

Chang Shuhong

chinese painter
(1904-1994)

from Paris to Dunhuang

Diana Landi



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French period
(1927-1936)

Special edition 2011

常书鸿

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One day, Daisaku Ikeda asked him:
« *If you could live again, what would you do?* »
Chang Shuhong simply answered:
« *I would come back to Dunhuang, to the Mogao Grottoes...* »

March 1980 – Dunhuang

I first heard of Chang Shuhong by Chance (or was it Destiny?) on May 20, 2010 at the International Energy Forum in Shanghai, China.

Since then, fascinated by his paintings, his experience and his life, I discovered a man who managed to go beyond his origins and his culture and become a symbol of human universality. Chang Shuhong was very young when he left China for Paris, in search of the inspiration and the environnement he could not find in his homeland.

In his own way, he was an explorer and an adventurer driven to a faraway continent by his artistic calling. While we Westerners usually consider ourselves to be the exploratory civilization "par excellence", with mythical characters such as Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus and Magellan, it is both captivating and unusual to see a reverse path of a Chinese artist who went to Paris to look for what Gauguin probably found in the Caribbean, or Rimbaud in North Africa.

Similarly interesting are the reasons which drove him back to China, to Dunhuang, on the fringe of the Gobi desert where his work, as both a restorer and archaeologist, enabled him to get out of the blind alley that Parisian art had taken at the beginning of the twentieth century. From the outset, Chang Shuhong's life can be perceived as a dialogue between China and the West, which is clearly something to be explored and relived.

I will let other people, experts in Art or History, analyze the reasons why such a close encounter could happen through painting where, more than in other domains, the cultural distance between the Chinese world and the Western civilization can be appreciated. This book is about his life in France, brought to our knowledge through historical documents in Lyon and Paris, where he spent part of his youth, as well as pictures of his first paintings.

Diana Landi

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Diana Landi". The ink is dark and the background is light.

Acknowledgments

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