

# Beyond Less Harm Descriptors: How Cigarette Packs in China Connote Health

Carmen Washington, Joanna Cohen, Kevin Welding, Katherine Smith

## Background

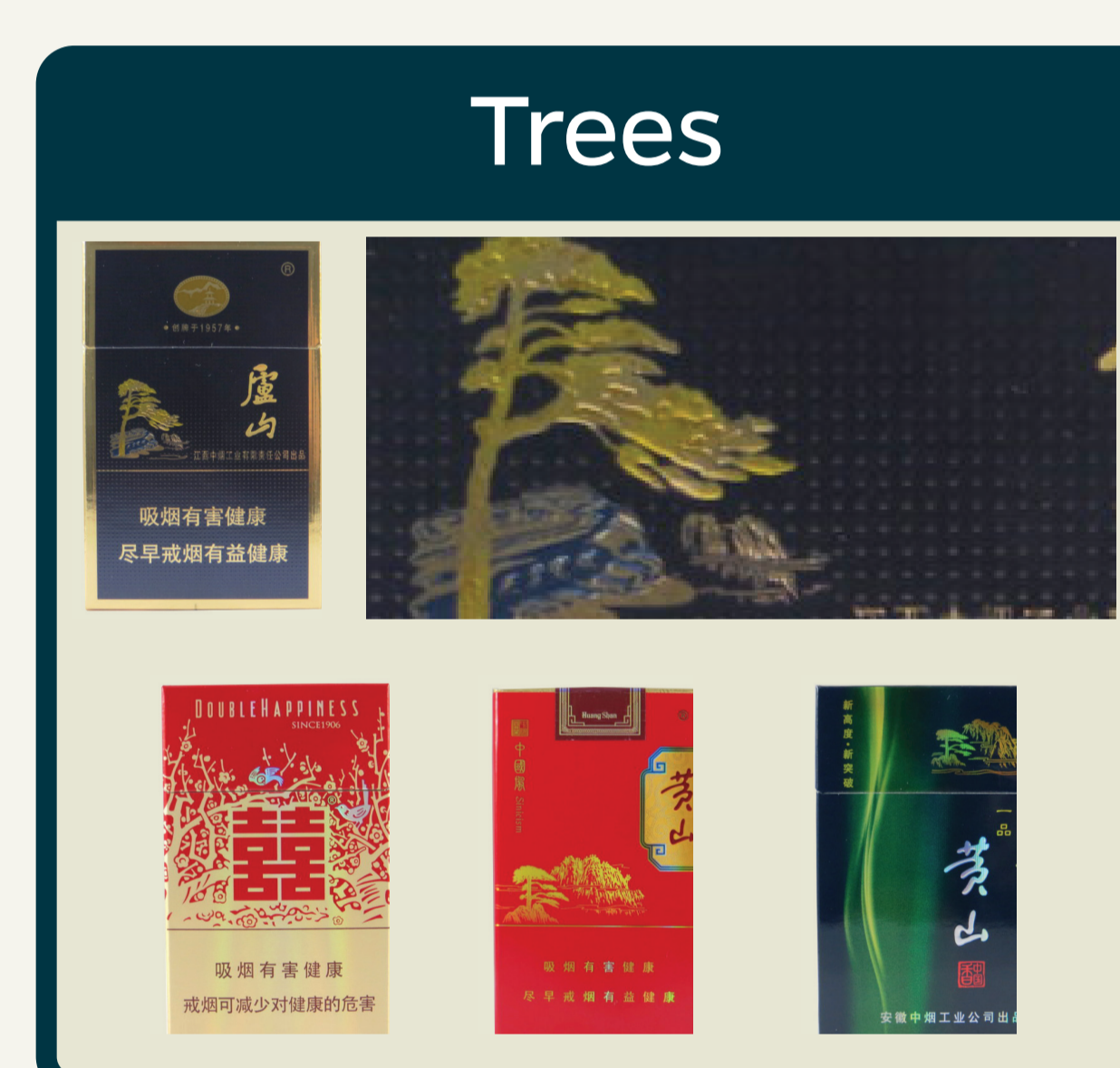
- The FCTC recommends banning tobacco product packaging and labeling that promotes false, misleading, deceptive impressions about a product's characteristics
- China specifically bans terms such as “health care”, “treatment functions”, “safe”, “environmental protection”, “low harms” and “light”, “ultra light” and “mild”
- Nature, landscape, and herbs connote wellness and longevity in China
- We describe how packs in China convey less harm in other ways and may communicate health benefits through cultural references

## Methods

- 453 cigarette packs were systematically purchased in China in 2013: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Kunming and Chengdu from low, middle, and high socioeconomic areas
- Two independent coders assessed the packs for words and/or imagery conveying less harm or health benefits/life promotion
- Two independent linguists translated words and imagery for cultural meaning and significance

## Results

14% of the China sample used non-tobacco plant imagery



Across the sample “natural” or “organic” and nature associated terms (28%) were used to describe the product

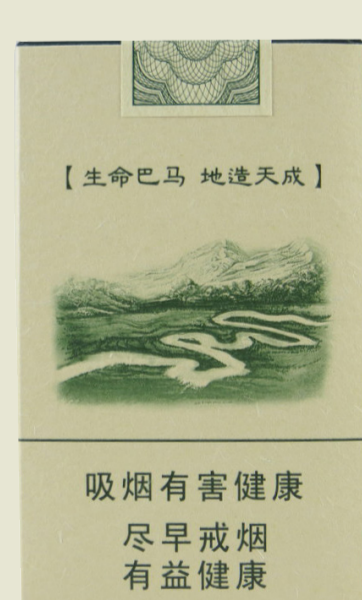


“Cultivated with eco-friendly techniques”

Some packs used EXPLICIT health benefits/longevity messages or images to describe the product



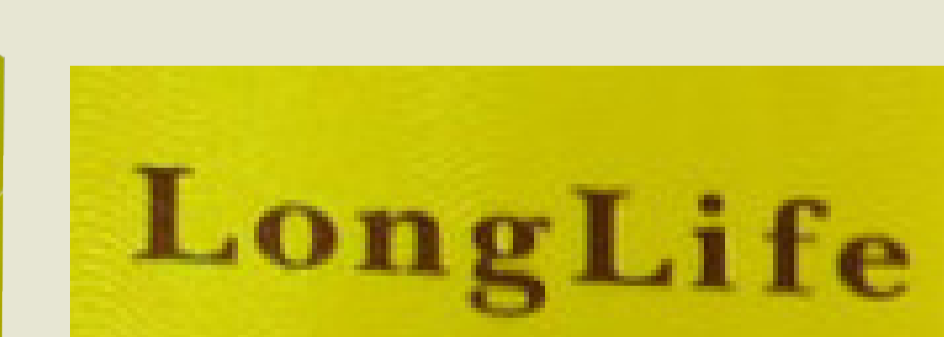
“So prosperous is Huizhou, that even its grass is a treasure. With its fragrance swirling inside my bosom and my body submerged in its smoke, I feel like the legendary immortals dancing inside clouds.”



Brand name is Bama Tiancheng. Bama is a countryside known and studied for its residents' longevity. Product states, “nature gifted the inhabitants of Bama with long life”.



Use of traditional medicinal products: ginseng root and tea



Brand name promoting longevity

## Conclusions

- Our analysis shows that cigarette packs in China used cultural references connoting health, not covered in the misleading descriptor ban
- It is important for public health groups and regulators to be aware of the cultural references tobacco companies might use