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The Global Diffusion of Manufactured Cigarettes: An Analysis of Eastern Emulation

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*Why is it that among the female sex the women who lead blameless, regular lives are the least frequently addicted to smoking?*² – Tolstoi³

In the past three decades, cigarette dependency in less-developed nations has intensified. About 82 percent of the world's 1.1 billion smokers reside in low-income nations.⁴ From 1970-1990, cigarette consumption increased by 64 percent in middle to low-income nations, while decreasing by nine percent in the wealthiest countries.⁵ Nevertheless, these statistics are unrepresentative of female-smoking trends worldwide. Even though rates of smoking in developing countries are increasing, only nine percent of females in these nations smoke. Conversely, twenty-two percent of females in developed nations smoke.⁶ Although smoking rates have recently declined in developed nations, usage has standardized between male and female residents. And despite the fact that there remains a substantial disparity between the smoking habits of both sexes in middle-income countries, female cigarette consumption is becoming more widespread. Furthermore, due to trade liberalization, urbanization, increased GDPs, and an international push towards gender equality, health experts foresee potential for increased usage. It is estimated that by 2025, worldwide smoking rates of females will increase from eight to twenty percent.⁷ Whereas rates of female smoking in developed nations has steadily decreased in the past thirty years as a result of policy change and health education, diffused access to cigarettes and a loosening of social mores has facilitated a statistical surge of female tobacco consumption in moderate-and low-income countries.

This paper analyzes the determinants of reduced tobacco use in the West, collated with data that provides insight into the upward trend of female smoking in developing nations. I begin with a brief historical review of tobacco in American history, touching upon the commercial aspects of cigarette manufacturing and the industry's flagrant use of symbolism. I continue with an analysis of the factors leading to a decrease in Western smoking and theorize as to why middle-income nations in the East have recently experienced the reverse: a rise in female tobacco consumption. The essay concludes with an investigation into the global influence of Western smoking habits, the role of globalization in determining tobacco trends, and the reasoning behind increased rates of female smoking in previously communist nations.

Since its onset into consumer culture in the 1500s, tobacco has been a contentious commodity. Tobacco found its way into alternative culture as a direct result of Europe's mercantile presence in North America. Before the formation of the highly lucrative Triangle Trade, nicotine usage was limited to "tobacco-houses" and sold prescription-only.⁸ Nevertheless, it remained present in Anglophone culture, though was described as a "morally depraved, corrupt" act well into the 1600s.⁹ A female of that era wouldn't have been seen with a cigarette in her hands.

In fact, the issue of women's smoking didn't emerge until the late 1800s. In the 1880s, Americans overwhelmingly chewed tobacco.¹⁰ It was not until Buchanan "Buck" Duke from Durham, North Carolina began to market his form of hand-rolled cigarettes that smoking became popular. The more-feminized version of the cigar prompted criticism almost immediately. A New York City health reformer was reported as saying that ladies who smoked were "aping the silly ways of some pseudo-accomplished foreigners."¹¹ By 1900, four states had passed legislation

banning the distribution of cigarette products.¹² From its onset, the United States government saw cigarette smoking as an objectionable act.

It was not until World War I that cigarettes became an accepted part of American culture. Before the U.S. entered WWI, the government viewed cigarette smoking as immoral and wasteful; they modified their convictions during the war. Cigarettes were sanctioned as rations for soldiers due to cheap manufacturing and distribution costs, rumored ability to suppress appetite, and perceived association to the allied French. In addition, tobacco “calms the frightened, sedates the wounded, energizes the weary, and distracts the bored.”¹³ The government spent \$80 million on tobacco products – eighty percent of it used to buy cigarettes – between April 7, 1917 and May 1919.¹⁴ The YMCA, which initially prohibited smoking in its facilities, became one of the biggest overseas distributors of cigarettes. Along with other humanitarian organizations, The American Red Cross gave away more than one billion cigarettes during the war. In the span of two years, cigarettes became a token of American patriotism.

America experienced a proliferation in cigarette consumption following the defeat of the Central Powers in Europe. While smoking became commonplace practice for men, a woman’s right to inhale remained controversial. Nevertheless, the female market constituted the fastest growing division of the cigarette industry post-1920. Similar to contemporary reports, the *Magazine of Wall Street* anticipated that the tobacco industry would profit from women well into the future. The industry caught on, and in 1927, Philip Morris advertised its new Marlboro brand with the slogan “Mild as May.”¹⁵ Likewise, Lucky Strikes juxtaposed its cigarette branding with the weight-loss catchphrase “Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet.” Its market share tripled. Lucky Strikes became the best-selling brand for two years.¹⁶ As suffragettes fought for the right to vote, the tobacco industry capitalized on the struggle and marketed cigarettes as “torches of freedom.”¹⁷

Unfortunately, cigarettes did little to substantially aid the fight for equality. Instead, their prevalence led to a series of negative public health issues. Most significantly, elevated levels of smoking directly resulted in an exorbitant amount of new lung cancer cases. The 1940 U.S. Bureau of Census reported that the rates of lung cancer soared 36 percent from 1934 to 1938. Nevertheless, this did little to halt the spread of tobacco use. Physicians and medical associations distanced themselves from tobacco reformers. Forty years later, four out of ten Americans – the highest per capita level of consumption – identified themselves as cigarette smokers.¹⁸ It was not until the 1964 surgeon general’s warning that smoking caused lung cancer in men that smoking patterns declined.¹⁹ Since the mid-1970s, widespread tobacco usage has gradually declined.

Nevertheless, tobacco companies have successfully integrated cigarettes into the fabric of everyday life. By the mid-to late-1900s, smoking was a common habit for men and women alike. On average, thirty percent of American females smoked throughout the latter part of the 20th century.²⁰ Although outspoken critics have condemned tobacco usage since its commercial onset, the industry has skirted strict policy reform for over a century by providing the federal and state governments with tax revenue. Without government interference, companies freely marketed their product to the public (packaged image included). The tobacco industry targeted women by exploiting their struggle for equality (embodied by Virginia Slims advertising campaign “You’ve come a long way, baby”) and by branding cigarettes as a mark of femininity.²¹ They effectively marketed tobacco as both a feminine prop and a weapon of emancipation. Furthermore, this technique was not limited to the United States. In the 1990s, a brand dubbed “Ms.” emerged in India and China.²² As the percentage of female smokers dipped from 30 percent in 1979 to 23 percent in 1990, the Western tobacco industry directed greater focus to Asian and Eastern European markets.

The modern anti-tobacco campaign has triumphed in the past two decades by combating smoking on two fronts. It has curbed tobacco consumption in the U.S. with an effective collaboration of public policy measures and an increased outlay of antismoking education. In addition, anti-tobacco organizations devote extensive resources to publicizing the negative effects

of passive smoking (i.e. second-hand smoke) and to exposing and combating the corrupt strength of industry manipulation.

Furthermore, it is cost-effective to invest in antismoking measures. Tobacco addiction decreases worker productivity and increases government healthcare costs. A 2008 study from Centers for Disease and Control estimated that smoking is responsible for \$96.8 billion in productivity loss annually and an additional \$96 billion on healthcare expenditure. In comparison, government sponsored tobacco control programs amounted to \$595 million in 2007.²³ Numerous local and state governments across the U.S. have responded to recent antismoking data by enacting smoking bans in restaurants, bars, and hospitals. Various European nations have followed suit: Britain, France, and Ireland all banned smoking in public places.²⁴ Although studies remain inconclusive as to whether bans overwhelmingly curb smoking, they have reduced rates of harmful carbon monoxide and alleviated the pervasive threat of passive smoking. As smoking becomes more of an inconvenience, the total number of cigarettes smoked per day has decreased.²⁵ Above all, policy-based restrictions have altered the perceived notion of smoking from the “norm” to “taboo.”

While cigarettes transitioned to illegitimacy in the West, tobacco companies sought out previously unfamiliar markets to compensate for loss revenue. Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, tobacco giants like Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds instated manufacturing agreements with the declining communist giant.²⁶ The trade liberalization policies of the past twenty years in the Former Soviet Union, China, and Africa further facilitated big tobacco’s objectives. Being that tobacco wasn’t a foreign product to these populations, but a state-controlled commodity, the freeing of markets was ideal for the industry. Transnational tobacco rapidly invested money into the East and systematically purchased state-controlled tobacco companies. By the mid-1990s, 50% of plastic bags and billboards in Moscow displayed tobacco advertisements.²⁷ Furthermore, research conducted by BAT indicated that a standardized approach to product marketing was just as effective as an adapted, local method in the Former Soviet Union (FSU).²⁸ BAT was able to implement Western marketing techniques halfway across the globe.

Similar to Buck Duke’s conjectures of the late 1800s, BAT reported that women represented an untapped market in the East.²⁹ BAT and other transnational tobacco companies took advantage of the Eastern Bloc’s developing taste for capitalist culture and beckoned consumers with taglines like “Test the West.”³⁰ In Hungary, the industry presented women with a brand named “Lady’s First”(sic).³¹ Countries that traditionally discourage female smoking, like Hong Kong and India, have also seen their fair share of gendered advertising. Ads for “MS Special Filter” feature women in ostentatious Western clothing and jewels. Capri brand promotes individuality – which has customarily been a Western concern – with the slogan: “Be you.” The image of the modern, emancipated Western female is pervasive throughout tobacco advertisements.

Companies like Philip Morris and BAT have been successful at influencing women. In the former East Germany, rates of young female smokers have doubled.³² In China, smoking rates among men peak at 60%, though only three to seven percent of women smoke. Nonetheless, the rate of young female smokers has already begun to increase since 2004.³³ Moreover, China’s smoking population comprises 30% of the worldwide total. In Poland, big tobacco has inundated the public with Marlboro ads featuring a female sporting pearls and a cowboy hat.³⁴ In a similar fashion to the 20th century American advertising, tobacco companies portray female ambition and attach gendered associations onto their products in Eastern Europe and Asia.

For the past century, the tobacco industry has toyed with the concept of feminine identity. While it banks on selling straight-packaged masculinity to men, it advertises cigarettes to women in a contradictory manner. For example, the now-infamous Lucky Strikes’ ad featuring a feminine athlete was both a reference to women’s insecurities towards weight and a publicizing of female athleticism. In addition, tobacco advertising is especially effective when directed at a target

audience that is “unclear, unequal, or unrewarded.”³⁵ Women, adolescents, minorities, and populations of the developing world are particularly prone to cigarette use.

The World Health Organization estimates that female smokers will triple in numbers by the next generation.³⁶ If the prevalence of smoking continues to transition from rich to poorer nations at the current rate, tobacco-related deaths will increase from three million to ten million annually.³⁷ This sharp spike in projected deaths is linked to high fertility rates in the developing world, heightened rates of female smoking, longer life expectancy, and overall increase in human population. Furthermore, research has shown that, health-wise, females sacrifice more than males. Smoking not only affects fertility, but also decreases a woman’s life expectancy by 14.1 years.³⁸ The presence of transnational tobacco directly affects rates of rate of cancer and cardiovascular disease. Furthermore, citizens of less-developed countries are more prone to tobacco’s negative health effects, with arguably less access to healthcare and educational resources. As America and Britain experienced a slew of disease following widespread tobacco use in the 1990s, China and the FSU are likely to see an increase in tobacco-related illnesses.

Traditionally across cultures, tobacco use was a form of masculine expression. It was not until women fought for suffrage that smoking became an acceptable female practice. Lucky Strikes and Durham opportunistically understood that marketing cigarettes as a symbols of liberation would not only speak directly to females, but also double their numbers of potential consumers. Tobacco companies utilized a similar marketing design in the East. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and China’s reliance economic on trade liberalization, transnational tobacco acquired new outlets for product promotion. As Eastern Europe and China transitioned to a capitalist financial market, male-smoking rates initially increased, followed by a spike in female usage.

In accordance with the tobacco diffusion model, men are the innovators of a population and more apt to embrace new ideas and novel technologies.³⁹ Once men incorporate a new product into their lifestyles, a second wave of people – often persons of “lower status” and women – adopt it too. Pampel suggests that Eastern acceptance of manufactured tobacco exemplifies product diffusion through a population. In addition, higher status individuals are the first to respond to the publicizing of tobacco’s negative effects. Statistically, high status individuals are the first to quit smoking, even as a population experiences an increase in the number of female smokers.⁴⁰ At this stage of diffusion, female smokers will parallel men in increased cigarette consumption. Although still prominent, the gap is decreasing between male and female smoking rates as manufactured tobacco diffuses across Eastern markets.

For over seventy-five years, the image of a lit cigarette was pictured throughout the pages of fashion magazines, featured in innumerable Hollywood movies, and plastered on city billboards. A cigarette was the 20th century prop of “cool.” The thin cylinder of rolled tobacco promoted an image that transcended physical merchandise. Additionally, because cigarettes are inherently a product of indulgence, the industry marketed tobacco in a way that conveyed luxury but masked its gratuitous nature. Furthermore, companies allied themselves with women’s social movements, including the suffragettes of the 1920s and campaigns for greater autonomy in developing countries. The sheer determination of tobacco industrialists is demonstrated by their irreverence for, and concurrent capitalization of, issues present in the public arena.

Tobacco marketing campaigns have achieved enormous success by capitalizing on Western values. To target men and women alike, the industry correlated cigarettes smoking to a basic freedom *and* the freedom to chose. It fabricated the notion that smoking is a basic human right and that brand selection is a privilege for those living in a liberalized market. This scheme finds its roots in capitalism: citizens shop freely under capitalism, but view certain brands as congruent or incongruent to their perceived identities. Modernization not only allows for an over-abundance of choice,, but an over-emphasis on it. Societies accepted foreign brands of cigarettes as an alternative to less commercialized state-controlled options.

Additionally, formerly communist nations looked towards America as they transitioned to a free market system. For the average Eastern European and Chinese citizen, access to American culture was limited to movies, music, and the occasional fashion magazine. By implanting itself directly into Eastern lifestyle, tobacco industry introduced an additional 1.5 billion people to the American stereotype via tobacco advertisements. These ads portrayed Americans as laid-back individuals who sported cowboy hats and as people who lived lavish lifestyles and flaunted big smiles. These ads were not only deceptive, but also a form of “‘white supremacist racism’ by linking prosperity, leisure and prestige to the imagery associated with smoking.”⁴¹ Smokers emulated Western lifestyle and subscribed to the individualizing value of free enterprise. Cigarettes wedged themselves between concepts of leisure, reward, and the core American operating system of hard work.

The commercial success of transnational tobacco is a symptom of globalization. Due to the existence of a “global community,” the industry exposed consumers to the similar stimuli. Tobacco companies advertised their product under the pretense that the media has bridged a common culture, shared common experience, and enabled the sale of common products.⁴² Due to a “convergence of culture,” transnational tobacco easily transitioned from Western to Eastern markets.⁴³ In this sense, public health is hampered by globalization. Although globalization increases mutual awareness between nations (and the potential for global anti-tobacco movements), it also expedites the objective of transnational tobacco companies.

It should also be noted that men and women respond to antismoking campaigns differently. That said, men and women also experience smoking differently. Women have reported that they find solace in smoking; it’s a dependable mechanism for calming anxieties and fears.⁴⁴ Furthermore, being that women have been historically marginalized, cigarettes surface as means to restore identity. Unfortunately, cigarettes do little to substantiate a real sense of selfhood. “Cigarettes offer momentary resolution of the conflicts in women’s experiences.”⁴⁵ Instead, manufactured associations serve as a distraction from the actual issue of feminine development. “If identity is derived from commodities and images provided by the media, attention is deflected from a more valuable source of identity, namely the historical precedents and the immediate politics of...circumstance.”⁴⁶ To complicate matters further, studies have shown that women thrive off inter-communal networks. The social aspects of smoking are especially appealing to females.⁴⁷ If gender equality is progressing in developing nations, females may relish in their liberation over cigarettes and conversation.

To effectively curb cigarette use, Chinese and Russian anti-tobacco organizations can look to the West as recourse. Their effective forms of antismoking measure have decreased smoking levels in women by 15 percent in the past thirty years.⁴⁸ In addition, published findings indicate that level of female cigarette consumption is correlated to the presence of the tobacco industry.⁴⁹ Therefore, if antismoking organizations can prevent further infiltration of the industry and tarnish the image of tobacco before cigarettes reach women through societal diffusion, they may be able to significantly reduce female rates of smoking.

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