

Rhinoceros Horn and Tiger Bone in China: An Investigation of Trade Since the 1993 Ban

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Executive summary

In May 1993, in response to international conservation concern about the threat to rhinoceroses and Tigers posed by commercial trade, the State Council of the People's Republic of China issued a ban on trade in rhinoceros horn, Tiger bone and their medicinal derivatives. This ban included the removal of these items from the official pharmacopeia of China, and the cessation of all manufacture and commercial trade within China.

To ascertain the effectiveness of this ban, TRAFFIC conducted surveys of China's retail market in 1994, 1995 and 1996, as well as a mail survey of pharmaceutical manufacturers in 1995. While in China, TRAFFIC investigators gathered anecdotal information about the Government's means of implementing the ban and the level of awareness of the ban in China's traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) community.

This report presents the findings of these four post-ban investigations, all of which were carried out by Chinese-speaking investigators of Chinese descent. Trends are examined to the extent possible, though very little pre-ban market information is available for making plausible "before and after" comparisons.

In the three post-ban surveys of the retail market in China, investigators researched availability of three categories of prohibited items: 1) raw rhinoceros horn and rhinoceros horn powder; 2) commercially-packaged Tiger-bone wines and plasters; and, 3) other manufactured traditional Chinese medicines containing rhinoceros horn and/or Tiger bone.

In 1994, rhinoceros horn or horn powder was seen in 7.6% of the 170 businesses (shops, and hospital and clinic pharmacies) in which horn was requested and with 6.5% of the approximately 154 medicine-market vendors surveyed that year. Commercially packaged Tiger-bone wines or plasters were seen in 8.7% of the 208 businesses in which they were requested in 1994 and with 3.9% of approximately 154 medicine-market vendors surveyed. Other types of manufactured Chinese medicines claiming to contain rhinoceros

horn and/or Tiger bone were seen in 10.8% of the total of 442 businesses visited in 1994.

In 1995, the availability of such prohibited items remained low. There was an increase from 1994 in the percentage of cases where rhinoceros horn or horn powder was seen (to 8.5% of businesses where horn was requested and 12% of medicine market stalls visited), but an apparent decrease in availability of commercially packaged Tiger-bone wine and plasters (seen in 7.2% of businesses where requested and at 2.6% of medicine-market stalls visited). However, investigators noted several formulas similar to Tiger-bone plasters and wines on the market in 1995, which may have contained Tiger-bone, although not declaring so. Manufactured Chinese medicines, other than wines and plasters, labelled as containing rhinoceros horn and/or Tiger bone were seen in 10.7% of the total of 355 businesses visited in 1995.

In 1996, there was again an apparent increase in the percentage of businesses where rhinoceros horn or rhinoceros horn powder was seen (to 12.5% of those where horn was requested), but the level of availability decreased at medicine markets, (where horn or powder were seen with 10.6% of medicine-market vendors). There was an apparent further decrease in availability of Tiger-bone wines and plasters in businesses (seen in 2.9% of businesses where requested: wines and plasters were not surveyed for at medicine markets in 1996) and there was little change recorded in the level of other manufactured Chinese medicines purporting to contain rhinoceros horn and/or Tiger bone (seen in 13.6% of the total of 280 businesses in 1996).

When interpreting all these findings it is important to note that variations over time may be attributable merely to chance, as retail outlets were not selected in a manner that would provide statistically correct comparisons over the three years, 1994-1996.

TRAFFIC's 1995 mail survey of pharmaceutical manufacturers in China duplicated methods used in a 1991 survey conducted by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Hong Kong and TRAFFIC East Asia-Japan. Where the focus of the 1991 mail survey was on use of derivatives of several endangered species, the 1995 survey focused solely on use of Tiger bone. In 1995, 207 companies were contacted, 32 of which replied, four (13%) of which offered to sell medicines containing Tiger bone. Two of these four expressed willingness to manufacture new medicines containing Tiger bone.

Reports, both official and anecdotal, supported by the fact that raw rhinoceros horn and rhinoceros horn and Tiger-bone products were never present in more than 13.6% of outlets, of any category,

surveyed in any one year, indicate that the Government of China made substantial effort to implement the ban of May 1993. While TRAFFIC investigators did not use quantitative scientific methods to measure awareness of the ban, they noted that more than half of the TCM sellers contacted in 1994 were aware of the ban. In other years also, about half of all sellers asked for a prohibited medicine or ingredient expressed awareness of the ban. Despite Government efforts to communicate the ban, however, some vendors in every year were willing to sell medicines which they realized were banned. Several of these merchants claimed that they were simply trying to rid themselves of old stock, although a few claimed to have new stock available.

Taken together, the results of these surveys could indicate that China has been highly successful in implementing the domestic ban on trade in rhinoceros horn, Tiger bone and their medicinal derivatives. Lack of pre-ban surveys of the trade prevent this or any other conclusions about availability before versus after the ban. What is more important, and of immediate conservation concern, is the fact that even a low level of availability exists in the world's most populous country – a country that depends, at least in part, on TCM to provide health care to 1.3 billion people. If poaching stands behind the source of rhinoceros horn and Tiger bone in China, the world's remaining rhinoceros and Tiger populations could not supply even a small residual demand in that country for long. Therefore, the report concludes that, as a matter of urgency, the Government of China must act to stop residual trade in the medicinal derivatives of rhinoceroses and Tigers, and investigations must be launched to ascertain the origin of those products that remain available on both the retail and wholesale market in China.