

In Europe: An Incursion of Asian Heroin

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A noteworthy trend is rapidly developing on the European drug scene. The previously drug-free capital cities are quickly becoming hubs of activity for groups of "ethnic" Chinese engaged in the traffic of heroin smuggled from Hong Kong and other principal cities in the Far East. Chinese criminal elements of Amsterdam, Brussels, and London, once content to reap profits from their prostitution and gambling interests, have now shared their efforts to the marketing and distribution of Asian heroin throughout Western Europe.

In March 1972 U.S. and Netherlands narcotics officials made the first successful penetration of this traffic, culminating in the seizure of more than five pounds of white Asian heroin in Amsterdam. Included in the list of defendants was the owner of a Chinese restaurant in Breda.

One of the earliest cases involving this traffic occurred in London during June 1972 when H.M. Customs Service searched the bedrolls of two Chinese residents of Hong Kong upon their arrival at Heathrow Airport. The search uncovered 16 pounds of No. 3 heroin.

In early 1973 U.S. and European narcotics officials identified Amsterdam as the main distribution point for Asian heroin in Western Europe. As a result of a case initiated in New York, DEA identified an extremely active group of Chinese traffickers who were operating in The Hague, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam. In March two DEA agents traveled to Netherlands and conducted an investigation

of eight members of the organization. It was learned that the leader was planning to sell 30 pounds of brown No. 3 heroin. Upon delivery three defendants were arrested in Amsterdam by Dutch authorities. Since Netherlands law does not recognize the act of conspiracy, the remaining defendants could not be charged. During their investigations the agents learned that the group was seeking to establish a link for Asian heroin distributors connecting Hong Kong, Europe, and the United States.

After the successful penetration of the Amsterdam group, DEA and foreign authorities recognized that the traffic pattern had been shifting from Paris to Brussels, then back to Amsterdam like a fast-moving shadow. In mid-1973 Chinese groups were dispatching the majority of their couriers from the Far East via commercial aircraft. At a time when a fairly certain pattern and trend was identified, the shadow shifted to Hamburg where, on August 19, 1973, German customs officials and the Hamburg police seized 11 pounds of No. 3 heroin from a Chinese seaman who had concealed a part of the load on his person and the rest of it in his cabin.

During the fall of 1973 DEA, in concert with police and customs officials in France, Germany, Belgium, and Netherlands, continued to put forth concentrated efforts to break the links which were then connecting the Chinese traffic between The Orient and Europe. On August 30, 1973, a routine check of a Chinese resident of Singapore on his arrival at Kastrup Airport in Copenhagen re-

sulted in the seizure of seven pounds of No. 3 heroin. In an effort to avoid suspicion during his travels, he had flown from Singapore via Moscow to Copenhagen. After a second seizure in Copenhagen in December 1973, the groups sent their couriers on their previous travel pattern from Hong Kong via Paris to Amsterdam.

On January 21, 1974, a seizure of heroin of Asian origin in Europe was made at Orly Airport, Paris. During a routine inspection of a Chinese traveler's suitcase, a large number of camphor balls were uncovered, evidently to inhibit a detector dog's ability to locate the seven pounds of No. 3 heroin which had been secreted in the suitcase's lining. Two couriers were arrested. One of them had previously visited Norway, Denmark, and Amsterdam, the pivotal point of this traffic.

Since July 1972 European police and customs officials have arrested 62 Chinese traffickers and seized a total of 178 pounds of Asian heroin.

In a few years heroin addiction has increased in the principal cities of Netherlands, France, Germany, and Italy. As New York has historically been the primary distribution center for heroin here, Amsterdam has become the focal point for this traffic which thus far has been adequately contained within Europe. In the coming months DEA and foreign counterpart officials will continue to apply resources to strike at this traffic or contain it at a level where it hopefully will not be able to spread towards North America.