

ON THE QUESTION OF THE EXISTENCE OF ELEPHANTS
AND RHINOCEROS IN NORTH CHINA
IN HISTORICAL TIMES

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This article was suggested by an inquiry from Dr. J. G. Andersson who approached me one day, in the summer of 1917, with the question whether there were any references in Chinese historical records to indicate that rhinoceros and elephants inhabited North China in historic time. He also showed me an article¹ in the Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in which the following remarks bear upon the topic which I shall dwell upon in this paper:—

The rhinoceros and elephant certainly lived in Honan B. C. 600. The Tso-chuen commenting on the Chunt'siu of the 2nd year of the duke Siuen (B. C. 605) describes the former as being in sufficient abundance to supply skins for armour. The want, according to the popular saying, was not of rhinoceroses to supply skins, but of courage to animate the wearers. From the same authority (Duke Hi XIII, B. C. 636) we learn that while Tsoo (Hukwang) produced ivory and rhinoceros skins in abundance, Tsin, lying north of the Yellow River on the most elevated part of the loess, was dependant on the other for its supplies of those commodities. The "Tribute of Yu" tells the same tale. Yang-chow and King (Kiangpeh and Hukwang) we are told sent tribute of ivory and rhinoceros hide while Liang (Shensi) sent the skins of foxes and bears. Going back to mythical times we find Mencius (III, V, 9) telling how Chow Kung expelled from Lu (Shantung) the elephants, rhinoceros, the tigers and leopards; proving that in more northern regions the tradition of their former existence was handed down to a few centuries before our era.

¹ Inaugural address by the President - The Borderlands of Geology & History p. 20, N. S. No. XI, 1877.

The following citations from the Chinese sources are necessary to clarify the misinterpretation quoted above from the Journal.

I.

In *Tso chuen* (左傳)

In the second year of duke Siuen (宣公 606 B. C.), Hua-yuan (華元) of Sung (宋) having been defeated by the army of Cheng (鄭), sent this driver to tell the workers who were fortifying the city wall that it doesn't matter to throw away the armours, for cows have hide, and rhinoceroses (犀 *hsi*, and 兕 *Ssu*) are plenty.

Lin Yao-sao (林堯叟) of Sung dynasty (960-1276) explained that the words *hsi* and *ssu* denote the hide but not the animals themselves.

In *Hsueh wen* (說文):

Ssu (兕) looks like wild cows, color black, its hide hard and thick, good for making armors.

In *Pen tsao* (本草, written by Chen Tseng-chi, 陳藏器).

Ssu (兕) is the female of *hsi* (犀). Then *ssu* and *hsi* are of the same species.

In *Kao kung chi* (考工記) in *Chow li* (周禮):

Armory men make armors. One set of armors is made of seven pieces of *hsi*-hide or six pieces of *ssu*-hide. The armor made of *hsi*-hide can last 100 years and that of *ssu* hide 200 years.

In *Yen fan lu* (演繁露):

Formerly in San Tai (三代, that is, the dynasties of Hsia, Shang and Chow, 夏商周) and (before) Tsin and Han (秦漢以前) armors made of hide were much used; that is to say, the hide of *hsi* and *ssu*.

Since the ancient armors were made of hide, every country tried to store large quantities of it. The Sung principality did the same, but it is not written that Sung had living rhinoceroses. Moreover, there is no indication that Sung had elephants.

In *Tung chian* (通鑑).

In the first year of Chow (紂 of Shang) (1154 B. C.), ivory

chop-sticks were first made. Chi Tse (箕子) exclaimed: "Now they make chopsticks of ivory. Then they will make bowls of jade. The king wants to satisfy his desires. Woe is the country".

The site of the capital of Shang was in Honan. If there were elephants there, then ivory could not be a luxury reserved for the king. That the ivory is so much prized as it was by Chi Tse, indicates the rarity of this commodity due to the necessity of its transportation from far distant countries. From this the fact, that around the year 606 B. C. there were no elephants in Honan, seems more evident. Moreover in *Han fei tse* (韓非子):—

Man rarely sees elephants (象). When one gets a dead elephant, he pictures it and imagines the habits during its life time. Thus imagination comes to be denoted by the same word Hsiang (象).

Han Fei lived during the period of 360-260 B. C. in the country of Han (韓) which occupies partly the central plain of Honan and the southern part of Shansi of today. Even as late as that period there were no elephants existing in this region.

In the 13th year of Hsi Kung (僖公) there was no mention of using rhinoceros and elephant hide for driving away the enemy. It was in the 28th year of Hsi Kung (629 B. C.) that it was recorded:

The countries Ch'in (晉) and Chu (楚) fought a battle. One officer of Ch'in named Hsu Chen (胥臣) covered the horses with tigers' skins.

This is the instance of driving away the enemy; but tiger skins, instead of those of rhinoceros or elephants were used.

II.

It is quite possible that in the area of Chu (楚) there were rhinoceroses and elephants. From *Hsun tse* (荀子):—

The people of Chu use the hide of the rhinoceros for making armours. Their hardness ranks with that of metals and stones. From *Tsao chuan*, in the 23rd year of Hsi Kung (634 B. C.):—

Prince Chung Erh of Ch'in said to the Prince of Chu: "Feathers, furs, tusks, and hides are products of your territory. What

there are in Ch'in are only drifted there from the residues of your country''.

Again in the 4th year of Ting Kung (506 B. C.) :-

Chu (楚) fought against Wu (吳). The prince, Chao Wang (昭王), of Chu let elephants, angered by the burning of their skin be driven into the rank of Wu's soldiers.

This means, that in the latter part of the Chow dynasty there were rhinoceroses as well as elephants in the territory of Chu, (and none of them in Ch'in).

But Chu was the southernmost country of the Chinese territory known at that time. Its southernmost limit reaches well into the present Kuangsi (廣西) Province.

From *Fang yu chi yao* (方輿紀要) :-

Chuan Chow (全州) and Yung Ning Chow (永寧州) were parts of Chu in late Chow time.

Moreover Chu had more communication with aboriginal tribes. The presence of rhinoceroses and elephants seems then a matter of natural consequence.

In *Er ya* (爾雅) :-

The beauty of the south are in the rhinoceroses and elephants of Liang Shan.

Some hold that Liang Shan is the modern Heng Shan in Hunan.

In *Mo tse* (墨子) :-

Chu has Yun Meng, rhinoceroses and deer are plenty. From these quotations therefore, it appears that there were rhinoceroses and elephants in Chu.

But the fact, that Mo Tse in another paragraph, did mention elephants in the region of Yun Meng, seems to indicate that elephants inhabited still more southern regions.

In *Ti li chi* (地理志) of *Han hsu* (汗書 annals of Han) :-

"Yueh (粵 modern Kwangtung province) is the country of Chian Niu and Wu Nü (牽牛婺女). Near the coast are rhinoceroses and elephants''.

In the *Hsi nan yih chun* (西南夷傳) in *Ho han hsu* (後漢書) annals of the late Han)

“Rhinoceroses and elephants exist in the region of the Ai Lao tribe.”

In *Hséh wen* (說文, by Hsu Shen 許慎):—

Rhinoceroses are cattle (bulls & cow) outside the southern frontier. Elephants are large animals of Nan Yueh.

These therefore are indications that in the period of the Hans (206 B. C.-219 A. D.) elephants and rhinoceroses existed in more southern regions

In *Shih chi* (史記):—

Li Ssu (李斯) protested to Shi Huang-Ti (始皇帝 246-210): “If only products of Chin are regarded with esteem, then the wares made of rhinoceroses and elephants [bones] can not be your utensils

From the above quotations it is clear, that it was a long time, since these animals had disappeared north of the Huang-Ho.

III.

In *Yu kung* (禹貢), it is shown that Yang Chow (揚州) and Ching Chow (荊州) sent tribute of elephants tusks, rhinoceros hide, feathers, and furs. All the historical records show that all the region from the five ranges south-ward to the sea belong to Yangchow. In Hu Wei's (胡渭) *Yu kung chuei chih* (禹貢錐指), Huang Wen Hsu (黃文叔) is quoted to have said:

Yangchow is the region of Wu and Yao (吳越) and all that extend to the South Sea.

Yang Shao Ching (楊守敬) said in *Li tai yu ti yen ké hsien yao tu* (歷代輿地沿革險要圖) “Island foreigners of Yangchow should be those of Liu Chiu and Luzon”.

Then Yangchow includes a much wider region than that north of the Yangtze and commonly call Chiang Pei

Again said Yang Shao Ching:

Ching Chow (荊) of *Yu Kung* extends to Kwei Lin (貴州) and Hsiang Chiün (象郡) (Kwangsi and southwestern Kwangtung).

Then Ching Chow is not confined to the provinces of Hupei and Hunan of today. Hence the regions of Yangchow and Chingchow of *Yu kung* should have rhinoceroses and elephants.

In *Yu kung*:-

“Liangchow (梁州) produces bears and foxes”

These are animals recognized as of northern region, but no mention of those southern ones, elephants and rhinoceroses is made.

In *Shan Hai Ching* (山海經), there are several passages to the effect that elephants and rhinoceroses were in existence in what is now Szechuan province. This book is alleged to have been written by Yu and Yi (2200 B. C.). If so, then the elephants, etc. only existed in southern China.

In Wang Hue Pien in *Chow Shu* (周書王會篇):-

Yi-yen (伊尹) about 1760, as the director of the frontiers said: “those southern countries petition to be allowed to send elephants’ tusk and pointed rhinoceroses hide as tribute.” At the beginning of Shang, the distribution of the animals was still the same.

IV.

So far as the quotation from *Meng tze* (孟子) is concerned, it is thus:-

Chow Kung (周公) as Minister to Wu Wang (武王) killed Chow (紂) of Shang and fought against Yen (奄); drove away Fa-Lian to the sea-coast and killed him, drove tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses and elephants into distant regions.

Chow Kung, though he had Lu as his principality, had never actually ruled over it. He was always in the capital as minister. What he did in driving away tigers, etc., was in the capacity of a minister.

Again it is stated in *Mentze*:

After the death of Yao and Shun (2357-2206 B. C.) tyrants succeeded one after another, palaces were sacrificed to make pools, cultivated lands were turned into parks, and animals and birds came to flock together. Up to the time of Chow the whole world was in turmoil.

Then the animals driven away by Chow Kung must be those brought to the park from far distant places and not local products.

From Hsia to the end of Chow dynasty, elephants and rhinoceroses were not inhabitants of the northern region. In the late Chow, what existed in the region of Chu must also have been confined south of the Yangtze.

In the animals of Tang (618-9 A. D.) and Sung (960-1263 A. D.) numerous places in Hunan are said to have rhinoceroses. However, no mention of elephants is found. The latter existed only in what is the present province of Kwangtung & Kwangsi so there is some slight indication that both of these two animals migrated southward since the late Chow time. The question whether this was due to the pressure of man, or to the change of climate must be solved by geological and palæontological evidences.

This paper was originally written in 1917, as mentioned at the beginning, when our knowledge of the Cenozoic deposits of North China was still very meagre. Since then, explorations of Drs. Andersson & Zdansky discovered that the Hipparion fauna, including numerous species of elephants and rhinoceroses was widely spread in Northern China in early Pliocene time (see *Essays on the Cenozoic of North China*). But in the Neolithic sites, it is a surprising fact that no bones of these animals were found. Instead of them, the white boar was quite common. This boar was also a tropical species in a climate comparable to those of Southern China of today. Probably what accounts more for the disappearance of rhinoceroses and elephants is the pressure brought to bear upon these animals by the migration and colonization of the population in the Huangho valley. At any rate, the bits of facts, mentioned above are quite enough to prove that since historical time, no such animals have existed in Northern China.
