

Country Profile on Alcohol in Malaysia

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country of nearly 20 million people located on the southernmost tip of peninsular Southeast Asia and on the western edge of the island of Borneo. The country resulted from the amalgamation of British colonial possessions in the region after World War II. Independent since 1957, the country has three main ethnic groups: Malays, comprising just under 60% of the population; Chinese, 28% of the population; and Indians, approximately 8%. The country is ruled by the Barisan Nasional, an alliance of 13 parties dominated by three large parties each representing one of the major ethnic groups. In keeping with its Malay majority, the country and its laws show the influence of Islam, but the official policy is one of tolerance for all races and religions.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ALCOHOL IN MALAYSIA

Prior to the advent of the Europeans, there was very little alcohol production or consumption in Malaysia. The Malay sultanates of peninsular Malaysia adhered to Islamic attitudes regarding alcohol, and abstention was the norm. In the states of Sabah and Sarawak on Borneo, indigenous people traditionally drank a home-made rice wine called *tuak* or *tapai* in conjunction with harvest celebrations and social or communal gatherings (Arokiasamy, 1995). People in these states are reportedly still vulnerable to heavy drinking as a result of the use of large quantities of alcohol to indicate the hospitality and quality of a long house (Tan, 1994).

Most of the alcoholic beverages drunk in Malaysia today came with the European merchants and later colonials beginning in the 17th century. The local Malay population in the main eschewed the wine-type beverages brought by the Portuguese and Dutch in the 17th and 18th centuries. As the British developed plantation agriculture and mining in the 19th and early 20th centuries, they used alcohol as a colonizing and proletarianizing force, as British colonials did elsewhere in the empire (see e.g. Van Onselen, 1982). To Indian labourers brought over from southern India to work in the plantations, the British made alcohol readily available. It served a dual purpose of entertaining the workers and returning their wages to the plantation's coffers

(Arasaratnam, 1970). As workers became more dependent they began to produce their own palm wines. In response, the British began a government monopoly on palm wine or "toddy" production that continues to this day.

The British brought in Chinese to work the tin mines. Chinese consumption of opium and spirits went a long way towards financing the British administration of the Straits Settlements, as the colony was known (Jesudason, 1989). The Chinese community also quickly spawned rural entrepreneurs who produced alcoholic beverages, either independently or for the mine or estate owners. This class of beverage became known generically as *samsu*, a term whose original meaning was rice wine, but which today encompasses a wide range of locally-distilled alcoholic beverages, with strengths ranging from 30 to 70% absolute alcohol.

The British also brought with them traditions of drinking beer and its higher-alcohol cousin stout. The market for these beverages began via imports from Europe. By the 1930s the first major industrial brewery was in production in neighbouring Singapore. Others followed on the Malay Peninsula. Prestige alcohol products, distilled spirits such as Scotch whisky and cognac, also arrived with the British.

3. TYPES OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES AVAILABLE

The tribal societies of East Malaysia still consume *tuak*. Today, government shops hold a monopoly in the rapidly dwindling market for palm wine. *Samsu* is widely available in urban and rural areas. Historically, sales of this cheap and often unsanitary alcohol provided a significant part of the revenue of the rural small shopkeepers. Today, such shops also do a strong business in beer, particularly stout. *Samsu* and beer are the two leading alcoholic beverage categories nationwide measured by volume of absolute alcohol. There is a range of beers available, and nearly all of them come from the country's two breweries. Aside from *samsu*, distilled spirits are imported, with foreign cognac and whisky being the most popular.

4. THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY

In 1968, the two leading brewers, Guinness and Malayan Breweries, merged to form Guinness Anchor Berhad. Shortly thereafter, in the early 1970s, Carlsberg built a brewery outside of the capital of Kuala Lumpur. Today the two companies split the malt beverage market, with Carlsberg holding roughly 60% to Guinness' 40%. The leading distributor of branded industrially produced spirits is Riche Monde. A descendent of the Boustead and Co. trading house, Riche Monde is jointly owned by a holding company whose leading shareholder is the Armed Forces Cooperative Society (Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera), and by a joint venture between Mœet-Hennessey, one of the world's largest wine makers, and United Distillers (Guinness), the second largest purveyor of distilled spirits in the world. According to the Consumers Association of Penang, there are now eight principal distillers of *samsu*, all of whom

are Chinese, selling to a primarily Chinese distribution network (M. Assunta, Consumers Association of Penang, interview, 4/27/95).

5. ALCOHOL AVAILABILITY, MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

Sales director Lee Kee Hock of Guinness Anchor Berhad, which brews Guinness and Heineken as well as Singapore-based Asia Pacific Brewery's flagship brand Tiger and Anchor, told Jernigan he estimated there are approximately 200 000 heavy consumers of his company's product (interview, Kuala Lumpur, 4/18/95). Brewery personnel have regular personal contact with each one of these drinkers. Both leading breweries hire young women to work in pubs and restaurants representing the brewer. Their sole purpose is to greet customers and offer them the company's beer. Carlsberg spends more than RM5 million (US\$2 million) per year on this person-to-person promotion.

Unlike many developed countries, in Malaysia the majority of alcohol consumption occurs on-premises. In addition to the bar and restaurant women, the brewers sponsor tours of beauty queens and rock bands through the bars, and seasonal tours such as the Anchor beer "Santarinis" at Christmas. The biggest seasonal promotions occur in early January, in time for Chinese New Year. Promotions in bars can carry strong sexual overtones. Tiger beer, made by the Guinness-Heineken affiliate, called its Christmas tour of women "Xmas Xpose" and featured low-cut cleavage prominently on the tour poster. A recent promotion for Jose Cuervo tequila bore the title "Lick, Shoot and Suck", and offered patrons the opportunity to lick salt from a woman's breasts, take a shot of tequila, and then suck a lime from her mouth (Teoh, 1995).

Approximately 80% of non-duty free sales of high end distilled spirits occur in hostess clubs catering to local and foreign businessmen. These clubs have an elaborate incentive system worked out with the spirits marketers to boost consumption of particular brands, especially cognac. According to a leading cognac marketer, the club manager receives a bonus over and above his or her profit if sales exceed a certain number of cases. The clubs employ women as hostesses to entertain the businessmen. These women are supervised by a "mama-san" who also receives a bonus pegged to the amount of cognac consumed. Finally, the businessmen earn points for each bottle consumed. The points may be exchanged for gifts -- watches, perfume, and leather goods -- which are then traditionally given to the hostesses. Thus virtually everyone working in the club has a personal interest in seeing to it that large amounts of cognac are consumed.

Alcohol companies, particularly the cognac marketers, also provide incentives for alcohol consumption in conjunction with functions, such as weddings, anniversaries, family or business association meetings, and the like. Depending on the amount of cognac expected to be consumed at a wedding, for instance, a cognac marketer will provide glasses, tables, servers, tents, photographer, entertainment, and even the wedding cake.

Although advertising is banned on broadcast media, both beer and distilled spirits companies advertise in cinemas and in the print media. Some companies also advertise on Chinese-language pre-recorded videocassettes. The alcohol companies spent an estimated RM31.1 million (US\$12.75 million) on advertising in 1994 (Shunmugam, 1995). In addition, beer and spirits companies sponsor sporting events, rock concerts and charitable events. Carlsberg's success in the Chinese community has built on the good will it has won in the past decade by funding a local rock and roll band competition that culminates in a tour by the winning bands to the privately-run and financed Chinese language schools. Carlsberg pays all costs for the concerts, enabling the schools to keep all of the proceeds.

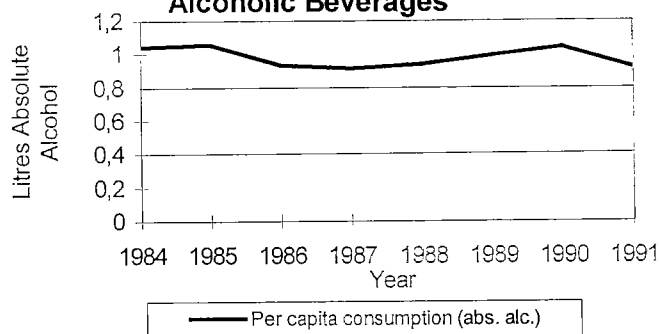
While in developed countries such as the United States making health claims about alcohol in advertising is illegal, in Malaysia at least one company won approval from the Ministry of Health to claim in print and on-premise advertising that its product is "good for mothers in confinement." Benedictine D.O.M., a liqueur marketed internationally by Bacardi, has an average alcohol content of 40%. Its supermarket campaign targeted to women features a mother holding her infant. The newspaper ad for the campaign claims the product is "good for mothers in confinement". The civil servant responsible for alcohol problems in the Ministry of Health told Jernigan that the food division had given the ministry's approval for this claim, and that her division had not been consulted.

In response to even tighter advertising restrictions than the alcohol companies face, Malaysia's cigarette marketers engage in "indirect" advertising, promoting their brands with products other than cigarettes in order to keep the brand in front of the public. Philip Morris advertises Marlboro clothing, Peter Stuyvesant runs a travel company, and Salem has a chain of CD stores. Government officials in 1995 and 1996 made statements threatening to ban direct alcohol advertising. In response, Carlsberg is trying out its own chain of CD stores, the Carlsberg "Hot Trax" stores, which display the Carlsberg logo on every wall and at the end of every aisle of shelving and display cases containing compact discs, comic books and sports trading cards.

Alcohol industry sources estimate that there are 35 000 major retail outlets selling or serving alcohol in the country. In addition, smaller outlets such as coffee shops are not permitted to sell beer for on-premises consumption, but will customarily provide the customer with a beer bottle and a bottle opener.

Per capita consumption estimates range from less than one litre to as much 6.5 litres for adult consumption of spirits alone (UNDP, 1991). Figure 1 represents an attempt to derive per capita consumption estimates by using data on overall alcohol availability. Working from import and export figures provided by the Malaysian Office of Statistics, domestic production estimates drawn from UN sources, and estimates of the size of the *samsu* market from Consumers Association of Penang, figure 1 below shows

Figure 1: Per Capita Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages



apparent per capita consumption in Malaysia from 1984 to 1991. These estimates are higher than those of two market research firms, Datamonitor and Impact Databank (Datamonitor, 1995; Impact Databank, 1995). They would be roughly in line with the estimates of *World Drink Trends*, the most widely quoted global source on per capita alcohol consumption, if the latter had made similar assumptions regarding duty-free and *samsu* sales (Produktschap voor Gestilleerde Dranken, 1996). Even with generous assumptions about the size of the *samsu* and duty-free markets, per capita consumption hovers around one litre of absolute alcohol per year. By comparison, the French consumed more than 11 litres of absolute alcohol per capita in 1995, and relatively temperate Norway consumed 4.1 litres of alcohol per capita (Produktschap voor Gestilleerde Dranken, 1996).

The graph gives some sense of trends in the market. The economic recession of the late 1980s probably contributed to the drop in consumption during that period. The turn downward again in 1991 is most likely the result of a major increase in both import duties and alcohol excise taxes effective at the beginning of that year. For three consecutive years the government raised taxes on alcohol. However, by 1995 alcohol industry officials indicated in interviews that sales had returned to their former levels and were increasing again (beer sales growing at between 5 and 7% per year, well ahead of the roughly 2.4% annual population growth).

But such an estimate of per capita consumption has many problems. First, Malaysia has a higher proportion of its population under age 15 (roughly 38% in 1990) (ESCAP, 1991) than most developed countries. Second, the 60% of the population that is Malay and Muslim is reputed not to drink, and the Malays as a whole probably drink less than other ethnic groups. Third, men drink far more than women do. If one assumes that no women and only 20% of the Malay population drink, the per capita estimate for 1990 rises to 4.3 litres. However, even this does not give an accurate picture.

6. CURRENT DRINKING PATTERNS

Surveys of subpopulations show that drinking patterns vary by gender, race and income. Most of the drinkers are men. Observers report increasing numbers of younger urban women from all ethnicities are beginning to drink, but there are no survey data to confirm this. Government attitudes towards alcohol compromise the ability of researchers to study drinking practices. In interviews conducted by Jernigan with a variety of government officials in 1995 and 1996, alcohol was repeatedly termed a "sensitive" subject because of the racial issues raised by drinking. Malay officials termed the problem "an Indian issue", emphasizing Islam's prohibition against use of alcohol by the Malay majority. Indian officials responded to the blaming of the problem on their community by pointing to evidence that others, in particular Malays, were known to drink heavily. The predominantly Chinese professionals in the alcohol industry blamed problem drinking primarily on *samsu*, consumed in the main by Indians. A national household mobility survey in progress in 1996 includes questions about quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption. However, the government decided to omit this section of the survey when interviewing Malay respondents.

General population surveys of drinking patterns in Malaysia thus either do not exist or are unavailable. The only available random population-based survey used purposive sampling to obtain an urban-rural balance is a sample of 1001 elderly Malaysians in peninsular Malaysia. Only 11% of the subjects drank alcohol. Of this number, nearly half reported thinking they drank too much, and that their families complained about their drinking. However, this could as easily result from cultural bias against drinking as from consumption of alcohol at problem-inducing levels. A smaller study of rural Malays and aboriginal people in an area 50 km from the capital found that 5% of the Malays and a third of the aborigines drink alcohol. Quantity consumed and frequency of drinking were not assessed (Ali et al., 1991).

Although government researchers do ongoing random sampling of secondary schoolchildren regarding drug use, including alcohol and tobacco, the most recent year for which figures regarding alcohol use were published was 1976. At that time, in two states with substantial urban populations, 19% of secondary schoolchildren reported drinking alcohol, with 1% drinking "often". Three percent of sample respondents drank distilled spirits at least once a month, and 5.6% drank beer at least that frequently (Spencer & Navaratnam, 1976).

Type of beverage consumed varies by race and social class. Rural low-income Indian workers are the primary consumers of *samsu* and toddy. As with other low-income drinkers, their drinking is defined by price and prestige. To this day, the alcohol economy on the agricultural estates guarantees a stable workforce:

“It is common for these estate labourers to buy hard liquor at the beginning of the month, when they receive their salary; to shift to the less expensive beer toward the middle of the month, when they have less money; and to end the month with cheap toddy or *samsu*. Many of the drinkers on these estates spend their entire income on alcohol. It is also common for them to take advances on their salary to buy liquor, resulting in virtual debt bondage” (Ariokasamy, 1995).

According to beer industry officials, blue-collar workers, seeking higher alcohol content for the money, are the largest consumers of stout, which comprises about 40% of malt beverage sales. As one industry marketing official remarked, the decision to drink stout is “I think primarily economic - a beer would cost me RM4.50. A Special Brew [Carlsberg’s entry into the stout category] would cost me RM\$4.70, and I get almost double the shot of alcohol”. (Cha Boon Lim, director of market management, Carlsberg Brewery Malaysia Berhad, interview with Jernigan, Shah Alam, 8/29/96).

The Indian population is actually comprised of two groups: the rural workforce and their descendants, overwhelmingly Tamil and Hindu, and the middle class civil servants, doctors, lawyers and other professionals who came to the country during British rule, but who trace their ancestry to an array of other Indian groups, including Muslims, Christians and Sikhs (Rabushka, 1973). Drinkers from this group occupy the middle of the drinks market, consuming lager beers as well as distilled spirits.

Chinese consumers dominate both the beer market (Carlsberg estimates 80% of their sales are to Chinese) and distilled spirits, the high end of the market. What may be an apocryphal story circulating within the beverage industry recalls that when the French first came to Hong Kong to market cognac, the fact that Chinese tended to down their fine beverage in a single motion at first shocked, and then delighted them. Distilled spirits, particularly cognac, are the lubricant of major events in the Chinese community, ranging from weddings to anniversaries to office parties, family or small merchant association dinners, or birthdays. At such events, the grade of the cognac signals the importance of the event and its sponsor. The host is expected to circulate to and toast each table with a “Yam Seng” (bottoms up)-style toast. Heavy drinking is thus common at such events, but solitary drinking is relatively rare among the Chinese. Chinese women are not known for their drinking. However, there is a group of alcoholic beverages targeted specifically to Chinese women. These beverages, like Benedictine D.O.M. mentioned above, claim to contain the Chinese herbs traditionally taken by women in the sixty days following giving birth.

7. ALCOHOL-RELATED PROBLEMS

Data collection on drinking practices and problems in Malaysia has been done primarily in hospital and other medical care settings. Shortcomings of this methodology include under sampling on those less likely to seek medical treatment (e.g. women) and, since the hospital studies have all been done in urban public hospitals, over sampling on lower income urban groups, notably Indians. The single available study of psychiatric admissions at a general hospital reported less than 2% of admissions were for alcohol dependence (Chin et al., 1993). However, the study's authors noted that the low numbers of this and other diagnoses may be attributable to severe overcrowding in the psychiatric ward, a general tendency not to seek treatment for mental health problems, and bias on the part of both physicians and the general public toward reserving psychiatric admission for those suffering from problems that appear more serious and dangerous, such as schizophrenia and other psychoses.

Saroja (Saroja and Kyaw, 1993) conducted the most thorough hospital-based study of drinking practices to date. She interviewed all patients over age 16 admitted to the orthopaedic, surgical and medical wards of the General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur over a period of three months. Using first the CAGE screening device, and then subjecting those with at least one positive CAGE response to a diagnostic interview based on DSM-III-R and a brief quantity/frequency questionnaire, Saroja found that 48% of the sample consumed alcohol, and that a third of this group (12% of the total sample) could be determined abusers or dependents. All of the abusers and 90% of the drinkers were male. Sixty-one percent of Chinese, 60% of Indian and 30% of Malay inpatients were drinkers. Nine percent of Chinese, 22% of Indian, and 6% of Malay inpatients were abusers or dependent. All of the abusers or dependents were male, with a mean age of 54 as opposed to 45 for the drinkers as a whole and 42 for the non-drinkers. Of the abusers, 67% drank beer, 17% spirits and 16% *samsu*. The drinkers were more likely to be beer drinkers, and far less likely (2%) to drink *samsu* (Krishnaswamy, 1992).

Another study at the General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur took blood alcohol levels of 883 patients admitted for head injuries (Mohammed Azman et al., 1989). Thirty percent of these had blood alcohol levels greater than 50 mg./100 ml. Ninety-one percent of these were male, three-quarters were between 20 and 50 years of age, and all three ethnic groups were represented: 41% were Chinese, 39% were Indian, and 18% were Malay.

Maniam (1994) studied 562 consecutive patients visiting an urban general practice. There is no evidence that his sample is representative of the general population. Seventy percent of the Chinese, 11% of the Malays and 42% of Indians had used or were currently using alcohol. Six percent of the Chinese and 22% of the Malays seen at his practice drank more than 14 units of alcohol per week.

The Ministry of Transport estimates 200 crashes occur per day in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur alone. There are no data available on the percentage of these that are

alcohol-related. A study of 155 consecutive cases undergoing post-mortem examination at the General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur in 1988 and 1989 found 59 of the deaths (38%) were from road traffic injuries (Shahrom et al., 1991). Thirteen of these (22%) had blood alcohol levels in excess of 50 mg./100 ml. Indians again are over-represented in the alcohol-related fatalities, with seven of the deaths versus six Chinese and one Malay.

From these slim data it is apparent that, although per capita consumption of alcohol in Malaysia may be low, there is a sub-population that drinks heavily and suffers and causes substantial alcohol-related problems.

8. CURRENT RESPONSES

8.1 National Alcohol Policies

As discussed above, the national government's attitude towards alcohol is complex. In addition to its religious sensitivities, the Malay ruling class also has financial interests in alcohol. Racially-motivated rioting between Chinese and Malays in the wake of the 1969 general elections led to a series of laws passed in the last two decades to improve the economic position of the Malay majority. Requirements that local non-Malay firms have a minimum of 30% ownership in the hands of Malays and that foreign firms could only hold 30% equity led to a Malay elite with holdings in virtually every sector of the economy, including alcoholic beverage production. This elite also dominates the government (Jesudason, 1989). Thus for example the Malay-dominated Armed Forces Cooperative Society holds a controlling interest in the corporate parent of the leading distilled spirits importer as well as 11% of the leading brewer. The Malay elite is also heavily invested in the plantation system benefiting from the *samsu* economy. Finally, the government continues to have a strong interest in alcohol tax revenues. In 1994, alcohol excise and import duties brought in more than RM 601 million (US\$246 million). In addition, the government levies a 15% sales tax on alcoholic beverages at the retail level.

The ambivalent position of the government regarding alcohol creates a disjointed national approach to alcohol policies. On the one hand, government officials justify alcohol tax increases on health and crime prevention grounds (*New Straits Times*, 1993), and in 1991 one minister called for licensing authorities to "strictly enforce the conditions governing the sale of liquor". (Choong, 1991). In the more Islamic states such as Kelantan, alcohol sales are banned in public places.

However, in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur and the key production centre of Penang, alcohol outlets abound. Nationwide, the ratio of major outlets selling some kind of alcoholic beverage to population is one for every 575 people, based on alcohol industry estimates. Small purveyors without alcohol sales licenses also commonly hide behind an exemption in the law permitting possession of unlimited amounts of alcoholic beverages for personal consumption. Occasional efforts to tighten the licensing

process, or to block new licenses on the basis of over concentrations of existing ones, have met with no success and in some cases have led to the dismissal of the instigating civil servant from license-giving bodies.

There is no requirement for alcohol education in the schools, although it is sometimes covered in a general substance abuse curriculum. Government officials told Jernigan that raising the subject of drinking alcohol in classes with Malay children present would offend the Malays. The government maintains an extensive network of treatment centres for illegal drug users. There are no government-sponsored treatment facilities for those with alcohol problems, despite calls by health professionals and the news media for their establishment (Ismail, 1994).

Minimum age for consuming alcohol is 18. A strict drinking-driving law, setting the legal limit for driving at 80 mg./100 ml. and prescribing a penalty of RM2000 (equivalent to US\$792) or six months in jail or both for the first offence along with loss of license, was implemented in 1996. A spokesman for the Road Transport Ministry pointed out, however, that all but the most serious alcohol-related crashes are probably not reported, since drivers have 24 hours within which to report a crash, permitting drunk drivers to sober up before appearing before police. In addition, several informants told Jernigan that arrestees for drinking-driving were commonly paying the arresting officer directly between RM300 and RM700 (equivalent to US\$119 and US\$277, respectively) in order to avoid the larger official fine. Even if this is the case, the law would be expected to have a deterrent effect.

The government has also put in place a comparatively strong set of controls on the alcohol market. Duties and taxes on both imported and domestically-produced alcohol are substantial, resulting in high alcohol prices by international standards. These levies are not indexed to inflation, and so their effect on alcohol consumption will tend to be temporary. Direct alcohol advertising is forbidden on broadcast media, and on billboards except in Sabah and Sarawak.

8.2 Non-Governmental Resources

The Alcoholism Foundation of Malaysia (YAM) receives a small amount of government funding (supporting less than one full time employee), does some educational work, prepares responses to questions that arise regarding alcohol in Parliament, has sponsored conferences on alcoholism in Malaysia, and provides a limited amount of counselling and referrals to what treatment and self-help groups exist. The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) regularly publishes educational materials and news stories about alcohol and alcohol promotions and sales in its journal *Utusan Consumer*. It lobbies the government for tighter controls on alcohol. Staff from CAP have also been instrumental in backing the organization of the "Women Against Alcohol" movement on the rubber estates in the state of Kedah. This movement has brought together hundreds of women to challenge what they consider to be an exploitive *samsu* trade, using public rallies, the burning in effigy of *samsu*

bottles, and the like. There are two Alcoholics Anonymous meetings weekly in the capital city - members of that group knew of no other meetings in the country.

9. CONCLUSION

Malaysia provides a snapshot of a country in the midst of rapid social change trying to define its relationship to alcohol. Consumption of alcohol is low but seems likely to grow, albeit at a relatively slow pace due to the abstention of the majority of the population. Measurement of health problems from alcohol falls into a problem definition feedback loop: if a problem is not defined as such, it is difficult to muster resources to support its measurement, but without statistics attesting to a problem's severity, government bodies are often reluctant to devote resources to the problem's alleviation, or for that matter to its measurement.

Despite its small size, the Malaysian alcohol market is profitable. Even with major tax increases in the three preceding years, both beer companies reported profits after taxes in excess of 12% of sales. The government reported legal imports of alcoholic beverages worth more than RM255 million (US\$104.5 million) in 1995, and tax receipts from alcohol of more than RM601 million (US\$246 million).

The national government's disposition towards alcohol is shaped by religious, political and economic factors. Government statements refer to health concerns as a justification for such policies as higher taxes and advertising restrictions. Given that the Ministry of Health has been unable to secure funding for any programme regarding alcohol, the priority given to health concerns in government decisions about alcohol must be questioned. The recent strict drinking-driving law will certainly make some difference in the incidence of this adverse consequence of drinking. However, in the absence of baseline data or stringent reporting requirements, it will be impossible to assess the law's effectiveness with any certainty.

Malaysia's alcohol market exhibits a bifurcation common in many developing country settings. On the one hand, a locally-produced and inexpensive alcoholic beverage, in this case, *samsu* dominates consumption and seems to exact a heavy social toll on lower income and rural populations. Tax increases seeking to reduce alcohol consumption but affecting only the higher-end products such as beer and globally-branded distilled spirits most likely channel consumers back to *samsu*.

On the other hand, a small number of companies, all linked to at least one of the top twenty transnational producers and marketers of alcoholic beverages, dominate the rest of the market. Their profits accrue both to the local shareholders and to the global parent corporations. Although the government has taken a number of steps to limit their marketing activities, the companies continue to grow the market. Their marketing activities – advertising based on health claims, targeting the heaviest drinkers, encouraging heavy consumption, and so on -- cry out for greater corporate responsibility, and for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach on the part of

governmental and nongovernmental organizations to alcohol and alcohol problems in the nation.

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