

A Cultural History Concerning Natural Materials - a Study from the Aspect of Drugs

Kaisuke Yoneda

Osaka University

1-6, Yamadaoka, Suita, Osaka 565-0871, Japan

Summary

In ancient times, all the materials of the items used for clothing, culinary life, and housing that are basic to human life were natural products. The value of natural materials seems unchanged even today. How to deal with them, however, differs greatly from age to age.

From the viewpoint of the study of natural materials, I have been examining the materials of various cultural assets. The ideal example that shows us how to natural materials were used in old times is the treasures of the Shosoin, a wooden building situated near the Todaiji temple in Nara, an ancient capital. In addition, the Shosoin contains lots of drugs, aromatics, and pigments in the raw. Based on the study of those treasures kept in the Shosoin, I have considered the natural materials of ancient times.

However, all of the materials preserved in the Shosoin are overseas products.

As far as drugs, aromatics, and pigments are concerned, Japan has been depending on imports to secure most of such materials. This also fits old times. The goods shipped from China, the Korean Peninsula, or southern countries were unloaded in Nagasaki and transported to Osaka and carried to ancient capitals. By the 5th or 6th century, highways had been established for the transport of those goods. What was most valued from among those imported goods then were aromatics and pigments. This tendency was reflected in the incidents to smuggle the goods being imported that later occurred frequently.