

## Teh-wei Hu: International Leader in Health Care Reform



“No U.S. academic has had as profound an impact on the health system reform of Asian countries as Teh-wei Hu,” states Dean Stephen Shortell. The World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, and the Chinese Ministry of Health all look to the UC Berkeley professor emeritus for advice on issues of health care planning and tobacco control. More than a dozen countries, including China, Cambodia, Estonia, Indonesia, Latvia, Thailand, and Vietnam, have benefited from Hu’s advice on tobacco tax policy.

Hu began working in health economics before the field had a name, and he has been involved in tobacco control for more than 20 years. “I started working on tobacco control in California, when the state had Prop. 99,” he says. Hu and colleagues analyzed policy and made recommendations to the state for the landmark legislation, which increased the tax on tobacco and earmarked the funds raised for tobacco-related education, research, and prevention.

Hu has played a major role in reforming the health systems of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and has devoted much of his time to trying to solve health problems there, including, but not limited to, smoking in China. The world’s number one consumer of tobacco products, China has 350 million smokers, making up a quarter of all smokers worldwide. An additional 460 million people in China are exposed to secondhand smoke, most of them women and children. The country is also the world’s largest producer of tobacco, so that industry is tremendously important to the national economy.

This puts China’s economic interest at odds with the health of its people. “It is a well-known fact among Chinese officials that smoking causes lung and cardiovascular diseases and leads to high medical expenditures and premature deaths,” writes Hu. “Yet China has been reluctant to impose the most effective tobacco control policy—raising the tobacco tax—due to its concerns over the negative economic impacts of revenue loss, income loss among tobacco farmers, or employment loss in the cigarette manufacturing industry.” But an analysis by Hu and colleagues shows that a 10 percent tax

increase would raise revenue by \$3.6 billion, while reducing cigarette consumption by 1.5 percent and potentially saving 1 million lives. The extra tax revenue could be used for health and social welfare programs.

In a study funded by a five-year grant from the Fogarty International Center of the National Insti-

tutes of Health, Hu and colleagues at the School of Public Health and other UC campuses examined the impact of an additional tobacco tax, the economic costs of smoking, and the cost-effectiveness of tobacco-control interventions in China, in order to inform policymaking by Chinese officials. The team looked at factors such as the effects of secondhand smoke on women and the impact of China’s entry into the World Trade Organization. They established a framework for tobacco control research in China, working closely with the World Bank; China’s Ministry of Health; the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine; and health economists from China’s Beijing University, Fudan University, and Sichuan University. The findings are summarized in Hu’s

newly edited book, *Tobacco Control Policy Analysis in China* (World Scientific), which was published in January 2008.

Hu joined the faculty at the School of Public Health in 1986 and served as a department chair in the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, while serving as the School’s associate dean for research, he

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organized a schoolwide Dr.P.H. program. In 2003, he received the Distinguished Teaching and Mentorship Award at the School’s commencement ceremony. Upon his retirement in 2004, Hu received the prestigious Berkeley Citation for his distinguished and extraordinary service to the Berkeley campus. He remains involved with the School, advising doctoral students on their theses. He also continues to consult on tobacco control for the WHO, the World Bank, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use. 📄

—Michael S. Broder