

NOTES ON CHINA

China is obviously the one land in the world on which only the casual visitor would dare to make notes. The "old-hand" knows too much to say anything.

Though no threads are available to guide one through the China Labyrinth, for the time being at any rate, I suppose Chiang Kai-shek is the nearest thing to a thread there is. In spite of the failure of his anti-communist campaign in Kiangsi, in spite of the ominous spread of communism during the past six months in Szechwan, in spite of the rapid extension of Japanese control in the north, in spite of the revolt of the 19th Route Army and the Foochow sessionist movement, and in spite of his universal and growing unpopularity among the educated classes, I have the distinct impression that since my last visit (June, 1932) the web of his authority has been steadily woven and extended in many quiet ways over wide areas of China. I do not mean at all to imply that it is a stout web. On the contrary, it is one of the most fragile webs that could be imagined. But that it exists at all is significant. His person and his authority (in conjunction with Soong and Wang) have constituted a sort of "Ile de France" outside of which there is little more than primeval chaos.

What are some of the evidences of this slowly extending authority?

1. The fact that (having eliminated Chang Hsueh-liang) the Nanking Government has been dealing directly with the Japanese in regard to issues in the north (note conversations between the Japanese Minister, Mr. Ariyoshi and Huang Fu in the Western Hills during October.)

Note: The manner of eliminating Chang Hsueh-liang is another story. A reputable correspondent in Peiping told me one tale which, if true, is a perfect illustration of the Chinese capacity to wait a very long time to get what they want and then finally to get it with the least possible

injury to themselves. According to this story several divisions of Chang's, acting on their habitual principle of non-resistance, were retiring towards the Great Wall before the Japanese advance in Jehol last spring. They suddenly found their further retirement blocked by several divisions of Nanking troops who under the pretext of establishing two or three supporting lines just south of the Wall told them that they could not retreat any further. The only alternative left to Chang's men was, for the first time in their lives, to face the Japanese. The Japanese destroyed them, the young Marshal embarked on a World Tour and Chiang Kai-shek established his authority, in appearances at any rate, over the north.

2. The fact that thus far (November 27) Canton has not taken advantage of the Foochow Revolt to embarrass Nanking, but on the contrary seems to be veering in the direction of benevolent neutrality which would be nearly equivalent to positive support.

3. I have been struck in a number of cities by the amount of work under way on educational plant and equipment-reconditioning or constructing primary school buildings, colleges and universities. The Government University of Wuhan (just south of Wuchang) has buildings which any university in the world would be proud to possess. They are a triumph of aesthetic sense and architectural skill. The style is an adaptation of occidental structure to Chinese form conceived of by a young architect who is a returned student from Cornell. It was obvious that Cayuga's waters had determined the location, but the buildings themselves happily bore no resemblance to the plant at Ithaca.

Though the success of the educational system depends in the last analysis upon the provincial authorities, work like that at Wuhan is going forward under the stimulus and eventual supervision of the Nanking Ministry of Education. That Ministry has authority even in Canton!

4. The municipal police have appeared extremely efficient wherever I have been (much more efficient in Nanking, for example, than a year and

a half ago,) and I received the impression that this efficiency in cities like Hankow, Wuchang and Kiukiang was not unrelated to the influence of the Central Government. This is a very superficial impression, but I think there is something to it.

5. An American business man, who during the past twenty-five years has been travelling from time to time through the interior of China looking for markets for engineering equipment, told me that he was convinced that there had been a steady "settling down" and "opening up" of great sections of the interior since 1927. He estimated that at least 15,000, and possibly as much as 20,000 miles of dirt road had been built during the past five years. These roads can be used by automobiles during dry weather. The amount of hard surface road is still negligible, but there has been a very fine hard surface road opened within the past year between Nanking and Hangchow. This construction of roads is the most revolutionary event that is taking place in China. The Romans knew that it was roads that civilized barbarians. And it may not be far-fetched to conclude that the growth and extension of the sovereignty of the Chinese Central Government depends primarily upon the establishment of a dependable system of communications.

6. The city and environs of Nanking are a paradoxical symbol of both amazing promise and rather depressing pathos. The changes that have taken place in the interior of the city during the past year and a half are indeed striking. These include the rapid continuation of the program of building government offices, the extension of hard surface boulevards, the appearance everywhere of hideous western-style dwellings and the completion of a municipal water supply system. But even more striking is the transformation that has taken place in

the country around Nanking. That transformation provides impressive evidence of what a stretch of Chinese land can look like after six years of labor uninterrupted by civil war. The Department of Agriculture has been so successful with the experimental farms that when standing in the midst of these near the Ming Tombs it was difficult to believe that there could have been war in China since the Ming Dynasty!

But there is also a pathetic side to the picture. The immense amount of money and labor spent on monuments, Spirit Valley Shrines, and national recreation parks in commemoration of events which have not yet really occurred makes one wonder how far the authorities have any real comprehension of the character or magnitude of the task that lies before them. It may be merely a survival of what appears to have been a traditional Chinese propensity for symbolizing the power of the Government through the size and magnificence of the Governor's Tomb.

There seem to be three main lines along which decisive action is being taken which will determine whether or not Chiang Kai-shek can maintain and increase his power and consequently whether or not the small gains which have already been made will be held. These lines are:

1. Discovery of an interim "modus vivendi" with Japan.
2. Continuation of internal policy implied in League--American assistance for the program of the National Economic Council.

The Soong policy.

3. Liquidation of civil war with the communists.

In attempting to take positive action along these different lines it would appear at times that mutually irreconcilable conditions have to be fulfilled. No doubt Marshal Chiang is more acutely sensitive to this fact than anyone else. Where the conditions are too flagrantly

contradictory he will probably avoid as far as he can making any public statement and content himself with recourse to the most ancient of all Chinese social games--the game of Balances. This game consists in waiting for time to establish an equilibrium between two mutually irreconcilable social forces--the sole function of the player being to convey to his opponent the most vivid impression of veering in his direction that he can possibly convey to him without actually having to budge one inch from his own position.

1. An interim "modus vivendi" with Japan.

Since the Tangku Truce Japan has considerably strengthened her position in China.

It is commonly reported in the north that she actually controls Peiping now through the Chinese officials who are in her pay. I was struck by the fact that there was no passport examination entering China from Japan through the port of Tangku.

There are conflicting reports as to the continued efficacy of the anti-Japanese boycott. The British officers of a Yangtze River boat between Hankow and Nanking said that the Japanese lines were running on the river again, that they were rapidly recapturing the cargo trade and even the passenger trade. I saw a Japanese boat come in to Kiukiang and can testify to the truth of this as far as passengers are concerned. Up the river and in the north I was told that Japanese goods were being bought again in large quantities. This does not seem to be true in the Shanghai area.

Perhaps one reason for the continuation of sullen resentment in Shanghai is that instead of doing everything in their power to efface the memories of the past the Japanese have preferred to perpetuate those memories in the most vivid manner. At the point where North

Szechwan Road leaves Chapei for the country the Japanese have built a series of barracks which are, I suppose, without parallel in the world. I drove by one of them and there was another not far away. They have the appearance of a combination apartment-house-fortress, and loom like medieval castles over the surrounding Chinese dwellings. There are very thick concrete walls with a heavy battlement above (a line of Japanese marine heads popping up above it,) and below steel rolling doors (something like fire engine house doors) which when rolled up display a row of tanks ready to move out at a moment's notice. The building I saw could certainly house five thousand men in a pinch. Just across the road there was a bright and shiny new Japanese Shinto Temple containing the ashes of the men killed in action during the Shanghai affair. The Temple had just been dedicated a day or two before. This proximity of temple and fortress hardly constitutes convincing "sales talk" for the Chinese.

The visit of Mr. Sugimura (formerly of Geneva and the League) to China during the autumn is perhaps an illustration of a more rational method of fishing in troubled waters. I don't know whether he caught anything or not. It may have been a sheer coincidence that the Foochow revolt broke out immediately after his visit to the south. In a press interview he said that Japan had no political interests in south China, consequently he hoped his visit would not be misunderstood. He also had a long conversation with Hu Han Min whom he praised afterwards as the most intelligent and best-informed man in Asia as far as Far Eastern questions were concerned.

Since the Tangku Truce Chiang Kai-shek has evidently felt that the best way to meet Japanese pressure for the time being was with fair words, courtesies and a certain amount of collaboration. During

October direct negotiations were initiated between Nanking and Tokyo which were interpreted both in Japan and China as implying the commencement of a slight pro-Japanese orientation on the part of the Chinese Government. These negotiations took place just outside of Peiping in the Western Hills. They were carried on between Huang Fu, Chiang Kai-shek's political representative in the North, and Mr. Ariyoshi, the Japanese Minister to China. The latter was taking a vacation in the Western Hills; the former happened to be there on account of his health, and so the conversation began. The fact that Huang Fu is supposed to have been formerly connected with the old Anfu party which has, from time to time in the past, been liberally subsidized by the Japanese, assured that the salt of their conversation would have plenty of savor.

There were immediate repercussions in Nanking which illustrate the difficulty of reconciling this development of policy with the maintenance of the Soong policy. These repercussions occurred in connection with Soong's resignation as Minister of Finance.

2. League--American Assistance. The Soong Policy.

Almost everyone seems to regard Mr. T. V. Soong (Harvard and the sole male member of the Soong⁺dynasty) as far and away the strongest non-military figure in China. He has been consistently and vigorously anti-Japanese, favoring armed-resistance in the north last spring and opposing every move in the direction of collaboration with Japan. His positive policy centered on the program of social and economic reconstruction of the new National Economic Council to be

+ Mrs. Sun Yat-sen, Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek and Mrs. H. H. Kung (wife of the present Minister of Finance) are all sisters of T. V. Soong.

carried through in part with the help of League experts and American money. He saw in this program the only way to rehabilitate China and make her eventually strong enough to push Japan out. The Japanese naturally regarded him as their most formidable opponent in the Nanking Government. When Soong resigned it was commonly supposed that the sole reason was because of disagreement with Chiang over military appropriations. He told a friend a few days before he resigned that he was sick of continually being called upon to hand over to the army funds he had raised for social reconstruction. But this does not seem to have been the whole story.

During Soong's absence in the United States securing the fifty million dollar R. F. C. loan, Wang Ching-wei (the third "strong man" in China and Chairman of the Executive Yuan) began to use his influence on the side of conciliation and collaboration with Japan. This involved getting rid of Lo Wen-kan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and a friend of Soong's who is also strongly anti-Japanese. Soong heard of this development when he was in America and cabled Chiang to make no changes in personnel until his return. He cut his trip short and started back. When his ship called at a Japanese port, he again heard the same rumor and again sent the same cable to Chiang. On disembarking at Shanghai he learned that only the day before Lo had been rushed off from Nanking by airplane on the pretext of making an investigation for the Government in the interior which was equivalent to his dismissal. Wang took Lo's place as "acting" Minister of Foreign Affairs. This was the early part of October. The conversations in the Western Hills commenced about that time.

Chiang asked Soong to come to Nanking (military headquarters for the anti-communist operations in Kiangsi) to talk with him about his trip.

Upon Soong's arrival Chiang told him that most of the funds he had raised would be needed for the continuance of the anti-communist campaign. Soong protested that the funds had been raised for other purposes and that he would resign if they were diverted from those purposes. He went back to Nanking where Wang greeted him with "Oh! This is terrible! You mustn't resign. If you resign all of us will resign." But Wang privately said to Chiang, "Let him go." So Chiang insisted and Soong, realizing that Wang was playing a game with him, handed in his resignation. Naturally enough the tension seems to have been chiefly between Soong and Wang. From the standpoint of the total political situation Soong's resignation is regarded as a tactical move--as a double protest against Wang's pro-Japanese tendency and Chiang's fixation that the communists can only be liquidated by the use of military force. It does not represent a definite breach between Chiang and Soong. On the contrary it is perfectly possible that they may be working together again in a short time.

When Soong's friends realized how Wang had double-crossed him and also saw the implications of the conversations in the Western Hills, they decided to square with Wang immediately. Early in November a meeting of the Central Political Committee of the Kuomintang Party was called (this is the most powerful policy-making group in the party,) and Soong's friends, who controlled the meeting, demanded from the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who was present (Wang stayed away and sent an assistant secretary in his place) a report on the conversations in the Western Hills. The assistant secretary protested that he was not competent to report but such pressure was applied to him that he finally told the whole story, with the result that a telegram was immediately sent to Huang Fu ordering him to cease his negotia-

tions with Ariyoshi!

In such cases in the past the Japanese reply has usually been to stir up new trouble for the Nanking Government. As far as Sino-Japanese relations are concerned Chiang is truly between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. If he resists the Japanese, they will destroy him; if he comes to terms with the Japanese the Chinese will destroy him. He is only secure when the Japanese are occupied with more formidable opponents elsewhere. No doubt he has had reason at times to thank God for the communists who have offered the best possible excuse for preoccupation south of the Yangtze, and who have provided the one type of justification for his own existence that the Japanese could understand since they, even less than he, desire a Communist China.

3. The liquidation of civil war with the communists.

As with every other major Chinese problem, so it is with communism. You can find no two people who will agree as to who the communists really are, what their strength is, and what the future of their movement will be.

Some facts, however, are sufficiently plain. By the middle of November (just before the Foochow revolt) it was generally agreed that the Kiangsi campaign had reached a complete impasse and that there was even some possibility that it would shortly collapse. Chiang's tactics were to draw a ring around the communist area cutting off supplies (especially salt.) He had been employing a force variously estimated at from 200,000 to 400,000. Gen. Wetzel, his German military adviser, told a friend of mine that two European divisions could complete the job in three months. Chiang's men have been at it off and on for several years. Their morale has been going down. They have no idea of what they are fighting for. They don't see why they should kill

other Chinese who are fighting for what they would like to have--a redistribution of land to the peasants. As the troop trains go south from Kiukiang, the men read communist messages written in white letters on the face of the cliffs--"We don't want to kill you. We are your friends. We only want to kill your officers."

I am inclined to think that this communist movement in China is much more than just organized brigandage on the part of the unemployed. The hungry man, of course, constitutes the rank and file. But the stories that are coming out of Kiangsi now sound strangely like the stories that came out of Russia in 1917-1920. There are stories of groups possessed with the enthusiasm of religious fanatics, of Christian churches and schools turned into "Lenin-tangs," of a severe party discipline which trains men in the meaning of labor and instils a loyalty to the movement capable of producing acts of great heroism and devotion. This capacity to put the common good above the interests of family or life is not a Chinese trait, and is one of the country's greatest moral needs. Its appearance in the communist-controlled areas certainly cannot be accounted for in terms of brigandage.

As a result of this state of affairs Chiang's men have tended to acquire a friendly feeling for their alleged enemies as soon as they moved into communist areas and established personal contacts with the peasants of the district. The upshot has been that large numbers are continually going over to the enemy. During the second week of November it was reported that 10,000 men of the famous 19th Route Army (the defenders of Shanghai) had just been surrounded and captured by the communists. It seems more likely that the capture was arranged by mutual consent. In any case the incident meant that the communists were supplied with that many more guns and soldiers. A wag might say that

if it weren't for Chiang's punitive expeditions the communist army could neither be equipped nor recruited.

Now that the whole 19th Route Army has turned against Chiang and come to terms with the communists a far more serious situation has been created. As a result the communists have already received much needed supplies of salt, medicines and munitions. Should this working agreement continue it means that for the first time the communists will have an outlet to the sea through which all necessary supplies can be smuggled, the Nanking gunboats being quite incapable of establishing an effective blockade along the whole Fukien coast. Such an outlet will of course greatly increase the military effectiveness of the communist armies, and may mark the turning of the tide in the destiny of the whole communist movement in the interior.

Equally serious for the Nanking Government has been the phenomenal growth of the communist armies during the past few months in the remote province of Szechwan (50,000,000 people and one of the most fertile areas in China.) The social situation there could hardly be worse than it is. The war-lords have been particularly ravenous because of the wealth of the country, and in some areas the taxes have already been collected for thirty-six years in advance. Naturally the peasants are ripe for revolt.

It is an ironic fact that communism spread to Szechwan because of Chiang's success in cleaning up parts of Honan and Anhwei. Nearly a year ago the bands in these areas began to move west. At first they numbered only a few thousand, but by this autumn their number is supposed to have grown to around 120,000 with some 80,000 rifles. I came within two or three hours of seeing some of the people on their way to join this army as I was coming down on the train from Peiping to Hankow. We reached a station called Ming Kiang in southern Honan about six o'clock

in the morning. Earlier in the morning a force of communists (variously estimated at three, four and eight thousand) crossed the railway line marching westward towards Szechwan. This point was less than 150 miles from Hankow. The traffic on the line was held up for four hours and an armored train was rushed up but nothing came of it.

If Chiang finds it impossible to liquidate communism by military measures when it is within striking distance of his capitol it is obviously unthinkable that he can cope with a militant and powerful movement supported by the wealth of Szechwan and practically inaccessible to his armies.

The only sensible alternative would seem to be to come to terms with communism. To come to terms with it not by opposing its social objectives and then making a treaty with the communist areas; but by adopting many of its social objectives and throwing whatever influence the present Government may have behind a program of social reconstruction in a relatively restricted area which would demonstrate that Nanking also has advantages to offer the people. T. V. Soong's policy of concentrating on the work of the National Economic Council offers the only possible hope of winning the support of the masses in competition with communism. It remains to be seen whether or not Chiang, trained to think of the military solution as the most effective solution, will eventually throw in his lot with Soong. When a group of missionaries recently asked him to sponsor a movement for village reconstruction, he passed the buck back to the missionaries and replied, "Why don't the Christian Churches do it themselves?", which was not a very reassuring answer.

The important questions for the immediate future seem to be:

1. Will Chiang be willing to reduce military operations to the minimum required for policing the areas now under his control?
2. Will he be willing to use the funds thus released for the work of the National Economic Council?
3. Can Nanking be friendly enough with Japan to avoid a repetition of the Shanghai incident type of thing without betraying the whole of China into her hands?
4. Can the Foochow revolt be isolated or will it spread?
5. What will Soong's future relations be with Nanking?

I spoke of Soong above as being the strongest non-military figure in Chinese political life. As a matter of fact he is also a very powerful military figure. As Minister of Finance he was also Collector of the Salt Revenue and in that capacity built up what is reported to be the best-trained body of troops in China, numbering about 20,000 and officered by graduates of St. Cyr, West Point and V. M. I. One section of these troops constitutes the only existing Chinese chemical warfare service. In addition he has a naval base of his own on the coast. Consequently when the war lords talk Soong can use their language. Though H. H. Kung is now Minister of Finance, Arthur Young and all of Soong's own men remain in the ministry. Soong also continues to be Chairman of the National Economic Council. Hence his moves during the next few weeks will have a decisive bearing on future developments. Will he win Chiang over to his policy and force Wang out or will the three of them decide to work together again?

Will there be time for these questions to be answered?

Or will China's destiny be taken out of her hands even more completely than it has been in the past by some extraneous catastrophic event over which Nanking has not the slightest control but which would

change the face of the Far East as completely as Europe was changed by the World War?

If the war that everybody expects does come everything in Eastern Asia will be thrown into the melting pot. If it doesn't come, the central question for China remains: can Chiang Kai-shek continue to govern long enough to lay the foundations, even within a small area, of an enduring social order? If he can't there seems little likelihood that anyone else can.

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Note on Shanghai

The present paradoxical situation that exists in Shanghai throws an interesting side light on the plight of China.

On the one hand so much silver from the interior has come to the Shanghai banks for safe-keeping that instead of paying interest on deposits the banks are charging for storage. From one point of view some of the great banks on the Bund are monuments to the rapacity of China's war-lords. They are drains into which is poured the economic life-blood of the interior. If circumstances begin to get uncomfortable for one of these blood-sucking gentlemen in a distant province, after having squeezed everything he can possibly get out of the wretched inhabitants he takes his silver and his wives, retires to Shanghai and rots in luxury for the rest of his life.

On the other hand, the relative security of the International Settlement offers an opportunity for the communists as well as for the retired war-lords. I was told by a number of people that the communist underground organizations in Shanghai were steadily gaining strength, and had even secured some measure of control over the Chinese moving picture houses and Chinese producers. I went to see one of these Chinese

radical films. It was a story of the brutality and greed of a minor magistrate in Szechwan and of the popular rising against him. As a production the film was quite inferior, but I should imagine that its revolutionary appeal would be considerable. There is said to be an interesting connection, which I could not verify, between a certain Mr. Doo or Two or Tdoo (the Al Capone of Frenchtown) and the movie houses and the communists. It seems that many of the Chinese theatrical folk are also pro-communist. The Russian play "Roar China" is now being given in Shanghai.