

中國的犀牛角雕刻藝術

The Art of
Rhinoceros
Horn Carving
in China

Jan Chapman



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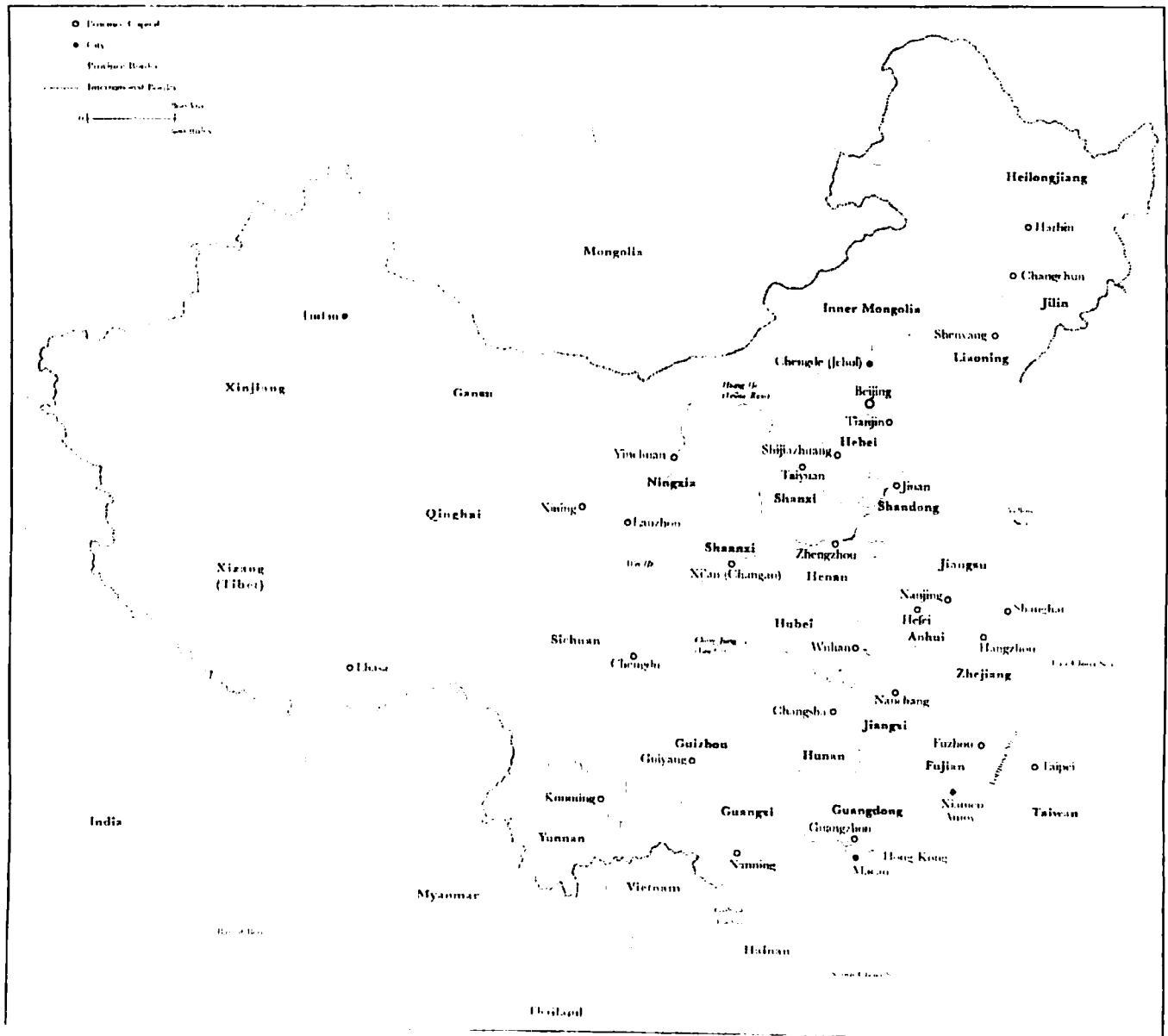
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MAP OF CHINA SHOWING MODERN CITIES AND REGIONS



Foreword

I vividly remember my first visit to the National Palace Museum in Taipei in the early 1970s when I was astonished to see the beautifully and delicately carved rhinoceros horn cups on display. At that time I was relatively ignorant about these Chinese masterpieces, and when I returned to Taipei in 1979 to carry out the first survey of rhinoceros products for sale on the island, I visited the museum again. I was determined to learn more about the carved rhinoceros horn cups, but to my dismay, no one on the staff could tell me much. I found it odd, as there have been many major studies of Chinese art.

Following the publication of *Rhinoceros, Rhinoceros, Rhinoceros* (Chatto & Windus, 1982) in which my wife Chryssie and I briefly discussed Chinese rhinoceros horn cups, Jan Chapman of the Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art invited me to visit her in Dublin. There, in 1983, I had the unique opportunity of not only viewing one of the world's largest collections of antiques made from rhinoceros horn, but also of handling every one of the 219 cups to try to discover from which species of rhinoceros the horn had come from. Jan and I also examined each piece to ascertain which had been stained for greater artistic effect and to attempt to date the pieces. Jan enthusiastically outlined to me her plan to prepare a catalogue of this impressive collection of rhinoceros horn carvings. Ever since our first meeting, we have been in correspondence, exchanging articles and sharing our interests in rhinoceros horn.

Jan Chapman has greatly increased my appreciation of this little-known yet magnificent Chinese form of art. Indirectly, she has also been partly responsible for saving many rhinoceros horn cups. After the communist takeover of mainland China, pharmaceutical factories and some import/export corporations there experienced difficulties in obtaining raw rhinoceros horn for their medicines due to restrictions on foreign exchange. The officials of these factories therefore purchased antique carvings from individuals in China who needed cash and were willing to part with heirlooms. Workers in the pharmaceutical factories were ordered to pulverize into powder many of these carvings to put into various fever-reducing medicines. Literally hundreds of antiques were destroyed in this fashion although by the late 1980s China had the largest official stockpile of rhinoceros horn in the world: 9,875 kilogrammes.

On a visit to China in 1990, I was officially shown store rooms in Beijing, Tianjin and Guangzhou, containing large quantities of rhinoceros horn powder and shavings plus remaining sacks full of antique plates, cups, libation bowls, paintbrush holders and figurines. I was told that these valuable antiques had been bought for the sole purpose of being smashed up for making medicines. At that time, Chinese factories were consuming at least 650 kilogrammes of rhinoceros horn a year. Naturally I was shocked that magnificent works of art, some dating back to the early Ming Dynasty, were scheduled for destruction. I complained to the officials in China about this practice, and when I left the country I made public this information. I also wrote a short article for *The National Geographic*.

In 1992, when I returned to China as the United Nations Special Envoy for Rhinoceros Conservation, the Chinese allowed the film crew accompanying me to video the rare antiques, crates full of shavings and the actual making of medicines containing wildlife products. This television documentary was

subsequently shown all over the world. Then, in May 1993, the Chinese State Council, under pressure from various conservation organizations and foreign governments (especially the United States), finally prohibited the manufacture of medicines containing rhinoceros horn. This regulation has probably saved the remaining antiquities held by the pharmaceutical and import/export corporations from destruction. Hopefully, these works of art (including some from Cambodia) will now be put on display in Chinese museums. Maybe Jan Chapman will be invited to examine them and perhaps even be given the opportunity of cataloguing them.

All the carvings from museums and private collections were made before the Chinese Revolution in 1912, so this demand for raw material was not responsible for the drastic decline of the rhinoceros in the twentieth century. As recently as 1970 there were an estimated 70,000 wild rhinoceros of all five species in the world; in 1997 the figure was down to 11,500. As far as I know, no rhinoceros horn cups have been made for decades in Eastern Asia, although rhinoceros horn is still crafted into a few dagger handles in Yemen and perhaps Oman.

The interest taken by conservationists and others in the well-being of the rhinoceros in Africa and Asia has greatly increased since the 1970s on account of the drastic decline in the number of these animals. Jan Chapman's book will be of great interest to these conservationists as well as to art historians. She gives detailed information on the horn, the part of the animal that has been in greatest demand by illegal hunters and illicit traders throughout the world. She correctly demolishes the western myth that rhinoceros horn was widely used as an aphrodisiac and that rhinoceros horn is essentially 'agglutinated hair'. She includes accurate behavioural information on the animal and reliable data on the uses of its products and the main markets, all of which are essential for establishing successful conservation strategies.

Conservationists will thus be pleased with this work as old myths are repudiated and new information is given, such as a methodology for identifying the species from which horn is used for carving. I hope that readers of *The Art of Rhinoceros Horn Carving in China* will obtain a greater appreciation of the rhinoceros and its unique role in the cultural history of Asia.

ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN

Formerly, United Nations Special Envoy for Rhinoceros Conservation

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