

# Opium in Dutch East-India, Dirk Teeuwen MSc A Government Opium Monopoly, called "Opium Regie"

Batavia 1925

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The Netherlands 2007

**P.1 The opium factory north of the former Stovia building at the corner of Jl. Salemba Raya / Salemba and Jl Diponegoro / Oranje Boulevard, Batavia 1925**

## Contents

1. Annotations of the author  
Pawn shops, salt, opium
2. Opium regulation before 1900
3. Opium regulation after 1900
4. Problems, force of circumstances
5. Conclusion
6. Sources, quotations, notes, account for pictures

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P.2, p.1 A Chinese, result of abuse of opium for 20 years, Batavia - Jakarta 1925  
P.3, p.1 Main entrance of the Opium Factory on Salemba, Batavia - Batavia 1925

## 1. Annotations of the author

The government of Dutch East-India / Indonesia was in the exclusive control of three monopolies: pawnshops, salt winning and opium manufacturing.

### Pawnshops

In bygone days pawnshops in Dutch East-India were operated by private citizens only. The right to manage these shops were leased by municipalities, etc.: local Dutch governments. In 1903 malpractices caused the Dutch government to place the management of the pawnshops under government control. This was done so in Java and Madura, 1927, and in the Outer Islands in 1938. Nevertheless rooting out clandestine pawning was impossible. At the other hand the number of official pawning shops greatly increased in the course of the years. The management of the official pawnshops was conducted by natives, Indo people (a) and European officials. Natives, usually, were entrusted with the control of minor shops.

### Salt

The preparation of salt was a colonial government monopoly since time immemorial (b) in Java and Madura, in most districts of Sumatra and in Dutch Borneo. In Southern Sulawesi / South Celebes the preparation of salt was in the hands of private people. In some parts of Sumatra, some people enjoying the privilege of importing salt, supplies were brought from Singapore, Penang and the mainland of Malaysia. Mainly the transport of salt took place by governmental institutions, partly by private enterprises. Sales were effected by European, Indo as well as native officials.



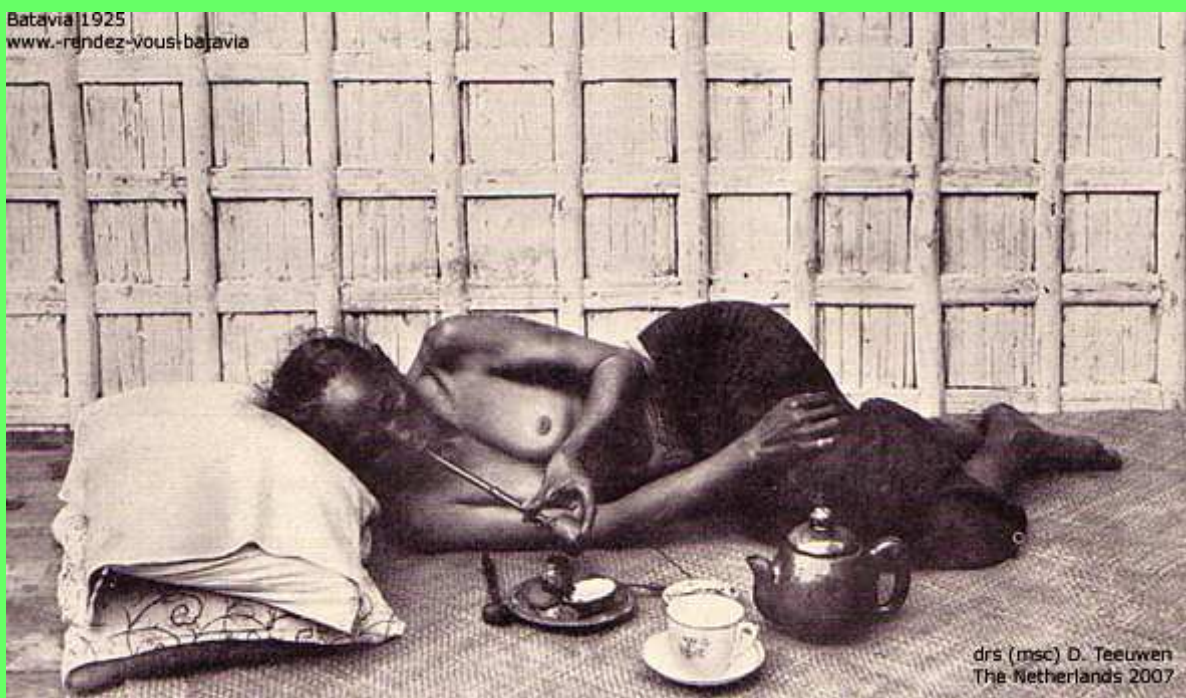
P.4 Natives smoking opium, Batavia - Jakarta 1925

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## Opium

The official opium monopoly was introduced in 1894. In conformity with international agreements this legislation had the object to make provision for existing requirements concerning the smoking of opium. The government wanted to guard against the abuses interwoven with the consumption of this narcotic. However, the only solution of the colonial opium problem was a minimization of the cultivation of poppy plants (papaver in Dutch). One other complication was the importance of the revenues to the government from production and sales of opium. The benefits on behalf of the government were growing through the years. So, from that point of view, there was a little stimulus to give short thrift to the opium problem.

My impression is that (1) the, maybe, insolvable problem of opium smuggling as well as (2) the problem of the unofficial opium smoking dens did not contribute to an improvement of the situation (in those days in the colony!!). Those problems did not encourage the colonial government to aim for its original intentions. Maybe because of such problems: in 1926 the government considered the possibility of cutting the official prices of opium because of the continuous smuggling and the, consequently, relatively low price of unofficial opium. The Opium Conference of Geneva, November 1924 - February 1925, did not bring a workable solution on behalf of "opium" as well as the addiction to morphine and cocaine.



P.5 Female addict, Batavia - Jakarta 1925

## 2. Opium regulation before 1900

The medical use of opium (*papaver somniferum*) and the possibility of addiction to this drug were known - in Persia, India and the Far-East - a long time before the birth of Jesus Christ. The Dutch East-India Company, which settled itself in Java in 1619, tried to monopolize the opium trade. The Company succeeded to obtain this monopoly in Mataram (1676), in Ceribon / Cheribon (1678) and in Banten / Bantam in 1681. Because of that, or not, the use of opium, as well as the contraband trade, increased enormously.

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At first, in the nineteenth century, the government meant to create a better situation by the so-called "opium licence system" / opium pacht (in Dutch). This meant that it was prohibited to sell opium in the open market. Until 1904 sale was allowed to licenced retailers only, who had to pay an enormous amount of money to the government for this exclusive right. But the smoking as well as the smuggling of opium were deeply rooted. The licence system led to too much abuse and so encouraged the use of opium.

### 3. Opium regulation after 1900

September 1<sup>st</sup> 1894! In the isle of Madura (east of Java, twenty miles east from Surabaya / Soerabaja) the government of Dutch East-India started to try out an experiment with the distribution of opium under governmental control. Before 1894 opium could be offered for sale by licensed retailers only. Because of the intrenched problems, concerning opium, the government of Dutch East-India - on the mentioned date - started with the distribution of opium under governmental control (in Dutch: "Opiumregie"). In January 1<sup>st</sup> 1904 this control had come in force throughout Java and Madura. In January 1<sup>st</sup> 1913 the Government Opium Monopoly / Opiumregie had been introduced in all the Outer Districts also, with the exception of Ternate and West and South New Quinea. (a) In 1921 the monopoly was introduced there as well. From that moment on the Opiumregie was in force throughout Dutch East-India. The aim was, of course, to restrict as much as possible the use of , opium. (1) The sales were conducted by officials who received fixed monthly wages, so that there no middlemen who would benefit in any way by the volume of the opium sales.

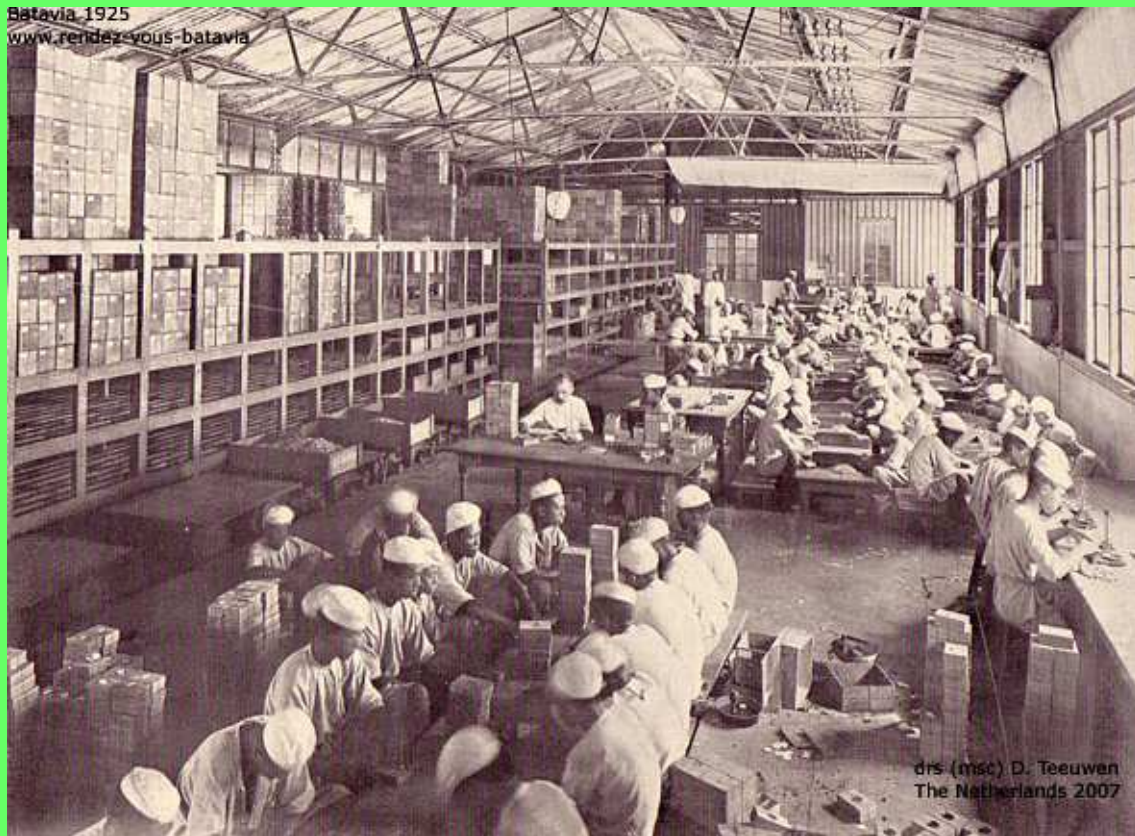


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**P.6 Part of the Opium Factory at Jl Salemba, meant for purified opium to get roasted. Batavia - Jakarta 1925**

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**P.7 The screening of the opium, before decontrolling on behalf of retail. Batavia - Jakarta 1925**

### **3. Problems, force of circumstances**

**In daily life Europeans, Indo people, many Chinese and natives could provide themselves with opium without trouble from anywhere.**

**Table 1 Registered selling from 1920 until 1928 (e)**

	<b>Measure: 40 grams</b>
<b>In Dutch East-Indian Guilders of 1925:</b>	<b>1925, 1.1.368.075</b>
	<b>(1925: Outer Districts, 677.208, incl.)</b>
	<b>1927, 1.531.169</b>
<b>1920, 2.607.000 measures</b>	<b>(1927: Outer Districts, 40.580.051, incl.)</b>
<b>1923, 1.386.000</b>	<b>1928, 1.601.016</b>
<b>1924, 1.304.185</b>	<b>(1928: Outer Districts, 42.827.807, incl.) (2)</b>
<b>(1924: Outer Districts, 756.418, incl.)</b>	

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**P.8 Filling up tubes with opium, Jl Salemba; Batavia - Jakarta 1925**

**In 1925 the government itself exploited 18 depots, 1062 retailers and 47 official opium dens. The opium factory in Batavia was very paying. In 1925 it produced more than 102 million tubes filled up with opium. In the same year the number of factory employees increased from 632 to 650. The smuggling of opium increased in an unbelievable speed.**

**Table 2**  
**Measure: 40 grams**  
**Confiscated measure opium**  
**589 measures in 1920**  
**7.511 measures in 1923**  
**14.000 measures in 1924**  
**25.000 measures in 1925 (2) (3)**

**The conclusion about the use of opium in the Dutch East-Indies, from all the tables in this article, is a horrifying one. Not so amazing. The official price of a measure (40 grams) opium was 30 guilders and 20 guilders for a measure (40 grams) smuggled stuff. In 1926 there were more than 20 illegal opium dens in Surabaya and, there, the average sales measured 30 measures (40 grams) daily. The Surabayan Chinese multimillionaire Cia Po Chat was locked up in jail, because of smuggling opium. He smoked opium daily. Every day a lot of purified grams cost him more than 40 guilders. (Well, they said so.) Horrifying: in Java about 150 owners of illegal opium dens were booked in 1925.**

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**P.9 Purification of opium, Jl Salemba; Batavia - Jakarta 1925**

## **5. Conclusion (f) (g)**

**The official Dutch colonial monopoly regulation of the opium production failed, because of:**

- uncontrollable imports and exploitations of opium dens;**
- the addiction of natives and foreign natives, specially Chinese;**
- thousands of years of history of abuse;**
- the geographical features of Dutch East-India, Indonesia;**
- being short-handed because of financial and political reasons;**
- absence of international coordination;**
- contradictory interests: on the one hand guarding the use of opium and on the other hand enjoying the iscal revenues of the opium regulations;**
- in my opinion a final conclusion is impossible, because of the practical complexity of the colonial reality in those days;**
- the lack of severe punishment.**

## **6. Sources, quotations, notes, account for pictures**

### **Sources**

**(1) Division of Commerce of the Department of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce: Handbook of The Netherlands East-Indies, edition 1924; Bogor / Buitenzorg 1924**

**(2) Kalff, S: De Lofflycke Compagnie; Amsterdam 1916**

**(3) Department of Agriculture, Industry an Commerce: Handbook of the Netherlands East-Indies 1930; Buitenzorg Java 1930**

**Also: Geesink, J.W.: Het opiumvraagstuk; from > Tropisch Nederland (periodical) Amsterdam, volume 1929-1930**

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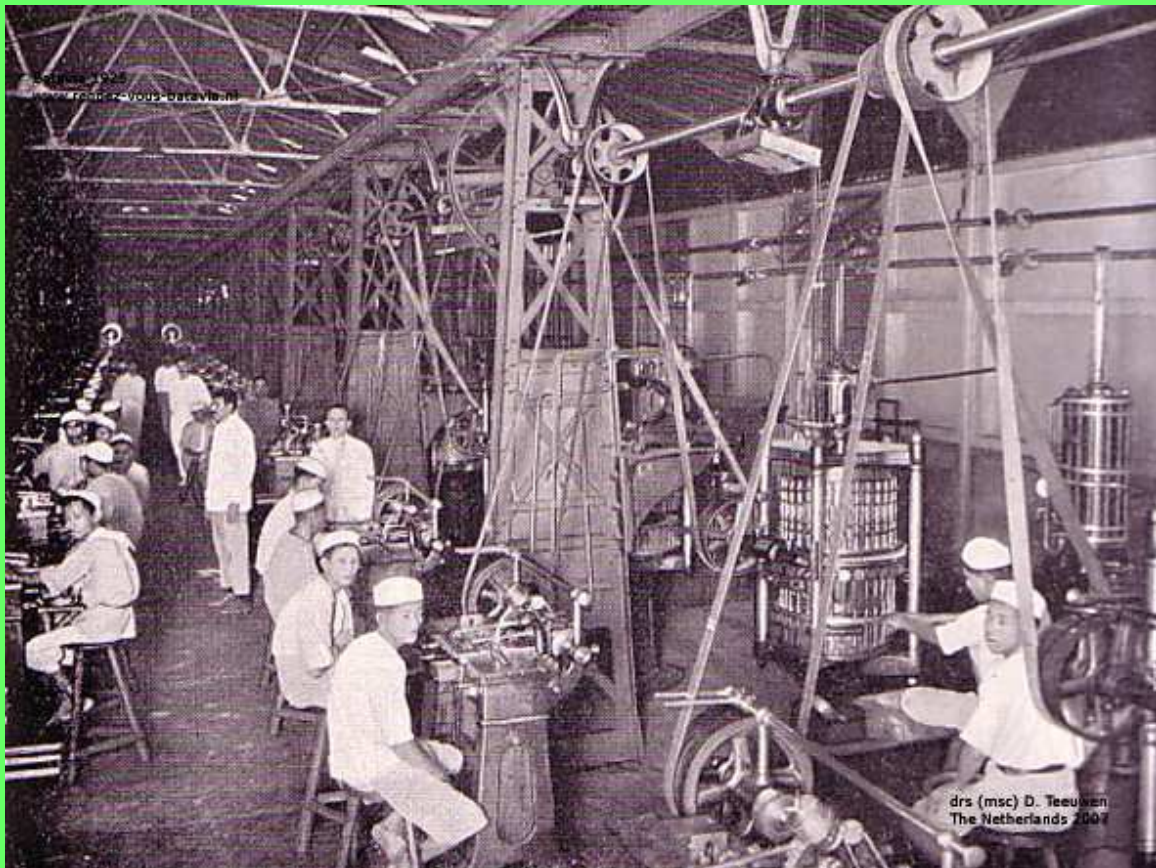
- (4) Klerck, dr E. S. de: *History of the Netherlands East-Indies*; Rotterdam 1938  
Also: Gonggrijp, dr G. F. E.: *Geïllustreerde Encyclopedie van Nederlands-Indië*;  
Leiden Holland 1934  
(5) Vugt, E. van: *Wettig opium*; Haarlem Holland 1985

#### Quotations

- (1) *Handbook of the Netherland East Indies* 1924 p. 62, 63  
(2) *Handbook of the Netherland East Indies* 1924, p. 27  
(3) *Handbook of the Netherland East Indies* 1930 p. 88  
(4) *Angoulvant* p. 112

#### Pictures

Pictures are from the books/periodicals in the list "Source (3)"



**P.10 Opium factory, Jl Salemba; Batavia – Jakarta 1925**

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**Ending**