Japan: land of the rise in lung cancer

US government aids cigarette sales

The following article was written by Alan Blum, MD, based on extensive materials supplied by Peter Evans, a teacher of English at Keio University, Tokyo.

In no other country in the world is the two pack (or more) a day cigarette habit more prevalent among men than in Japan. Seventy percent of Japanese men admit to being regular cigarette smokers, more than double the American percentage.[1] In contrast to the trend in American business toward executive health and fitness programs, smoking is still very much a part of the Japanese businessman's lifestyle.

Notwithstanding the fact that lung cancer is the fastest growing cause of death in Japan (accounting for 5,171 deaths in 1960 and 25,647 in 1983, according to Japan's National Cancer Center), the Japanese government has shown little interest in the problem of smoking. Indeed, in 1983 the newly appointed minister of health and welfare said as he assumed office that smoking was the secret of his good health. In 1982 in the Diet (Japanese parliament) the minister of finance boasted of his heavy smoking and drinking,[2] and Prime Minister Yashuhiro Nakasone, responding to an opposition politician's objection to cigarette advertising on television, has said that cigarettes are not harmful as long as smokers adhere to the warning printed on each pack.[3] The Japanese warning reads, "For the sake of health, let's be careful not to smoke too much."

For 80 years the manufacture, distribution, marketing, and advertising of all domestic cigarettes were controlled by the Japan Tobacco and Salt Public Corporation, a government monopoly. The monopoly long protected its position (and 80,000 domestic tobacco farmers) by restricting the importation of tobacco and the distribution and advertising of foreign cigarettes.[4] Foreign brands accounted for only 1.8% of the 306 billion cigarettes sold in Japan in 1983. Under pressure from American cigarette companies, the government recently transformed the tobacco monopoly into a semi-private company, with two thirds of its shares still held by the Ministry of Finance. The new company, Japan Tobacco, Inc, made its public debut on April 1, 1985 with advertisements in daily newspapers that promised "to continue to be effectively managed and contribute to society by introducing ease and relaxation into daily life." The company offers miniature flowering tobacco plants, a "symbol of peace of mind and tranquility."

A second quasi-private corporation, Japan Tobacco International Corp, also has been formed to export cigarettes to countries in Southeast Asia, as a hedge against declining sales in Japan.

Although advertising is limited to some extent (to about $50 million a year) by mutual agreement of the tobacco companies,[5] cigarette advertising is still ubiquitous. Logos for such domestic brands as Cabin 85 and Mild Seven appear throughout the country on shopping bags, storefronts, trash cans, and trucks. Cigarettes are sold in more than 500,000 tobacco shops, coffee shops, bars, and restaurants, as well as from approximately 330,000 vending machines available around the clock. In 1973 there were 141,500 such machines (data obtained by Japan Action for Nonsmokers' Rights).

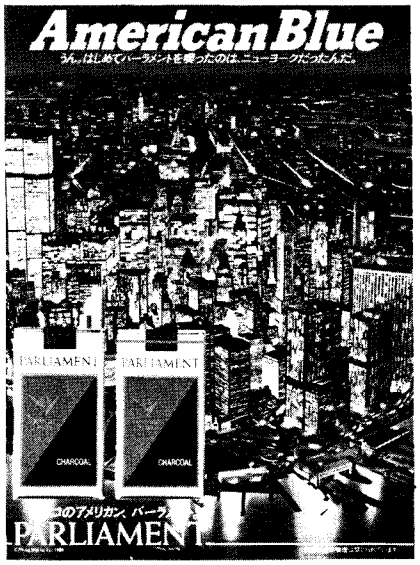
Cigarette advertising is still permitted on television. One recent advertisement featured a popular Japanese novelist conducting an orchestra using a Cabin 85 cigarette as a baton. Another in the series showed a popular young movie star sitting in a dune buggy, in violation of the monopoly's own guidelines against using youthful role models. Television advertisements for another domestic brand, Cosmos, employ the latest in computer graphics. At the end of each commercial is a statement that smoking by minors is prohibited, an admonition, observes Peter Evans, that could hardly be calculated to glamorize smoking among young people. Advertisements for Cosmos using the same images also appear in numerous magazines read by teenagers.

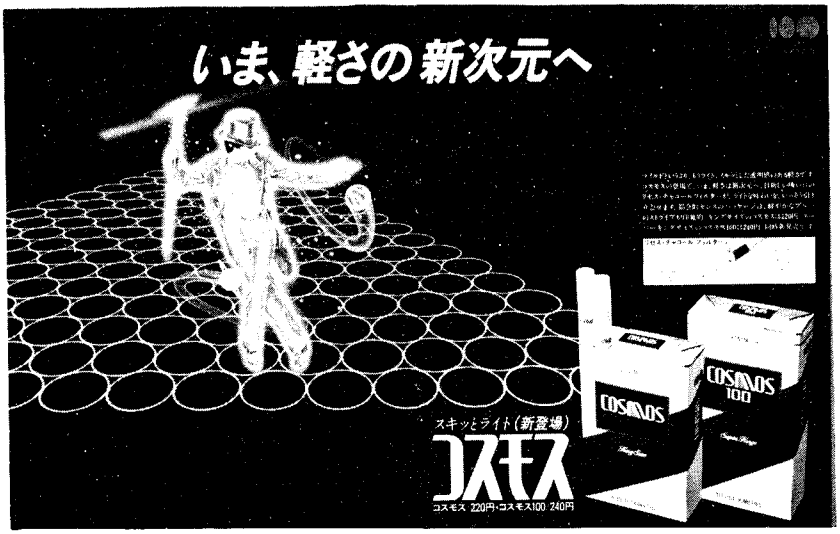
Foreign cigarette companies are stepping up their campaigns on billboards and in retail shops—advertising by Philip Morris is up by 50% in 1985.[5] The company's Lark brand (Japanese trademark rights for which were purchased from "rival" multinational tobacco company Grand Metropolitan) has become known through its advertising spokesman, American actor James Coburn, who advises viewers to "Speak Lark."

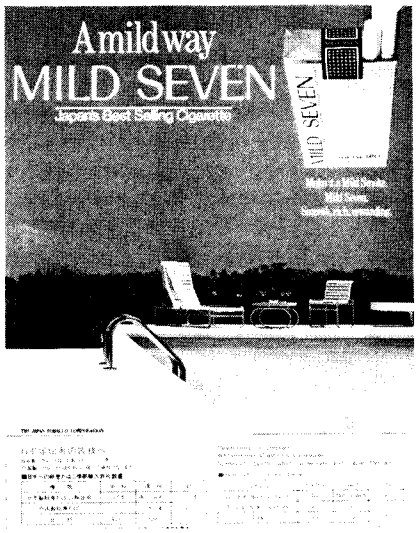
RJ Reynolds' Camel is the fastest growing brand. A new company, RJ Reynolds/Mitsubishi Corporation Tobacco Company Ltd, controls sales for Reynolds' cigarettes and merchandise bearing its cigarette brand logos.[6,7] (Mitsubishi Corporation, closely allied to the giant automobile maker that recently announced a joint venture with Chrysler in the American automobile market, has served as RJ Reynolds' import agent since 1971.) Reynolds-Mitsubishi will try to increase sales by targeting its advertisements to young smokers.

In 1984 Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation (BAT) announced it would link with Japan's leading confectionery company, Meiji Seika Kaisha Ltd, which is also a manufacturer of pharmaceutical products, to sell its cigarettes in 4,900 kiosks, 12,000 pinball arcades, and 175,000 confectionery and baked goods outlets.[8,9] However, vigorous protests and threatened boycotts by the Japanese Lawyers' Organization for Nonsmokers' Rights and the nearly 40 other groups belonging to the All-Japan Anti-smoking Liaison Council succeeded in delaying implementation of the marketing agreement. The lawyers' group made it clear that it would seek enforcement of laws that forbid persons under 20 years of age to smoke or buy

For information on the non-smokers' rights movement in Japan, address correspondence to Bungaku Watanabe, Director, Japan Action for Non-smokers' Rights (Ken'en-ken Kakuritsu o mezasu hitobito no kai), 1-7-3 Hirakawa-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102, Japan. For additional information on smoking, cigarette advertising, and efforts to counter smoking, address correspondence to Takashi Shiraishi, The All-Japan Anti-smoking Liaison Council, 846 Kami Kawai, Asahi-ku, Yokohama 241, Japan.







Japan's $11 billion cigarette market is double the size of the country's famed telecommunications market. Although foreign imports have accounted for only 2% of cigarettes smoked, the recent relaxation of trade barriers and advertising restrictions has given American cigarette makers hope of nearly tripling their sales by 1988. Most aggressive in its promotions is Philip Morris. Its advertising for Virginia Slims features an American model and the slogan, "Sexy, slim, slim cigarette" (top left). Parliament advertisements in magazines and on billboards feature the slogan, "Yeah. When I first smoked Parliament, it was New York" (top center). In magazine advertisements, impressionistic essays with English titles like "American Blues" and "Downtown" describe how it feels to be in New York (top right). RJ Reynolds uses its caucasian "everyman" to appeal to impressionable young Japanese (middle left). Japan Tobacco, Inc (JTI) advertisements for Cabin 85, Sometime, and Cosmos are imitative of American advertisements (middle center, middle right, bottom left). The advertisement for another JTI brand, Mild Seven, appeared in the March 1985 issue of the United Airlines flight magazine on all US flights, notwithstanding the absence of the Surgeon General's warning (bottom right).

cigarettes and that prohibit anyone from selling to a minor.

Such protests have not deterred the Reagan administration from working on behalf of tobacco interests to press the Japanese government to permit increased imports of American tobacco. The All-Japan Anti-smoking Liaison Council has pointed out the hypocrisy of America's trying to expand exports of goods that are labeled as dangerous within the United States.

Seven members of the Diet have formed a non-partisan anti-smoking group known as the Parliamentarians' Council on Smoking Problems.[10] But so deeply involved in the tobacco business is the Japanese government that it has never produced an anti-smoking poster and has not supported restrictions on smoking in public places. A request by the Education Ministry for 6 million yen ($25,000) from the 1985 budget for the development of a national anti-smoking program was rejected, as was a request by the Ministry for Health and Welfare for 7 million yen ($29,000) for courses for health officials to curb smoking.[11] Unlike most western countries, which are at least talking about laying the groundwork for a non-smoking generation, Japan gives no systematic information on the dangers of smoking at any stage in school education. The situation is just beginning to change. A handful of junior high schools have introduced anti-smoking literature into the curriculum and a workshop on anti-smoking education held in Tokyo in 1984 drew 70 teachers from across the country.[12] The chairman of the Japan Teachers' Union has also endorsed stepped-up educational efforts.

The impetus for the increasing attention to smoking has come from the All-Japan Anti-smoking Liaison Council, which helps coordinate the activities of nearly 40 organizations around the nation. An annual anti-smoking week, begun on April 7 to 13, 1984 to coincide with World Health Organization Day, earned an editorial salute from *The Japan Times*, an English-language newspaper.[13] The week features parades, exhibits, and smoking cessation clinics throughout Japan, united by graphic posters. In 1985 the council scheduled its campaign to coincide with the end of the government monopoly, and its posters carried the slogan, "The state quits, I also quit."[12]

Vigorous opposition by the council has been launched against the exporting of cigarettes to other Asian countries. A recent appeal has been made to the Japanese emperor to end the practice of giving cigarettes as gifts to guests and volunteers in the Imperial household.[14] In January 1985, the council sponsored a concert whose title satirized the tobacco monopoly's "Nice day, nice smoking" slogan: "Clean air, clean music." The event, featuring a leading Japanese composer, singers, and other musicians, raised funds for the council.[15] The council has established a hotline for complaints about smoking in the workplace, on transportation systems, and in other public places.[1]

The effort to assert the rights of non-smokers began in earnest in Japan in 1978 with the establishment of *Ken'en-ken*—a catchy phrase meaning "the right to dislike smoking"—as a national movement to ban smoking in public places. *Ken'en-ken,* headed by Bungaku Watanabe, is more formally titled Japan Action for Nonsmokers' Rights (JANR). At the Fifth World Conference on Smoking and Health in Winnipeg in 1983, Watanabe called attention to the targeting by Japanese cigarette advertisers of women and teenagers. Whereas only 8% of women aged 20–29 years smoked in 1968, 17% reported doing so in 1981. Watanabe pointed to an advertisement featuring a popular Japanese actor lighting up a cigarette after exercising with a jump rope as "fraudulent, criminal advertising."

As the result of growing public complaints and the efforts of JANR and other groups, in 1984 the Japanese National Railways added a second non-smoking car to each of its famed bullet trains. Still, two thirds of Japanese express trains lack such accommodations.

JANR has found that only two of 75 major general hospitals in Tokyo prohibit smoking and only 18 others provide smoking rooms that are separated from non-smoking areas.[1]

Doubtless because of the contributions of Watanabe, the council, and Dr Takeshi Hirayama (whose research [*Br Med J,* Jan 17, 1981] indicates that the spouses of persons who smoke also have a high risk of lung cancer), Japan has been chosen as the site of the Sixth World Conference on Smoking and Health in 1987.

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American writer and translator Sandy Heinlein, who resides in Japan, observed the union of the ancient performing arts and the modern cigarette pack when he visited the remote village of Kushibiki, which has a 450-year old tradition of amateur Noh performance.

In one of the two farmhouse-shrine-theaters of this community, many of the village elders and leading religious figures wearing traditional dress, smoked cigarettes at the most important Buddhist festival. To Heinlein this seemed akin to a priest and choir lighting up during midnight mass.