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**CONSERVATION CRIME AND RHINOCEROS POACHING:
FROM ANCIENT CUSTOM TO MODERN DILEMMA****Friedo J.W. Herbig¹ and Megan L. Griffiths²**

ABSTRACT

It is common cause that the poaching of South Africa's natural resources, particularly high profile species, such as rhino, is inexorably lubricated by the demand ebb and flow for the yield to be derived from these organisms. The appetite for rhino horn, specifically by Asian countries, fuels and perpetuates the illegal trade in this commodity despite rhinos being in jeopardy worldwide. The use of rhino horn for cultural and traditional reasons, as well as medicinal purposes present as significant factors contributing to the exigency for such products. Since conservation crime/criminology takes the damage to nature as its core focus it appears to ignore, partly, the ontological relations between some cultural groupings and nature that do not necessarily view nature as a natural resource per se. In other words, some cultural identities might view flora and fauna as totemic/ethnic symbols of a particular group of avatars or ancestors. Can the natural resource(s) being harvested to serve these cultural, traditional and/or medicinal purposes be deemed criminal or criminogenic because the natural resource being utilised is in some way vulnerable? Is the conservation crime/criminology logic viable in a context where nature is regarded as more of an object than a subject of social justice? It is equally important to ask the question whether these beliefs, customs and/or practices are still valid in a post-modern society, and whether trying to modify them amounts to conservation praxis or disrespect. This article critically examines, from a metaphysical standpoint, some of the cultural, traditional and medicinal tensions that exist in relation to the rhino poaching phenomenon. It, furthermore, seeks to determine whether judiciously marginalising alternate views regarding the use of natural resource products is not merely reproducing injustices by proposing solutions presented within the same logocentric paragon of traditional philosophical thought?

Keywords: *Conservation crime; rhino horn; poaching; Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM); custom and tradition; conspicuous consumption*

INTRODUCTION

Western society's understanding of extending moral value to nature is predicated on a prudential conception of intergenerational justice – save nature to ensure our own survival. Therefore, any crime against nature must be considered a crime against humanity, which must in turn be reflected in law in order to gain moral agency. Can this be done without violating the rights and freedoms in terms of natural resources being viewed as a social good or the commons? By way of example, anti-whaling groups protest against a whale hunt carried out as a cultural rite of passage by certain indigenous Polynesian communities. These communities only hunt relatively few animals compared to commercial whaling trawlers who pursue far higher numbers. Raising the ire of environmental groups, such as Sea Shepherd and concerned citizens alike numerous pilot whales and dolphins are culled each year during the traditional 'grindadrap' or 'grind' in the North Atlantic Ocean's Faroe Islands, a tradition that dates back more than three centuries (Lee, 2012: 3; West, 2014: 1). This butchery, although abhorrent, involves the killing of far less organisms than in the commercial arena and serves to bring the Faroese community together in the spirit of food provision and teamwork. In terms of Herbig and Joubert's 2006 definition of conservation crime/criminology, as an exemplar of natural resource criminality (see below). It would

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imply, at face value, that these actions should be deemed as being equally negligent or manipulative as commercial whaling, since it is ostensibly contributing to the annihilation and/or trauma of cetaceans. Consonant herewith the traditional/customary use of rhino horn as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) also dates back millennia and has an ingrained cultural significance in the East – it is in fact viewed by many as a cultural icon (Ellis, 2013: 24). For the people using rhino horn elixirs, whether rhino horn can be scientifically proven to work as a medicine or not, is most likely irrelevant. A large portion of the world's population (including South Africa) use healing systems other than the science-based Western pharmaceutical/pharmacological approach, and those people believe that they have the right to do so (Shaw, 2011: 20).

Can the view that certain customary/traditional and or medicinal uses of natural resources under such circumstances be regarded as iniquitous because it is leading to the destruction of rhino populations? Can this be deemed a just and fair approach? The danger of applying practical wisdom to a complex issue, such as natural resource crime, is of course that it ignores the role that power has played in shaping how we define human-nature relations and which entities are the primary cause of the destruction of nature. Nature means more than a natural resource for some cultural groupings. How do we cater for them using the practical solution of conservation crime/criminology? These are the issues that will be examined in this article discourse. The authors take the view that fundamental change or behaviour modification is necessary where cultural, traditional and/or medicinal practices harm or have the potential to harm natural resources unnecessarily, and therefore strongly support the unilateral acceptance/application of the conservation crime/criminology maxim. In doing this the authors not only assume that readers will disagree with some of the arguments, but actively hope that they will do so. If ruminating on the discourse and viewpoints provides some food for thought, and/or prompts certain readers to oppose the inherent line of reasoning, then at least one important function of this treatise will have been achieved.

DEFINITION OF CONSERVATION CRIME

In addressing the impact of traditional, customary and medicinal uses of rhino horn on rhino poaching and its ramifications it becomes necessary to determine whether the definition below is applicable to this dilemma subsequently rendering such usage a conservation crime. Accordingly the definition is provided as an *aide memoire* to the issues being discussed and will be scrutinised against the backdrop of being potentially unethical and insensitive to prevailing traditional, cultural and curative natural resource practice

Conservation crime can be defined as “any intentional or negligent human activity or manipulation that impacts negatively on the earth's biotic and/or abiotic natural resources, resulting in immediately noticeable or indiscernible (only noticeable over time) natural resource trauma of any magnitude” (Herbig & Joubert, 2006: 96).

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE: CULTURAL DISSONANCE?

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is defined by the Gale Medical Dictionary (2008: np) as an ancient and still existing method of healthcare premised on the belief in balance, moderation and prevention. According to Ayling (2013: 5), Rabinowitz (1995) traces the trade of rhino horn in China as far back as 2600 BC. Furthermore, rhino horn has also appeared in ancient Chinese scriptures, such as the Divine Peasant's Herbal from the 1st Century BC. From ancient times rhino horn cups were thought capable of indicating if the liquid they held was poisonous. In TCM rhino horn, ground to a powder and taken orally, is regarded as having curative properties ranging from hangover relief to palliation of fever, rheumatism, gout and stroke (Griffiths, 2015: 99) and even as therapy for snake bite, haemorrhoids, hallucinations and demonic possession (Minnaar, 2014: 200). According to Shaw (2012: 20) TCM combines herbs and animal products to create harmony and balance in

the body and has an entrenched ethnic credence in the East. Contrary to media reports, rhino horn has never been prescribed by TCM practitioners as an aphrodisiac, but is currently believed by some to cure cancer, which has spiked demand for rhino horn, specifically in Vietnam (Ash, 2012: 5; Bega cited in Minnaar, 2014: 200). Recognising the fact that there is no scientific evidence linking rhino horn to any medicinal value most TCM countries in Asia removed rhino horn from their traditional medicine pharmacopoeias. This has not, however, eliminated demand. Traditional medicine, as a therapeutic art, places great emphasis on the spirit of the animal as embodied in its flesh and bones, so an absence of scientific proof for medicinal qualities is not regarded as determinative. Belief in the curative properties of rhino horn remains deep seated in Chinese-related cultures.

Rhino horn also has symbolic value. A pair of rhino horns constituted one of eight treasures, known as the Eight Precious Things or *'pa pao'* and portions of rhino horn were also worn as badges of rank by military officials during the Ming and Qing dynasties in China (Welch, 2008: 68). Rhino horn has long been regarded as a status symbol and was, and still is, being used by elites as a gift to obtain favour and influence and in cultural 'face consumption' practices (acts of conspicuous consumption in order to enhance, maintain or save face). Although the use of rhino horn is not taught in Asian culture today, it remains entrenched in its history and consequently is still used by many Asian families. Through social learning children assimilate the behaviours of their parents and role models and replicate them in their own lives (Burke, 2014: 53 & 123). In this way practices and values, albeit in a gradually declining fashion, are perpetuated.

From the foregoing it is clear that the demand for and the consumption of rhino horn is intricately woven into the traditional, cultural and medicinal fabric of the Asian psyche and as such creates a demand for this commodity that is consequentially detrimental to the conservation of rhino species in South Africa – where the largest (75%) remaining population in the world currently resides – and elsewhere. It follows therefore that because such usage is having a negative impact on rhino preservation that it can indeed be regarded as a natural resource/conservation crime (albeit somewhat auxiliary) as per definition. It is not only the actual poaching of rhino that is illegal, but also the act(s) that drive the demand, even though somewhat peripherally. The vexing question is, in spite of this, whether the application of the definition to derive at this supposition is ethical given the traditional and customary bonds that exist? Can customs and traditions justify the consumption of such a product despite the conservation predicament it creates?

RHINO HORN DEMAND FLUCTUATION: A CHRONOLOGICAL SNAPSHOT

Before considering the above and other pertinent questions it is necessary to establish the current position regarding rhino horn usage on the global stage. As determined, rhino horn has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years. It is generally classified as a 'heat-clearing' drug and was typically combined with other medicinal ingredients to treat a variety of ailments from fevers to convulsions and epilepsy (Ash, 2012: 5; Ellis, 2013: 24; Griffiths, 2015: 102). Over time there have been constantly shifting peaks in demand for rhino horn, as illustrated by the following succinct chronological overview (Ellis, 2013: 24-25). During the 1970s Japan was the foremost consumer of rhino horn in Asia. The principal market dynamic was the sale of manufactured medicines, which were branded products and available in pharmacies and stores. In 1980 Japan ratified the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a treaty aimed at ensuring that the international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Upon joining the treaty, the Ministry of Health required all manufacturers of rhino horn medicines to find substitutes for their products. Generally speaking, the use of manufactured medicines in Japan meant the use of rhino horn was easier to control, since the products were mostly registered with the government in the country of manufacture and one company dominated the manufacture of rhino horn. Demand reduction strategies did work in Japan and the

country is no longer a problem with reference to the open sale of rhino horn. From Japan the trade in rhino horn shifted to South Korea, and throughout the 1980s this country was a major consumer of rhino horn in Asia. Most sales were over the counter, with rhino horn being prescribed by practitioners who generally operated as both doctors and a pharmacy, by prescribing specific treatments to patients. The medicines are generally produced on-site and sold directly to consumers. An import ban on rhino horn to South Korea was implemented in 1983 and South Korea also ratified CITES in 1993. As a result of these actions, together with the threat of US sanctions in respect of undermining international species conservation policy, rhino horn was completely excluded from official Korean pharmacopoeia rendering Korea insignificant as a rhino horn consumer country.

From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s Taiwan was Asia's biggest rhino horn consumer. As with South Korea, point-of-sales were the principal source of rhino horn. When the Taiwan market peaked, Zimbabwe suffered its greatest loss of rhinos. Taiwan, subtly pressured by the US in terms of the potential imposition of sanctions (again, as was the case with South Korea, for undermining international species conservation policy), implemented an import ban in 1985 and all sales were prohibited by the government in 1992. The Taiwanese government also instituted scientific tests to determine the efficacy of rhino horn concluding that it was not worth using in any medical sense. Subsequently Taiwan is no longer significant in terms of rhino horn consumption. Although China was a minor consumer of rhino horn in the 1970s and 1980s it only became more active in during the 1990s. In joining CITES, imports were banned in 1981 and exports in 1988. Domestic trade was prohibited and all stockpiles of rhino horn were registered and sealed in 1993. China regrettably continues to be of concern as a consumer country of illicit rhino horn. With a growing capitalist-oriented economy and less state-run businesses, individual entrepreneurs and private business have created more varied avenues for the illegal trade in rhino horn. Yemen, in contrast to the other countries mentioned, was a substantial consumer of rhino horn during the 1970s and 1980s for the carving of traditional dagger handles (*Jambiya*) as opposed to the consuming of rhino horn products for other reasons. The Yemeni government has, however, implemented proper legislation to enforce the CITES ban on the trade in rhino horn. Public awareness campaigns coupled with economic hardship and political instability have meant that rhino horn demand has virtually been eradicated in Yemen. Asia's current rhino horn trade dilemma appears to be linked, in no uncertain terms, to Vietnam's economic development and increasing levels of disposable income. In concert with the poaching pressure on South Africa's rhino population since 2005, killings have surged and Vietnam has rapidly grown to be the world's largest recipient of both legal and illegal rhino horn from South Africa (Ellis, 2013: 25). Gosling (2015: 1) in fact describes Vietnam's appetite for rhino horn as a "rocketing market", an issue which is unpacked in the subsequent section.

THE VIETNAM CONNECTION: GENERATING RECENT AND PRESENT DEMAND

Over the past decade, Vietnam has experienced rapid economic growth, with a concomitant demand for wildlife products. The rhino poaching scourge in South Africa is largely nourished by this insatiable and surging demand creating the 'perfect storm' so to speak for rhino poaching and the illegal horn trade (Parry, 2012: 1-2). Milliken and Shaw (2012: 21) in fact state that there is no doubt in South African officials' and conservation organisations' mind that Vietnam has become the main end user market for illegal horn. Despite being branded as an 'implicated state', the Vietnamese government has denied this and claimed that rhinoceros horn is not commonly or widely used in Vietnam (Mouton, 2013). Contrary to this claim rhino horn is increasingly being used as a status symbol amongst the wealthy Vietnamese elite, in business deals and social gatherings where it is ground to a powder and mixed with water and drunk (Parry, 2012: 2; Ellis, 2013: 25; Stewart, 2015: 1). Rhino horn is now more expensive than cocaine, which has helped build its standing and ability to grease

palms during business deals (Guilford, 2013: 7; Stewart, 2015: 1). In support hereof Rademeyer (2012a: ix) claims that rhino horn is more valuable than platinum, gold, heroin and cocaine per kilogram and has become a party drug for the wealthy and a (false) panacea for the very sick. Paradoxically, the world's dwindling rhino population threatens to make this scenario even more worrisome as diminishing supply drives its appeal and prices ever upwards. Griffiths (2015: 169) concurs that Vietnamese people are currently the main consumers of animal products, such as rhino horn, due to their traditions and fictitious views about medicinal and social gains. Vietnamese consumers tend to utilise rhino horn recreationally or as a status symbol to demonstrate their affluence. There are, however, still those who believe in the healing properties of TCM, including rhino horn. They might have the misguided view that rhino horn may be used as a treatment for cancer, or to increase alcohol tolerance and treat hangovers (Griffiths, 2015: 99). Scaffolding onto this point Ash (2012: 5) maintains that the most significant use of rhino horn is not medicinal, but cultural. Ash (2012: 5) in fact states that websites in Vietnam are touting a wine and rhino horn mixture as "the alcoholic drink of millionaires" and may even be consumed as a luxury product at "rhino wine associations". Furthermore, and perhaps most troubling of all, Milliken, a conservation expert with the Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce organisation (TRAFFIC), states that the upwelling in rhino horn demand from Vietnam has nothing to do with meeting traditional medicinal needs. It is in fact to supply a recreational drug to revellers and the *nouveau riche* (Rademeyer, 2012b: 1) or to fleece dying cancer patients out of their cash for a miracle rhino horn cure that will never happen (Parry, 2012: 2). Despite claims by some prominent individuals in Vietnam that imbibing rhino horn had cured their cancer (Stewart 2015: 1), a rumour that persists to this day, the president of the UK Association of TCM went on record stating that there is no evidence of rhino horn being used to treat cancer in nearly two millennia worth of Chinese medical texts (Guilford, 2013: 3-4).

Cancer is, however, a big problem in Vietnam with approximately 150 000 new cases per year and a long waiting list for radiotherapy. Cancer rates are furthermore rising by 20-30 percent per year, both because prosperity has brought with it increased levels of pollution and unhealthier lifestyles, and simply because more cases are caught and diagnosed. Many people are still not very familiar with cancer and 70-80 percent of cases are being diagnosed in the late stages. That gives Vietnam a cancer mortality rate of 73 percent, one of the highest in the world, the average for the developing world being 67.8 percent (Guilford, 2013: 6).

Anecdotal evidence alarmingly suggests that there is currently a scam doing the rounds whereby rhino horn traders target ill individuals outside clinics and persuade them to purchase illicit rhino horn under the pretence of it being capable of curing their cancer. Buttressing this point, Ash (2012: 5) asserts that patients, fortified by the misconception that ingesting rhino horn can cure cancer and other serious illnesses, actually buy rhino horn from peddlers who, lacking any probity, enter hospital wards to exploit them in their distressed and vulnerable state. These Vietnamese charlatans "recognise that goods have magical powers that have nothing to do with 'needs' and they have become architects who transform ordinary and unpretentious things into exotic valuables" (Wilk, 2006: 304-5). This is, in spite of everything, a process based on the enchantment of totems, of symbols of power and status, and of tokens of identification and belonging, physiognomies that drive the competitiveness and herd-behaviour of consumerism. In this case, the magic has been performed on rhino horn, taking its illicit availability and artificial abundance and transforming it into desiderata.

Horns are also given away as presents by those wishing to gain the approval of others with higher political or socioeconomic statuses. Consumers of rhino horn who generate the demand tend to (for the most part ignorantly) justify their role in the demand arena through their cultural beliefs despite the increasing non-traditional use thereof. According to Shaw (2012: 21) and Stewart (2015: 1) the main rhino horn consumers are the so-called 'habitual users' who are invariable wealthy, middle-aged, urban-dwelling elites who frequently use

rhino horn as a detoxifying beverage and body-rejuvenating tonic. As maintained by Guilford (2013: 4) Vietnam's tally of millionaires has grown 150 percent in the last five years which is, according to CITES, inflating a bubble of demand for rhino horn. At present, belief in the detoxification properties of rhino horn, especially following excessive intake of alcohol, is considered the most common routine usage (Shaw 2012: 21).

Rhino horn is increasingly being used for non-traditional purposes, such as a miracle cure for cancer (Leggett, 2011: 1). It is used in tandem with chemotherapy, where rhino horn is believed to minimise the harmful effects of the other treatments and act as a body detoxifier following excessive consumption of alcohol or rich food (Ellis, 2013: 25). Evidence strongly suggests, however, that the promotion of the miraculous curative powers of rhino horn represents none other than a cynical marketing ploy to increase the profitability of the rhino horn trade. TRAFFIC has also identified another consumer group comprising affluent young Vietnamese mothers who keep small quantities of rhino horn for home preparation of medicines to treat high fever, especially for their children. The diversification of uses for rhino horn and the alarming rate of poaching (see Annexure A for an indication of the incremental steep rise in rhino poaching in South Africa between 2007 and 2015) signifies a serious case for concern and emphasises the urgent need for action from Vietnam. There has unfortunately been little evidence of political will from Vietnam in tackling the illegal trade in rhino horn and limited evidence of arrests and prosecutions within the country. According to Vaughan (2012: 6) the view that Vietnam constitutes the principal market for megafauna horn is rejected by Vietnamese government officials, who claim that it is merely a transit country for horn, having too few links with South Africa and being too poor to support such a market. Vietnamese authorities, in fact, maintain that their intelligence agencies had identified China as the destination for 99 percent of the horn that goes through Vietnam (Rademeyer cited in Minnaar, 2014: 201). Vietnam's own park rangers do not have to worry though, their job is already done. In 2010, the last Javan rhino was found dead, a bullet wound in its leg and its horn hacked off (Guilford, 2013: 8). The continued consumption of rhino horn for so-called cultural reasons appears to be antediluvian and out of kilter with modern day society and global conservation efforts and ethos. There is no logical reason to perpetuate such 'tradition', when they can be viewed as pseudo-medicinal, predatory and harmful to the environment and viable options exist. Creating a demand for rhino horn based on these foibles is to say the least *ignus fatuus* and nugatory.

DISCUSSION: INTERPRETING THE DYNAMICS

Crystallising from the above discourse is an Asian rhino horn usage mosaic facilitating its interpretation and analysis. There are a few fundamentals that emerge, namely that due to enlightenment and political will rhino horn usage has been minimised in a number of Asian countries. These countries are no longer considered significant in the rhino poaching equation. Data reveals that many Asian countries, despite having been large consumers of rhino horn, have for all intents and purposes ceased the cultural/traditional practice of rhino horn consumption. Moreover the consumption of plundered rhino horn, due to the poaching demand it creates, can indeed be regarded as a conservation crime by virtue of Herbig and Joubert's 2006 definition. In pondering this dilemma a distinction needs to be drawn between primary and secondary conservation crime. Some crimes result directly from the destruction and degradation of the earth's resources, for example, the abuse of non-human species (rhino poaching). Other crimes that are coadjutant or reliant upon such despoliation, for example those arising from the violation of rules/laws that attempt to regulate environmental harm (in this case the creation of an illegal medicine market) can be regarded as collateral conservation crime, but nonetheless as conservation crime.

The question that remains is whether intervening in the traditional customary usage space amounts to disrespect or not? The answer to this question, the authors strongly submit, is that, since the usage of rhino horn for any and all purposes has been tested and found

wanting, no custom or tradition should be allowed to continue if the natural resources it utilises are unsustainable and constitutes leveraging that resource beyond the limits of acceptable biodiversity change. Notwithstanding, ancient culture and tradition are still observed by some segments of the population that regard rhino horn as desiderata, and will probably ensure minimalist (parasitic) but gradually decreasing consumption in the years to come. The usage is, however, based on the presumed thaumaturgy of rhino horn and misguided beliefs, myths, superstition, and traditions which do not pass muster. They should be subtly discouraged and diplomatically replaced with alternatives as has been demonstrated elsewhere in the world. By way of example, Yemen dagger manufacturers now use alternative products for their handles and actual leopard skins have been replaced with synthetic ones during Shembe tribal religious celebrations and rituals. Customs and traditions are to be respected, but so is nature and the adverse effects a particular custom is having on global biodiversity. This is enough reason to alter habitual practices to ones that are more environmentally friendly, and sustainable and cannot, therefore, it is submitted, be regarded as disrespectful. As food for thought consider whether the continued use of rhino horn by Asian consumers does not perhaps constitute gross disrespect for nature and fellow human beings.

Asians who utilise rhino horn (especially those residing in urban spaces) probably do not even appreciate the importance of biodiversity and genuinely believe that it is acceptable to exploit rhino products offered for sale. They, quite feasibly, may lack any awareness of the social and cultural heritage consequences of these crimes, and as a result be apathetic to South African and range country conservation issues. Gosling (2015: 1) in fact states that Asian people are often led to believe that when a rhino dies its horn is simply *picked up* (authors' emphasis added). For these cohorts rhinos are merely animals that exist for humans to exploit. Their conservation status is of no significance, and whether or not extinction is imminent has no tangible meaning to them.

The problem, however, cannot only be attributed to Asian consumers. South African citizens, albeit inadvertently, also play a somewhat recondite role in the perpetuation of this crime phenomenon. For many, if not most, South Africans concern about conservation issues, such as rhino poaching is a luxury they just cannot afford. Much of South Africa's citizenry lives below the breadline and struggle to make ends meet in a climate of perpetual crime and violence. Heinous crimes, such as murder, rape, robbery and assault, to name just a few, permeate citizens' daily lives. Whether or not rhino are conserved has no impact or influence on the collective mentality of the 'person in the street' – they are essentially concerned with the 'here and now'. Saving or not saving a rhino does not perceptibly affect the ordinary blue collar worker in any way and, therefore, does not engender a natural feeling of reprehensibility that other crime does (Herbig, 2008: 31-32). Campaigns and remonstrations directed at mitigating rhino poaching are regarded by many as the domain of the wealthy and white, probably even promoting resentment for this sector and their crusades. Subsequently a common understanding of the gravitas of the situation, and a will to embrace conservation, is lacking, which consequentially creates a climate in which poachers can ply their trade with relative impunity. Policing resources are directed to the most immediate threats to public safety and this impacts negatively on overall efforts to combat this specific crime, as well as others in the natural resource remit. Contrariwise, Griffiths (2015: 126-127) argues that, as humans, our existence cannot be separated from the presence of animals, since they are an integral aspect of our lives and identities. She states further that more needs to be done to improve awareness in South Africa, as well as in Asian countries regarding the importance of conservation and biodiversity and to incorporate these essentials into the cultural framework of all individuals.

On the other hand the Vietnam situation is somewhat more perplexing, since rhino horn usage is associated with affluence and is essentially non-traditional. The spreading habit in Vietnam of licentious hyper-consumerism seems to herald continued demand and

concomitant supply (poaching) on an increasing scale. Here we are dealing with individuals who are equally divorced from nature and natural resources, but additionally have a hedonistic and selfish outlook on life, using rhino potions and gifts to progress up the social and corporate ladder. The syndrome permeating Vietnamese rhino horn consumer society is known as 'conspicuous consumption'. This segment of the population is spending money on and acquiring luxury goods to publicly display economic power – of the income or accumulated wealth of the buyer. To the conspicuous consumer, such a public display of discretionary economic power (as opposed to frugality) is a means of attaining and/or maintaining a given social status – the flamboyant consumption of goods to provoke the envy of others. Furthermore, Vietnamese hyper-consumerism embodies the consumption of goods for non-functional purposes and the associated significant pressure to consume those goods exerted by the modern capitalist society, as those goods shape one's identity. In a hyper-consumption society goods (in this case rhino horn in its various forms) are often status symbols that broadcast associated meanings (displaying prosperity and by implication importance and standing in society) and, subsequently, the need to consume in such a society is less due to competition with others than through individuals' own hedonistic pleasure. It would seem that the value of consuming rhino horn to horn-hungry Vietnamese consumers is the fact that it essentially has no value – the ultimate expression of opulence – being able to purchase and consume something for no other reason than because it is possible for them to do so.

Although many Vietnamese rhino horn end-users are, in all probability, ignorant of the harm being caused by their conspicuous consumption it is also quite feasible that many do realise it and use cultural beliefs/traditions to justify their behaviour – a type of neutralisation technique enabling individuals to break the law without seriously damaging their self-image (Burke, 2014: 154-155; Conklin, 2013: 156). By appealing to higher loyalties rhino horn patrons can rationalise their actions by the demands of a group – a cluster of individuals (the *nouveau riche*) that is smaller than the whole society, but that requires its members to conform to group standards that are sometimes unethical or incompatible with the law.

Notwithstanding, forcibly trying to stop people from using their traditional medicine can be viewed as a prejudiced practice. One cannot abruptly discriminate against people according to their cultural beliefs, and doing so would entail imposing Western principles on to other cultural groups and amount to (tactless) cultural homogenisation. Since cultural homogenisation is typically associated with Western culture dominating and destroying other cultures it is viewed negatively, since it leads to the reduction in cultural diversity. However, some scholars have a positive view on homogenisation, especially in the area of education. It is said to produce consistent norms of behaviour across a set of modern institutions, thus tying institutions, such as the modern nation state and formal education together in a tight conservo-rational sphere – a form of (tactful) cultural homogenisation. Teaching universal values, such as rationality and conservation through mass schooling is a part of the positive benefits that can be generated from homogenisation. Attempts to change fictitious beliefs and consumption practices should not, therefore, be viewed as the Western voice imposing its will, but indeed the voice of wisdom and reason. This being said, and based on the current data regarding rhino poaching levels the continued use of TCM (rhino horn) as a cultural potion and/or recreational tippie strains the very bounds of reason. The Asian relationship with rhino must somehow be shredded and transformed. Accelerated behaviour modification would seem to be the order of the day while remaining sensitive to other peoples' cultural beliefs. To clinically and abruptly condemn the cultural usage of rhino horn would amount to insensitivity and prejudice. However, if it is done diplomatically, sensitively and honorifically, it will in all likelihood be accepted more readily. The bottom line, however, is that the perpetuation of customs and traditions for the sake of perpetuating customs and traditions can simply no longer be condoned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research by Griffiths (2015) has established that the quixotic superstitions held by certain Asian consumers drive the demand for rhino horn. These superstitions underline the importance that users place on social status and good health, which clearly demonstrates the need for education and awareness of conservation issues in consumer and range countries. Rhino horns, as well as lion and tiger bones, are used in TCM, but not in other ethnic curative cultures. While numerous animal products are used in traditional African medicine, lion bones and rhino horn are not. Instead, lion and rhino intestines and hearts are utilised, as well as rhino skeletons, which are believed to reinforce a baby's bones. South Africans subscribing to traditional healing methods believe that removing a rhino horn brings misfortune as it takes away the poacher's manhood. Furthermore, pangolins are exploited for a wide variety of medicinal usages in both African and Asian countries.

Although often touted as a panacea, increased legislation and law enforcement will in all probability just drive the rhino horn trade (further) underground. The will to abstain and conserve must radiate from the consumers themselves, hence behavioural change will be the best solution. Minnaar (2014: 226) argues in this regard that the solution to rhino poaching is to 'kill' the demand in Asia for rhino horn completely, which will require a number of measures, not least being to change the habits of users and to encourage them not to resort to it for 'ersatz' purposes. Minnaar (2014: 226) does, however, caution that it might take some generations to instil such a change on the mindset of the public. Change will, however, need to be culturally sensitive and ensure that this illegal activity is mitigated by the very perpetrators themselves, while simultaneously reducing demand and curtailing poaching. Change should not be seen as forced, but rather as voluntary and comfortable – transformation should ideally evolve from within the individual and then gradually infuse society. Once the allure of desired things lose their significance and symbolic values they will in all likelihood also lose their economic value, but will retain their physical value in the sense of being an artefactual presence.

Consumers who utilise animal products, particularly rhino horn, appear to do so because of a lack of education and mistaken beliefs, for example the fact that high-profile individuals claim that rhino horn can cure terminal illnesses. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (2013: np) stated that educational adverts, such as the one below, are being touted in Vietnam in order to bring about behavioural changes in terms of consumption of rhino horn.



(Source: World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF, 2013: np). Used by the WWF as an advert aimed at the Vietnamese end-user).

In this vein Philp (2014: 3) states that Durban conservationist Andrew Muir was recently the tour guide for two Vietnamese celebrities, Thu Minh and Tanh Bui who were visiting South Africa to film an educational campaign aimed at explaining the poaching pandemic to Vietnamese rhino horn consumers. Griffiths (2015: 166) states that they were videoed amongst the rhinos and promised to promote the importance of conservation back in Vietnam. Muir was quoted as saying that using role models, such as celebrities in awareness campaigns is crucial to bring about behavioural change, since many individuals do not realise that their consumption directly results in such natural resource trauma (Griffiths, 2015: 167). The figure of Jackie Chan (movie star) standing next to a rhino is being beamed from TV screens all over Asia, in shopping malls, at airports and in people's homes – his message is simple: “When the buying stops, the killing can too” (Gosling, 2015: 1).



(Source: as cited in Gosling, 2015 – as used by used by the NGO WildAid in their public campaign to end the illegal wildlife trade).

Chan is one of a growing number of celebrities used by the NGO WildAid in an effort to end the illegal wildlife trade in our lifetimes by strangling the demand. In relation to whether the use of celebrities in conservation are a hindrance or a help Pringle (cited in Duthie, 2014: 12) muses that public figure endorsement not only generates and retains public attention (for the target issue), but also increases recall rates in an overly cluttered market space. Consonant herewith Duthie (2014: 20) argues that with the rise in the prevalence of social media, celebrities are increasingly being used to spread conservation organisations' messages to their fans through social media conduits, such as Twitter or Facebook. It is common knowledge that these are extremely powerful and readily used information dissemination instruments. An example of a successful awareness campaign (albeit devoid of specific celebrity endorsement) is the WWF's Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI), whereby certain vulnerable species of fish were targeted for protection. Prominent corporations (themselves household names with their own merchandising celebrity status) took part and committed to changing their buying behaviour which led to reduction in demand. Consumer behaviour changed as a result and most of the vulnerable fish species populations are once again on a sustainable trajectory (WWF 2013: np.). Education for all citizens is thus a key factor as ignorance about conservation is a major contributor to these offences along all points in the trade chain.

According to Barrett (2014: 1) in an interview with an old TCM doctor it was stated that buffalo horn can also be used in the same way as rhino horn, they have a similar ingredient, and people in China have used both for many generations. This strongly implies that placebos are readily available to placate avid rhino horn users and smooth the transition to viable alternatives without offending traditional beliefs or customs per se. Archaic customs are no longer a good fit with global (not only Western) conservation philosophy and praxis and accelerated intuitive behaviour modification (adaptive) is required. Also relevant to the behavioural change ideology is the success achieved in educating members of the traditional Shembe (amaNazarite) culture in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) (the largest independent/indigenous religious movement among the Zulus). These individuals dress in genuine leopard skins during their cultural ceremonies. Since being taught about leopard poaching, many of them have opted to instead use faux leopard fur for their outfits. This case illustrates that if people are made aware of conservation issues – especially if they are not themselves directly involved in the killing of the animals – they are often willing to be educated and to amend their behaviour. It is deemed completely acceptable to try to change the behaviours of consumers who use animal products based on the new cultural practices, such as to improve their status or to cure cancer and hangovers as is the case in Vietnam. Utilising culturally sensitive methods to reduce the demand, such as a Vietnamese marketing business creating a demand reduction campaign for the new Vietnamese users will be beneficial. It might not, however, be appropriate for a European company to design such a campaign, as they might not fully understand the Vietnamese cultural and social facets and incentives.

Behavioural change can most usefully be applied in end-user countries in order to reduce demand. This is particularly the case for Vietnam, which was identified as the greatest contributor to these offences in terms of non-cultural demand. Behavioural change can be seen as a significant preventative measure – with a commensurate reduction in need. A distinction should be drawn between the old traditional medicinal and the new cultural uses of animal products in Asian cultures. It was found that it is these new social uses of animal products in Vietnam that are causing the current problems around the illegal trade in endangered animals, particularly imperilled pachyderms. While the Chinese have been using traditional medicine for thousands of years, there is currently not a great use of animal products, such as rhino horn. Instead, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners are now often opting to use plant-based products. The small medicinal trade that does still exist is not based on scientific fact, and instead founded on myths that animal products can lessen ailments, such as fevers – a parasitic use that can be expected to continue for many years to come, but in all probability not sufficient to sustain the demand for continued poaching.

CONCLUSION

So why do Asian people continue to use rhino horn in the light of the worldwide condemnation against them for doing so? There is absolutely no evidence that anyone today or in the future will suffer ailments if no more rhino horn were to be consumed. If rhino horn were to be removed from the diet of those consuming it they would be no worse off as a result. Does this not then clearly imply that its consumption can be regarded as frippery or, at least, an extravagance - a luxury and not a necessity? If there is no current need or valid reason to consume rhino horn and no foreseeable need or rationale to consume rhino horn why do certain Asian peoples still persist in using it? Arguments about it being tradition and custom (cultural) are often rendered and it is without question that the custom is very old in Asian communities. But is that enough of a reason to continue something that is so obviously gratuitous and condemned by so many other humans around the planet? Consumption of rhino horn can be regarded as an act of economic, environmental and collective impetuosity. It is fiscally rational only to suppliers and purveyors, not to consumers; it is environmentally damaging in promoting indiscriminate poaching and plunder and it is anti-social inasmuch that it creates an ersatz nostalgia. Humans have a tendency to think

themselves superior to every other life form and that they have a God-given right to exploit the planet's resources, no matter what. This is a precarious point of view, particularly when there are so many of us currently inhabiting the planet. How much abuse can natural resources take before our whole life support system collapses? Perhaps we should think more along the lines that we have a God-given responsibility to protect the planet and its biodiversity. We as humans supposedly rule or have dominion over the creatures of the earth, but with such rule and sovereignty come responsibility and accountability. Rhinos and their horns belong to nature and not to humans of any nationality per se. Traditions and customs are valuable and there is much to be said about protecting languages, dress, music, architecture, art and other expressions of who we are. The world keeps getting smaller so it is all the more important to remember where we came from. However, there comes a time for some traditions and cultural expressions to be shelved and retire to the history books. We would not want to see cannibalism or human sacrifice practiced today, but for those who did once practice them, they were extremely important cultural activities (West, 2014: 6).

Surely Asian communities partaking in these traditional practices can be made to see the desistance potentiation in phasing out these conventions. In the final analysis there is no justifiable reason for Asian people to continue consuming rhino horn. There needs to be a move towards a worldwide conservation parity and appreciation of the finiteness of many of our natural resources. Although the parasitic consumption of rhino horn as part of TCM can be expected to continue (as there will always be those that place their own importance ahead of rational argument and the 'good of the commons') it will hopefully dwindle in time allowing the desistance to contribute further to the rejuvenation and reintegration of the world's fragile rhino population for the benefit of all humankind – otherwise, like it or not, rhino dystopia and accompanying human morbidity is imminent. Asian government agencies and civil society cannot afford to vacillate or harbour parochial sentiments in this regard and need to assume the role of learning/change brokers at their earliest convenience. They need to signal the salient issues of rhino population decline and tease out workable solutions to the dilemma. Moreover further poaching risk can be moderated by paying increased attention to emerging patterns of contrived consumerism and related processes involving non-human species.

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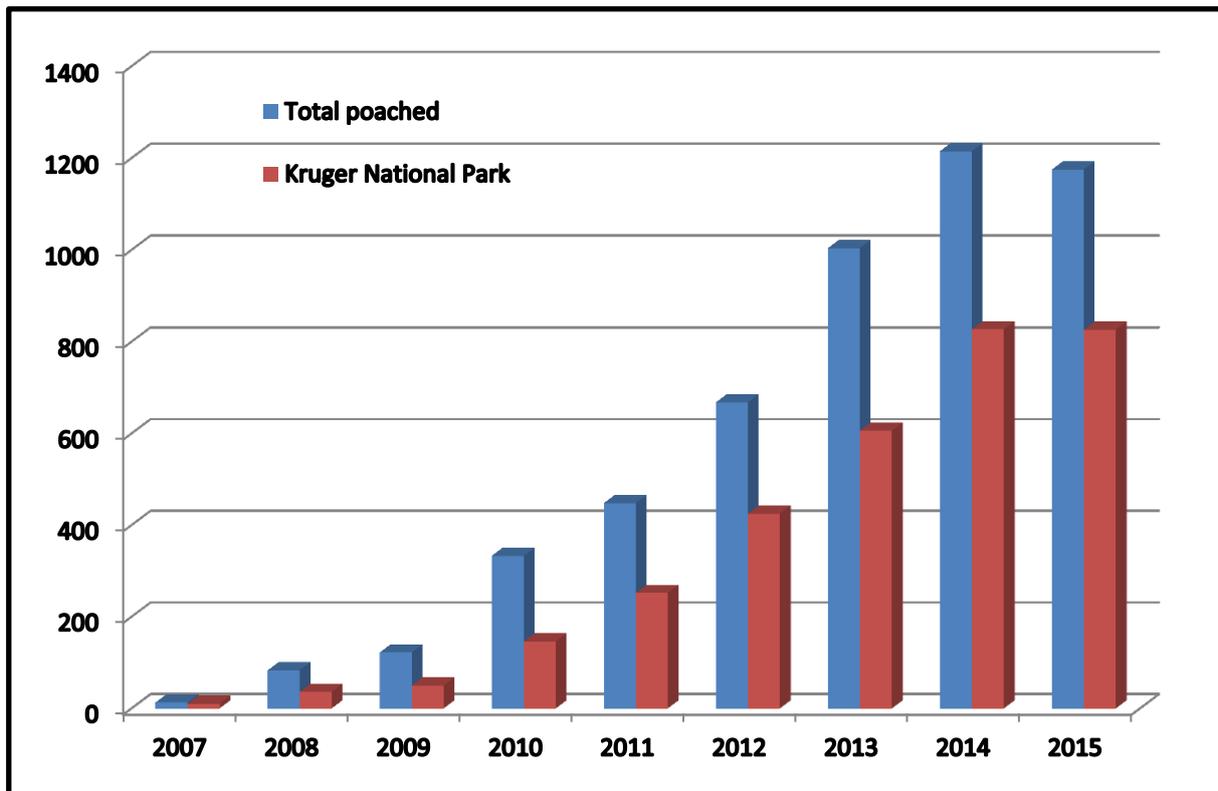
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ANNEXURE A: NUMBER OF RHINO* KILLED IN SOUTH AFRICA: 2007-2015

Figure 1: Recorded numbers of rhino poached and killed in South Africa (2007-2015)



Graph Legend: Figures for poached rhino in South Africa: 2007-2015

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total SA	13	83	122	333	448	668	1004	1215	1175
KNP	10	36	50	146	252	425	606	827	826

* In 2015 the estimated population of both Black and White rhinos in South Africa was 21 000 – representing between 75 and 80 percent of the total remaining rhino world populations.

(Poaching Facts, [sa]).