A World Gone Upside Down

★ IN DECEMBER A YEAR AGO, when all Tahiti's radios blared the news of Pearl Harbor, the Chinese population of Papeete precipitantly fled. Fearing a blitz by an old enemy, they packed dry goods and groceries and the little precious belongings that their fingers searched out in the dark of the Polynesian blackout and departed. Their fragile tropic houses were poor shelters from an enemy whom they knew capable of bombing far-flung places.

Pushcarts, battered cars, buses, trucks and every conceivable vehicle that could be pushed, dragged or coaxed into use, served the Chinese in their dash for freedom. Throughout the night and far into the next day the migration continued. No one believed that there were so many Chinese in the whole South Pacific as glutted the Broom Road in a frantic search for safety.

Soon the districts of Punaauia and Paea bulged with Chinese. They required housing. There were big houses and small ones, vacant because of the dearth of tourists and the fact that residential Americans had long since flown to the safety of their own shores. But the Chinese were not particular. They took over shanties and shacks, ramshackle hovels and copra sheds as well as the great houses on vacated estates. Once fabulous districts emerged from their siesta and again sprang to life. The Chinese refugees needed shelter and they were willing to pay for it.

In the words of Ray P. Davis, who reported the incident from Papeete for *The Christian Science Monitor:*

"The rents were exorbitant. From an average rental of five hundred francs a month, prices suddenly zoomed to 2,000 and 3,000 and 4,000 francs a month. But they paid the prices, these people who seem to conjure up money from the air.

"They paid the prices and watched the world go upside down."

—ELSIE BALLARD