

HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY : CULTURAL SPONSORSHIP BY TRANSNATIONAL TOBACCO COMPANIES



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Around the world more and more countries have been enacting laws prohibiting advertisement of tobacco products. In order to increase sale the transnational tobacco companies have been finding other means of promotion such as product placement, brand diversification, and sponsorship of sports and culture.

Cultural sponsorship does not have to show the logos but it is a very cost effective means to improve the cigarette makers' tarnished images. Most important of all, ***sponsorship create a positive association between arts and smoking.***

Cultural sponsorship encourages consumers, especially youth and women, to associate smoking with successful artists and high level art and cultural achievement. The lives and accomplishments of leading actors, famous musicians and top artists are highly visible and attract widespread interest. Young people in particular look to successful artists as role models. Thus tobacco use continues to be promoted as ***positive social behavior*** and another generation of new smokers is recruited.

The transnationals prefer to sponsor music, fashion shows and painting contests. In the Asia-Pacific region the tobacco industry has made an intense effort in various forms of cultural sponsorship. Musical performances, with their celebrity stars, Western image, and enormous following of young fans, have been a magnet for tobacco sponsorship outside the US. Rock concert produced in the US are beamed through satellite to a local transponder in Asia. The transponder adds a voice over in a local dialect and alter the video image to change a free-standing event into a cigarette-sponsored one by superimposing a cigarette logo onto the original video image. With this technique, a Madonna concert in Spain becomes a Salem Madonna Concert in Hong Kong. In this city, RJ Reynolds sponsored the Salem "a Video A Day" that ran movies on TV twice a day through the week. Tina Turner performed in a televised concert produced in the US that was not related with cigarettes. The concert was aired in Malaysia as a Salem concert and Tina stated that she had never given permission to have it reaired as a tobacco-sponsored program. RJ Reynolds responded bluntly that it wasn't a cigarette advertisement. In Indonesia RJR and a domestic tobacco producer were quite cooperative sponsoring a concert named 'Mild Live'. In China, Philip Morris was a proud sponsor of a popular ballet "The Red Detachment of Women". In Taiwan, RJR agents arranged a concert by teen idol Hsow-Yu Chang, with five empty packs of Winstons the only accepted admission "ticket"—ten for souvenir sweet shirt. In Seoul, Philip Morris planned to sponsor a series of concerts in various cities but after only one performance it had to give up because the Association of Smoking and Health came out to oppose,

with the strong backing of 30 NGOs, and urged all secondary schools to boycott the events.

In our own country the first tobacco-sponsored cultural performance was a concert by Tony Bennett and McCoy Tyner Trio on 16 and 17 November 1993 at the Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel sponsored by Philip Morris, with revenue donated to the King's Chai Pattana Foundation. The second was a show "The Ambassadors of Opera" at the Oriental Hotel, held on June 21, 1994, sponsored by RJ Reynolds with the cooperation of Continental Micronesia Airline and the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra Foundation under the Royal Patronage of the Crown Prince. The third was a series of Philip Morris ASEAN Arts Contest, held for the first year during 1994. This year is the fourth of such event.

At the Tony Bennett concert I took a group of health NGOs and newspaper reporters to witness the show. After the performance we handed a letter to Tony Bennett saying that his splendid work was tainted by tobacco and it could be so contagious that it was spreading the "brown plaque" to the people of Thailand. At the first annual PM ASEAN Arts Contest I came out to oppose the plan by giving interviews, writing 3 articles in different newspapers, writing to the Rector of Silpakorn University asking to withdraw from coorganizing the contest, writing to the Prime Minister, writing to the Heads of the other ASEAN Governments, and finally asking the participants attending the World Conference on Tobacco and Health in Paris to sign a letter requesting the Prime Minister of Singapore not to allow the exhibition of the awards. At the later stage the Medical Council, the National Committee for the Control of Tobacco Use and the Ministry of Public Health also joined the opposition. Eventually Silpakorn University withdrew from coorganizing but the contests went on. In 1995 and 1996 I, being merely a senior citizen working in a small NGO, did not make a move. So too were the bigger, and supposedly responsible, tobacco control GO and NGO of our land. It is sad and ironic that last year the WHO's 1996 World No Tobacco Day had the theme "**Sport and Arts Without Tobacco**" and the Ministry of Public Health' Thai version was "**ศิลปะและกีฬา ไม่พึ่งพาบุหรี่ ถวายองค์ภูมิ 50 ปีทรงครองราชย์**" or "**Arts and Sport do not depend on tobacco - for the King's 50th Anniversary of the Royal Ascension to the Throne**", yet the 1996 PM ASEAN Contest was organized in Thailand to honor the King's Anniversary!

And it is serendipitous that this particular event was patronized by a former Prime Minister who presided over the national contest and by another Prime Minister,

currently a Privy Councilor, who presided over the ASEAN contest. A faculty of Silpakorn University helped supplying expert panel and the National Museum of Arts helped providing the venue for the contest and exhibition.

And where is the healthy public policy for this issue ? Where are the anti-smoking GO and NGOs ? They should be ashamed that they have not done anything in this matter. No body seems to know about the Koreans' success in warding off sponsorship by the merchant of death. We should not any more be proud that Thailand has tobacco control laws which are among the world's best because a fortnight ago the President of Vietnam, a country that had been bogged down by war for so long and has not fully recovered, announced the banning of sport and cultural sponsorship by tobacco and alcohol.

Also our arts community should be reminded that *the arts exists to ennoble mankind and it can not allow itself to be used to create a positive association with the producer of the product that annually kills 42,000 of its fellow citizens.*