

PÈRE JEAN PIERRE ARMAND DAVID CM

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In Melbourne, some years ago, I was asked to attend the laying of a plaque in St. Kilda Botanical Gardens. The plaque was to honour a French Jesuit priest I was told, and the ceremony was to be done by the Chinese Government Consul-General. Then, rather timorously, I was asked did I know of the priest and was he really a Jesuit, as the Encyclopedia Britannica called him, or was he a Vincentian. I had never heard of him so I phoned Fr Bill Sheldon CM in Rome. I was able to claim him as definitely one of us. So a new plaque was made in time for the ceremony. Since then I have seen him referred to as “a Franciscan of the Lazarist Order,” whatever that species is! “He”, of course, is Fr Armand David CM. There is another plaque honouring him at Washington, DC, zoo.

This article may accordingly be something of a guilt trip. I knew nothing of a confrere who was admitted to membership of that august body, the “Academie des Sciences, Paris” in 1872; a confrere who was awarded the Gold Medal at the Sorbonne (jointly by the Société Géographique, the Réunion de Savants and the Société de France); a confrere who was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour by the French Government in 1896, having declined the honour twice before; a confrere considered by his contemporary colleagues as “one of the brightest lights of the Lazarist Order.”

Jean Pierre Armand David was the third son and child of Rosalie Halsouet and Fructueux Dominique Genie David. He was born 7th September, 1826. His elder brothers were Joseph (doctor and, later on, the mayor of Espelette) and Louis (a pharmacist and, also later on, the mayor of the nearby town of Hasparren). His younger sister, Leone, married, becoming Mrs Berho, and continued to live in Espelette. All

Armand's family predeceased him. They were from the French Basque region of Espelette, near Bayonne, in the Pyrenées, about 30 km south west of Dax, almost on the shore of the Bay of Biscay.

A very close relative after whom, presumably, Armand was named, was an uncle Armand Halsouet. He was a lawyer in Bayonne and the godfather of Armand David. They kept in contact when Armand was in China. It was to this uncle that Armand wrote from China; "Above all do not think that China will become Catholic. At the pace things are going now, it will take forty to fifty thousand years before the whole Empire will become Christian".

Fructueux, his father, was a doctor of medicine, the local magistrate and Mayor of Espelette. It was from him that Armand gained his love and knowledge of nature as well as the practice of trekking through the forests and mountains for hours at a time. It was from his father too that he gained useful medical expertise that later saved his life, and that of others, from plague, typhus, smallpox, leprosy, rabies, cholera, dysentery and malaria.

During his years in China he suffered all these things and in most cases his knowledge of what to do saved himself and others. There were no helicopters or telephones! He accepted some local remedies like boiled bamboo roots when he had no medicines left. But he did not accept the remedy offered by a lama monk from Tibet on one occasion. David asked him for any form of diuretic to combat an illness he was suffering with. The monk went to get something but found he had none left. He told Armand not to worry because he had the next best thing. He wrote the name of the remedy on a piece of paper, put it in his mouth and chewed it for some time. Then he took it out, rolled it into a pill in his dirty hands and then told Armand to chew it too and swallow it. To swallow the name of the "cure" was as good as the medicine itself apparently. Armand desisted.

After his first Holy Communion at, I suppose, about the age of twelve, his parents sent him, as a lay boarding student, to the nearby college, a “petit séminaire”, at Laressore, about four km from the family home. He was not intended for the priesthood. He was sent there because that college had a good academic reputation. During his six years at Laressore he usually gained top place in his class, for both diligence and excellence. Reportedly it was located in a very pleasant part of the region. Anyhow, he showed most interest and aptitude in those subjects dealing with the study of the natural sciences. He said himself later on that he could not understand why his fellow-students were interested in reading anything else!

During his years at the College he frequently returned home to visit the family who were a very close-knit unit. And he continued to delight in long walks in the neighbouring hills and his observations and examinations of plants and animals of all kinds.

Towards the end of his school studies he decided to enter the priesthood with the particular desire to go to the foreign missions. When he informed his parents they were both happy and supportive. But it was not a “shoe-in” decision on his part since he speaks of the contrary influence of Voltarianism around him.

Entry to the Congregation¹

He began his study of philosophy at Bayonne at the age of twenty, in 1848, and completed it in two years. Whether he came under the influence of any confreres at this time is unknown to me. But the revelation of “the Miraculous Medal” had occurred in 1830, was ratified in 1846 and the devotion quickly spread throughout Europe. Then also in 1846 there was the beginning of the visions and apparitions of Jesus and Mary to Sister Apolline Andriveau (the Red

¹ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*. Paris.(1936), 482.

Scapular) that lasted several years. These were accompanied by the messages of Jesus² to “the Priests of the Mission”. Presumably these were talking points, at least in France, and may have influenced Armand in his choice of vocation. Whatever, after his philosophy he applied to enter the Congregation of the Mission in Paris. This was during the time of Fr Étienne as Superior-General (his life-term had commenced in 1843).

David entered the Internal Seminaire at Paris on 4th November, 1848, at the Maison-Mère. It is interesting to note that among those in the Seminary with Armand were M. Devin, future secretary-general; MM. Guierry, Rouger and Bray, all future bishops in China; M. Boré, a future secretary-general, then superior-general (successor to Fr Étienne); M. Touvier, future vicar-apostolic in Abyssinia; M. Soubielle, a future provincial of Poland, and M. Sipolis, whom Armand much later singled out as one of the best entomologists in the “New World”.³ The following year there was a General Assembly in the house (30th July to 11th August, 1849). Cholera was raging in Paris at the time but the brave souls carried on regardless!

It was at this Assembly that the Provincial of Lombardy, in Italy, M. Durando, (now Blessed Marcantonio Durando), spoke to Fr Étienne about the troubles of the Congregation in his Province, and they were many, both inside and outside the Congregation. Besides the ongoing schism between the Italian and French confreres which involved M. Durando at the highest level, there was the Italian “Risorgimento”- the opposition to Austrian and other armies in the not yet united country we now call Italy. One of M. Durando’s brothers was General Giovanni Durando, a dissenting general. His other brother was General Giacomo Durando who supported the repression of religious communities and properties. Marcantonio tried to keep some balance between them but ended up the “meat in the sandwich” and, as so often

² Edward R. Udovic, CM., *Jean-Baptiste Étienne and the Vincentian Renewal*. (Chicago:Vincentian Studies Institute, 2001), 482.

³ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris.(1936), 483.

happens, he got squashed! How he did so much other work is quite extraordinary. The confreres at the Alberoni and Bedonia colleges had been confronted by armed forces; the seminary at Turin had been closed; Community property was being confiscated, etc. He repeated his difficulties to Fr Étienne when the latter visited Italy soon after the Assembly.

Armand made his vows on 5th November 1850 (the two year seminaire which was the practice since the time of St. Vincent until about 1950 – the first year being reserved exclusively for spiritual and community formation with studies starting in the second year). Having already completed his philosophy he would have studied theology during his second year seminaire. Whether according to practice or not, he received Minor Orders, in Paris, on the 14th June 1851.

But the needs of Lombardy would not go away. Savona College, pressured perhaps by the government of the city, was in urgent need of a qualified lecturer in the advanced courses of the natural sciences – a fairly new branch of study there. Savona College (on the Italian Riviera about 20 kms south west of Genoa) had been under the direction of the Vincentians since 1780. The College was founded basically for the formation and education of the secular clergy but had both intern and extern students. Better known to us is the Collegio Brignole-Sale. It was established, endowed and given into the care of the Congregation by two eminent citizens of Genoa in 1854 for the formation of foreign missionaries. Savona College had survived the French Revolution and had built up a successful reputation, though during the 1850s, there were some troubles and disorders. At this time the CM houses in Piacenza (Alberoni College), Genoa and Savona were under French protection by order of Napoleon in 1806.

Appointment to Savona College in Italy

Fr Étienne thought of Armand to fill the need and in the General Council of the CM. on the 10th August, 1851, it was decided to send Armand to Savona. The old story appears there – he was sent to help in the current crisis “pour quelque temps” – and stayed there for ten years! The appointment took him by surprise. He writes, “I had not yet completed my theology course when my superiors, pressured by need, sent me to Italy”.⁴ He had other tasks at the College but the teaching of the natural sciences was his principal one. To help in his teaching he planned to set up a room for displaying items of natural history – the beginnings of a little museum which grew into an admired and valuable innovation in the city.

It is worth noting that he himself set up this project (with all requisite permissions) and the confreres of the house remembered that fact. Much later, towards the end of 1870, he visited Savona and was very happy to see his museum had escaped destruction or confiscation (it was the time of the struggles for the unification of Italy) “because it was declared to be the personal property of M. David”.⁵ Towards the end of his life this Museum was gifted to the City of Savona by the Congregation.

After his first year at Savona he wrote to Fr Étienne on 31st November, 1852, reminding him what he had said before he went to Savona – that he wanted to go to the missions and that this desire had not changed in any way. He repeated his reasons for wanting to go there. He then says that he is writing this letter

...because I have delayed up to this, with the agreement of my superiors, advancing to sacred orders so that I would have more time for the study of theology, of Italian and for the French

⁴ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris.(1936), 484.

⁵ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris.(1936), 773.

lessons I have given this past year. It's intended that I receive all the sacred orders before Easter. (He was ordained to the priesthood at Savona in March 1853). I'm writing today because I'd like to know very soon, if possible, what plans are intended for me. The reason why I ask is that besides my other duties, I've undertaken, with the agreement of my superiors, a task that will take up much time; it is the development for the College of a natural history museum....this year I've been given an extra four or five hours class work per day...."⁶

He was in a quandary as to whether to continue the museum undertaking or to concentrate on the preparation of his foreign missionary needs such as languages, Chinese customs etc. He concludes with another page of reasons why he considers himself called to foreign mission work.

In spite of his eloquent pleading he stayed where he was, at Savona, for another nine years. But he never wavered in his desire though giving his best efforts to Savona. Several times he discussed this wish of his with the Provincial, Fr Durando, who supported his petition. Of course, one would expect Fr Durando to do so because he himself had joined the Community with the desire and intention of going to China. But he never got there!

Armand did very well in his teaching and before he left Italy he was well known and sought after by scientists in both Italy and France. He was a determined person but at the same time a retiring character and one has to "read between the lines" in the hope of discovering some tantalising information. More than once he was confronted in China by really bloodthirsty bandits. He mentions how he thought his end was nigh (as did his Chinese guide!) and he pointed his rifle at them. Then he omits what happens next! – he is continuing his travels. He was so retiring that we would have known very little of his time in Savona had

⁶ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission.*, Paris.(1936), 487.

he not been expressly directed to write about it by his superiors at the end of his days of exploration. Of his teaching at Savona he says it was not without some benefit:

there were some of my students who made a name for themselves in science and exploration; there was M. d'Albertis who made wonderful discoveries in Papua (and Melanesia). I recall too the Marquis Doria whom I encouraged early on towards natural history and who was responsible for the scientific illustrations and was the founder of the wonderful natural history museum, the Museo Civico des Genes (at Genoa).... and one of the best zoological publications of our time.”⁷

Armand was aware of the hardships and dangers of going to China. The news of Clet and Perboyre was well known as also the great missionary work of other confreres. From the time of Appiani, (the first Vincentian, sent by Rome not by the Superior General) in 1697 and Pedrini in 1703, until shortly before Armand's arrival, the confreres were in China as quasi-underground missioners. Afterwards they could enter China through “the front door”. Poor Appiani was extremely proficient in the Chinese language unlike Francis Regis Clet who was a very poor hand at it. I say “poor Appiani” because when de Tournon was sent as Papal Legate to try to reason with the Emperor of the time he took Appiani along as his translator. Appiani was not given to diplomatic handling of phrases. His stern simplicity earned him nineteen years imprisonment from the Emperor!

Let us return to Armand David. He repeatedly applied to Fr Étienne to go to China. But his application was not made to go to a mystical or dreamland China.. There were several important issues of a more political nature which, in an article like this, cannot be dealt with at

⁷ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission.*, Paris.(1936), 483.

length, but yet cannot be omitted if we are to appreciate David's mentality and decision.

The peoples of China in David's time

China of course has a long history – a succession of dynasties and emperors. But it was, and still is to a degree, made up of many diverse peoples with many different languages and dialects. Even today the people of Shanghai speak their own dialect of Mandarin, Shanghaiese, which is not easily understood by visitors. So too do the people of Beijing. The official language is Mandarin but not everyone in China speaks or understands it.⁸ In the south of China Cantonese is spoken generally. But not all Cantonese speakers understand Mandarin and vice versa. And what is so of these main cities is multiplied outside them. This is one of the less recognised problems of China.

This diversity of languages is mirrored by the diversity of origins. Armand had to deal with Tartars, Manchus, Mongols, Moslems of north-west China, (originating from Turkistan; China today has claims to part of Turkistan - at least "on the books"), Tibetans, Han and many other smaller groups. Apart from being under the umbrella of the Emperor they were pretty much autonomous. There were small but fierce bloodthirsty bandits among them – more lawless the further they were from Peking. Massacres of villagers were not uncommon. Away from Peking and Shanghai people became a "law unto themselves". Even today there are 56 racial groups in China – the largest by far being the Han – and when filling in a form, e.g., employment form, the applicant must state his/her racial grouping.

One man very helpful to David was a Mongolian named Sambdatchiamba. He was a huge strong middle-aged former Buddhist

⁸ Mandarin and Cantonese languages share the same written characters, but are understood differently as, for example, the figures 1,2,3,4, etc., are understood in most languages but spoken differently in them.

monk. He had been converted to Christianity and had been a guide and friend to Vincentian missionaries for over thirty years. When Armand first met him in open country about 160 km north west of Peking he almost shot the poor man who was only trying to give him a hug, having recognised him as the foreign priest he was to meet. Armand had been warned about bandits in that area. Both men were strong-minded, very different, but intensely loyal to each other and in time became close friends during their journey to Mongolia and, hoped for, Gobi desert.

The influences of earlier incursions, Genghis Khan, his grandson Kublai Khan, even Marco Polo and others can be recognised. Even today some Chinese scholars can detect words that originate from the Magyars. The Chinese language itself contains words with a similarity to Hungarian words.

So the China of Armand's time was an accumulation of very different territorial groups of peoples, of different origins, languages, traditions and sympathies. Possibly just one thing was shared by all these peoples – their dislike of Westerners! But being so disintegrated they were not able to put up a viable opposition to the foreigners.

The Opium Wars

I can find little, if any, glory in the treatment of the Chinese peoples by the Westerners in the nineteenth century. Of course I look at it now from a different perspective to that of centuries earlier.

Opium originated in Greece and Macedonia, as far as records can tell, so far back it hardly matters. But it was not indigenous to India or China – it was brought there from outside. Likewise, tea was not indigenous to Britain. It was brought there from outside.

To simplify, almost to the point of absurdity, but not quite, Britain liked the taste of tea and “imported” (less shameful than “practically stole”) it from China through its merchants at the beginning of the 19th century. At the same time it forcibly introduced the sale of its opium into China with dreadful effects lasting perhaps a century. The sale of this opium in China paid for the tea it took from China – a very nice deal for Britain.

The devastation caused by this opium usage and dependency became apparent early on and the Chinese government attempted to stop the trade. In 1839 it confiscated all the opium warehoused by British merchants in Canton. This action inflamed the already simmering antagonism between the Chinese and the British. Then, a little later, some drunken British sailors killed a Chinese villager. The British refused to hand them over to the Chinese authorities because they did not trust the Chinese legal system. So war broke out. This is known as the first Opium War between China and Britain (1839 – 1842).

The better organised and armed British forces won the war. By the Treaty of Nanking (29th August, 1842). China had to pay a huge indemnity, had to cede the territory of Hong Kong, allow trade at five shipping ports (sometimes called the treaty ports) for the exclusive rights of British merchants and allow residential rights to British citizens who would be exempt from Chinese law. Among these ports were Amoy, Canton and Shanghai. This is probably the origin of the English expression “to shanghai” someone. Shanghai later came to be known as “the Paris of the East” and many fine examples of European architecture still remain along the Bund, though dwarfed today by the mighty Jin Mao Tower.

The Chinese were left so powerless that other countries, France, the USA, and Russia, like sharks at a feeding frenzy, demanded and had to be given similar privileges. This right of residence gave a degree of freedom of entry and movement to foreigners, including missionaries, at least within those cities.

But Britain wanted more and more opportunities for commercial gain. It was not colonialism that Britain was interested in; it was trade. And other foreign countries were moving in on “their territory”. In 1856 they used the excuse of “insult incurred” when some Chinese officials boarded the ship *Arrow* and lowered the British flag. It was a Chinese owned ship but registered and crewed by the British. Hostilities began again in the second Opium War (1856 – 1860), sometimes known as the “Arrow War”.

The French, seeing a good chance to share some spoils, used the murder of a French missionary in western Kiangsi province as an excuse to join with the British in this war. Many missionaries had been murdered in China, down the years, but it had never before caused a war.

Again the Chinese were forced to a new treaty (Treaty of Tientsin) in 1858. This time the Chinese had to provide residence in Peking for foreign envoys, the opening of several new ports to Western trade and finally, of particular relevance to us, they had to give freedom of movement, even in the interior of the country, to Christian missionaries to evangelise. Before the Chinese signed, the British added the legalisation of the importation of opium to the treaty. The Chinese finally signed in 1860 at the Peking Convention. It was at this time that Russia acquired a long strip of Pacific coastline from China and built up the town and naval base of Vladivostok

This was the climate leading up to the appointment of Armand David to China. Western domination of Peking and Shanghai (and other places) led to a humiliation of the Chinese people that they haven't forgotten. They made later attempts to re-possess their country, e.g., the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. This was an officially supported peasant uprising attempting to drive all foreigners out of China. The name “Boxers” was coined by the foreigners from the secret societies who called themselves the “Righteous and Harmonious fists”. They

practised boxing and other rituals in the belief that it made them impervious to bullets. But it took the scourges of the World Wars, the Chinese civil war of 1928 and Communism to succeed in gaining back their own country. Of course there were some gains to China by Western occupation but the suppression of their national spirit and dignity, their economic impoverishment, the flouting of traditional Chinese ceremonies and family relationships, the use of the foreign law courts to promote the causes of Chinese Christian converts, especially by the missionaries, outweighed those gains. From 1884 to 1928 there were signs at the entrances to parks in Shanghai and Beijing (Peking) dating from those days of Western occupation, that are remembered by the Chinese today. The signs read, “No dogs, No chinese” - in that order.

Armand David was a child of France. In Peking he would have had Chinese servants. But it has to be said that I can find no record in his writings of any antipathy to the Chinese as a race. When George Bishop writes of Armand speaking disparagingly of the Chinese during his early years in China, he would be referring to occasional outbursts during his travels when his work was damaged or destroyed, or his progress impeded by bandits or self-appointed officials. And certainly in his early days he railed against what he saw as the worst aspects of Chinese life. These outbursts are understandable but they do not convict him of bias or dislike of the Chinese people. During his later journeys through mountainous and dangerous areas of the interior he lived “cheek by jowl” with his Chinese companions. Long before he left China he had come to love them and their company.

The French Government and the Congregation of the Mission.

In 1860, after the Peking Convention, the French Government was eager to increase its sphere of influence in China. As part of this plan it asked the Congregation of the Mission to set up a College in Peking and with the local bishops, recommended the establishment of minor

seminaries for the young Chinese candidates for the priesthood. There was some discussion about the possibility of setting up a university to extend French culture and language to the Chinese. Something along these lines had been begun by the Jesuits in Shanghai. Now the Congregation of Propaganda Fide and the bishops were thinking of the same thing for Peking.⁹

The relationship between the French Government and the Congregation, particularly in Fr Étienne's time, has been studied by Fr Edward Udovic CM in his scholarly thesis *John Baptist Étienne and the Vincentian Revival*. When reading Fr Étienne's correspondence with the Roman Congregations, involving the Popes, it becomes clear that Étienne is imbued with a strong loyalty towards France. In his dealings with the Italian provinces of the Congregation of the Mission – a very difficult situation – the same thing, his Gallicism, comes through.¹⁰ In the subsequent far more difficult situation with the Spanish provinces those confreres were bitterly divided depending whether they were pro or anti French. The Congregation was French! But the other European provinces could exist! At the first General Assembly after the Province of the United States was established no delegates from that province were allowed to participate because they were not European (read French). They were allowed observer status.

It was during Fr Étienne's time as Superior-General that the matter came to a head about moving the administration (Maison-Mère as well?) of the Congregation from Paris to Rome. Étienne was strongly against it. To support this and other various arguments with Italian Church authorities, he was able to call on a number of high placed French Government officials, usually Ministers of State, to his support. But it has to be said that at other times those government officials seemed to take the initiative to which Fr Étienne had to comply. It was the Concordat of 1801, after the disbandment of the Congregation of

⁹ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris.(1936), 491.

¹⁰ Udovic *Jean Baptiste Étienne and the Vincentian Revival*, 245.

the Mission in the French Revolution, that gave the Congregation legal existence in France (1804). Fr Étienne judged it right and necessary to co-operate with the government in order to guarantee the continuation of the Congregation. So the central government of the Congregation stayed in Paris.

On the issue of the nationality of the Assistants, it was conceded by Paris that they could be chosen on an international basis instead of being all French. Fr Étienne was not happy with this, seeing it as “the thin edge of the wedge” towards moving the Curia to Rome.¹¹ The French Chargé d'affaires took up Étienne's attitude when he wrote “it (the plan for international Assistants) could impede the government's relation with the administration of the Congregation by introducing heterogeneous elements who could easily become difficult and even hostile”.¹² Nevertheless the French had to concede this point.

But they prevailed over Rome in the matter of the Superior-General always being a Frenchman and living in Paris. We recall Fr Slattery being elected Superior-General after World War II and having to adopt French citizenship. And he was still unable to move to Rome.

All in all, the Congregation and the French government worked together very closely and it's not too much to describe the Congregation as an instrument of French colonial policy in the 1800s. The choice of the Congregation by the government was generally regarded at that time as an honour to us. But it did link the French confrere missionaries as members or employees of the French government in Chinese minds as well as others.

The other side of the coin is that the French government financially, medically, legally and in facilitation of travel, assisted much of the work of the missionaries. All the expenses of Armand's journeys in

¹¹ Udovic *Jean Baptiste Étienne and the Vincentian Revival*, 244.

¹² Udovic *Jean Baptiste Étienne and the Vincentian Revival*, 245.

China were covered by French Government and National Museum disbursements.

And of course, this link-up enabled the missionaries to get into China in the first place, whereas previously it had taken months, even years, of stratagems to enter. So God alone knows the merits of the matter.

Appointment to China

At the General Assembly of 1861 (27th July – 4th August), Bishop Mouly CM, Vicar Apostolic of Peking, attended and spoke of the new possibilities of evangelisation in China after the Peking Convention (1860). He was wanting missionaries and sisters. The immediate plan was to set up Colleges, as mentioned earlier. Fr Étienne turned to Armand David for the work. Armand wrote “Our government has expressed the desire for missionaries in Beijing to open French schools as soon as possible. Fr Étienne ... decided to appoint me to the task of preparing the way for these establishments. The long time I’ve spent in education makes him believe I’m able for the work”.¹³

In passing, this same Assembly decreed that no confrere accept any decoration or honorary distinction from civil authority whether in Europe or the foreign missions. This is why David had to twice decline the Legion of Honour. The rule was strictly enforced in Étienne's and Boré's time.

Armand left Savona to go to Paris in 1861. Major changes had occurred in the Maison-Mère since he was last there; the casket of St. Vincent was completed in 1856; the two side-aisles with ten small altars had been added to the chapel; the bodies of Sts Clet and Perboyre were laid to rest there.

¹³ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris.(1936), 490.

On arrival in Paris Armand dealt mostly with our confrere, M. Vicart, whom Étienne placed in charge of the missions of China and Mongolia. But while there he met Bishop Mouly whom he was to accompany to China. Mouly invited Armand to visit a famous Sinologist, M. Stanislaus Julien, of the National Institute of Paris. He, Julien, had often sought the help of the missionaries in obtaining objects and specimens from China. Julien soon realised that Armand and he shared the same love of natural history and immediately declared that he wanted Armand to use his natural talents and interests in China, “au profit des savants françaises”. He introduced him to the leading figures in the Academy of Sciences who would give him commissions for work David would send back to them. He accepted and promised to do his best to fulfil their desires and expectations of him. No doubt he received some excellent advice from them as well.

Departure for China

The day came for them to leave for China, on the 20th February, 1862. The group consisted of one bishop (Mouly), three missionaries (including himself and M. Favier, later on a famous Vicar Apostolic in China), two lay-brothers and fourteen Daughters of Charity. They sailed on the *Descartes* from Toulon, about 70 km east of Marseilles, east across the Mediterrean to Alexandria. The Suez Canal was not yet open so they went by road, perhaps 150 km, to the top of the Red Sea. We are not told exactly where but somewhere there they embarked on the *Japon* for the long journey of almost five months to China.

But it was not yet “plain sailing”. After passing the Gulf of Aden and entering the Indian Ocean their little ship sprang a leak and was in danger. The ship was beached, probably on the northern coastal tip of Somalia, the trouble was corrected and they set off again for China. When they reached China it was “easy going” for them, unlike their predecessor missionaries who had to use their wits and wiles to get in. Because of the 1860 Peking Convention this group of missionaries was

able to disembark on Chinese soil and depart for their various destinations in China without hindrance. Armand was appointed to the Peitang (in Peking) and went there directly with Bishop Mouly arriving on the 5th July, 1862.

Six years previously Rome had divided the Bishoprics of Peking (the northern capital) and Nanking (the southern capital) into three Vicariate Apostolics for that whole vast area. The original Bishoprics had been established in 1690. The Vincentians had the care of the new Peking Vicariate and a second Vicariate south west of Peking. The third Vicariate, south east of Peking, was given to the care of the Jesuits.

The Peking Vicariate contained the important centres of Tientsin and Baoding. Of interest, in 1997 when a group of Vincentians had the opportunity of visiting some of our previous mission areas, they visited Tientsin where the Bishop welcomed them (about ten or twelve confreres) to afternoon tea, or its Chinese equivalent. He was recalling the Vincentians he could remember and asked, “how is my old friend, Peter Boonekamp?” “I’m quite well thank you”, answered Peter who was one of the group. (Peter’s niece, by the way, is Senator Brian Harradine’s (2nd) wife). Tientsin will be mentioned again later.

Baoding is an old Catholic centre, south of Peking. When that same group of Vincentian tourists, just mentioned, wanted to visit Baoding they were refused permission by the Chinese Government and shortly after, the priest and bishop there were arrested and jailed. As far as I know they are still in jail. The government intervention arose because of the driver of our mini-bus. In China a driver goes with every hired car or bus – a vehicle cannot be hired otherwise. This driver has to report each evening where the group went that day and other details of the trip. In the morning he has to file a report of the coming day’s activities. This is when the trip to Baoding was stopped. The group was told they were not just “retired teachers on tour” as said on their visas.

They were a religious group making a pilgrimage. Fortunately this was towards the end of the tour.

Armand David was appointed to the “mother house”, the Peitang. This word refers to the bishop’s residence, the Cathedral and other Catholic buildings. It is not clear but it seems the first Peitang was more widespread and less compact than the more famous second Peitang, the enclave that was erected in 1887, after Armand’s time in China. It was this second Peitang that was besieged in the Boxer uprising of 1900 in Peking.

The confreres, the Daughters of Charity, the orphanage, many Chinese Christian workers, offices of all kinds, were located in this Peitang enclave surrounded by a high wall. Since the Boxer Rebellion was aimed very much at the Christian missionaries this Peitang was the centre of their attack in Peking. The siege lasted fifty-seven days. All the animals, all the foliage of the trees and even their roots were eaten by the desperate defenders. Many were killed including one hundred and twenty children, fifty-one of them in the one explosion.¹⁴ The defence of the Peitang was led by a twenty-three year old French lieutenant named Paul Henry, with thirty naval marines. This Paul Henry lived and prayed with the Vincentian Community as much as possible until he was killed on the 30th July, 1900. Many wonderful things were said of him by all in the Peitang and he is remembered and honoured by an oil painting of him in the Maison Mère in Paris which is now kept in the souvenir room together with other great memorabilia of the Congregation. With only two days food left the siege was lifted a few days later by the arrival of fifty infantry marines. But all this is in 1900!

Coming back to Armand in 1862! The College buildings seem to have been established before his arrival. Although he was not the headmaster (Bp. Mouly had that position) he had a brief to set up the

¹⁴ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris (1958) , 281.

courses appropriate to the buildings available. He taught the natural sciences, Bp. Mouly, the courses on anthropology, the two other confreres (names unknown) taught mathematics and physics, and music and clockmaking. All these confreres worked very well together and Armand probably would have stayed at this task happily for many years. Before his arrival he had resolved to set up a natural history museum in the college as he had done in Savona. This College was at the Nantang.

The Catholic Church in Beijing

There were, and still are, four Catholic Churches in Peking – north, south, east and west. The Peitang is better known today as the Beitang (North Church) and has been the most important of these churches since 1860. It dates from early Jesuit days having been opened in 1703. As with the other churches, it went through many vicissitudes of destruction and confiscations but was finally given back to the Church in 1985.

The Dongtang (East Church) is of particular interest to us in that its last foreign priests were our Irish confreres. The first two confreres appointed were Fr Patrick O’Gorman and Fr James Mullins in 1918. Fr Mullins was stationed at Malvern at the time though he had spent about ten years at St. Stanislaus' College. He was farewelled from the College at the end of 1918 and went to the Dongtang, known also in the Western world as St. Joseph’s. The last Irish parish priest was Fr Maurice Kavanagh who, as many of us know, suffered terribly at the hands of his Communist torturers. By earthquake and, later on, by fire, this Church was destroyed several times, though it had existed for 159 years. By 1860 (the Peking Convention) when all former properties were returned to the Church, all that remained of the Dongtang was a gate with nothing but rubble inside. It was rebuilt in 1884. But like all the churches it was burned down in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. As indemnity it was built again in 1904. Within about the last eighteen

months the Chinese government has remodelled and beautified the street (Waugfujing St. – formerly Morrison St. - the “Collins St. Melbourne” of Beijing) and established a beautiful plaza and park near the front of the church – an unintended advantage indeed. Chinese priests staff the church now; both apparently of the Chinese Patriotic Church. The two Sunday Masses were crowded in 1998, but numbers have dropped since the public opposition of the parish priest to the canonizations of a few years ago.

The third Church is the Nantang (South Church). Until 1860 this was the main church and residence of the Bishops. The original church was built by the Jesuit Fr Schall, successor to Fr Matteo Ricci SJ, about 1650, the first Catholic church in Beijing. It too was destroyed by earthquake in 1775, fire in 1900 (the Boxer Rebellion), and rebuilt in 1904. It was in front of this church that yours truly had his first, and most serious, heart attack.

The fourth church is the Xitang (West Church). This is the most recent of the churches built nearly 200 years ago by our confrere Fr Pedrini about 1723. Pedrini offered hospitality here to missionaries of various Congregations which became a lasting tradition. But in 1811 the imperial government ordered that only those priests with duties at the imperial court could reside in the city. The visitors moved out leaving four priests who were forbidden to leave the church grounds under pain of deportation. The four did leave the church grounds illegally and were promptly deported. The church was forcibly dismantled and so Pedrini’s dream came to an end after about 90 years. The church was rebuilt in 1867 (again the Peking Convention) and again burned down in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. This “yo-yo” continued with it being rebuilt in 1912. It is to be returned by the Communist government but it’s not quite agreed what to do with it. It is fairly close to the Beitang and the least important of the four churches.

Armand David starts work in the college

To return again to Armand David at his college at the Nantang. There seems to have been a good number of students – perhaps seventy, but the college lacked resources and survived from day to day. The confreres were busy learning the language used in Peking as well as their sacerdotal ministry. Armand had his special interest – natural history - and explored the environs of Peking to find material for his museum which he could see would be useful for the future of the College. I wonder if there could be any connection between the enthusiasm for these natural history museums of the confreres in the nineteenth century with that of St. Stanislaus College Bathurst?

The Peking museum was ultimately to become so important and so valuable that it would be claimed by the Emperor of the time as his own.

Still in 1862, the year of his arrival, Armand trekked north outside Peking to Kalgan, a Vincentian mission and Christian village under the Great Wall of China, both to learn the language and to search for interesting flora and fauna. He was able to do this only in his free time from the college. Besides being a very amiable person he was also a most energetic and single-minded man.

In 1863, again he went north east to Jehol, and somehow had an extended leave time from the College. He was away for five months this time, but principally learning the language in which he became quite proficient, also doing some missionary work and no doubt always searching for new gifts of nature. Jehol was a great mountainous area and little did he know then how valuable this mountaineering was going to be for him He still had no idea of the appointment awaiting him in about eighteen months time. Already he was in contact with the eminent M. Henri Milne-Edwards of the National Institute of Paris and the professors of the French Academy of Sciences and was sending back, not only seeds and plants, but his study notes on what he

discovered. In this he was not just a collector but was a botanist, a true scientist. He is credited with being the first of the Far Eastern plant hunters to be so methodical and painstaking in his discoveries within a given area.¹⁵ Unknown previously to me, the first great systematic botanist of importance was St. Albert the Great.¹⁶ Botanical history places his work of discovery of plants on the way to and from Poland as Apostolic Visitor ahead of his theological and philosophical studies and hardly mentions his student, St. Thomas Aquinas.

Perhaps this is the place to say that Armand David was a highly reputable authority of international standing in many fields of study. Opinions vary as to whether he was primarily a zoologist or an ornithologist, but he was also geologist, botanist, animal geographer, mineralogist, and an expert on fish, molluscs, reptiles, insects and mammals.

Père David's appointment as an explorer

The quality and quantity of the work David sent back to Paris aroused the enthusiasm and admiration of the professors and scientists of Paris. Once China was opened up to foreigners in 1860, it was an Eldorado for plant hunters from all over the world. The professors of the Paris Museum realised they had an exceptionally able colleague in Père Armand David, and they approached the Minister of Public Instruction (a government Minister), M. Victor Duruy, asking him to request the Vincentian Superior General, Fr Étienne, to release Armand from his work at the college to become full time explorer in the interior of the vast Chinese empire. Although it was an exceptional request Fr Étienne agreed to it. This seems to have been in the second half of 1864 because David wrote to the secretary general of the Société de Géographie that year saying; "I'm going to spend six monthsnear

¹⁵ Tyler Whittle, *The Plant Hunters*, (London: Heinemann, 1970).

¹⁶ Whittle, *The Plant Hunters*.

the great imperial park of eastern Mongolia....The distances I will walk would be enough to take me from Peking to Moscow”.¹⁷

The basic terms of the agreement were that David would receive official endorsement from the government and that the necessary funds to cover all his expenses would be made available. The duration of this contract was simply “for several years”. Both terms were agreed on – David’s work was officially titled “a scientific mission”, and he never seemed to run out of money. Somehow Fr Étienne, M. Duruy and David saw this arrangement as “a service to French science and the good of religion”. He continued his work on his own museum when he could but now he was contracted to supply the Parisian academics and museums with rare discoveries from China. Armand was delighted with the appointment and immediately started his planning and preparation.

The Wardian Cases

Before speaking of his journeys of exploration, it’s worth realising the work involved in sending seeds and plants from their native China through climates hot and cold, storms at sea etc. to a distant Paris.

Briefly, the difficulties of sending seeds and plants were multiple – careless and/or ignorant ships’ captains and crews, rats and vermin on board, the rolling of the ships which often had to travel round Cape Horn, the extremes of heat and cold and more. Very few specimens ever arrived safely or survived for long in their new climate after they arrived.

The history of the passage of plants is often divided into pre-Wardian and post-Wardian times.¹⁸ Dr. Nathaniel Ward, an English medical

¹⁷ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris (1936), 494.

¹⁸ Whittle, *The Plant Hunters*.

practitioner, quite accidentally discovered how to solve the problem. In 1827 he put a caterpillar in a glass jar to pupate in mould at the bottom of the jar. He fastened a lid on it, put it away and simply forgot about it. Much later on he found the jar. Presumably the caterpillar had perished but he noticed growing in the mould a tiny fern and a blade of grass. His curiosity was aroused. He wrote; “ I observed the moisture which during the heat of the day rose from the mould, condensed on the surface of the glass and returned whence it came, thus keeping the earth always in the same degree of humidity.”

The secret was to have a closed container that was entirely glazed and permanently closed (although some light was required). He needed a clean, even and undisturbed climate as vital to the health of his plants. These were called “terraria” (and still are for indoor plants).

There was great demand for a successful container such as this but Ward had to prove his invention. His great public test came in 1834. Two of Ward’s “cases” were planted with English ferns and grasses, sealed and placed in a suitable position on board a ship to Australia (Botany Bay). After the six month voyage the cases were unsealed ashore and the contents were found to be in perfect condition. But there was a second part to the test. The same was to be done on the return voyage. And Ward stipulated that the plants were to be native Australian and ones that had already proved to be bad travellers. They included a small creeping fern which had never survived the trip to England.

From Botany Bay, round the Horn, on to London the plants experienced temperatures from 20 to 120 degrees and the rolling storms of Cape Horn. When they arrived in London, Ward found them fresh, green and thriving. By means of Ward’s “cases”, Cork Oaks were sent to South Australia and coffee, cinnamon and ginger were sent to Queensland.¹⁹

¹⁹ Whittle, *The Plant Hunters*, 108-112.

From now on botanists (including Armand David) could send their discoveries round the world. Armand had to build his own containers wherever he was in the wilds of China to preserve and transport his specimens and this required considerable carpentry skills as they had to be perfectly fitting at the joints and enclosed by whatever means were available. Glass was often used where possible, which was not the case in the interior of China. He doesn't say what he used but often says he had to build his cases. For living plants he was able to use simple bamboo baskets to carry them from the interior to the coast where he would repack them properly for the voyage to France. For skins he had to taxidermy and case them the same day to avoid the destructive humidity.

The Père David Deer

About mid 1865, Armand visited the vast imperial park of Hai-tzu, a few miles south of Peking. He had seen a herd of about 120 strange gentle animals grazing there some months before, but unseen by most Westerners. No European or Chinese, apart from the staff, was allowed in the enclosed park and it was the death penalty for anyone to kill one of these animals. But at this time there was a break in the wall not yet repaired, and David wrote “ I was fortunate enough to be able to see, from a safe distance, a herd of more than a hundred of these animals”.²⁰ He goes on to describe them at length, but regrets that up to this he has not been able to obtain even a hide of the animal and that the French Legation could not get an animal through official channels.

But “happily I knew the Tartar soldiers guarding the park...”²¹ and some exchange of money (we would call it bribery and corruption!) did the job. He was sold some hide and bones of the deer which he

²⁰ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris (1936), 494.

²¹ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris (1936), 495.

smuggled back to the College to study. At least the guards trusted him, because for them to be caught doing this meant public decapitation – and probably the same for Armand. This was in January 1866.

The Chinese called this animal “Mi-lou” or more commonly, “Seu-pou-siang” meaning “the four characters that do not match”. By that they meant that this animal has the horns of a stag, the neck of a camel, the foot of a cow and the tail of an ass.

It is unknown in recorded time to have existed in the wild. The only animals alive in the mid 19th century were those in this Chinese imperial park. Fortunately Armand was able, about early March 1866, to obtain three living animals and have them transported back to Paris. This was through the good offices of the French Legation who prevailed upon Hen-Tchy, Superintendent of the imperial estates, to turn a blind eye while these three deer escaped.²² Some years later he was able to send more of them to Europe. It is fortunate that he did because most of the herd in the park were killed in a flood in 1895, and the few that escaped were killed, probably for food, during the Boxer Rebellion. We should remember that the secret societies of peasant uprisers, called Boxers, were initially trying to end the reign of the emperors as well as the foreigners. They had no scruples about killing the Emperor’s animals. Eventually they were coaxed into joining with the imperial power to concentrate against the hated foreigners. This is when their name was changed to “Harmonious and Righteous Militia”.

The only animals of this species (genus probably) still extant after 1895 were the ones David had sent to Europe, and these are the progenitors of all Père David deer in the world. A breeding population was established at Woburn Abbey in England by the Duke of Bedford. From here, much later on, they were re-introduced into China as a

²² Helen Mary Fox, *Abbé David’s Diary*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 6. This is one of many instances where the author in the *Annales*, Edouard Robert, has omitted details from the diaries because “ne conviennent pas aux Annales”.

goodwill gesture. Today they are found only in zoos and game parks although I've been told there was a herd in Wingatui, in New Zealand near Dunedin, for purposes of venison production, but I cannot confirm this.

This deer is one of Père David's more important, and certainly better known, discoveries, and was named in his honour by the Institute of Paris, "Elaphurus davidianus". In March 1866 he wrote:

... I have hurriedly boxed my last shipment to the Museum, consisting of mammal and bird skins and living plants, which I have confided to the intelligent care of M. Alphonse Pichon, attaché of the French Legation, who is returning to Paris. The most important specimen of the shipment is the *seu-pou-siang* (Père David deer), a kind of large deer,..."²³

His first journey of exploration

The first trips to Kalgan and Jehol were principally educational and missionary familiarisation. But now he was to begin his first of three full time exploration journeys, this time into Mongolia and if all went well, which it didn't, into the Gobi Desert. It was to last seven and a half months, from 12th March 1866 to 26th October 1866. Being a careful, punctual and prepared man, he was ready to leave sooner but was held back by the shipment to Paris mentioned above. This was always a condition he had to deal with – the few occasions of transport that became available.

He needed five mules; two for himself and his Chinese guide, Ouang Thomas, though he preferred to walk to better observe everything, three to carry the equipment required for such an expedition. They needed summer and winter clothes because of the extremes of climate

²³ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 5.

they would experience, they needed some bedding, all their hunting gear, everything that is required for taxidermy, for plant specimens, boxes of all sizes, empty bottles etc. Being a devout as well as a learned man, as acknowledged by all, he included in his diary:

“It goes without saying that, in view of my position as a missionary, I have not forgotten my ecclesiastical appurtenances. The accomplishment of his religious duties towards the Creator should be the principal concern of man on earth; when that is done, one’s heart is at peace and one fears nothing in this world. As for food, I depend on the Chinese, and I believe that with a little goodwill, one man can live wherever another can. I do not burden myself, therefore, with any food, except a bottle of cognac for emergencies”.²⁴

In another place in his diary he says; “After the usual religious exercises (which I do daily though I do not mention them in my journal)....”

On this, and all his journeys, Armand kept his famous daily diaries. These are the background of almost all we know of him. He wrote to members of the Academy of Sciences, the Société de Géographie, the Natural History Museum of Paris, but these letters all contain technical and scientific information. This little article prescind from this kind of information which can be found by the volume in botanical and other works. I’m wanting to concentrate more on the confrere, Armand David, information about whom it is more difficult to glean.

Through poor diet and fatigue Armand suffered a degree of anaemia. One writer states it was pernicious anaemia but I cannot believe this to be true – he could never have made the journeys he did with that complaint. But he claims that his anaemia affected his memory

²⁴ Fox, *Abbé David’s Diary*, 8.

somewhat, necessitating him to keep a daily diary. He was faithful to it in all his travels in China.

First stage - Peking to Suanhwa

On 12th March 1866 he left Peking in high spirits with his Chinese guide travelling north. Their road, even out of Peking, was nothing more than a large number of ruts worn parallel to each other – and called an imperial highway! There were no road maintenance teams. When the ruts became too bad, people just went to the side of them, making it a wide imperial highway.

Armand had done his homework in deciding to travel by mule rather than by cart. These last had no springs cushioning rocks and holes. This more than counterbalanced any benefits of shelter from sun and wind. The mules offered a more surefooted ride. But most of the time Armand made his journey on foot in order to be able to observe plants, rocks, insects etc. more closely.

The most impressive ability of Armand David was his prodigious knowledge of birds, snakes, animals, geology and palaeontology. He had no reference books with him but he writes everyday of the hundreds of specimens giving these wonders of creation their latin or other scientific names. E.g., “The stones in this ...plain are for the most part porphyry, diorite, and trachyte, but there are also pieces of blue limestone”.²⁵ Rocks aren’t just rocks! And again, “.....this animal.....might well be *Canis rutilis* of Pallus (probably *Cuon javanicus alpinus*).”²⁶ Even Helen Fox, to be mentioned later, edits out many pages of these scientific observations.

²⁵ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 8.

²⁶ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 28.

This, his first major journey, would leapfrog from one mission station to another as much as possible. He lists all the little hamlets and villages he passed through or stayed at, but here, for clarity's sake, we'll only mention the main ones.

His first major objective was the town of Suanhwa, four days travel away, almost always on foot. In between he slept wherever he could find shelter. In Mongolia, by law, "inns" (hovels or stables) had to be about a day's journey apart, about thirty miles, so there were no late morning starts or dillydallying on the way especially in the shorter days of winter.

It was on the 16th March, "at 2 o'clock we enter Suanhwa". Armand was a very precise and exact man, which of course made his discoveries so valuable and reliable. Missionaries of various Congregations stayed in Suanhwa as a base for their work among the Christians of the region, and were always welcome. Such cordial hospitality made him decide to stay there a week as his first base and he paid off his muleteers who had been contracted only this far.

Wherever he stayed he never "just sat in the sun". He was always out studying the region. There were coal mines in the general area that had been worked from antiquity. In some places, mountain streams powered mills. He regretted that so much of the mountains and countryside had been denuded of trees, so much so that only coal was available for fires. He made a study tour of the wildlife along the important Yang Ho river, noting the number and plumage of geese and ducks, swans and plovers, larks and peewits, gray jackdaws and rooks and every other object of his searching mind. The next day he went fossil hunting and not without success.

Ten miles from Suanhwa, on the 19th March, he visited some Christians at Nan-t'ang who asked to see him. The next day he walked twenty miles to visit some more Christians as also the local priest, M. Lauriel. When he arrived there at lunchtime he found another visitor

present – his bishop, Bishop Mouly. But after lunch there was no rest; he was off to visit another fossil site he had noticed; “too good to miss” he writes.

Second stage - Suanhwa to Erh-shih-san-hao and Kweisui

Each day he continued making excursions from Suanhwa to which he returned on the 23rd March, but he writes “ my trips did not produce any novelties”. Now he prepared for the next leg of the journey – from Suanhwa to Erh-shih-san-hao where he arrived on April 4th, and where the confreres had a mission station. Before leaving Suanhwa he had purchased a Mongolian tent because he would spend most nights in the open with his Chinese guide and future companions. His confrere, Brother Chevrier, was waiting here to join him as a hunter as far as the next main base of Saratsi. Ever thinking ahead he had to curtail somewhat his westward planned journey to Kangsu and even the Gobi desert, because of rumoured insurrections occurring out there. His next immediate decision was to decide upon, and procure, his mode of transport for his now considerable cargo.

A few days later he met up with his fourth companion, the famous Sambdatchiamba (mentioned earlier, whom Armand nearly shot). This Mongol convert ex-lama was the great guide, years earlier, of our confreres MM. Huc and Gabet in Tibet and was to pilot them through Mongolia. I should point out here that the Chinese attached little value or importance to maps until the end of the 19th century. A guide was essential.

The next stage was to Kweisui, about two hundred miles further west. There were no muleteers out this far and the local porters refused to go anything like two hundred miles. They had to work their own fields during the short summer available to them in this area of Mongolia. He was able to hire a strong wagon with four beasts so all was well to start off. His confreres at Erh-shih-san-hao gave generous provisions. Their

staple food for their travels was millet and a floury substance called “tsamba”, made of pre-cooked beans and barley that looked like red dust. It was mixed with water and swallowed as best one could. Armand said he could stomach this for about a week but no more.

On 18th April they left Erh-shin-san-hao to travel across desert because it was a shorter route, but without much habitation on the way. Usually, as protection against bandits and wolves (and other fierce animals), travellers tried to stay near the tents of others at night. They were lucky to meet any others in the desert though it was possible and did happen.

They were among Mongolians this far north west – the Chinese were uninterested in desert terrain. Some Mongolians welcomed them pleasantly but at other places they were very unfriendly and charged them dearly and in advance for the most deplorable accommodation. The snow they experienced in the desert gave way to warmer weather as they now travelled along the fertile cultivated plain. They were again among Chinese.

On the evening of the 23rd April they arrived in Kweisui. Here too the confreres had a house. Unexpectedly, they met up with M. Claude Marie Chevrier, the priest brother of Bro. Chevrier their companion. This was their third stopping place or base, after Suanhwa and Erh-shih-san-hao, and the two brothers and Armand made an excursion the next day to some nearby mountains but their chief success seems to have been in finding a quantity of dandelions which they took home for a salad and which Armand called a luxury after what they had eaten on their journey. The following day, April 25th, M. Chevrier had to leave for another Christian community in another direction. Armand wanted to depart too because there was little natural history of interest around Kweisui.

Third stage - Kweisui to Saratsi

It was the 1st May when they left for Saratsi which they made their main base for some months. From there they would make several exploratory excursions (of weeks at a time) of surrounding areas. Saratsi, where they arrived on 5th May, was a town where no Europeans had ever been seen. They were able to hire two small cabins and were very happy about it because at last they had a place of their own. The authorities of Saratsi were suspicious of them but they couldn't help that. They insisted they were not Russian spies nor thieves of the local gold and silver. They could only hope they could allay their suspicions in time.

They had many varied experiences, some quite dangerous, in their explorations – far too many to retell here. The botanical and other discoveries, and the note-taking, continued day after day.

The Saratsi expeditions

The first trip was to a mountainous area, Wu-la-shan, that they had been directed to earlier on by M. Victor Duruy in his brief of the “scientific mission”. Right from the start Armand had had his doubts about the value of this whole northern journey. It was well west of Saratsi and close to the Yellow River. Before they reached there Bro. Chevrier and Ouang Thomas returned to Saratsi both to guard their house against thieves and to prepare the birds already collected. Now it was just Armand and Sambdatchiamba. Eventually, on June 10th, they returned to Saratsi where they found everything in good condition. What Armand wrote of this expedition was what he was to repeat of this whole first journey; “I am fairly content with my expedition even though I did not procure anything extraordinary”.²⁷ What he did obtain

²⁷ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 84.

was the knowledge of his own courage and ability to keep his health and strength unimpaired.

After two weeks of rest, but mainly because of the rain, they set out again in a different direction to western Wu-la-t'o intending to be away for three weeks. Bro. Chevrier joined them for this 2nd excursion and, when climbing mountains, made good use of a rope tied to the camel "Sambo" had managed to acquire. It proved far more suitable for carrying their load. The two daily requirements they always had to look for were water and dry dung - for cooking their millet and tsamba. One would have expected plenty of venison of many kinds from hunters with guns, but Armand would only shoot an animal if it was for scientific examination. However he did share when Bro. Chevrier shot four partridges instead of one for "scientific examination" on one occasion. "Sambo" didn't care much for meat anyhow.

The expedition results were similar to the earlier one and they returned to Saratsi on July 17th, again finding everything peaceful and intact. He calculated they had walked close to 175 miles each way on the trip. They rested at Saratsi doing some short day trips always searching, but not mixing much with the local people because most of the time the population was fazed out on opium. It was an epidemic, a scourge affecting almost the entire population and known among them as "European smoke".

A week later, July 24th, they made a third shorter excursion around the "Wu-t'ang-chiao" mountain lasting about a week. Apart from coming across herds of yaks for the first time this trip was much the same as the others.

Besides his many other talents, Armand seems to have had a good knowledge of music. He writes,

Mongol music is more varied and has a more extensive scale than Chinese, where the monotonous melodies revolve

invariably on five or six notes cut almost mechanically by measure in two-time. The Mongols...sing almost constantly in full voice, while the Chinese sing in a horrible falsetto or make a raucous brawling which splits European ears. As for instrumental music it is about the same in both nations; it is detestable. They have no idea of harmony, and chords are entirely unknown to them.²⁸

They arrived back in Saratsi on 1st August but all were unwell. "Sambo" had dysentery but refused Armand's medicines and Armand too was beginning to feel feverish with the onset of severe head-aches. With no improvement after a few weeks they all decided to leave Saratsi and return to Kweisui, 120 miles east. They had a large collection of specimens to be cased and noted, and were lucky to be able to rent two carts for the return journey. This time they were warmly and genuinely farewelled by their Saratsi neighbours. Although they were five days in reaching Kweisui they felt so ill that they decided to keep going to reach the confreres house in Erh-shih-san-hao. It was another seven days travel. They reached it on the 10th August late in the evening, but Armand was exhausted and collapsed on arrival.

The good care of MM. Bray and Chevrier nursed him back to health and they stayed there 12 days. Here at Erh-shih-san-hao Bro. Chevrier left their team and returned to his community at nearby Kalgan. Armand, as soon as he could walk, was out looking for new specimens. Eventually he and Sambdatchiamba left for Suanhwa where his faithful assistant, Ouang Thomas, was waiting for him. It was time now for "Sambo" to depart and return to his native village in Mongolia. It would have been an emotional parting, for those two would each have given his life for the other, even though, at times, they got on each other's nerves. In Suanhwa Armand found new plants and birds that were not there on the outward journey. They stayed a month collecting

²⁸ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris, (1936), 794-795.

and then returned safe and sound to Peking on 26th October – an absence of seven and a half months.

He gives his own judgement on this first exploration:

The collections I made and sent to France (the Museum of Natural History of Paris) were not brilliant, for the high Mongol plateaus are desperately poor in every respect. Nevertheless a number of animal and plant species, some new to science and others of interest to zoogeography, were secured. Undoubtedly the expedition would have been richer in results for science if the rebellion in western China had not prevented me from going across Kansu to Tsinghai, as I had intended. This region, as yet unexplored and difficult of access, should contain various novelties.²⁹

²⁹Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 143.



The Three Journeys of Jean Pierre Armand David CM

Journey 1 ——— *Journey 2* ——— *Journey 3* ———

(Map of China courtesy of Clip Art, Graphic Maps, <http://www.graphicmaps.com>)



*Left: Jean Pierre Armand David
(Photo courtesy "China Sparks")*

Bottom Left: Giant Panda

*Bottom Right: The Dongfang
(East Church) which was
formerly under the care of the
Irish Vincentians.*



The second journey - Central and Western China - Peking to Tientsin

Armand spent 1867 resting but mainly developing his College museum. He kept in constant contact with Paris, if constant it can be called when mail might take six months to get there. He was also planning a second long journey. Because of Moslem rebellions in north west China he had not been able in his first trip to travel down from Mongolia across the western province of Kansu to get into the province of Tsinghai as he had intended. He had high hopes for exploration in that area just east of the independent principality of Tibet. The eastern boundary of Tibet was rather indefinite at that time but extended further east than at present.

To make such a long journey that would take him about three years was his presumption. It would require good health, which improved throughout 1867 but was still not the best. In fact his journey would be curtailed because of poor health and completed in two years one month.

To avoid the wars mentioned he would try to enter Tsinghai from the south, across the province of Szechwan, coming up the Yangtze (or Blue) River from Shanghai. Of course the journey would begin from Peking.

Packing his luggage was a vital matter. When read to leave, the 26th May 1868, he had five cases and trunks. These were taken about fifteen miles to the east of Peking, to the river port city of Tunghsein. He had made very welcome contact with all the European Legations, and the doctor at the French Legation, Dr Martin, gave him a good supply of medicines against fevers (malaria?) and dysentery. He wrote: "When one is far from home, lost amid the masses of Chinese, whose ideas differ more from ours than even their physical traits, nationalities vanish and all Europeans consider themselves compatriots. We end by

taking an interest in each other's families, no matter to what European nation or what religion we belong."³⁰

He is even asked to ascertain why the Tibetan principalities require legal passports from the Peking government for missionaries destined for Tibet. This was not so much a political matter of compliance or not with the Peking Convention of 1860 as a question of where the Chinese boundaries were in relation to Tibet.

He departed Peking at 7.00 am in the community covered cart and arrived at Tunghsien by noon, accompanied by his long-time assistant, Ouang Thomas, and another unnamed Chinese helper. They travelled by hired boat down the river to Tientsin where there was a major CM community house and where they arrived the next day. It wasn't that far but the Chinese of that time did not travel at night whether by boat or on foot.

The signs of war and rebellions were obvious. Boats were tied up by the hundreds around Tientsin as a form of defence. These included two French gun-boats, the *Aspic* and the *Lebrethon*. Their look was more fearsome than their fire-power. Armand knew the captain of the *Lebrethon* and would travel with him to Shanghai. He had told Armand that the *Lebrethon* didn't have a single gun capable of firing at the time.

The community house, the French Consulate, the Daughters of Charity house and the orphanage were contiguous within the Tientsin, a large city in China. The English, Americans and Russians established themselves a little more than a mile south of the city on previously uninhabited land which came to be known as "the European concession".

³⁰ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 145.

At dinner one night with a number of Europeans the conversation got round, as apparently it always did, to the vice, ignorance, greed, cunning, and anything else they could think of, of the Chinese people. There was a knock at the door and a Chinese Christian merchant from Shanghai, not a wealthy man, wanted to make an offering in thanksgiving to God for a safe voyage and blessing on his business. The offering was sufficient, as he intended, to build a new church. The conversation fell flat!³¹

Tientsin to Shanghai

Eventually the *Lebrethon* was ready to sail with Armand, his assistants, their baggage all on board. This was July 5th. On the 7th the ship reached the mouth of the river and set out to sea. Immediately Armand was seasick! He would have preferred to get out and walk. They rounded the coast of Chefoo and aimed for the mouth of the Yangtze River well south. Arriving there a few days later they took its first tributary to the left, the Huang-P'u, which flows through and past Shanghai, a city that greatly impressed Armand.

In Shanghai he met up with another missionary explorer, M. Jamet, who had just returned with an expedition to the Mekong River in the west of China. Jamet told him to forget travel on the Yangtze during these summer months as it was far too dangerous. The melting snow of the Himalayas make the Yangtze waters both high and swift and to this day are the cause of great destructive floods in China. He must wait until winter before penetrating into the western provinces. Adding to that, Jamet told him not to expect too much in the way of natural history in the province of Szechwan because it was deforested, though he might find something in the further west towards Tibet. To cap off his gloom he experienced the truth of the saying that it rains one day out of three in Shanghai.

³¹ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 156

Even on these wet days he was out looking for plants, insects etc. and it must be realised here although not mentioned all the time, there is hardly a day in the next two years when he is not out walking and collecting. It was his “consuming passion” and his “order of day”.

Because of Jamet’s advice he altered his plan and now decided to spend several months in Kiangsi province, about one quarter of the way to his western destination. There was a community house, well placed for exploration, in that province and he planned to make that his base. Financially he was still supported by the Paris museum and the Academy of Sciences in Paris, but this was useless in western China where there was no money as we know it, just pieces of copper. To have enough for three years he would need porters to carry it all on their backs. And of course that would have been irresistible to the brigands and thieves along the way. M. Lemonnier, the CM bursar for the western provinces arranged for him to receive whatever monies he wanted from Chinese merchants wherever he went including Muping, an independent Tibetan principality, where he would stay for several months.

Shanghai to Kiukiang

On the 24th June he left Shanghai on the steamer *Hirado* to travel up the Yangtze, stopping now and again, like “a milk-run”, at ports like Nanjing. Within three days they were coasting along the frontiers of Kiangsi on their left and soon approached the entrance to Lake Poyang - an inland sea. The city of Kiukiang (“city of nine rivers”) was on the northern shore of this great lake and the CM house, the orphanage, as well as the episcopal residence, were there.

He soon exhausted the natural history possibilities of Kiukiang and moved from there to a derelict shack (called Nazareth) the community

owned on the southern shore of Lake Poyang enabling him to be closer to areas of interest. Otherwise he would have to spend hours each day by boat to and from Kiukiang. I suspect he also wanted to be on his own. But he was close enough for prepared food to be brought to him daily from Kiukiang by his assistant, Ouang Thomas.

Immediately he was off walking over the countryside for more than a month, climbing mountains, visiting pagodas, preparing specimens, but sometimes returning to Kiukiang for a feast day or whatever. He and Ouang Thomas were subsisting otherwise on a vegetable diet during this time and both were becoming unwell. In fact on August 21st while visiting Kiukiang Ouang became quite feverish and ill. He too, like “Sambo”, distrusted western medicine and would have none of it. But after a week or more he finally consented to take some quinine and his trouble abated with the second dosage – at least for the present.

This was September 1st. That very day Armand received word from M. Aymeri that M. Salvayre, the procurator-general of the Congregation, was arriving in Tientsin about the 10th to make a visitation of the Chinese missions, and wanted to speak with him. Leaving Ouang in Kiukiang to further recover Armand, on the 6th returned en route to Tientsin where he arrived on the 8th (which seems incredibly fast, but that is what he says) and spent time with M. Salvayre both in Tientsin and Peking, where nothing of any great importance is recorded. But there seems to be a discrepancy between the report by Helen Fox of Armand’s diary and Armand’s account of it in the *Annales* of 1869.³² In the *Annales* he gives much detail about this visit even to the extent of saying that nobody recognised him (Salvayre) at first because he was wearing a beard. And he describes the slow journey from Tientsin to Peking because of 4,000 soldiers

³² David’s account is in the *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris, (1869), 292. Robert’s account is in the *Annales*, (1936), 502. Fox appears to accept Robert’s account which is surely incorrect when reading David of 1869.

returning home after a victory over the rebels.³³ They were trying to reach Peking for the feast of St. Vincent on the 27th Sept. and Armand was certainly with them. Helen Fox has him only in Shanghai and back in Kiukiang on 20th Sept.

On the way back to Kiukiang, via Shanghai, he spent a few days with Bishop Delaplace in Ning-Po, in Chekiang province, – more truthfully, with the rain, plants, animals, insects, snakes, fish of the area – and arrived back, probably about the 5th October.

The floods were particularly heavy that year, 1868, and the house at Kiukiang was actually marooned for a month. Not only did it delay his departure for the west but the humidity caused the loss of some of his specimens. As he said; “to date the elements have not much favoured my trip or my plan of exploration”.³⁴

Word arrived that six young missionaries of the Paris Foreign Mission Society were arriving the next day on their way to the western provinces. Despite Ouang Thomas being not yet fully recovered, Armand hurriedly prepared to depart with them the next day, 13th October.

Kiukiang to Chungking

Four missionaries arrived on the *Hirado* which Armand was now familiar with and would travel in to Szechwan province. The other two missionaries were in a second boat. Of course there were other passengers, including Europeans, aboard. On the 15th October they disembarked at Wuhan, a very large composite city originally consisting of Wucheng and Hankow, to visit Bishop Zanali, the Vicar Apostolic of Hupeh province. It is very surprising that Armand makes

³³ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris, (1869), 292.

³⁴ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 196.

no mention at Wucheng(fou), where he had just landed, of the tremendous work and sufferings of earlier confreres and in particular, of St. Francis Regis Clet and St. John Gabriel Perboyre, both of whom were martyred there (18th February 1820 and 11th September 1840 respectively). The Vicariate was now under the care of the Italian Franciscans.

From Wuhan they had a choice of routes to Shasi on their way to Chungking. They could go directly west by rivers and lakes opening into each other but necessitating two smaller boats, or, stay on the Yangtze River in the *Hirado* and go south then further north, in a horseshoe direction to Shasi. This would save them packing and repacking their considerable luggage, but would take them some weeks longer than the direct route which would take only a week. They chose this last, avoiding also the many dangers of the winding Yangtze rapids and whirlpools.

In some places the boats had to be dragged along with tow ropes pulled by up to a hundred hauliers, of whom there never seemed to be any scarcity. It was on this leg of the journey that Armand became violently ill and he feared he had been poisoned in the ship. In China this was the usual method of doing away with people including a number of missionaries. With hindsight he became suspicious of other occasions when he might have been poisoned, usually when drinking tea. But of this occasion he wrote: “The pain became so unbearable I soon fainted. But fortunately nature came to my aid, abundant evacuations helped, and I improved gradually”.³⁵

No two days were the same; there was always something happening! Everything around him captured his interest. On the 29th October they reached Shasi where they had to transport their cargo across town and re-embark on a large boat to go to Szechwan province. But nothing happened quickly in China. It was only a mile or so across town but

³⁵ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 201.

with all the intermediaries involved it took several days. They were not happy with the local Chinese parish priest who knew they were coming but skipped town a few days before. Nevertheless they made themselves at home in his presbytery. The main delay was in getting a suitable boat, and it was the 6th November before they were able to move on to Chungking.

With incidents too many to relate, they travelled down gorges, up dangerous reefs, past whirlpools and rapids. Usually a number of boats travelled together for safety's sake against both shipwreck and pirates. After more than two weeks they passed the border of Hupeh and Szechwan provinces, but remember the Chinese did not travel at night and there were frequent stops and delays.

At last, on the 17th December, they arrived at Chungking. All over China, including Chungking, most of the population was hostile to the Christians. Here the Bishop had to insist on the European missionaries going out only in covered chairs so as not to arouse the antipathy of the people. So when they disembarked they were carried in chairs up a series of very steep stone steps to the Bishop's residence (Bishop Desfleches).

I delay a little longer on Chungking because this is where our own intrepid missionary, John Halloran, laboured for four years. Remembering well John's description of the weather there, I quote Armand David's description; they are very similar:

According to (Desfleches and Favan) and the native Chinese, the climate of Chungking is not good. It rains almost half the year. The sky is usually cloudy or foggy even without the thick smoke produced by the coal burned here. Summer is very hot The humidity, however, is very great, and the whole

population feels the effects of the bad climate; I am told that most of the time half of the inhabitants of Chungking are ill.³⁶

John's history in Chungking is his for the telling and I'm sure it would be every bit as interesting an experience, though different, as that of Armand David. But I must move on.

Chungking to Chengtu to Muping

Two of his former missionary companions on the Yangtze continued by boat on to the capital of Szechwan, Chengtu. As Armand was going to travel by direct route overland, he left his less essential baggage to the two to take on to Chengtu for him. Their trip would take them a month – Armand's, just ten days on foot. He left on 27th December, 1868, together with Ouang Thomas, and six porters; three for his essential baggage and three for his covered chair. He was still under the injunction of the Bishop to keep out of sight as much as possible. The attacks and persecution of Christians was no less severe in the western provinces than it was thirty or forty years earlier in the time of Perboyre and Clet, though it was more now against groups of Christians rather than individuals.

During most of the nineteenth century there was a series of uprisings throughout China mostly as a result of social tensions between factions but a common factor was hatred of Christianity. These uprisings had the general name of "The Taiping Rebellions" as they originated in the city of Taiping in the province of Kwangtung. There was a constant struggle (and corruption) between the rebels and the imperial army. The contemporary Muslim rebellions, mainly in the north-west, had the same social and religious antipathy factors but also more radical political leanings. These were the rebellions that prevented Armand from travelling further west in his first journey. The troubles confronting him towards the end of the second journey were known as the "Miao Rebellion" a short distance north of Muping.

³⁶ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 241.

All luggage was carried on the porters' backs or in wheelbarrows. There were no donkeys or wagons out there. But the road to the capital was good apart from the mountains where the highway consisted of stairs. For whatever reason he couldn't understand, the porters did not like him getting down from his chair in these difficult places.

Along the way they slept overnight in different small villages they passed through with Armand continuously studying what nature had to offer in those areas. Proceeding westward they paused at Neikiang, (a name that is still spelt the same today). Few of the names of cities and towns Armand mentions can be found in modern atlases, nor older ones, because Armand wrote them down in phonetic French as he heard them. But from the context, his routes can be traced.

From Neikiang they turned almost directly north, slightly west, following the Tung river which took them straight to Chengtu. Here they accepted the hospitality and friendship of Bishop Pinchon. But best of all he was able to give good advice to Armand because he had exercised his priesthood in Muping for some years. In fact he whetted Armand's appetite to move on immediately to Muping, only six or seven days' journey away. But wise counsel prevailed and he delayed until after the Chinese New Year when there would be less snow on the mountains, for Muping was at the distant foothills of the Himalayas. Besides, his luggage had not yet arrived. Bishop Pinchon gave Armand the permission he needed, to stay in the College at Muping. He wanted to stay there for an extended time, perhaps a year, as the main base of his whole second journey of exploration. Everyone recommended Muping to him.

While waiting in Chengtu he decided to make a small excursion a couple of days' walk to some mountains to the north. He was frequently warned about the dangers thereabouts to which he replied;

It is said to be dangerous to travel here during the last month of the Chinese year and I am told about thefts and murders committed by bands of brigands. But if I am to be held back by fears of this kind I can do no exploring, since the wild places, reputed to be the haunts of thieves and malefactors, are precisely the ones that offer the most in the way of natural history in China. For safety only and to cool evil fancies I shall be careful to keep my gun much in evidence.³⁷

Armand's short excursion to the north lasted about three weeks and was profitable to his collection of new species. When he arrived back at Chengtu his luggage had arrived but it was Chinese New Year (11th February in 1869) and nothing moved in China for those holidays. But on 22nd February he departed for Muping, west slightly south, of Chengtu, arriving there on the 28th February. Muping was across the Szechwan border, in Sikiang, one of the numerous autonomous states into which the large area between China, Tibet and Mongolia was divided. The College, with about fifty students, was originally established as a refugee base for the persecuted Christians of China. The rector, M. Dugrite, of the Paris Foreign Missions generously put aside several rooms for him and his work.

Armand employed local hunters and even some students were interested enough in finding and catching new specimens for him. This was almost the daily pattern for the next nine months. There were moments of great anxiety, and of great danger - danger from within the work itself, and danger from outside in the form of nearby Miao bandits.

The effort of discovery here was very successful, far more so than on his earlier stay at Kiukiang. During three or four months there, at Kiukiang, he was able to send to the Museum of Paris: (1) nine or ten species of mammals, (2) thirty species of birds, (3) twenty-seven

³⁷ Fox, *Abbé David's Diary*, 253.

containers of fish and reptiles (sixty new species), (4) 634 species of insects, (5) 194 species of plants.

Discovery of the Giant Panda

In three months at Muping he was able to send many more times that number. The discovery that caused most interest started on March 11th (1869). He was taking a rest one afternoon on his way home from an excursion when a landowner, a Mr. Li, invited him in for a cup of tea or whatever. On the wall of the room Armand saw, for the first time, the skin of the giant panda bear. His delight was heightened when his hunters promised to bring him one soon, They caught one on the 23rd, but killed it so as to carry it home more easily! Nevertheless, Armand recognised it for the novelty that it was. Eventually, on April 1st, they captured a live animal for him. But what did he do with it after studying it? He didn't say but certainly he wouldn't have kept it alive at the college with him. He didn't approve of killing animals unnecessarily, so I presume he put his taxidermy skills to use. It is disputed among zoologists whether Armand ever sent any live giant pandas to Europe. In 1888 the Jardin des Plantes, in Paris, had four giant pandas, the only examples outside China. There is an unrelated "lesser panda" also introduced into Europe about 1869. It is claimed that Armand was the first Westerner to ever sight a giant panda. I wonder if this can be substantiated when one remembers the earlier missionaries in that area, especially Huc and Gabet.

The discoveries go on and on. I must try to keep to the person, Armand David. He had the joys of discovery but often sadness at the loss of his preserved (!) specimens. Either through the high humidity or the carelessness of his assistants, all the skins of the species of golden monkeys he had discovered, were lost. And his Wardian cases were proving difficult for lack of timber and carpenters. Even the nails had to be brought from a distance of several days' journey.

It was about this time, in early July, that he received some letters from Chengtu. In particular, a letter from his family in Espelette. He uses the French word “parents” which I think is a generic name for members of a family, so we are not sure whether either/both his parents were still alive. More likely the letter was from his uncle and godfather, Armand Halsouet. He says nothing more in his diary than the fact he received the letter.

Illness and departure from Muping

By the end of August he felt he had most of what he wanted from Muping and was thinking (but not very seriously) of moving elsewhere – in fact, to Lungan nearer to Lake Koko Nor. This was his dream in his first journey. But by now fatigue was setting in. It was all he could do to pack three large crates or cases to take to Chengtu in the hope of getting them away to Paris. Since mid-June he had collapsed several times and was bedridden for days in the College with fever and pains. M. Dugrite, the Rector, deserves an amount of credit for trying to get Armand to show some restraint. It was at this time that he felt he badly needed a diuretic and was offered boiled bamboo roots. This proved ineffectual so they gave him goosefoot grass mixed with oil and vinegar. And it worked!

While temporarily relieved he moved off to Chengtu, on foot, with porters for his cases. Two days after arrival, he was smitten with a new illness which he diagnosed as having some of the symptoms of typhus and he was confined to bed for two weeks. But with a poultice of ginger and onions moistened with brandy (taken externally I trust) he recovered sufficiently to be carried back to Muping.

But his health didn't improve. It took all his best efforts to prepare another five large cases of specimens, doing all the carpentry himself, ready to send off to Paris. It soon got to the stage where he was

confined to bed and couldn't rise even for Sunday Mass. The Chinese doctor diagnosed his illness as "bone typhus", common enough in China but unheard of by Armand. This was the end of October and he now realised that he must end this journey of exploration sooner than he had hoped for.

The local civil situation was deteriorating into armed conflict, so it may have been for the best that he prepared to leave. For himself he would not have been swayed by this fear, but his well known presence in the district would almost have become a cause of serious trouble for the College where he was living.

By a stroke of good fortune he found some rice porters returning to Chengtu empty handed. All the local men were being drafted into the armies. He employed them for his cases and luggage and on the 22nd November, 1869, he ended his exploration and departed Muping.

Even so, there was a very long journey ahead of him to get back to Peking. This time he returned by boat down the Yangtze taking his cases with him. Whether due to illness or "Chinese time" we don't know, but Armand was delayed one week at some port on the way home. At Shanghai he was able to despatch his five crates to Paris. Then he was out to sea again on his way "home" to Tientsin and Peking.³⁸

The ship stopped at the delightful port of Chefoo where he met his compatriot friend. M. Vignier. While chatting, Armand said how much he was looking forward to meeting his confreres, M. Claude Chevrier and M. Ou Vincent, the Daughters of Charity and friends in Tientsin. M.Vignier must have been shocked and he said, "don't you know? They were all massacred just one week ago", the day Armand was due home.³⁹

³⁸ This is where H.M.Fox concludes her published work on Abbe David's Diary.

³⁹ George Bishop, *Travels in Imperial China*, (London: Cassell, 1990).

His return to France

Armand's spirit must have reached rock bottom. His health was shattered, his mission at Tientsin totally destroyed and burnt, his confreres, the ten Daughters of Charity and more than one hundred Christians massacred there.

He asked for, and was readily given, permission to return to France, not only to recover his health, but also to assist in the cataloguing and description of many of his specimens still waiting to be done in Paris.

To be brief, he embarked on the *Empress Eugenie* in July 1870, within weeks of his return from Muping. By the time the ship had arrived in Sri Lanka, news arrived of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. It took just forty-five days to cross from Sri Lanka (the Suez Canal was open) to Marseilles where he disembarked. But, Frenchman though he was, he wasn't allowed into France. The borders were closed because of the war. So he took the enforced opportunity to return to his first mission, the College of Savona, in Italy. He was pleased to find his natural history museum there undamaged and not even confiscated, because, as said earlier in this paper, it was declared to be his personal property. He stayed in Italy until the fall of the Commune, either at Community houses, or with friends such as the Marquis Doria.

By now he was a world authority in many of his fields of expertise and used his sojourn in Italy to study the views of his fellow "savants" against his own discoveries. He found some merit in the Darwinian theories and was something of a bridge between the theories of evolution and religion. But he rejected the notion of the change of species and espoused a notion of a simple variety within a species. He

gives his reasons, showing a tremendous grasp of palaeontology and other sciences.⁴⁰

When peace returned to France, so did Armand to Paris, arriving on the 20th June 1871. Fr Étienne went to meet him and soon after sent him to the Berceau (St. Vincent's birthplace near Dax), no doubt to recuperate. He returned to the Maison Mère for the feast of July 19th.

The first thing he did in Paris was to visit the Natural History Museum, where he was pleased to find there was no damage despite the nearby shelling of the recent war. The collection had been taken into the crypt at the start of the war.

At the Academy of Sciences, the Secretary-General, M. Blanchard, spoke of Armand in high praise and organised a public exhibition in Paris of the collections of M. David in August, 1871. Despite the deprivations and difficulties of the recent war, the exhibition was a great success. There was general amazement that one man could discover so many things, so beautiful and rare.

But Armand was absent. He had gone home to see his relatives, hoping to recover better in his native Basque country air. And recover he did, almost completely. He returned to Paris in the middle of September 1871, feeling strong and well enough to prepare for a new voyage to China! This new campaign would last three or four years ending in an exploration of the Philippines – so he thought.

By now directors of museums in many countries were in contact with him, and word of his acclaim reached China before he did. But before departing he wrote many learned articles engaging the views of the best minds in the world on those subjects. He made a trip to England at this time but its purpose is unknown. He expressed his view strongly that China should not be “europeanised”. “China has no wish nor need

⁴⁰ Bishop, *Travels in Imperial China*, 176-177.

to do so. She possesses within herself the elements of her own prosperity. Her ‘personality’ has lasted for four or five thousand years without any essential or fundamental changes. Is she not then a protest against the incessant changeableness of western nations?” He was clearly against introducing reforms in China, in spite of his earlier castigations of many of their customs.⁴¹

His return to China

Eventually he embarked for China in January 1872 and arrived in Shanghai late March. Immediately he made a six weeks trip south to Ning-Po, an area recommended to him. On 10th May 1872 he returned to Shanghai and took an English steam-boat to Tientsin where he arrived on 31st May. No doubt, this visit was an emotional one for him remembering the massacre of twenty-three months earlier.

He continued on to Peking where he spent some months preparing for this third trip of exploration. All the time he was writing, arguing, with scholars around the world. He continued with his daily diary from which we know anything and everything about his time in China. The original French edition of his diaries is long out of print. There is an edited, abridged and translated version, in English, by Helen Fox printed by Harvard Press in 1949. But there seems to be only one copy in Australia, at the Australian National University Library in Canberra. Due to an error in the inter-library loan scheme, I was not able to obtain this for almost three months so that it was not as useful to me as it might have been. I had nearly completed my writing by then. There is a sizable amount of the diaries spread throughout our French *Annales de la Congrégation*, part of which we possess in our Archives

⁴¹ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris (1874), 542.

at St. Stanislaus' College, Bathurst. It is a very valuable resource particularly for the early history of the Congregation – would that we could obtain some of the many volumes we lack. In some ways, for us, the *Annales* is even more valuable than the mere diaries because there are letters there from various people which shed more light on Armand personally than his diaries.

About this time he complained that some items from his Peking museum had vanished. In a letter to his relatives he commented that the new bishop of Peking (Bishop Delaplace) was not “au courant” with the natural sciences and their importance. Also he (the bishop) was very sparing in his encouragement of Armand.

The start of his third journey of exploration

The day arrived for his departure, 2nd October 1872. He left Peking, this time without much regret, but not knowing he would never see it again. He had the company of two young Christians and would make most of his journey in a wagon. He travelled south from Peking into the heart of central China. On 8th October, he arrived at Baoding (Paoting) in Hebei province where the Community had a house (even to this day “instar”). About another five days walking took him to Zhengding, not knowing, of course, of a future massacre there of confreres, seven of them, by the Japanese. The sole survivor of this massacre, Fr Joseph Chow CM, lives in Taiwan. Armand then entered Shansi province and continued down to the Yellow River (the Hoang Ho), the second greatest in China, about 4500 kms long, which he reached on the 24th October. More and more often he was required to produce his passport. When that didn't suffice during the river crossing he produced his revolver in a threatening manner, and that did suffice. A week later he entered the then province of Shensi stopping at Xian, all the time making expeditions into the surrounding regions, particularly the Chin Ling mountain range.

At the beginning of 1873 he did some pastoral work which he obviously enjoyed, until the return of the parish priest at which time Armand had to give up his room. It was his intention now to continue west towards Kansu, his “holy grail”. But everyone advised him not to go there because of the war and brigands who were very active at the time. His porters flatly refused to go with him.

Change of plan “mid-stream”

He had to change his desire and turn to plan B in his third journey of exploration. So far, Armand did not seem to be as full of enthusiasm and joy as in his earlier journeys. The novelty would certainly have worn off and this change of plan would not have helped. Instead of going west to Kansu, he would go south-east to Kiangsi province. So he continued south by boat along the Han River down to Wuhan. Here he linked up with the route of his second journey up the Yangtze.

But this time it was he who was shipwrecked on the Yangtze and while he saved his life he lost everything else – including his natural history specimens and equipment. From this point of view his trip so far became a waste of time and effort. It was all he could do to reach the confreres’ house at Kiukiang on Lake Poyang.

The confreres restocked him, and despite the illness of his companions he pushed on further south to Nanchang (Kientchang) and then to Tsitou where there was a mission house and College. But he too was now extremely ill. He remained bed-ridden all that summer and there was no improvement until October.

Feeling slightly better he started off again, this time to the east – most unwisely – to an area recommended to him on the Kiangsi-Fukien border. By the time they reached the village of Koaten, Armand was in agony with chronic bronchial ague and inflammation of the lungs. So

ill was he that he was given the Last Sacraments. His Chinese helpers were also seriously ill.

The end of his journey

Clearly his days of scientific exploration were over. Walking over mountains and crossing rivers they managed to get back to Tsitou and then Kiukiang. His porters were carrying a few crates of specimens he had collected since the shipwreck and, with those, he took a boat back directly to Shanghai along the Yangtze, arriving there 5th April, 1874. Somehow this third journey did not go as hoped for. He seemed not to have been able to devote all his energies and enthusiasm to the task. Perhaps Helen Fox in her translation of the diaries had something of this feeling when she decided not to include the third journey diary in her work. She did say she felt it was too academic (taking up two printed volumes of scientific data) to be of interest to the ordinary reader.

His health had now broken down completely. He had travelled, mostly on foot, a distance of over 3,000 miles on this journey and about 4,000 miles of the two earlier ones, totalling something like 7,000 miles altogether. During his three explorations, not counting the losses through accident and neglect, he had found more than 1,570 plants, including over 250 new species and about eleven new genera. And this was just his flora collection

Resting in the Community house in Shanghai he was handed a letter from his good friend and now Bishop of Shanghai, Bishop Desfleches⁴²:

My dear David,
Greetings.....

⁴² Bishop, *Travels in Imperial China*, 183.

I enclose the medical report from Dr. Martin of the French Legation. I do not understand all the complicated medical terminology. I discussed the matter with him a few days ago, and he advised you should be sent to Europe to regain your health. His advice is that you should not be sent back to China again as your health could not take that. I explained to him that, apart from your faith, science was the most important consideration in your life, that the study of science, the exploration of the marvels of the hand of God, were the expression of your religion.

But Dr. Martin was adamant. To stay any longer in this climate or to return to it again will kill you.

I have considered the matter with some of the Fathers.

It is with great reluctance that I must tell you that we are making arrangements for you to return to France at the earliest possible opportunity. I know how this will break your heart, but it is your health and life that drives us to this reluctant decision. I am sure you will understand.

With fraternal greetings,
Yours in Our Lord Jesus Christ
Richard +
Vicar Apostolic.

Final departure from China

Armand departed from Shanghai on the 3rd of January, 1874. When he arrived back in Paris, he recovered his health somewhat, and assisted again in writing up his discoveries and those of later explorers. He taught the young students and made himself available to the public as

much as possible. In 1881 he was well enough to go to Tunisia to collect, though one surely needs imagination to wonder what he could collect in the desert. In 1883 he travelled to Istanbul, presumably for the same purpose.

In 1896, after having twice declined the award of the Legion of Honour (thanks to the General Assembly decision of 1861), he was not asked the third time. It, the Cross of the Legion of Honour, was imposed on him by the French Government! Together with the Medal went a broad smooth red sash. At his death it was found unopened in his cupboard. It had never been worn.

On his last trip home to Espelette, where he was still “Old Fructueux’s boy”, he delighted young and old with a very large spider he had trained. “He would pet it and let it run about the room, then call it and have it come back to him.”

His affinity, even his passion, for plants and animals is summed up by what he wrote on his second journey, to Muping:

It is really a pity the education of the human species did not develop in time to save the irremediable destruction of so many species which the Creator placed on our earth to live beside man, not merely for beauty, but to fulfil a useful role necessary for the economy of the whole. A selfish and blind preoccupation with material interests has caused us to reduce this cosmos, so marvellous to him with eyes to see it, to a hard, matter-of-fact place. Soon the horse and the pig on one hand and wheat and potatoes on the other will replace hundreds of thousands of animals and plants given us by God.⁴³

Armand David was noted at his death as a man of great modesty, extreme simplicity of manner, and unfailing amiability. Despite his

⁴³ Fox, *Abbé David’s Diary*, xxii.

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near fatal illnesses in middle age he passed away gently at the Maison Mère on November 10th, 1900, at the age of seventy-four He is remembered by the many discoveries that bear his name, including those in Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne.

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