

## Editor's foreword

This dictionary is the fruit of more than a decade of research on the identification of the herbal, mineral, metal, and animal ingredients found in Sowa Rigpa formulas. During the hard times of early Tibetan exile, the seed of this project sprouted in the mind of Dr. Pasang Yonten Arya as he started training in the art of medicine making at Men-Tsee-Khang's pharmaceutical department in Dharamsala, India. After he and his friend Dr. Namgyal Tsering graduated top of their class in the summer of 1977, they were offered the unique opportunity to specialize further by working in the pharmacy as apprentices. Through the mentorship of the celebrated physician Jamyang Tashi Tsona (1918-1986), they gradually acquired the intricate practical knowledge and skills required to harvest, process, and compound raw materials into different forms of medicines. Working with these complicated formulas, however, the specializing young *amchi* faced many issues. With few Tibetan medical texts available, it proved to be exceedingly difficult to identify obscure ingredients, many Sanskrit terms, uncommon synonyms, and the poetic and secret names that are customarily revealed in oral instructions. While gaining the trust of the master, at times the only solution was to read through entire volumes on pharmacognosy for clues. In any case, much dedication and effort were (and still are) required to become an expert on this subject.

In this context, Pasang Yonten began compiling names from various texts in 1978, relying on Deumar Géshé Tendzin Püntso's (1725-?) *Crystal Orb and Rosary* and Dési Sangyé Gyatso's (1653-1705) *Blue Beryl* as core references. He made square cards cut from a bunch of expired Tibetan calendars, diligently writing down and memorizing each term together with a short description. Over the years, the cards were bundled together with a thread and kept in a box as the collection kept growing, becoming like a personal treasure trove. The idea to create a dictionary for the benefit of future

students, practitioners, and researchers came much later, inspired amongst others by the *Illustrated Materia Medica of Indo-Tibetan Medicine* (1987) by Vaidya Bhagwan Dash. Correspondingly, this book is dedicated to Yutok Yönten Gönpo and the many other ancient physicians who transmitted the precious teachings on pharmacognosy from India and beyond to Tibet, thus contributing to the enduring syncretic legacy of Sowa Rigpa. It is this traditionally closely guarded, vast yet essential expertise which is referred to as *Yutok's Mind Ornament of a Hundred Thousand Herbs* in the subtitle of this dictionary.

After more than ten years of steadily gathering names, during his pharmacy training and later while teaching at Men-Tsee-Khang College, Gen. Pasang Yonten entrusted the paper cards collection to Mr. Lhakchung Tsering. Without the availability of any photographic or digital resources, this student at the *thangka* painting school affiliated to the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives volunteered as a scribe and also kindly provided the elegant line drawing of Yutokpa. When the finished manuscript was finally published in 1991, Pasang Yonten let the cards be swept away by the arid winds of Ladakh from the roof of his house, like prayer flags, just before he moved to Europe.

*Dictionary of Tibetan Materia Medica* starts with a one-page preface and an introduction that briefly lays out the motivation and purpose for its compilation, followed by some remarks on the selection criteria for the inclusion of terms and quotations. The next heading presents an overview of several consulted sources, including an outline of the *Four Medical Tantras* as well as complete chapter lists of *Crystal Orb* and the Indian medical compendium *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasaṃhitā*, which was translated into Tibetan by Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055). The actual dictionary, in Tibetan alphabetical order and covering 257 pages, catalogues roughly three thousand unique terms. It documents an astounding variety of general ingredient names and different types (in terms of color,

size, or superiority), numerous Sanskrit-derived terms (which are marked by the syllable ཨྲ), Chinese and other foreign loanwords. A large proportion are synonyms, which are cross-referenced to the respective main entries. There, essential information on the medicinal properties of the material in question is frequently added along with notes on similar species and substitution practices.

This extensive lexicon of materia medica might well be the first of its kind in Tibetan medical history, forming a much-needed linguistic bridge between the encyclopedic ocean of classical medical works and scholar-practitioners today. As such, it remains an ideal starting point for research on topics such as medicinal plant identification and classification, as well as an indispensable guide for anyone interested in interpreting or making the renowned multi-compound medicines of the Sowa Rigpa tradition.

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