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**Opium use has fallen in the past century—except in America**

OPIUM production increased to nearly 9,000 tonnes in 2007, the highest level for years, according to a United Nations annual "World Drug Report" published on Thursday June 26th. Opiates remain the main problem drug in terms of treatment. But while there is cause for concern, comfort may be had in knowing things are not nearly as bad as they used to be. In 1909, international concern over the ravages of the then legal and freely traded drug culminated in a meeting of the International Opium Commission in Shanghai. And from UN estimates using Commission documents, it is plain to see why. Some 16.4% of the population were puffing on opium in Singapore, and over 8% in Hong Kong and Macau. The only country to use more than it did a century ago is America.

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