



Key features of the Asian Big Cat (ABC) skin and bone trade in China in 2005-2011 November 2011

There are two parallel markets for ABC products, one from captive-bred animals and one from wild animals. It is not yet clear to what extent they overlap.

Asian Big Cat skins from wild sources

- Skins of wild leopards, tigers and snow leopards continue to be sold in China, with ABC parts being openly displayed as recently as 2011.
- Since March 2010, reported seizures in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, China, Russia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka account for the poaching and trafficking of at least 308 Asian big cats, destined for markets in China. This is likely to be the minimum.
- Most parts found in Western China come from South and South East Asia.
- Occasionally traders claim to source skins from Africa (such as leopard).
- Skins are smuggled through mountain passes into Tibet/Western China, often via well-used routes.
- Tibetan areas (TAR, Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu) are known as places to buy exotic items and raw medicinal materials.
- Key towns identified by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) as ABC retail hotspots include Lhasa (TAR), Shigatse (TAR), Xining (Qi), Linxia (Gan), Litang (Si), Nagchu (TAR), Songpan (TAR) Kangding (Si).
- Tibetan community no longer major buyers of skins and bones, but are involved in trade. Prior to 2006 Tibetan community were major purchasers of skins for use in chupa – traditional costume. This market largely collapsed in 2006-2007 following calls from HH Dalai Lama, though in areas where HH Dalai Lama is not followed (Shigatse) some residual use remains.
- There is no evidence that the collapse of the Tibetan was the result of increased enforcement or government action, either local or national.
- There have been documented reports that local government officials sometimes encourage and pressure Tibetan government employees to wear ABC skins on their chupa, during festival periods.
- Majority of traders have been involved in the trade for several years at least. EIA repeatedly encounters repeat offenders.
- Principle retailers in Western China are members of Hui community. They are traditional small traders in the region.
- Bones are primarily sold to Han Chinese (Hui, Tibetan communities do not use them).
- Consumers of skins may come from any community, but since 2006 the largest market is reportedly Han Chinese.
- Skins often sold along with uncertified ivory, coral and teeth/claws, antiques etc.

- Leopard and snow leopard skins often displayed openly. Tiger skins always hidden. Photos sometimes displayed. Requesting detail may lead to being taken to third location.
- Skulls, teeth, claws often displayed openly, bones generally hidden.
- Customers specifically mentioned as tiger skin purchasers by criminals include army and police.
- Not clear if bones are entering formal patented TAM pharmaceutical industry, or if they are being sold in closed networks, raw.
- Prices of skin and bones remain high, although turnover is unclear (though on the few occasions where EIA has seen the same tiger skin dealers year after year (Lhasa, Linxia), they have not been the same skins).
- Outside of Western China, skins and raw bones become increasingly hard to find.
- Not clear if skins from wild caught animals are now being certified and sold (see below).
- Uncertified ivory is openly sold in many parts of China, including major East Coast cities.

Captive-bred animal skins / Tiger Bone Wine

- 6000 captive-bred tigers in China. It is not known how many leopards.
- Skins can be registered and legally sold (skin registration scheme – SFA Notification 206, and increasing examples – see Appendix 2). Though not clear how many are from wild or captive bred specimens.
- Government has not explained if there is any mechanism to distinguish wild skins from captive skins.
- There is no information available on how many skins have been registered and sold.
- Sale of ABC skins is not illegal if a permit is provided.
- Sale of tiger bone medicine illegal under 1993 State Council. It is not completely clear if this applies to tiger bone wine (TBW), as it is often marketed as general tonic.
- Reports of TBW made in large quantities from tigers that have allegedly died of natural causes in breeding facilities, with skeletons being steeped in large vats at offsite wineries, at least until 2009.
- TBW expensive (up to US\$100 a bottle), often sold from premises only and to government officials, business people etc.
- Some traditional Chinese practitioners have said that TBW is not a traditional Asian medicine, but more of a general tonic and status symbol.
- TBW is sometimes advertised openly in tiger breeding centres and ‘safari’ parks.
- Some businesses claimed (in 2007) to have SFA permits to sell tiger bone wine.
- Skins and bones of captive-bred animals being stockpiled.

Formal Traditional Asian Medicine trade

- Tiger bone use in medicine illegal under 1993 State Council Order.
- State Food and Drug Administration continues to issue licenses to produce tiger bone products (does not in itself imply production).
- EIA has not encountered much packaged and branded tiger medicine in China in recent years, and in cities like Chengdu and Guangzhou there seems to be high level of awareness among traders and industry.

- Packaged tiger bone products have been found outside of China as recently as 2010 (for example in Operation TRAM).
- Leopard bone and musk plasters are commonly found inside and outside China, often with separate ingredients lists in English and Chinese (i.e. leopard listed in Chinese, but not in English).
- Raw tiger and leopard bone is still available to buy in Western China (see above).

Appendix 1 – Summary Data

Below are two tables of summary data on skins and bones found by EIA and WPSI investigators in Western China.

NOTE – these are not exhaustive market surveys, but the result of investigations. It is not advisable to go door to door or stall to stall when conducting an investigation into an illegal product, given that local traders frequently know each other. Furthermore, it was not possible to visit the same locations each year, or to seek exactly the same products in every premise. Thus these results are indicative only.

Fig1. Skins found in selected towns 2005-2009, not including chupa being worn. Source: EIA

Year	LHASA			LIXIA			XINING			SHIGATSE			NAGCHU			SONGFAN			KANDING			Total tiger	Total L	Total SL
	T	L	SL	T	L	SL	T	L	SL	T	L	SL	T	L	SL	T	L	SL	T	L	SL			
2005	3	7	0	0	163	60						2							0	0	0	3	172	60
2006	11	10	0	1	36	8						0	0	0		0	2	1	0	1	1	12	49	10
2007	0	0	3	0	88	4													0	1	1	0	89	6
2008				1	13	9																1	13	9
2009	3	2	4	0	5	7	1	1		0	3	0	1									4	12	11
2010																								
2011				4	1																	0	4	1
GRAND TOTAL WHOLE SKINS 2005-																					20	339	99	

NOTE!!! - NONE OF THESE FIGURES INCLUDE SKIN CHUPA, OF WHICH THERE HAVE BEEN LITERALLY HUNDREDS SEEN (T, L, Otter)
 did not go there
 T= Tiger
 L = Leopard
 SL = Snow Leopard

Fig 2. Bones and claws s found in selected towns 2005-2009. Source: EIA

Year	LHASA						LIXIA					XINING
	TIGER BONE	TIGER SKULL	LEOPARD BONE	LEOPARD SKULL	LEOPARD CLAW	LEOPARD TEETH/CANINE	TIGER BONE	LEOPARD BONE	LEOPARD SKULL	LEOPARD CLAW	LEOPARD TEETH/CANINE	TIGER TEETH/CANINE
2005	-	1	-	1	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	-	0	-	0	"over 60 leopard and snow leopard claws"	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
2007	-	0	-	2	34	"Few"	-	-	-	-	-	-
2008							-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	1 incomplete skeleton, 1 tiger leg bone	1	-	-	-	-	<1kg	<1kg	5	100	-	2

Appendix 2 - Example of tiger product available for sale with permit.

<http://www.paifun.net/news/2010-8-20/356.html>

Siberian Tiger specimens for auction

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The specimens appear in good condition, are a recent acquisition by the company that is auctioning them off.

The tiger skin rug is being offered for sale at RMB 800,000 (approx USD \$124,000)

The stuffed tiger is being offered for sale at RMB 700,000 (approx USD \$109,000)

Claims that the specimens have been legally registered for sale in China, but that CITES permits would be required for export.

