

SCULPTURE OF HAN SUYIN UNVEILED

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Han Suyin is a famous Chinese British woman writer well known to the Chinese people. On August 29, 2008, the government of Canton of Valais and the nongovernmental Fondation Espace-Enfants of Switzerland erected a sculpture of Han Suyin in Saint-Pierre de

Clages, a small town and one of the European book villages. On the seat of the sculpture was carved Han Suyin's epigram expressing her lifetime aspiration: "I want to introduce universal human nature in my books". At the sculpture unveiling ceremony, the minister of

culture of Canton of Valais spoke highly of Han Suyin as an outstanding woman who takes literature as her bounden duty to promote friendship between the peoples of various countries. The 92-year-old Han Suyin accompanied by her family members attended the ceremony.

Han Suyin and her Swiss friend at the sculpture's unveiling ceremony



By erecting a sculpture of Han Suyin, the government of Canton of Valais wished to express gratitude to her for living on the bank of Lemman Lake and taking Switzerland as her home for several decades. The sculpture stands in Saint-Pierre de Clages, a small town with beautiful scenery. It is one of the 22 European book villages where discussions of various kinds on books are often organized. In the town there is a Roman styled church built in the 11th century. The sculpture under the shade of green pines in front of the church forming a delightful contrast to the brightly coloured glass windows of the church has become natural scenery of the ancient town.

The erection of the sculpture of Han Suyin by Switzerland has reminded people of the hard efforts made by Han Suyin in the 1980s to have a relief of

the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai made in Paris. "Zhou Enlai is the most outstanding son of the Chinese nation." This is what Han Suyin often says to people. As early as in 1920, groups of Chinese youth went to France on work-study programmes in pursuit of revolutionary truth. Among them was Zhou Enlai who once stayed in a small hotel in Godefroy Street of the 13th District of Paris. Even today on the wall next to the entrance of the hotel is a memorial plaque—Zhou Enlai's relief head sculpture—for later generations to pay respect to.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bay, former director of the Literature Department of les Editions Stock of France, confirmed to the author of this article that the advocator of making a memorial plaque for Zhou Enlai in Paris was Han Suyin. Ms. Bay is the publisher of Han Suyin's works in France. She recalled that one morning in the 1970s, she was suddenly waken up by a peal of telephone ring and heard Han Suyin's usual resolute voice: "Please come to see me immediately." So she hastened to see Han and learnt why Han was so urgent to see her.

Han Suyin's father was one of the Chinese railway engineers of the first generation, and her mother was from a Belgian noble family. At the time when Japan launched the war of aggression against China, Han Suyin was studying medicine in Belgium. On learning that her motherland was suffering from Japanese army's devastation,

she resolutely decided to return home: "China is my soul, my breath, my life!...Go back to the motherland! Nothing is more powerful than this strength of love!" Since then, she has never stopped for a moment caring about the destiny of China. In her contacts with the leaders of New China, Han Suyin respects Zhou Enlai particularly. In her later years, in order to write *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China*, she interviewed personages of various circles who had worked for and been close to Zhou Enlai, and also visited Paris to trace Zhou Enlai's life in France.

The place where Han Suyin met Ms. Bay for that appointment happened to be Godefroy Hotel in the 13th District of Paris where Zhou Enlai stayed when he was in France. Han Suyin was very familiar with Zhou Enlai's activities at that time. She gave Ms. Bay a detailed account of them and said that she wanted to have Zhou Enlai's head sculpture placed in his former residence in Paris. Han Suyin's proposal got positive response from the Chinese Embassy in France. After discussion between the Chinese and the French sides, the Paris Municipal Government invited Paul Belmondo, a noted sculptor of Auguste Rodin School, to make the head sculpture.

Paul Belmondo was already over 80 years old at the time. The senior artist said with emotion, "It is not an easy job to show Zhou Enlai's charisma.

I have drawn tens of Zhou's sketches and compared them repeatedly, trying to let more lights focused on Zhou's face so as to reflect the vitality and spirit of his inner world through light." In his meeting with the photographers sent to Europe by the Shanghai TV Station to shoot *In the Footsteps of ...*, a documentary about Zhou Enlai, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Paul Belmondo's son and famous film star, said, "Father said to us many times: 'Zhou Enlai and I are of the same age. It is a great honour in my life to make a head sculpture for such a great man.' The picture of Zhou Enlai provided by the Chinese Embassy was only a front face picture, which was very difficult for sculpting. Father took great pains with the sculpture composition and altered it many times." Finally a lifelike Zhou Enlai's relief head sculpture appeared in Godefroy Street. Han Suyin's long-cherished wish was realized.

Han Suyin's love for China remains unchanged all her life. Almost all her 30-odd works are related to China. Since the 1980s, her works have been successively introduced to China and translated into Chinese. They include *The Crippled Tree*, *Birdless Summer*, *A Mortal Flower*, *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China*, and etc. In 2007, the Shanghai Century Publishing Group introduced and translated *A Many-Splendoured Thing* into Chinese, making this classic novel about China writ-

ten by Han Suyin in English and enjoying popularity in the West for over half a century at last return to her motherland. The film adapted from the novel won three Oscar awards in 1956.

In 1986 Han Suyin set up “the Han Suyin Fund for Scientific Exchange between China and the West”. Through this channel, many young scholars got a chance to visit and study in Europe, and have become the backbone of the relevant frontier disciplines. She also funded the Chinese Writers Association to create the “Nation-

al Rainbow Award for Best Literary Translation” (which is now the Lu Xun Literary Award for Best Literary Translation) to help develop literature translation in China. “Han Suyin Award for Young Translators” sponsored by the China International Publishing Group was also set up by Han Suyin. So far it has given out awards 20 times.

As for a long time Han Suyin has given lectures in many parts of the world and taken a just stand on many issues concerning China including the

Tibet issue and safeguarded the cause of the Chinese people, some anti-China forces in the West have attempted to isolate her and restrict the influence of her activities. The fact that now the Swiss people have erected a sculpture for her has actually returned justice to this gifted woman writer.

Now, the sculpture of Han Suyin is in Switzerland and the relief sculpture of Zhou Enlai in Paris, the two casting light upon each other from distance, symbolizing an eternal friendship. □