

ATTITUDES OF HONG KONG CHINESE TOWARDS WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND THE USE OF WILDLIFE AS MEDICINE AND FOOD

A TRAFFIC *Species in Danger* report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need for this survey has been underscored by repeated instances of illegal trade in rhino horn, Tiger bone and their medicinal derivatives in Hong Kong. Therefore, TRAFFIC East Asia set out to scientifically document the demographics of those among the Hong Kong population who might be potential consumers of these products. It was hoped that documenting these demographics would aid public awareness and law enforcement efforts toward stopping illegal trade of this kind.

This research was conducted in July 1996, using random sampling methods and a telephone survey of a sample representative of the Hong Kong Chinese population as a whole. There were 1,157 successful interviews during the survey, representing a response rate of 54.3%. The standard margin of error is less than 1.5%.

This survey found that about 6.8% of Hong Kong's adult population uses TCM regularly and that users are more likely to be women than men. While about 35% of TCM users seek advice from TCM practitioners and TCM shop assistants, over 50% of TCM users would not try to ascertain the ingredients of TCM prescribed to them.

Among TCM users in Hong Kong, three-fifths (59%) claimed they would refrain from using TCM purporting to contain parts of wild animals. Perceived need and efficacy collectively were cited as one of the major reasons why TCM users would use TCM containing parts of wild animals. People with lower educational levels were found to be more willing to pay higher prices for TCM containing parts of animals taken from the wild, as opposed to animals bred in captivity. Fourteen percent of TCM users would continue to consume TCM containing endangered animals that are protected by law, while another 37% might do so "depending on the situation". Among this 37%, two-fifths (41%) would do so if it were perceived to be necessary.

Seven percent of the TCM users (or 2% of the total sample) had used TCM claiming to contain rhino horn, while another 4% of TCM users (or 1% of the total sample) had used TCM claiming to contain Tiger bone. This survey confirms that there is a residual demand among the adult population of Hong Kong for TCM containing rhino horn and/or Tiger bone, and that males and older TCM users are more likely to use such products. Sixty-five percent of "rhino horn users" and 69% of "Tiger bone users" said they would stop using medicines containing these ingredients if informed that such use were prohibited by law. Twenty-three percent of rhino horn users and 19% of Tiger bone users, however, stated they would continue using these products even if they know it were against the law.

About three-fifths (59%) of the adult population expressed concern about endangered species. More than three-fourths (77%) of these respondents agreed to give up certain TCM if that would help save wildlife from extinction. Nearly 70% of the adult population expressed the belief that humans would be adversely affected if wild animals were to become extinct. The majority of people found to be supportive of wildlife conservation were younger and better educated.

Users of TCM were generally more supportive of wildlife conservation than were non-users. Among TCM users, those who do not use TCM containing wild animal parts expressed more concern for wildlife conservation than did those who use TCM containing wild animal parts. Those people who used TCM containing wild animal parts in general did not feel that their use of wildlife as medicine has an impact on the ecology.

Three-quarters (74%) of TCM users support the use of laws to prohibit the use of endangered animals as TCM ingredients. Only 14% of the TCM users would definitely continue to use TCM containing ingredients derived from animals protected by law despite being informed of legal prohibitions. Sixty-five percent of "rhino horn users" and 67% of "Tiger bone users" would stop such use if they were informed of such prohibitions.

One-third (33%) of the adult population had consumed exotic animals. Males and older people were more likely to have eaten exotic animals. Snake was the most popular exotic animal for consumption, China the most popular place for eating exotic animals, followed closely by Hong Kong. More than half of the adult population had consumed tonics containing wild animal derivatives. Females and the younger generation were found to be the main users of these health tonics.

In summary, this survey found that a majority of Hong Kong Chinese, and especially those who use TCM, expressed concern about wildlife and wildlife conservation and would voice support if they were well informed of the relevant issues.

Effective channels of communication have to be explored to convey the issue of the relationship of TCM and wildlife conservation to the members of the TCM community (particularly TCM practitioners, shop assistants and students studying TCM) and TCM users. Local legislation and regulatory measures implementing CITES should be incorporated in TCM courses in Hong Kong. Disciplinary mechanisms to self-regulate the use and trade in endangered species within the TCM community should be encouraged by the proposed statutory TCM body in Hong Kong.

Among the target end-user consumer, males and older TCM users, who are more likely to consume rhino horn or Tiger bone, should be the target group. The "undecided users of endangered animal parts" should be polled in order to document their deciding factors. New immigrants from the Chinese mainland (>1.7 million in the next 20 years) should be targeted in public education programmes.

Alternatives and substitutes which have proven effective should be explored and promoted among TCM users and TCM practitioners. Consideration also should be given to further exploring options for captive breeding and propagation of medicinal species, in order to relieve commercial pressure on the wild populations.