



The window of a traditional medicine shop in Kyoto, Japan, displaying rhinoceros horn, a narwhal tusk and many other items.

# The decline in the trade of rhinoceros horn

by Esmond Bradley Martin

From October 1982 to February 1983 under the auspices of the World Wildlife Fund, IUCN, African Wildlife Foundation and African Fund for Endangered Wildlife, I visited ten Asian countries to study the present state of the international trade in rhino products and to make an attempt to reduce further both the supply and demand of rhino horn, skin and hooves for medicinal purposes.

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**A recent study of the trade in rhino horn, skin and hooves for medicinal purposes suggests that at long last the Asian demand for these products is falling.**

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This attempt was based on the implementation of certain recommendations I had made to IUCN, following previous trips to Asia.

I had earlier discovered that prices for rhinoceros commodities increased by as much as twenty-fold during the 1970s and that the rise in prices was encouraging poaching on a scale hitherto unknown, eliminating over 50 per cent

of the world's rhinos. However, between 1980 and 1982, concerted efforts were undertaken to give the remaining rhinos in the wild greater protection and to thwart the trade across international borders. There is today considerably less rhino horn on the markets, and what is equally encouraging is the fact that prices for rhino products in most countries have only slightly increased between 1980 and 1982. This means that at long last the Asian demand for rhino products is falling; had the demand for rhino horn continued on the same scale as it was three years ago, there would have been substantial price increases because of its lesser availability.

In Hong Kong, which I chose to investigate first on this trip, because it had been the world's major entrepot for rhino horn and hide until 1979, I found that rhino horn is still very much in demand. I visited 50 Chinese medicine shops and learned that nearly half of them were selling it, mainly for the same traditional purpose, to lower fever. Most of the horn available was of African origin and it had been imported prior to 1979. Its average retail price is now \$15,700 per kilo. However, there is a lot of saiga antelope horn for sale in Hong Kong now, and the pharmacists are encouraging their clients to use it instead of rhino horn.

During the 1970s Hong Kong imported and consumed a considerable amount of rhinoceros hide which came from South Africa. Traders in other parts of Africa were, and appear still to be, ignorant of the value of rhino hide as a traditional Chinese medicine. Prior to the import ban in 1979 of all rhino products, there was a lot of rhino hide for sale in Hong Kong. Now, much of it has been consumed, and what is particularly noteworthy is the fact that pharmacists are now selling processed hide which they sometimes even call 'rhino hide' but what is actually dried water buffalo hide. This fake rhino hide is so widely available and so cheap that the price for

genuine rhino hide has actually decreased. Moreover, wherever rhino skin is in demand in South-East Asia, one finds for sale the fake variety which comes from Hong Kong suppliers. Although I do not encourage dishonesty in the description of medicinal products, this development has definitely reduced the demand for genuine rhino hide and it is used for the same purpose, to treat human skin diseases.

In the last couple of years there have only been two known attempts of smuggling rhino horn into Hong Kong, and I doubt that any substantial quantity of rhino horn has come into Hong Kong illegally and undetected since the ban. However, there is a legal loophole which allows traders there to export their old stocks. In 1976, when the Hong Kong authorities required traders in possession of rhino horn to obtain a licence for it, 4,835 kilos were registered. Since then, 2,300 kilos of this have been consumed locally or exported. I discovered in talks with dealers in South Korea that they have imported much of that from Hong Kong. This trade in old stocks must stop immediately as it is continuing to stimulate the demand and use of rhino horn in South Korea and also in the Philippines.

From Hong Kong I flew to Japan to see if there has been much smuggling of rhino horn there since the ratification of CITES in 1980. I was only able to confirm a few such cases; for example, in 1981 a trader in Hong Kong had ground down some rhino horn into a powder and shipped it to Japan as 'animal horn' and it freely entered the country. As far as I could ascertain, it seems that only very little came in illegally in 1982. Rhino horn is the only rhino product used in Japan and demand for it has not increased during the past couple of years; its retail price is one of the lowest anywhere in Asia — \$2,200 a kilo. There is in Japan, however, a considerable amount of old stocks for sale in

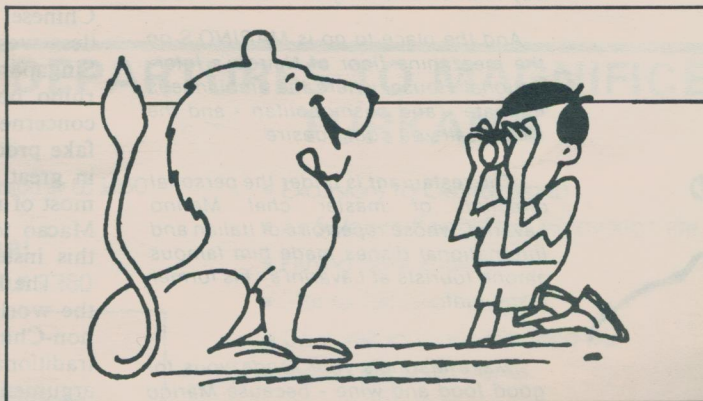
traditional medicine shops (of the 15 shops I visited in Kyoto, all had rhinoceros horn, but it was not selling well). One reason why rhino horn is not being sold as much as in the past is that the Japanese Ministry of Public Welfare sent out a circular in 1980 to most dealers of rhino horn, requesting them to sell substitutes for it; but the Ministry did not, as some westerners believe, outlaw the domestic consumption of rhino horn. The major consumers of rhino horn in Japan are people living in Osaka, Kyoto and Nara, where there is a very long tradition of using rhino horn for fever, colds and flu; in Tokyo, the demand for it is considerably less. I predict that in the near future there will be fewer and fewer customers requesting rhino horn, particularly if efforts are continued to encourage the Japanese to use appropriate substitutes for it.

Today South Korea is one of the major importing countries in the world for rhino horn, and most of it comes from Hong Kong, although the official imports (142 kilos in 1981) are gross undercounts and the stated country of origin (Indonesia) is incorrect. South Koreans are probably consuming more rhino horn than ever before. In 1980 I examined in Seoul 30 'oriental medicine clinics' (the name given to traditional medicine shops by Koreans) and found that over half had rhino horn; on this trip I visited 76 in Seoul, of which the same proportion had rhino horn. Also in 1982, I went to Pusan, the second largest city of the country, and to Taegu, which has hosted an annual autumn traditional medicine fair since the seventeenth century. All of the clinics I visited in Pusan and most of those in Taegu offered rhino horn for sale.

Today in South Korea, most of the rhinoceros horn, which is all from African animals, goes into one particular medicine, called Chong-Sim-Hwan, which literally means 'medicine for purifying the heart'. It is a concoction

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containing 31 ingredients in addition to rhino horn, pounded into little balls, weighing 3.75 grams each. People suffering from high blood pressure, heart attacks, tension and blood disorders usually take three balls daily, and one costs US \$5. Patients either chew them up or boil them in water and drink the resultant infusion. Chong-Sim-Hwan balls are very popular in South Korea and are sometimes exported; my Korean interpreter told me that she regularly sends them to her relatives in Australia.

I talked with scores of doctors in South Korea about the possibility of substituting some other ingredient for rhino horn in these medicine balls, and I was repeatedly told that for as long as rhino horn remains available they would not consider making any changes. I also discussed the issue with officials of the Korean Oriental Doctors' Association (KODA), who admitted finally that if the government imposed a ban on rhino horn imports, they would have to use something in its place and that saiga antelope horn would probably be the best alternative. However, they would be unwilling to use it until all rhino horn stocks were depleted, and they would not start advocating to their members that rhino horn should not be used in making Chong-Sim-Hwan unless it did in fact become an illegal import.

I found the attitude of the Korean doctors atypical in Asia. In the other countries I visited, practitioners of traditional medicine were much more willing to accept the fact that substitutes for rhino horn are now necessary. Perhaps the strong reluctance to change in South Korea is due to the fact that the country is for the first time reasonably prosperous and people can now afford more animal products. It is not only rhinoceros horn which is imported in considerable quantities, but also deer



Esmond Bradley Martin

*Rhinoceros horn is made into a variety of medicines in Asia.*

antlers, antelope horns, centipedes, musk and geckos. The Koreans have always highly valued animal products in their medicine and one of the most popular is the meat of indigenous snakes. In the larger cities there are snake soup shops; I spent the afternoon in one in Pusan, watching the owner prepare the soup for that night. Every twenty minutes or so, he went to a boiling cauldron and dropped in another half-metre long snake, live from a crate. His customers would buy the soup by the bowl, and pay \$20 for it. I lifted the wooden top of another pot of snake soup that was all ready, steaming away with just a little water; no seasonings had been added. Koreans consume snake soup as an aphrodisiac and also as a general tonic. The shop owner offered to let me taste some; it was similar to a thick beef broth with vegetables.

In another part of Pusan I visited a market which sold dogs, cats and black goats. Dogmeat is cooked plain or made into a soup, also for aphrodisiac purposes. It is popular throughout South Korea and special dogs are bred like cattle

for this. Black goats are eaten mainly by women who have menstrual problems. Cats are eaten to relieve rheumatism.

On account of the extensive demand for animal products in South Korea, and the refusal of traditional doctors to use substitutes for rhino horn, I do not believe there is any way other than persuading the government to initiate a total ban on rhino horn imports to change the present situation. Moreover, if rhino horn does not become an illegal import, it is probable that the demand for it will continue to increase.

Of all the places I visited on this trip, Macao had the highest percentage of fake rhino products. It has also had the highest percentage increase in rhino horn prices over the last three years — 89 per cent. Macao's economy has continued to grow by leaps and bounds since 1979, and the medicine shop owners are probably selling even more rhino horn now than they used to, despite the rise in its cost. Stocks appear to be plentiful, and some new rhinoceros horn has been imported from China, even though China is not allowed by CITES to export it. There is the possibility that in Macao, as in other places where fake rhino products have come onto the market, prices for the genuine horn and skin will decrease in time. At present, however, because the Chinese in Macao are more traditional (less westernised than in Hong Kong or Singapore) and because they can afford rhino horn and are apparently not yet concerned over the appearance of the fake products, saiga antelope horn is not in great demand as a substitute. I spent most of my time with the pharmacists in Macao to try to encourage them to sell this instead of rhino horn.

The Philippines is the only country in the world which prohibits its citizens of non-Chinese origin to purchase traditional Chinese medicines. The argument for this restriction, as given to me by the Ministry of Health, is that because the herbs, animal products and processed medicines used by the Chinese have not undergone rigorous modern testing they may be dangerous. The

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Ministry of Health has, in addition, initiated strict controls over the very existence of Chinese medicine shops throughout the country during the past ten years. Proprietors of such shops have now been told that no licences will be issued in the future to practitioners of Chinese pharmacology who are not already in business and that present practitioners will not be allowed to sell their shops, but in a few instances recently widows and sons of practitioners have been permitted to carry on the business of a deceased Chinese pharmacist.

Although there are about 700,000 ethnic Chinese in the Philippines, they have been discriminated against for many generations; and they are now, possibly as a consequence, more westernised than anywhere else in South-East Asia. Even in Chinese restaurants in the Philippines, one uses forks and spoons, not chopsticks, which are only handed out when specially requested. Not surprisingly, given the circumstances of the Chinese in the Philippines, demand for traditional Chinese medicines is small.

For the 700,000 Chinese, there are only 75 Chinese medicine shops in the entire country. These are all registered as 'Chinese Drug Stores', and 40 of them are in the capital of Manila. I interviewed pharmacists in 17 of the largest, which are located in Manila's 'Chinatown'. Only four had rhino horn for sale, and I was told that since the early 1970s, when its price started to increase, demand has fallen sharply; few Chinese are willing to pay what is now the equivalent of \$10,706 for a kilo of rhino horn.

In the Philippines' other major cities — Cebu, Zamboanga and Davao — there was no rhino horn at all for sale, although some Chinese drug stores had had some in years past. It is not very likely that new stocks will be imported in any significant quantities.

Next stop was the Sultanate of Brunei, a small country on the island of Borneo with a total population of 225,000, of whom 60,000 are Chinese. Research has shown that wherever there is a Chinese community in Asia there is in all probability a market for rhino horn, and I found Brunei was no exception. In the capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan,



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Since 1979 Dr. Martin has been working mostly for the World Wildlife Fund and IUCN, examining the trade in rhinoceros products and elephant ivory in both Africa and Asia. He has published the results of his research in many journals, including *Oryx*, *Animal Kingdom*, *Africana* and *Zimbabwe Wildlife*. His latest book, written with his wife, Chrysee, is *Run, Rhino, Run*.

there are five Chinese medicine shops and rhino horn was for sale in two of these. It was of African origin, imported from Singapore.

The Chinese and Malays in Brunei consume a considerable amount of so-called anti-fever waters. One of the pharmacists with whom I talked in the capital told me that he sells on average a thousand bottles of anti-fever water a month. The most popular brand is 'Pearl, Rhinoceros and Goat Horn Water' which, according to its label (in English) is 'effective for many kinds of illness, such as fever, headache, toothache, earache, eye diseases and thirst.' Its contents are 'a distillate from a formulation containing: Rhinoceros Horn, Pearl, Calcium Sulphit [sic], water'. However, if rhinoceros horn is really used in its preparation, the amount must be extremely little; a 220 ml bottle retails for less than US 75 cents. While the 'Pearl, Rhinoceros and Goat Horn Water' is manufactured in Johore Bahru, Malaysia, there are several other anti-fever waters produced in Singapore and now, for the first time, in Indonesia.

I visited one of the major factories making anti-fever water in Singapore, the Ho Poh Onn Drug Merchants. An employee there told me that rhinoceros horn is indeed used, but in minute amounts. When I asked to see how the anti-fever water was prepared, I was hastily invited to leave the premises! Upon further questioning, it was said that it was only made on certain days of the week (not when I was visiting) and that its preparation was a secret process. The international trade in these anti-fever waters is technically legal, but I feel that it should be stopped because it encourages the demand for rhino horn.

When I was in Djakarta in late 1980 I discovered that the majority of the rhinoceros horn in Chinese medicine shops was from the Sumatran species. Unfortunately then, I did not have time to go to the island of Sumatra where most of these animals live, but on this trip I did. I wanted to find out whether or not the Chinese traders in Sumatra's largest city, Medan, were buying the horn. To my astonishment I found rhino horn in only one of the 21 large medicine shops. I cannot be sure that the medicine shop owners do not buy any horn to sell to their colleagues in Djakarta or Singapore, where most Sumatran horn is presently available, but they certainly do not have a local market for it in Medan. I also visited three medium-sized cities on Java island, Yogyakarta, Solo and Semarang, to find out if rhino horn was in demand. I carried out a survey of all the medicine shops in these cities and discovered only one that had any rhino horn. The pharmacists declared that it was just too expensive now, which was the same explanation for its absence in commercial centres outside the capital cities of the Philippines and Brunei. However, in these three Javan cities the medicine shops sold the cheaper rhino products: skin, anti-fever waters and processed medicines from China.

Singapore, one of the main entrepôts for wildlife products in Asia, still has no restrictions on the imports or exports of rhino products. However, from 1979 to 1982 the retail prices for rhino horn had gone up by less than two per cent, and in real prices (after inflation) had actually

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declined. The main reason for this is that the pharmacists are now using large quantities of saiga and water buffalo horn. In some cases, dishonest pharmacists have even sold to would-be rhino horn customers water buffalo as rhino horn. It is very cheap, and huge profits can be made this way. The water buffalo horn comes from Indonesia and Thailand; and although it is not believed to be as effective a drug as saiga horn, it is to some extent accepted by traditional doctors as a possible substitute.

Most of the African rhinoceros horn in the Singapore medicine shops is not new. Since the demand has decreased for rhino horn, it will probably be some years before all stocks are used up; and because of the lesser demand, the pharmacists will probably not increase its price for fear of selling even less and having to wait longer to recover their investment. Buyers of rhino horn for medicinal purposes in Singapore much prefer Asian to African horn, and some new Sumatran horn is coming into Singapore from Indonesia. Various pharmacists told me that Indonesians and Chinese have recently obtained some Sumatran horn, taking it illegally off the island of Sumatra and literally hawking it around Singapore to see who will pay the most for it. Singapore is probably now a more important market-place than Djakarta for Sumatran horn because pharmacists can legally trade it there, and in paying for it in Singapore dollars they are offering a more valuable currency than the Indonesian rupiah. On account of the fact that Asian rhino horn is considered more powerful and effective than African horn for treating high fever, the pharmacists buy it at a much higher price and thus have to charge their customers accordingly. In early 1983 in Singapore, the retail price for a kilo of Asian horn was \$19,170 as compared to \$9,876 for African horn.

There is Indian rhino horn coming into Singapore as well. When the wholesale price of Indian rhino horn in Assam shot up from \$2,000 a kilo in 1978/9 to \$7,800 in 1979/80, the poachers in India began to increase their hunting efforts. From 1972 to 1979 a total of only 19 rhinos were illegally killed in Kaziranga National Park, the main reserve in the world for the Indian species. In 1980, however, the poachers, responding to the higher prices offered, killed 20 rhinos and in 1981 they killed even more, 38. All these animals were slaughtered for the sole purpose of obtaining their horn, most of which was sent out of India. From traders I interviewed in Singapore and Malaysia I learned that the Indian horns were first taken to Calcutta, then shipped to Singapore. Some have been sent from there across the causeway to be smuggled into Malaysia, eventually ending up in Chinese medicine shops in Kuala Lum-



Esmond Bradley Martin

*There are over 1,000 Indian rhinos in Kaziranga National Park in Assam — more than in all the other reserves in the world together.*

pur and Penang.

From 1981 to 1983 in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, there has been a sharp decline in the number of Chinese Medical Halls selling rhinoceros horn. Over this same period the retail price of rhino horn has gone down by 13 per cent. Nevertheless, this is not meant to infer that it is no longer wanted, and it did not deter a person in 1980 from entering the Kuala Lumpur Zoo illegally one night and removing a piece of horn with a knife from the tame black rhinoceros called Farouk.

In Georgetown, the second city of Malaysia, there is still a strong demand for rhino horn, skin and hooves. In fact, Georgetown was the only place I visited in South-East Asia where the percentage of Chinese medicine shops having rhino horn for sale has actually increased. Georgetown is also unique in another way. There I saw more rhino hooves (used for the same purpose as rhino horn) for sale than anywhere else; the retail price for a kilo of rhino hooves averaged \$1,968 and they came from both Sumatra and South Africa.

The results of the research I have carried out indicate that the quantity of

new horn reaching the world market has fallen from eight tonnes annually between 1972 and 1978 to less than four tonnes a year from 1979 to 1982. Since the number of rhinos in Africa was reduced by over half during the 1970 decade, poachers are now finding it more difficult to locate rhinos; furthermore, some of the African countries which had been among the main suppliers of rhino horn (Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa) have initiated tactics which in turn have greatly restricted the movement of rhino horn across their borders.

Concerning the retail prices for rhino horn in Asia, on average they have increased by only 20 per cent since 1979/80, about 8.5 per cent a year, roughly the same as inflation. As for rhino hide, a kilo in Hong Kong has gone down in retail price from \$423 in 1979 to \$376, and its decrease in price in Singapore is even more spectacular during this period: from \$923 to \$635. Wholesale, average costs of rhino horn have remained the same since 1979: \$550 for African horn per kilo C.I.F. South-East Asia, and \$9,000 per kilo for Asian horn.

There are many reasons for the declining demand in rhino products today. First, and most importantly, Hong Kong and Japan have stopped importing them, in 1979 and 1980 respectively, and these two countries were the largest consumers of rhino horn for medicinal purposes. In Hong Kong, where pharmaceutical traders produce numerous books and brochures on traditional drugs, these now include explanations why rhino horn is no longer being imported; and in Japan, the government itself sent letters to pharmacists requesting that they promote the use of substitutes for rhino horn. Such actions are commendable: they have helped to lower domestic demand and, possibly, they will also discourage illegal imports. Secondly, saiga antelope horn is now much more widely used as a fever-reducing drug in Asia than it was, partly because of my

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own efforts to persuade importers, doctors and pharmacists in oriental medicine to use it instead of rhino horn; but, mainly, because it is a very much cheaper drug and is traditionally acceptable as a substitute for rhino horn in Chinese medicine. The retail price for a kilo of saiga horn in Kuala Lumpur, for example, is around \$120, while a kilo of rhino horn is \$10,732 for African species and \$17,280 for Asian species. Thirdly, since Hong Kong is a major entrepot for most traditional Chinese drugs, and can now only supply to other countries stocks of rhino horn imported before the 1979 legislation, pharmacists elsewhere in Asia are aware that it will become increasingly difficult to obtain via Hong Kong. Moreover, because the traders in Hong Kong do not want to lose their rhino horn customers to foreign pharmaceutical firms which will supply rhino horn, they are doing their utmost to sell other drugs as substitutes. Fourthly, the sharp rise in the wholesale price of rhino horn, which was US \$35 a kilo in 1972, led to the appearance of fake rhino horn shavings and tips of water buffalo horn being marketed under the name of rhino. This has made customers suspicious; consequently, some would rather buy a packet of dried herbs or saiga antelope horn when in doubt about the genuineness of the rhino product they are offered. Fifthly, already worldwide publicity about the decline in rhinos has reached the ears of many city dwellers in

Asia, through the mass media and even by word of mouth, with the result that many would-be consumers of rhino horn are no longer asking for it when they visit their traditional pharmacies. From interviews I carried out, however, this is not usually because they appreciate the need for conservation, but because they don't believe there are any more rhino horns available.

While the demand for rhino products in Asia is waning, stopping the trade is still a long way off. Efforts to reduce it are hampered not only by those who flout laws prohibiting the movement of rhino horn across certain international borders, but also by loopholes in legislation and even the absence of restrictions in some countries. Without effective controls on this trade, rhino horn can continue to reach the main markets and if such supplies become substantial, the demand could escalate once again.

There is also the major challenge of North Yemen. Its location is close to African rhino sources, the demand for horn remains high there, and it is well known that even though the government made rhino horn an illegal import in late 1982, it is still coming into the country. Smuggling is nothing new to North Yemen: traders have managed to bring in and take out other illegal goods with impunity. Regarding rhino horn, traders are now arriving on scheduled airline flights to Sanaa with rhino horn from the

southern Sudan in their baggage.

The role of Singapore as a legitimate entrepot for rhino horn is perhaps the biggest problem insofar as the trade in this product for medicinal purposes is concerned. Moreover, during the past few years there has been a definite increase in the amount of rhino horn and skin coming into Singapore from Sumatra because the Singapore dealers generally offer higher prices, and the horn can freely enter the country. There is not even a duty levied on rhino products.

China is still exporting vast quantities of various manufactured tablets containing rhino horn. These are to be found in traditional medicine shops throughout Asia—in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines as well as in Singapore, Hong Kong and Macao. In selling such manufactured medicines the traditional pharmacists continue to cater to the demand for rhino horn. Since the rhino horn is not readily identifiable in these drugs from China, they are technically allowed to be imported by countries which have ratified CITES.

Although neither the demand nor price for rhino horn has significantly increased on international markets since 1979, the incentives for poachers to supply it from the remaining 16,000 rhinos in Africa and the 2,000 in Asia are still tremendous.

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