditional elements, reflecting her pride in and adherence to her own culture. Jiang Biwei's posture is slightly twisted yet relaxed, indicating her leisurely and carefree attitude towards life. Xu Beihong meticulously captures and presents this natural state, demonstrating his mastery and profound understanding of detail. A closer look at the painting reveals a hint of melancholy on Jiang Biwei's face, evoking the viewer's contemplation of the homesickness that overseas students might feel. Overall, Xu Beihong, through his delicate artistic techniques, highlights the deep emotions of his subject, specifically the graceful and reserved qualities of Chinese women.



Figure 6: Pan Yuliang, "Self-portrait" (1940) 90×64 cm, oil on canvas, Source: Anhui Museum

In Pan Yuliang's 1940s work "Self-portrait" (Figure 6), she draws inspiration from the implicit beauty the Chinese people, skilfully creating a classical Chinese atmosphere in the painting. At first glance, Pan Yuliang is dressed in a black qipao, a distinctive symbol of Chinese women. The

printed patterns on the qipao exhibit a vintage style and the dignified elegance of traditional women. Her hand rests on the edge of a table, presenting a relaxed and natural posture. Upon closer inspection, Pan Yuliang's expression is confident and graceful. This expression is not an exaggerated confidence but is conveyed through subtle facial details, such as slightly upturned eyes and gently parted lips, reflecting inner calm and determination. These detailed treatments convey a gentle yet restrained strength, profoundly embodying the subtle temperament of the Chinese people. In summary, the Chinese nation is characterised by a deep historical and cultural heritage, with a national character that tends to esteem the beauty of subtlety. In the paintings of Pan Yuliang and Xu Beihong, this natural temperament is subtly expressed through the posture, expressions, and scene selection of the figures. Both artists, through delicate brushwork, the use of colour, and compositional arrangements, reveal the inner emotions and spiritual states of their subjects, thereby conveying complex emotions and deep philosophical insights. This mode of expression not only reflects the aesthetic tendencies and thought patterns within Chinese culture but also emphasises the importance of implied meaning. Overall, the oil paintings of both artists are influenced by racial factors and exhibit the artistic expression of the subtle temperament inherent in Chinese culture.

4.2 Milieu



Figure 7: Xu Beihong, “Xiao Sheng” (1926) 79.5 x 38 cm, oil on canvas, Source: Beihong China Art

The milieu factor or the social environment also influence Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang in terms of the artistic formation. Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang, two Chinese artists who studied in France, were profoundly influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures. This influence is

primarily reflected in their educational experiences in China and their study experiences in France. The fusion of these two cultures enabled their artworks to exhibit a unique blend of Chinese and Western characteristics. “Xiao Sheng” (1926) (Figure 7) is an oil painting created by Xu Beihong in 1926, featuring Jiang Biwei, his former partner, as the main subject. Jiang Biwei was born in a scholarly family and was a talented, graceful woman. She accompanied Xu Beihong to France for his studies. Xu Beihong created a series of works featuring Jiang Biwei, such as “Stroking a Cat” (1925), but this work, “Xiao Sheng” is regarded as the most outstanding piece among them and is also considered one of the most significant music-themed works in the 20th-century Chinese figurative painting (Zhuangyu, 2021). This work is imbued with Xu Beihong’s deep emotions. The sketch for the painting is inscribed with: “Drawn for Biwei in the mirror during the late autumn of the year of Jiazi (1924). Beihong.” (Pan, 2004) In the oil painting “Xiao Sheng”, Jiang Biwei has short black hair and is dressed in a long, front-buttoned robe from the Republic of China period. She is slightly bowing her head while playing a long xiao. The xiao, also known as the dongxiao, is an ancient Chinese wind instrument. In ancient China, both flutes and xiao were collectively referred to as “flutes,” representing a group of similar instruments (Feng & Sornyai, 2023). In Chinese traditional culture, the long xiao is often used as an accompaniment for poetry recitation or various religious ceremonies. Although Xu Beihong chose a Chinese theme for his painting, his style was Western. In creating “Sound of the Flute,” Xu Beihong used dark and heavy colours, whether it was the grey-purple long robe worn by Jiang Biwei or the dusky lakeside scenery, to create a somber and melancholic atmosphere. This painting style reveals Xu Beihong’s deep influence by the literary and narrative qualities of French oil painting, and it also hints at his transition into a more melancholic symbolism (Kristeva, 1987).



Figure 8: Pan Yuliang, “Two Girls Dancing with Fans” (1955) 55×65cm, oil on canvas, Source: The researcher conducted field work and took photographs at “The Hong Kong Jockey Club Presents - Song of Spring: Pan Yu-Lin in Paris.” in 2018

In the 1920s, Pan Yuliang went to France and Italy to study painting. This experience allowed her to master the peak realistic techniques of Western art and the expressive methods of various Realist schools. Additionally, her exploration of Chinese painting offered fresh perspectives and breakthroughs that enriched her creative process. In the mid-to-late 1950s, Pan Yuliang created a series of oil paintings themed around the activities of Chinese rural women. Among these, “Two Girls Dancing with Fans” (1955) (Figure 8) stands out as a representative work. This painting, which focuses on traditional Chinese culture, blends Western painting techniques, exemplifying a fusion of Eastern and Western art styles.

The painting depicts two women dressed in traditional Chinese ethnic costumes performing a dance together. They each hold a fan in their right hand, with intricate patterns to enhance the visual effect. The dancers’ movements are graceful and fluid, with one in red and the other in green, appearing elegant and striking.

Pan Yuliang’s depiction of the double fan dance is a traditional dance form originating from northern China. The vivid portrayal in the oil painting shows the two dancers seemingly telling a story with their enchanting movements. Although this work is filled with Chinese elements, the colours in the painting are bright and vibrant, using strong contrasting colours to create visual impact. The pure and vivid colours create a striking visual effect on the canvas. The rough brushstrokes emphasise the sense of movement and strength in the work, which are the characteristics of Fauvism (Zelazko, 2024).

In creating this oil painting, Pan Yuliang chose a theme from Chinese folk art while incorporating Western Fauvist techniques. This reflects the influence of both Chinese and French environments on Pan Yuliang, resulting in an artwork that embodies a fusion of Eastern and Western art styles.

In summary, Pan Yuliang and Xu Beihong, through the discussion on these artworks, were profoundly influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures, reflecting the impact of milieu factors. This influence is primarily manifested in their educational experiences in China and their studies in France. The fusion of these two cultures enabled their artworks to exhibit a rich traditional Chinese cultural atmosphere while incorporating advanced Western painting concepts, thereby embodying a unique blend of Eastern and Western characteristics.

4.3 Epoch



Figure 9: Xu Beihong, “Put Down Your Whip” (1939) 144×90 cm, oil on canvas,
Source: Creative Flair

Early 20th-century China was frequently plagued by wars, resulting in immense suffering and profound impacts on the people. The historical background of this era not only witnessed the physical destruction of cities and the collapse of social order but also reflected a complete stagnation of economic activities and a severe blow to the public mindset. This resulted in artworks that are being produced in a specific context. As artists were deeply influenced by the times, their works often embodied profound themes, addressing the brutality of war, the suffering of the people, and a strong yearning for peace. Among the works that reflected the condition of China in the early 20th century is Xu Beihong’s “Put Down Your Whip” (1939) (Figure 9), created in Singapore, received high praise from overseas Chinese leaders. He used this artwork to print one hundred thousand postcards for disaster relief fundraising. The oil painting is set against the backdrop of performances by the Shanghai Drama Rescue Association’s Second Mobile Drama Troupe during the Anti-Japanese War. “Put Down Your Whip” was one of the significant street theatre in China (Kaulbach, 2001). The play tells the story of a father and daughter who fled from the occupied Northeast region and ended up on the streets. The father forces his daughter, Xiangjie, to sing for money, and when she refuses, he raises his whip to her. A young man intervenes to stop him, which sparks the public’s anti-Japanese sentiment, leading to strong cries of “Down with Japanese imperialism!” In “Put Down Your Whip,” the female protagonist in the painting is dressed in a white dress with blue stripes, holding a red

silk cloth, and performing with great effort to earn a living. The surrounding audience includes some in ragged clothes and others wearing military uniforms with rifles, indicating that China is in a turbulent era where people seek hope and solace through art. Xu Beihong's "Put Down Your Whip" reflects his deep concern for the Mukden Incident and the subsequent suffering of the people of Northeast China and echoes his patriotic act of selling his paintings for donations in Nanyang in 1939 (Zou, 2022). By depicting street dramas during the Anti-Japanese War, Xu Beihong aimed to inspire patriotism among the people. This work not only documented the hardships of that era but also showcased Xu Beihong's intention to awaken the spirit of self-help among the people through art, reflecting the "profoundness" of his work during the wartime period. In summary, the overall atmosphere of the war-torn era had a significant impact on the emotions and artistic creations of these two artists, reflecting the influence of epoch factors. In this context, the artists were deeply influenced by their times, and their works often embody profound themes, addressing the cruelty of war, the suffering of the people, and a strong yearning for peace.



Figure 10: Pan Yuliang, "Massacre" (1942) 36×45 cm, Oil on Canvas, Source: Anhui Museum

In 1938, Pan Yuliang left the war-torn China and embarked on her second period of residence in France. Shortly after, World War II broke out, and as the war progressed, the German fascist army conquered Paris and the entire French territory. The Nazis forcibly occupied local studios and residences, forcing Pan Yuliang to move to the suburbs of Paris (Chau, 2011). Against this historical backdrop, Pan Yuliang created the thematically profound work "Massacre" (1942) (Figure 10). In this painting, she depicted many people lying in pools of blood, with surviving adults leading terrified children attempting to escape the disaster. It is worth mentioning that Pan Yuliang's depiction of post-war disaster scenes

are filled with contrasts and conflicts. In the foreground of the painting, people are dressed in bright blue and white clothing, but beneath these vibrant colours lie the war casualties, fallen in pools of blood. Although the representation of blood is faint and sporadic, it still evokes a sense of gore and horror. In both China and France, Pan Yuliang personally experienced the brutality of war. She deeply understood the pain, cruelty, and fear that war brings. Through “Massacre”, Pan Yuliang not only denounced the cruelty and ruthlessness of war but also hoped to call on people to cherish peace and life through this work. This painting reflects her profound personal feelings about war and expresses her longing for future peace. By using bright colours, she visually constructed a strong contrast, enhancing the impact and expressiveness of the work, making it a thought-provoking masterpiece of the era.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The core argument of this study is to reveal how the formation of art of these artists results from the combined influence of multiple factors. These factors include racial culture, cross-cultural exchanges between different countries, and the changes of the epoch. As analysed earlier, it could be argued how such factors have influenced the artists and the subjects they choose to produce. Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang were accomplished Chinese artists who studied in France in the early 20th century. As this paper has pointed out, Taine’s “Three- Factor” Theory, by using development artists who received multiple influences, produced the kind of artwork they created. It can discover how painters conceive and create their paintings with the same spiritual ideas and unique stylistic features (Taine, 1873). Both Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang studied Western painting in Shanghai and later in France. They attended the National School of Fine Arts in Paris and learned Western painting techniques under renowned professors. In their creations, they blended Chinese and Western artistic cultures. Their works frequently appeared in exhibitions and salons, achieving remarkable success. Upon returning to China, both artists held significant positions in the art department of Central University, dedicating themselves to the development of Chinese art education. This research provides a multidimensional enhancement and supplementation of the lineage study of these two artists and offers a background for revealing their similar characteristics in artistic practice and thought. According to Taine’s “Three-Factor” Theory, a comprehensive understanding of an artwork requires considering three factors: race, milieu, and epoch (Taine, 1873). This study selected and analysed several oil paintings by the two

artists, discovering that the three factors above influenced their works. The artistic development of the two Chinese artists who studied in France is closely linked to the factors of race, milieu, and epoch. It is undeniable that the customs and ideas of each era change, but national characteristics remain relatively constant because they originate from ancient cultural traditions and the national spirit. As emphasised in this study, the Chinese cultural pursuit of artistic conception has led to a tendency towards subtlety. This inclination towards subtlety is always present on both subjective and objective levels, whether in the creators or the appreciators. If the factor of race is the internal reason influencing the artistic development of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang, then milieu is the external factor. Their cross-cultural experiences studying in China and France made them inheritors of dual cultures, thereby shaping their unique style that blends both Eastern and Western elements. Finally, the factor of epoch played a crucial role in shaping their art. The turbulent historical context of the early 20th century imbued their works with depth and social significance. They used their art to express concerns about the turmoil of the times and human suffering, making their works more impactful and thought-provoking. Under the interplay of these three factors, the artistic creations of Xu Beihong and Pan Yuliang exhibit a unique style and profound depth. The contribution of this study lies in its analysis of the factors shaping their art, offering a multidimensional understanding of the various influences on the formation of painting art. For artists, the three factors of Taine's "Three-Factor" Theory—race, milieu, and epoch—can serve as inspiration and reference for their creations. For viewers, considering these factors provides a more comprehensive perspective, enabling them to explore the hidden cultural meanings behind the surface form of the artworks.

References

- Chau, T. K. (2011). *Differencing Men's Modern Art, Historical Review of Pan Yuliang's Xiesheng and the Theme of Women's Culture* Chinese University of Hong Kong].
- Cinquini, P. (2018). A new approach to the study of a phenomenon between Asia and the West: Chinese artists' studies at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris 1914–1955 Part 1 (Z. Dong, Trans.). *The Art of Oil Painting*, 1, 96–103.
- Clark, J. (1998). *Modern Asian Art*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Davis, C. (2020, February 19). A brief timeline of 20th century visual art movements stories. *The Collector*. <https://www.thecollector.com/a-brief-timeline-of-20th-century-visual-art-movements/>
- Dong, S. (2013). *Pan Yuliang's art chronicle*. Anhui Fine Arts Publishing House.

- Fan, D. (2019). Pioneering: Chinese artists abroad in France and Chinese modern art (1911–1949). *CAFA Art Museum*.
<https://www.cafamuseum.org/en/exhibit/detail/625>
- Feng, L., & Sornyai, P. (2023). *DongXiao in Shandong province, China: The organology and music characteristic* Mahasarakham University].
- Harris, J. (2006). Art history: The key concepts. *Routledge*.
- Kaulbach, B. (2001). Street Theater in China in the 1930s. *Asian and African Studies*, 10(2), 148-159.
- Kristeva, J. (1987). On the melancholic imaginary. In *Discourse in psychoanalysis and literature (Routledge Revivals)* (pp. 20). Routledge.
- Levine, M. (1986). The diligent-work, frugal-study movement and the new culture movement. *Republican China*, 12(1), 67-88.
- Li, X. (1993). China's New Art, Post-1989. In *Major trends in the development of contemporary Chinese art* (pp. x–xxii). Hanart T Z Gallery.
- Logan, P. M. (2018). Primitive Criticism and the Novel: GH Lewes and Hippolyte Taine on Dickens. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46(1), 125-142.
- McLoughlin, K. (2011). Xu Beihong and early twentieth-century China. In *Xu Beihong: Pioneer of modern chinese painting* (pp. 73–84). Denver Art Museum, Cop.
- Morton, M. G. (2005). Art History on the Academic Fringe: Taine's Philosophy of Art. In *Art History and Its Institutions* (pp. 229-242). Routledge.
- Pan, Y. (2004). *A concise history of modern chinese arts*. Baijia Publishing House.
- Shen, P. (1998). Memories of work—study studies in France. *The Essence of Literature and History*, 11, 4–11.
- Su, L. (1991). The tragedy of Pan Yuliang, a strong woman seventy years ago. *Chung Wai Literary*, 50(2).
- Sullivan, M. (1989). *The meeting of Eastern and Western art*. Univ of California Press.
- Sullivan, M. (1996). *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*. Univ of California Press.
- Taine, H. (1873). *The philosophy of art* (Vol. 1). Holt & Williams.
- Teo, P. (2010). Modernism and orientalism: The ambiguous nudes of Chinese artist Pan Yuliang. *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 12(2), 65-80.
- Wang, Z. (2006). *Xu Beihong Chronicles Long Edition*. Shanghai Pictorial Press.
- Wolfenstein, M. (1944). The Social Background of Taine's Philosophy of Art. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 5(3), 332-358.
- Wong, K. F. (2004). *Reimaging China: history painting of Xu Beihong in early twentieth century*
- Wong, K. F. (2012). Paradox of Modernity: Xu Beihong's Paintings in Twentieth-Century China. *China Review International*, 19(3), 357-361.
- Wu, L. (1979). *Selected Western literature essays: Vol. Volume II*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
- Zelazko, A. (2024). *Fauvism*. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Fauvism>
- Zhang, Y. (1935). Sketch of Pan Yuliang's painting exhibition. *Central Daily News*.
- Zhang, Z. (2019). Xu Beihong: Living art forever. In Z. Zhang & H. Mei, (Eds.). CITIC Press Group.
- Zhuangyu, Q. (2021). THE THEME OF MUSIC IN CHINESE FIGURATIVE PAINTING OF THE 20 TH CENTURY. *European Journal of Arts*(4), 153-159.
- Zou, K. (2022). Singapore Oral History, Liu Kang, And the Making of Nanyang Art History in Singapore. *Journal of Social Sciences Naresuan University*, 18(1), 203-237.