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A CULTURAL BATTLE

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Alarmed by a 90 percent decline in the worldwide population of rhinoceros since 1970, conservationists around the globe have made the plight of the rhinoceros a major point of concern. The principal cause of the decline of this ancient, unique and rare animal is poaching for international trade, in particular for the traditional Oriental medicine, which attributes multiple curative powers to its horn.

There are only five species of rhinoceros throughout the world today: two of them are distributed in Africa – the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) and the white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) – and three in Asia – the great Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), the Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) and the Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*).

China, though the largest nation in Asia, has never been a range State of the species. Nevertheless, whenever the topic of rhinoceros conservation is discussed (all five species are listed in CITES Appendix I, except one population of the white rhino), China is also mentioned. To understand why, it is necessary to understand traditional Chinese medicine.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

For thousands of years, long before recorded history, the use of wild animals and plants for medicinal purposes has been an important part of Chinese culture. The rhinoceros, highly valued for the healing attributes of its horn, is closely linked to that age-old custom. If the rhinoceros were to become extinct, an invaluable part of traditional Chinese medicine would also disappear.

Rhino horn contains rare and precious medicinal properties. For centuries, powdered rhino horn has been

used as a crude drug in numerous applications. Its most important therapeutic attributes include stopping fever, counteracting toxicity, relieving convulsion and cooling blood. It has been used in nearly 100 traditional Chinese medicines, such as Angong Niu Huang Wan, Niu Huang Qingxin Wan, Dahuoluo Wan, Xijiao di Huang Wan, Xijiaijiedu Wan, for the treatment of encephalitis, apoplexy, paralysis, hemiplegia, high fever, convulsion, coma and other conditions.

Such patented medicines are an indispensable part of traditional medical practice and are deeply trusted by the Chinese people, both on the mainland as well as abroad. The use of rhinoceros horn has also been a significant factor in the establishment and diffusion of traditional Chinese medicine among other Asian countries, coming to play an equally important role in their medical cultures.

For this reason, the fight for rhinoceros conservation can also be called the cultural battle to conserve traditional Oriental medicine.

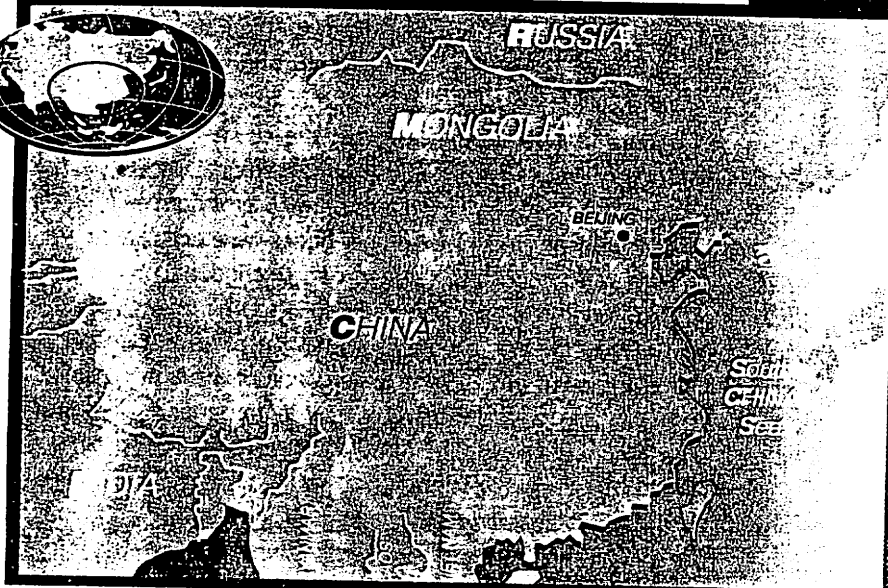
Because of excessive hunting, poaching and smuggling the rhinoceros is now in danger of extinction, its population having dwindled 90 percent in the past quarter century. Saving the rhinoceros from extinction is the common task and historical responsibility of all the countries concerned.

CITES member States realize that peoples and nations are, and should be, the best protectors of their own wild

PHOTO: WWF/ROLAND SEITRE-BIOS



Rhinoceros horn on sale at the Chengdu market, Szechwan, China.



CHINA

Population: 1,170,000,000 inhab.

Urban population: 26.23 percent

Population density:

118 inhab./sq.km.

Area: 9,596,960 sq.km.

Capital: Beijing.

Other cities: Shanghai, Shenyang, Guangzhou.

fauna and flora. Therefore, the greatest efforts in species conservation should be undertaken in their range States.

Developing their economies, strengthening conservation management and promoting or improving the standard of living of local residents are all keys to providing the best possible protection for the rhinoceros. However, this also requires overcoming many difficulties, since most range States are developing countries that lag far behind the industrial world in economic and technical terms.

Saving the rhinoceros from extinction means providing assistance to the range States, especially with funds and technical know-how from the leading economies. This should be not only a common responsibility, but also an international obligation.

China, as the world's major rhino horn consumer country, also bears significant responsibility in protecting the rhinoceros. China's stance towards wildlife conservation and the compliance with international obligations has been clear and forceful.

AN ARDUOUS TASK

The provision in the Law of the People's Republic of China on Wildlife Protection stipulating the inclusion of the rhinoceros among the wild species benefiting from the highest degree of protection by the State provides a strong legal base for implementing CITES. In terms of rhino conservation, it affords the legal measures to control the illegal trade, transportation, processing and use of rhino horn and related activities.

In order to support and encourage range States to take an active role in rhinoceros conservation and block illegal trade routes, the State Council of the People's Republic

Language: Chinese, official; deriving from northern Mandarin. There are dialect variations in the rest of the territory, of which the most widespread is Cantonese in the south.

Religion: There is a diversity of religions in China. Taoism, Buddhism, Islamism, and Christianity are spread throughout the entire country with close to 100 million believers.

Currency: Yuan.

People: 95 percent of the population is of the Han nationality group. The rest of the population belongs to another 55 nationality groups. The Han possess their own language and writing which, owing to sheer numbers, is the most widely practiced language in China and in the world. The Hui and Manchu also use the Han language. The other 53 national minorities have their own languages and 23 of these are written.

Geography: The relief divides the country into three large regions: Asiatic Central China, with high plateaus, frozen during the winter and covered with meadowlands in summer; Northern China, where the great prairies of Manchuria extend; and Meridional China, a hilly region crossed by the Yangtze Kiang and Si Kiang rivers. Today, China has more than 95 million cultivated hectares. It is one of the countries with the most varied animal life in the world.

Most endangered species: Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Giant Panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*), Golden Snub-Nosed Langur (*Rhinopietecus roxellana*), Chinese Alligator (*Alligator sinensis*), Chinese Monal (*Lophophurus lhuysii*), Chinese Giant Salamander (*Andrias davidianus*). ❁

of China issued a Notice banning all trade of rhino horn and tiger bone and their medicinal use.

The Xinhua News Agency, the People's Daily newspaper, Chinese Central Television, the Central People's Broadcasting Station and other major mass media immediately began campaigns to explain the trade ban to the public and enlist popular support for the prohibition.

The Departments of Forestry and Public Health took swift action, organizing and implementing the Notice nationwide: monitoring, registering and weighing legally obtained rhinoceros horn and Chinese medicinal products which contain elements of rhino horn, and completely halting all future production of Chinese medicinal products which are made with rhino horn and tiger bone. This had a tremendous impact on the economy, producing a direct loss of about 2.5 million US dollars.

Last year, the Environment and Resources Conservation Committee under the Standing Committee of National People's Congress together with the Environment Protection Committee of the State Council organized a national review on law enforcement related to environmental protection.

A look at implementation of the trade ban on rhino horn and tiger bone revealed interesting data. A total of

some 40,000 persons combed the country inspecting about 3,100 marketplaces and medicinal stores. In January 1994, 230 kilograms of rhinoceros horn and 50 kilograms of real or false tiger bones were destroyed in separate actions in Zhanjiang city, Guangdong province and Haerbin city, Heilongjiang province. All the material destroyed was confiscated during law enforcement crackdowns in 1993. Implementation of the Notice ban was also a major part of law enforcement activity throughout 1994.

These efforts plainly show the determination of the Chinese government regarding strict enforcement of laws protecting the rhinoceros, putting all its weight behind stopping excess hunting, poaching, illegal trade and all other unlawful or unauthorized activity regarding this rare and precious species and its by-products.

Despite confronting many obstacles and sustaining tremendous economic loss, China, as a developing nation, is effectively pursuing a host of activities on behalf of rhinoceros conservation. This should be deservedly recognized as China's greatest sacrifice and contribution in support of international rhino conservation measures, especially in range States.

Nonetheless, rhino horn has been used in medical products in China for eons and is widely accepted by its people. Time is needed to change the traditions and beliefs that have passed from generation to generation. The government must therefore carry on efforts to implement the trade ban on rhino horn, encouraging ongoing education programs to promote understanding and support from the general public, strengthening law enforcement and controlling and combatting illegal trade and unlawful activities.

In the meantime, research on a substitute for rhinoceros horn and its applications is also a major task which needs to be undertaken in order to satisfy public demand for medicinal products and disease prevention. Indeed, research for a substitute has been listed as a top state priority on the 21st Century Agenda of the People's Republic of China and the ninth 5-year state technical research plan.

The task ahead is long and arduous; its cost great. And it requires the sincere understanding and support, as well as the urgent and welcomed assistance, of the international community. ☉

PHOTO: WWF/ESMOND MARTIN



Medicines made with rhinoceros horn.