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Senior Project

## **Project Title**

Why is smoking cigarettes so popular in China?

## **Project Abstract**

Over 300 million people in China smoke cigarettes. Indeed, throughout most of China, cigarette use is widely accepted and even promoted, while many people don't believe or fully understand the harm cigarettes can cause. This project attempts to understand why cigarette smoking is so popular. Specifically, I ask whether certain social customs and cultural beliefs are driving tobacco-use in China. To address this question, I conducted background research on tobacco-use in China and other countries and examined the effectiveness of several strategies to control tobacco use. I also conducted an anonymous on-line survey of current smokers, past smokers, non-smokers, and second-hand smokers (n=458) focusing on the role of cultural beliefs in shaping attitudes about smoking behavior. The result of my research suggests that culture does play an important role in determining attitudes towards smoking and smoking behavior. Based on these results, I provide several culturally specific recommendations for limiting tobacco use in China.

## **Product**

My final product will be a report including several parts. The first part would be some statistics showing how bad the problem that smoking in China has been. The second part is some current strategies for banning cigarettes smoking in public in a hope of reducing the number of smokers in China. Also, there will be an analysis of each strategy's effectiveness. The third part is an investigation for the real cause of smoking behavior for most smokers in China. It will include surveys, questionnaires, observations, and personal experience. The fourth part is to provide strategies to help people quit smoking effectively and reduce the increasing number of smokers in China.

## **Goals**

First, I want to complete the project without rushing everything. I mean I don't want to complete for completion. Second, I want to research in a wide range of cities in the world, not only in one continent or countries with similar cultural background. Third, I want to produce actual practical and feasible recommendations and strategies for achieving the purpose of my project.

## **Significance**

The purpose of the project is to reduce and eliminate the behavior of smoking in the built environment of a Tier 3 city. The Tier 3 city in China has more smokers comparatively. This phenomenon is an example of social inequity because of big cities with more government funds and more practical policies that could reduce the smoking population. The government would spend relatively more funding on solving all kinds of social problem including smoking and improve the environment of the city. Also, smoking causes health issues to smokers, second-hand smokers, and their children. It is one of the leading causes of preventable disease and death in the world. So, my project would provide comprehensive research, analysis, recommendation, strategies, solutions for reducing the behavior of smoking in Xiangtan City and other Tier 3 city in China. It would provide the ways and methods to raise awareness and a theoretical support for future actions.

## **Context/Background/Histroy**

It is known to a majority of people that “tobacco use can lead to serious health problems and quitting smoking greatly reduces the risk of developing smoking-related diseases” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Most people still could not stop it. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that nearly 20 percent of adults smoke and 70 percent of them want to quit. But only 3 percent of smokers successfully quit for their whole lifetime (Smoking & Tobacco Use, 2017). For the last 20 years, researchers have been trying to figure out what were the causes of addiction and solutions for helping to quit. It is believed that people get addicted because of biological factors. However, more and more recent researches showed cigarettes addiction is more likely to explained by the psychological factors. In another word, tobacco addiction is caused mainly by the psychological and mental dependence.

The project aims to raise people’s awareness of the effects of smoking cigarettes. It would help to change people’s mentality that smoking cigarettes are something they should never do. It would help to increase the life expectancy and decrease the risk of having many different types of diseases. It would make our city and life cleaner and healthier. There are many different benefits that would bring to people if we live in a smoke-free environment.

The history of smoking and anti-smoking activities varies in different parts of the world. In the US, the smoking population has dropped from 20.9% (nearly 21 of every 100 adults) in 2005 to 15.5% (more than 15 of every 100 adults) in 2016 (Jamal A, 2018). The World Health Organization (WHO) has spent many years on fighting tobacco smoke and have been teaching people around the world the effect of smoking. They have published a report about the progress they made and the implementations for solving the problem in more countries. They have had very broad data on tobacco related policies. However, in China, the prevalence of tobacco in Chinese men has peaked since the 1980s. The past 30 years, the smokers start to smoking more and more early, and a half of smokers did before 20 years old in 2010 survey (Yang, 2018).

## **Literature review**

### **Project background literature**

Smoking cigarettes are very common in China. There are over 300 million smokers in China which is the largest global producer and consumer of tobacco. The rates of smoking among Chinese males are the highest in the world at 52.1%. The annual number of deaths caused by tobacco is projected to double from about 1 million in 2010 to 2 million in 2030, with a further increase up to 3 million in 2050 (ITC Project and Tobacco Control Office, China CDC, 2017). So effective methods have to be carried out to prevent more deaths of smokers and secondhand smokers who are under the influence of secondhand smoke.

Then, I would dig into the strategies that have been implemented in China already. I would like to stress the ineffectiveness of most strategies since the smoking rate has never been declined greatly. The reasons behind the ineffectiveness are a very complex and broad topic that involves different layers from local to central government. One strategy I have searched on is anti-smoking television advertising. The huge urban community population has over 50% of males smoke cigarettes. Advertisement on television was carried out in five different time slots per day from 15 May to 15 June in 2011 across 12 channels of Chongqing TV. The aim is to educate not only smokers but also non-smokers to dislike cigarettes smoking in public. Then the survey was conducted among the community and a questionnaire was administered in late June to 1,342 native residents. The recipients who were mostly reached randomly age 18-45. The results showed that the advertisement did not show significant differences on smoking-related knowledge and attitude between non-smokers who had seen the advertisement and those who had not (Xianglong, Gong, Zhang, & Wu, 2015).

### **Education Campaign Worldwide**

Another strategy I have researched on is different levels of education campaigns which aim to increase public awareness of the dangers of smoking in China. Between 2008 and 2010, the World Lung Foundation ran several local media campaigns to raise awareness about the harms of smoking, including the “Sponge” campaign (a graphic depiction of the damage that smoking does to your lungs) and the “Giving cigarettes is giving harm” campaign in 11 cities (designed to raise awareness of the negative health impact of gifting cigarettes) (ITC Project and Tobacco Control Office, China CDC, 2017). The practice of giving cigarettes are viewed by most people as an act of hospitality and friendliness. Besides, one of the most urgent things has to be educated among public especially in rural areas. The awareness of health hazards posed by secondhand smoke was relatively low. Only 43.5% of those with a college or above education were aware that secondhand smoke could cause all three types of diseases (heart disease, lung disease and lung cancer) (Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). What worse, “awareness of the health risks of smoking is low in China. Only 68% of smokers believe that smoking causes lung cancer in smokers (compared to well over 90% in Western countries) and 54% believe that smoking causes lung cancer in non-smokers. Only 37% of smokers are aware

that smoking causes coronary heart disease and only 17% are aware that smoking causes strokes” (ITC Project and Tobacco Control Office, China CDC, 2017).

### **Smoking as a Cultural Norm**

Before conducting the survey, I have made assumptions that the only effective strategies for China would focus on people’s mentality or mindset. The mentality does not only concern with social norms but also culture belief. The psychological part is the most difficult part of smoking cessation. Nowadays, the appearance of e-cigarettes has become very popular among young people. The advertisement and designed appearance of it have attracted many teenagers as well. The report I found on Chicago Tribune talked about how the mayor wants to ban the online selling of e-cigarettes after he found out underage teenagers had access to purchase them online (Byrne, 2018). This has become another epidemic of mentality believing smoking cigarettes or e-cigarettes is fine or even a cool thing to do among young people. As mentioned earlier, the practice of gifting cigarettes is the first thing I want to stress on. People have a wrong mentality that giving cigarettes to people on holiday or other occasions is very respectful and welcoming. It not only encourages smokers to continue smoking but also makes cigarettes gifting a part of the culture that would influence widely and deeply to the younger generation. Next, the bandwagon effect has always been the most common reason for people to start smoking. Personally, I started smoking when I was only 13 years old in my junior high with many classmates who are doing too. It has already become a very common phenomenon that teenagers start smoking at a very young age under bandwagon effect or peer pressure (Singh, 2018). Movies, music videos, and other media are the other sources that teenagers learn the smoking behavior. The education function of the media can be a double-edged sword that teaches the right things and bad things. So, I would also look into more researches on how the media plays the role of influencing the tobacco control.

### **Methods**

In this project, I will include four main parts of my report which is my final product. I will have the first part as an introduction so there will be the statistics for showing the prevalence of smoking in China and seriousness of effects of smoking. The statistics are available from the World Health Organization (WHO) who has collected many different types of data analyzing different angles of problems. I will also collect and find data from other Chinese and International organizations that were founded to reduce smoking rates and help people to quit smoking. The goal of this part will be showing the significance of stressing cigarettes smoking issues and attracting attention from my audiences or readers. Because not everyone will be interested since cigarettes seem to be not a big problem now in the U.S.

Secondly, I will introduce the past and current ways of reducing smoking rates by the central government and local government in China. Because there have been some methods and strategies that’ve taken into action but no radical change in smoking rate or noticeable reduction of smoking behavior in many public areas. For example, there is a cross-sectional

study that was conducted in Chongqing, China. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-smoking television advertising among Urban community residents in Chongqing, China. Questionnaires were participated by over 1,000 residents aged 18-45 through street intercept survey. And most important part was the evaluation of the television advertising on anti-smoking strategy because it indicated how effective the strategy was and it could be used as the basis to develop more effective strategies on anti-smoking (Xianglong, Gong, and Zhang). I will research for more sources that evaluate strategies of anti-smoking and from different disciplines such as policy, education, smoking interventions, media campaigns, tobacco price change, etc. From learning past and current strategies, it would not only help understand the effectiveness of different strategies of anti-smoking in a different social and cultural context but also narrow down selections of possible solutions for reducing smoking rates. Then I could transit to my point which is smoking behavior is mainly reinforced by the social norms and people's mentality.

From the last part, I will be able to introduce my third part of the report which talks about how people's mentality affects smoking behavior. I will conduct a survey on ever smokers, current smokers, daily smokers, former smokers, second-hand smokers, and non-smokers. All my survey recipients will be Chinese in China or in the U.S. Conducting surveys on different types of smokers allows me to compare the different mentality because that might be the main reason why people smoke, people quit and people never. My survey questions will focus on getting the answers to how mentality difference affects smoking behavior. My survey questions will be in Chinese and after I received all the survey answers back, I will translate them into English. Then I will create charts to show the relationship between mentality on cigarettes smoking and smoking behavior.

The fourth part will be the solutions of mentality change or education. I know it will be less likely effective and practical because mentality has been formed and hardly change. But one common weakness of human is people always follow the mass trend or mainstream behavior. The mainstream could be happened at a relatively small setting first such as a workplace. For example, one person at a workplace quits smoking will increase the possibility for another person who always smokes with him to quit. Because from my surveys, it will definitely show the positive relationship of smoking company and smoking behavior. So, from this point, I will start brainstorm ways to discourage smoking behavior for individuals. I will also incorporate my personal experience on quitting smoking and try some strategies to help my friends who smoke cigarettes.

## **Assessment**

My final product will compose mainly four parts as I explained in my Methods. I would like to assess each part with different criteria as follows. The first research/background section will be successful if I could collect a wide array of sources that provide my reader with a comprehensive understanding and raises their interest or even concern. Successful research

includes statistics on smoking prevalence for different age groups and other demographics (sex, education, income, etc). Then, case studies on Chinese cities with similar demographics and size about what they have done with smoking control. For this part, the success depends on whether the case study is able to demonstrate the points which provide a transition to my proposal. My proposal is that the main focus for reducing the smoking rate in the small cities of China should start from changing people's mindset and the cultural tradition. A successful third part would require my survey and research that could prove my proposal to be broad and strong. I assess my survey according to the number of participants in my survey and the variety of different smoking population such as non-smokers. The success of my final recommendation would depend on the estimated effectiveness and operational feasibility.

## Appendix One: Bibliography

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