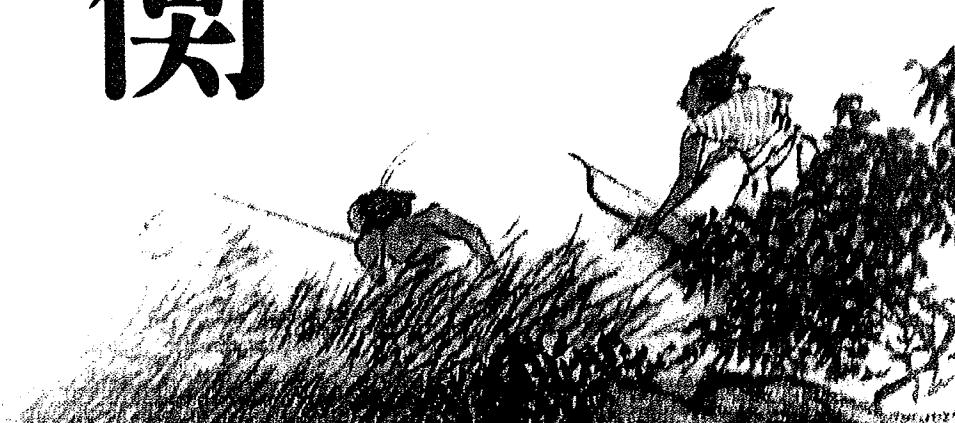


DISQUISITIONS ON THE
PAST & PRESENT

古今論衡

15



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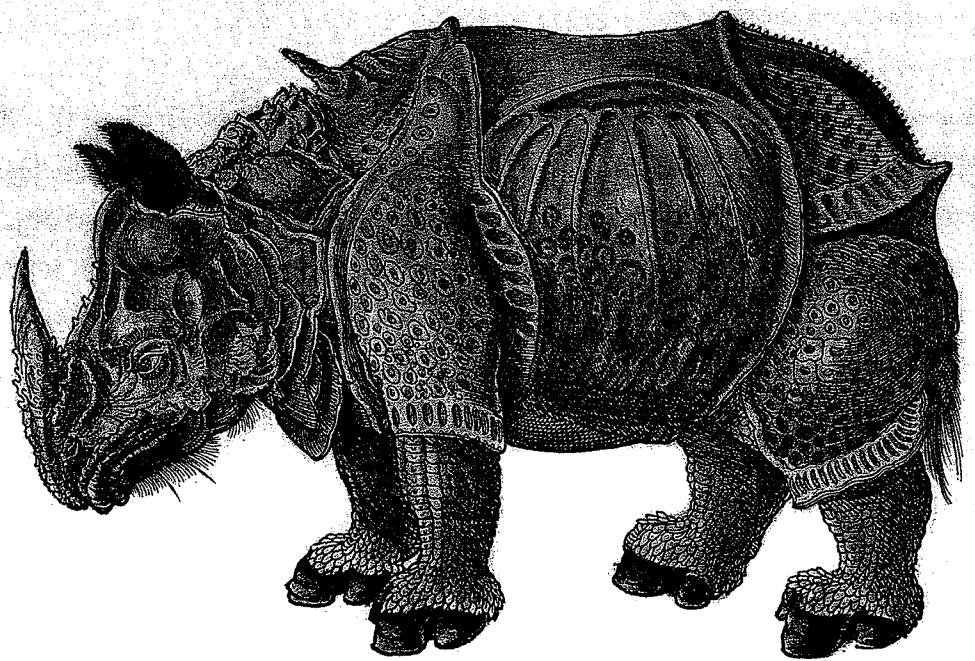
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New Knowledge of Strange Things: Exotic Animals from the West

存廣異聞：西方異獸

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Color, Konrad Gessner, 1516-1565, Rhinoceros, hand-colored woodcut from
Historia animalium, Zurich (Switzerland), 1551.

Eugenio Menegon 梅歐金

Boston University, USA

古今論衡 第 15 期 2006.10

「疑其東來以後，得見中國古書，因依仿而變幻其說，不必皆有實跡。然核以諸書所記，賈舶之傳聞，亦有歷歷不誣者，蓋雖有粉飾，而不盡虛构。存廣異聞，固亦無不可也。」

《四庫全書總目提要》卷七一，《坤輿圖說》

“We suspect that after [Verbiest] came to the East, he consulted ancient Chinese books and modeled [his work] after them, accordingly modifying his theories, something we do not need to prove in concrete detail. If we compare what is recorded in the book with what is reported by traveling merchants, such information will not turn out to be all false, and although it has been embellished, it will not be completely fictitious. It is certainly fine to preserve and broaden our knowledge of strange things.”

(*Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 1795 ed., j. 71, *Kunyu tushuo*)

Exotic animals, especially African ones, had appeared in European maps since the Middle Ages. But it was only at the end of the fifteenth century that the travels of Portuguese and Spanish explorers revealed to Europe the existence of new, unknown species along African and Asian coasts and in the New World, while also confirming the presence of animals mentioned in ancient Greek and Latin sources, but rarely seen for centuries. In keeping with this tradition, the maps drawn by Jesuits in China eventually also came to include depictions of such animals, just like their European prototypes. Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇 (1551-1610) never included any pictures of animals in his world maps, busy as he was in filling all available spaces with written texts, including zoological information. However, pictures of exotic animals inspired by collections of Renaissance bestiaries appeared in a series of later manuscript world maps based on the 1602 edition of Ricci's *mappamondo*. One of these maps is a manuscript facsimile preserved at the Nanjing museum (plate 1). The zoological depictions were probably inserted to please Chinese courtiers and scholars, and to make the maps more attractive as artistic objects. Based on an original lost today, the Ricci facsimile map was probably produced in the imperial palace by Chinese artists, who tried to copy the unfamiliar shapes of the Renaissance beasts as found in Western books of the Jesuit library in Beijing, supplied to them by the missionaries. Scholars have identified the sources of some of these animals in the works of Ortelius and a number of other northern European

cartographers and naturalists. When later on, in 1674, Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁 (1623-1688) compiled another world map (plate 2), he also included in the lower parts of the map a host of animals associated with the continents of each hemisphere. By that time, the Chinese literati and courtiers must have expected such curious drawings as an essential complement to the map. However, there is little overlap between the series of animals in the Ricci manuscript facsimile and the Verbiest map. Only the rhinoceros, the mythical and ferocious *su* 蘇 of Patagonia and a few marine creatures can be found in both.

Let us concentrate on the rhinoceros, since its artistic genealogy is rather illustrious. We find a colored version in the Ricci facsimile, while the Verbiest version is in black ink. The rhinos are both copied from a 1551 drawing by the Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) [plate 3]. But their original prototype is a famous print by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) [plate 4]. Dürer's original was drawn around 1515, and it reproduced a munificent gift of an Indian king to the royal zoo of the King of Portugal. Dürer never saw the animal, and used some drawings by others to create a masterpiece of fantastic zoology that continued to inspire imitations well into the eighteenth century. The imaginary armor of this rhino suggests the weaponry of a European knight. The Ricci facsimile map, the later Verbiest map, as well as Verbiest's geographical treatise *Kunyu tushuo* 坤輿圖說 (1674) [plate 5] all contained Dürer's rhino.

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But the chain of transmission of Dürer's rhino did not stop with Verbiest. Besides reappearing together with an elephant in Benoist (蔣友仁, 1715-1774)'s world map drawn by order of the Qianlong emperor in the 1760s, Dürer's picture became also the official depiction of the Asiatic rhinoceros in the late imperial zoological tradition. The immense imperial encyclopedia *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, published in 1726 included Verbiest's rendering of the rhino, there called *bijiaoshou* 鼻角獸, or “horned-nose beast,” [plate 6] as well as a number of other exotic animals from Africa, America, Europe and Asia depicted in Jesuit maps and books. These images obtained further circulation following the reprint of Verbiest's *Kunyu tushuo* in the Qianlong-period treasury of literature, the *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書, and in a mid-nineteenth-century popular geography collection entitled *Zihai* 指海.

Rhinos had roamed northern China in ancient times, but by Tang times they had retreated to the south. Tang authors called them *xi* 犀 or *xiniu* 犀牛, which is also the word for rhinoceros in modern Chinese. But apparently by late imperial times the true physical

shape of the rhino, known to Chinese medieval artists, had faded away. The *xi* was depicted as an ox with one horn (here we see a picture from the *San cai tu hui* 三才圖會, 1607 [plate 7]). By Qing times, thus, Dürer’s representation of the rhino entered the mainstream of Chinese scholarly consciousness through the imperial encyclopedia, side by side with the ox-like *xi*. Less removed from reality than the *xi*, Dürer’s somewhat fantastic concoction still left Chinese scholars incredulous. After all, the pachyderm was depicted by Verbiest together with a unicorn and other mythical creatures. The Westerners’ rhino was finally classified under the category of “strange (that is ‘fabulous’) beasts” (異獸). But like European cosmographers, late imperial Chinese scholars remained critically open to new knowledge, without excluding *a priori* what they had not seen in person. The eighteenth century Chinese critics of Verbiest’s *Kunyu tushuo* quoted in the opening of this essay adopted the stance that most of the Jesuit’s information was of Chinese provenance –a position first introduced by Ming loyalist literati and then adopted by the Kangxi emperor, and known as the theory of “the Chinese origin of Western Learning” (*Xixue Zhongyuan* 西學中源). However, they still left a door open for exchange, writing in their review of Verbiest’s work in the *Siku Quanshu* that “it is certainly fine to preserve and broaden our knowledge of strange things.” (「存廣異聞，固亦無不可也」。) Things as strange as a rhinoceros.

十八
禽獸

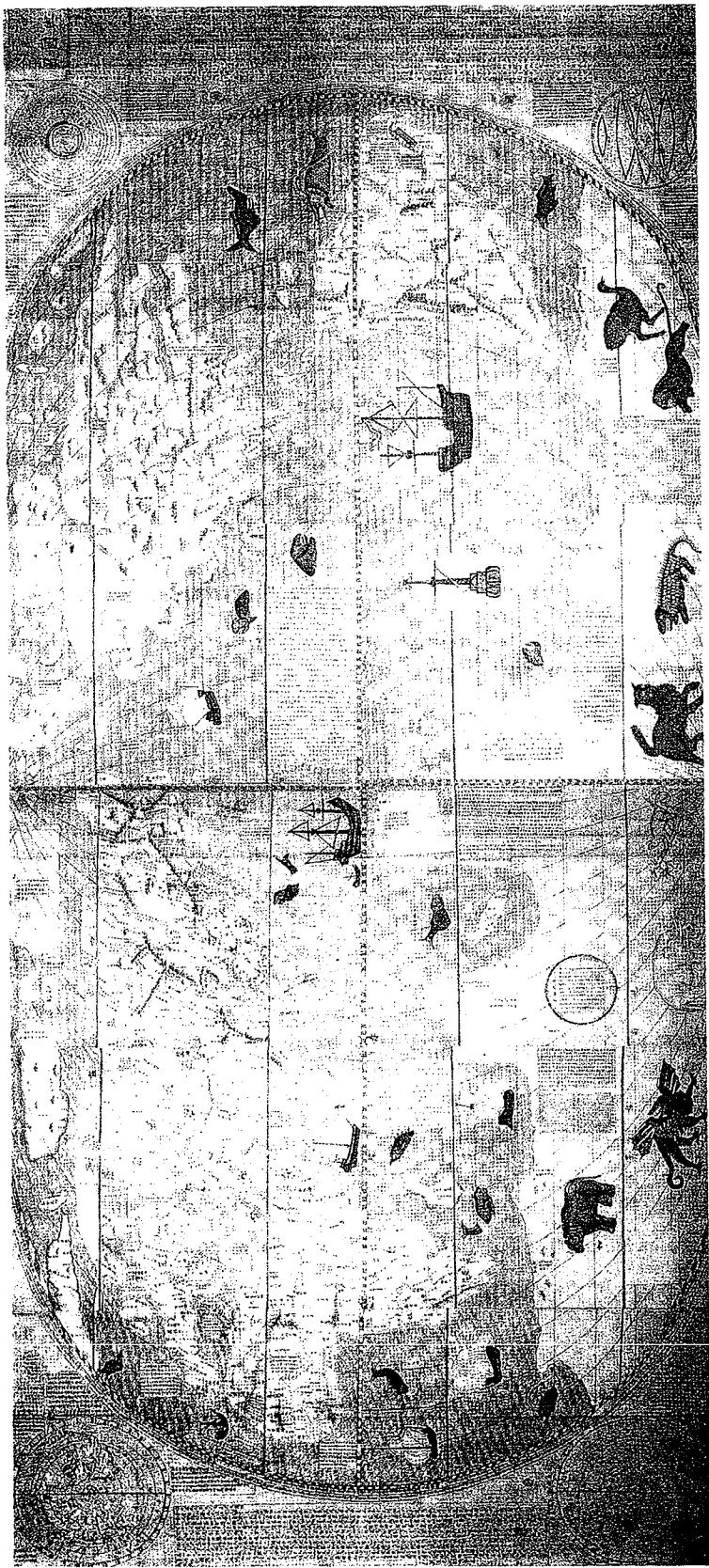


Plate 1: Matteo Ricci's world map 《坤輿草圖全圖》

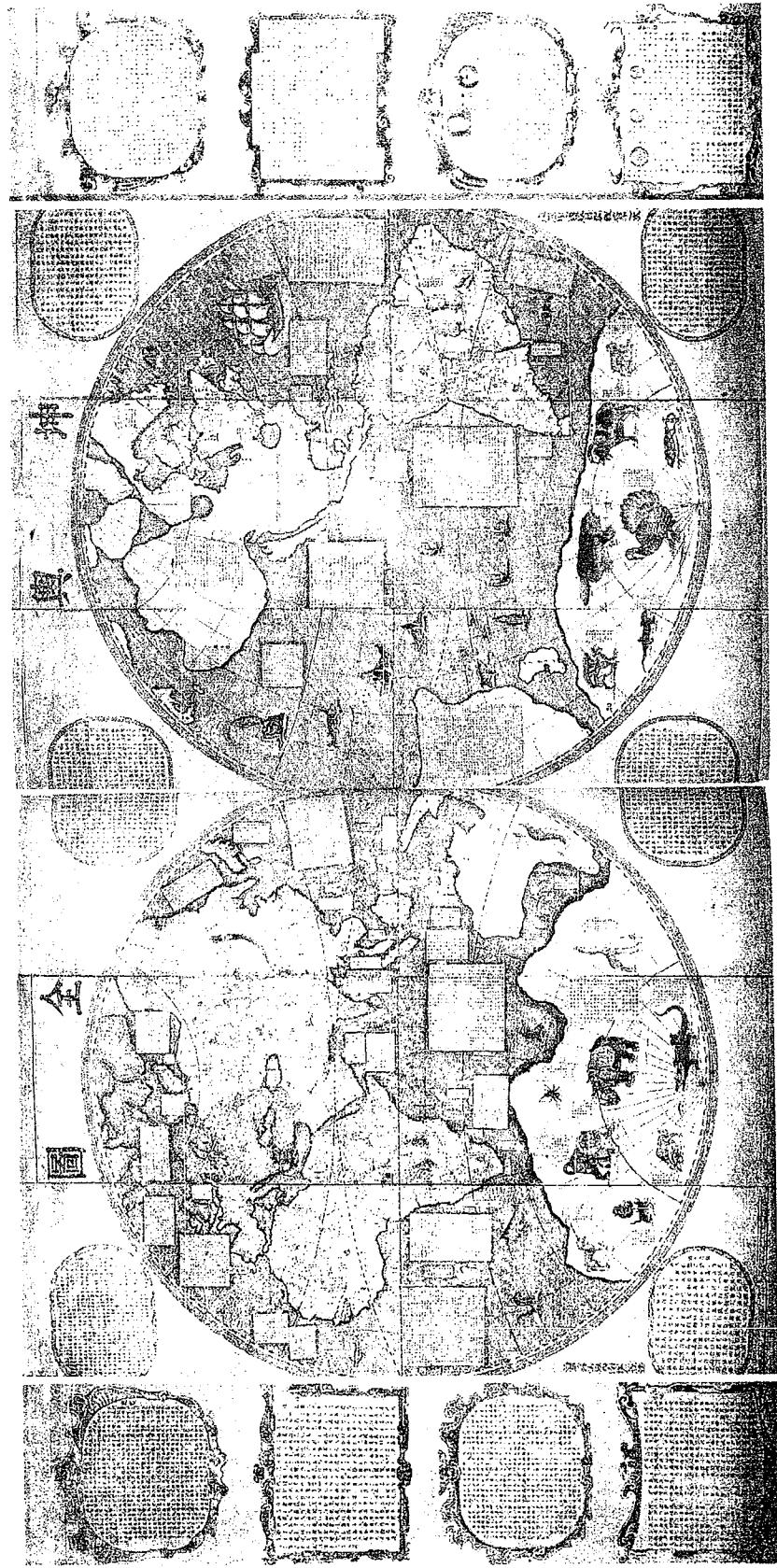


Plate 2: Ferdinand Verbiest's world map 《坤輿全圖》

新廣異聞

De Rhinocerote. A. Lib. I. 953

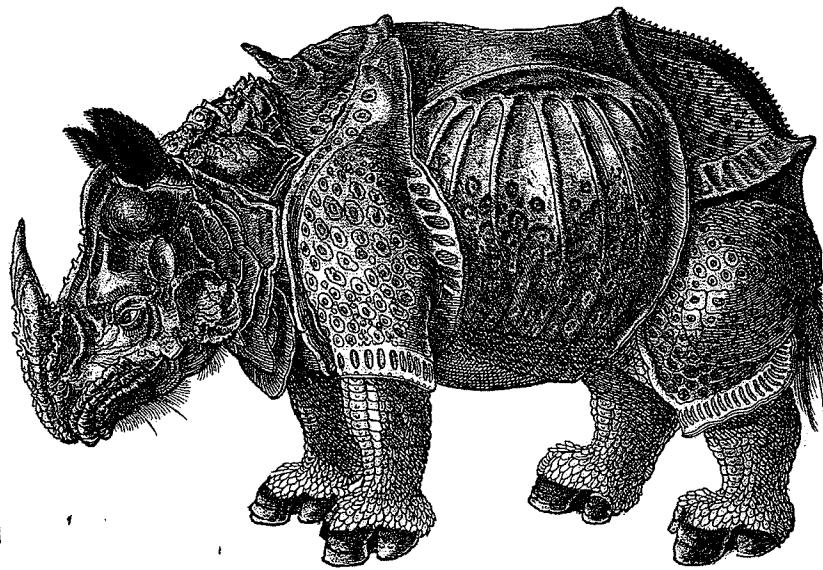
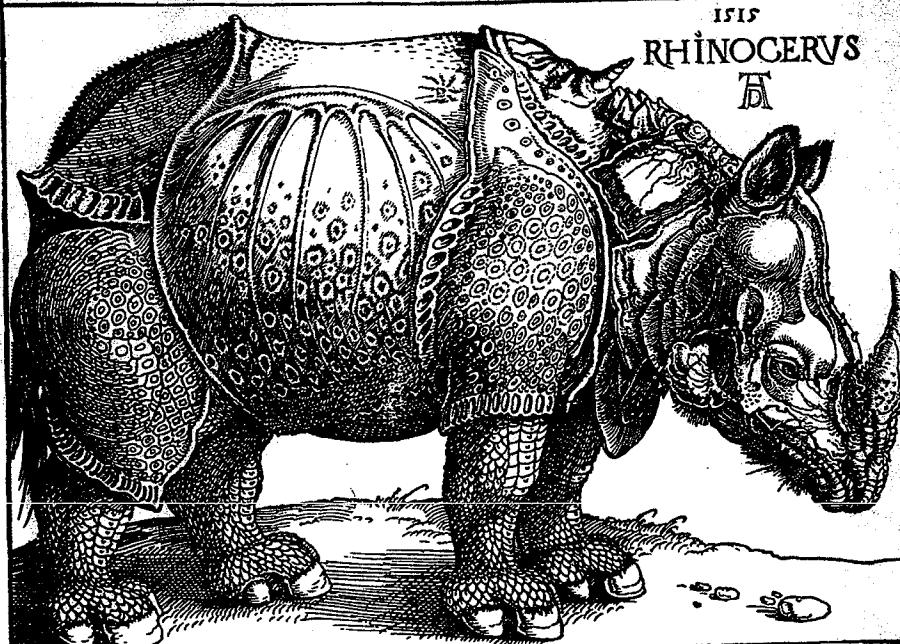


plate 3: Color, Konrad Gessner, 1516-1565, Rhinoceros, hand-colored woodcut from *Historia animalium*, Zurich (Switzerland), 1551.

Sehr Chaffendheit! 1515. Jac 201. Niemand kann gescheuchet werden zu dem Lande von Portugal gen Lissabona aus Indien prächtig! der große Kriegs-Chef, der namen ist Rhinoceros. Das ist kein zu kleiner geschilderter Krieger! und ist von diesen Kriegern ist vorigen Jahr gefangen, als der große der ber. Schiffmann, aber überredet, von seinem Lande sehr wachhaftig, es hat ein Horn auf dem Kopf, das kommt auf der Kasten, das hat vierzehn Zoll lang, und das ist der größte der Schiffmanns Schiffmanns. Der Schiffmanns furchtlos füchtet nicht vor dem, wo es ein Kriegs-Chef ist, so leicht. Wenn der Kriegs-Chef nicht vor dem Schiffmanns kann, und wenn er nicht auf dem Lande ist, er willigen, ihn das mag er sich nicht erwehren, dann das Kriegs-Chef ist alle geprungen, und wenn der Schiffmanns nicht kann, kann er nicht das Kriegs-Chef gegen auch, das der Kriegs-Chef, und freiging und auch Lustig / ist.

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Albrecht Dürer, Rhinoceros, 1515

plate 4: Albrecht Dürer, Rhinoceros, 1515.

Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁
Kunyu tushuo 坤輿圖說
(Explications on the World Map), 1674.



plate 5: F. Verbiest, Rhinoceros, in *Kunyu tushuo*, 1674.

Qinding Gujin tushu jicheng 欽定古今圖書集成
(Imperialy approved synthesis of books and
illustrations past and present), 1726,
博物彙編, 禽蟲典, 卷125.

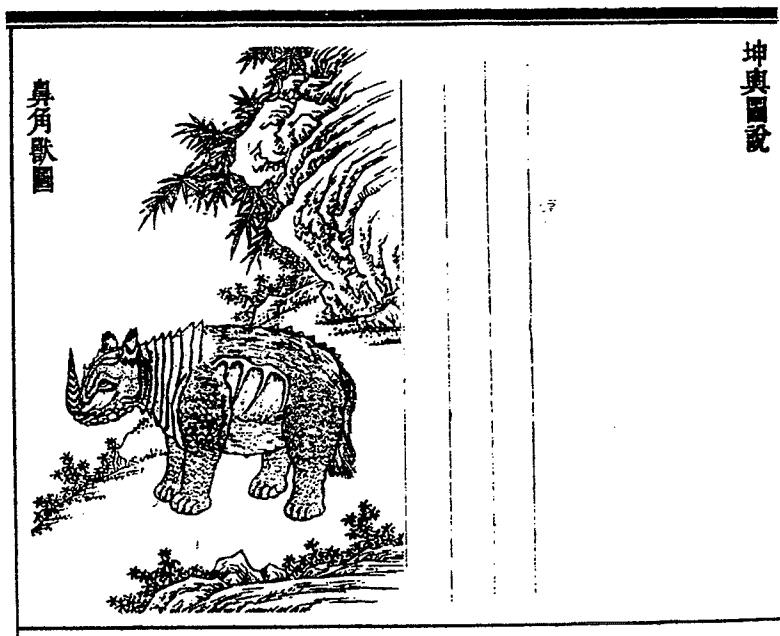


plate 6: *Gujin tushu jicheng*, Rhinoceros, 1726.



Wang Qi 王祈 ed., *Sancai tu hui* 三才圖會
(Assembled pictures of the three realms), 1607.

plate 7: *San cai tu hui*, Rhinoceros, 1607.

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