

The free trade agreements' impacts on alcohol consumption: a guide for government decision

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BACKGROUND

As one of the leading causes for premature death, alcohol is a major risk factor for noncommunicable diseases. In the global context, free trade and investment agreements (FTIAs) are being promoted as a mechanism for economic growth. At the same time, public health advocates are concerned that FTIAs will increase alcohol and tobacco consumption, by weakening public health policies. Effective health policies for alcohol control and tobacco control have been strongly opposed by trans-national alcohol and tobacco industries, through FTIAs. It is imperative to ensure good regulatory transparency by limiting the influence of vested interests.

OBJECTIVES

This research has the following objectives:

- 1) situation analysis of alcoholic beverages imported to Thailand from 2000 -2019.
- 2) correlation analysis of free trade agreements between Thailand and other countries, and trade values of alcoholic beverages.
- 3) discussion on free trade agreements' impacts on alcohol consumption, as a guide for government decision.

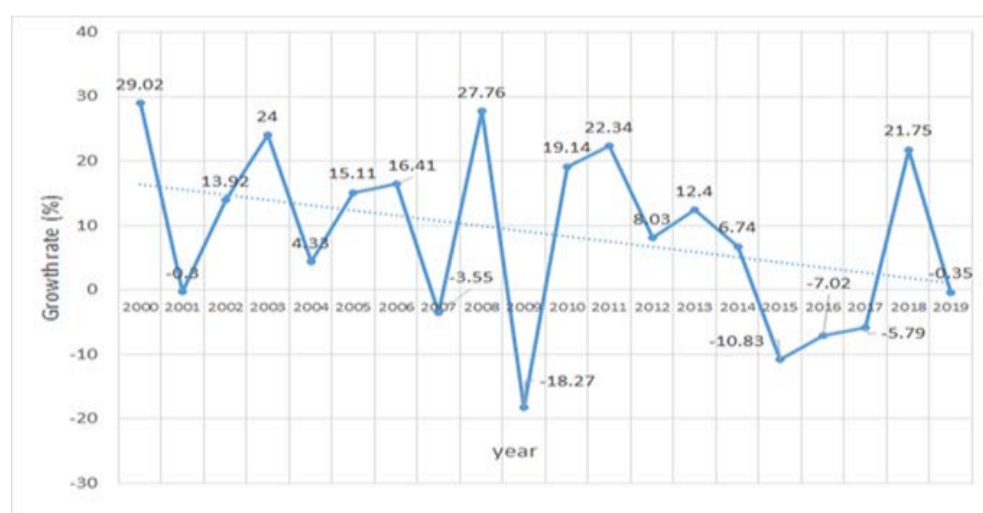


Figure 1. Growth rate of alcoholic beverages importation to Thailand during 2000-2019.

METHODOLOGY

Specific sampling from experts who follow free trade agreements closely, with in-depth interview. Data and statistical analysis by

1. Analyzed patterns and trends of alcoholic beverages imported to Thailand between 2000 – 2019, with descriptive statistics: frequency, percent and ratio.
2. Forecasting values of alcoholic imported to Thailand between 2000 – 2019, by using multiple regression.
3. Content analysis from in-depth interview, and personal communication with those who are experts in free trade agreements, and alcohol control, academicians, NGOs, and civil society representatives.

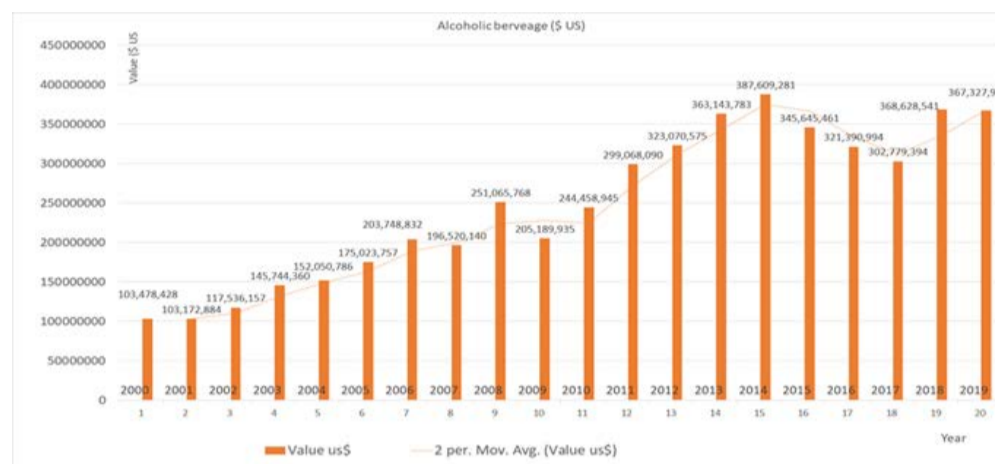


Figure 2. Values (in \$US) of alcoholic beverages importation to Thailand during 2000-2019.

RESULTS

1. Thailand imported most alcoholic beverages from U.K. and France throughout the 20 years period (2000-2019).
2. Correlation between Thailand and other countries, with values of alcoholic beverages trade, had 3 modes: consumption abroad, commercial presence, and various investments related to alcoholic service businesses.

Analysis by multiple regression indicated that influential factors on imported alcoholic beverages to Thailand were: the first decade had an influence of 0.472 more than the second decade, and Gross Domestic Products (GDP) had an influence of 1.02.

Economic growth was an important factor for alcoholic beverages market in Thailand, through more buying power and behavioural changes of population in metropolitan areas.

3. Discussion of free trade agreements' impacts on alcoholic beverages consumption, as a guide for government's decision, were: Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), Technical Barrier to Trade, and Digital Trade as a new challenge.

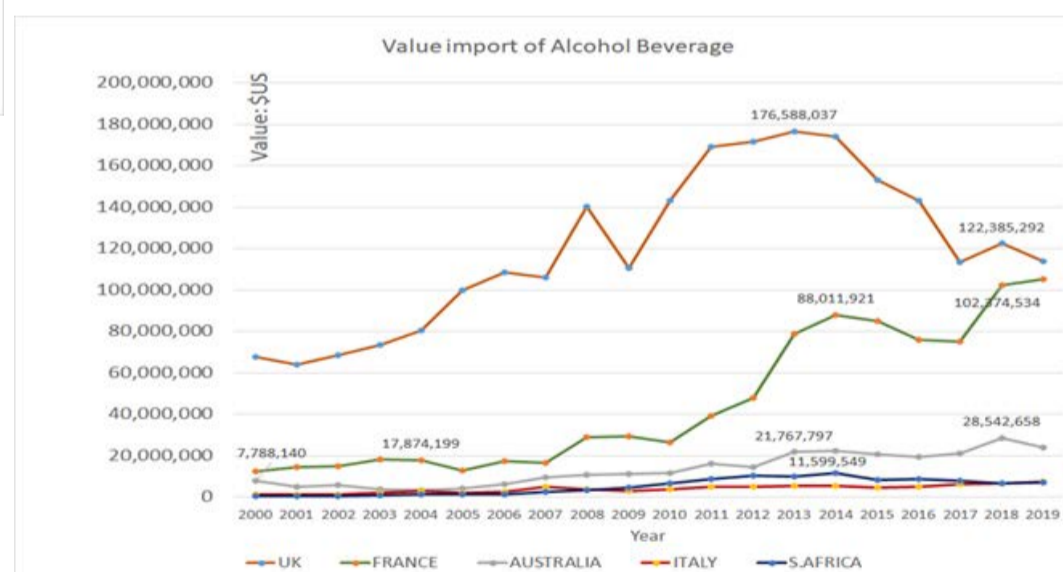


Figure 3. Imported alcoholic beverages values from top 5 countries during 2000-2019.

CONCLUSIONS

First, there should be integrated researches, covering sophisticated areas of theory and scientific system, including political economy of health, and monitoring and evaluation of free trade agreements' impacts on health.

Secondly, government should require that there should be a frame for coherent of public health principles with human rights, and sustainability of social and environment, for a common good.

Thirdly, health advocates should reframe procedural for negotiation, content and context, with the importance of society, environment, and health for all.

Fourthly, government leader should be concerned about Investor Protection chapter in Regional Comprehensive Economics Partnership (RCEP), and Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (CP-TPPA), which allow foreign investors to demand government to comply with commercial goals.

Lastly, alcoholic beverages should be treated as "no ordinary" goods on negotiation table, and government should provide a remedy compensation for the damage caused by alcohol.

ADVOCACY MESSAGE

Economic growth is not as important as growth with sustainable development. The reframing of policies incoherence is necessary for healthy public policy, including pursuing 'health in all policies' for public health protection.

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