

betting the Rhino Horn Trade

*Esmond Bradley Martin and
Lucy Vigne*

n has become the world's largest
ot for illegal trade in rhino horn
both Asian and African species.
g the last three years it has
ed North Yemen as the country
poses the greatest threat to the
al of the rhinoceros.

behalf of the World Wide Fund
ature, Esmond Bradley Martin
d out research in the Republic
ina (Taiwan) in July 1988, in
to determine how effective
n's August 1985 ban on the
ational trade in rhino products
en. He learned that the govern-
has not tried to enforce it and
ie trade is flourishing.

ity of the 20 million Taiwanese
e in the efficacy of rhino horn
ever-reducing agent and a cure
; and, unlike the Chinese in Hong
or Singapore, they generally do
ake use of traditionally accep-
substitutes for it. Their strong
nd for rhino horn, coupled with
untry's very rapid economic
1 (the per capita income has
sed from US\$ 390 in 1970 to
000 in 1988), has resulted in
ese businessmen buying much
rhino horn during the past 15
paying higher sums for it and,
1985, easily smuggling these
as into the country.

Now, for the first time ever, Tai-
wanese are buying rhino horn not as
a medicine but as an investment! They
realise that the world's rhinos — which
have already fallen in number from
70 000 in 1970 to about 10 500 in
1988 — will become even more
scarce, and they believe that the value
of rhino horn will consequently be even
greater in the future.

According to pharmacists, govern-
ment officials have not inspected their
shops for new rhino horn stocks. It is
not surprising, therefore, that recently
obtained illegal horn is sold quite
openly. Nearly 90% of Kaohsiung's
main pharmacies sell it, as do 73% of
those in Taipei. There have been no
attempts by the government, tradi-
tional doctors or pharmacists in
medicine shops to promote the sub-
stitution of Saiga Antelope or Water
Buffalo horn for that of rhino.

Adding to the Taiwanese demand
for rhino products, Hong Kong traders
have started to buy large quantities of
African rhino horn in Taiwan for re-
export to mainland China, where it is
used in manufacturing patent medi-
cines. Immediately prior to 1987,
Macao and Singapore had been the
major entrepots for African horn in
Asia, but since these governments
have stopped the trade, the Republic

of China has taken over their role.

Strong demand for rhino horn in
Taiwan has recently pushed up prices
sharply. Between April and July 1988,
the retail price doubled in Kaohsiung
(the second largest city) from
US\$1 536 to US\$3 347 per kilo. Asian
horn, from Sumatran and Indian
Rhinos, is more expensive in Taiwan
than anywhere else in the world,
retailing for over US\$40 000 a kilo.
Taiwanese are offering middlemen in
producer-countries higher prices for
their supplies, and the middlemen in
turn are giving greater financial incen-
tives to poachers to hunt down remain-
ing rhinos.

Most of the Sumatran Rhino horn
on sale in Taiwan has originated from
the few scattered rhino populations in
Indonesia and Sabah (Malaysia), where
a poacher may receive as much as
US\$7 300 for the pair of horns, nails
and some hide from one rhino. Tai-
wanese businessmen purchase the
horn from traders and medicine shop
owners in Sabah and in Singapore.
Bangkok traders make available to the



Esmond Bradley Martin

horn products on sale in pharmacies in Taiwan.



Esmond Bradley Martin

Rhino horns photographed in Pilanesberg National Park, Bophuthatswana. They were later stolen from a locked storeroom.

Taiwanese additional Sumatran Rhino horn from northern Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia. The Indian Rhino horn reaches Taiwan via Hong Kong and Singapore; Taiwan is today one of the very few countries which still consumes notable amounts of the horn from the greater one-horned rhinoceros.

As for rhino horn and hide from Africa, these are smuggled into Taiwan via the Republic of South Africa. The Black Rhino horn originates from animals poached mainly in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, but

probably other countries in the region also supply some. The White Rhino horn on the market used to come from Mozambique (until the species was eliminated there) and from some private ranches in South Africa. It is likely that at least part of the White Rhino horn now on sale in Taiwan originates from the two government stores in southern Africa, which were broken into, and it could well be that individuals owning rhino horn trophies are beginning to sell these to Taiwanese. Rhino hide, found in 40% of the pharmacies in Taipei and Kaohsiung,

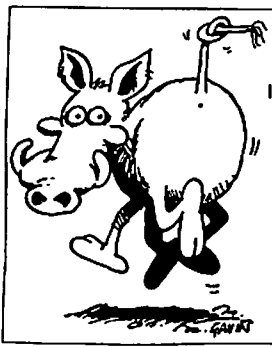
is almost all from White Rhinos in southern Africa. How do the horn and hide leave the Republic of South Africa for Taiwan?

During the past few years, the South African government has been actively encouraging Taiwanese to come and work. So far, Taiwanese entrepreneurs have set up 125 factories and more are under construction. There are over 2000 Taiwanese residents in South Africa. Thus, the perfect opportunity has been provided for Chinese businessmen to purchase rhino horn and hide from illegal South African dealers and take these supplies from Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg to Taipei.

The Republic of China's trading in rhino horn is going to have a catastrophic counter-effect on the efforts to conserve the dwindling numbers of rhinos in Asia and Africa. Action must be taken very soon to stop it. The South African authorities should do their utmost to halt the illicit trade in rhino products that is carried on within the country's borders and they should also prevent the smuggling of these products by tightening up controls at Jan Smuts airport. Conservationists must urge the government of the Republic of China to enforce its 1985 law prohibiting imports and export of rhino products. Taiwan has the infrastructure to control the trade; it can be done by increasing controls at Customs and by requiring all dealers in rhino horn to register their present stocks. Then, those who have supplies should be given a reasonable time limit within which to sell them if they so wish; afterwards, the government must prohibit all internal trade in rhino products and regularly inspect the medicine shops to prevent infringements.

The alternative could be the rhinoceros species' extinction in the wild.

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