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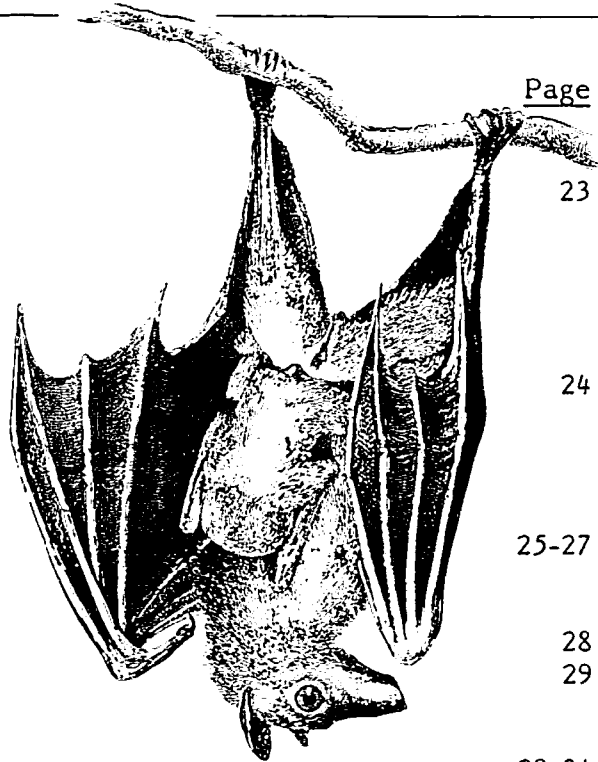
Traffic Bulletin

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*Centre insert: Text of Convention on International Trade in
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South Korea Stops Rhino Horn Imports

by Esmond Bradley Martin

South Korea used to be one of the world's major importers of rhinoceros horn. Its official Customs statistics state that from 1980 to 1983 an annual average of 230 kilos (kg) of rhino horn were imported, but in the course of fieldwork there in 1980 and 1982, I estimated that the actual imports were more than double (see Martin, 1983). The smuggling of rhino horn into the country was abetted by a variety of taxes levied on it, which by 1983 had forced up the wholesale price fifty-six per cent. However, the main importers there told me that, because most of the horn is ground down into powder, they find it more economical to purchase poorer quality horn, that was badly damaged or partially eaten by insects. Thus, in 1983, the wholesale price there, including duties, was only US\$840 a kg, whereas high quality horn would have cost just over US\$1000.

The rhino horn came partly via Japan but, according to the traders, largely from Hong Kong which was still allowed to export "old" stocks that had been legally brought into the Territory prior to 1979. In 1982, I carried out a sample survey of Oriental Medicine Clinics in Seoul, the capital, and Pusan, South Korea's two largest cities, and found that sixty-two per cent of the seventy-six clinics I visited in the capital had rhino horn for sale and, in Pusan, every one of the eight main clinics did. All the horn was of African origin.

This survey of South Korea's Oriental Medicine Clinics revealed that over ninety per cent of the rhino horn goes into making a medicinal ball called Chung Sim Hwan which literally means a "ball for clearing the heart". Twenty-nine other ingredients are also used, including musk, Saiga Antelope horn and donkey hide, held together with honey and wrapped in gold paper.

Interviews with local doctors and scientists indicated that more than 500 of these balls are made every day in South Korea, and they are an extremely important traditional Korean medicine. They weigh 3.75 grams and are sold for about US\$6 each. A patient may consume one a day for the purpose of curing high blood pressure, nose bleeds, paralysis, body pains or blood poisoning.

In 1982 I met with the head of the Korean Oriental Doctors' Association to suggest that substitutes for rhino horn should be used in the medicinal balls. He adamantly refused even to consider the suggestion that the import of rhino horn should be banned, or to inform the Association's members of the problem of rhino conservation, because of the importance and widespread use of Chung Sim Hwan.

In 1983 I consequently publicized the fact that South Korea was still importing large quantities of rhino horn and was therefore partly responsible for the depletion of rhinos in several African countries. The adverse publicity and pressure from international conservation organizations, especially the World Wildlife Fund, gathered momentum, and the South Korean Government decided to act. In November 1983, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs issued an order that demanded the immediate elimination of rhino horn from all medicines; from then its use became illegal.

On 7 November 1983, a group of traditional doctors held a meeting to discuss substitutes for rhino horn and decided to try reindeer horn, but soon switched to water buffalo horn. This followed experiments carried out at Kyung Hee University (the best known university for Korean oriental medicine studies). In early January 1986, I had a meeting with several of the senior scientists working there and was told that water buffalo horn was now an accepted substitute. They wanted to carry out further studies on other possible substitutes, such as cow horn, and to win public support for alternatives by publicizing their work, for which they said they hoped US\$10 000 could be raised.

There is some confusion in the various government publications as to exactly when the import of rhino horn was outlawed in South Korea. The Ministry of Trade and Industry issued a directive on 1 January 1984 prohibiting all imports of rhino horn from that date, but this restriction was not published until July 1984. In contradiction was the Tariff Schedule of Korea 1984, published by the Korean Customs Research Institute, which stated that the rate of duty on rhino horn in 1984 was forty per cent and would be thirty-five per cent in 1985. Then, the Ministry of Trade and Industry made an official announcement (Number 85-18), on 31 May 1985, stating that, with immediate effect, rhino horn imports from most countries were prohibited. Finally, the Korean Customs Research Institute in Seoul, on 17 July 1985, published in CCCN Overall Guide Book of 1985 and 1986 the following statement: "The import of rhinoceros horn is prohibited according to pharmaceutical law" (p. 670). In practice, however, the Government did not allow into the country any rhino horn imports in 1984 and 1985.

In January 1986, I surveyed 108 Oriental Medicine Clinics in the East Gate and Kyung Tong market areas of Seoul and found, not surprisingly, considering the extensive supplies there were in 1982, that fifty-one per cent were still selling rhino horn, mostly in the form of Chung Sim Hwan, for an average retail price of US\$1 771 a kg, which is actually lower than it was four years earlier (see Table). I believe this to be an encouraging sign that the demand for rhino horn is decreasing in South Korea. Moreover, this is not because interest in Korean traditional medicine is declining. In fact the five colleges in South Korea are now graduating 250 doctors a year, compared to about seventy in 1976, and there are 3000 Oriental Medicine Clinics in the country, a record number in modern times.

Oriental Medicine Clinics Selling Rhinoceros Horn
in Seoul, South Korea, 1980-1986

Year	No.Clinics examined	No.selling Rhino Horn	% selling Rhino Horn	Av. Retail US\$ a kg
'80	30	19	63%	1436
'82	76	47	62%	1797
'86	108	55	51%	1771

The smuggling of rhino horn into the country is said to have dwindled to a very small amount. According to Chong Shol Ho, the Chief of the Investigation Section of Customs in Seoul (pers. comm.), there are only a few attempts to bring in rhino horn now. The Government has recently made a concerted effort to inspect cargo shipments, for it realizes that it has lost considerable revenue from taxes on such goods as tobacco which were being brought into the country clandestinely. Traders confirmed this to me. They also said that, coupled with the closer inspection, the falling demand for rhino horn made smuggling too risky for the small profits. Moreover, rhino horn is no longer readily available from Hong Kong or Japan, and Korean traders have not been able to find alternative sources for it.

Finally, I believe that the efforts of those pursuing research into substitutes for rhino horn as a medicine at Kyung Hee University should be encouraged. As respected scientists in oriental medicine, their findings could have wide appeal, not only in South Korea but also in other parts of Asia where rhino horn has traditionally been in demand as a fever-reducing drug.

Reference

Martin, E.B. (1983):

Rhino Exploitation. WWF Hong Kong. 122 pp.