

## The burden of tobacco-related illnesses in China



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**Background:** Globally non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are replacing infectious diseases and malnutrition as the leading cause of disability and premature death.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that in the future almost 70% of all deaths will be due to NCDs and 80% these deaths will occur in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>1</sup> Thus, the global burden of NCDs represent a significant threat to human health, development, and the achievement and continued maintenance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although tackling the global burden of NCDs is complex, it is estimated that more than half of the global burden of NCDs could be avoided through proper health promotion and prevention initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

**Methodology:** This study was conducted as a targeted literature review utilizing the following journal databases: *Google Scholar*, *PubMed*, *JStor*, *British Medical Journal*, and applying the following keywords “tobacco usage in China”, “burden of tobacco related illnesses in China”, “China national tobacco corporation”, and “China’s ascension into the WTO”.

**Findings:** The gradual liberalization of China's economy has allowed it to become one of the biggest economies in the world. For continued economic

prosperity, it was imperative that China gained membership into World Trade Organization (WTO) in order to be able to actively influence global trade policies and overcome the view that it was a global threat. Numerous international industries supported China’s ascension into the WTO, including the Transnational Tobacco Corporations (TTCs), which would now have equal access to the 300 million plus Chinese smokers. The Chinese National Tobacco Corporation (CNTC) is a state-owned corporation, and the largest tobacco company in the world. The CNTC generates 7-8% of the Government of China’s annual revenue and has been a crucial factor for the economic prosperity of China.<sup>2</sup> However, the medical and labor costs associated with tobacco-related illnesses in China have already started to outweigh the revenue generated by the CNTC. Currently, NCDs account for 80% of all deaths and 70% of total disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) in China. These outcomes are largely attributed to the high prevalence of tobacco usage, and environmental tobacco smoke exposure.<sup>3</sup>

**Conclusion:** Due to the influx of TTCs and the continued maintenance of the CNTC to generate revenue for the Government of China, China’s burden of tobacco related illnesses will continue to increase and threaten China’s economic prosperity as the number of deaths associated with tobacco usage is expected to triple by the year 2050.<sup>4</sup>

### Global Health Relevancy

Through tobacco control policy reform, high- income countries have been able to reduce their respective burden of tobacco-related illnesses by reducing the number of tobacco users. Consequently, in effort to preserve their market, numerous Transnational Tobacco Corporations (TTCs) have used the liberalization of the global economy to protect their profits by expanding to low- and middle- income countries (LMICs), such as China where restrictive tobacco control legislation and enforcement does not yet exist. This has created a burden of tobacco-related illnesses in China and an increase of chronic diseases globally.