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Tobacco advertising on the street in Kunming, China

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Keywords

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China ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in October 2005, promising to ban all tobacco advertising by January 2011. To prepare for and ensure an effective and comprehensive ban, it is important to monitor the current channels and levels of tobacco advertising and promotion. Our recent trip to Kunming city, capital of the south-western province of Yunnan, gave us a gleam of the prevalence of tobacco advertising and the strategies adopted by the local tobacco companies in promoting their products.

We attended a workshop on tobacco control policy evaluation in Kunming in late April 2008. During our three-day stay there we were quite “impressed” by the ingenuity of the local tobacco companies in advertising their products. We saw tobacco companies’ names, corporate-images and websites on rooftop signage and windscreen of taxis (see Figure 1 for such a tobacco ad for the “Honghe Group”, which is one of the major tobacco companies in Yunnan. Its website (WWW.HONGHE.COM) is on the back windscreen of the taxi). We also noticed similar tobacco ads on large posters erected on the street and on buildings near Kunming railway station. On our way to a well-known tourist attraction (The Ethnicity Village of Yunnan), we saw dozens of huge promotional lanterns for “Hongyun Tobacco Group” lined up like lampposts and extended for several hundred meters along the median strip of the main road (Figures 2 and 3). On these red lanterns, the tobacco company’s name and brand (“Yunyan” brand) are highlighted in huge Chinese characters. Slogans of the company also appear on the lanterns (same as those on their cigarette packages): “Having the companion of Hongyun [cigarettes], good luck and happiness will be with you”. When we came to an intersection of the main road, the lantern advertisements were now replaced by large posters (Figure 4). The tobacco ad on the posters was presented as a Chinese poem, claiming that it is a famous brand in China; that this brand of cigarettes has unique flavour and can help smokers express their exceptional personalities.

In China, the 1991 Tobacco Products Monopoly Law (Article 19) and the 1994 Advertisement Law (Article 18) ban direct tobacco advertisements on movies, radios, TV, newspapers or periodicals. However, restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotion in China are not comprehensive. There are no clear restrictions on outdoor and Internet tobacco

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ads. The tobacco ads observed in Kunming indicate that tobacco companies are continuing to exploit the loopholes in the existing laws to promote their deadly products, suggesting an urgent need for enhanced policy development and robust monitoring and enforcement of the laws regarding tobacco advertising restrictions if China were to fulfil its FCTC obligations.

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Figure 1.
A tobacco ad for the “Honghe Group” on rooftop signage and back windscreen of a taxi,
with the tobacco company’s name, corporate-image and website.

Figure 2.
A promotional lantern for the “Hongyun Tobacco Group”, with huge Chinese characters displaying the company’s name, slogans and its “Yunyan” brand.

Figure 3. Promotional lanterns for the “Hongyun Tobacco Group” were lined up like lampposts along the median strip of a main road in Kunming.

Figure 4.
A poster ad for the “Yunyan” cigarette brand, presented as a Chinese poem, claiming this famous brand can help smokers express their exceptional personalities.