

A Spot Check on the Availability of Rhino Products in Guangzhou and Shanghai, China

Jonathan Loh and Kirsty Loh

BACKGROUND

The People's Republic of China became a Party to CITES in 1981. In 1988, the Ministry of Forests ordered the registration of stocks of rhino *Rhinocerotidae* horn held by state-owned patent medicine manufacturers and import-export corporations; stocks owned by retail pharmacists or private owners were exempt from registration. By January 1990, a total of 9875 kg of rhino horn had been registered (Martin, 1990). According to the Ministry, this stockpile was being used up at the rate of 600 kg to 700 kg a year (Martin, 1990) and had been reduced to almost 8500 kg by 1992 (E.B. Martin, pers. comm., 1993). Under Chinese law, these horns were treated as pre-Convention stocks which may be sold internally or exported, although the importation of rhino horn is prohibited.

On 29 May 1993, the State Council announced a prohibition on the importation, export, purchase, sale, or transport of rhino horn or Tiger *Panthera tigris* bone into or within China and ordered manufacturers to stop using rhino horn in medicines. All stocks were to be "examined, re-registered, sealed up and properly kept". Existing medicines which contained rhino horn or Tiger bone were to be disposed of within six months or "sealed up and forbidden for sale". It will not be necessary to prove whether or not rhino horn is real; under the new regulations, any product labelled as containing rhino horn or Tiger bone will be treated as such.

INTRODUCTION

Spot checks of pharmacies in Guangzhou (formerly Canton) by Martin in 1985 and 1987 showed that 17% and 15% respectively sold African rhino horn (Martin, 1989). No rhino horn was seen in the wholesale market on either occasion. Martin also found rhino horn in Xian in 1985 and in Chengdu in 1987. On both trips, pharmacies visited in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and other Chinese cities did not possess rhino horn although traditional medicine manufacturers continued to use it as an ingredient in medicines for export (Martin, 1989).

Just prior to the Government's trade prohibition announced in May 1993, TRAFFIC Taipei carried out a brief investigation on 20 to 25 May 1993 in order to determine whether or not rhino horn was available in pharmacies in Guangzhou and Shanghai. These cities were selected because they represent two of the fastest-growing centres of trade and commerce in mainland China. Guangzhou is one of the cities for which there is a record of trade in rhino horn, whereas rhino horn has

never been recorded as being sold in Shanghai. If found to be available in China, the investigation also sought to compare the price and availability of rhino horn with Taiwan.

METHODS

In Guangzhou, the wholesale market for medicinal substances in Qing Ping Road and pharmacies in the city were visited by one of the authors and two local residents, both Cantonese-speaking. The investigators asked for rhino horn in each pharmacy visited and, if available, asked to see it. They also looked for rhino horn openly on display in the market.

Pharmacies in Shanghai were visited by one of the authors using the same approach as in Guangzhou. A visit was also made to the offices of the Shanghai Medicinal Herbs Corporation, a manufacturer of patent medicine and supplier of prepared herbs.

RESULTS

Guangzhou

Articles said to be rhino horn were seen in four out of eight pharmacies visited; most of these were said to have been imported from India. It is the view of the authors, however, that the horns seen were fakes. In each pharmacy the prices were comparable, with an average of RMB 214.63 a gram (US\$21.45 a gram). Two of the pharmacies in possession of 'rhino horn' were Government-owned.

Three traders were able to supply African rhino horn in the wholesale market (see Table). Two had one whole horn each and the third had a bag of horn pieces. The whole horns were genuine, one weighing 300 g and the other estimated to be 1.5 kg. The average price was RMB 13 333 a kg. One trader reported that recently the price had fallen considerably although was unable to explain why. Other traders said that they could supply rhino horn if requested but had none on display; such results were discounted.

Material purported to be rhino skin was available in four pharmacies at an average price of RMB 25.44 per 10 g.

Qing Ping Market	Item	Price (RMB)
Stall A	whole horn (300 g)	12 000/kg (300 g=3600)
Stall B	whole horn (c.1.5 kg)	15 000/kg
Stall C	pieces	13 000/kg
Average		13 333/kg
US\$/kg		1 333

Wholesale price of African rhino horn in Guangzhou, 20-21 May 1993.

Prices converted from Renmin bi (RMB) to US\$ at actual market exchange rates US\$1=RMB10.

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Shanghai

No whole rhino horn or pieces of rhino horn were seen in Shanghai. A product described as powdered African rhino horn was available in five of the nine pharmacies visited. The powder was packaged in glass phials, produced in each case by the Shanghai Shi Yao Cai Gong Si (Shanghai City Medicine Company), and was labelled as containing 0.3 g of *Pulvis Cornu Rhinoceri Africani*. The price of each phial was RMB 17.70.

A representative of the Shanghai City Medicine Company explained that the company had stopped producing powdered rhino horn since its stock of horn ran out at the beginning of 1992. The stock had been imported five years earlier at a cost of US\$5000 a kg. No rhino horn had been bought by the company since then and the product still available in pharmacies derived from old stock. Upon enquiry at pharmacies which sold the rhino horn powder, however, it was claimed that the product was still available from the company. Asked if they would be able to provide a large quantity for export, one pharmacy said that they could. The same pharmacy sold a well-known patented medicine "Angong Niu Huang Wan" (Angong Cow's bezoar balls), produced in Shanghai, and a similar product with the same name but spelt "An Kung", produced by the Tong Ren Tang factory in Beijing. Both listed rhino horn as an ingredient: "*Cornu rhinoceri* 5.56%" in the Shanghai medicine and "*Cornu Rhinoceri Asiatici* 20%" in the Beijing product. Another pharmacy sold the Beijing product, but from more recent stock, with ingredients which listed Baikal Skullcap Root *Radix Scutellariae* in place of Asian rhino horn.

No pharmacies had any powder that had been ground on the premises. None of the pharmacies visited had Asian rhino horn, whole or powdered.

One pharmacy offered rhino bezoar powder (ground rhino gall stone) for RMB 192.00 a gram - a price comparable with Asian rhino horn. This has not been previously identified in trade and may have been mislabelled.

DISCUSSION

It is likely that the rhino horns offered for sale in pharmacies were fake. The African horn displayed in the wholesale market was genuine, however, and was offered at a price slightly lower than for that which was available in the Taipei wholesale market (approximately US\$1300 a kg cf. US\$1600 a kg).

The increase in the availability of rhino horn in the wholesale market and the indication of increased demand in the retail pharmacies is of concern. The Chinese economy is currently growing at an unprecedented rate, particularly in the southern and eastern seaboard provinces, where annual growth has been well over 10% since 1990. The danger is that the greater availability of cash and the rising prosperity of private businesses will lead to an increase in the demand for rhino horn by pharmacists, as it apparently did in Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, in southern China especially, traditional uses of animals and animal products are not changing. On the contrary, the use of exotic species for medicine or meat may well increase as it becomes more affordable for the new consumer class.

In Shanghai, where the range of animal species traditionally used has never been as wide as in southern China, only pre-packaged rhino horn powder was available and it was not possible to ascertain whether this was genuine. Shanghai, however, has also exhibited rapid economic growth over the past three years, at least comparable with that of the southern provinces. There is therefore a risk that medicine manufacturers and pharmacists will be encouraged to purchase new rhino horns as business develops.

It is interesting to note the presence of rhino bezoar powder, the ground gall stone of the rhino, which has not previously been recorded in the trade. It is not known whether the product seen was genuine or not. Cow's bezoar or cow gall stone powder is used in traditional Chinese medicine, often in conjunction with rhino horn. Rhino bezoar is mentioned in some Chinese herbals, with one reference dating back to a text attributed to Hua Tuo, a physician from Anhui Province in the second century A.D. (Keys, 1976; Sun, 1987).

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Jonathan and Kirsty Loh, TRAFFIC Taipei