

History of the “Yakushoku-dogen” Concept

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Summary

In my article published in the No. 206-2002 issue of this Journal, "Learning from the Health-Promoting Diet in Traditional Oriental Medicines and Development of Functional Foods," I remarked that the concept "Yakushoku-dogen (literally: medicines (yaku) and foods (shoku) share the same origin)" is part of the food culture of the Oriental world.

Chinese food culture in particular has been based upon the age-old idea of emphasizing dietary regimens prescribed in pre-symptom medicine (the idea that a proper daily diet is a fundamental basis for achieving physical and mental health while preventing disease), which is embodied in "Yakuzen (dishes specially prepared for medical purposes)."

In the Tang Dynasty, "Yakuzen" became a sort of specialized field of study and the creation of "Yakuzen"-related literature commenced. However, "Yakuzen," together with foods, health care and medicine, has since then been treated as part of an integrated discipline in China. Therefore, we cannot talk about the developmental history of "Yakuzen" without referring to the history of the "Yakushoku-dogen" concept.

Many books on herbs and herbal foods have been handed down in China, partly because Chinese civilization, including the Yellow River and Yangtze River civilizations, has characteristically valued books and other forms of record-keeping, and partly because even when many books were burned with the aim of ideological control during the Qin Dynasty, practical and scientific books, including books on medicine, agriculture and astronomy, were excepted.

To explain the history of Chinese herbal foods systematically and describe their development step by step, before giving examples of "Yakuzen," will help readers understand the nature not only of "Yakushoku-dogen" but "Yakuzen" as well.

In another article I will discuss how the concept, or culture, of "Yakushoku-dogen" has been accepted in Japan, and what kinds of influences it has exerted on health care and food culture in Japan since ancient, mythological times.

There is no doubt that the "Yakushoku-dogen" concept has had a part in popularizing a kind of "Yakuzen", including health foods and functional foods, in present-day Japan.