



# SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY

*A Monastery of the Order of Saint Benedict*

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## ARRIVAL IN CHINA

In January 1940, we arrived in Hanoi, Fr. Alberic and myself. We stayed in that city for a week and booked a train ticket to Kunming. We took one of the last trains going to China. This railroad had been built by the French and was passing through very difficult country with high mountains and deep gorges. The bridges over the gorges and the sustaining-walls along the line were remarkable pieces of engineering. The Japanese Air Force had tried many times to destroy the line, but in vain. The trains kept rolling. A Chinese soldier was stationed on each coach and taking photos was prohibited. A few days after we reached Kunming, the Japanese finally succeeded blowing a bridge and the railroad was put out of commission. The last link by rail was cut off from Indo-China and isolated the Central Government of Chiang Kai Shek from the rest of the world. The only communication left was by air plane.

We had been travelling with Bishop Larregain, from the "Pretrés des Missions Etrangères de Paris." He had just been consecrated Bishop by the Pope and was returning to China to be the new bishop of the diocese of Kunming. He had spent many years in China as a missionary and loved to talk about his experiences. Listening to him was a great education for our future life. He told me; "You will make your own experience and you will be very happy." I liked this advice which was very true. Of course we stayed at the bishop's place, where we met Bishop Yupin who was there in residence., with his secretary Father Tong.

Kunming the capital city of Yunnan Province, was situated on a 6000 feet high plateau. The red sandy plateau strewn <sup>with</sup> large red rocks had an severe beauty. The climat was mild and agreeable all year round. Kunming was my first Chinese encounter and experience. I did not know a word of Chinese, except these three words "Tien Chu T'ang", which means the catholic Church, the "Temple of the God of Heaven." But as I did not pronounce them with the chinese <sup>right</sup> intonation, nobody understood what I was saying. Everything in this city interested me. It was so different from Europe, so intriguing. I was puzzled ~~by all the new ways of life.~~ by all the new ways of life. I walked for many days ~~all~~ through the streets



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visiting theatres, temples, stores. The open air displays of all kinds of goods., the colorful silk banners in gold, red, with beautiful chinese lettering, a kind of publicity panels , all <sup>that</sup> was a joy for the eyes. Talking about traffic, the pedestrians, the bicycles, the pousse-pousses, the carrying-chairs, the ox-carts were fonctionning harmoniously, until a truck would bring confusion every where.

The people of Yunnan are not really chinese , they are "Lolos". They had been for many years opposed to the Central Governement of the Republic and finally had accepted the offer of Chiang Kai Shek to unite against the Japanese. The chief of the "Lolos" became the governor of Yunnan Province.

A fewdays after our arrival in Kunming, Bishop Yupin invited us for dinner. He ordered one of these dinners with pigeon-eggs, swallow-nests, shark -fins, sea -weeds, lacquered ducks !!! I was not prepared for all these refined flavours, and they did not fondle my palate. But! the gravy made them delicious . An excellent wine is served with chinese food. It ressembles more an alcohol than our regular wine. The wine is served in tiny little cups. Thanks to God! The Chinese sip the wine slowly during dinner. The chinese wines are extracts of corn alcohol, orange, wheat, potatoes or rice alcohol. All the guests of a table help themselves with chopsticks from the same dish in the middle of the table. If there are any bad germs, the alcohol takes care of them. It was my first initiation with chopsticks and as I did not seem to be very handy with them, Bishop Yupin told me kindly: "Use your little spoon. you might still be hungry, when we leave the table."

There was no public transportation system between Kunming and Chungking, Szechwann. Father Tong had to go to Chungking for business reasons and was kind enough to invite Father Alberic and myself to travel with him. He was looking for an opportunity to travel with the Chinese Postal Service trucks. After ten days of inquiry we found 2 Postal Service Trucks leaving for Chungking. Father Alberic travelled with Father Tong, and I was alone with the driver



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in the second truck. The driver knew a few words of french and promised Father Tong to take good care of me. The driver was a charming man and tried very hard to keep up a conversation with the few french and english words , he knew.

The journey was beautiful the scenery breathtaking. The newly built winding road through high mountains, deep gorges or skirting ravines was scary. It was a section of the so-called "Birma Road" There was an untold number of trucks broken down along the road, which received the cemetery of trucks." At one point the road made ten loops to arrive on the top of a mountain in a small town and go down the other side. It would have been easier and less costly to go around the mountain. I learned, later, that the road was a gift from the chief road builder to his family living in the city on top of that mountain. Hundreds kilometers of road without gas station, garages. Each truck had to carry all of its gasoline. Each driver needed a mechanic for repairs. These mechanics are very skilled with bambous and strings to repair a motor or fenders. As the gasoline was difficult to buy, most of the trucks were running on charcoal.

Yunnan is a grandiose province with its high mountains ranges and valleys succeeding each other. The first day we stopped for lunch. But the little restaurant, my driver has chosen, seemed to me so dirty with a dirt floor, dirty paper every where, dirty tables and flies all over. No, I had no more appetite, and I told the driver taht I was not hungry.. How little I knew about Chinese life! The driver looked at me with surprise and went to look for a better place, but could not find one. In the afternoon, we found some fruit pedlars along the road and bought mandarines. They were delicious. I never had such good fruit in Belgium.

That evening we stopped in a smal town. I was really hungry, and without being invited, I sat down next to my companion for the evening dinner. Hot tea was brought and we were given hot towels for the face and the hands.



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How refreshing the after feeling of the hot towels! The chopsticks and the little spoon, were served in a bowl of boiling water. A cup of wine made the whole dinner very friendly. You have to watch the servers, because they keep filling up your cup. The wine tasted like a sweet gin. In short, all these preparations looked very clean and healthy. The dinner was simple and delicious. The driver was my first teacher of chinese manners, and showed me how to use the chopsticks and the bowl of rice. You keep the bowl under your nose and with the chopsticks you push the food in your mouth. The foreigner was the focus point of the place and I was surrounded by a lot of children and idlers, watching me curiously and laughing at my clumsy use of the chopsticks. Then, the driver took one pea, with the chopsticks. I stared at him in disbelief and the whole crowd bursted out laughing. As I was still hungry and could not use my chopstick fast enough I finished the meal with a spoon. When it came to pay the bill, to my astonishment, the driver took the tab. After the dinner we went to the Catholic mission. The missionary was out visiting the outlying churches, The lady who opened the door, seeing a foreigner was so embarrassed that I decided to stay in a hotel. She offered, however, a wonderful soothing warm water foot bath. It was so comforting! At the hotel we found Father Tong and Father Alberic who had gone through the same experience.

The following day we were on our way through the Kweichow province. The valleys are growing narrower and more precipitous. Then we went through plains strewn with isolated mountains in the shape of fir-cones, springing straight from the valley floor. The road goes around all these cones, a fantastic sight. Very few people live around here in this mountainous region. At Kweiyang, the capital city of Kweichow, we were welcome by a French missionary of the French Foreign Missions of Paris. He was very happy to receive the visit of young missionaries coming directly from Europe. The evening and the following day were spent in talking about China, Japan, and the war in Europe and home. He made us feel completely at ease after the last weeks stresses. He came to visit us in Chengtu a few years later and was wearing an american military uniform. I have always been thankful to the warm welcome of this missionary, whose name I have forgotten.



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In January 1940, we arrived in Chungking and were welcomed by Fr. Raphael, Fr. Thaddeus Yang, Fr. Wilfrid and the secretary of Fr. Yang, Mr. Liu. Fr. Yang was the editor of a french magazine doing publicity on behalf of the Central Governement of Chiang Kai Shek, the only paper, Chungking had to make its views known to the french communities in the Far East. Fr. Wilfrid was the french teacher of Madame Song Mei Li, the wife of Chiang Kai Shek. Song Mei Li invited us to dinner, Unfortunately urgent business kept Chiang and his wife <sup>from being</sup> present and Mr. Tong, minister of the information, was asked to be our host. Before the meal everybody was explaining me the chinese dinner manners. You do not hold the bowl above your nose, while eating. You do not help yourself from a newly brought dish, until invited by the host. When you finish eating, you place the chopsticks in front of you on the empty bowl etc...I was watching ~~very~~ every body carefully. But at a certain moment, Dr. Tong came back, after answering a telephone call, to finish his meal. He lifted his rice bowl not only above his nose but over his eyes as well.. I looked at Fr. Yang and Fr. Raphael!

Mr. Liu, asked me my chinese name. Pa Pe Yang, I said, the name given to me by Father Lou Tseng Chiang.. I could not translate the meaning of Pa, but Pe Yang, means the Sun of the North. He told me , Pa is not commom in Szechwan, and gave me the name of Pe which means white and he added Tsen Ming, the name of a painter of the 14 century which means Clean & Clear. My name was then changed to Pe Tseng Ming, White Clear and Clean. I kept the new name.

I Chungking we were residing at the Bishop's house. Msgr. Jantzen, bishop of Chungking was a priest of the French Foreign Missions of Paris. At that time the whole city of Chungking had been destroyed by the Japanese bombardements. The governement had established its quarters in the caves of the mountains. The residence of Bishop Jantzen was more than have demolished. I admired the spirit and the courage of the bishop and his procurator Fr. Brun. Great missionaries! There was hardly one house <sup>left</sup> intact in the city, but life continued. The merchants were repairing the facade of the shops as well as they could and the excitement on the streets of a big Chinese town would start all over again. Chungking became the capital of China, the siege of the Central Government. The industry



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of the East Coast moved to Szechwan and Chungking. Chiang Kai Shek, chose Szechwan because of its great agricultural wealth and its remoteness in South West China. Invading Szechwan would be a risky project for the Japanese.

Chungking, what a city! It is called the "City on the Mountain" because it is built on terraces above the Yang Tze river. It is also called "The Misty City" because of the <sup>dense</sup> fogs that roll over the city during the rainy season. The river flows some 200 meters down in the gorge. The houses are hanging on the cliffs, or built on terraces all the way to the top. The yearly floods sweep away many of the houses, but they are rebuilt right away. The air field is in the bottom of the river, which made landing at that time very difficult.

Chungking was swarming with people. If there were no monuments or points of interest or museums to visit, it was the excitement of the daily life, the colourful street, the spirit to survive in face of the devastation caused by the Japanese, the will to resist, made it a very unique city. Of course I was an outsider and I did not know what was going on inside <sup>the</sup> struggles.

But for me, it was all so new. Father Brun found for us a steamboat going up stream on the Kialing <sup>Kiang</sup> River, to Ho-chuan. We were on our last journey leg to Si Shan our monastery and destination.

Szechwan in Chinese means four rivers. It is the province of the four rivers. The Yang Tze River, called also the Blue River, the Kialing Kiang, the Ming Kiang, flowing through Chengtu and the Tuo Kiang. These four mighty rivers create four different regions. Our monastery was situated in the basin of the Kialing Kiang river, a red sand and red rock basin in the center of the province. In Ho-Chuan we stayed in the rectory. It took a long time to prepare the journey to Nanchung, <sup>a</sup> three days trip to the north, by carrying chair. The day before the departure, the carriers came to figure out the weight of the passengers and establish their price. Father Raphael needed three carriers, Father Alberic and myself needed only two carriers each. The very lively bargaining where every body was talking together and motioning to us took about one hour. Of course I did not understand a word, but secretly I found myself on the side of the carriers.



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The following morning we celebrated Mass before sunrise. The carriers were ready and soon the convoy was on its way. Seven sedan-chairs for the passengers and the luggages. My first travelling in a sedan-chair! I did not feel at ease, being carried on two men's shoulders. Father Raphael, however, told me: "This is their livelyhood. We are in another culture, another society. It will take time to understand."

I wanted to walk but I found out very quickly that the porters did not like it, because I was slowing the pace. It was important that we reach our destination before sunset due to the danger of being plundered by the highway men. This situation goes back only to the Chinese revolution in the beginning of the 20th century. The revolution disorganized China. During the Ching dynasty the highways were safe in the whole country. The central government of China was not yet accepted by all the generals. There were a number of local generals whose authority did not go beyond the territory occupied by their soldiers. The rest of the country was left for any one to grab. Chiang had a hard time to put order in that mess.

The carriers trot on the road. Lying in a sleeping position in the chair, and being swung to and fro, following the cadence of the porters, I began to dream and to doze. The mountainous path was skirting a ravine. Suddenly I felt the sedan chair leaning to the side overlooking the ravine. The porters started to shout, "Oh, Oh." We were on a curve. Will the porters loose their balance and throw me? I felt a queer feeling. The carriers slowed down and with great effort reestablished the balance. Then they bursted in laugh, a Chinese natural reaction after escaping a great danger. Your joints get stiff in that comfortable position, and quite a few times I decided to walk. But it was clear that the carriers preferred to carry their load.

The journey brought us along the Kialing Kiang river. The valley was very long and covered with blossoming yellow colza, the earth was red. ~~A beautiful sight.~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~The rice paddies were full of water. The boats on the river~~



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a beautiful garden telling the story of a very rich land. On the river the boatmen were towing boats full of rice or grain. Bent forward they advanced slowly, singing repetitive chants at the rythm of the beat of the gong on the boat.





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## LIFE IN SI SHAN

The word Si Shan, means the " Mountain of the West" The monastery was built in the center of a small canyon overlooking the plain of Shunking (our nearest town) and in the distance the Kialing Kiang river. The view was very beautiful.

The monastery was built first according to the <sup>preliminary</sup> plans of bishop Wang, our local bishop, <sup>then</sup> the plans of Fr. Emile with Fr. Hildebrand as main contractor. An itinerant sculptor did all the decorating wood works of the buildings, the columns capitals, the bases, the doors, the windows etc.. He was an excellent sculptor with a great feeling for natural movements. It was beautiful.

Behind the monastery, an orchard of orange and mandarine trees was leaning against the mountain, on three terraces. Our fruit was delicious and we gave tons of oranges and mandarines to the bishop and the orphanage.

The monastery was built in a rice field. A few years later, a few years later the field sank a little and one morning at 6 o'clock, one of the main beams of the building, under the heavy pressure, bursted with the sound of a terrific explosion, leaving the building leaning over the rice field. The monastery was rebuilt and made much more agreeable to live in, thanks to the talent of Fr. Emile.

When we arrived in Chungking, Song Mei Li, gave us a beautiful dog, a Irish setter, We named her "Milou". One year later she gave us <sup>a</sup> male Irish setter and he was named "Pan". They were both hunting dogs and caused a few problems with the local farmers. We paid many ducks to the farmers at an highly inflated price. Both Milou and Pan, were a real joy for the monks and we made long walks with them. Our dogs were beautiful well nourished so different from the squalid local dogs watching the farms. The farmers did not feed their dogs; it is up to them to find food! It was advisable to carry a walking stick, to keep the dogs away from you. <sup>in long walks.</sup> Our two setters did not last very long in this strange land.



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Mrs Chiang wished we had news from all over the world, so she send us a Philipps Radio set. This was very welcome. We had no electricity, Father Raphael on his way back from Chungking brought a Dynamo with a propeller. Father Eleuthere, an electrical engineer, installed the Dynamo and the propeller on top of the mountain, behind the monastery, a heavy electric wire, bought in Shunking, conducted the power to a set of batteries. The wind machine was making such a racket in the valley, and the farmers were wondering what we were doing, Father Raphael thought it would be good to explain our neighbours and invite them to listen to a broadcast in Chinese. Our neighbours were amazed and came back several time to listen to the news. They had never heard or seen anything similar. The first windmachine did not last very long. A strong wind gust wrecked the installation on the hill. Song Mei Li send us then a real good "Zenith Wind Machine". Once installed we had no more problems and had enough power for the chapel, the dining room, and of course the radio set.

The monks had a wonderful time listening to the news. In May 1940, two hours after the invasion of Belgium by the Germans, we heard the news through "Radio Perth" of Australia. Radio Perth news anchorman was a french of New Caledonia who spoke old french from before the French revolution. The old language with its old expressions, were sometime so funny that we all bursted in laugh. A diversion and relaxation in this tense world situation! Nobody ever missed the news.

Mrs Chiang, would send sometime coffee. It was delicious! There was no coffee in our part of the province. We sipped the coffee with delight at the ten o'clock coffee break, Fr. Raphael, Fr. Eleuthere and myself. We made it last too long, I guess, until the coffee was a little more than coloured water. Fr. Eleuthere was preparing coffee cakes, "macarons" according to a Tournai recipe.

My first cell in Si Shan was in the old monastery, which had not yet collapsed in the rice field. My cell was next to the library. I had a wood bed, covered with straw and a bambou mat and on top of the bed a large mosquito net. The blanket ressembled a quilt, in which you roll yourself in, and was neatly folded at one end of the bed. There was also a table, a chair, a wardrobe. The windows



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had no glass and were covered with oil paper. It was very cold, I arrived in Si Shan the first days of February, and so Father Hildebrand, the procurator, gave me a "ho long", a bambou stove, which is a bambou basket containing a earthen ware pot with charcoal. You carried the stove in your hands to warm up your fingers. When you sit down at your table you put it at your feet, under your long gown, the heat slowly comes up and invades the whole body. It was very pleasant. In the winter time, the little bambou stove is never far away from you. It does not freeze often and the temperature is never very low below freezing point. But the humidity is so high that you were shivering in the winter, and could not work more than a quarter of an hour at your desk. There was no heating system in the houses. The chapel, the dining room and the library however, were equipped with large braseros of charcoal, <sup>placed</sup> in the middle of the room. In north China braseros are put under your bed. <sup>were</sup> We all working during the day in the pleasant atmosphere of the library.

I could not sleep that first week in the monastery. All night long, there was a racket above me in the attics, a kind of boisterous dance. After a few days, I thought I had contracted some skin disease. It may well have been the new way of life or the new diet. I went to see Father Hildebrand asking for some laxative, or some appropriate medicine. He examined my skin covered with blisters, all swollen and red. <sup>My</sup> The whole body was itching. Father did not say anything and took me by the arm to my cell. He went straight to my bed and lifted the bambou mat. I saw in horror a rat nest <sup>in the straw</sup> and the rats running away. My problem was flea bites. The racket in the attic was rats running around. The things moving at night on my toes and on the blankets were rats. What a wonderful beginning of my life in Si Shan!!

There was a lot to do in Si Shan. We had to keep the monastery and the noviciate running smoothly. <sup>We had a</sup> boarding school of the little oblates. The oblates were sleeping in a separate building outside the cloister, and went to class in our elementary school with over two hundred enrollment and ten teachers. The principal and his assistant (his own brother) <sup>catholic and</sup> were excellent. The school had been established by the former prior, Father Gabriel Roux, for the children of the valley, the Pou and Tchou families. The school was free and all the expenses were covered by



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St. Andrew's Abbey and the monastery of Si Shan. To crown all our activities, we had the major seminary of the diocese, the territory of Fr. Raphael and Father Eleuthere. The children sparkled a lot of joy in the valley and the parents were thankful for the education we were giving them. The monks were not neglected by the children. Several times a year we were invited to the certificates distribution ceremonies. On these memorable occasions, the children entertained their teachers and parents with small plays. These plays were delightfull, the little Chinese are born actors. Unfortunately we had to close the school in 1942 due to lack of resources. The oblates were send to the public school in town. The school for oblates gave us three benedictine monks, Father Paul, who died in <sup>1960 in</sup> a concentration camp during the communist regime, Fr. Felix Tang and Brother Peter, who spent 25 years in prison, was released recently and joined us at Valyermo in 1984.

Life in Si Shan was not always easy. The climat was bad. The winters were very humid and rainy. A light rain called le "crachin" would fall for two weeks without interruption. The <sup>cold</sup> wind blowing from the Gobi desert was usual in March. We were shivering at temperature above freezing point. In the winter time we were wearing a gown lined with padding and looked enormous. The little bambou warmer was a blessing for our hands and feet. The summer heat was unbearable, as the monatery and the valley were surrounded by rice fields full of water. There was 100 per cent humidite day and night. Sweltering heat in the rooms, and a mosquito net over the bed, made sleeping almost impossible. I do not know how many hand fans I used in Si Shan to get a little comfort. June and July were the hottest months. A heavy thunderstorm around august 15, reminded that the mild fall temperature was not far away. The <sup>black</sup> monastic habit with belt and scapular was intolerable. Father Abbot Theodore Neve, insisted we wear the habit in spite of Fr. Rapahel's objection. Fr. Hildebrand was seen, the scapular on the arm and the belt thrown over the shoulder. Finally one day we heard a saving remark of a chinese coolie saying: "These foreigners must be very rich. Look how many unnecessary cloths they wear." Next day Father Raphael decided that we would dress like the chinese priests, the chinese gown of light cotton or silk for the summer, a padded gown in the winter and the mandarin toque. Every body was happy.



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Spring and Fall were very beautiful and agreeable in Szechwan. Fr Emile and Father Eleuthere and myself, would take long walks in all the picturesque and colourful valleys of Szechwan, There was a saying that there was not a square foot of leveled land in Szechwan. Fr. Emile and Fr. Eleuthere knew all the nooks and corners of the region, never tired of seeing them again.

We did not yet know the hazards of traveling on the Kialing Kiang river, flowing along the city of Shunking, even by calm weather.. We had just paid a visit to the parents of one of our little oblates and decide to go back by boat to the monastery. My feet hurted after such a long walk. We found a boat loaded with rice, and a few passengers on board, leaving for Sunking. The boat was loaded to the water-line. The day was great, we moved along swiftly, moving from one rapid to another followed by smooth water surfaces. The brise was light. The boatmen were very skilled. But in the late afternoon, the bverloaded boat hit a sand bank and stopped in the middle of the river. The boatmen tried in vain to clear the boat, the stream was too strong. There was no immediate danger, bu the boat had to be unballasted. Naturally the passengers had to go first. The boatmen called out for help and asked for an extra boat to rescue the passengers. The bargaining process started with the people on the river bank. "How much money for a relief boat?"- "It is impossible, too dangerous and too far away." After a long discussion a price was set for each passenger. The little boat seemed to struggle with the strong current. It arrived safely, but any passenger who wanted to go ashore had to pay the price before boarding. The Chinese do not trust people in this situation. Some did protest but eventually every body paid the price and came safely ashore. The Kialing Kiang river can be very dangerous and treacherous at flooding stage. It carried a deep red water, and sometimes it was carrying whole houses with the people sitting on the roof. Some where along a river bend the house was thrown against a rock or the river bank and totally destroyed. There was no way to save the peoples.

During the war years, the Japanese air raids caused great fear and damage in the cities and villages. They would bomb<sup>ed</sup> systematically all the cities of any



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size to demoralize the people, and the planes on their way back to their bases would drop a bomb at random on a farm, a hamlet or a small township. The airplanes came only on a clear day and passed over the monastery. On such a day, Fr. Eleuthere would leave the monastery early in the morning, with his books under the arm and a packed lunch, and <sup>go</sup> out to a lonely place out of reach of the airplanes. His companion was our dog Milou. In the evening we saw Fr. Eleuthere coming back after the alarm signal. We usually stayed in the monastery, but when the bombings increased and more farms were hit, Fr. Raphael advised us to leave the monastery at the second air raid alarm signal. I never followed his advise and stayed home, because the chance of being hit was so minimal.

We used to work in the libray around a large table. The only cozy and warm spot of the monastery. We had endless discussions on philosophy, theology, politics, with Father Eleutuere in the lead. Fr. Yang had his wise remarks and Father Raphael stated the orthodoxy. I asked questions and objected. We did not often agree.

I had a <sup>chinese</sup> language teacher. He was a seminarian. At the beginning we were speaking latin. I had always a teacher at my side. Every day, he would punctually arrive at 10 AM in my room and for a whole hour we worked together. Fr. Raphael, too, had his teacher. Fr. Wilfrid had the gift of languages and spoke chinese extremely well. He learned it in Suiling a town, 2 days travel from the monastery, with Fr. Eleuthere and Fr. Vincent. When Fr. Raphael had to make a speech in town, he would write his text and Fr. Wilfrid red it for the public. Later, when we had financial troubles, Fr. Wilfrid became a teachr of english in a high school of Shunking. Fr. Yang, a real chinese scholar, was studying the chinese of the scholars and was trying calligraphy.

I was practicing also english with a young chinese postulant from Hong Kong, Brother Bernard. There was an english cession every day on the side walks of the monastery. As we walked back and forth on the side walks, we saw a bird



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at the corner of the building and looking in the other direction, motionless. As we came close enough to touch it, he flew away. Looking on the walk way to the right we saw a snake that had hypnotysed the bird. Our arrival broke the charm. There were lots of snakes in Si Shan, Fr. Hildebrand did not like them, as they were feasting on our pigeons. We tried all kinds of methods to get rid of them.

I was a substitute teacher in the seminary and I was not quite successful. To help our local bishop Msgr Wang of Shunking, we had taken over the major seminary, at no expenses to him, in Si Shan. Fr. Raphael was the president, Frs. Thaddeus, Eleuthere, Emile and Wilfrid formed the teaching staff. I was a substitute. Fr. Raphael asked me to teach philosophy. That was a time, when the superiors thought that <sup>if</sup> you had a theology degree, you were good for any job even the job of architect.

To give some relaxation time to Fr. Eleuthere, teacher of philosophy, Fr. Raphael asked me to take the course on psychology for one semester. The course was given in latin, because the seminarians knew and spoke latin very fluently. I prepared the lessons vey carefully. But I could not create any contact with the students and they learned nothing. I was mastering the latin language quite well. After two weeks of teaching, Father Raphael heard some complaints from the students and he came himself to listen to my class. I started the class by reading the thesis , and making some comments. Fr. Raphael interrupted me and asked the seminarians, " Do you understand?" - "No " they said. I repeated the thesis and its comments. New interruption, "Do you understand?"- "No" again. I saw two front blood vessels swelling on the forehead of Fr. Raphael. That was bad sign. " You do not understand and you do not ask Father more explanations!" Father Raphael was furious and let it be known. I was embarrassed and started ~~all over~~ again. The written exams were miserable. Two weeks later, I asked Fr. Raphael to take over the course, until the return of Fr. Eleuthere. I never taught philosopy <sup>again</sup> any more.



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## THE SEMINARY

The seminary worked out very well, as long as Fr. Wang, superior of the minor seminary, was the spiritual director of the seminarians. Fr. Wang was a wonderful priest, a great friend of the monastery, loved by everyone with a great influence on the local clergy. The bishop listened to him with pleasure. Unfortunately, Fr. Wang died from blood poisoning after a bad injection made by the local doctor. From that day on, the seminary changed. We were at the end of 1941, in the middle of the war.

The seminarians not supported anymore by Fr. Wang, fell under the influence of bishop Wang. He feared Fr. Raphael, because he was Italian and Italy was at war with China. Bishop Wang wanted to minimize his relation with him and the monastery to prevent the chinese government from taking over the properties of the diocese. I never understood the bishop's reasoning. Our monastery was a foundation of the Abbey of St. Andre in Belgium. Belgium was an ally of China. But there were several nationalities among the monks. The fears of the bishop were not well founded, since the local authorities had received a letter from Chiang Kai Shek, warning them to protect the monastery and its monks.

Two or three times the seminarians did not like some regulations adopted by Fr. Raphael, Superior of the Seminary, They complained with the bishop who gave a counter-order. Fr. Raphael found out and right away asked to see the bishop, to explain what happened. The bishop's embarrassing answer was that the seminarians should obey the superior of the seminary. A same incident happened a few weeks later. Father Raphael, then, closed the seminary and send the seminarians <sup>back</sup> to their bishop. We could not afford to give them room and board anyway.

We had the total financial responsibility of the seminary, without any subsidy of the diocese. We followed faithfully the missionary conception of Father Abbot Neve, who wanted to see Si Shan come to the help of a Chinese diocese.





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## FINANCIAL DISTRESS OF SI SHAN AND THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE

We had a few financial problems during the war. We were cut out from Belgium and St. Andrew's Abbey could not help us anymore. Our Monastery had no dowry, no capital, no properties, no reserves. Before the war St Andrew's Abbey was helping us from day to day. We could afford to have a school for oblates, a grammar school with over two hundred children and a staff of 12 teachers, and a major seminary. But since 1940, slowly our resources had dried up. St. John's Abbey of Collegeville was coming to our help by sending Mass Intentions. That was a God sent. We had no local income and our neighbours were even poorer.-

The cellerar had cut our meat ration to one pound a month. The main staple was rice, rice and more rice. The food was tasty but very lean. We experienced real poverty like our neighbours. However they were used to rice and could eat lots of it. We could not eat enough rice to get the proteins needed for a good diet. Several monks became very sick in Si Shan and in the following years.

The day of payment of the teachers was near. We could not meet the payment. Father Raphael went to see the bishop and explained our predicament. The bishop, the face expressionless, listened in silence, got up slowly went to his room and locked the door behind him. We heard him opening the safe, locking the safe. We were all waiting anxiously. He came back with FB 2000,00..a trifling sum in these circumstances. You can guess our disappointment. St. Andrew's Abbey had been the greatest contributor and benefactor of the bishop's diocese. The cathedral furnishings had been a gift of the Abbey. The major seminary was a gift, the staff was a gift. We went back to the monastery.. Thankfulness and appreciation are not common virtues. A pleasant surprise waited for us . The monastery had just received from Fr. Abbot Alcuin of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville the sum of \$ 1000.00, The check was in Chungking ready to be cashed.  
God's Providence !



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Another day of payment arrived some time later. We went to see the bishop. He refused to help. And again surprise ! The following day we received a telegram from the Nuncio in Chungking, advising Fr. Raphael that a check of \$1000.00 from Fr. Benoit, our procurator in Rome, had been received in Chungking for Si Shan. God was obviously protecting the monastery. ! We finished the semester, but in July 1942, we were forced to close the school. The school had been started by the former Prior, Fr. Gabriel, for the children of the valley. It was a great loss for all the families.

Our cash flow was so low, that even before the departure of the seminarians, Fr. Raphael had decided to send the monks working in the parishes. Bishop Wang was short of priests and Fr. Raphael offered the help of three monks. The answer came, "Fr. Wilfrid, learned so well the chinese language in the diocese of Chungking (diocese of Bishop Jantzen), why don't you try to find work over there." I was with Father Raphael and it was hard for me to swallow the insult. The bishop, however, accepted me ,because being present to the conversation he had to save my face and his too.

The following months were the happiest in my life as missionary. I became the assistant of an old Chinese priest Fr. Teh and became his best friend. We spent hours talking and he initiated me to the Chinese culture, the theater, the customs and the Chinese poetry. Fr. Teh was great scholar. Most of what I know about chinese life came from Fr. Teh.

Bishop Rouchouse of Chengtu, knew our financial difficulties and our problems with bishop Wang. He wrote to Fr. Rapahel and invited the monks to work in his diocese and then he added this little sentence, "Please, send me all your bills." We did and Fr. Poisson, the procurator of the diocese of Chengtu paid all the bills without questioning. Fr. Hildebrabd and Fr. Alberic left for Chengtu where they received a warm welcome. That was in the summer of 1942.



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Bishop Rouchouse wanted to have a Benedictine monks in his diocese. When St. Andrew's Abbey decided to make a monastic foundation in China, Bishop Rouchouse hoped it would be in his diocese. Abbot Theodore Neve and Fr. Jehan Joliet, chose to help the newly formed chinese clergy diocese of Shun King, which was a division of Chengtu diocese. The new bishop Msrg. Wang had recently been consecrated by Pius 11. As Fr. Jehan Joliet was in Chengtu for a few weeks, bishop Rouchouse in a very kindly way said to him: "One day, you will come back to me." These words showed the bishop's perspicacity. Bishop Rouchouse was very generous, he promised us a large piece of land in the center of the city with a spacious chinese style house, 40 acres of prime rice fields near Chengtu. Fr. Hildebrand became pastor in a mission and Fr. Alberic, spiritual director in a home for senior citizens at Ho Pa Ch'ang, near the major seminary of Chengtu and the old hermitage of Fr. Jehan Joliet. In the mean time Fr. Wilfrid took a teaching job in english in a high school of Shun King, 8 kilometers from Si Shan. The monastic life and schedule continued in the monastery with a greatly reduced number of monks. Had bishop Wang been a little more concerned about the Benedictines in his diocese, we would probably not be in California.

In 1942 Fr. Yang had returned to Chungking at the request of Bishop Yupin to publish, on behalf of the Central Governement, a french magazine of information, for the french communities in the Far-East. Fr. Yang needed materials and asked me to write a few articles on Chinese art. Each time I finished an article, with Fr. Eleuthere, we would walk to the city, drop the envelope in the mail box and treat oûrselves to a good dinner in town. We were hungry!



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## PERSONNEL

We had very good employees and very faithful. The most faithful one was our procurator, Mr. Yu. We use to call him Yu Kuan Sze, Procurator Yu. He knew french and had been introduced to Fr. Jehan Joliet as an interpreter, by bishop Rouchouse, only for a short time. Mr. Yu stayed with us until our expulsion from China in 1952. Procurator Yu learned french as an employee on the Belgian railroad, from Peking to Hang Chow on the YnagSze Kiang river. From interpreter he became procurator. He did very well, was thrifty and honest and faithful. He was, maybe, a little too thrifty! He liked to drink and then was very amusing.

Procurator Yu hired the help, did all the purchases in town or in the country side. Once, he hired a taylor who stayed at the monastery several months and made all the robes for the monks and the personnel.

During Lent the monks were fasting and abstaining according to the monastic regulations. There was no meat for forty days. The procurator Yu, came to Fr Raphael telling him that there was no fish in town, except for a few shrimps and eels, at a very high price. Eggs were expensive too, even more than meat. Fr. Raphael decide to suppress the Lenten food observance, Mr. Yu suggested we eat Chinese cheese, a cheese made with soya beans rich in proteins and which could be prepared in many different ways. Some cooks could give the cheese the appearance and taste of meat. That cheese was called also "the meat of the buddist monks."

The christians did not know the days of abstinence, simply because for most of them, abstinence was a daily occurrence. The only days they could eat meat were on the market days, which sometimes fell on a friday. The thrift of



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the procurator was sometimes disappointing. He had ordered a "seal" made for Fr. Raphael. It was a very nice jade beautifully engraved. The seal is the equivalent of a signature in China. Unfortunately, the seal was a little too large for the box, a bone box. In order to save the price of a new box, procurator Yu, had the face of the seal filed to fit the box. Fr. Prior's name, in the process, became illegible. It had to be started all over again.



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## RECOLLECTIONS FROM CHINA

First years in China

*Raphael*

Father decided to let me learn Chinese in a complete Chinese environment. In April 1940, I left the monastery for Kan-Chi-Ch'ang, a mission post and very large parish of the diocese, where I would learn the ABC of the language. I had a teacher with me, an ex-seminarian, who spoke perfect Latin. I was to start from Latin .. the only way of communication.!

The porters were ready early in the morning. I got into the carrying chair, and before sunrise we were on the road. The carrying chair, is like a hammock stretched on two branches of bamboo carried on the shoulders of two men. A thick blanket and a pillow are laid in the hammock. Laying in the hammock, slightly balanced by the rapid cadence of the porters, makes traveling very relaxing and agreeable. Once in a while, the legs get stiff and you feel the need to walk. Walking is never long, because you are slowing down the pace of the porters. They insist you go back in the chair, as the halting place has to be reached before sunset. The roads in Sze-Chwan are straight up and down the hills and the valleys. Many of them dating back to the Han Dynasty or built by emperor Ch'in Sze Huang Ti, 2000 years ago. He built a number of roads north south to repulse the invaders from Mongolia and Manchouria.

The porters wear rice straw sandals, with a beautiful white or red buckle on the main toe. They will last one hundred fifty miles, about fifty kilometers walk. They are easily replaceable, as you can buy new ones at every stop at a very reasonable price. The porters carry also a pipe and tobacco attached to the pants and they will smoke each time they take a rest.

Sze-Chwan is a very beautiful country covered with rice fields. In the winter and beginning of spring the rice fields become bright yellow colza fields. The earth is red and many rice fields are kept under water. The whole landscape is a delight for the eyes.



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We walked up and down the hills, that morning. At each summit a Banyan tree unfolds its beautiful and enormous crown of foliage over the road. Little farms are crouched in bambou thickets . There are no trees around, because they are systematically cut for fire wood or for cooking rice. The banyan is left alone, as its wood does not burn well. The bambous around the farms are grown for their delicious bambou shoots. They give some shade in the summer. Under the banyan, the travelers rest, the porters smoke a pipe, everybody relaxes. No for long . We have to get back in the chair and let the porters trot quickly over the road, so that we may reach our destination well before sunset. After sunset traveling is dangerous, specially close to a city. We trot down the hill into a valley covered with colza. What a sight! The colza crop is important in Szechwan. It produces an oil for lighting. All the farms, the hamelets, the villages and ~~towns~~ are using colza oil for lighting. It is the main source of light. The residu of the colza is pressed into large cakes and put in the rice fields as a fertilizer. Colza oil lamp was our main light in our rooms in the monastery.

Each ~~five or~~ ten kilometers , the portés would stop in a tea house for a longer rest. I would take a table. Hot towels were brought for the face and the hands, then hot tea is served. When you perspire, hot tea makes you perspire even more, but pretty soon freshness invades the whole body. This is a wonderful custom! I smoke the pipe, one of these long pipes, somebody else has to light for you. The pipe is used for cigar smoking. The chinese tobacco is pure, very strong and very good. In the mean time my porters had disappeared. They came back ten minutes later, from the back shop, all refreshed and eager to go. I learned later, that they spend ten minutes in the back shop ~~to smoke~~ <sup>ing</sup> opium. I could not blame them.

The first evening we arrived in the town of Yotze. The hospitality of the missionaries is well known and is a real comfort after a long day's travel. A basin of warm water is brought for your feet, scented hot towels for the face and the hands, ~~the~~ the cup of tea and peanuts and finally the pipe , either the cigar pipe of the water pipe.

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A jovial Father explains to the porters where to lay the luggage and the blanket wrapped in an oil cloth. The porters will be fed and stay overnight at the mission. After the ritual of the pipe, an excellent dinner is served with generous and strong wine. Everybody is happy.

The missionaries love these visits, because it brings them news and it is an exchange of information and a sharing of mutual experiences. We did not stay up long after dinner. I was exhausted and happy to go to bed.

We travelled two more days before reaching the town of Kan Chi Ch'ang, where I was supposed to learn chinese. Kan Chi Ch'ang was a beautiful mission, built in the 1920's by Father Kong. The church was enormous, next to the church a grammar school with an enrollment of several hundreds of children brought a lot of noise and joy to the mission. There were ten teachers with whom I will have a great time to practice the language. The mission was situated on a plateau overlooking a river. All the farmers around were christians and cultivated beautiful rice fields.

The pastor Fr. Huang, had made his studies of theology in Rome and spoke also perfect latin, like my teacher seminarian. For several weeks, latin was used as a common language and after that <sup>time</sup> I spoke latin quite well. The pastor helped me very much in my studies and I am grateful for his kindness. He explained to me also ~~many~~ <sup>the</sup> ways and customs of the people around the mission.

I studied eight hours a day. After the morning mass and the breakfast with the pastor and my teacher, I would start repeating aloud, like the children at school, the lessons of the preceding day. My teacher was there to correct the accent and the tone. Then the new lesson for the day and the laborious effort of memorizing six new characters (letters) et repeating <sup>or</sup> those of the preceding day. The saturday lesson was a repetition of the week day lessons. The afternoons were used for writing, learning calligraphy and when I was tired I ~~would~~ <sup>for</sup> wander <sup>ing</sup> around visiting the farmers and trying to generate a little bit of conversation. The christians around the missions were very kind and received you always with a bowl of rice alcohol with plenty of <sup>hot</sup> water and two <sup>poached</sup> ~~boiled~~ eggs inside. It was delicious!

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I used the 1st grade school books and up. Each character had a picture of its meaning and so I learned with the eyes and the ears. Long evenings in the teacher's study would end a long and tiring day.

After three months the pastor invited me to give my first homily on Sunday. I prepared a sermon very carefully and repeated it several times in front of my teacher. Finally he told me, "it's alright." The sermon was written in Chinese, and the pronunciation neatly marked on the side. I was not too scared when I stepped on the pulpit and it seems to me that I did a fairly good job. However several times I heard the children in the front pews having difficulties to suppress their laugh. After Mass, the Christians come to the rectory to greet the pastor as it is customary. Father Huang asked them about the sermon. "Father speaks very well Chinese." Then he asked them, "What did he say?"

A long silence followed! Then he asked the children. "Why did you laugh during the sermon?"- "Father said Iai-Su."- In other words I was mis-pronouncing the name of Jesus and gave the sound a total different meaning. I learned something that morning and decided to study harder.

To relax, I made many pastel sketches of the fields and farms around the mission. I did not keep any of them but gave them away and made quite a few people happy. To be honest, I must say that most of the people I gave them too did not understand my European style.

My life in a large mission gave me the opportunity to witness new aspects of the life of the Chinese such as weddings and funerals. I will always remember the beautiful wedding ceremonies. The bride comes to the church in a magnificent sedan-chair, carried by four porters. I saw the bride, drawing slightly the curtain of the chair, to have a furtive glimpse of her future husband. It happens quite often that the fiancés never met each other before the wedding. The wedding is a family affair arranged by the parents. The bride steps down, her face covered, dressed in a superb red dress (colour of joy). She is cheered and applauded <sup>in the</sup> deafening sound of thousands of fire crackers.



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After the church ceremony, the merry-making starts in the home. The house is decorated with dozens of red and gold banners, wishing happiness, long life many children in the literary language of the poets. There is an orchestra. The fire crackers resound at the arrival of ~~at~~ the important people, and honorable guests. The gifts pile up in the lounge. Tea is served, tobacco smoke fills the air. The whole house breathes joy and happiness. The bride now takes her veil off. Everybody can admire her and she too <sup>is</sup> beaming. All these things happen in the home of the groom, which will become the home of the bride. Ten square tables sitting each eight guests are set up. The dinner will last the whole day. A nice wedding dinner may have up to sixteen, twenty four or thirty, two courses. You are not obliged to sit at your table all during the dinner. The guests get up, go for a walk, smoke a pipe, do whatever they feel like doing and come back to their place. The meal is usually more amusing at the end when the guests start a little game with the win<sup>drinking</sup>~~ning~~. The guests invite other people to drink a cup while they use a trick not to do it. Bottoms up, for some is getting your lips wet. A cup full of wine is poured, secretly, on the floor and refilled with water.. When a guest invite you to drink a cup of wine, the ritual requests that you return the politeness and invite him to drink with you. You can imagine how dangerous that can be if there are many guests present and you are a guest <sup>of honor</sup>. As a foreigner and the associate pastor, I was a guest of honor. At one wedding I drank 18 cups of wine!!! Only after that experience did the pastor explain the chinese customs and how to handle myself.

*of the table*

When a course is brought in, the presider <sup>of the table</sup> waits a while and with his chopsticks invites every one to eat. Then comes the wine again, and so on for 16 or 24 or 32 times.. Fortunately some food, usually rich in fat, neutralizes the effect of the alcohol. Before the meal you may also take a medication in the form of a red powder that will also reduce the effect of alcohol. Anyway a wedding dinner is a pleasant life event, everybody enjoys. The climax of the dinner is when the bride invites the guests to drink wine, she goes from table to table, <sup>the</sup> thanking <sup>guests</sup> for being there and drinks with them. However she can, according to the chinese etiquette, dispense the guest from returning the cup. The families spend huge sums of money for these weddings. It is important for the "FACE" of the family and its social standing.

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Each little town or large village has many inns. Tea houses are everywhere and are used as restaurants. The inns are nice looking, the rooms seem very clean, but they do not have all the comfort you may wish. The bedbugs, the fleas and the mosquitos will not let you sleep if you do not take a few elementary precautions. When you stop at the inn, the first thing to do is to leave your whole bedding inside the oil cloth. The oil cloth is spread over the bambou mat. Inside is your blanket (a kind of eider-dron quilt) and your pillow. The sides of the cloth hang down the side of the bed without touching the floor. An important ritual, because during the night, if there are bedbugs, they will not be able to climb in your bed but would slide down the oil cloth or stay under the cloth. Another ritual is the mosquito<sup>net</sup> inspection, then you lower the mosquito net all the way to your blanket only. You may then expect a peaceful and refreshing night. In the morning you wrap your bedding carefully in the oil cloth.

When you travel in Szechwan, you leave always before sunrise. The porters are always ready. You get into the carrying chair, and you travel one hour without stop at full speed. As soon as you see the smoke coming out of the farms and the villages it is the sign that rice is being cooked and time for breakfast. Wet hot towels are brought to refresh face and hands. Tea is poured and steaming rice is served. Chopsticks are offered in a steaming hot water bowl as well as the little china spoon. Hot dishes succeed each other rapidly on the table unless you like the cold salted vegetables and rice only, the food of the poor. In the middle of the table two small saucers, one with soya sauce the other with hot sauce. Szechwan cuisine is very good, tasty but hot. The spicy food is a blessing, it stimulates the appetite in the hot summer time.

Rice is served with each meal and is the most important staple of the Chinese diet, even more than bread in the west. (We are in South West China). Rice is steamed and served more or less dry or mixed with water, (called wet rice), something<sup>like</sup> rice-milk in Europe. There is no limit to the amount of rice served. A porter will eat easily three or four big bowls of rice as I could hardly finish one.

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## SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY CERAMICS

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I was always hungry in Szechwan, except when I was invited to the table of bishop Rouchouse or to a big dinner party, a celebration or the house of a missionary.

The first time I went to a restaurant was at a halting station between Kungming and Chungking. I was traveling with the Chinese Post Office trucks. The driver stopped at lunch time and invited me to come in. But the place was so filthy with flies all over the tables that I could not sit down and enjoy anything. I told the driver that I was not hungry. He seemed surprised. That evening we stopped in a small town and the driver invited me again for dinner. I was so hungry and I did not refuse. The restaurant seemed to be clean. I sat next to my companion who knew a few words of english. Hot towels were brought, hot tea, chopsticks and spoon in a bowl full of hot water. The attendant brought little cups with wine, a strong wine which tastes more like cognac than regular wine. Everything looked so clean, nice, tasteful and healthy!

My companion taught me how to use the chopsticks, how to hold the bowl of rice under the nose and how to push the food from the bowl into the mouth. Our table was surrounded by children and idlers who had a good time. At one moment they all bursted into laugh. The driver had just shown me how to pick up a pea with the chopsticks and eat it. I looked so mesmerized that the whole restaurant bursted into laugh. As I was very hungry and I could not use well enough the chopsticks, I finished the meal with a spoon. When it came to pay the bill, to my astonishment the driver said, "No!" It had been taken care of. I insisted, I wanted to pay. It was all in vain.



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## BRIGAND STORIES

After the 1911 Chinese Revolution, China was divided in a great number of small territories occupied by "War Lords" more or less independent. Chiang Kai Shek had sharply reduced their number, but there were still a few in the Szechwan province. Groups of highwaymen were roaming the countryside and collecting taxes from local farmers and merchants.

My first experience of an encounter with brigands was on a short trip on foot to the town of Linshui, a day's walk from the mission I was studying Chinese. I was with my teacher. Our lunch stop that day was at Tientse, a small village <sup>r</sup>crouched in a valley at the foot of a high mountain. That village controlled the difficult and winding road up to Linshui. As usual when arriving in a village, I stopped in a tea house and there we found ourselves in the middle of the brigands who were terrorizing the region. All of them were heavily armed. My teacher turned white and wanted to run away. I kept him inside the inn, and I asked the attendant to stand drinks all round. The ice was broken and they all came around my table. For a solid hour we talked. They asked me many questions about myself, the war, Belgium my native country etc.. Right away they had found out that I was a catholic missionary and the conversation was extremely friendly.

The Catholic Church had fairly good relations, in this part of the province, with brigands or "War Lords". Some years ago, a French missionary, Father Kong, still very much venerated by the Christians and respected by the Chinese people, had given <sup>the</sup> right of sanctuary to a few brigands' leaders and one war lord, as they were hotly pursued by government troops. The Catholic churches and the rectories were considered French territories, and benefitted of the right of sanctuary, which was respected by the authorities. The brigands have always been thankful to the missionaries.

After one hour, I asked incidentally whether the road to Linshui was safe traveling. Silence. The men look at each other and then very kindly told me, "Sure, no problem. go ahead".



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I left my hosts for that long ascending road, hoping to reach Linshui before dark. When we reached the top of the mountain, suddenly, one masked man jumped in the middle of the road from behind a rock and asked who I was. Then with a broad smile let me pass. He had already received the message from his friends in the little village, by signs. My teacher panicky runned in front of me. I found him one kilometer ahead of me, trembling and almost unable to speak. One hour and a half later we arrived in Linshui. Father Tong, most graciously, was waiting and received us with all the chinese marks of respect and love. The chinese priests liked to receive the missionaries. It was a break in the daily routine, an exchange of news and the <sup>opportunity</sup> ~~occasion~~ of going to confession.



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Another time, again accompanied by my teacher, we walked into a hilly valley controlled by a group of brigands. Their lair was a fortified village at the top of the valley. When I saw that beautiful village, I decided to enter it and have a cup of tea. As we were going through the village gate, I had a strange feeling. The people looked at us in a disquieted manner, without smiling, which is very abnormal in the China of that time. They probably had not seen strangers for many years. We did not find a Tea House and suddenly my teacher whispered to me, "It is the lair of the bandits, let's go away!"

A few months later, I took a little vacation in the northern part of Szechwan, to visit the family of our school principal. I was with Brother Bernard Huang, a young novice born in Hongkong. (Before the communist take-over, Fr. Rapahel sent him to St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, for his studies of philosophy and theology. He rejoined us in Valyermo in 1956.) We had already walked more than a week and my feet were hurting badly. In the morning or in the evening I was taking foot-bath to relax my feet. As we were leaving Linshui, the pastor warned us, "Be careful, the road is dangerous and infested by bandits." The road through the valley was long, very long. We did not encounter any travelers nor porters. Weeds were growing between the stone slabs; something you do not see often on the well traveled roads of Szechwan. This was the most extraordinary road, the most abandoned one, I have ever seen in Szechwan. No bandits showed! The little knapsack on your back was not enough to attract the attention of the bandits. It was no worth it.

On these dangerous roads the merchants are always escorted by a detachment of soldiers. If the detachment is stronger than the group of bandits, they leave you alone. But if the bandits are stronger or better equipped than the soldiers, they stop and rob you. Of course, money is a big element, if the soldiers get a good pay, they will protect you. If the pay is not so good then it is up to the events.



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Fr. Hildebrand had an interesting experience, on one of his regular visits to the christian communities. He stopped in a Tea House for a cup of tea. Everybody in the inn was dismayed as they had just heard that a caravan of merchants escorted by soldiers had been completely robbed. This road was known as the "opium road", the main supply road of "opium" from Si K'ang to Szechwan. Fr Hildebrand was a very clever man. He thought the bandits must be distributing the booty among themselves. Let's go right away, we may have a good chance to go through. The merchants did the same reasoning and mixed their merchandise with Father Hildebrand's luggage and left with him. But when they reached top of the road, they were arrested by the bandits. Then Fr. Hildebrand had a stroke of good luck. He recognized among the bandits, one of his parishioners. They looked at each other and the man shouted, "Let all the baggage of Fr. Ma (Fr. Hildebrand's chinese name) go through. All The merchants grouped themselves close to Fr Hildebrand. All the porters were allowed to pass except the last two.

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When bishop Wang accepted me to work in his diocese, I was sent to an old, wonderful chinese priests mission to help him. Father Teh, was good man and <sup>a</sup> good priest. I loved him as a father and he loved me like a son. I learned so many things about chinese way of life and the chinese culture. Fr. Teh was a scholar and knew poetry and theatre and he told many times that if I wanted to do good missionary <sup>work</sup>, I had to know the chinese culture. He became my mentor.

The help I was bringing to Fr. Teh was mostly the visitation of the out-lying mission posts. The traveling was too exhausting for Fr. Teh. Before sending me out on visits, Fr Teh, he sent instructions to all the catechists warning them to give me the red carpet welcome. The reception was great every where. Carrying chairs were provided from post to post. I enjoyed talking with the christians. They were so kind and open and so simple. They too loved the visit of a missionary and had usually a lot of questions. Two or three times a year, he would come, celebrating mass, administering the sacraments, baptizing, taking care of the spiritual needs of the individuals and the community. Sometimes he had to help some of them materially too.

One evening, I arrived in a big ranch. It was the biggest missionary stop of the mission. I saw a <sup>charming</sup> little house, especially for the father. The outside and inside were very neat. You could tell it had been cleaned thouroughly recently.

The straw on the bed was fresh and had been taken directly from the cow barn. After the welcoming dinner of eight different courses, I asked my host the permission to retire because I was very tired. An oil lamp <sup>threw a dim light on</sup> a beautiful carved table and next <sup>on</sup> a large wooden bed with a mosquito net. I fell asleep right away.

How long did I sleep? I do not know . I had no watch and there was no clock in the house. Suddenly I woke up with terrible itchings at the end of my toes and my fingers. The itching kept climbing on my legs and arms. I had a queer impression that something was crawling on my legs and arms. It was intolerable.

I got out of bed and reached for the oil lamp. What a sight! Uninterrupted files

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## SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY CERAMICS

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of bedbugs were climbing the legs of the bed, the frame of the mosquito net and marching on my sleeping mat. Light chases the bedbugs away, but putting an oil lamp on the bed was a fire hazard so I decided to sleep on the floor outside the mosquito net. Alas! The mosquito music and bites were still worse. I crawled back in my bed, sat down and spent a great part of the night killing one by one the bedbugs. They were now also on top<sup>of</sup> the mosquito net and let themselves fall and make<sup>a</sup> soft landing on me. Finally all the oil being used, the oil lamp slowly died out and I fell asleep in the early morning.

I looked terrible in the morning when I came down for breakfast. My face and hands swollen, pimples covering face and hands. I could hardly open the eyes, The catechist, embarrassed and confused, ordered the bed taken apart and each piece of the bed was put in boiling water for a whole day. Fresh straw taken from the field, a new mat and the following night i had a wonderful rest.



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## Reception in Christians homes

The catechist is responsible for the welfare of the mission. He will send a carrying chair to pick up the missionary or bring him back to the mission. The general rule of politeness is applied by the catechist or the family to the visiting priest: A hot bath for your feet, hot and scented towels for face and hands. Soon, you are invited into the K'e Ting, the family room, and offered a hot cup of tea, a long pipe which has to be lit by a other person. Sometimes when many ladies are present, you share the water pipe that is passed from one person to the next. I did not care very much for this custom. The family and other families gather in the K'e Ting, and start asking questions on yourself, on Europe and on religion and spiritual matters. The neighbouring families come around and go to confession etc... Finally at sunset, dinner is served, a good eight course dinner basted with excellent wine. The wine is an alcohol extracted from rice, corn, orange or wheat. After dinner again meeting of all those who like to talk religion, family affairs ( in China family linen is washed in public ), or any problems interesting the christian community until late at night. The evening ends with the night prayers, sung by heart, by all those present, including the children. Chinese prayer is beautiful to hear. It ressembels a soft very musical melopee. Mass is celebrated the following day, early in the morning.

The catechist, a man or a woman, is administering the mission, teaches the prayers and catechism to the children or the adults, tries to <sup>solve problem and help</sup> establish peace. The prayers are all memorized. I must admire the wonderful memory of all these children reciting very long morning or evening prayers without the slightest hesitation. Preparation to confession is very well done. In the confessional, the chinese use a schema easy to follow: the ten commandments, the precepts of the church, the works of charity, the ten capital sins etc.. For instance, they will confess, 1st commandment... nothing, 2nd commandment nothing, 3rd commandment... I disobey my <sup>so</sup> prents.. etc.. It is clear, that if you do not possess the language very well, you understand what they are talking about.



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The Christians know many prayers all learned by heart when they were children. When a member of the family is dying, the whole family gathers together around the person's bed and recite the long prayers of the dyings , all by heart , without hesitation. The Sunday Mass is sung by the whole congregation, with hymns and prayers varying according to fesat days or the liturgical period. These prayers were originally taught by the Jesuits missionaries in the XVII century and then by the French Missionaries of Paris , who took over Szechwan in the XIX century. One of the reasons why we chose Szechwan for our monastic foundation was the existence of these old Christian communities which could be the seed of monastic vocations.

The sung prayers sound very much like a soft melopee. The rythm is the natural use of the tones of the language, high, low, ascending or descending. It is beautiful to the ear. In the evening , walking in a Christian residential area, you hear these soft rythmic prayers coming from the homes, You know the dinner is over and the family prays together before retiring.



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## The Chinese Theater

Twice a year, the missionary would visit the out-lying Christian communities. The visit usually lasted three weeks. Local problems were discussed and solved. The Father would administer the sacraments, visit the sick.... These visits were very pleasant. The meetings were held in the evening after sunset when everybody was back from work. The Mass was early in the morning before work time. The days were quite and empty. In order to kill the time I decided to follow the advise of Father Teh, that wonderful priest I was helping at that time, and spent most of the day in theaters. I was already more than two years in China and he told me that if I wanted to know the Chinese culture, I had to be familiar with its theater.

In the winter time, any good size village will invite a group of actors to perform in the local theater. In the course of one winter an important part of the classic repertoire is played. The doors open at 10AM and close late at night. The Chinese love the theater and know many plays by heart. During the day they drop in any time, drinking tea, eating peanuts, talking or doing business, without paying attention to the actors. However at a certain time, everybody stops talking and listens. It is the high point of the play, a passage difficult to interpret. If the interpretation is good, the whole audience clap their hands. If the interpretation is so and so, everybody goes back to their own business and the children keep playing around the stage. To be an actor calls for a great self control

The Chinese know their theatre much better than the europeans know their own. In imitation of the local people, I dropped at 10am in the theatre, smoked my pipe, drank tea and ate peanuts and watched the acors. I did not understand a word or anything at the beginning, but the rapid pace of the play and its variety and the colors of the costumes were simply a joy for the eyes. As I kept going, I started to catch the <sup>symbolic</sup> meaning of some ~~symbolic~~



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movements and gestures such as opening a door, opening a window, get on horse , dismount o horse etc.. The masks of the actors, was slowly revealing me his character , good or bad. Little by little the theater came alive . I still had to understand and study the words.

The theater repertory is very rich. You have the epic opera, the historic opera, the lyric opera, teh poetic opera, the comic opera, the comedies, the romantic plays etc.. The comedies are very realistic and suggestive. In a comedy the actor had a great freedom to make political or personal hints. Nobody could or should take offence .

The decor was simple. The decor of the Peking theater was very sober. Large dark <sup>of one color</sup> hangings around the stage. Very abstract. Only the play was important.

The Szechwan decor was a little more elaborate. ~~The more you were going south the more elaborate decors~~ As you were going south you would find more sophisticated decors very influenced by Europe.

The play is abstract, symbolic in its gesture, its action, its mimic, and its acrobatic dances . The actors sings from the head , or sings through the nose. The same melodies the same rythms and ~~and-cadences~~ <sup>repeated</sup> are used from one play to another according to the characters of the personages of the play or the <sup>needs</sup> ~~needs~~ of the play. The great variety of musical instruments and voices of the European <sup>opera</sup> ~~theater~~ is unknown in China.

A small orchestra accompnies the voices. The orchestra is composed of three musical instruments and a little drum that gives the beat. The music of the Peking theater is well contained and very agreable to the ear. In Szechwan , cymbals are added to the orchestra, which may become deafening. I carried in my pocket cotton balls for my ears.

The costumes were usually magnificent and extraordinary.



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The Chinese theater is a fundamental part of the social life. Through the theater the people are linked with their age old heritage, their culture. It is taught in school and from his very tender age a chinese memorizes many plays. The personages of the great epopees , the great historic heroes, the great lyric writers or poets are familiar to the students. The plays reflect many bouddist or taoist legends , the spirit of bouddist philosophers. The theater was so attractive to the chinese, so close to their way of life, that the missionaries interdicted the christians to go to the theatre under pain of excommunication. However , when I came to China that rule became obsolete. I remember during the war, a very famous chinese actor , Mei Lang Fang, came to Chengtu. He was a perfect  
I went to see Bishop Rouchouse, our bishop, inviting him to see the show. The bishop said: " Father Werner, those who go to the theater are excommunicated." I answered, " I know. The excommunication can be absolved by the bishop. So if we go together, I will be absolved right away." The bishop laughed and invited the Vicar General Fr. Poisson and Father Charel to go to the show with me. It was a marvellous show everybody enjoyed. From that day ~~the-visits to-shows-became-frequent~~. Fr. Raphael and many missionaries would go to shows.

I was an opera addicted. Several times a week, between two business calls, I would spen one hour or more in a theater, smoking my pipe, drinking tea and eating peanuts and admiring the wonderful cast dancing military dances acrobatic jousts accompanied by the rapid cadence and beat of the music .

I will always remember the wonderfful travel peripateias of the monk Huang, who was sent by the emperor in the 6th century, to bring to China the sacred books of buddism. Huang travel<sup>ed</sup> through Mongolia, Sinkiang and arrived in India through West Tibet. He had with him <sup>two</sup> minor gods, personnified in a donkey and a pig. ~~and~~ They traveled with him in order to protect him against evil spirits. The whole epopee is a delight, ~~and~~ the most popular history with unexpected turn of events.\*



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The theater lost a great deal of its charm, when the communists took the city of Chengtu. The beautiful old operas were all changed into peoples struggle against the upper class and showing communism as the present day answer to centuries of struggle. It was boring..

Of course going to the theater was not my only occupation but it was giving a special flavour to my studies of Chinese culture.

The villages which could not afford to pay for a group of actors, would invite "storytellers". Sitting on the side of the street or in a tea house, they fascinated adults as well as children with their marvellous stories. These storytellers were very talented.





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## RELATIONS BETWEEN MISSIONARIES AND CHRISTIANS

The life of a missionary or a pastor was very hard not only because of a lack of comfort but mainly because of a lack of communications. It was very difficult to find some one to talk to on the same intellectual level. The missionary was so respected and venerated in the country side that anything he said was accepted as the Gospel. The hardship of learning a new language made conversation even more difficult. A wall was being built between the missionary and the christians.

The communication problem eased when we moved to Chengtu. The people we came in contact with were more educated and came from another milieu, college or university students or graduates. Many of them had even a better education than some missionaries.

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## THE STUDY OF CHINESE LANGUAGE

As soon as I arrived in China, Fr. Raphael gave me a Chinese teacher who was always at my side. I had several teachers, Four months before leaving, expelled by the communist regime, I still had a teacher and every morning, together, we would read the editorial of the daily newspaper.

Our method to learn the language was to use the method of the chinese elementary schools, a direct and visual method.

Starting with the first grade book, I went all the way to the fifth grade book and then to more difficult books. The grammar is very easy and simple. You can judge this by the number of pages of the grammar, three pages! The great difficulty is the use of the proper tone. The Chinese language is a monosyllabic language. ~~Each sound means a word, The sounds, in many language is limited~~ such as ma, wu, tsing etc. The number of basic sound is limited. In order to increase the number of sounds and make yourself clear, the chinese use tones. There is a high tone, a low tone, a ascending tone and a descending tone <sup>in</sup> the Széchwán dialect. ~~dialect has four different tones~~, the Peking language has five tones. Canton dialect is proud to display ~~up to~~ 15 tones... A basic sound pronounced on a high or low... tone will signify something totally different. For example, the word Wang on a high tone signifies Emperor, on a low tone it will signify forgetfulness, on a ascending tone, hope, on a short tone (fifth tone of Peking), it will mean, net.. The sound Ch'i, will signify a bambou mat on which you sleep but if you use the wrong tone, it will mean a prostitute.. It can be embarrassing asking this in a hotel. There is no way to make a mistake in writing, because the characters will be different.. The problem is to have a well trained ear. When two chinese do not understand each other, they write the character in the palm of their hand.



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You needed a good visual memory for the written language, to learn to write. I used to memorize six characters a day, at the end of the week I would look over the characters of the five days. After two weeks I would look over ten days work and so on...I repeated these characters very often in my mind in order to impress them in my memory.

Some characters are simple some are very complicated, they may vary from one stroke of the brush to fourteen strokes. The characters are ideographic, it means, one character expresses an idea. For instance the word "PEACE" is the abstract picture of "One Woman under one roof." "Prisoner" is depicted, a man inside a square. Sometimes you can guess the meaning of a character, you have never seen or have forgotten, by studying the composite strokes, or by recognizing a basic character such as peace, man, mother<sup>ij</sup>, water.. You can guess the sound and the tone. The old ideograms of the old Chinese language have developed into complicated abstract modern characters.

You may be able to read almost everything you want with the knowledge of two thousand different characters. The basic Chinese is three to four hundred different characters. With the basic Chinese you could read a good deal of the daily newspaper and simple books. The scholars know between three thousand and ten thousand different characters. The Official dictionary of the Mándchou dynasty had thirty thousand characters. A constant effort of the memory was needed to keep up with the study of Chinese. Composing new modern words was not a difficult job.

The popular language was easier to understand than the literary language, Suffixes and prefixes were used to make yourself clearer. For instance, to the sound of mother, MU, the popular language will add Tsing, which means a love: Mu Tsing<sup>relationship</sup>. In many cases the monosyllabic language became polysyllabic .



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We had to learn to write, to handle the brush That is not easy at all.  
The fountain pen , was claiming its rights. But you had to use a brush  
to write on Chinese bambou or rice paper. I spent hours and hours  
learning how to handle the brush , to grind the ink stone and to mix  
the ink with water . I could not be a calligrapher, I do not understand  
why it did not work...

*Werner Papehaus de Marchelen*