

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Subject

Date of Submission

# The Father of Chinese Modern Painting Xu Beihong

Xu Beihong is a renowned artist in modern Chinese painting. He was born in Jiangsu and his original name was Xu Dazhang. After his father's death, he changed his name to Beihong, which expresses the feeling of sadness. He also played a significant role in innovative Chinese painting. Consequently, the style of Chinese painting turned to realism. He invented a method that finally solved out the problem of malaise associated with Chinese painting in the past resulting in Chinese painting making it to the world stage. Although people say he is a great artist, I do not entirely agree on that. I am of the opinion that his patriotic heart is far away over the achievement of art.

After the death of his father and son, he moved to Shanghai to look for a job. However, he could not find a job in the populous Shanghai City. The Huang brothers saved him from committing suicide. Many years later when the Huang brothers became bankrupt, Xu gave them an expensive painting to uplift them financially. This was an indication that Xu remembers those who have helped him in the past duration of time notwithstanding.

Xu later met his teacher Kang Youwei, who is a well-known person in China. Kang, who was leading a group of reformist artist, brought Xu

on board to show him different painting styles. It is at this point that Xu realized the need of mixing Western painting styles with the traditional Chinese painting styles as a way of improving Chinese painting to bring it to the international standards. Xu realized that unless Chinese painting styles changed they would not get a place in the modern world.

Xu wanted to go to Paris to study Western painting but he could not afford the expenses and tuition of the colleges in Paris. Kang suggested to him studying in Japan because the tuition is cheaper than in western country. Xu decided to study in Japan. He went to Japan with Jiang Biwei his wife. Jiang came from a family of intellectuals. At first, his father refused her marriage to Xu. However, she was deeply in love with Xu. She therefore went to Japan with him without the blessing of her family. This was unheard of during that period in China. Due to necessity, they back to China. During his study in Japan, Xu had seen many different painting styles. The experience in Japan taught him that Chinese painting styles were too conservative.

The principal of Peking University, Cai Yuanpei, introduced him as a professor. For the first time that Xu realized his duty was not just an artist, but he had the added responsibility of revitalizing Chinese cultural painting. Therefore, he was determined to incorporate western style. He decided to study abroad in Paris. He finally obtained the opportunity to study in Paris. During his study in Paris, Xu found out that the problem with Chinese painting is lack innovation. By contrary, Western painting always changed from one generation to the other.

Western painting tended to abstractionism in the 1910s. However, Xu believed that the direction of Chinese painting style should be opposite that of the Western style. Xu did not just want to copy the style of

western painting. He wanted to change and innovate traditional Chinese painting. "Realism" was the future of Chinese painting he pointed out. He also pointed out that "learning the lesson of western painting of science and the method of practice is very necessary," (Fu 42). From "Tian Heng and His 500 Retainers" it is evident that the background of the painting is based on the history of Chinese novel. On the other hand, he used many western characters to draw the painting.

Upon graduation, he became the first Chinese to obtain a diploma in painting from a Paris school. He returned to China equipped with many western painting skills becoming a professor at Nanjing Central University. He used the skills he learnt in Paris to draw a gigantic painting named "Tian heng and his 500 retainers." This painting opened a new page in traditional Chinese painting. Chinese artists realized what the future of Chinese painting would look like. This is very important because majority Chinese artists did not have an idea about the direction of Chinese painting prior to this painting. The painting taught Chinese artists new painting skills.

As earlier mentioned, Xu is not only painter but also a preserver of cultural relics. When the president of Chiang Kai-shek wanted to remove the "Ming Wall," Xu fought against it. During that period, people could not negotiate with the president but he did it despite the risk involved. He not only protected the "Ming wall" but also preserved the history of Chinese. Therefore, he is not only an artist but also a patriot.

In 1933, he decided to conduct an art exhibition in Paris. He strongly believed that communication between Western countries and China was of utmost importance. Western people may understand China through the art of perspective. Fortunately, the show was very

successful. Prior to that, the Western people knew Chinese as a people with little education. After the exhibition, they saw another side of China. Even though art show was conducted in Paris, it spread the Chinese culture and art to the whole world. As the result, Western people changed their attitude towards China.

During the War World II, Japanese occupied a large part of China. Xi fought against the Japanese aggression instead of painting in the house. The painting "Guangxi three heroes," was used to praise the heroes who stood against Japanese militarism. He used painting to express his patriotism and to support the Chinese army against the Japanese. As a patriot, he went to Singapore to sell his personal painting in order to obtain money to support Chinese army. He sold all his painting and personal collections to support his country. The paintings were tending towards propaganda. The oil painting "put down your whip" was also created in Singapore. The figure of the painting is an actress. She used dancing to express opposition against Japanese aggression.

After the Singapore trip, Tagore introduced him to India. The famous painting "Yu Gong Move Mountain" was created in India. This painting is realism and based on Chinese legend. The story described an old man who wanted to move to the mountain and build a road in Stone Age. It was impossible to do that by human's hand. After the old man's death, his offspring achieved his dreams. This painting implies that Chinese people will win against Japanese's aggression generation after generation. Chinese people would never give up. The trip also introduced Chinese paintings to India.

After the end of World War II, Xu became a professor and Chairman in the Central Academy of Fine Arts and National Artist's Association of

China. He taught his students in details. For example, he required that his students be able to draw the anatomy of a horse before painting the horse. Due to the high standard of teaching, his student's skills and knowledge in painting were exemplary. Therefore, many artists, who graduated from this art school, are famous in the field of painting. Most of them also became professors among Chinese universities thereby, filling the gap of Chinese art.

## Conclusion

Xu's influence in the field of art is immense. He brought innovation to traditional Chinese painting. The mixing of traditional Chinese style painting and western style painting is the future of Chinese painting. He also used his painting and collection to support his country during World War II. He utilized painting as propaganda to tell Chinese citizen what was happening in their country and what they should do. Art also can be a weapon during war. He also trained the next generation of artists equipping them with the skill and knowledge for the revival of art in China. All his actions had profound effect on Chinese art.