

ABSTRACT

Special characteristics of traditional Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan Medicine) pharmaceuticals

The 21st century is a century of fast development and high competence where there is immense demand for concrete scientific research on the efficacy of herbal ingredients of many of the traditional medical systems but it still remains a very difficult subject to explore. It was evident since the 3rd century that the ancestors of Tibet understood the existence of medicine while they understood the existence of poison and this verifies the emergence of Tibetan pharmaceuticals quite early in history. The practice of traditional medical systems like Sowa Rigpa has been continuously passed down through many lineages and has achieved legal recognition from other countries also. With the affiliation of Sowa Rigpa, this medical system is bound to reach more countries and with the change of time, Sowa Rigpa medicine production and manufacture will definitely increase.

The intrinsic gist of this presentation is “though the spread of traditional Sowa Rigpa system in various countries is a positive sign and a symbol of advancement but if the production of Sowa Rigpa medicines are not scrutinized and formulated as per the laid standards of Sowa Rigpa, then there will always remain a danger of deterioration of the essence of Sowa Rigpa tradition”.

Tibetan language is like the fundamentals and Buddhist philosophy is like the life force of Traditional Sowa Rigpa. To excel in Sowa Rigpa tradition, one has to be well versed in Tibetan language and to learn Tibetan pharmaceuticals one should understand the essential meanings of the pharmaceutical texts and scriptures written in Tibetan language. Moreover if Sowa Rigpa medicines are formulated merely based on referring to the texts, without acquiring any experience in this field, then also it may prove fatal to the patients, which in turn will bring bad will to the tradition and will become the reason for decline of the tradition.

In order to formulate Sowa Rigpa medicine as per standards, the specialist pharmaceutical doctor should possess the six qualities of an authentic Sowa Rigpa doctor and should abide by the ethical commitments of a Sowa Rigpa doctor by being well aware of the procedures and practice of spiritually blessing the medicines. While actually compounding the medicines, the doctor should ensure correct identification of herbal ingredients, exercise the seven essential limbs of standardization of Tibetan herbal compounds and make sure the medicines contain the eight potencies as required.

The principle guidelines for standard Sowa Rigpa medicine and pharmaceutical practice set by Central Council of Tibetan Medicine (CCTM) is an essential guideline/manual for modern Sowa Rigpa Pharmaceuticals.

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL SOWA RIGPA (TIBETAN MEDICINE) PHARMACEUTICALS

1. SOWA RIGPA; The treasure of Tibet

Sowa Rigpa; commonly known as Tibetan Medicine is one of the great Asian traditional systems of medicine that stands at par with Indian Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine. This medical system is originated from Tibet since the beginning of its civilization, about 5000 years ago and it has been one of the extraordinary traditional studies of Tibetan people. Gradually through the centuries, this system flourished in its own country of origin and spread further into its neighboring countries. Today, *Sowa Rigpa* is being taught in many academic institutions, Literal and Clinical research studies on *Sowa Rigpa* are conducted, *Sowa Rigpa* hospitals and clinics are established and the system is legally recognized and practiced in multinational countries like India, China, Russia, Nepal and Bhutan etc. Like Ayurveda, having its unique Hindi term or words for its traditional medicine, *Sowa Rigpa* is typically a Tibetan literal term which is being used only for Tibetan Traditional system of medicine in the history of ancient Asian traditional systems of Medicine. The term *Sowa Rigpa* not merely means healing. It describes more than the healing in the sense of mantras and powers. It is a complete and a well-documented system of medicine with both preventive as well as curative measures. The etymology of the Tibetan word *Sowa Rigpa* reflects the idea of a practical system and the philosophical outlook on which it is grounded. The term *Sowa* stands for antidotal measures that are set against diseases or the imbalances of the energies or disorders causing diseases in the human organism that to be eliminated. And the term *Rigpa* implies the medical system as a science that demonstrates the practical application of the philosophical orientation. Thus, *Sowa Rigpa*, when both terms taken together, stands for a provision for holistic treatment of the body, Mind and the Spiritual aspect.

Sowa Rigpa as a system is composed of rich literal heritage. Though the principal text of *Sowa Rigpa* is *rGyud-bZhi*, apart from it there are immense commentaries on *rGyud bZhi* itself and many other independent texts on *Sowa Rigpa* covering various subjects like Materia Medica, pharmacology, human physiology and anatomy, etiology, pathology, medical history and so on. More than 2000 *Sowa Rigpa* literal works are currently available in the canonical collection.

2. WHO, its Traditional System of Medicine and *Sowa Rigpa*:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has published its global strategy - WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023 in which the policy and regulations of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) were introduced. The South East Asian Traditional Medicine in its chapter, includes the Indian Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, The traditional medicine of DPR Korea, The Koryo Medicine, Dhijivehi Beys; the Traditional Medicine of Maldives, The gSo-ba-rig-pa Rigpa; Bhutanese Traditional Medicine, Desheeya Chikitsa, popularly known as Indigenous system of Medicine of Sri Lanka, Myanmar Indigenous Medicine which is based on Ayurvedic concept, Traditional Medicine known as

Jamu, an Indonesia TM were all listed under the Traditional System of Medicine in South East Asian countries whereas the *Sowa Rigpa*; Traditional Tibetan Medicine, which originated from Tibet is not included in the SEAR Traditional Medicine. Since *Sowa Rigpa* system of medicine plays a significant role in providing practical healthcare to humanity and represents a comprehensive Medical Tradition gaining popularity because of its efficacy and recognition in most of the Asian countries, *Sowa Rigpa* system of medicine should be enlisted in the WHO SEAR Traditional Medical Systems.

3. *Sowa Rigpa*; Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity:

In ancient *Sowa Rigpa* history, the *sMenpa*; Physicians has been greatly respected as well as strict legal regulations have been set regarding ethical and proper practice of the system under Tibetan rulers even in the 8th Century; which indicates that *Sowa Rigpa* has long been a part of Tibetan culture. Under current status and circumstances of Tibet, *Sowa Rigpa* is being practice in Tibet on the name of China's Tibetan Medicine/*Sowa Rigpa* གུང་གོའི་བོད་ཀྱི་གསོ་བ་རིག་བླ་ and in India, under the Indian System of medicine which many believes it's an Indian system of Medicine. Both the countries have also submitted their application of *Sowa Rigpa* and the Practice of *Lum*-Medicinal bath under the same title of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Sowa Rigpa; being one of the five great knowledge of Tibet and also an integral part of Tibetan culture, this tradition is of benefit for all human and thus it's an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

4. Concept of *Sowa Rigpa* Pharmacology: གསོ་རིག་ལྷན་སྦྱར་གྱི་གཞི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ལེན་ཅེས་ཅུ་མ་གཞག

All matters are formed on the basis of five Cosmo- physical elements-*Jung-wa-Nga*. Even the absence of a particular element will not facilitate the formation of any matter. *Sowa Rigpa* stresses the importance of Medicinal Tastes (*Ro*) it's Potencies (*Nus-Pa*) and its Post Digestive Taste (*Zu-rJes*) which relates to the consideration of essential limbs of medicinal plants in order to the prime therapeutics efficacy.

Right Habitat

The first of the seven requisition of collecting medicinal plant is the Right Habitat. The growing sites or habitat should be clean and fragile with free of pollution, waste and garbage. Plants should be growing abundantly in their natural sites. The cool-warm potency should be in acquiescence with the inherent cool-warm potency of herbs or plants. For instance, the cool potency herbs grow on the site of mountain facing north is more effect to hot disorders whereas the warm potency herbs grown on mountain facing south is more effect to cold disorder. The natural sites of plant should be blessed by Buddha and high spiritual practitioners, whose innate power effects the herbs and gives them more power to eliminate disorders.

Right time of collection:

The collection of medicinal plants at specific times is a very important consideration to Sorig Medicine for the effectiveness of medicine for different ailments. The various parts of the plants such as root,

stem, branch, leaf etc are collected in their own period, when their potency is in its supreme and prime. The root, branch and stem should be collected during late phase of autumn, when all other parts fall or dry. The leaf, latex and shoot are collected in the late phase of summer or rainy season. While flower, fruit and other aril parts are picked up during early autumn after maturation. The bark, cortex and resin are collected and extracted when shoots sprout in the middle or the late phase of spring. Plants used as emetic are collected during late phase of spring, the power of fire and air elements, which are the stronger influence on sprouting of seedling. As a result, specific plants have acquired an ascending effect. Likewise, the plant which is used for purgative need to be collected in phase of late autumn, because the power of earth and water elements are predominant and the stronger at root, this specific plant has a descending power of effect.

Removal of Poison (Coarse potency):

Each plant has coarse potency in its parts of morphology characteristics; such as root, stem, branch, leaf etc. The coarse potency of medicinal plant impairs the digestive heat and affects the therapeutic benefit of that particular disorder. It is very necessary to remove the coarse potency of collected medicinal plant to minimize the side effect and smoothing potency of the medicine in order to restore the digestive heat. The medicine is more effective for specific disorder with removal of coarse potency. The example that possess coarse potency such as the bark of root, pith of stem, node of branch, petiole of a leaf, sepal of a flower and apocarp and endocarp of a fruit present coarse potency.

Method of Drying Process:

It is very important to have proper drying process according to the nature of the medicinal plants in order to have required medicinal effects. The collected herb are cleaned by washing before drying if needed and then the stem, branch and root chopped into pieces immediately after collection and dried properly to maintain its potency. The cool potency herbs are dried in the shade and cool wind, whereas the herbs with warm potency are dried in the sun and nearby fire. Likewise, warm potency herbs should not be exposed to cool breeze and cool potency herbs should not be exposed to fire and the sun. The medicinal plants should be free from smoke, moisture, insects, fire and contamination substances. If the drying process is following systematically in order, the crude drugs will retain their potency and superior qualities.

The timely utilization of plants:

It is unwise to keep collected medicine for many years in the storage. Generally, any kind of medicinal substance has its own time of utilization. The medicinal substance derived from the herbs should not be exceeding one year of storage, particularly the leaf and flowers. After one year, the herbs lose their therapeutic potency. It is very important to replace the dried herbs by fresh stock of herbs every year and indeed herbs should be used within the same year of collection. However, there is special method to maintain the therapeutic potency, to keep herbs longer during for utilization. The concentrated decoction of herbs or plants can be preserved for more than a year without losing its potency.

The Strength of Medicine:

The diversity of medicinal plants is vast and abundant in the nature. Nature gives us enough remedies for solving the different ailments that exists on this planet but not for self-indulgence. The strength of medicine also depends on its own medical efficacy. As each system has develop since the very existence of civilization and each culture has its own way of management through various processes and methods in order to achieve the supreme an efficacy and effectiveness of medicine in its struggle against various diseases. One of the factors to strengthen medicinal plants is correct identification and analysis of therapeutic value and medical efficacy through research, particularly in clinical research for specific diseases.

5. Special characteristic of *Sowa Rigpa* Pharmaceuticals:

Generally *Sowa Rigpa* pharmacy is perceived as an amalgamation of mere plants, herbs, minerals and is devoid of any fundamental pharmaceutical principal and when people experience positive result out of *Sowa Rigpa* medicines many gets surprised. But *Sowa Rigpa* pharmacy is more than just herbs and is laid on strong fundamental principles. In *Sowa Rigpa* pharmacy, every medicinal ingredient are believed to have its innate composition of the five elements which give rise to six tastes, eight potencies, three post digestive tastes and seventeen qualities. On the basis of the tastes, potencies and post digestive tastes and qualities, characteristics of hundreds of medicinal ingredients has been established which are been valued even in this highly developed science era. Some of the special characteristics of *Sowa Rigpa* Pharmaceuticals are:

I. *Sowa Rigpa*; a Natural Medicine

Sowa Rigpa medicines are sourced from nature bearing in mind its composition of the five elements. To support this statement, it has been clearly stated in *Sowa Rigpa* that human body is composed of the subtle five elements, disease is caused due to either deficient, excess or disturbance of five elements and the remedy to balance the five elements is sought from nature which is again composed of five elements.

II. The ethics and qualities of physician:

Ethics and Medicine are two inseparable unities. According to *Sowa Rigpa* as influenced by Buddhist philosophy, Ethics means the right way of living as well as the right attitude of the mind. Unlike other Traditional System of Medicine, *Sowa Rigpa* has a separate chapter on the ethics and role of physician in which the following points were covered:

- The Essential Requirements of a Physician
- The nature of a Physician
- The definition of a Physician
- The classification of a Physician
- The action of a Physician

➤ The Fruit or result of being a Physician

The Essential Requirements of a Physician are Intelligent Mind, Kind hearted, Holding the Commitment of six obligation of mental attitude, two obligations to be maintained and the three obligations to be comprehended. The Physician should be expertise in the use of body, mind and speech, and finally the physician should be hard working and expert in social principles.

Six Obligations of mental attitude are: Master should be treated like Buddha, Their Teachings are like the Teachings of great Saint/Buddha, Medical texts should be treated like authentic words of the Buddha and the Fellow Student should be treated like vajra friends and the patient should be like your One's only child and the Pus and blood should be treated like one's own dog and pig.

Following are the two obligations to be maintained by physicians:

- Eminent knowledge holders and their Instruments should be maintained and preserved as the protector and their implements
- **Medicines:** As jewels (wishful filling), nectars (prevents from death) and offering substance (knowledge holders medicine).

The physicians who are responsible of compounding the medicines should have the authentic empowerment, oral transmission and secret instruction (practical instruction) passed down through renowned and proper lineage.

Ethics: while practicing *Sowa Ripga* Pharmacology, the moral ethics and motivation of the physician is of primary importance. It should not be accompanied with selfish desire to attain fame and temporary wealth which encourages commercialization and exploitation of the tradition. Rather the sole motivation of compounding the medicines should be to heal and bring about well being which is described as the ultimate means to attain spirituality, wealth (compassion, loving kindness) and happiness (ultimate-enlightenment.)

III. Spiritual practice and initiation

The practice of *Sowa Rigpa* pharmacy is not seen as an ordinary job. It entails intensive mental projection of compassion that itself needs proper spiritual practice. Beginning from the collection of medicinal ingredients to compounding of the medicines to dispensing it to the patients, the entire process is not considered to be successfully completed if authentic empowering of the ingredients and the medicines are not carried out. It may seem to be spiritually related alone but the fact is this kind of practice covers the mental wellbeing aspect of modern wellness.

The spiritual practice of *Sowa Rigpa* pharmacy also involves physicians integrated meditation, visualization, mantra recitation to develop higher level of transformation of the body and mind. In fact the term used for Tibetan Physicians which is '*sMenpa*' itself means 'to help' and when we talk about helping somebody, our mind always becomes the most vital entity that motivates to help.

6. Central Council of Tibetan Medicine (CCTM) and its Pharmaceutical registration

Central Council of Tibetan Medicine (CCTM) was established after an Act. (“Tibetan Medicine Central Council Act. 2003”) passed by the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, with the final approval by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The main objective of CCTM is to prescribe minimum standard of education in *Sowa Rigpa*, to register and regulate the *Sowa Rigpa* medical practitioner, medical colleges/Institution and medical pharmacies and to preserve, promote and propagate *Sowa Rigpa* medical tradition.

CCTM consists of 2 appointed members, 3 reserved members and 6 elected members including 2 members from Non Tibetan practicing Sowa Rigpa medical tradition. The executive members meet every month as a monthly meeting and Board meeting in every 6 months.

Under the provision of TMCC Act, The following rules and regulations has been set up by CCTM:

- CCTM (General) Regulation
- Rules and Regulation for the Registration of Tibetan Medical Practitioner
- Rules and Regulation for the Registration of Tibetan Medical Pharmaceutical company/unit
- CCTM Yuthog Award Regulation
- CCTM Election Regulation

Under these Regulations, 5 Sowa Rigpa Medical Colleges/Institutes, 5 Sorig Pharmaceutical Company/Units and total number of 464 medical practitioners has been registered under CCTM till date. From the 464 medical practitioners, 315 are Institutionally Qualified and rest of 149 are Non Institutionally Qualified (NIQ) practitioners


