

6.1.6. THE JAPANESE AND KOREAN TRADE IN RHINOCEROS HORN

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ABSTRACT

In this first study of the trade in rhinoceros horn in Japan and South Korea, the author examines the origins of the demand and quantifies the amount of horn imported into these two countries since the late nineteenth century. He discusses in detail the present-day uses of rhino horn and explains how it is sold in pharmacy shops and in traditional clinics.

The wholesale prices for rhino horn are listed, along with comment on the smuggling of this commodity into South Korea. Differences in retail prices for the horn are noted, and the results of a sample survey of various traditional medicine establishments are analysed, giving the percentage of such places offering rhino horn for sale to the public.

The author also presents his ideas regarding the measures that the governments of Japan and South Korea have taken to bring a halt to this trade and what action conservationists should now take to discourage the demand for rhino horn in these countries.

Introduction

In 1979 I wrote a monograph for WWF/IUCN, called The International Trade in Rhinoceros Products. I based my study on research I carried out in Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand which, except for the latter, have never had resident rhinos, and it is the Chinese who live in these countries who mainly import and consume the rhino products found in their traditional pharmacies. Consequently, the role of horn and skin, the two most common rhino products for medicinal purposes, was practically the same in all these countries. The horn was primarily used as a fever-reducing drug and the skin was believed to be of value in treating human skin disorders. Moreover, the preparation of these two products was similar, following procedures laid down by Li Shih Chen, the most famous Chinese pharmacist of all time, who wrote the Pen Ts'ao Kang Mu in the 16th century.

Perhaps I should add, for those who are not familiar with the demand for rhino horn today, that even though North Yemen imported an estimated 13 tonnes of rhino horn between 1972 and 1977 for making handles to daggers, an additional 23.5 tonnes was consumed elsewhere as a medicine.

I have recently returned from a trip to Burma, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and South Korea for the purpose of further developing my study of the trade in rhino products in countries where the Chinese are less predominant. I wanted to ascertain the influence the Chinese have had regarding the use of rhino products in these countries; what differences may exist between the different peoples in their own beliefs and practices concerning rhino products; and whether the consumption of rhino horn was widespread.

I found that in Burma, Indonesia and Malaysia, countries which still have rhinos living in forested areas, the demand for rhino products is relatively high. Although the animals are legally protected, poaching is carried out wherever possible and indigenous rhino horn finds its way to local pharmacies for domestic consumption. It is generally the Indonesians,