

Pharmaceutical Development of Medicinal Plants – Benefit or Challenge to Conservation of Wild Resources

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With the progress of pharmaceutical investigation on medicinal plants in recent decades, so many new bioactivities of medicinal plants have been found, resulting in the fast development of medicinal plants as therapeutic drugs. This accelerates the predatory digging of the wild medicinal plants, leading to the decreased medicinal plant resources. Meanwhile, the shrinking resources force people to seek other measures such as cultivation and searching alternatives to obtain them, thus, the wild resources are conserved in turn.

During the last several decades, the pharmacologists have studied medicinal plants for new therapeutic drugs, and great achievements have been obtained. For example, Radix *Salvia miltiorrhiza*, the root of *Salvia miltiorrhiza*, was only used by a few Chinese people before. After it was demonstrated to be active for resistance to atherosclerosis, antitumor and immunologic modification, this drug has been needed all over the world. This demand encourages the people to excessively dig up the wild plant and makes it in danger. With the decreasing

resources of *Salvia miltiorrhiza*, people have to resort to cultivation to obtain the necessary material. In this way, the wild resource of *Salvia miltiorrhiza* was recovered and conserved. However, this is not always the case. For example, *Taxus chinensis*, as a Chinese medicine, was only used in China long time ago. Nevertheless, since a well-known bioactive compound named paclitaxel was isolated from *Taxus chinensis*, this plant has been endangered and facing extinction because of the excessive cutting. Although the effort of cultivation has also been made to this plant, the recovery of resources of *Taxus chinensis* has become very difficult due to its slow growth.

Like two sides of a contradiction, usage and reservation of medicinal resources always mutually restrict and promote. Although the decreasing medicinal resources induced by pharmaceutical development can be partially or totally recovered through manual intervention, it should take practical measures to secure resources conservation or limit the development within an acceptable scope before it is too late.

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