

**TAIWAN –
THE GREAT CONTRIBUTOR
TO ASIAN HEALTH**



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On the '*Double Tenth Day*', the 10th day of the 10th month, of this year President Lee Teng-hui stated that Taiwan was determined to rejoin world organizations. He said "the progress made here in political, economic and social aspects has given us strength and strong aspirations to participate in the international community."

To me, Taiwan has already actively participated in the international community with flying color.

Not only did Taiwan make socio-economic progress at home but also extends cooperation out into the Asia-Pacific region as well. The regional cooperation has become important more than ever before in the midst of the evolving new world order and the shifting of focus of the global economy toward the Asia-Pacific region.

One of Taiwan's prominent role in the social aspects has been the protection of the Asians' health, especially from the devastation of tobacco use. Taiwan has worked with more resolve to promote a regionwide coalition to eliminate the use of this deadly product.

TOBACCO USE IN ASIA AND THE TOBACCO NEO - COLONIALISM

Tobacco now kills one of the world's inhabitants every 13 seconds. Up to now not many of the victims live in Asia. But the ensuing century would be the period that the people of the Asia-Pacific could witness the epidemic of tobacco-related diseases, disabilities, and deaths.

As North Americans and Europeans quit or died, of cigarette-induced diseases, in increasing numbers the tobacco merchants see the Asia-Pacific region as the greener pasture. Here the population is vast, female smokers few, government tobacco monopolies inefficient, western style sophistication a great desire, and revenue much needed.

Asia is the area where forty-four per cent of all the world's cigarettes are produced, the area where prevention of an epidemic

of tobacco-induced diseases and deaths is one of the greatest challenges for the rest of this century.

Most of all Asia is the area where the global tobacco war will ultimately be fought.

Asia's cigarette consumption is almost half of the world total. In 1985 the U.S. State Department started to help strong arm Asian governments into opening up lucrative domestic cigarette markets to American companies. By 1992 the U.S. firms' export to the Pacific Rim increased almost fivefold, representing twelve percent of the entire America cigarette production. With US domestic consumption declining two to three per cent a year and Forbes' prediction "*The party is over for the U.S. cigarette industry*" the American manufacturers look to Asia as their resurgence and are convinced that "*the party is just getting started.*"

The U.S. forced open three successive Asian markets, Japan in late 1986, Taiwan in 1987, and South Korea in 1988. Each country fought a losing battle, yielding within a short period, for fear of the U.S. trade retaliation affecting their tremendous volume of trade surpluses.

In early 1989 I received a confidential report that our Thai Ministry of Finance was quietly negotiating with American cigarette producers to bring foreign cigarettes into Thailand and legally sold for the first time. The ministry had prepared the list of foreign brands and were about to propose to the cabinet for approval. So on March 13, 1989 I, then as a deputy permanent secretary of Public Health, broke the news to a specially-held media conference, asserting many serious consequences if foreign cigarettes were to be freely marketed in the country. That raised a great uproar and all people in the health sector, ranging from the Ministers to various NGOs, came out in full force opposing the legalization of the import. On April 10, the United States Cigarette Exporter, realizing that the '*under the table*' deal was blocked, went to the United State Trade Representatives (USTR) for help. Their petition was accepted and investigation process would take not more than one year, according to the U.S. Trade Law.

At this point our international friends came and gave a big helping hand.

On June 12, 1989 the Asia-Pacific Association for the Control of Tobacco (APACT) was formed at a conference in Taipei, with the wise and timely initiation and generous

support of Dr. David Yen, chairman of John Tung Foundation. Founding members included leading tobacco control advocates from Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan. A letter was sent to the then President George Bush : “The Asia-Pacific Conference on Cigarette Smoking and Health, consisting of representatives of associations in nine Asian and Pacific nations, met in Taiwan June 10-12, 1989. All the groups present expressed out rage with the reckless and aggressive marketing of United States cigarettes in the Far East.....The cigarette issue is not an issue of trade or trade imbalances. It is an issue of human health, and Asian health is as important as American health. Asians want to purchase good American products not harmful ones.....We urge you to be a champion of Asian health and reject the possible damaging effects of this investigation.”

On June 30, 1989 the AFACT wrote to A.J. Bradley, Chairwoman, Section 301 of the USTR, “The AFACT wishes to go on record in opposition to the petition of the USCEA that requests your agency to use section 301 of the 1974 U.S. Trade Act to compel the Government of Thailand to allow the importation of foreign cigarettes and repeal a public health law that prohibits cigarette advertising... If USTR forces Thailand to liberalize its market and Western style cigarette smoking patterns emerge, two million of all the Thai children alive today will be killed prematurely by smoking ... many will be killed by cigarettes that the US has convinced its children not to smoke.”

On September 19, 1989 the Section 301 Public Hearing was held in Washington, D.C. Eight persons and organizations testified against and twenty one supported Thailand for her determination to prevent foreign cigarettes into the country. Among the twenty one friends Taiwan’s Professor Ted Chen gave the testimony as a representative of AFACT.

Concurrently on the same day a half page color advertisement was published in the Washington Times by the AFACT, with a drawing of Uncle Sam holding ‘*Liberty Bell cigarettes*’ and heading ‘*President Bush, is America a Friend or Foe?*’ In its text: “For the last 50 years America has been the leader of the free world and as a friend has fought to keep Asia free of oppression and because of the greatness of America, millions of oriental children can look forward to healthy, productive lives. During the past few years, a foe has emerged from the West who is forcing the harmful cigarettes and cigarette advertisements that Americans do not want onto Asia. Since 1985, the US Trade Office has threatened

Taiwan, Japan, and Korea with trade sanctions unless those countries allowed the import of US cigarettes and repealed laws prohibiting cigarette advertising. Today, Thailand, one of America's greatest friends, is facing similar threats by the US Trade Office...We want Asian children to grow strong and healthy by eating good American wheat, citrus and beef and not be killed prematurely from smoking the cigarettes that American teenagers do not want. If the US trade policy is successful more Asians will die from smoking than all who died in World War II. Korea and Vietnam War combined. Today, America has a choice of being a friend of Thailand and not a foe. We urge the US Trade Office to reject the tobacco companies petition to force Thailand to accept American cigarettes.....”

During 1-5 April 1990 The Seventh World Conference on Tobacco and Health was held in Perth, Australia. At the meeting the Deputy Minister of Health of the Royal Thai Government presented plaques of honor to the President of APACT Dr. David Yen and the Secretary – General Dr.Ted Chen, citing their enormous and tiring effort in helping Thailand in the 301 case.

These two distinguished Taiwanese indeed deserved the regal accolade bestowed on them.

With tenacious fight at home and big help from friends in Asia and all around the world the US Government felt that bilateral negotiation, through 301 case, would not be socially acceptable to the world community. So the USTR forwarded the case to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) despite strong opposition from the USCEA. The fight in the multilateral arena concentrated much upon the health aspects and I, as the health member of the Thai team, could solicit the support of the WHO's Tobacco or Health Team in testifying to the Panel. The outcome was indeed marvellous. The GATT's decision was that Thailand's restriction on the importation of cigarettes were contrary to the GATT's rule but because of the concern for the health of her people Thailand could impose indiscriminate advertising ban, ingredient disclosure, strict labeling, control of sale, and appropriate setting of taxation.

This was a great landmark case. It was the first GATT case that determines tobacco controversy.

The US government announced termination of the 301 investigative procedure on November 23, 1990, a long overdue period of one and a half year.

It seemed to be a defeat in trade but it was indeed a victory in health.

This magnificent victory is shared by all – the national health groups, the Asian colleagues, the American friends, and the tobacco control advocates all around the world.

FOR THE SAKE OF OUR CHILDREN

At least half the world's population is now younger than age 25, and 80% of those live in developing countries.

With the attempted tobacco colonialization of Asia an aggressive marketing force enters the region in a coercive manner and influences free choice unduly. With the tobacco industry's greed at the expense of public health thousands of our children will start smoking on this very day and thousands will die as a consequence.

Gabriela Mistral the Chilean Nobel laureate poet said : we are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow'. His name is 'Today'.

So we must remain ever vigilant. In Asia women and children will be the targets for the tobacco companies.

The challenge is daunting and resources are lacking.

The enemy is formidably looming large and tobacco control advocates small.

The profits at stake for the tobacco industry are enormous, but so too are the health burdens for the population of the Asia-Pacific nations.

The Asian solidarity is a must. Taiwan as a wealthier state has played a major role in the support for tobacco control activities in the region. We need a strong action to respond to the challenge presented by rapid social, economic, and political change. We need a new paradigm for health whereby its protection and promotion will be the key components.

Tobacco use shall be prevented from damaging the precarious economic and health equilibrium of the Asia and Pacific region.

And Taiwan will be in the forefront for this magnanimous endeavor.

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