



china RED TOURISM

TAKE IT AS RED

Caroline Cooper investigates China's newfound enthusiasm for packaging Communist revolutionary sites as tourist destinations



27-year-old Tan Longwu wears hip skateboarding t-shirts and rides around his western Jiangxi hometown on a new motorcycle. "We were able to buy that last year," he says. "We have been doing very well lately." Tan, his family and his neighbours have all been cashing in on a major new drive that is sweeping China: Red Tourism.

In developing a marketing campaign set to run until 2010, Chinese authorities are working hard to drum up enthusiasm for some of China's most remote yet revolutionary areas. For the Party, it's a win-win situation of fostering economic development in some of the nation's poorest inland areas while also backing up its ideological rhetoric.

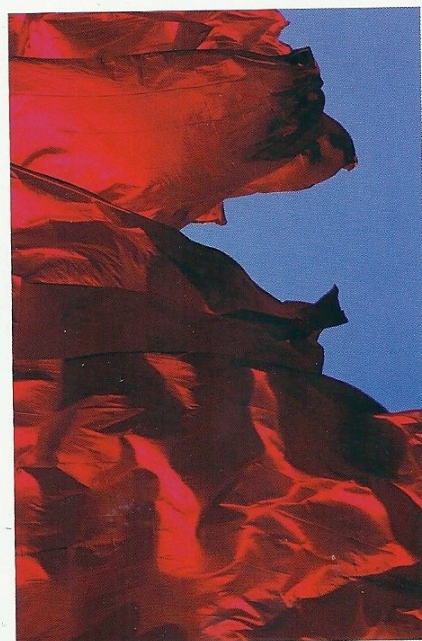
Tan runs a general store near Mao's Jinggangshan home. "Tourism is our primary source of income. Hundreds and thousands of people visit the site every year," he explains. "That is up from just tens of thousands a few years ago." But he is worried about the still lacklustre tourist infrastructure. "We need to invest in better hotels and roads. This area is still rather backwards. The development of the area will help to support us."

Travel to the old Communist Party of China (CPC) strongholds presents an incredible juxtaposition of economic opportunity alongside ideological fervour. It's classic capitalism with a red revolutionary backdrop.

According to Xinhua News Agency, RMB 700 million (USD 86.4 million) was allocated in 2005 alone in support of the campaign, which aims to highlight key sites of the Party's early history up until the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. Red Tourism is expected to bring in RMB 20 billion (USD 2.41 billion) and directly employ two million people by 2010, according to Xinhua. With most of China's revolutionary sites located in fairly remote, under-developed areas, the campaign is already being credited with bringing funds to poorer regions while bolstering a heavily nationalistic agenda.

The present framework for the campaign includes roughly 100 sites and 30 'routes' among the sites. Jiangxi and Shaanxi, the start and end of the Red Army's Long March, as well as Mao's home province of Hunan, are the major Red Tourism destination provinces, with dozens of increasingly well-organised 'red stops' in each.

"Visitors to our Red Tourism sites are mostly government officials, and some



PEOPLE POWER: (top) A statue outside the Chinese Revolution History Museum in Tian'anmen Square, Beijing, espouses the physical and moral benefits of labour; (above) The flag raising and lowering ceremonies at Tian'anmen Square are conducted by PLA soldiers trained to march at precisely 108 paces per minutes, 75 centimetres per pace

Mao Zedong kept a private villa at beautiful Mount Lushan in Jiangxi province. It has since been converted into a museum

schoolchildren," according to Xie Li, an official at Jiangxi's Jinggangshan ticket sales office. The office says ticket sales to Jinggangshan revolutionary bases for the first eight months of 2005 reached 604,575, up from 118,373 in 2004.

With its rolling green precipices and mountainous hiking trails scattered among key revolutionary bases, Jiangxi province is a prime example of how Red Tourism is developing in China and where its promoters hope it will go.

"The tourism industry in China has been growing by an average of 14 per cent per year over the last five years. People want to visit the places where the new China was born," explains James Jao, director of JAO Design in Beijing. The Chinese government has turned to planning and design firms to doll up some of its most important Red Tourism sites. JAO Design landed the Ruijin project in Jiangxi province, home of the first incarnation of the Chinese Communist Party from 1931 to 1934. "We were commissioned to plan out the birthplace of the People's Republic of China, and we consider this a very sacred job."

The firm is working with the Ruijin Planning Bureau to develop an integrated USD 30 million scheme of hotels, roadways and infrastructure to connect Ruijin's Red Tourism dots. The planning process has not always been easy, as the firm struggles to work with the government through funding shortages, bureaucratic entanglement and differing ideas.

"The government thinks this is a great way to rehabilitate the poorer pockets of inland areas. But they don't have any kind of systematic strategies or policies at this point other than goodwill. So it's a trial and error

process," says Jao. "We have already worked in Ruijin for two years. The city doesn't have a lot of money. So we get started, we get stopped, we get started, we get stopped. It's a long process."

Ruijin was where the CPC consolidated its power against an encroaching Nationalist Party and Japanese invasion. The base spread over an area of 50,000 square kilometres, taking over the stately Xie family home, large enough to host meetings of up to 500 people. Today, the grounds feature regular tours by guides dressed in traditional Red Army uniforms. Meeting rooms and living quarters are decorated with period pieces, including worn ink blotters and coarsely woven slippers, and the Ruijin Revolutionary Performance Troupe performs daily tributes to the Red Army base, often dancing and lip-synching for as small a crowd as one or two. "This is what we should do," comments one performer after his show. "It is our duty."

Several other sites in and around Ruijin are now part of the Red Tourism circuit. The Great Hall of the Provisional Central Government of the Soviet Republic of China, a woodland auditorium that seats up to 2,000, is shaped like a Red Army cap. The Monument to the Red Army Martyrs, a giant pockmarked bullet, stands at the centre

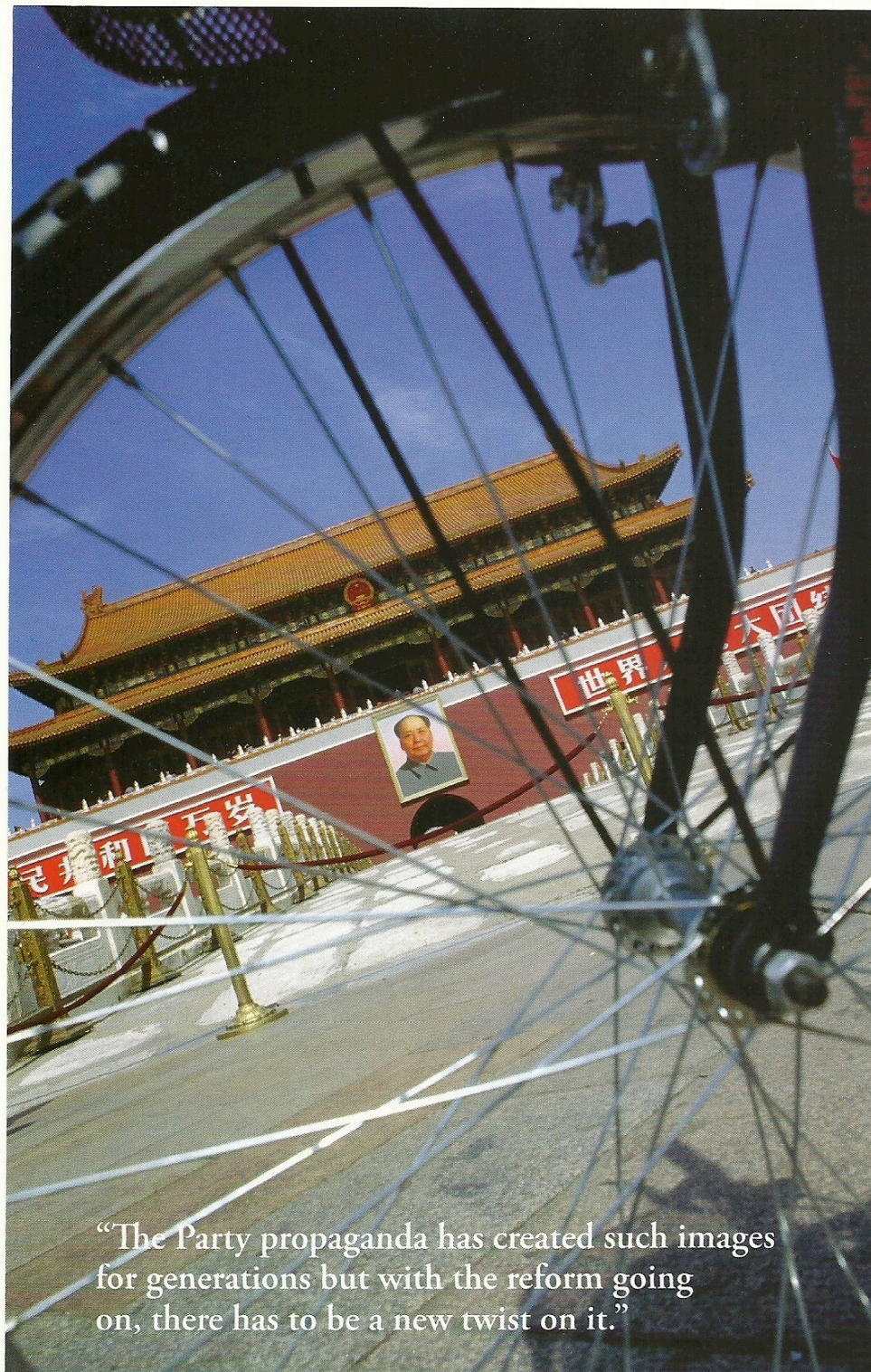
of the old Soviet grounds.

As the flagship site on the Red Tourism circuit, Ruijin today is bustling with restaurants, hotels, and souvenir shops that strive to capitalise on the red firmament. Yet all of this promotion of Communist Party lore threatens, some argue, to whitewash Chinese history. The region's history is far murkier than the casual visitor will be told. Locals were caught between duelling communist and nationalist forces, and many lost their lives in a time of political suspicion and uncertainty. Unsurprisingly, little of this is dealt with on the Red Tourism trail.

Sidney Wong, an assistant professor of city and regional planning at the University of Pennsylvania, feels the Chinese government is increasingly reliant on a strong sense of nationalism to bolster itself alongside the country's continued economic strength. "Red Tourism is based on several assumptions that there is a market demand for the nostalgic era, sustained by marketing efforts and some mystification of the revolution and individuals," Professor Wong comments. "The Party propaganda has created such images for generations but with the reform going on, there has to be a new twist on it."

Local Party officials at the designated Red





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Tourism sites are quick to confirm that they are eager to see tourist cash flow into their region. "Red Tourism was started in order to develop the economy of revolutionary base areas. This is the most important aspect for us here in Ruijin, where our economy has only just begun to develop," comments Xiao Yi, the Party Secretary of Ruijin.

For some, however, the promotion of China's revolutionary history is more about delving into private memories than traipsing around public grounds spending money. 83-year-old Zhou Guanggui was Chairman Mao's neighbour in Jinggangshan during the revolutionary days. "I saw Mao here several times and met him as he was working," Zhou recalled, watching through the slats of his fence as hundreds of tourists streamed towards the Chairman's residence. "He was kind, but very busy."

For foreign visitors, China's Red Tourism sites offer a wide range of attractions. Often set amid some of the country's most spectacular natural scenery, visits are easily coupled with mountain hikes and nature walks. The sites themselves, with their passionate rhetoric, are a clear glimpse of how historical memory works in China today.

Most Red Tourism sites are promoted as part of group packages, and tours can be arranged with English-speaking guides. Beijing Youth Travel Service caters to national and international visitors along China's Red Tourism trail and can arrange all manner of itineraries. "The most popular sites are the routes along the Long March," explains Zha Yanping, an agent at the travel service. Packages include accommodation, meals and entry fees and come to USD 150-200 for four to six days of red revelry.

And what would the Chairman have made of this capitalist take on China's sacred revolutionary sites? "Well, Mao didn't specifically say anything against Red Tourism, so I guess it should be allowed," jokes Ruijin Party Secretary Xiao.



THE WHEEL DEAL: (from top) Arguably the most iconic of Tian'anmen's many sights, the portrait of the Great Helmsman is a photo opportunity not to be missed for the thousands of tourists and devotees who visit daily; At 74 metres in height, the Huangguoshu Waterfall, in historic Guizhou, is one of the tallest in Asia

CAP IT OFF: (from top) A 15-kilometre path leads to the 2,200-metre summit of Huashan in Shaanxi province, the end point of the historic Long March; A young recruit in classic garb



RED HOT TOURISM TRAIL

The Red Tourism trail winds through the famously zigzag route of the Long March, a 12,500-kilometre journey from Jiangxi to Shaanxi taken by the Red Army between 1934 and 1935. Stops in and around Mao's Hunan hometown of Shaoshan have also become part of the route. Here are a few highlights:

- **Kick off** the tour in Jiangxi province on the unimaginatively-titled First Hill of the Long March, in the mountains west of Ruijin. Wear good hiking shoes to explore the curious natural network of stone caves in and around these hills.

- **Breathe deep** on Jinggangshan, where fresh air and green views are in abundance. Recall the words of historian Guo Moruo, who ambiguously quipped, "After visiting Jinggangshan, no mountain will be an attraction."

- **Check in** and check out the Ruijin Hotel, a posh, leafy resort outside the Jiangxi Soviet in Ruijin that is rumoured to be the favoured pitstop of President Hu Jintao when in town. (100 Dong Shen Jie, Ruijin; +86 (0)797 252 2001; USD 30-85 a night)

- **Walk along** the banks of the Chishui river in Guizhou province, a treacherous waterway the Red Army reportedly crossed four times during the Long March. Some still swear by swimming in the nippy waters to honour the old Reds and for good luck.

- **Tip back** a bottle of one of China's most famous pre-revolutionary spirits, Maotai. The flagship distillery is on the banks of the Chishui, facing a monument to the Red Army.

- **Meet up** in Zunyi, site of one of the most famous meetings of the Communist Party during the course of the Long March, where

Mao is said to have consolidated much of his political support. As with many established Red Tourism sites, photo-ready imitation army uniforms abound (see right).

- **Pop by** Mao's hometown of Shaoshan, Hunan province, and ask for Mama Tang (Tang Ruiren). This elderly woman claims to have rubbed neighbourly elbows with the Chairman and will gladly sell you a bowl of her Mao-licious porridge, a cornerstone dish of her thriving enterprise, the Mao Family Restaurant Corporation Limited.

- **Badger the masses** with a visit to the Shaoshan exhibit of 5,000 Mao badges, on display until 2010. Have a word with the curator, Wei Shengquan, who has taken the badges from his private collection of over 30,000.

- **Look beyond** the traditional Hunan dish of braised fatty pork, a Chairman special, and try the delicious Hunanese hot and spicy frog legs.

- **Go deep** into the Yan'an caves of Shaanxi province, the final stop of the Long March and a pre-Beijing communist base. Guides can be hired to tour the caves (both revolutionary and otherwise).

- **Top it all off** with a trip to Beijing's Tian'anmen Square, a recent addition to the circuit. Climb to the top of Tian'anmen gate and become a mini-Mao, staring out over your domain. 📷



essentials

GO WITH...

In Beijing, the Beijing Youth Travel Service specialises in Red Tourism packages. (Rm 1206, Panjiayuan Tower, 12 Panjiayuan Nanli, Chaoyang district; +86 (0)10 8778 9483; www.byts.com.cn/english)

Nationwide, contact discount travel service e-Long (www.elong.com).

PS...

See also www.crt.com.cn, a government-run site with comprehensive information on Red Tourism in both English and Chinese.