

Free China Review

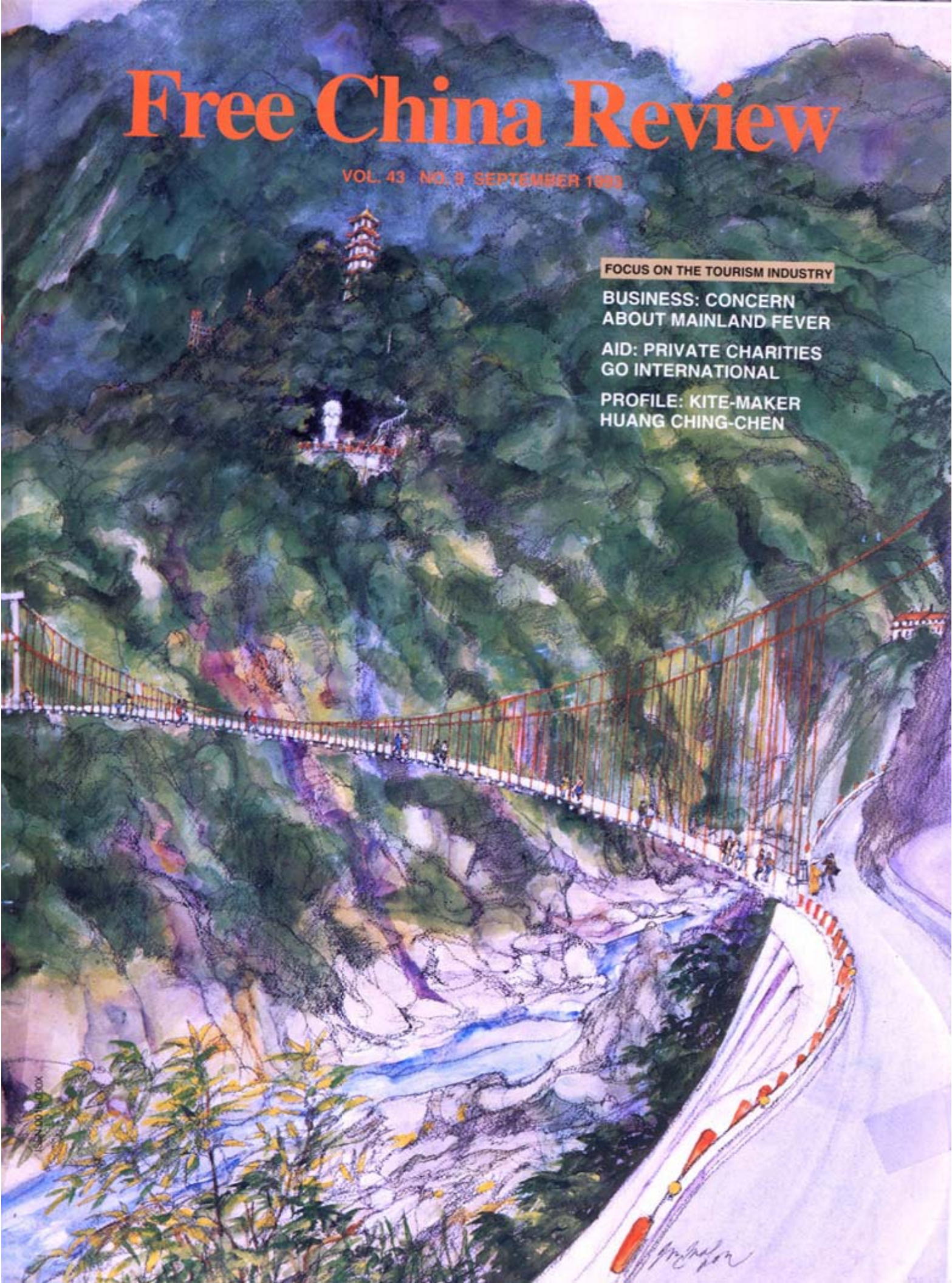
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FOCUS ON THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

**BUSINESS: CONCERN
ABOUT MAINLAND FEVER**

**AID: PRIVATE CHARITIES
GO INTERNATIONAL**

**PROFILE: KITE-MAKER
HUANG CHING-CHEN**



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Michael van

A Blind Spot on Tourism

One of the fastest growing industries in Asia is tourism. Between 1985 and 1990, the rate of increase was nearly double that of other regions in the world, according to a recent study released by the World Travel & Tourism Council and the American Express Foundation. The number of international visitors to the Asia-Pacific region over these years increased by about 68.5 percent—from approximately 31.4 million to nearly 53 million—and the prospects for the future are even brighter. Virtually every place in the region is tapping into the billions of tourist dollars being spent.

Over the past few years, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, mainland China, and South Korea have made tourism a high priority. The results are clear. Their visitor arrivals have increased, cultural preservation has received a shot in the arm, cities are cleaner, transportation is better, and service industries have enjoyed higher standards and profits. Moreover, there are spin offs. These include improved international images and greater success in attracting international conferences and athletic events.

In the midst of this rapid change, Taiwan is falling behind in building a strong tourism industry, both domestic and international. Why is this?

Many blame the government for not grasping the economic importance of tourism as well as its potential in strengthening the service industry, expanding educational and leisure activities, and helping to build Taiwan's international image. But the private sector is no less to blame. Hotel associations, tour operators, and temple managers, for example, have not compiled enviable records in providing tourist-friendly software compared with their counterparts abroad.

The lack of priority given to tourism development is surprising. Although many of the government's economic policy goals would seem naturally to include tourism, this dimension is generally omitted. Although the island's coastal and mountain scenery, arts scene, cuisine, and

cultural resources have great tourism potential, they are not well developed, packaged, or marketed.

Consider the economic dimension. Taiwan is becoming a postindustrial society in which service industries—including banking, insurance, transportation, and communications—make up the economic wave of the future. This change is reflected in the central government's economic stimulus package, drafted this summer by the Council for Economic Planning and Development, the executive branch's chief policymaking organization. According to the plan, the highest, long-term priorities are to make Taiwan an Asia-Pacific technological center, an international financial center, a regional operations center, and a transportation hub for the Western Pacific.

Over the past few years, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, mainland China, and South Korea have made tourism a high priority. Why not Taiwan?

But one of the best ways to convince international bankers and business people to base their operations—and their families—in Taipei instead of Singapore or Hong Kong is to offer a variety of cultural, leisure, and recreational activities. The connection with tourist industry development is obvious.

In addition, it is recognized that Taiwan's economic growth from agricultural backwater to major world trader has been achieved at the expense of the environment and the quality of life. As a result, the government's Six-Year National Development Plan is geared to rebuild the island's infrastructure to ensure a higher standard of living. Most of the plan's hardware, especially the transportation projects, have a potential impact on tourism. As yet, no priority has been assigned to the tourism dimension of these projects, but there are strong arguments for doing so.

The private sector should also change its thinking on the marketability of

the tourism industry. It could start by taking a look at traditional and modern Chinese culture. It has never been better. Civic cultural preservation groups are becoming more active and the dance, arts, and music scenes (Chinese and Western) are blossoming. So why aren't there more tourists? There are two problems: insufficient infrastructure and lack of marketing. But these could be overcome by Taiwan's famed entrepreneurs if they eliminated their blind spot on tourism and their pursuit of short-term returns on investment.

Look at software, the support services that are so essential to tourism. After all, cultural or historical attractions are not enough in themselves for today's travelers. What is needed? The place has to be known (advertising, informed tour agents, maps); it has to be reasonably convenient

to reach (mass transit, tour buses, parking); there must be support at the site (tour guides, multilingual information brochures, clean food and water, clean rest rooms), and there must be souvenirs (postcards, books, slides, CDs, videos, T-shirts, folk arts).

Even better, there should be some pleasant nearby walking destinations so visitors can get a feel for the place.

With this in mind, look at Lungshan Temple in the oldest part of Taipei city. Although it has for decades been one of the most popular stops for visitors, no services are available. The same is true for most potential visitor destinations. Although a variety of tourist sites and activities are available, they are not marketed or maintained. And the lack of information, ticketing, and tour assistance makes it unnecessarily difficult even for Chinese-speaking residents to arrange to see a Peking opera, take a temple tour, or visit a group of folk artists at work.

When both the government and the private sector realize—as those in Bangkok, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur already have—that big tourist dollars can be made with a tourist-friendly infrastructure and good marketing, then expect some rapid adjustments. It's time to check priorities. ■

The slow boat to China has become a jefoil, making the trip from Hong Kong in under four hours. The hovercraft moved into a seascape of small islands emerging from the mist, as in a Chinese or Japanese print. Often we came close enough to imagine ourselves swimming from those secluded beaches, perhaps taken there in one of the pagoda-like junks that are calligraphic brush strokes in the South China Sea. Soon we were in The Republic of China, mainland China's ancient port of Guangzhou, known to Westerners as Canton since the 17th Century.

Just a short airplane ride away, part of it within eyeshot of the mainland, is the Republic of China on Taiwan. Thus, three Chinas within hailing, and shooting, distance of one another, three separate Chinas side by side but functioning on very different levels economically, politically, and socially. The puzzlement is how they can be so geographically close, so ethnically Chinese, and yet each so unique.

Canton The Chu Chiang (Pearl) River bisects this most densely populated city in China. On the North Bank is the old city, dating back to the Ming dynasty and a newly emergent commercial district. Across the busy river smokestacks smudge the textile, cement, and rubber factories.

We were met at dockside by soldiers in green uniforms with red-starred caps and a representative of the China Travel Agency who asked us to call her "Chang". Our first stop was the Tai-Tai-Jie Happy, Happy Restaurant where we were served myriad dishes of steaming shrimp dumplings and baked buns filled with pork and other delectables. Cantonese dim-sum embraces over one thousand varieties, and gourmets rank it the best in China. Two Australian children in our party appeared bewildered by all the choices and expressed preference for the McDonald's hamburgers they eat back home. If things keep going the way they are they may get that change the next time they come to today's China.

"China to the People," reads the inscription atop the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall on the site of the



South China Jade cutting factory.

former presidential palace, high in the center of the park browned and dusty at the end of summer. Splendid but stolidly built of steel and reinforced concrete, the memorial to the great revolutionary is now used for large-scale conferences and performances. It was here in southern Guangzhou that Sun Yat-sen's Republican Revolution against the imperial dynasty took place at the beginning of this century.

Aloof but well informed, Chang brought us to a porcelain workshop, The South China Jade Carving Factory, the Five Rams Stone Sculpture, The Mausoleum of the Seventy-Two Martyrs and the Guangzhou Zoo, ending the day at the new and elaborately appointed China Hotel—one of three new hotels that have become the core of the ever-growing foreign business and diplomatic scene. Its luxurious amenities include an indoor gym, saunas, tennis courts, swimming pool, four cocktail lounges, and eighteen restaurants, all of this in a country where physical laborers make up ninety percent of the employable population, three-fourths of them farmers whose production is con-

trolled by the state. And adjacent to the China Hotel is the Guangzhou Friendship Store with goods priced to appeal only to visitors from overseas.

On our way to a collective farm we moved through a maze of bicycle traffic, the musical ting-tong almost a deafening as automobile horns. There are over one and a half-million bicycles in this city and our driver seemed to be brushing against each of them. "He is a good driver," Chang assures us as the bicycles weaving around us touched the sides of the bus.

We visited with a farm family walked out among the ducks and goats and chatted with a farmer bicycling a healthy sow to market. Late we walked through an open market where farmers can sell excess produce not due the state. And China has now formed fourteen special zones of industrial and commercial development in port cities such as Shanghai. These are modeled after Hong Kong, but more immediate model for the New China is probably Taiwan.

Taipei We had always called it "Formosa." Now the Republic of China on Taiwan is a haven for an industrious people who have made it into a thriving microcosm of Western society astride the trade routes between Japan, the Philippines, and Hong Kong since 607 AD, subjugated by the Mongolian conquerors, under Japanese occupation for fifty years this subtropical island is considered by many to be a mere province of China. However, the country is defended by a people vehement about its independence and with a deep distrust of the government on their mainland. Despite these quakes of history it is still "Ihla Formosa" (Beautiful Island) as the Portuguese found it to be.

The Chinese on Taiwan have been economically successful with their industries, but they are now concentrating on reviving their traditional culture. "We have been working all these years to become 'economic animals' and now we strive to become 'cultural animals,'" says Raymond Tai, director of the government information office.

One rallying point for Chinese culture is The National Palace Museum in the center of Taiwan's capital, Tai-

pei. When Mao Zedong's army swept down from the north, Chiang-Kai-shek and his followers fled to Taiwan, taking with them a priceless collection of Chinese treasures. Six hundred thousand precious art objects are stored in the museum's security vaults tunneled into the mountainside behind the museum. These true crown jewels of China are the prime pieces collected by twenty-nine consecutive emperors of the Ming and Ching dynasties who occupied Peking's Forbidden City for over 500 years.

The opening of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum made Taiwan a leader in contemporary Chinese art. Built around a central court it is in the grand tradition of Chinese architec-

ture, with stacked square exhibition halls that capture light through great glass windows. Across from it reigns the Grand Hotel, a duplicate of an elegant Chinese palace, constructed under the supervision of Madame Chiang-Kai-shek. Said to have the world's largest classical Chinese roof, impossible without modern technology.

Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall stages traditional Chinese Opera on the weekends, and the Armed Forces Cultural Activities Center has excellent shows nightly. Soon opera fans will be able to attend performances at the new Opera House being built adjacent to the impressive Chiang Kai-shek Memorial. There is also a new

Music Hall, making this park a cultural center for the performing arts.

Hong Kong Hong Kong is an exemplary blending of East and West, a prosperous and consistently frantic neon-lighted enclave attached to the mainland, with a thriving economic freedom and a tenuous political one. The British and Chinese have agreed to a 50 year interim; after its occupation by treaty in the year 1997 this present Crown Colony will continue as a showcase capitalist territory within the Chinese hegemony.

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Hong Kong's frenetic free enterprise coexists with uncertainty over the immediate future.



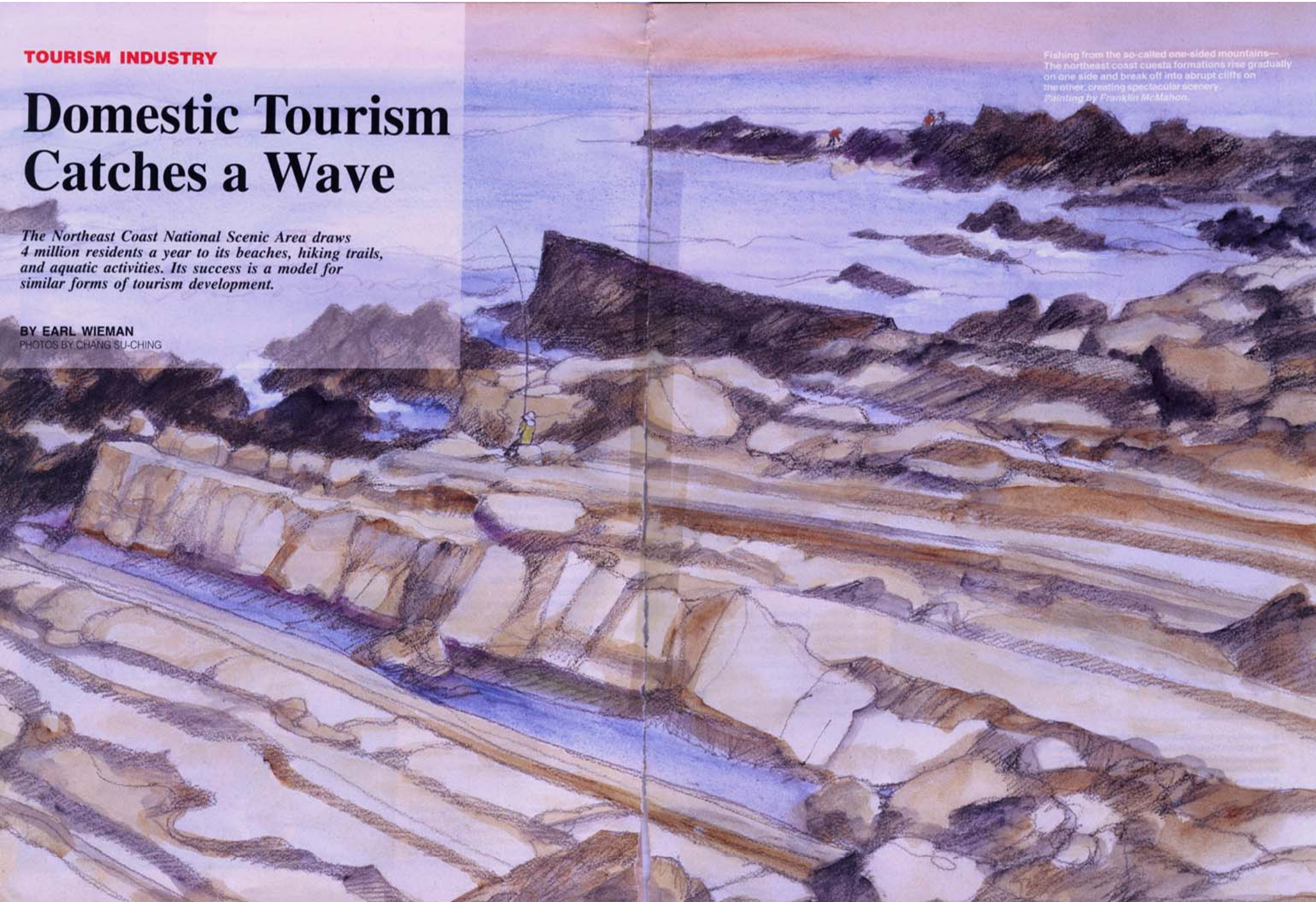
TOURISM INDUSTRY

Domestic Tourism Catches a Wave

The Northeast Coast National Scenic Area draws 4 million residents a year to its beaches, hiking trails, and aquatic activities. Its success is a model for similar forms of tourism development.

BY EARL WIEMAN
PHOTOS BY CHANG SU-CHING

Fishing from the so-called one-sided mountains—The northeast coast cuestas formations rise gradually on one side and break off into abrupt cliffs on the other, creating spectacular scenery. *Painting by Franklin McMahon.*



TOURISM INDUSTRY

Strong Culture but Weak Marketing

Taiwan's cultural and historical sites have strong potential for tourism development. But the island has a long way to go before it can catch up with the standards set by its regional competitors.

BY WINNIE CHANG
PHOTOS BY CHANG SU-CHING

The Kuantai Temple, built between 1660 and 1680 in the southern city of Tainan, receives its most recent face lift. The city has more than two thousand temples and early buildings, many of them designated first-rank historical sites.
Painting by Franklin McMahon.





Canton's million-and-a-half bicycles represent China's basic but emerging economy.

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It never seems to stop. Business is the business of this place and it proceeds with the greatest of intensity in the island city, Hong Kong, for which the territory is named; across Victoria Harbor in bustling Kowloon; in the New Territories which extend a hand from the tip of the peninsula toward the Peoples Republic; and in 235 islands, all of these composing the territory called Hong Kong.

Modern Hong Kong began in the 1950s when thousands of refugees from the mainland sought stability in the British Colony. In the following decades both the English and the Chi-

nese seized the opportunity to serve as exporters and manufacturers of goods for the world market, creating the capitalist nerve center of the Orient.

The largest shopping center in all Asia is here. Ocean Centre, Ocean Terminal, and Harbour City are linked; and they are located just a few minutes walk from the Star Ferry. The smart shops in this vast complex showcase designs by Lanvin, Saint Laurent, and Gucci. Christian Dior items made in China are surprise finds in the China Department store. Department stores pepper the area but most shops are small family enterprises dealing in cameras, hi-fi equipment, rugs, clothing, jewelry, and crafts; and further north on Na-

than Road is the incomparable Jade Market.

Three-square-mile Kowloon, including Tsimshatsui, is a major shopping mecca, a big supermarket, a shopper's paradise. There is no sales tax. Most imports are duty-free and there is a keen competition that keeps prices lower.

At ten cents a ride, the Star Ferry between Kowloon and Hong Kong Island is the best, most picturesque, travel value on earth. The city's variety and energy flow all around as colorful junks, sampans, freighters, warships, and cruise liners hustle by against a horizon filled with stalagmitic skyscrapers. This is the third largest container harbor in the world after Rotterdam and New York.

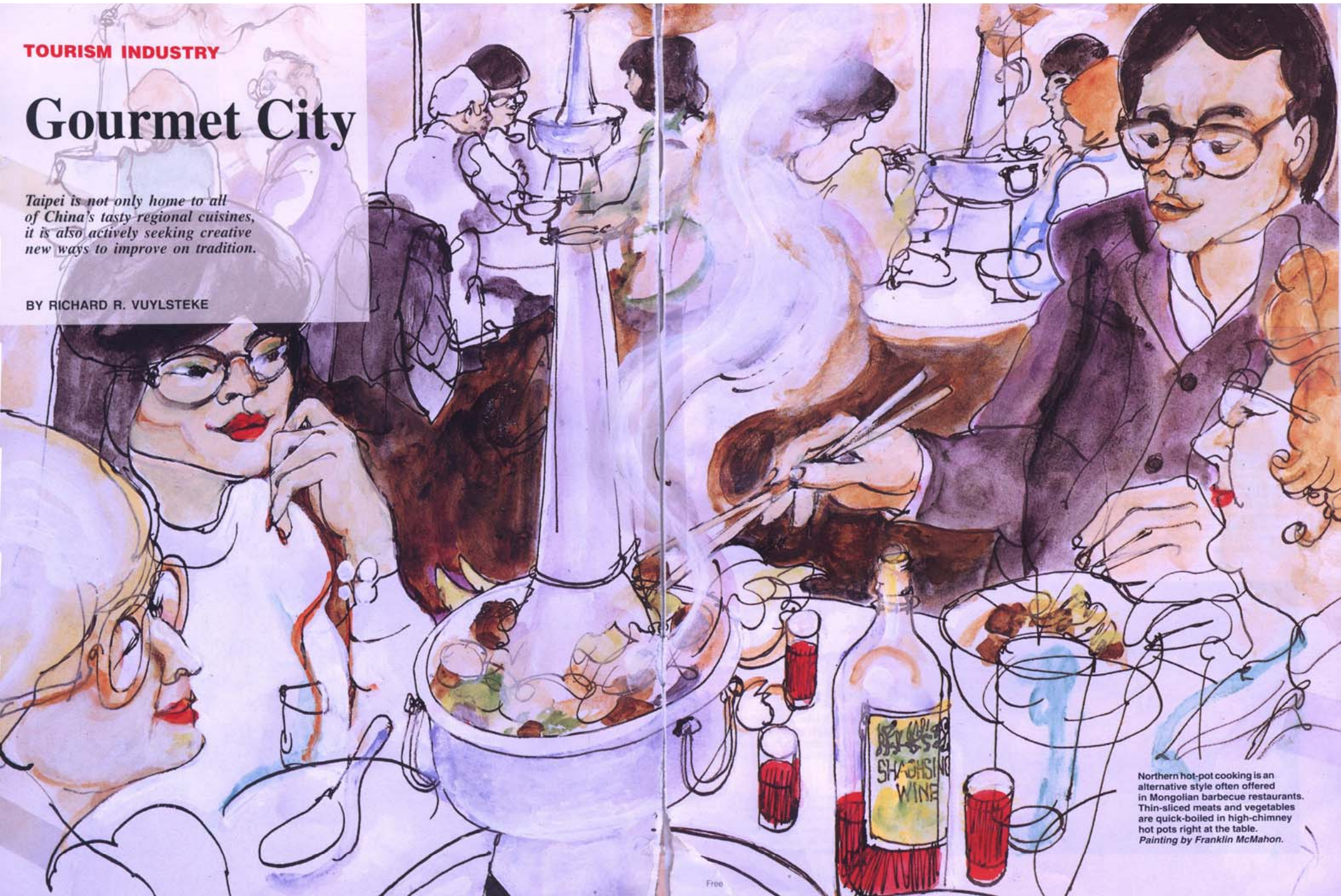
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TOURISM INDUSTRY

Gourmet City

Taipei is not only home to all of China's tasty regional cuisines, it is also actively seeking creative new ways to improve on tradition.

BY RICHARD R. VUYLSTEKE



Northern hot-pot cooking is an alternative style often offered in Mongolian barbecue restaurants. Thin-sliced meats and vegetables are quick-boiled in high-chimney hot pots right at the table. Painting by Franklin McMahon.

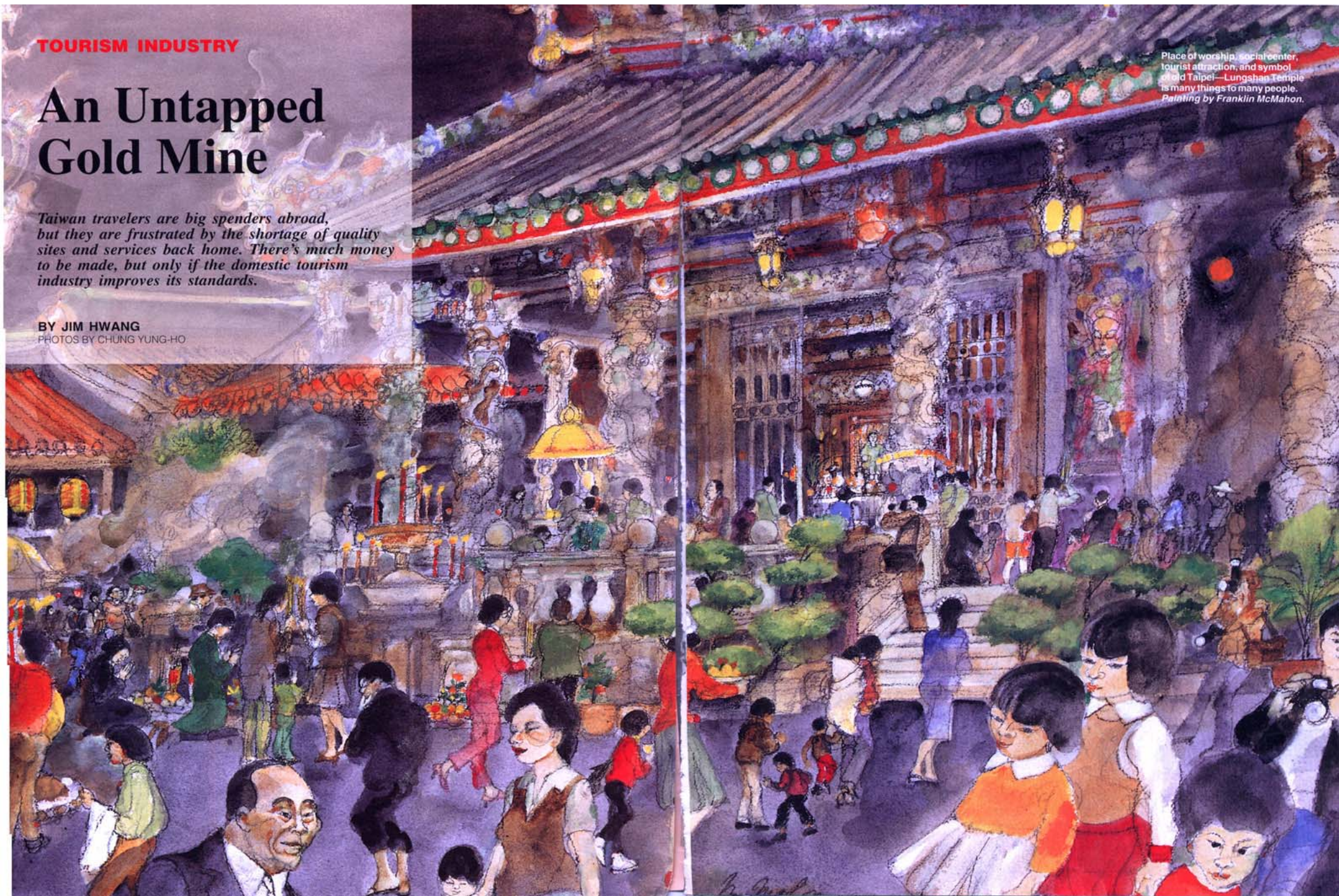
TOURISM INDUSTRY

An Untapped Gold Mine

Taiwan travelers are big spenders abroad, but they are frustrated by the shortage of quality sites and services back home. There's much money to be made, but only if the domestic tourism industry improves its standards.

BY JIM HWANG
PHOTOS BY CHUNG YUNG-HO

Place of worship, social center, tourist attraction, and symbol of old Taipei—Lungshan Temple is many things to many people.
Painting by Franklin McMahon.



by Irene McMahon
paintings by Franklin McMahon

Taipei Fine Arts Museum
faces Grand Hotel.

THE THREE CHINAS

