

## SPECIAL INTERVIEW WITH MR HERBERT SCHWABL

Interviewer: TMAC; (Men-Tsee-Khang) Student

---



Dear organisers of 3<sup>rd</sup> International conference on Tibetan medicine,

We, the participants from Men-Tsee-Khang College would like to thank you from the bottom of our heart for organising such a great conference and giving us a chance to participate in it. We learned too many things of great value as Tibetan Medicine students and future physicians. The things we learned from each speaker and each session is highly valuable but more than that we felt like our faith in Tibetan medicine got so much stronger as we witnessed by our own naked eyes the enthusiasm and interest shown by even non-Tibetans. They would not see the value of Tibetan medical system until and unless they are convinced about the efficiency of Tibetan medicine in treating diseases. It is true Tibetan medical institutions have not succeeded in proving the safety and effect of any Tibetan medicine through intensive scientific research. This can send a wrong message to younger generation and western people that Tibetan medicine is only a quack practice and its effect only a placebo effect to certain people. Therefore, we felt that organising such conferences is a great initiative and a step that we must continue to take.

This conference is one of the best platform to advance Sowa Rigpa in the modern times. And for that matter, we felt that all the institutions of Tibetan medicine need to cooperate with each other and participate in this kind of conference. This year the only organising members were Central Council of Tibetan Medicine, Central Institute of higher Tibetan Studies and Chagpori Tibetan Medical Institute. The other institutions did not take part in organising this historic conference. In future, we hope that all the concerned members take due responsibility and take active part in such conferences for the common good in Sowa Rigpa.

Finally, we also would like thank Central Institute of Higher Tibetan studies, Sarnath for the warm hospitality and all the facilities made available to us.

Following is a summary of the conversation we had with Mr. Herbert Schwabl, Director, Padma Company, Switzerland. It was such a nice and knowledgeable interaction with him. We also would like to thank him for taking the time for us.

**Student: How did you get interested in Sowa Rigpa?**

**Mr Schwabl:** I was a student in Austria, Europe. Maybe you have heard the name of Heinrich Harrer. He was the English tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama when His Holiness was a young child. He wrote this famous book called “Seven years in Tibet”, and I read this book in my younger age. Before that I had never heard of Tibet. Then I started to study physics. I was interested in the physics of the living things called biophysics. From biophysics, I suddenly interested in all strange things like homeopathy, Chinese medicine and so on. I heard that a company in Switzerland is producing Tibetan medicine and I did a research project with them. They sent me herbal formulae to do research on immunology and so on. From this I shifted over. I read more pieces and so on. I became more interested in herbal products. So very first from reading a book to studying in the university and to more deeper interests.

**Student: How is the impression of Swiss people on Sowa Rigpa?**

**Mr. Schwabl:** First of all, they don't call a term Sowa Rigpa. Nobody in Europe knows what Sowa Rigpa is. They call it Tibetan Medicine because in Switzerland, 5,000 Tibetans live in Switzerland. So, Tibetans are well-known there. Tibetans live in many villages and you would see many Tibetans working there. We at Padma, we don't tell people that we are interested in Sowa Rigpa or Tibetan medicine because we speak and talk to sick people. To tell the truth, they ask for a cure first not what system of medicine. First cure and then may be interested in the system. It is our idea to live it up to the patients to get them interested. First is not to convince them that Sowa Rigpa is good. First you must see that the medicine works. If the medicine works, then you have a prove already. So, we don't work first to convince the people about the theory, but we start with the real thing. I think this is the best. Even if you want to go into medicine, it is best to start with success. When you help people, they open their heart, not the other way around. First convince their mind and then heart, that doesn't work. You have to convince their heart first. That is our experience.

**Student:** You made the Padma medicines not according to Tibetan medical texts but based on scientific research. Do you think it is in a way diluting the pure Sowa Rigpa tradition or helping Sowa Rigpa in some ways?

**Mr. Schwabl:** It is a difficult question. There are several aspects to this question. First of all, I know that this medicine helps a lot people. If it doesn't, it is just useless. The formula is based on Gabur25 formula which is an ancient formula. Now you have to do a time travel with me. How

did the formula start? We have to go fifty years back. Our company Padma was founded in Switzerland in 1969. At that time, no body knew about Tibetan medicine though Tibetans had somehow arrived ten years ago. Those times, long distance communication was not that easy. It was not like today at all. Those times, you could send a letter or telegram from Switzerland to India, but the plane stopped about three times I think. Raw material was very difficult to get. The language was not known. So, at that time, this formula came to Switzerland. At that time, they interpreted the formula according to the knowledge of that time. We do have these old scriptures or old text books where these formulae are. But how did they read it fifty years ago? We can't judge from today. Now as it as an official medicine in Switzerland, we gave all the information to the authorities and they gave a stamp on it and said this is the formula. So, if we say we want to change the formula, the government would say it is not possible. So, we are stuck here in a way as it is a historic formula and can't be changed.

**Student:** Is your medicine herbal medicine?

**Mr. Schwabl:** It is herbal medicine. Gabur formula and in our interpretation, we have 22 herbs and one of them is camphor and there is one mineral. Therefore, if somebody asks, is this a Tibetan formula, I would say yes, it is but it is not a classical formula. It is a derivation or interpretation of a classical formula. We also do other formula which we do now like Sindu5 or others. These are more according the books. That is my final statement to this. Any practical formula is always an interpretation of the text book. So, when your teachers tell you a formula, it is always one possible interpretation. Tibetan culture goes from Siberia in the north to India, Ladakh and Bhutan and so on in the south. So, there are different interpretations to one formula. I would say, do not judge it as right or wrong rather think of it as a possible interpretation. You should not think this is the only way you should do it. I can rightfully say that formula Padma28 has helped millions of people. So, apparently something must be right in it otherwise it would not help. I think this is number one. If it does not help, forget it. Forget any formula even if it is in the Gyushi or wherever.

**Student:** Why did you choose Gabur25?

**Mr. Schwabl:** A doctor who came from Siberia to St. Petersburg in Russia in 1850 which is 170 years ago. This doctor saw that coming from Asia to Europe, it is very important to have a cooling formula for the people because of the life style of European people were so different. That time it was very important for him to have two very important formulas. One is a cleansing formula and the other one is a cooling formula because in Europe at those times as well as today have a very rich diet and hectic lifestyle.

**Student:** Did you face any problem during your research and practice?

**Mr. Schwabl:** We did face lots of problem. One of the problem is high cost of research. Many years ago, it didn't cost as much as today. You also need lot of specialist people to work with, other universities and so on. This becomes more complicated. In modern times as also in India, everything is so high tech that it is very difficult to tell them to work with herbal medicine. You

will learn that you can't be expert in all fields as pharmacist, doctor, researcher, etc. You will need specialisation. You will also need adapt to the needs of the time and adopt new things gradually. The things written in text books are true, but you have to see when it fits and where. Every generation has to do it.

**Student:** Do you have any advice for us about proving the effect of Tibetan medicine scientifically through research?

**Mr. Schwabl:** For you as future doctors, the best thing would be your experience with patients. You will learn from your experience. Science is not helping you, you just have base on your own experience, not because something is in the book for you as Individuals.

Thank you Mr. Schwabl for your time and sharing knowledge!

\*\*\*\*\*

To know more about Mr. H. Schwabl, Please click below link:

<http://tibmedcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/9-herbert-schwabl.pdf>