NEWS ANALYSIS

Smoking among Chinese youth: a cure for crying?

A cure for crying? Anecdotal reports from Fujian, Jiangsu and Shangdong Provinces tell of babies and toddlers being given puffs on lighted cigarettes to stop them from crying. Kung Mingming, a four-year-old, became so rapidly addicted that he constantly pestered his parents for cigarettes. When his father decided that the toddler should quit, Mingming had such difficulty while living in a household of smokers, that he had to be sent to live with relatives.

The China Daily, China's official English-language newspaper, recently reported a group of pre-teenagers nervously smoking Western cigarettes at a street corner in Beijing, lighting them with a gas lighter. When asked how they could afford the expensive foreign brands, the children's leader defiantly shouted: "It's none of your business. I bought them and didn't steal them. Smoking is not exclusive to adults." Their bravado quickly collapsed when they were told they would be sent back to school.

The "open policy" and the new affluence in China clearly have some drawbacks. The young are rapidly developing a taste for Western consumer goods, in particular, costly foreign cigarettes, which they perceive gives them a sophisticated image. It was because of the increase in smoking among children and young people in China, that "Youth and Tobacco" was chosen as the theme for the Third National Symposium on Smoking and Health, held on 25-28 October 1992 in Beijing. The Chinese Minister of Public Health, Dr Chen Min Zhang, gave a stirring speech on the need to protect China's young, reiterating the prediction of Professor Richard Peto, that 50 million of all the children alive today in China will die prematurely from smoking if current smoking patterns continue.

The conference was sponsored by the Chinese Association on Smoking and Health, the International Union Against Cancer (UICC), and the University of Oxford, ICRF Cancer Unit. The World Health Organisation and UNICEF were represented, a landmark in that it was the first time that UNICEF had attended a national conference on smoking anywhere in the world.

One hundred and forty delegates from all over China attended, some from the major cities and others from remote, rural provinces. The 40 papers were equally diverse, examining smoking and attitudes towards smoking among children and university students from 17 different provinces. Paper after paper (including a report on a multicentre study of 30,000 middle school and university students by Professor Niu Shiru et al) showed more similarities than differences in smoking behaviour from children in the West.

Overall, smoking prevalence among Chinese youth is increasing rapidly. Recent studies in junior middle schools show overall increases of 3% each year. In general, fewer girls than boys smoke, but smoking among girls is also increasing, and in some places is extremely high, for example, in Heilongjiang and Wuhan. Smoking among some groups is distressingly high, such as the Yi minority people in Yunnan, where 69% of boys and 17% of girls smoke.

Most future smokers start experimenting with smoking before they are 12 years old, moving to become daily smokers by their late teens or early twenties. Early school leavers smoke more than those who continue their education. Fewer urban than rural children smoke.

The reasons why children and young people smoke in China are more or less the same as in Western countries: they are influenced by smoking among their parents, siblings, friends, and teachers; they are curious; they want "something to do to relieve boredom"; and they wish to appear grown-up.

Chinese children are also the victims of passive smoking. Papers showed that parents' smoking has serious effects on their children, causing more respiratory infections and even an effect upon their children's growth in height.

Action taken
Action has been taken. The 1992 Tobacco Monopoly Law may be expected to have substantial effects on children: the law bans tobacco advertising for television, radio, newspapers and magazines; health edu-
cation is mandated for young people; students in high schools and elementary schools are prohibited from smoking; smoking is banned in many public places; and health warnings are now printed on cigarette packs in China. Delegates felt, however, that to really protect children, the law should go much further, for example, by banning all tobacco advertising and promotion.

A plan has begun for health education to take place in every year of school, mainly focussing on information on the harmfulness of smoking. Studies show the benefits of localised campaigns, but it is difficult to assess the amount and type of teaching about smoking occurring throughout the whole of China. One paper showed that 35% of school students thought smoking was good for health, so there is still work to be done.

The National Health Education Institute is half-way through a Rural Farmers’ Quitting Project in remote areas of six provinces. This project, through the schools, mobilises children to encourage their parents to quit. Competitions are being held for smoke-free households, and even smoke-free villages. In 1991, a promotional tour of the project villages in Shaxi Province was organised, accompanied by a bus-load of the national press corps, swelling the number to over 200. Children lined the routes with garlands as the cavalcade arrived by a wide variety of transport—jeep, bus and “iron rooster” (railway train). Little girls dressed in red (the Chinese lucky colour) performed dances, sang anti-smoking songs, and front teeth missing, recited how they had helped their “daddy” stop smoking. Some fathers, more reluctantly, testified how they had stopped as a result of their children’s admonitions.

**Recommendations**

The meeting yielded several important conclusions and recommendations. First, as children are starting to smoke at such a young age, health education on smoking needs to concentrate on kindergarten and primary school students. Also, giving children information on smoking is not enough to prevent their starting to smoke. For example, children need to be taught how to say “no” to friends who offer them a cigarette, and they need to learn to distinguish between good and bad, and learn, for example, the “truth” of tobacco advertisements.

Most importantly, great emphasis was placed on the importance of not neglecting girls. Although girls still smoke much less than boys in China, there are alarming signs that this is beginning to change. Western countries have shown that health educators neglect girls at their peril. In fact, the greatest single opportunity for prevention of non-communicable diseases in the world would be to prevent a rise in smoking among girls and women in China.

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**Canada leaving other countries out in the cold**

On 15 January 1993, a Quebec appeals court ruled that the Canadian government has the right to ban tobacco advertising. The long awaited decision overturns a lower court ruling that said Canada’s anti-smoking policy violated freedom of speech.

The 1988 Tobacco Products Control Act, the law responsible for the tobacco advertising ban which became effective on 1 January 1989, had been challenged immediately by cigarette manufacturers on the basis that it breached Canada’s Charter of Rights, which guarantees free speech. Not only did Quebec Superior Court Justice Jean-Jude In 1991 that Canada’s tobacco advertising ban is unconstitutional because it infringes on the jurisdiction of Canada’s provinces, but he also rejected the government’s arguments that banning tobacco advertising reduces consumption. Chabot chose instead to accept the arguments of the tobacco industry that advertising is aimed at getting persons who smoke to switch brands and that the recent decline in the number of Canadians who smoke is the result of higher taxes. “There isn’t any proof that advertising itself is a danger to the public,” the judge wrote. “As Aristotle said, the word ‘dog’ never bit anyone.”

The Canadian government appealed against Justice Chabot’s decision, and to the delight of many health organisations in Canada, the most recent ruling by Appeal Court Judge Louis LeBel was in favour of the government ban. The Quebec Court of Appeal said there was sufficient evidence about the health dangers associated with tobacco, as well as the link between advertising and consumption, for reasonable legislators to have been justified in passing a law restricting tobacco advertising.

This decision allows the next phase of the Tobacco Products Control Act to be implemented, which requires store owners to remove all cigarette advertisements from their premises and even change a store’s name if it happens to include a cigarette brand name. Following the ruling, the tobacco industry instructed cigarette retailers to remove their cigarette signs and clocks.

“This ruling gives the government a green light to fulfill its promise of introducing stricter health warnings on cigarette packages,” Canadian Non-smokers’ Rights Association (NSRA) legal counsel David Sweeney told Tobacco Control. “The ruling undermines the arguments used by the tobacco industry around the world. Upholding the law on a constitutional basis will help the UK and the US. The tobacco industry has been using their successful challenge to the Canadian law in the first round of appeals as a tool for preventing an advertising ban in Europe. That strategy has just been stripped away.”

The tobacco industry is planning its last challenge to the law in the Supreme Court. According to an editorial in The Globe and Mail, the Toronto-based national newspaper, “[For the Supreme Court to uphold the ban by ruling] the right way would beading in effect the parliament and not courts are best positioned to determine matters of public policy such as those raised in tobacco advertising.”

Despite the on-going appeals process, the ban on tobacco advertising has been in effect since 1 January 1989. Loopholes in the law, however, do exist. For example, the law allows for sporting events to be sponsored under corporate names. As a result, cigarette manufacturers continue to sponsor sports and cultural events by creating new companies named after cigarette brands (e.g., the du Maurier Ltd. Atlantic Jazz Festival).

Sweeney feels that the loopholes will eventually be closed through further government action. “Due to the restrictions imposed by the government, the tobacco industry is becoming progressively less efficient in its advertising and promotion,” Sweeney said. “At some point the government is not going to allow tobacco companies to play any more
In September 1992, with the aim of reducing teenagers’ access to tobacco, the council, newly renamed Smoke-Free Nova Scotia, launched a paid advertising campaign on billboards and in newspapers and circulars. Unlike the innocuous public service advertisements by most health organisations and agencies in the US and elsewhere, the blunt Nova Scotia ad, reminiscent of the brilliant broadsides of the Canadian Nonsmokers’ Rights Association in the early 1980s, implies that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) have been dragging their feet. “Your child can buy cigarettes easily,” the headline reads. “Ask your MLA why.” Eight health organisations co-signed the advertisement. It is unlikely that the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia, the Medical Society of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Dental Association, and the Lung Association had ever been a party to such bold language, much less in the form of a paid advertisement.

In a twist on conventional exposés of the ease and frequency with which children are able to purchase cigarettes, Taylor’s group conducted a survey of 196 retailers which found that 62% supported heavier penalties for selling tobacco to minors and that 57% supported revising the legal age for buying tobacco products to 19 years. Moreover, the survey found that 68% of store owners felt that the creation of a provincial license to sell tobacco would have no impact on business. The release of the survey’s results led the largest circulation Nova Scotia newspaper to publish an editorial noting that, while actions against tobacco smuggling rings were intensifying, no similar effort has been made to curtail illegal sales of cigarettes to children. “Nova Scotians will be forgiven for concluding that the government of Canada seems more concerned with its own tax revenues than with the public health,” wrote the Chronicle-Herald and Mail-Star. “The truly cynical might further conclude that authorities have turned a blind eye to legal violations when doing so means a higher tax grab.”

Taylor himself was the subject of another of the newspaper’s biting editorials after the Canadian Navy turned down press requests for a follow-up interview with Taylor, who had called on his superiors in the Navy to end the practice of promoting duty-free cigarettes to sailors. “He [Taylor] should be thanked, not silenced,” the paper wrote on 17 December 1992. “Certainly, he’s the only sailor in sight who isn’t blowing smoke on this issue.” Whereas the average Canadian pays $6 to $7 for a pack of cigarettes, Canadian Armed Forces personnel can purchase them for $1.50 a pack.

Taylor brought this disparity to the attention of the press following the leak of coverage in the mass media of a preliminary report concerning the prevalence of smoking within the Canadian Navy. The Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ) (15 December 1992) and various newspapers broke the story on the report, publication of which had been delayed by the Navy since its completion seven months earlier. The report found that smoking in the Navy has actually increased since 1987, and that more than twice as many sailors aged 17 to 19 smoke (53%) as do civilians. Overall, 45% of naval personnel smoke compared to 30% of civilians. Commenting to CMAJ reporter Patrick Sullivan on the findings among the non-commissioned ranks, Taylor said, “I’m not aware of any other Canadian occupational group in which smoking is that prevalent.” Although 49% of the more than 1000 Navy members surveyed favoured a smoke-free workplace, 21% disagreed, and 30% didn’t care. The fact that more than half of those surveyed either didn’t care or didn’t want change doubletalks help explain the Navy’s slow pace in creating a more healthy environment. Indeed, the Navy’s Chief of Staff for personnel and training, Commodore Jim King, not only disavowed interest in changing the smoking behaviour of sailors but also questioned the wisdom of doing so. “...We worry about these things at our peril,” King told The Halifax Daily News. “It also affects the morale of our people – it’s just as important as their health after all...”

Taylor found that Player’s strategy of using sport sponsorship as a way to introduce children to smoking seems to be working well among Nova Scotia’s youth. Included in a survey of teenagers’ impressions of advertising was a photograph of a billboard advertising Player’s Ltd. Racing. Fifty-nine per cent of the 51 adolescents surveyed recognised the billboard as an advertisement for Player’s...
cigarettes. Across Canada Player’s has a market share of 13%, but among
113 teenagers surveyed by Smoke-Free Nova Scotia, 20% of 11- to
13-year-olds and 33% of 14- and 15-year-olds said they prefer Player’s.

Similarly when shown a billboard ostensibly advertising an equestrian
competition held annually in Halifax (“The du Maurier Challenge”), most
(61%) of the adolescents surveyed saw it as an advertisement for du
Maurier cigarettes, the second most popular brand smoked by teenagers.

The group is working to ban all tobacco industry sponsorship of sport-
events and thus close the loophole in the Tobacco Products Control Act
prohibiting the advertising of cigarette brands. — AB, ES

Vive la France!

In July 1992 a court in Quimper, France ruled that the televised images of
cigarette advertisements at Formula One Grand Prix auto races are
illegal. In the wake of that decision, the Federation Internationale du
Sport Auto (FISA), the world-wide sanctioning organisation for Formula
One racing, recently cancelled the 1993 French Grand Prix, one of 16
annual FISA races. Prior to the ruling, the French Comité National
Contre le Tabagisme (CNCT) had been pressuring the courts to enforce
a 1976 French law which banned the advertising and promotion of tobacco
products on French television.

The court ruled that the 1993 French Grand Prix would not be
permitted to appear on French television, even if the race is not on
French soil. The Williams-Renault Formula One team, which is spon-
sored by RJ Reynolds’ Camel cigarettes, was the main focus of the
ruling. The court also demanded that the British-based Williams team pay a
fine the equivalent of US$5.6 million, while the French engine manufacturer
Renault was fined US$765,000 for displaying the Camel logo at the
Japanese Grand Prix and Australian Grand Prix. The court also warned
TF1, the French television channel which holds the exclusive right to the
coverage of the French Grand Prix, that the television company would be
fined $2000 for each televised image of a tobacco brand logo.

Sponsorship of motor racing has become one of the major promotional
activities of the tobacco industry throughout the world. Since the bann-
ing of cigarette advertising on tele-
vision in the US in 1971, television has greatly enhanced the visibility of
motor sports and its sponsors, whose logos appear on the cars, the drivers,
the pit crews, and signs around the tracks. A driver can sell advertising
space on his chest, back, shoulders, and helmet, and the higher the logo is
on his clothing, the higher the price.

The extent of tobacco brand-name exposure during a single auto race was
the focus of an article by Blum in the 28 March 1991 issue of the New
England Journal of Medicine. He reported that 5939 verbal and visual
mentions of a single cigarette brand (Marlboro) were found in the 90-
minute telecast of the Marlboro Grand Prix auto race. Using a more
charitable monitoring technique, staff members of the French CNCT ex-
amined the television coverage of the Monaco Grand Prix of 31 May 1992,
and found 1134 appearances of known tobacco brands.

Most developed countries have en-
acted laws prohibiting tobacco ad-
vertising and promotion on television
and other electronic media. As a
result, tobacco companies have since
shifted much of their advertising bud-
gets into sport sponsorship, in order
to maintain tobacco brand-name
exposure on television, thus circumvent-
ing existing laws. The ruling by the
French courts set a precedent for
applying existing broadcast advertis-
ing bans to cover televised tobacco-
sponsored sporting events.

According to Brian Harvey and Bill
Oursler, two motor sport journalists
in the US, one result of the recent
French ruling may be to bring more
auto racing teams to the US, where
enforcement of the ban on televised
tobacco advertising has been nil. The
international circuit of Formula One
racing is most like US Indy-Car
racing, which is already receiving
increased international exposure due
to the switch of currentFormula One
world champion driver Nigel Mansell
to Indy-cars.

At issue is the question of develop-
ing nations in Asia, Africa, and Cen-
tral America, whose citizens make up
the bulk of the millions of viewers of
Formula One over satellite TV, and
are a prime target for tobacco industry
expansion. Should Formula One no
longer be able to carry cigarette ad-
vertising via television to the Third
World because of political and govern-
ment pressures in Europe, such
tobacco-dominated racing will go else-
where, most likely to the US.

The reason that action in the US
will prove to be so important is the
fact that the television market is
increasingly global. Even in countries
where tobacco-sponsored sport is be-
ing phased out, such as New Zealand
and Australia, cable and satellite tele-
vision broadcasts originating from the
US allow young viewers to watch such
events as the Camel Mud and
Monster Show (Camel-cigarette-
sponsored truck racing) and the PPG
Indy-Car Series, which has teams and
total races sponsored by Philip
Morris/ Marlboro.

The US Public Health Cigarette
Smoking Act of 1969, which prohibits
the promotion of cigarette brands on
US television, has never been applied
to televised cigarette-sponsored
sports events, despite repeated peti-
tions to the US Attorney General by
Doctors Ought to Care (DOC) and
Action on Smoking and Health (ASH).
Were the law to be applied to the
race mentioned in Blum’s study
(the Marlboro Grand Prix), with fines
of $10000 per violation, the National
Broadcasting Company, which tele-
vised the race, would be fined US$9
million! Under those circumstances
neither media corporations nor cigare-
tte makers could afford to continue
televising tobacco-sponsored sporting
events.

A ruling such as that described in
France will probably not happen soon
in the US, according to Nat Walker,
the senior director for the Winston
Cup, a series of 29 stock car races in the
US sponsored by RJ Reynolds’
Winston cigarettes. In an interview
with Selena Roberts, a motor sports
journalist writing for the Orlando
Sentinel, Walker said, “Cigarette ads
have been governed [in the United
States] since 1969. It’s a law we
don’t break. We sponsor the sport.
We aren't advertising; the Justice
Department agrees.” In contrast to Walker’s viewpoint, Ledwith found that children are able to associate tobacco brand names with the sports they sponsor (Health Educ 1984; 43: 85–8).

Spitting (smokeless) tobacco advertising and promotion in the US are not included under the same law as cigarettes, however. The Comprehensive Smokeless Tobacco Health Education Act of 1986 prohibits the advertising and promotion of spitting tobacco brands on television. In October 1991, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the government agency responsible for enforcing the law, ruled that Red Man spitting tobacco (manufactured by the Swedish-based Pinkerton Tobacco Company) violated the law by sponsoring the Red Man All American Pulling Series, a series of televised races where tractors pull large sleds with heavy weights, as the Red Man brand-name was shown during cable telescasts. The FTC ruled that the signs which display the spitting tobacco brand-name must be removed from the view of television cameras. The offending signs were initially relocated, but have recently returned to the perimeter of stadiums and are thus back on television.

The possibility of increased government action to enforce existing laws in the US regarding tobacco-sponsored auto racing on television is being counteracted by a grass-roots lobbying effect undertaken by the auto racing industry at the encouragement of tobacco company sponsors. In a letter to members of the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA), the sanctioning organisation for Winston cigarette-sponsored drag racing in the US, RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company asked for the “continued support” of NHRA members for the Winston cigarette brand and its involvement in drag racing. NHRA generated 40 000 postcards to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) when former DHHS Secretary Louis Sullivan called for an end to tobacco-sponsored sports.

Anti-smoking organisations in some countries are approaching the tobacco sponsorship issue without relying solely on policy or further legislative actions, but rather through counter-messages as part of anti-tobacco sport sponsorship efforts. Such efforts, although limited at best, are popping up in certain racing circles. In Australia, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation sponsors several professional and amateur sports teams and associations, including sprint car racing. According to one individual associated with the sponsorship programme, the sprint-car team, featuring the Foundation’s Quit logo, is less than popular with fans at sprint-car races.

The Tobacco Free America Indy-Car, which made its first appearance at the 1992 running of the Indianapolis 500 (the largest single-day sport event in the US, attended by more than 300 000 fans at more than 150 countries), will compete against two Marlboro-sponsored teams in several races in the US during the 1993 Indy-Car Series. The team was supported primarily by the Head and Neck Cancer Rehabilitation Foundation in Indianapolis, Indiana, with additional assistance from the America Medical Association and DOC. – ES, AB

Stop press: The French senate has voted to permit the French Grand Prix to take place as originally scheduled. More to follow in the next issue.

Back to the future – with electrically powered cigarettes

In 1988 RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company (RJR) test-marketing a product called Premier – dubbed “the smokeless cigarette” by the media – in several cities in the United States (US). The device was a high-tech nicotine-delivery system, with a carbon fuel element at the tip and a bed-filled aluminium chamber containing nicotine, flavourings, and a humectant. The aluminium chamber was surrounded by shredded paper made from tobacco leaf. With the fuel element ignited, inhalation would produce a heated air stream which would nebulise the contents of the aluminium chamber. The user would receive a smoke-like aerosol containing nicotine, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and other ingredients (J Slade, Proceedings of the Seventh World Conference on Tobacco and Health 1990: 877–9).

In its public statements and advertisements, RJR claimed that Premier would produce less sidestream smoke, and fewer “controversial compounds” in mainstream smoke, compared to conventional cigarettes. The American Medical Association and the Coalition on Smoking OR Health petitioned the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate the product as a drug or medical device. If the FDA had exerted jurisdiction, it probably would have been forced to ban Premier, but the petitions languished for months at the FDA, until RJR pulled Premier from its test markets in February 1989 because of poor sales. Seven weeks before the death of Premier, its image was further tainted by publication of a study showing that Premier could be easily modified to
allow the surreptitious delivery of "crack" cocaine (EJ Cone, JE Henningfield, JAMA 1989; 261: 41).

RJR promised to go back to its research laboratories to try to improve the product. In August 1990, RJR obtained US patent #4,947,874 for "smoking articles utilizing electrical energy." Not to be outdone, Philip Morris (PM) obtained its own patent (#5,144,962) in September 1992 for a "non-combustion flavor-generating article (which) uses electrical energy to power a heating element which heats tobacco or other flavorants". The radical design of these products makes Premier look like the horse-drawn cart of the tobacco industry.

PM's patent documents explain that "smoking articles utilizing electrical power for heating...may have certain advantages over conventional smoking articles. For example, electrically-heated smoking articles produce the taste and sensation of smoking without burning of tobacco...(and) do not produce a visible aerosol between puffs".

One of the specific aims of the PM invention is "to provide an electrically-heated article which reduces or eliminates certain byproducts of burning". Philip Morris, no doubt, would have us believe that that goal has nothing to do with concerns about the possible health effects of those by-products.

The PM patent documents contain 19 schematic diagrams depicting the structure, control circuits, power consumption, and temperature characteristics of the "article", as well as the structure of "appliance-type devices for supplying electrical energy" to the article. One of these diagrams, and accompanying narrative from the patent documents, are reproduced here, to allow readers of Tobacco Control to appreciate the ingenuity of the inventors.

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