

CHINA CHANGES ITS CAPITAL

THIS month China gave itself a new capital. Here is a picture of the old capital, Chungking, as it seemed to a "New Yorker" correspondent (John Hersey) in March.

CHUNGKING gives an impression of pride and melancholy these days. The city's wartime enjoyments—the fame and the suffering for which it could congratulate itself—are now largely over. When the last Government bureaus move to Nanking this spring and summer, Chungking's greatness will have been all written out. It is natural that the people of Chungking should cling defiantly to the reputation which they and the city earned rather early in the war—in 1939 and 1940, principally.



MADAME CHIANG

"The difference was even more apparent"

Ever since those two years, when the residents of the war capital were ennobled by an intermittent fear of death from Japanese bombs, the reputation abroad of the city's population has been steadily slipping away. The corruption of Chungking in the later years, the periodic defeatism, the sordid consequences of inflation, the political knife-work of Kuomintang bureaucrats have become almost as famous in the outside world as the fine record of the earlier days. Nowadays the people of Chungking elide the unworthy things in the city's wartime history and speak very proudly and bitterly—and truly, no doubt—of the hardships they went through. The Government people who are still marooned in the capital cannot wait to get home and pour their moral superiority on their fortunate and perhaps less patriotic friends in the coastal areas. In Shanghai, which made out very nicely under the Japanese, a person newly come from Chungking is considered as tiresome as ever a "bomb bore" was in London.

One person who does not appear anxious to leave Chungking is Chiang Kai-shek. I attended, a short time ago, the first press conference the Generalissimo had given since the middle of October. The occasion for it was the negotiations with the Chinese Communists. The conference was held in the

living room of the Chiangs' house, and Madame Chiang was present. I had, as it happens, spent an afternoon with the Chiangs in that same room in May, 1939, and the difference between the two occasions was striking. Seven years ago Chungking was being bombed for the first time. China was at the ebb of her fortunes and at the flood of her spirit. America was selling scrap steel to Japan. Britain was too nervous about the situation in Europe to do anything in the East but appease. The Japanese had reached Ichang, only three hundred miles from Chungking, and a few days before my visit to the Chiangs the enemy had begun their terrible raids on the city, whose people had not yet properly catacombed themselves. Each raid started huge, uncontrollable fires, and thousands burned to death after every attack. In the midst of the city's obvious panic, the Chiangs were calm and extremely busy. More prudent people, like Madame Chiang's kinfolk, the Kungs and the Soongs, had taken refuge in the countryside or in Hongkong. But the Chiangs said they planned to stay in Chungking. They were, in fact, building an annexe to the house at the very moment when the rest of the city was falling apart. They were bursting with plans—he for the better distribution of Chungking's anti-aircraft defences, for the rallying of his armies, and for the building of arsenals and factories in Szechwan Province; she for the New Life Movement, the care of orphans, and the establishment of small industrial co-operatives. Their bearing was almost theatrically defiant. Their answers to questions were quick. They gave me—as I assumed they gave every visitor—photographs of themselves. She, very American, autographed hers.

Now, in 1946, when the war has been won but the peace was somewhat uneasy, the Chiangs seemed completely different people. He was much less military; he did not click his heels and bow and, when he sat down, he slouched in his chair. He no longer gave the impression of being impatient at the passage of time. He seemed to have plenty to spare. His mannerisms were less nervous. He did not seem now, as he did then, to be pumped full of compressed air. He used far less the word "hao," meaning "good," in the tone of an executive receiving reports, and far more the word "tze-ke," which means "this," and which serves the purpose of allowing the mind to pause and choose the proper word. In one sentence, I counted this stalling word sixteen times. Because of all this, Chiang seemed much older and much less sure of himself. In 1939, when the Generalissimo was 51, the chances were that things could not help getting better for him. In 1946, at 58, he can foresee only compromise, a diminution of his and his party's power, and old age.

The difference was even more apparent in Madame Chiang. Through most of the conference she sat and stared, apparently thinking hard about something else. Her face was heavier, and her eyelids were thickened, as if she had been sleeping too little, or perhaps too much. Most noticeable of all, she interjected her own ideas only twice during the entire interview.

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