

Preface

In 1860, Oliver Wendell Holmes pointedly expressed himself to the Massachusetts Medical Society: “I firmly believe that if the whole *Material Medica*, as now used, could be sunk to the bottom of the sea, it would be all the better for mankind, and all the worst for the fishes.” Should one think the same about the current approach in drug discovery from plants? Probably yes. Despite the spending of billions of US dollars, and three decades of efforts, high-throughput screenings have only allowed the discovery of a couple of drugs. One could have reasonably expected the discovery of an arsenal of drugs from the millions of plant extracts randomly tested, but “hits” can be inactive in vitro or too toxic, some molecules need to be metabolized first to be active, and false-positive and false-negative results are common.

The bitter truth is that the robotic approach in discovering drugs from plants has proven, to date, its inability to excavate the hundreds of molecules that will contribute to the health progress of Man. However, one can reasonably see that the last patches of primary rainforest on earth hold still hundreds of spectacularly active drugs that await discovery. The successful isolation of these drugs will depend on rational and selective collection of plants, heightened powers of observation, creation of original concepts, and formulation of new hypotheses to attain the sudden insight of which will be born new theories to extend the frontier of knowledge. As is often the case, that new theory might first be rejected out-of-hand by the dominant conservative group of established scientific schools of thoughts, the proponent of the new theory often being considered a quack. Gradually, however, if that theory is refined, developed and proven and leads to the discovery of wonder drugs, the real therapeutic usefulness, will be identified as a result of serendipity. Perhaps the future will see this new “Hippocratic” way of direct observation and logical interpretation displacing “robotic theories.”

At this point in time, ethnopharmacologists represent a little heteroclite community of scientists who assess the last traditional systems of medicine: Pacific Rim, Amazon, and Africa. For the research scientist who penetrates the unknown of medicinal plants alone, no guide books are possible because the territory they travel is uncharted. For the first time in the history of medicinal plant research, *Ethnopharmacology of Medicinal Plants: Asia and the Pacific* sheds some lights on the pharmacological potentials of one of the most exciting and enormously rich sources of potential drugs: the medicinal plants of the Pacific Rim, which encompasses more than 6000 species that are virtually unexplored for pharmacology.

Ethnopharmacology of Medicinal Plants: Asia and the Pacific is written for all who will participate in the field of drug discovery from plants and offers stimulating, thoughtful, and critical information that should contribute in some way to the scientific progress of ethnopharmacology and to the discovery of drugs. *Ethnopharmacology of Medicinal Plants:*

Asia and the Pacific emphasizes the fundamental importance of the precise observation of the use of each medicinal plant, combined with pharmacological experiments and its botanical classification, and provides the base for a new theory of ethnopharmacology.

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