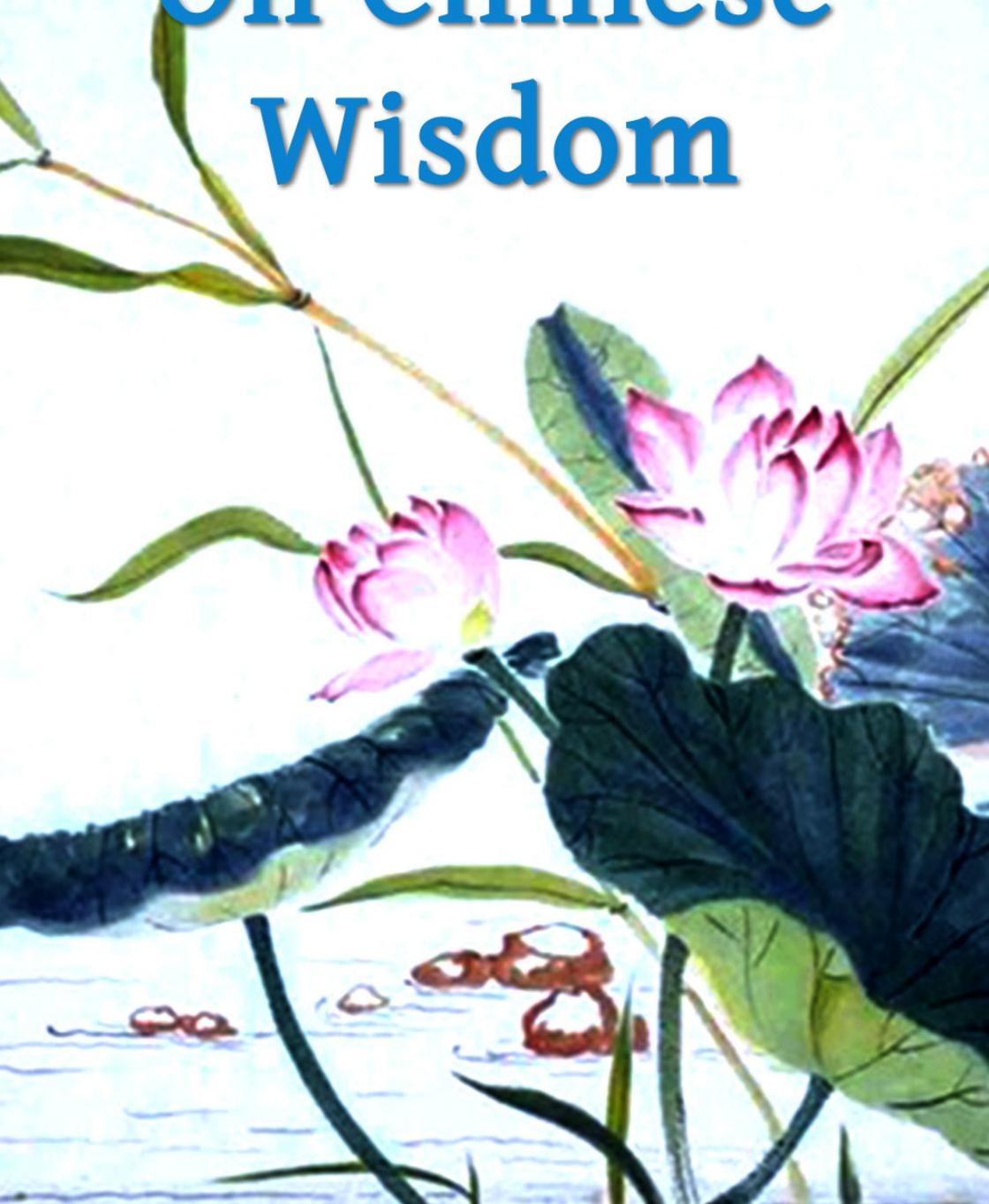


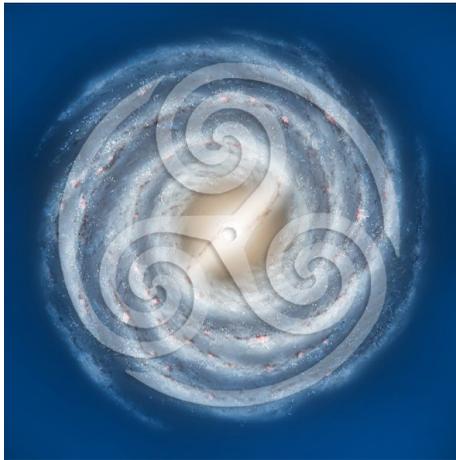
On Chinese Wisdom



On Chinese Wisdom

*Extracts from the writings of
Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*

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Notes from the Editor

This compilation is inspired by and offered to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother who guide us by their Presence and example.

It serves as a reference material for people who find it useful to learn and apply the wisdom in life.

This is an age where each individual has a unique role to play, and each culture has an opportunity to radiate its full potential, beauty and fragrance in the world garden.

May each one blossom like a flower, each in its own time, own way.

May humanity aspire for and realise Unity in Diversity by unending education, constant progress and a youth that never ages.

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The main headings were added by the Editor.

Passages in this compilation are mostly selected from Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA), published 1997; Collected Works of The Mother (CWM), published in 1978; and Mother's Agenda, originally published in 1991. The sources of other quotes are given in footnotes.

The numbers of the footnotes follow their sequence in this compilation, not according to the original text.

Deep gratitude to Sri Aurobindo Ashram for giving the permission to use the quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; to Devdip Ganguli for warm guidance and coordination; to Richard Hartz for providing scanned images of Chinese sayings in the handwriting of The Mother; to Eric Avril and Devdip Ganguli for agree-

ing to the use of the article *Remembering Hu Hsu* in this compilation; to Hu Hsu and many others whose wisdom and presence are a living influence even today.

Chinese translation of the compilation is under way. If you would like to translate it into other languages, please write to Deli Zhang (Anandi) at email:

anandizhang@auroville.org.in

Table of Contents

The Five Dreams of Sri Aurobindo (An excerpt).....	1
Sri Aurobindo: Asia & age of spirituality.....	2
Sri Aurobindo: The soul of poetic delight and beauty.....	2
Sri Aurobindo on the Chinese.....	3
Sri Aurobindo on Buddhism & Tao.....	4
Sri Aurobindo, like a Chinese sage?.....	4
The Mother on AUM and TAO sounds.....	5
The Mother tells the story of a Chinese emperor.....	6
The Mother plays Ping Pong (table tennis).....	7
The Mother: Hu Hsu is a genius and a sage!.....	8
The Mother reads and comments on Wu Wei.....	9
The Mother: Story of Two Priests.....	15
Chinese sayings in the handwriting of The Mother.....	19
Further Reading.....	28
The Mother's Dragons.....	28
Remembering Hu Hsu.....	33

The Five Dreams of Sri Aurobindo¹ (An excerpt)

When India gained its Independence on 15 August 1947 — Sri Aurobindo was born on 15 August 1872 — he responded to the request for a message to his countrymen by speaking on All India Radio of five dreams that he had worked for, and which he now saw on the way to fulfilment.

These five Dreams were:

“... a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India.”

“... the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization.”

“... a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all ...[people].”

“... the spiritual gift of India to the world.”

“... a step in evolution which would raise ...[humans] to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed [...them] since [...they] first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.”

¹Please click [here](#) to read the full version of The Five Dreams of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo: Asia & age of spirituality

... great events in Asia have even when they are outwardly intellectual, social or political a spiritual significance. Therefore when Asia once more becomes the theatre of the world's chief events, it is a sure sign that some great spiritual revolution, perhaps a great age of spirituality is preparing for humanity.

CWSA 12: 394

... Sattwa is present indeed in all communities as a natural force, for without it nothing could exist; but as a conscious governing strength, it exists only in India and China.

... From Sattwa springs the characteristic indestructibility which Chinese and Indian society, alone of historic civilisations, have evinced under the pressure of the ages, and the shocks of repeated, even incessant national disaster.

SABCL Supplement, Book Three: P281-284

Sri Aurobindo: The soul of poetic delight and beauty

...The spirit of man can make its home in either one of two things, the depths of our self arrived at through vision of self-knowledge, through power of self-mastery or through ecstasy, or a profound, a glad and satisfied acceptance of the truth, the delight and beauty of the world and life, of existence and experience. And either of these things can help too to bring in the other, — possess the inner self and life can become happy and illumined by a full sense of its hidden significance, or get hold of the complete delight and beauty of life and the world and you have then only a thin layer of shining mist to break through to get also at the self and spirit behind it, the eater of the honey of sweetness who is seated in the soul of man and extends himself through the universe. The ancient peoples had in a

very large measure this foundation of satisfaction and harmony, took the greatest interest in the reality of the inner self, as once in India and China, the Atman, the *Tao*, and life and the world as its field of expression and self-experience or, like the Greeks, felt at once the naturalness and profundity of human existence and gave to it an immediate and subtle aesthetic response...

CWSA 26: P257

Sri Aurobindo on the Chinese

... No other race but the Chinese, trained by the Confucian system to habits of minute method, perfect organisation and steady seriousness in all things great and small, could thus calmly map out a stupendous political, social and educational change, as if it were the programme of a ceremonial function, and carry it out with thoroughness and efficiency. Once the Chinese have made up their minds to this revolution, they are likely to carry it out with the greatest possible completeness, businesslike method, effective organisation, and the least possible waste and friction. In the history of China, no less than the history of Japan, we are likely to see the enormous value of national will-power using the moral outcome of a great and ancient discipline, even while breaking the temporary mould in which that discipline had cast society, thought and government.

CWSA 08: 266

...the steady, resolute, methodical Chinese, with their unrivalled genius for organisation...

CWSA 08: 291

Sri Aurobindo on Buddhism & Tao

Buddhist Nirvana

The Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin's Moksha are the same thing. It corresponds to a realisation in which one does not feel oneself any longer as an individual with such a name or such a form, but an infinite eternal Self spaceless (even when in space), timeless (even when in time). Note that one can perfectly well do actions in that condition and it is not to be gained only by Samadhi.

*

It [*the Nirvana of Buddha*] is the same [*as the Nirvana of the Gita*]. Only the Gita describes it as Nirvana in the Brahman while Buddha preferred not to give any name or say anything about that into which the nirvana took place. Some later schools of Buddhists described it as Sunya, the equivalent of the Chinese *Tao*, described as the Nothing which is everything.

CWSA 29: 431

Different Kinds of Buddhism

Buddhism is of many kinds and the entirely nihilistic kind is only one variety. Most Buddhism admits a Permanent as beyond the creation of Karma and Sanskaras. Even the Sunya of the Sunyapanthis is described like the *Tao* of Lao Tse as a Nothing which is All. So as a higher "above mental" state is admitted which one tries to reach by a strong discipline of the consciousness, it may be called spirituality.

CWSA 29: 433

Sri Aurobindo, like a Chinese sage?

On both occasions when Paul Brunton saw you, he had the impression of you as a Chinese sage. In the early days of my stay here, you struck me as a king of Hungarian gypsies! And when I say Hungarian, I mean the Magyar element which I suppose has mid-Asiatic characteristics. Do these ideas point to some occult truth or some outstanding fact of previous birth?

Confucius? Lao-Tse? Mencius? Hang-whang-pu? (Don't know who the last was, but his name sounds nice.) Can't remember anything about it. As for the Hungarian gypsy, I suppose we must have been everything at one time or another, on this earth in some other cycle. But I am not aware of any particularly Magyar or Chinese element in me. However, when I came here, I was told I looked just like a Tamil sannyasi and some Christians said I was just like Christ. So it may be.

More seriously, Brunton seems to have thought I was Lao-Tse. Maybe, I can't say it is impossible.

7 December 1936
CWSA 35: 56

The Mother on AUM and TAO sounds

More than any other sound, this sound "AUM" gives rise to a feeling of peace, of serenity, of eternity.

Moreover, this word is instinct with the mental forces which for centuries all those who have used it have accumulated around the idea that it expresses; and, for Hindus especially, it has the true power of bringing one into contact with the divine Essence it evokes.

And as Orientals have a religious mind and the habit of concentration, few pronounce this word without putting into it the convic-

tion that is needed to make it fully effective.

In China, a similar effect is obtained with a word of identical meaning and somewhat similar sound, the word "TAO".

CWM 02: 67

The Mother tells the story of a Chinese emperor

"Our Emperor is a just man," said the people of China, "for he is always ready to lend an ear to the complaints of the poor."

But a day came when the ear could hear no more. The Emperor suddenly became deaf. He could no longer listen to the song of the birds, the murmur of the wind or the voices of men.

The Emperor wept, and the nobles and officers who met with him in council made signs to him and wrote him words of consolation begging him not to be so sad.

"Do not think," he told them, "that I am sad for myself or for any trouble that this infirmity will cause me. I am sad because now I shall no longer be able to hear the prayers of the afflicted."

There was silence, for no one knew how to comfort him.

"Ah," he exclaimed suddenly, "I have found a way. Order my people to stop wearing red clothes unless they have need of my help. So whenever I see a man or a woman dressed in red, I shall know that it is an appeal to me; my deaf ears will hear it and I shall take care that help is given to the distressed."

The kind-hearted Emperor did not cease to do his work when he became deaf. He immediately thought of a new way of seeking out the poor and the needy. To seek them out — for the noble man does not wait for suffering to come to him, he tries to seek it out.

CWM 02: 279-280

The Mother plays Ping Pong (table tennis)

This is a story that Mother herself told us when we were playing table tennis with Her at Nanteuil house. Mother used to visit the various table tennis locations but mostly She played at Nanteuil. When we played against Mother we generally tried our best to return the ball well within Her reach and in as easy a position as possible for Her to hit it well. This required a good control on our part and was of great value in our own training, as Mother herself commented one day.

This same day, She explained that the game was invented by the Chinese and was called "Ping Pong". It was a very elegant game, generally played by the Mandarins. Then Mother showed us by beautiful gestures how they used to play it. First a Mandarin on one side hit the ball as we do now but in such a way as to make it easy for the Mandarin on the other side to return it. This was Ping. The receiver then made a courtly bow and returned it the same way - Pong. Then the first one bowed and returned it and so on. A very courtly game indeed and quite in character with their high culture, and entirely different from the Western concept of the game where one is determined to defeat an opponent.

The Chinese were known generally to do most things quite differently from the West. For instance, as Mother had also once explained, a family doctor was paid a monthly fee by each family on his panel but only so long as everyone in the family was well. If anyone fell ill, the payments stopped. So the doctor was always keen on keeping his patients healthy whereas in our system, though it may be unkind to say so, doctors generally earn from our illness more than from our good health.

This, of course, relates to the China of ancient days. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then.

The Mother: Hu Hsu is a genius and a sage!

H.S.² has written to me, and there was a sentence in his letter that brought a certain problem to my attention. He said, "I have done so many hours of translation – it's a mechanical task." I wondered what he meant by "mechanical task" because, as far as I am concerned, you can't translate unless you have the experience – if you start translating word for word, it no longer means anything at all. Unless you have the experience of what you translate, you can't translate it. Then I suddenly realized that the Chinese can't translate the way we do! In Chinese, each character represents an idea rather than a separate word; the basis is ideas, not words and their meanings, so translation must be a completely different kind of work for them. So I started identifying with H.S., to understand how he is translating Sri Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga* into Chinese characters – he's had to find new characters! It was very interesting. He must have invented characters. Chinese characters are made up of root-signs, and the meaning changes according to the positions of the root-signs. Each root-sign can be simplified, depending on where it's placed in combination with other root-signs – at the top of the character, at the bottom, or to one side or the other. And so, finding the right combination for new ideas must be a fascinating task! (I don't know how many root-signs can be put in one character, but some characters are quite large and must contain a lot of them; as a matter of fact, I have been shown characters expressing new scientific discoveries, and they were very big.) But how interesting it must be to work with new ideas that way! And H.S. calls it a "mechanical task."

²A Chinese disciple who translates Sri Aurobindo into Chinese (Editor: Hu Hsu, also known as Xu Fancheng)

The man's a genius!

And he has experiences, too. We've hardly ever spoken together, but I have seen some letters he wrote. To one person he said, "If you want the *Taoist* experience, all you have to do is come here and live at the Ashram – you will have the REALIZATION of Lao-Tse's philosophy."

He's a sage!

Mother's Agenda 03: 257-258

The Mother reads and comments on *Wu Wei*³

30 November 1955

...There is a Chinese sage who advises you to lie down upon events as one floats on one's back upon the sea, imagining the immensity of the ocean and that you let yourself go floating upon this... upon the waves, you see, like something contemplating the skies and letting itself be carried away. In Chinese they call this *Wu Wei*. When you can do this all your troubles are gone. I knew an Irishman who used to lie flat on his back and look outside, as much as possible on an evening when stars were in the sky, he looked, contemplated the sky and imagined that he was floating in that immensity of countless luminous points.

And immediately all troubles are calmed.

CWM 07: 392

15 August 1956

...The logical attitude — precisely the one described in the little book I read to you on Fridays now, *Wu Wei* — a perfect peace, a to-

³*Wu Wei*: a novel based upon the philosophy of Lao Tse, by Henri Borel (Librairie Fischbacher, 33 rue de Seine, Paris). English e-book *Wu Wei (Laotzu's Tao)* by Henri Borel can be downloaded for free at <https://www.auro-ebooks.com/wu-wei>.

tal surrender, putting aside all effort and all personal will, giving oneself up to the divine Will and letting it act through oneself.

Mind you, this is not at all easy, it is not as simple as it looks. But still, if one sincerely takes up this attitude, it is certain that immediately there comes a perfect inner peace, an unmixed bliss, and whatever may be the events of your life, they leave you totally indifferent. This has always been recommended for individual salvation; and I may remark in passing that in this little book, which is also very beautiful and very well written, the sage compares the state of surrender of which he speaks to a sea which is calm, blue, peaceful, vast, moved by a deep force, swelling up at the right moment, subsiding at the right moment — indeed, it is an ideal description.

...

CWM 08: P266

29 August 1956

I suppose most of you come on Fridays to listen to the reading of *Wu Wei*. If you have listened, you will remember that something's said there about being "spontaneous", and that the true way of living the true life is to live spontaneously.

What Lao Tse calls spontaneous is this: instead of being moved by a personal will — mental, vital or physical — one ought to stop all outer effort and let oneself be guided and moved by what the Chinese call *Tao*, which they identify with the Godhead — or God or the Supreme Principle or the Origin of all things or the creative Truth, indeed all possible human notions of the Divine and the goal to be attained.

To be spontaneous means not to think out, organise, decide and make an effort to realise with the personal will.

I am going to give you two examples to make you understand what true spontaneity is. One — you all know about it undoubtedly — is of the time Sri Aurobindo began writing the *Arya*,⁴ in 1914. It was neither a mental knowledge nor even a mental creation which he transcribed: he silenced his mind and sat at the typewriter, and from above, from the higher planes, all that had to be written came down, all ready, and he had only to move his fingers on the typewriter and it was transcribed. It was in this state of mental silence which allows the knowledge — and even the expression — from above to pass through that he wrote the whole *Arya*, with its sixty-four printed pages a month. This is why, besides, he could do it, for if it had been a mental work of construction it would have been quite impossible.

That is true mental spontaneity.

And if one carries this a little further, one should never think and plan beforehand what one ought to say or write. One should simply be able to silence one's mind, to turn it like a receptacle towards the higher Consciousness and express as it receives it, in mental silence, what comes from above. That would be true spontaneity.

Naturally, this is not very easy, it asks for preparation.

And if one comes down to the sphere of action, it is still more difficult; for normally, if one wants to act with some kind of logic, one usually has to think out beforehand what one wants to do and plan it before doing it, otherwise one may be tossed about by all sorts of desires and impulses which would be very far from the inspiration spoken about in *Wu Wei*; it would simply be movements

⁴It was in the review *Arya*, within a period of six years (1914-1920), that Sri Aurobindo published most of his major works: *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle* (originally *The Psychology of Social Development*), *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (originally a number of series under other titles).

of the lower nature driving you to act. Therefore, unless one has reached the state of wisdom and detachment of the Chinese sage mentioned in this story, it is better not to be spontaneous in one's daily actions, for one would risk being the plaything of all the most disorderly impulses and influences.

But once one enters the yoga and wants to do yoga, it is very necessary not to be the toy of one's own mental formations. If one wants to rely on one's experiences, one must take great care not to construct within oneself the notion of the experiences one wants to have, the idea one has about them, the form one expects or hopes to see. For, the mental formation, as I already have told you very often, is a real formation, a real creation, and with your idea you create forms which are to a certain extent independent of you and return to you as though from outside and give you the impression of being experiences. But these experiences which are either willed or sought after or expected are not spontaneous experiences and risk being illusions — at times even dangerous illusions.

Therefore, when you follow a mental discipline, you must be particularly careful not to imagine or want to have certain experiences, for in this way you can create for yourself the illusion of these experiences. In the domain of yoga, this very strict and severe spontaneity is *absolutely* indispensable.

For that, naturally, one must not have any ambition or desire or excessive imagination or what I call "spiritual romanticism", the taste for the miraculous — all this ought to be very carefully eliminated so as to be sure of advancing fearlessly.

Now, after this preliminary explanation, I am going to read to you what I had written and have been asked to comment upon. These aphorisms perhaps call for explanation. I wrote this, inspired perhaps by the reading I was just speaking to you about, but it was

more than anything the expression of a personal experience:

“One must be spontaneous in order to be divine.”

This is what I have just explained to you. Then the question arises: how to be spontaneous?

“One must be perfectly simple in order to be spontaneous.”

And how to be perfectly simple?

“One must be absolutely sincere in order to be perfectly simple.”

And now, what does it mean to be absolutely sincere?

“To be absolutely sincere is not to have any division, any contradiction in one’s being.”

If you are made of pieces which are not only different but often quite contradictory, these pieces necessarily create a division in your being. For example, you have one part in yourself which aspires for the divine life, to know the Divine, to unite with Him, to live Him integrally, and then you have another part which has attachments, desires — which it calls “needs” — and which not only seeks these things but is quite upset when it does not have them. There are other contradictions, but this one is the most flagrant. There are others, for instance, like wanting to surrender completely to the Divine, to give oneself up totally to His Will and His Guidance, and at the same time, when the experience comes — a common experience on the path when one sincerely tries to give oneself up to the Divine — the feeling that one is nothing, that one can do nothing, that one doesn’t even exist outside the Divine; that is to say, if He were not there, one would not exist and could not do anything, one would not be anything at all.... This experience naturally comes as a help on the path of total self-giving, but there is a part of the being which, when the experience comes, rises up in a terrible revolt and says, “But, excuse me! I insist on existing, I insist on being some-

thing, I insist on doing things myself, I want to have a personality.” And naturally, the second one undoes all that the first had done.

These are not exceptional cases, this happens very frequently. I could give you innumerable examples of such contradictions in the being: when one part tries to take a step forward, the other one comes and demolishes everything. So you have to begin again all the time, and every time it is demolished. That is why you must do this work of sincerity which, when you perceive in your being a part that pulls the other way, makes you take it up carefully, educate it as one educates a child and put it in harmony with the central part. That is the work of sincerity and it is indispensable.

And naturally, when there is a unity, an agreement, a harmony among all the wills of the being, your being can become simple, candid and uniform in its action and tendencies. It is only when the whole being is grouped around a single central movement that you can be spontaneous. For if, within you, there is something which is turned towards the Divine and awaits the inspiration and impulse, and at the same time there is another part of the being which seeks its own ends and works to realise its own desires, you no longer know where you stand, and you can no longer be sure of what may happen, for one part can not only undo but totally contradict what the other wants to do.

And surely, to be in harmony with what is said in *Wu Wei*, after having seen very clearly what is necessary and what ought to be done, it is recommended not to put either violence or too much zest into the realisation of this programme, for an excess of zest is detrimental to the peace and tranquillity and calm necessary for the divine Consciousness to express itself through the individual. And it comes to this:

Balance is indispensable, the path that carefully avoids opposite

extremes is indispensable, too much haste is dangerous, impatience prevents you from advancing; and at the same time, inertia puts a drag on your feet.

So for all things, the middle path as the Buddha called it, is the best. CWM 08: P281-285

The Mother: Story of Two Priests

[Story of two priests on their boat journey to China to convert the Chinese and their interaction with the Mother on the boat.]

Sweet Mother, in the world today most people follow some sort of religion. Are they helped?

NOT much.

Perhaps they are taking it up again now, but for a very long time, towards the beginning of this century, they had repudiated religion as something opposed to knowledge — at least all intellectual people had. And it is only recently that a movement of return to something other than a thorough-going positivism has begun.

People follow religion by social habit, in order not to get into the bad books of others. For instance, in a village it is difficult not to go to religious ceremonies, for all your neighbours will point at you. But that has absolutely nothing to do with spiritual life, nothing at all.

(Silence)

The first time I came to India I came on a Japanese boat. And on this Japanese boat there were two clergymen, that is, Protestant priests, of different sects. I don't remember exactly which sects, but they were both English; I think one was an Anglican and the other a Presbyterian.

Now, Sunday came. There had to be a religious ceremony on the boat, or else we would have looked like heathens, like the Japanese! There had to be a ceremony, but who should perform it? Should it be the Anglican or should it be the Presbyterian? They just missed quarrelling. Finally, one of them withdrew with dignity — I don't remember now which one, I think it was the Anglican — and the Presbyterian performed his ceremony.

It took place in the lounge of the ship. We had to go down a few steps to this lounge. And that day, all the men had put on their jackets — it was hot, I think we were in the Red Sea — they put on their jackets, stiff collars, leather shoes; neckties well set, hats on their heads, and they went with a book under their arm, almost in a procession from the deck to the lounge. The ladies wore their hats, some carried even a parasol, and they too had their book under the arm, a prayer-book.

And so they all crowded down into the lounge, and the Presbyterian made a speech, that is to say, preached his sermon, and everybody listened very religiously. And then, when it was over, they all came up again with the satisfied air of someone who has done his duty. And, of course, five minutes later they were in the bar drinking and playing cards, and their religious ceremony was forgotten. They had done their duty, it was over, there was nothing more to be said about it.

And the clergyman came and asked me, more or less politely, why I had not attended. I told him, "Sir, I am sorry, but I don't believe in religion."

"Oh! oh! you are a materialist?"

"No, not at all."

"Ah! then why?"

“Oh!” I said, “if I were to tell you, you would be quite displeased, perhaps it is better for me not to say anything.”

But he insisted so much that at last I said, “Just try to see, I don’t feel that you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to fulfil a social duty and a social custom, but not at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God.”

“Enter into communion with God! But we can’t do that! All that we can do is to say some good words, but we have no capacity to enter into communion with God.”

Then I said, “But it was just because of that I didn’t go, for it doesn’t interest me.”

After that he asked me many questions and admitted to me that he was going to China to convert the “heathens”. At that I became serious and told him, “Listen, even before your religion was born — not even two thousand years ago — the Chinese had a very high philosophy and knew a path leading them to the Divine; and when they think of Westerners, they think of them as barbarians. And so you are going there to convert those who know more about it than you? What are you going to teach them? To be insincere, to perform hollow ceremonies instead of following a profound philosophy and a detachment from life which lead them to a more spiritual consciousness?... I don’t think it’s a very good thing you are going to do.”

Then he felt so suffocated, the poor man; he said to me, “Eh, I fear I can’t be convinced by your words!”

“Oh!” I said, “I am not trying to convince you, I only described the situation to you, and how I don’t quite see why barbarians should want to go and teach civilised people what they have known long before you. That’s all.”

And there, that was the end of it.

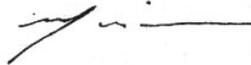
Mother India, December 2003 Issue (P1019-1020)

Chinese sayings in the handwriting of The Mother⁵

15-11-34.

The ancient wisdom of
China says :

“ He who knows how to find
instructors for himself, arrives
at the supreme mastery.....
He who loves to ask, extends his
knowledge; but whoever considers
only his own personal opinion
becomes constantly narrower
than he was.”



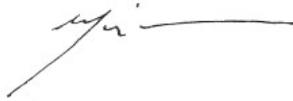
1. The ancient wisdom of China says: “He who knows how to find instructors for himself, arrives at the supreme mastery... He who loves to ask, extends his knowledge; but whoever considers only his own personal opinion becomes constantly narrower than he was.”
— 15.11.34.

⁵The following is taken from *Mother India*, December 2003 Issue (P1020-1027)

18-11-34.

Confucius has said:

"It is impossible to arrive at the summit of the mountain without passing through rough and difficult paths."



2. Confucius has said: "It is impossible to arrive at the summit of the mountain without passing through rough and difficult paths." — 18.11.34.

6-12-34.

Here is a bit of Chinese wisdom expressed by Meng-Tse:

"Our inner self is provided with all necessary faculties."

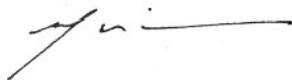


3. Here is a bit of Chinese wisdom expressed by Meng-Tse: "Our inner self is provided with all necessary faculties." — 6.12.34.

8-12-34.

Confucius has said:

"There is as much virtue
in the humblest things as in
the most sublime."



4. Confucius has said: "There is as much virtue in the humblest things as in the most sublime." — 8.12.34.

9-12-34.

One can read in the Chu-king:

"It is easy to know what is good,
but not so easy to practice it."

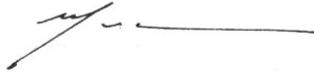


5. One can read in the Chu-king: "It is easy to know what is good, but not so easy to practice it." — 9.12.34.

13-12-34.

Confucius has said:

"It is better to love the Truth than merely to know its principles, but better than loving the Truth is to make it one's sole delight and practice."

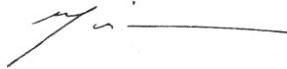


6. Confucius has said: "It is better to love the Truth than merely to know its principles, but better than loving the Truth is to make it one's sole delight and practice." — 13.12.34.

19-12-34

The buddhist scripture *Fo-sho-hing-Tsan-king* tells us:

"When you have learned the teaching, let your purified hearts find their joy in doing actions that are in harmony with it."



7. The buddhist scripture *Fo-sho-hing-Tsan-king* tells us: "When you have learned the teaching, let your purified hearts find their joy in doing actions that are in harmony with it." — 19.12.34

9. 1. 35

Lao Tse has said:

"When the intelligence is master
over the vital movements, then
one has force."



8. Lao Tse has said: "When the intelligence is master over the vital movements, then one has force." — 9.1.35

11. 1. 35

Lao Tse has said:

"The spiritual man thinks
more of what is within him
than of outer things."



9. Lao Tse has said: "The spiritual man thinks more of what is within him than of outer things." — 11.1.35

12-1-35

Lao Tse has said also:

"He makes his thought dynamic,
he opens his heart, he assembles the
inner lights."

yi —————

10. Lao Tse has said also: "He makes his thought dynamic, he opens his heart, he assembles the inner lights." — 12.1.35

3-2-35

Theng-Tse has said:

"In this state of pure
felicity the soul is enlarged
and the material substance
that is subject to it profiteth
also."

yi —————

11. Theng-Tse has said: "In this state of pure felicity the soul is enlarged and the material substance that is subject to it profiteth also."
— 3.2.35

14-2.35

The Fo-shu-hing-tsan-king says:

"As the light of a torch illumines
the objects in a dark room, even
so the light of wisdom illumines
all men, whosoever they be,
if they turn towards it."

12. The *Fo-shu-hing-tsan-king* says: "As the light of a torch illumines the objects in a dark room, even so the light of wisdom illumines all men, whosoever they be, if they turn towards it."

— 14.2.35

2.3.35

Tseu-tse has said:

"The sage's rule of moral conduct
has its principle in the hearts
of all men."

13. Tseu-tse has said: "The sage's rule of moral conduct has its principle in the hearts of all men." — 2.3.35

Lao-Tse has said:

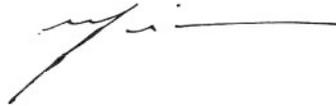
"Something beyond our power of discrimination existed before Heaven and Earth. How profound is its calm! How absolute its immateriality! It alone exists and does not change; It penetrates all and It does not perish. It may be regarded as the Mother of the universe. For myself I know not Its name, but to give it a name I call It Tao."

14. Lao-Tse has said: "Something beyond our power of discrimination existed before Heaven and Earth. How profound is its calm! How absolute its immateriality! It alone exists and does not change; It penetrates all and It does not perish. It may be regarded as the Mother of the universe. For myself I know not Its name, but to give it a name I call It *Tao*." — 23.3.35.

23.4.35.

Chwang-Tse has said:

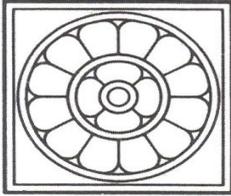
"When water is still, it reflects objects like a mirror. This stillness, this perfect level is the model of the sage. The heart of the sage in perfect repose is the mirror of earth and heaven and all existences."

A handwritten signature in cursive script, followed by a horizontal line.

15. Chwang-Tse has said: "When water is still, it reflects objects like a mirror. This stillness, this perfect level is the model of the sage. The heart of the sage in perfect repose is the mirror of earth and heaven and all existences." — 23.4.35.

Further Reading

The Mother's Dragons



Recent Publications *S a b d a*



Both of the lead articles in this issue are concerned with history, although their arenas of action differ widely. In the course of the evening talks that Sri Aurobindo and his attendants had between 1938 and 1943, the Second World War was a constant theme. Sri Aurobindo's comments showed not only a grasp of world politics but also a striking insight into military affairs. He was able to see the immediate and long-term consequences of strategic war moves to such an extent that a disciple once asked him if he had ever used the military genius he seemed to have. Sri Aurobindo's reply was "Not in this life." Our lead article brings to light the war's little-known Norwegian campaign and Sri Aurobindo's insights on its conduct and importance.

The second article tells the story behind a collection of dragon-themed embroideries commissioned by the Mother in 1947 for Sri Aurobindo's birthday. The account, prepared by the Ashram Archives Lab, details recent conservation efforts on these pieces and brings to light a piece of Ashram history, illustrated with some images of arresting beauty.

CONTENTS

World War II: Narvik, the Norwegian Campaign, and Winston Churchill	2
The Mother's Dragons	13
Recent Publications	16
Ordering Information	20

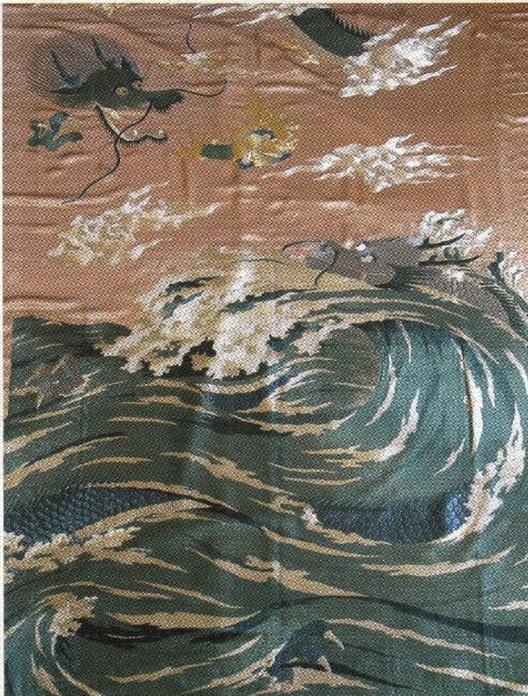
Book Reviews

Talks by Nirodbaran: <i>December 1969 to July 1970</i>	21
<i>My Savitri</i> Work with the Mother	23
Essays on Vedanta and Western Philosophies	25
An Integral Education for Growth and Blossoming	27



Readers may recall that on the Siddhi Day, 24 November 1926, a black silk curtain with three dragons in gold was hung on the wall of the verandah for the evening meditation. The tail of one dragon reached up to the mouth of the other and the three of them covered the curtain from end to end.

A. B. Purani records in *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* that they came to know later about a Chinese prophecy that says the Truth will manifest itself on earth when the three dragons (representing the worlds of earth, mind, and sky) meet.



A World of Resplendent Dragons



THE MOTHER'S DRAGONS

In September 2007, the Embroidery Department asked the Archives Conservation Lab to help reorganise, repair, and rehouse its collection of patterns made for the Mother during the 1940s. Among these patterns, in particular, are seventeen sketches of dragons in various sizes. Drawn primarily in graphite and black India ink, most of the dragon patterns had been sketched on large sheets of brown packing paper. Without exception, they were in a poor condition, having spent years folded or rolled up in overstuffed trunks. The project to preserve these historical drawings took about seven years.



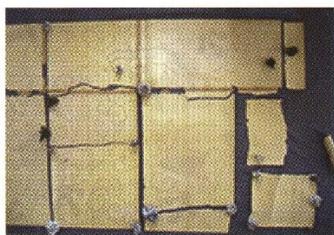
The dragon patterns were sketched by Sanjivan, one of the Ashram's artists. The Mother gave him a small card with a drawing of a Chinese dragon and explained to him what she wanted, often indicating the colour. Sanjivan confidently drew the designs on large sheets of kraft paper on the floor of the corridor upstairs in the main Ashram building. The Mother occasionally passed by to observe what he was doing. The sinuous patterns were then traced onto silk or satin, and finally embroidered with silk thread or gold and silver *zari* by young Ashram *sadhikas*.¹ Sanjivan said that the Mother's way of teaching was not just through practical guidance, but rather she could create with her advice the consciousness to understand and execute the work vividly and successfully.



Pattern pieces being sorted (above) and in the humidification chamber

We learned that the Mother commissioned this set of dragons for 15 August 1947 to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's birthday and the independence of India.² The embroideries were to adorn the walls, lintels and tables of Sri Aurobindo's rooms. The meticulousness of these embroideries is astonishing, their beauty inspiring. When one looks at the dragons in their exquisite splendour, one feels they are playful. As one examines the superb skillfulness of this embroidery work, one perceives an act of love.

A dragon pattern before and after mending



The conservation project began by placing the dragon patterns in a humidification chamber to allow the brittle paper to relax so it could be flattened under weights. Then each pattern was pieced together. Some were so fragmented it was a challenge to match the correct snout or claw with the right dragon.

Each fragment was cleaned with finely grated Staedtler eraser crumbs and a soft brush. Then the pieces were joined together with small “band-aids” of Japanese paper and wheat starch paste or methyl cellulose adhesive. Once assembled, the pattern was supported with larger strips of Japanese paper on both sides. Lining was not an option because the moisture it introduces was found to alter the colour of the inks and the paper. Heat-set mending tissue, activated with heat, did not adhere well because of ingrained soiling of the paper.

When the mending was completed, each pattern was interleaved with imported acid-free buffered interleaving paper and rolled onto a long tube for support. The roll storage tubes for this project are made from unbleached kraft fibers, have a neutral pH and are generally used to store photographic paper. A layer of acid-free buffered paper³ was wrapped around the tube before rolling up the pattern, then covered with a soft muslin cloth and finally a thicker cloth for additional protection against dust and abrasion. A tracing of the pattern and a treatment report were stored inside the center of the tube.⁴ The patterns are presently housed in the Ashram cold storage room for long-term preservation.



The five dragons pattern representing the five elements embroidered with gold and silver *zari* on satin

One of the first dragons to be completed was a wall hanging for Sri Aurobindo’s room. The pattern portrays five dragons which represent the five elements: earth, water, fire, ether, and air. In a letter to a friend written in 1943, Sanjivan referred to this piece. “I was busy,” he wrote, “with the design of a 6’ x 8’ curtain. The subject was five dragons with the sun at the centre and a border of flames along the upper three sides. I finished the design at around 2:30 at night and gave it to the Mother this morning. The Mother very happily said that she will get this ‘magnificent design’ embroidered with silver and gold threads.”⁵

The design was embroidered by Vasudha, utilising a stitch called “couching” or laid stitching which involves two sets of threads, the set that is being *laid* onto the surface of the fabric and the set that attaches the laid threads. As pure gold thread from Surat was used, each dragon is seen in a scintillating aura of gilded glory. “Magnificent it was, when the work was finished!” exclaimed Sanjivan.⁶ This piece, as well as a few others, formed “the dragon’s corner” at the Exhibition of Embroideries, Laces and Fans displayed at the Ashram Exhibition Hall from February 20 to 23, 1956. In her

book *The Story of a Soul*, Huta recollected: “I was really fascinated seeing an incredible set of six pieces made of heavy white satin—the enormous dragons designed by Sanjivan had been embroidered in gold and silver thread by Vasudha and other sadhikas for the Mother’s couch and its accessories. In China the dragon is considered to be Spiritual Strength.... The Mother had sat on the couch only once—for a while on the Independence Day of India, 15th August 1947. This was ultra symbolic, for she embodied the true soul of our country—Mother India.”⁷

A *sadhika* recollected that Mother gave them only one month to complete the set. They worked day and night, resting and taking just a bit to eat in between. Once when they were feeling tired and the work slowed down, Mother came and sat down among them and told them that they must make friends with the thread. “Years ago”, another narrated, “we used to embroider the bedcovers and curtains for Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the room which is now the *Bulletin* Office. We sat on the floor around a wooden frame onto which the cloth was stretched for embroidering. There was no fixed time; we worked for hours. We had no watches to distract us. The Mother used to come down to this room with a tray of glasses filled with juice. She would smile and say, ‘Put your needles down, *mes petites*, and relax your eyes. They need rest.’ Then we would drink the juice brought by our Sweet Mother while she appreciated our work; sometimes she even guided us.”⁸



Sadhikas at work on an embroidery frame

Contemplating this collection, one is struck with wonder at its beauty. The skill and devotion with which the embroideries were done makes them unique masterpieces. Like the patterns, the seventeen dragon embroideries have been carefully interleaved and individually rehoused for long-term storage. When Sanjivan first saw one of the embroidered dragons, he commented to a friend that it had been “done so well, it had such a gorgeous look”; it was “a piece worth showing to the whole world”.

—Archives Conservation Lab

¹ *Zari*, or *zari* work as it is known, is an intricate art of weaving threads made of fine gold or silver. Those responsible for sewing the dragon embroideries were Vasudha, Tara, Monghi, Minou, Annasouya, Bela, Lila, and Nirmala.

² Taraben’s recollection, confirmed by the Embroidery Department and Gautam Chawalla.

³ Made from 100% cotton rag at the Ashram Handmade Paper Factory.

⁴ Tracing the dragon patterns was so absorbing that we developed a kind of “dragon fever” whereby we couldn’t wait to begin each sitting and eagerly looked forward to the next. Dominant was the quiet atmosphere and a deep satisfaction after the completion of each dragon. Those involved in the tracing, which took about three years, were Maya, Mallika, Vilas, Barbie, Bimla, Mahesh, Koki and Nomi.

⁵ A copy of this letter was printed in *Srinwantu* (date and issue unknown).

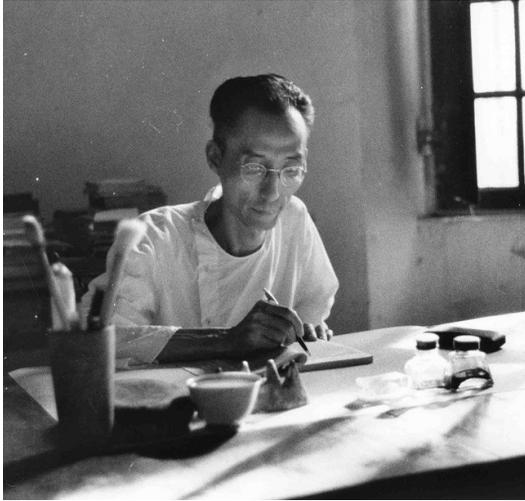
⁶ Bela-di mentioned that silver and red threads were used to make the flames, silver thread to make the clouds, and gold thread to make the dragons.

⁷ Huta. *The Story of a Soul*, vol. 2, Part 1 (Pondicherry: The Havyavahana Trust, 2009) p.50.

⁸ Taraben’s recollection, as recounted by Sunandaben and others.

Note: Our gratitude to Vilas for her remarkable skill in providing information from innumerable sources.

Remembering Hu Hsu⁶



Hu Hsu at work in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

In September 2017, the Chinese Ambassador to India Mr. Luo Zhaohui visited Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Addressing a gathering at the 68th anniversary celebrations of the People's Republic of China at New Delhi soon after his visits, Ambassador Zhaohui remembered Hu Hsu.

“Last week, I visited Pondicherry. It is one of my dreaming places. One of my teachers, Professor Xu Fancheng lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1945 to 1978. He was one of the most famous Chinese scholars, translating the Upanisad, Bhagawad Gita, and Shakuntala from Sanskrit to Chinese. He also introduced Sri Aurobindo to China. More than 300 paintings of Professor Xu were kept in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Looking at his legacies, our eyes were full of tears. He was one of the bridges between our two countries ... In the history of bilateral engagement, there have been

⁶This article was published in *Auroville Today*, Issue No: 342, January 2018. You can also read it [here](#).

thousands of prominent persons like Professor Xu, including Xuanzang, Faxian, Bodhidharma and Tagore. We should never forget their contribution and legacies ... Standing on their shoulders, we should do more today....We should turn the old page and start a new chapter..."

Hu Hsu (pronounced Hu Shu) was born on 26th October, 1909, into a wealthy family in Changsha in the southern province of Hunan. His family was respected thanks to one of his ancestors, General Hsu. The Hsu family was successfully engaged in the business of silk. At elementary school, a young Mao Tse-tung was his history teacher. While he lived in the family house, Hu Hsu never had to handle money. Later, when he was given some money for the first time, he confided to Shanta, a friend in the Ashram, that he felt embarrassed and didn't know how to deal with it.

A thorough classical education in literature and the arts was considered a necessary basis in his family. Lu Hsun, the noted writer and literary reformist, considered to be the founder of modern Chinese literature, became his friend and mentor. Hu Hsu studied History in the noted Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong and, thanks to Lu Hsun's support, obtained a scholarship to study Fine Art and Philosophy in the prestigious University of Heidelberg in Germany from 1929 to 1932. His first major work was a translation of Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

During the troubled days of the Sino-Japanese war, we do not know much about his whereabouts in China, but in 1945, just after the war ended, he decided to head towards the West, that is, towards India. He settled in Visva Bharati in Santiniketan to further his study of Sanskrit (he would go on to translate some works of the great classical poet Kalidasa from Sanskrit into Chinese), and teach

the History of Chinese Buddhism at 'Cheena Bhavan', the Chinese study centre co-founded in 1937 by Rabindranath Tagore and Tan Yun-shan (who also visited the Ashram, met The Mother, and had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo in 1939). Tan Yun-shan once wrote, "...As in the past China was spiritually conquered by a great Indian, so in the future too she would be conquered by another great Indian, Sri Aurobindo, the Maha-Yogi who is the bringer of that light which will chase away the darkness that envelops the world today." It is probably here that Hu Hsu first heard of Sri Aurobindo.

In Pondicherry

In 1951, Hu Hsu came to Pondicherry. Shortly after his arrival he wrote a poem which sheds some light on his first experiences (translated):

The Mother bestowed a flower for its blossom

*Other than offering a flower to the Mother, living in South India
nothing else matters.*

*Flower blossom, flower beautiful, flower can be divine, the divine it-
self silent, and the flower itself spring.*

*Time flies, experience beyond the material is new, timeless divine
knowledge is ever fresh.*

*This flower, this leaf, the essence of the present moment, this is the
way to realization.*



Painting by Hu Hsu

The Mother saw his potential – not only was he a scholar and master of many languages, but he also had the desire to translate Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s books into Chinese. Eventually he was given the Villa Orphelia to stay in, a large colonial mansion with a large garden in the French town, on Rue Dumas, right next to the Ashram Nursing Home today. He was working tremendously hard, fourteen hours a day. Manuscripts were quickly piling up, as well as brush paintings. Mother had brought back from Japan some calligraphy material and She gave some to Hu Hsu so he could continue to paint. When, in 1967, he exhibited his paintings in the Exhibition Hall of the Ashram, The Mother wrote a very special introduction: “Here are the paintings of a scholar who is at once an artist and a yogi, exhibited with my blessings.”

In a conversation dated October 30, 1962, she praised him as being a genius who was in fact coining new Chinese words to better translate Sri Aurobindo. She spoke highly of his translations and referred to one of his letters in which Hu Hsu wrote to a friend, “If you want to experience Taoism, come to live in the Ashram, you

will have the REALISATION of Lao-Tseu's philosophy." The Mother added: "This man is a sage."

Chinese Section at the Ashram School

In 1954, Nandlal Patel had just shifted his business from Pondicherry to Hong Kong. There he worked to start the Sri Aurobindo Philosophical Circle of Hong Kong, for which the Mother gave the message: "Let the eternal Light dawn on the eastern horizon."

While in Hong Kong, Nandlal received a letter from Jayantilal (in-charge of the Ashram Archives) telling him that Mother wanted him to buy a Chinese printing press and have it shipped to Pondicherry. The Mother added that a compositor should also be recruited as Hu Hsu could not do the printing work himself. So an ad was sent to a newspaper looking for a young assistant willing to go to India. 17 applicants replied, and Mother chose a young man from the list named Kau Tam Sing to come and help Hu Hsu. Nandlal Patel recalls:

Hu Hsu had just written to him, "This is the Divine's work", and Kau Tam Sing was ready, not asking the questions any ordinary person would have asked...A house was rented where Hu Hsu and Kau Tam Sing would stay. Hu Hsu used to get up to check that Kau Tam Sing was sleeping well, he cared for his wellbeing as if he were his son."

And so the Chinese Section of the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Education was born, with the blessings of the Mother. Hu Hsu single-handedly translated twenty books in twenty-eight years, including *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, the Upanishads, *On Education*, among many others. He also wrote a few original pieces on the true meaning of Confucianism, and on

the origins and deeper meaning of Chinese characters, thus showing a rare mastery of Indian as well as Chinese culture and spirituality. All the books he printed stated that they were "...dedicated to THE DIVINE MOTHER to WHOM the writer remains in permanent gratitude as it is only with HER boundless Compassion and Grace that this book has come into being".

In the Ashram: a friend and a teacher

In his house on Rue Dumas, Hu Hsu would often welcome his friends. He would also visit his neighbours, Ange and Peter Steiger. They remember Hu Hsu's affability and kindness and the fact that he spoke very good German, much better than his English it seems, which was rather hard to understand! He once shared with Peter a breathing technique he was using: inhale and welcome what you want, and exhale and reject what you don't want!

Ange, 4 years old at the time, loved him dearly and still remembers fondly how he would greet his neighbours' children when they ran into his study room, showing them his many brushes and other painting material. This man who worked tirelessly never seemed to be annoyed by their visits. A few children of the Ashram would also learn the art of Chinese painting under his guidance.

Hu Hsu loved to play the Chinese game of Go (called 'wei chi' in Chinese) and aspiring players like Vijay, Roy Chvat, Gary Miller, Steve Phillips, Ingo and Gerhardt Stettner used to meet in his house every week. Roy still carries on the legacy of Go in Auroville.

Hu Hsu was also a regular walker and cyclist, and every Sunday with Pierre Legrand or Peter, he used to throw divination sticks to determine whether they would go cycling or walking, and for deciding on the direction in which they should proceed. Pondicherry then was a walkers' and cyclists' paradise! They would visit Au-

roville, or the canyons near Utility. Once after a long walk, he explained how to restore one's energy levels: "...concentrate the consciousness in the feet, or gaze at the emerald green of a paddy field."

Sybille Hablik in her book *30 Years in India* writes about him:

"He was tall and slender but strongly built. We often saw him, dressed in Indian white pajamas and riding a bicycle, wearing a green eye-shade....Hu Hsu invited us to join him on Chinese New Year's day. We found him in his roomy colonial house sitting at a two-metre long table with a black glass top. We offered him a flat covered basket of fruits and wished him a Happy New Year. He had promised to paint something for me, so before our very eyes bamboos were magicked onto a big sheet of paper. I held my breath as I followed the movements of his huge brush: one stroke – the stem; a small diagonal curve – the growth node; another vertical stroke – the bamboo is growing; a thin line and a few points: there are four narrow pointed leaves.

With silent attention we followed the light, sure movements of the ink-brush – we were experiencing perfect skill.

Hu Hsu led us to two cupboards that contained the whole of Chinese history in the form of many individual books. 'This,' he said, 'is an official edition of which only three copies exist. This is one of them, the other two are in my homeland'.

A melancholy shadow fell on the three of us at last, as Hu Hsu played patriotic Chinese marches to us on his gramophone. It was a memorable meeting and for me, it was the beginning of a lasting friendship.

Today, the rare books on Chinese history are still preciously kept in a cupboard in the Ashram Library."

Auroville

On the day of the foundation ceremony⁷, the Auroville Charter was read out in the four languages of Auroville (French, Tamil, English and Sanskrit), and then in Chinese and Arabic. Hu Hsu translated the Charter, and the son of a Chinese dentist based in Madras read the Chinese text. The earth from both the Republic of China (Taiwan) and from the People's Republic of China (Mainland) were poured into the urn by Ashram youth (Kanu Dey and Vimala Sandalingam for Taiwan, and Bokul Chakravarty and Hema Singh for Mainland China).

In an article in *Nan Yang Siang Pau*, a newspaper in Singapore, Hu Hsu introduced the project of Auroville to the Chinese-speaking world and spoke about building "...a Pavilion which can represent the culture and arts achievements of the great Chinese civilisation", and invited Chinese scholars and artists to participate.

17th November, 1973

Roy recalls an incident on the fateful night The Mother left her body: "[Hu Hsu] was a very special kind of person. He once told me he could look at somebody and tell if he was going to die or not. I said, 'Oh it's interesting!' He said that well, it wasn't interesting, because when the Japanese had invaded China, everywhere he looked he saw people about to die. [...]"

I used to play Go with him. On November 17th, in the middle of the game, he stands up and says, 'Let's stop playing.' I looked at the clock: it was 7.25p.m. He says, 'It would be good if She could live up to a hundred'."

Return to China

⁷Auroville was inaugurated on 28 February, 1968.

In 1978, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Hu Hsu decided to go back to his homeland. A young man from Hong Kong, Desmond Hsu (Ramana) arranged his ticket and travelled with him. In Delhi, he stopped to get his Chinese passport for he had come to India before the People's Republic of China had been founded in 1949. He stopped for a while at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch. There Hu Hsu spoke at length with Tara Jauhar and did two paintings for her. She remembers, "He spent a long hour in conversation with my father and both of them, I remember, were very emotional. He left my father's room and I helped him with his luggage to the taxi as he left for the airport and China."

Back in China, he joined the Institute of World Religions, a department in the well-known Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Living much the same way as he had lived in the Ashram – quietly by himself – he remained engrossed in his inner quest. He continued his study, writing, and painting work, and shared his vast knowledge and experiences with fellow scholars and students. Soon he became known as one of the foremost Chinese scholars on Indian culture and spirituality.

His colleagues saw a remarkable similarity between him and the legendary Hsüan-tsang, the Chinese Buddhist monk who travelled to India in the 7th century, lived at Nalanda, learnt and translated the original Buddhist sutras, and returned to China with the sacred knowledge of the West (India). The parallel with Hu Hsu's own life is striking. His contribution is seen as particularly significant since he translated and returned to China with new sacred knowledge – the ancient pre-Buddhist spiritual knowledge of the Upanishads and the Gita, as also the contemporary spiritual knowledge contained in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's writings. After his return, Hu Hsu came to be known as Hsu Fan-cheng (also written as Xu Fancheng) – the one purified by the realisation of the Brahman con-

sciousness.

On 6th March, 2000, Hu Hsu left his body.

New Horizons

But his story is not over. While Hu Hsu's translations could not be sold in China of the 1970s, there is a growing interest in his writings today, and through him, in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's philosophy and vision. His students and colleagues in Beijing brought out his Collected Works in 2006, and the response to them has been very positive with Universities in China starting to read Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, and a few students studying his works, and even the Integral Yoga, as part of their doctoral theses. Discussions are also underway to open the first Centre for the study of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's writings in China. A small but growing number of Chinese-speaking seekers also visit the Ashram and Auroville inspired by the works of Hu Hsu, a few of them even choosing to settle down.

One can only hope and pray that the Mother's message given 55 years ago is indeed starting to take shape before our eyes, in our own times:

*"Let the eternal Light dawn
on the eastern horizon."*

Eric Avril and Devdip Ganguli