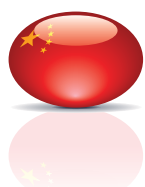


The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project



# ITC China Summary

FEBRUARY 2009



Promoting Evidence-Based Strategies to Fight the Global Tobacco Epidemic



# ITC CHINA SURVEY: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This summary presents key findings from Waves 1 and 2 of the ITC China Survey—a face-to-face survey of a cohort of 4,800 adult smokers and 1,200 adult non-smokers in six cities in Mainland China: Beijing, Changsha, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Yinchuan. As a party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) (signed in 2003 and ratified in 2005), China has committed to preventing and reducing tobacco consumption through various policy measures. The summary highlights attitudes and behaviours of smokers and non-smokers to assist policymakers in implementing effective tobacco control policies in Mainland China. Detailed results of the ITC China Surveys are available in the ITC China National Report at [www.itcproject.org](http://www.itcproject.org).

## ITC China Survey

**Survey Mode:** Face-to-face interviews

**Survey Sample:** 4,800 adult smokers and 1,200 adult non-smokers from 6 cities in Mainland China

**Wave 1 Survey Dates:** April to August 2006

**Wave 2 Survey Dates:** October 2007 to January 2008

**Objective:** To create a system for comprehensive surveillance and evaluation of tobacco control initiatives as they are implemented in China in accordance with its obligations under the FCTC.

## What is the ITC Project?

The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (the ITC Project) is the first-ever international cohort study of tobacco use. It is designed to evaluate the impact of policies implemented under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Each ITC Survey follows standardized protocols and includes rigorous measures to assess the impact and identify the determinants of effective tobacco control policies in the following areas:

- health warning labels and package descriptors
- smoke-free legislation
- pricing and taxation of tobacco products
- education and support for cessation
- tobacco advertising and promotion

ITC Survey findings will provide an evidence base to guide policies enacted under the FCTC, and to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of these legislative efforts.

## China is home to one-third of the world's smokers

China has the largest smoking population in the world. With more than 300 million smokers<sup>1</sup>, China accounts for one-third of the world's smokers and is the world's largest tobacco producer. Almost one million Chinese smokers die from smoking-related diseases each year, a number that is forecasted to triple in the next 50 years. In addition, more than 100,000 people in China died in 2002 from illnesses caused by secondhand smoke.<sup>2</sup>

China has a smoking culture that imposes strong social pressure on men to smoke. It is also expected that female smoking will become more socially acceptable as the tobacco industry has begun to target female smokers. The ITC Survey found that China has among the lowest rates of social disapproval of smoking—only 59% of smokers think that Chinese society disapproves of smoking, the fourth lowest rate of 14 ITC countries surveyed.

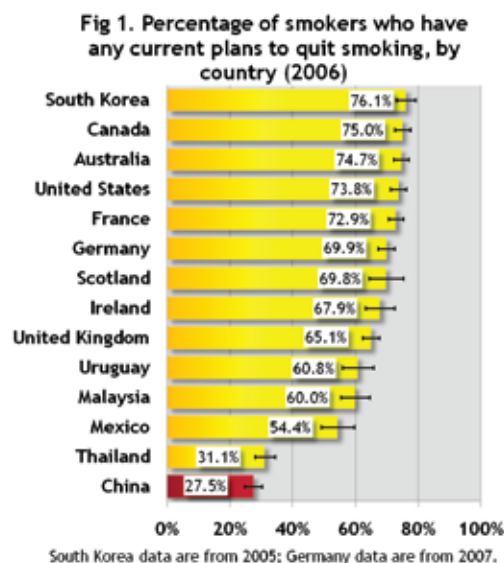
## Few smokers in China are planning to quit

Smoking cessation is relatively uncommon in China, and most smokers quit cigarette smoking because of chronic illness.<sup>3</sup> The ITC China Survey found that only 53% of smokers have ever tried to quit smoking—the second lowest rate of 14 ITC countries surveyed. China also has the lowest proportion of smokers, among 14 ITC countries surveyed, who have “any plans” to quit smoking (28%).

Only 5% of smokers in the ITC China Survey reported that price is “very much” a reason to quit smoking—the lowest rate of 14 ITC countries surveyed. Given the importance of price and taxation in tobacco control, it is clear that taxation remains a very underutilized policy strategy in the effort to reduce cigarette smoking in China.

## Health warning labels are not effective in China

Until October 2008, China's health warning labels were small and positioned on the side of the pack. Findings from the ITC China Survey showed that these warnings were ineffective. While half of smokers (50%) indicated that they notice labels “often” or “very often” only 8% indicated that warning labels made them think about the health risks of smoking “a lot”, the third lowest of all 14 ITC countries surveyed. In October 2008, the Chinese warnings were changed so that their text-only warnings were 30% of the front and back. Future waves of the ITC China Survey will test whether this change led to changes in warning impact.



<sup>1</sup> Yang, G., Kong, L., Zhao, W., Wan, X., Zhai, Y., Chen, L.C., & Koplan, J.P. (2008). Emergence of chronic non-communicable diseases in China. *The Lancet*, 372:1697-1705.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Health (2007). People's Republic of China. China tobacco control report. Beijing, May 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Gu, D., Tanika N. K., Wu, X., Chen, J., Samet, J., and Huang, J. (2009). Mortality attributable to smoking in China. *N Eng J Med* 360:150-9.

## Misconceptions and lack of awareness of health risks are common

Awareness of the health risks of smoking is low in China. Only 68% of smokers believe that smoking causes lung cancer in smokers (compared to well over 90% in Western countries) and 54% believe that smoking causes lung cancer in non-smokers. Only 37% of smokers are aware that smoking causes coronary heart disease and only 17% are aware that smoking causes strokes. These findings demonstrate the need to inform the Chinese people about specific harms of smoking in education programs and on health warnings.

In Western countries, “light/mild” and “low-tar” cigarettes have been marketed to appeal to health-concerned smokers, who believe that such brands are less harmful. This is a misconception: “light/mild” or “low-tar” cigarettes have little or no impact on harm of smoking. The ITC China Survey found that the majority of Chinese smokers believe that “light” cigarettes (56%) and “low-tar” cigarettes (62%) are less harmful than regular cigarettes - higher than any other ITC country surveyed.<sup>4</sup> This is a potentially serious obstacle to quitting in China because smokers may choose to switch to “light/low-tar” cigarettes instead of quitting, incorrectly believing that this will reduce their risk.

## Smokers and non-smokers support a ban on tobacco advertising

Current restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotion in China are not comprehensive. Tobacco companies continue to promote their products using outdoor displays and internet ads.<sup>5</sup> More than half (59%) of smokers and three-quarters (77%) of non-smokers support a ban on all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion, a policy that the Chinese Government intends to implement by 2011, in accordance with their obligation under the FCTC.

## Implications for Tobacco Control in China

While tobacco control efforts in China have expanded in recent years, the ITC China Survey findings point to the urgent need for continued progress to implement strong effective policies. In fact, 76% of Chinese smokers support stronger government action to control smoking. Specific recommendations for further tobacco control efforts in China include the following:

- **Implement complete smoking bans in workplaces and other public places:** Smokers and non-smokers support complete smoking bans in various public places, and ITC Surveys conducted in other countries demonstrate increased public support for bans after they are implemented. Strong guidelines adopted for Article 8 of the FCTC require all indoor workplaces and public places to be completely smoke-free. (SEE SIDEBAR)
- **Price and taxation:** Taxation is a very effective method of reducing tobacco use. However, very few smokers (5%) in the ITC China Survey reported thinking about price as a reason to quit smoking—a sign that prices are too low. Higher tobacco tax policies, consistent with Article 6 of the FCTC, would reduce cigarette consumption and increase quitting.
- **Strengthen health warning labels:** Well-designed warning labels on tobacco products are an effective means to increase awareness of the health effects of tobacco use and to decrease consumption. China’s warning labels will have greater potential impact if they are designed according to the recent strong guidelines adopted for Article 11 of the FCTC on packaging and labeling of tobacco products, which call for pictorial warnings on at least 50% of the package.
- **Public education:** Public education campaigns are needed to increase awareness of the risks of smoking to smokers and non-smokers’ health, to encourage smokers to quit, and to prevent young people from starting to smoke, consistent with Article 12 of the FCTC.
- **Ban tobacco product promotion and advertising:** Studies have shown that advertising bans reduce tobacco use among people of all income and educational levels, particularly among youth. Smokers and non-smokers alike support this ban which has been announced by the Chinese Government as a forthcoming policy initiative consistent with Article 13 of the FCTC.

4 Elton-Marshall, T., Fong, G. T., Zanna, M.P., Jiang, Y., Hammond, D., O’Connor, R. J., et al. Beliefs about the relative harm of “Light” and “Low Tar” Cigarettes: Findings from the (ITC) China Survey. Manuscript under review.

5 Li, L. and Yong, H.H. (2009). Tobacco advertising on the street in Kunming, China. *Tob Control* 18:63.

Fig 2. Percentage of smokers who said that warning labels on cigarette packages made them think of the health risks of smoking ‘a lot’, by country (2006)

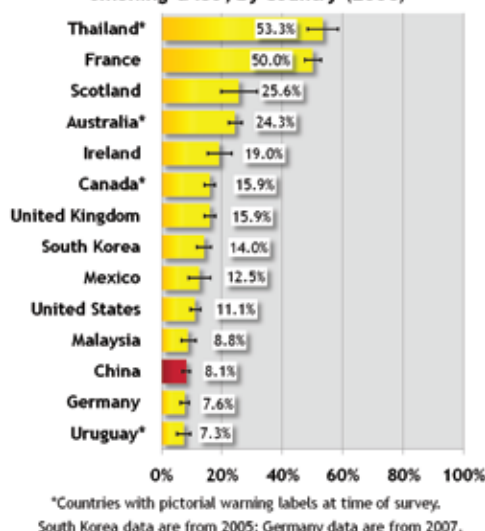
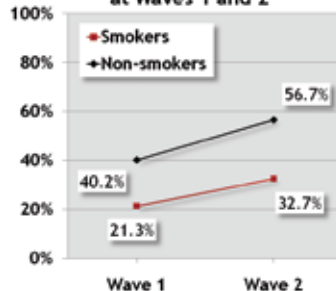


Fig 3. Percentage of smokers and non-smokers who support a complete smoking ban in restaurants, at Waves 1 and 2



## There is strong support for complete smoking bans in public places

China lags far behind other countries in efforts to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke. There are no comprehensive smoke-free laws in public areas in China. The ITC China Survey indicates that most Chinese citizens support completely smoke-free public places. More than 90% of smokers and non-smokers support a complete smoking ban in buses and schools. More than three-quarters of smokers and non-smokers support smoke-free taxis and cinemas and there is strong support for smoke-free government buildings and hospitals.

Completely smoke-free workplaces are uncommon in China. Only 15% of smokers and 25% of non-smokers report that complete bans are currently in place. Smoke-free workplaces are supported by 44% of smokers and 57% of non-smokers. In just one year – from 2006 to 2007 – support for a complete ban in restaurants increased by 12% among smokers (from 21% to 33%) and 17% among non-smokers (from 40% to 57%). Evidence from ITC Surveys in Ireland and Scotland indicates that public support increases significantly after the bans are implemented, and in general, these bans are highly successful and well-accepted.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Nearly all smokers (94%) and non-smokers (95%) supported Beijing’s 2008 smoke-free initiatives implemented for the Olympic Games. Broader, sustained implementation and enforcement of smoking bans in public places across China will offer significant public health benefits associated with reduced exposure to second-hand smoke and denormalization of tobacco.

6 Fong, G.T., Hyland, A., Borland, R., Hammond, D. et al. (2006). Changes in exposure to tobacco smoke pollution and support for smoke-free public places following the implementation of comprehensive smoke-free workplace legislation in the Republic of Ireland: Findings from the ITC Ireland/UK Survey. *Tob Control* 15 (Suppl III):iii51-iii58.

7 Hyland, A., Higbee, C., Hassan, L., Fong, G.T. et al. (2007). Does smoke-free Ireland have more smoking inside the home and less in pubs than in the United Kingdom? Findings from the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project. *Euro J Public Health*, 18, 1, 63-65.

8 Hyland, A., Hassan, L.M., Higbee, C., Boudreau, C., Fong, G.T., Borland, R. et al. (2009). The impact of smokefree legislation in Scotland: results from the Scottish ITC Scotland/UK longitudinal surveys. *Euro J Public Health*, Advance access published January 16, 2009. 1-8.

## THE ITC INTERNATIONAL TEAM

The ITC International Research team includes over 80 tobacco control researchers in 20 countries worldwide. Its Principal Investigators are:

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Mary E. Thompson – University of Waterloo, Canada  
K. Michael Cummings – Roswell Park Cancer Institute, United States  
Ron Borland – The Cancer Council Victoria, Australia  
Richard J. O'Connor – Roswell Park Cancer Institute, United States  
David Hammond – University of Waterloo, Canada  
Gerard Hastings – University of Stirling and the Open University, United Kingdom  
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## ITC CHINA PROJECT TEAM

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## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The ITC Project continues to explore opportunities for collaborating with low and middle income countries to help policy makers design, implement, and evaluate FCTC policies.

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U.S. National Cancer Institute  
International Development Research Center (IDRC) – Research for International Tobacco Control (RITC)  
Canadian Institutes of Health Research  
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Cancer Research U.K.

### Additional sources of funding and support:

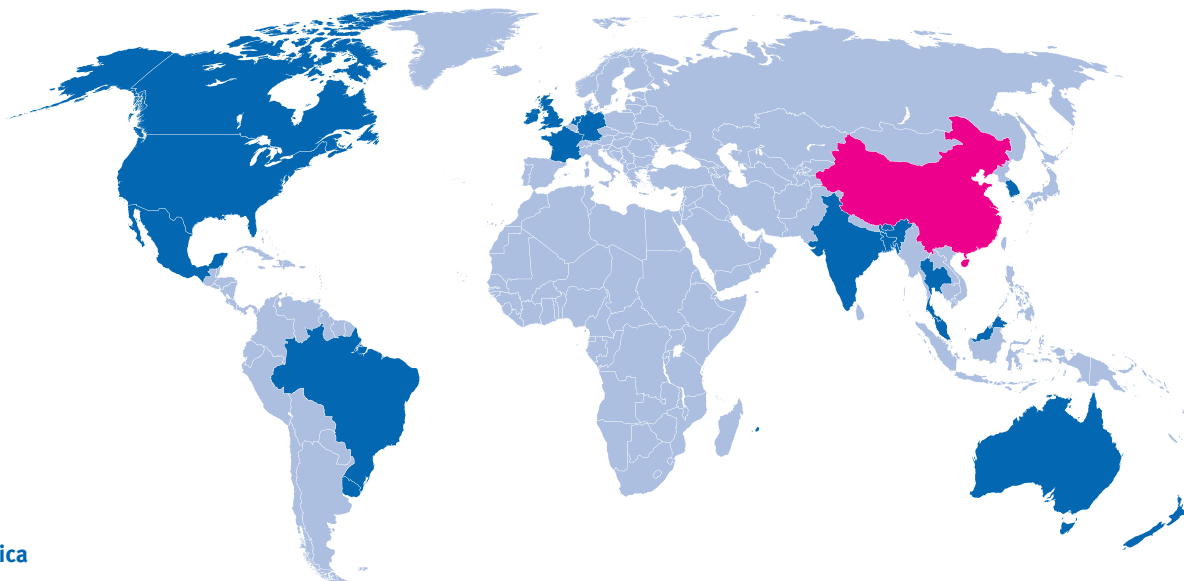
Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, American Cancer Society, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Canadian Tobacco Control Research Initiative, Propel Centre for Population Health Impact, Health Canada, Scottish Executive, Malaysia Ministry of Health, Korean National Cancer Center, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Australia Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Health Research Council of New Zealand, ThaiHealth Promotion Foundation, Flight Attendant Medical Research Institute (FAMRI), Institut national de prévention et d'éducation pour le santé (INPES) and Institut national du cancer (INCa), German Cancer Research Center, German Ministry of Health and the Dieter Menckes-Umweltstiftung, ZonMw (the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development), **National Tobacco Control Office, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention**, National Cancer Institute of Brazil (INCA), National Secretariat for Drug Policy/Institutional Security Cabinet/ Presidency of the Federative Republic of Brazil (SENAD), Alliance for the Control of Tobacco Use (ACTbr), Bloomberg Global Initiative – International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACyT)/Mexican National Council on Science and Technology

\*\*Support for ITC China Project

## THE ITC PROJECT: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF FCTC POLICIES IN...

20 countries • 50% of the world's population • 60% of the world's smokers • 70% of the world's tobacco users

Australia  
Bangladesh  
Bhutan  
Brazil  
Canada  
China (Mainland)  
France  
Germany  
India  
Ireland  
Malaysia  
Mauritius  
Mexico  
Netherlands  
New Zealand  
South Korea  
Thailand  
United Kingdom  
Uruguay  
United States of America



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